

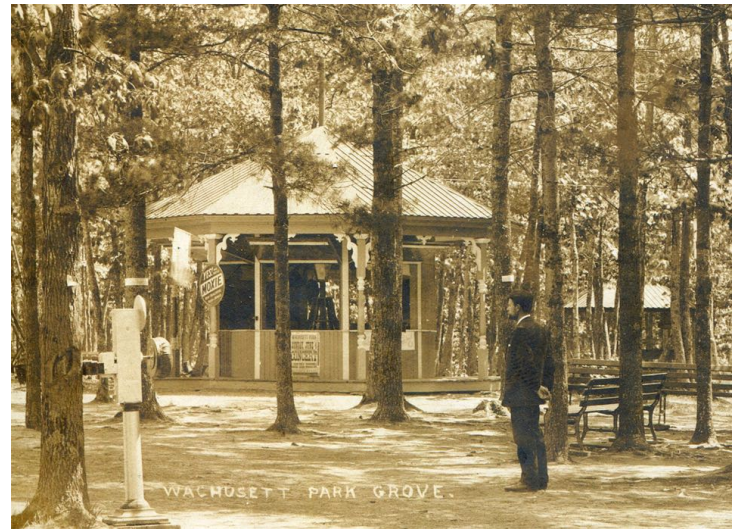
## Then & Now Wachusett Park 1873-1923



This popular park was located at the foot of Mount Wachusett on Wachusett Lake and in its peak use it saw over 10,000 visitors a summer.

In 1873, Simeon L. Bolton lived on what is now called Bolton Road at the original Barnard homestead. He conceived the idea of opening a public park for the purpose of a fun and social interaction during the warmer months in New England. With this in his mind, he purchased several acres of land on the west side of Wachusett Lake and at once set about having the trees thinned and the ground cleared. The first building he erected was a pavilion near the lake; part of which was enclosed for cooking.

The following year, he opened Wachusett Park for the first time to visitors on July 4<sup>th</sup>, and he and his wife offered pout dinners for visitors. Each off-season, they improved the entertainment opportunities they could provide at the park.



Over the next few years the Bolton's built:

- A two-story hotel called the North View House with an office, parlor, large dining room and kitchen, seven rooms for rent, and a piazza on two sides, with a very large horse stable next door.
- A bowling alley, swings, and teeters, boats for rent, "Candy Stand", camping area, and numerous picnic tables all over the property.

In 1875, Thomas Griswald, who owned land on either side of the Redemption Rock Road (Rt. 140), built a picnic area, which included:

- A story and a half hotel known as the "Lakeside House" with an office, parlor, dining room, and kitchen.



- A Candy Stand, with both the hotel and stand being on the Bolton Park side of Rt. 140.
- On the opposite side of Rt. 140, a stable, pavilion, bowling alley, and swings, and teeters. Today Rt. 140 goes through where the stables once stood.
- Griswald also rented boats and had a steamboat, which made trips around the lake for 10 cents per person.

Both hotel kitchens served pout dinners as their specialties, with the Bolton's even having their own private pond to ensure a constant supply of fish. Visitors to these parks came from all the neighboring towns and represented family, religious, school, veteran,

Post/Lodge, and social groups. Visitors often took excursions up Mt. Wachusett to enjoy its distance views of 300 cities and towns.

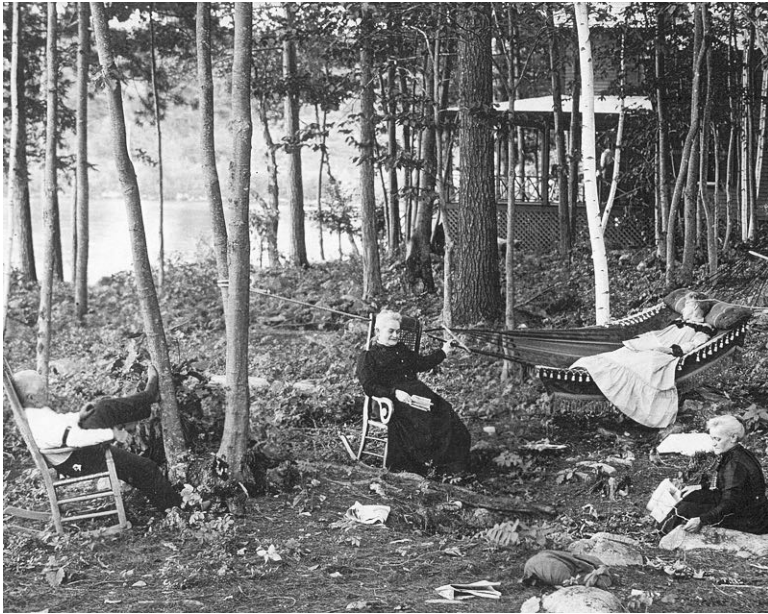
With Princeton being a summer resort at this time, with the advent of 2 railroad stations in 1871, many hotel visitors would hire transportation or walked, and come and visit these parks for the day. And if romping, singing, shouting, swimming, bowling, dancing, boating, and eating are among the indications of a good time, these visitors certainly had it.

In 1877, L. H. Brown of Fitchburg purchased about eight acres of land from S. W. Weston abutting Wachusett Park and on the lake. He built a white estate home with cupola and overtime-created lovely gardens, fountains, and walkways, which he graciously allowed park visitors to enjoy (pictured to the right behind the fence).

The next year brought a number of new events.







- The first Old Folks Picnic was held in 1878 with 137 over 70 invitees being honored by 600 family and friends in attendance. This event became a re-occurring picnic increasing in size every year.

- On a natural slope of the land near the lake, Mr. Bolton erected an open-air theater with dressing rooms on either side of the stage.

- A ravine in the park made a natural path to the lakeshore where Arthur Estabrook built a wharf and boathouse.

- Across the lake a beach was opened for swimming
- Numerous private businesses sprang up nearby: Arthur Stone's photography/tintype studio, and livery services for stabling personal horses, and horse drawn barges to bring visitors the 5 miles from the Westminster railroad station.
- The "Lake Shore Cottage," formerly the "Lake Shore House," was extensively repaired, painted and put in the very best order inside and out, after being sold at auction the year before.
- Planning sessions started in 1882 to build Mile Hill Road connecting Wachusett Park with the Mountain House Hotel, but it ends up taking over 6 years for it to finally be completed.

In 1880, Mr. Charles Kirby of Fitchburg leases property from the Bolton's in Wachusett Park on which he erects of a cottage and barn. Mr. Bolton begins to map out additional roads and paths through his property to be eventually leased.

After the 1883 season ends, Mr. Bolton begins the construction of a 40' x 80' rock maple roller skating





rink, with the plan to open by Memorial Day 1884. The skating rink is a huge success, drawing large crowds. Also that year, a third hotel on the opposite side of Wachusett Lake opened, called the Jennison House.



From 1885-1899 the area in and around Wachusett Park continued to expand customer friendly services:

- Street Lights are installed in Wachusett Park.
- Phone service is installed to the top of Mt. Wachusett
- The Jennison House now has accommodations for twenty-five boarders with boats, bowling alley, swings, etc., which boarders can use for free. No liquors will be allowed on the premises.
- The Gardner, Westminster,

Fitchburg Railway Company builds a trolley spur to Wachusett Park, and the Griswald Hotel and buildings are removed.

In 1902:

- The Gardner, Westminster, Fitchburg Railway Company purchases Wachusett and Griswald Park properties, and they make major repairs and upgrades to its entrance and walkways.
- The County Commissioners start discussing the building of a cable-line trolley from Wachusett Park to the summit of Mt. Wachusett. Their plan was to have the cable-line operational by the 4th of July 1903; this venture never got much passed the talking stages.







Why did the popularity of the Wachusett Park diminish?

- With the rise in use of the automobile, people traveled further distances for their entertainment.
- Fitchburg purchases Wachusett Lake
- Fitchburg puts a fence all around the lake removing it as a major park attraction.
- Fitchburg began pumping water from Wachusett Lake in 1906.

By 1920, the Gardner, Westminster, Fitchburg Railway Company has removed their trolley line and the park officially closes in 1923.



## Wachusett Park Entrance



**How the previous entrance looks today!**





*Possible Pavilion Foundation 2021*



*Possible North View House Hotel & Restaurant Foundation*



*Possible Foundation of the Roller Skating Rink*





*Fountain – Water Feed by Gravity From Bolton Pond*



*Foundation Stone Labeled 1930, if Wachusett Park Closed in the Early 1920's because Fitchburg Bought The Lake for Drinking Water,*

*What and Why Was Something Being Built There in 1930?*

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