

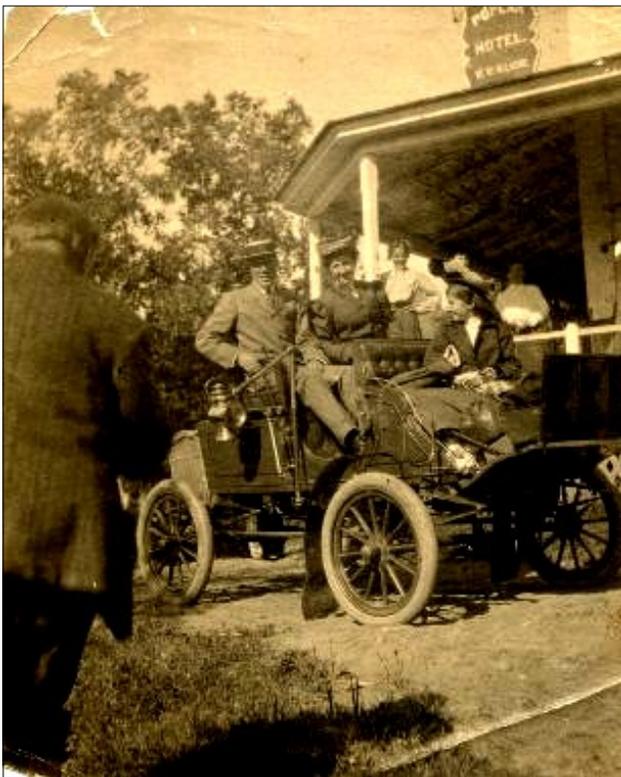
# My Summer Vacations at Poplar Tavern

A Photo Story by Dorothy Ficken

Dorothy Ficken lived in Ashmont Village, a section of Dorchester, and for reasons left untold spent part of her summers at the Poplar Tavern in North Newry. Her story is told in a photo album which was recently discovered by her grandson Bruce Pierce. Bruce is now a Newry resident but like many of us Bethelites and Newryites, Bruce also eventually made the move from Mass to Maine. After settling in Newry he discovered his grandmother's photo album with her record of summer experiences at Poplar Tavern during the years 1909 to 1911.

Dorothy had made an exciting earlier trip in 1905 when she rode in the front seat of a four passenger open topped steam car from her home in Ashmont to the Poplar Tavern. The car was made by the Prescott Automobile Company of Passaic, New Jersey. On the back of a photo taken at the Poplar Tavern Dorothy had written "George Peacock of Buffalo and family in Prescott Steamer. I road from Ashmont (Dorchester, MA) to Newry in the front seat. D.S.F 1905".

While Dorothy Ficken was vacationing in North Newry and likely enjoying every minute of it, about 12 miles away in North Bethel, Ruth Crosby was vacationing with her family at the Locke Farm. Dorothy left her memoir in photographs with annotations and Ruth wrote about her experiences in a book she titled, "I Was A Summer Boarder. In 1910, Dorothy was about 16 and Ruth was 12.



Mr. and Mrs. George Peacock and Dorothy Ficken—1905—Poplar Tavern

The Peacocks and Dorothy Ficken probably caused many eyes to turn during their trip along unpaved roads of the day from Portland through Gray, Auburn, Norway, South Paris, Bethel and Newry to the Poplar Tavern in North Newry. In 1905 Route 26 from Portland to Colebrook, NH had not been laid. The route from Gray to Norway ran to Auburn, then Mechanic Falls and to Oxford.

The Poplar Tavern's location on a frequently traveled route for vacationers and sightseers also made the hotel a well known establishment for publishers of touring guides. The White Mountains and Western Maine, especially Grafton Notch and Old Speck Mountain were highlighted destinations and must see places in railroad, steam ship and regional touring publications.

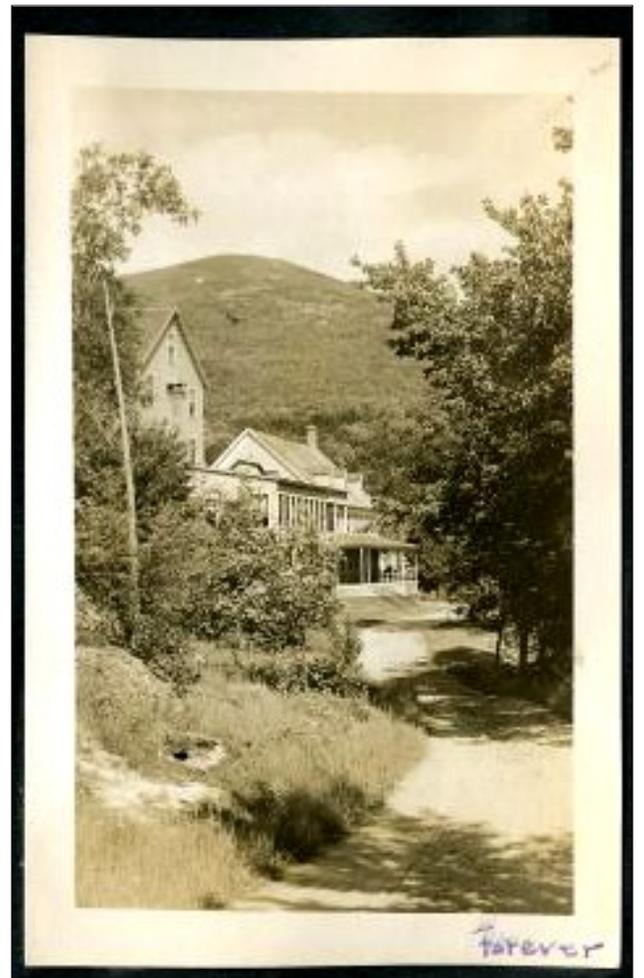
***About 1946, George Peacock, then very elderly, returned to North Newry to fish in Bear River again. Owen Wight told me that Mr. Peacock stayed at the Wight homestead and Owen looked after him. The old man had a great time fishing—remarkable that he returned after more than 40 years.***

The Poplar Tavern in North Newry and the Locke Mountain House in North Bethel were typical summer vacation places of those times. The Poplar Tavern had been built as an inn during the 1840's by Ithiel Smith who was a descendant of one very first families to settle in Newry. On the other hand, the Locke Mountain House had started as a traditional family farm; the farm's turn of the century owners, Phila and Mary Ellen Locke, had gradually added summer boarding for city people to the regular farming routine. The sisters were third generation Locke's—the founder, Samuel B. Locke had come to Bethel and established the farm at the end of the 18th Century.

A key feature for the success of both summer vacation businesses was the Grand Trunk Railway depot in Bethel. One could buy a ticket in Boston or New York that would cover the entire trip to either of the two places. Ticket cost also included stage service from the depot to inn or farm. Both railroad management and innkeepers promoted the ease of travel by rail from southern New England cities and New York City to their respective inns and boarding farms.

As it turned out once automobile travel into Maine became a practical reality, the Poplar Tavern seemed to attract vacationers who came by car more than the Locke Mountain House. Dorothy's photo album has a number of automobile party photos while cars are barely mentioned by Ruth Crosby. Although Ruth's father did make the trip from Massachusetts to Bethel by car more than once.

Vacation activities for the guests usually depended on horse drawn mountain wagons or hay racks when parties went for picnics at Screw Auger Falls or up the Sunday River valley to go mountain climbing.





July 1910

*Looking toward the cottages*

Looking toward the cottages  
July 1910



Dr. and Mrs. Gillett

July 1910

Dr. and Mrs. Gillett  
July 1910





Aug 1911

Picnic at Screw Auger Falls



Aug 1911

Picnic at Screw Auger Falls  
August 1911

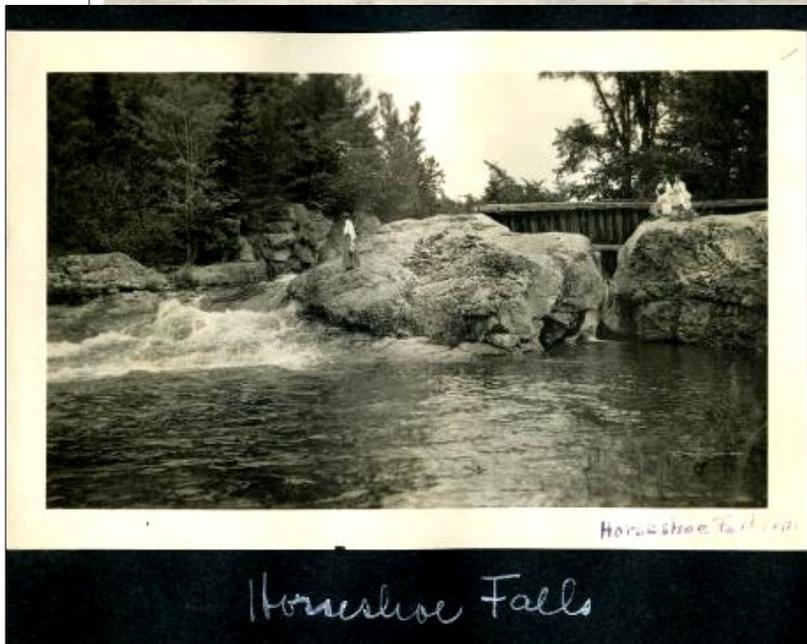


Some of the hotel guests



July 1910

Poplar Tavern



Horseshoe Falls 1910

Horseshoe Falls

Horseshoe Falls in Bear River—just a short distance up stream from the hotel