PRELIMINARY FINDINGS REGARDING BAR HARBOR PEST HOUSES

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In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was common for communities to maintain facilities to isolate individuals who had highly contagious diseases. These were referred to as "isolated hospitals" or "pest houses," presumably a shortening of pestilence. The word "pest" means plague in German and had the same original meaning in English. Thus it was not intended as a cynically humorous disparagement of the facility as it might sound today.

The first reference to an isolated hospital or pest house on Mount Desert Island that I have found is in the December 18, 1895 *Bar Harbor Record* in an article relating the tragic story of John Young who lost his wife and two children to typhoid. The article states that another child, a ten-year old son, was living in the pest house at the "Witch Hole" under the care of Nicholas Curran.

A report of the State Board of Health provided clinical details of the Young case and also refers to a son staying at a "pest-house" at "Witches Hole."[1]

The Town of Eden did not own this pest house; it was on property that was owned by the estate of Daniel W. Brewer who had died June 4, 1895[2]. The arrangements by which the Town used this building as a pest house need to be researched.

In 1903 the Town moved to purchase the property. At the Town Meeting held in March 1903, Article 63 authorized the Town to spend $750 to acquire the lot and $250 to repair the building to be used as an "isolated hospital." Although Osmund Emery, secretary of the Board of Health, did not give details, he did indicate that the Town had a property in mind[3]. The Town purchased a 0.3 acre property for the pest house on March 14, 1903 from Frank Brewer, acting for himself and as executor of the estate of Daniel Brewer[4]. The property was located on the Corkscrew Hill Road about 125 yards from the Paradise Hill Road section of the Park Loop Road. It is in an area that has been flooded by beaver activity in recent years although old maps show it as dry. It is highlighted on the map I have attached. The deed also conveyed the buildings thereon. This property is very near Witch Hole Pond and is almost certainly the same property that was referred to in the 1895 articles. The property is in Lot 32 on the Peters map[5]. Edward Brewer had purchased this lot[6] and conveyed it to his three sons who sold most of it in pieces to various people. Daniel Brewer acquired much of his two brothers' interests and retained ownership of Witch Hole Pond (at least it was excluded from any deeds of land

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[1] *Ninth Report of the State Board of Health of the State of Maine for the Two Years Ended December 31, 1895.* Pgs 27-29.

[2] MDI Genealogies on MDI Historical Society website.

[3] *Bar Harbor Record*, March 11, 1903.

[4] Hancock County Registry of Deeds, Book 391, page 33. (Hereafter referenced as "HCRD 391/33" etc.)

[5] James Peters' map of 1807 is located in the New York Historical Society. The lots are laid out but not numbered. The numbering was probably added by William Bingham or Col. John Black, his agent in eastern Maine. The numbered lots are shown on the Colby & Stuart 1887 wall map of Mount Desert Island.

[6] From Richard Higgins, January 1, 1847 (HCRD 82/410). Higgins had purchased it from the Bingham Estate November 27, 1841. (HCRD 72/2).

surrounding it) and the small area to the north that has recently been flooded and then drained and remains a wetland[7]. Daniel Brewer and his sons conducted an ice business at Witch Hole Pond and probably used this land for access to the pond and for equipment or storage[8].

A report of the Board of Health of the Town of Eden for 1903 states that the town had bought a lot and building of eight rooms fairly well fitted for a pest house that was about two miles from the village[9].

However, only a year later the Town sold the property back to Frank Brewer. Article 101 at the 1904 Town Meeting that authorized the Town to sell the Pest House Lot to Frank Brewer in exchange for $1,000 and a replacement half-acre lot along Breakneck Road[10]. Later in the meeting they voted to accept Frank Brewer's suggestion that the replacement lot would be near Eagle Lake or in New Mill Meadow.

Exactly why Frank Brewer would want to reclaim the property he had so recently sold to the Town is unclear. Perhaps he needed it for his ice business, or perhaps the existence of a pest house near his ice operations damaged the reputation of his ice.

Again, the Town acted very quickly. The March 16, 1904 *Bar Harbor Record* reported that the selectmen had looked at various sites for the new pest house without making a decision. Nevertheless, on April 13, 1904 the same paper reported that work had begun on the new pest house which was being built by Seth Hopkins. It was to be a two-story wooden structure 24′ by 24′ with a hall, large ward, kitchen and servant's room on the first story and a second ward room and other compartments on the second story[11].

Astoundingly, construction had started before the Town actually purchased the property. On May 6, 1904, Frank Brewer conveyed a half acre lot 143′ by 152′ on the "old New Mill Meadow line" with a right-of-way 16' wide along that line to the "old Eagle Lake Road[12]." I am guessing that the "old New Mill Meadow line" is the line between lots 34 and 33 continuing between lots 47 and 48 on the Peters Map. This line does not extend all the way to the Eagle Lake Road, but it could be projected on the same course. Looking at the 1887 Colby and Stuart map, it would look as though the line might run near the old Bar Harbor Water Company sedimentation tanks. The property description in the deed does not offer sufficient information to actually locate the lot.

However, the April 13, 1904 article in the Bar Harbor Record does. It describes the property as "on the eastern side of the Brewer quarry road just north of the old Eagle Lake Road and the site selected for the Hospital is on the southern slope of the hill."

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[7] See my paper "Old Paradise Hill Carriage Roads, Summary of Research" for the chain of ownership of Lot 32 where the pest house was located.

[8] The 1903 and 1904 maps of Bar Harbor published by the Summer Residents Association show the small lot purchased by the Town and sold back to Frank Brewer. They also show several buildings near Witch Hole Pond that were probably part of the Brewer ice business. They also show a road leading from the Cork Screw Hill Road to Witch Hole Pond, but it is incorrectly positioned. The correct position is shown on the 1882 USC&GS map of Mount Desert Island. Both deeds for the pest house lot mention the road meeting the Corkscrew Hill Road at the boundary line between the pest house lot and land of Wood and Mansfield.

[9] Report of the Board of Health of the Town of Eden for 1903 in *Public Documents of Maine for the year 1905*, Issued 1905.

[10] Warrant for town meeting in *Bar Harbor Record*, February 24, 1904. Meeting reported in the *Bar Harbor Record* on March 9, 1904 and again on March 10, 1904.

[11] The *Ellsworth American*, also of April 13, 1904, reported that the selectmen had selected a site for the Pest House on the Eagle Lake Road and the contract for the building had been let to Seth Hopkins.

[12] HCRD 409/37.

The article made me remember that on August 4, 2010 Les Heilakka and I explored what the article calls the "Brewer quarry road " (I called it the Brewer Mountain Road as it passes along the east side of that mountain rather than leading into the quarry, although two branch roads do.) About 250 yards north of the Eagle Lake Road we found a foundation to the east of the road. This exactly meets the description in the article and the lot could very well be bounded by a projection of the line in the deed. I was initially somewhat reticent about asserting that this was the site, but everything I have read confirms (or does not contradict) it.

I took pictures of the foundation which are attached. What the washtub was used for I cannot say. I am also attaching a map of the location with my tracks of the roads. There is also a cellar hole a short distance away on the west side of the road. The waypoint "Foundation" is what I believe was the Pest House.

On June 10, 1904, the Town of Eden sold the former Witch Hole pest house lot to Frank Brewer for $1,000[13].

In 1911 the Town concluded that this pest house was inadequate and lacked plumbing and a good supply of water. (This seems strange as it was only about 100 yards from the main water pipeline.) It voted $5,000 to purchase a new site[14]. It shortly purchased a 4.5 acre lot off Woodbury Road, which is just a short distance from the Eagle Lake Road[15]. The property was thereafter referred to as being on the Eagle Lake Road[16]. The Town continued to own both properties until it sold the 1904 pest house lot to George B. Dorr in 1927[17]. The land became part of Acadia National Park.

A new isolated hospital on the Woodbury Road property was designed by Fred Savage in 1913[18]. It is not certain if these plans were used for the building actually constructed.

After the third isolated hospital was built the Town made annual appropriations in most years, ending in 1947[19]. The building burned in the great fire that year[20].

In 1910 the second pest house was used to house George Marshall, his wife and child, who suffered from diphtheria. The child died. The Marshall family were paupers. The Town of

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[13] HCRD 406/382

[14] *Bar Harbor Record*, March 15, 1911. See also warrant Article 90 in the town Records.

[15] Harriet Roberts to Town of Eden. March 24, 1911. (HCRD 465/255). A lot survey is attached to the deed. See also, Sanborn Atlas of Bar Harbor, 1916. Detailed map 12 shows Contagious Hospital. The Sanborn Atlas of Bar Harbor of 1927, sheet 14, shows the same.

[16] See for example, the Bar Harbor Annual Report for 1918 (available on-line at the University of Maine website) which gives an inventory of town property including an Isolated Hospital near Eagle Lake with a value of $500 and an Isolated Hospital and lot on the Eagle Lake Road with a value of $9,000. (Emphasis mine)

[17] The 1927 Town Meeting approved the sale of the old pest house. *Bar Harbor Times*, March 9, 1927. The town then solicited bids for the old pest house. Notice in *Bar Harbor Times*, April 4, 1927. The Town conveyed the property to George B. Dorr on April 21, 1927. (HCRD 608/564) In the late 1920s and early 1930s Dorr purchased a huge number of properties and conveyed most of them to John D. Rockefeller shortly thereafter. I have not tracked the subsequent transactions regarding this property except to note that it is now part of Acadia National Park.

[18] Bryan, John N., *Maine Cottages: Fred L. Savage and the Architecture of Mount Desert*, 2006. List on page 246. See also MDI Historical Society catalogue number 001.74.814 for the plans of a proposed Isolated Hospital. (I have not seen the plans.)

[19] I kept a list with about 25 references, itself incomplete, which is not reproduced here.

[20] See map of the extent of the Bar Harbor Fire, published in the *Bar Harbor Times*, 1947. Accessed 4/27/2020 from Southwest Harbor Public Library Digital Archive, https://swhplibrary.net/digitalarchive/items/show/7548. The base map used for this was outdated and shows the pest house lot as still belonging to T.L.Roberts.

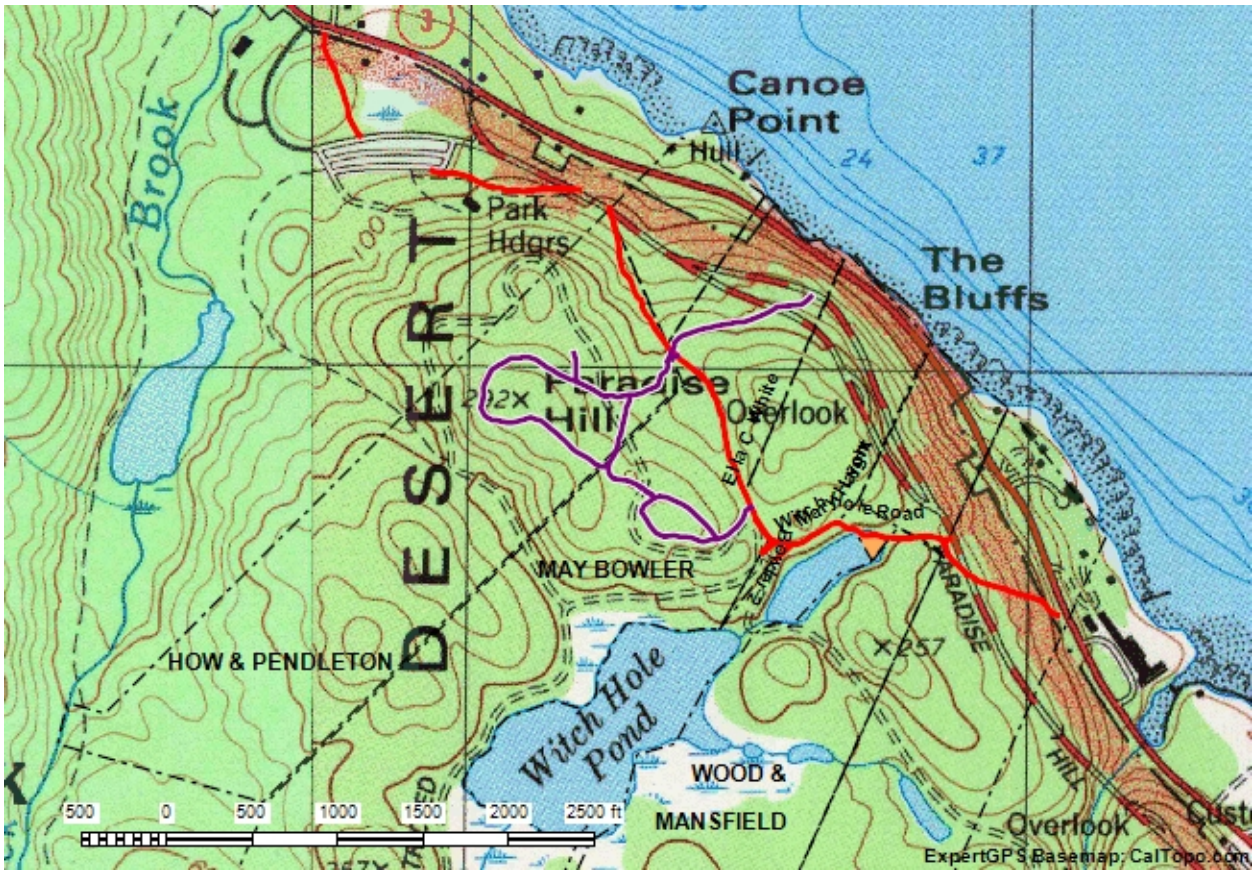
Eden successfully sued Southwest Harbor for the cost of providing care for them[21]. There were undoubtedly many more cases which did not invoke litigation or make the record books.

The isolated hospital played an important role during the flu epidemic of 1918[22] and another epidemic in 1926[23].

Other references to the isolated hospital or pest house are contained in *Bar Harbor's Gilded Century* by Lydia Vandenbergh and Earle G. Shettleworth[24]. "When children got sick, however, it was no fun at all. Local resident Claire Lambert described how children with communicable diseases would be sent to the "Pest House," a small cabin the woods on the Eagle Lake Road, where they could recover without endangering others." While there is certainly some truth in this, the frequency it implies must be taken with the skepticism well earned by all oral histories.

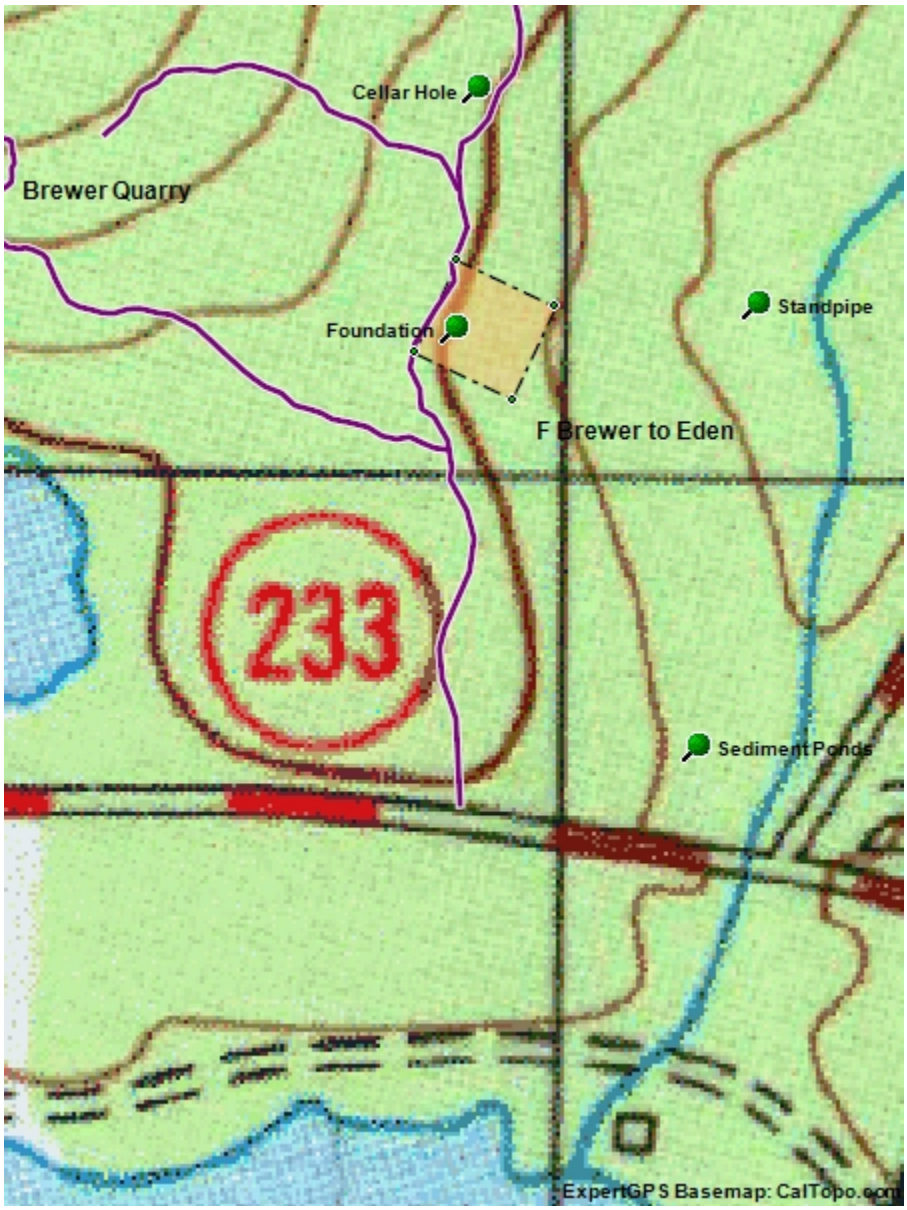
Another reference is in the MDI Hospital 120th Anniversary Historic Journal[25] which states that cases of contagious diseases were sent to the pest house as the general hospital did not take them.

4/29/2020

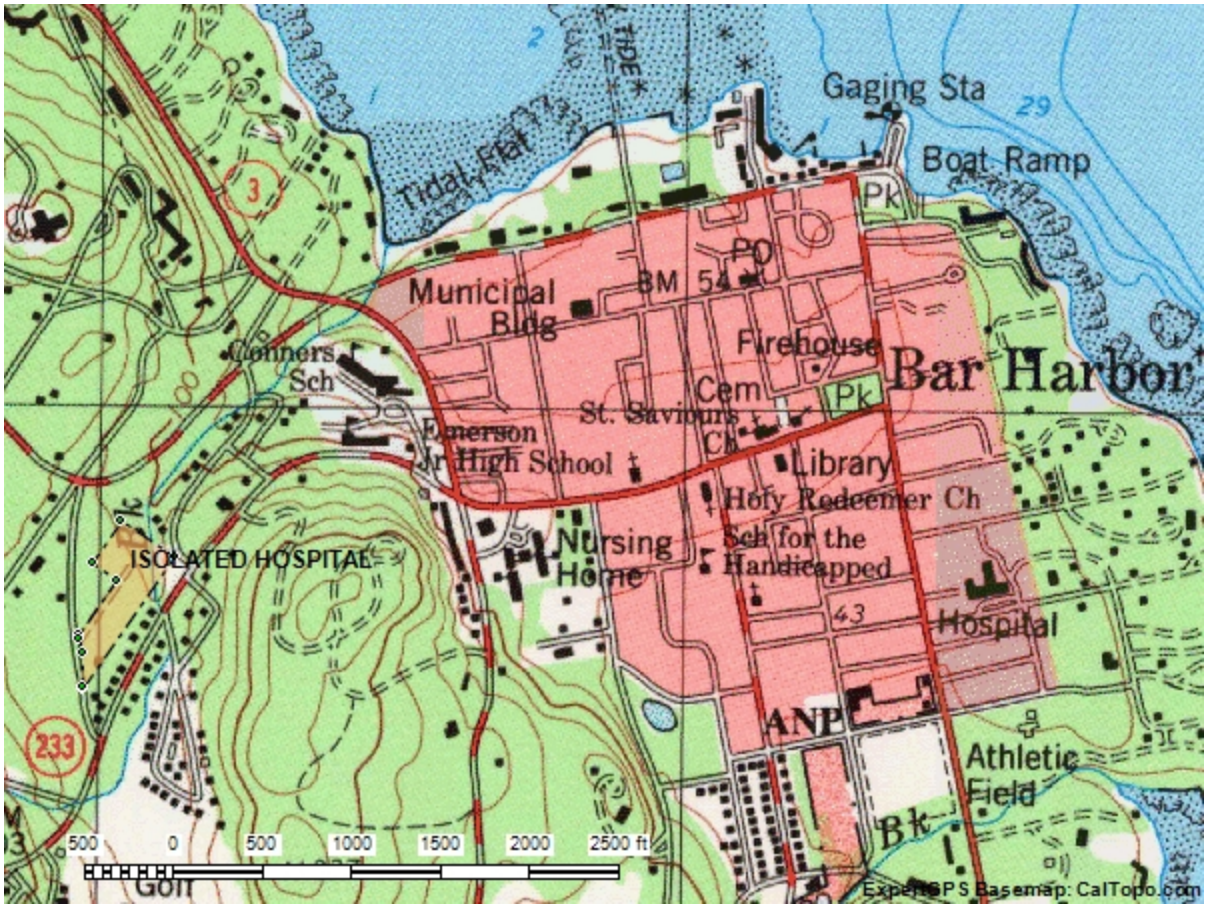


[21] Eden vs Southwest Harbor. Maine Court Reports, vol.108, page 489.
[22] See articles in *Bar Harbor Times* of October 12, 1918, October 19, 1918 and November 2, 1918 which specifically mention the isolated hospital. Additional articles may discuss the epidemic without mentioning the isolated hospital.
[23] *Bar Harbor Times*, September 15, 1926.
[24] Vandenbergh, Lydia, and Shettleworth, Earle G., *Bar Harbor's Gilded Century*, 2009, Page 138.
[25] Published 2017, page 7.

Site of First Pest House near Witch Hole. (Orange Triangle)



Site of Second Pest House by Eagle Lake. (Purple lines are abandoned roads.)



Site of Third Pest House, by Eagle Lake Road in reports.



Photograph believed to be foundation of Second Pest House at Eagle Lake. 8/4/2010.



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