

THE TOWN CRIER

TOWN OF SEARSMONT

SPRING 2014

TOWN MEETING 2014

April 5, 2014

For most people in this country, Town Meeting is an event they will never get to experience. Most Towns are run by Managers, councils, or mayors. We are fortunate to experience one of the purest forms of government in which the registered voters of the town come together to legislate policy and budgets for our local government. The residents who come elect the municipal officers, make financial decisions that have a direct impact on the budget, and adopt ordinances by a vote from the floor.

An association of men who will not quarrel with one another is a thing which has never yet existed, from the greatest confederacy of nations down to a town meeting or a vestry.

Thomas Jefferson

There is often lively banter and inside jokes, and always coffee and doughnuts. In Searsmont, we are fortunate that, in spite of any differences of opinion that we may have, the Town Meeting process remains cordial and productive—and is usually done by noon!

So, pick up your town report, and we'll see you on Saturday, April 5th at 9 a.m. Don't forget to come early for coffee and doughnuts!



Upcoming Events

Saturday April 5, 2014

Town Meeting

9 a.m.

Founders Day Celebration

12 noon

- Searsmont Community Building Meeting Room
- Bicentennial Proclamation, slide show, brief history of Searsmont presentation and exhibits,
 - Ames School student presentations, Bicentennial birthday cake, free refreshments,
 - Bicentennial items on sale (baseball caps, t-shirts, coffee mugs, historical calendars)
 - free gift for all who attend.

Monday, April 21, 2014

Patriot's Day

Town Office closed

Saturday, May 17, 2014

Demo Debris Day

Transfer Station 8 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Monday May 26, 2014

Memorial Day

Parade 9 a.m.

Town Office closed

Tuesday, June 10, 2014

State Primary Election & School Budget Referendum

Searsmont Community Building Meeting Room
Voting from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m.

News from the North End of Town

I have lived in a number of places in my life, but none comes close to the feeling I have when I say I'm from Searsmont. It is my hope that by writing this article, I will inspire others to write about their part of town and what it means to them.

We have called Searsmont home for twenty-one years now. I grew up in western Maine where the weather is harsher in the winter, and the stench of the paper mills fills the air. It is not by chance that we moved to this town. We spent several years looking for the best place to live, narrowing our search to four towns in this area before we settled on Searsmont. Our criteria were based upon the location, size, and cost of available land. Once we met these criteria, I figured we could build the house we wanted. We bought the first five acres of the one hundred and six acres we now own in 1989. After that we slowly acquired the additional land.

We were drawn to this neighborhood by the character of the land which had its roots in farming. When we moved here, there were six working dairy farms within about three miles. Two were in Searsmont, the rest in Morrill. All were small farms: milking twenty-five head or so of cattle. Thankfully, there are still two dairy farms in my neighborhood, both of which have been taken over by the grandsons of the former farmers.

Although I could not figure a way to make a living as a farmer, I told myself that, when I moved here, if I'm going to have farmland, we must be a farm. So we built a post-and-beam barn and we raise cattle, and grow hay, vegetables, and fruit on a small scale. We also cut wood, hunt, cross-country ski, ice skate, snow shoe and take long walks on our land.

Our end of town sometimes feels more like Morrill, than it does Searsmont. After all, Morrill Store is closer than Fraternity General Store, and many of our closest neighbors live in Morrill since our land abuts the Morrill town line.

Our house is at elevation 480 feet and our land slopes to the south. Thus, we can see much of the landscape south of us in Searsmont and beyond. We can see Lake Quantabacook, Levenseller Mountain and Moody Mountain in Searsmont, as well as Mount Battie, Mount Meguntacook, Hatchet Mountain and Blue Hill.

We live on Higgins Road North. Our road is named after a former landowner who once lived here. For those of you not familiar with our neighborhood, there is actually a Higgins Road North and a Higgins Road South. The middle section is discontinued, and thus, is impassable by most passenger vehicles. Our dead-end dirt road suits us fine. Because the road is dirt, some people hesitate to take it, and what traffic there is, is slow. Them *pot holes* keep people in line! Therefore, the occasional rabbit, deer, ruffed grouse, cow, dog or cat avoid the fate of a more traveled road. Because most everyone knows our road, they look out for my tractor skidding wood and the pulp truck that picks it up. Whoever comes down our road, past our house, is coming to see one of three families. Thus, we know most of the people who travel past our house, as well as everyone else on our road. I imagine that folks who live on the backside of Levenseller Pond, Brown Road, Peters Road, and Barrett Road feel a lot like we do because they also are dead-end dirt roads.

Before we moved here someone told us we should read "Fraternity Village" by Ben Ames Williams. I own it and have read it four times. I am always fascinated by it, probably because I can picture myself doing many of the things the characters do in the book. I know that Ben, Chet, and several characters described in this book walked my road in search for grouse and fished what we now know as Ruffingham Meadow.

The people here care a lot about their town. Maybe even more than we do. Ira Packard gave money to the Methodist Church, and set up a scholarship fund for University of Maine students from Searsmont. Richard Ames Senior gave land to the school district on New England Road to build on. Claudia Mercier gave \$100,000 to the library and town. James Robbins and his wife donated a lot of time and effort to create the new Little League ball field in North Searsmont. Scores of people chipped in to create the town office, library and historical society buildings that we have on North Main Street.

During the ice storm of 1998 the firefighters from this town checked on us daily and many people turned out to cut the trees that blocked the roads. For our part, we have been 4-H leaders for twelve years, my wife a girl scout leader, I was planning-board member for ten years and we have participated in ten Memorial Day parades. We also donated the septic design for the current town office.

So when you get chance, let the rest of us know what you think of this town and your neighborhood. I'm sure we can all learn something worthwhile. Things aren't perfect here, but in my mind, they sure beat life in some fast-paced city.

David Marceau



Searsmont Scholarship

The Searsmont Scholarship is a scholarship that is available to any resident of Searsmont who has completed at least one year of post-high school education. The Searsmont Parks and Recreation Scholarship, which was established in 1996, and the Searsmont Scholarship fund were combined in 2001 with a principal balance of \$11,990.99. Each year the interest on that money is awarded to a deserving applicant, as determined by the Scholarship committee. The committee looks at residency, academic performance, character, and financial need in making their decision. Scholarships are available for college, trade school, continuing education, and advanced degrees for students of any age and regardless of where they attend school.

Unfortunately, there is no active fundraising for this scholarship, and the principal amount hasn't changed since 2001. In these lean interest times, there isn't enough interest earned to make a decent scholarship award, or even enough to pay for one college textbook.

I am asking the community to support this scholarship at Town Meeting through a donation that, as suggested by the Donations Committee, can be used in part to build principal and in part for an award for this year. Without this support, it is unlikely that there will be a scholarship award this year, as there was not enough interest earned.

I hope that there might also be some who are interested in finding a way to make this scholarship grow through fundraising of some kind. It is certainly a challenge, but worth it to support the education of our residents.

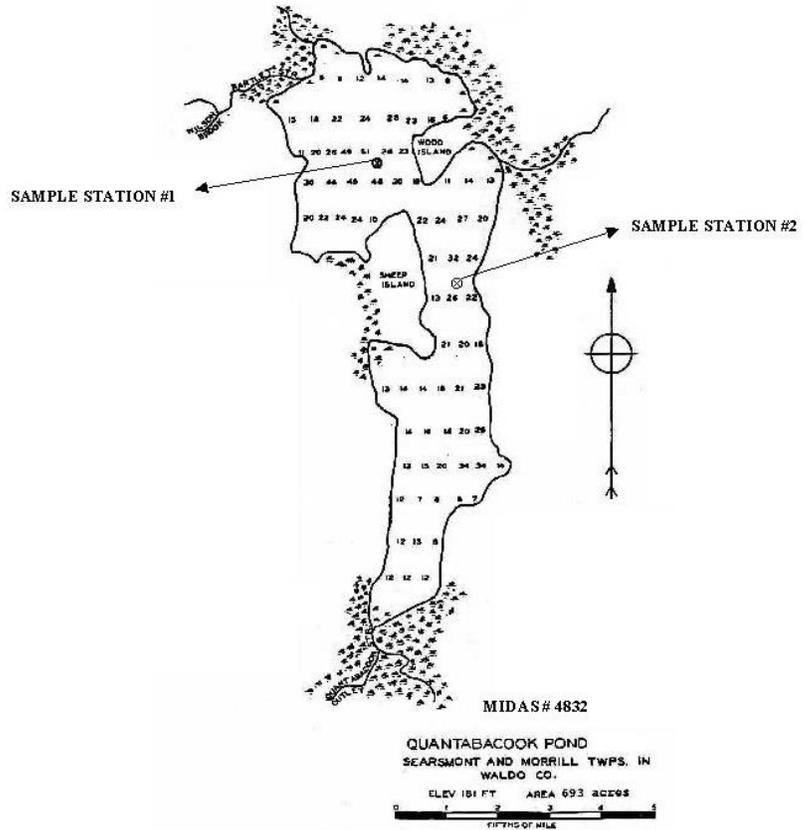
Kathy Hoey, Town Clerk

QUANTABACOOK LAKE

Morrill, Searsmont, Waldo, Maine

MIDAS 4832

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| Area (acres): | 662 |
| Perimeter (miles): | 8.3 |
| Mean Depth (feet): | 21 |
| Max Depth (feet): | 51 |
| Delorme Page: | 14 |
| Fishery Type: | Warmwater |
| Invasive Aquatic Infestation: | None known |
| Water Quality: | Average |



Data and image from Lakes of Maine
 Maine Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program
www.lakesofmaine.org



The Searsmont Town Office held an open house on Tuesday, March 25th to celebrate the retirement of Alice Pearse, the Selectmen’s Assistant and jack-of-all-trades in the Town Office for the last 14 years. Alice will retire on April 3, 2014. We wish her health and happiness as she embarks on this new journey.



Courtesy of Contessa, the pinwheel recipe that was such a hit at Alice’s open house:

Party Pinwheels Recipe



- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 2 (8 ounce) packages cream cheese, softened | ½ cup red bell pepper, diced |
| 1 (1 ounce) package ranch dressing mix | ½ cup diced celery |
| 2 green onions, minced | 1 (2 ounce) can sliced black olives |
| 4 (12 inch) flour tortillas | ½ cup shredded cheddar cheese |

1. In a medium-size mixing bowl, combine cream cheese, ranch dressing mix, and green onions. Spread this mixture on each tortilla. Sprinkle red pepper, celery, black olives, and cheese (if you’d like) over the cream cheese mixture. Roll up the tortillas, then wrap them tightly in aluminum foil.
2. Chill 2 hours or overnight. Cut off ends of the rolls, and slice the chilled rolls into 1 inch slices.

Tax Club

The voters at Town Meeting will be asked to approve a tax club program for the Town of Searsmont. The purpose of this article is to familiarize you with the concept in case you are not familiar with this program.

A basic understanding of the property tax timeline for Searsmont is helpful to understand some of the procedures in the tax club.

- The Town's fiscal year is February 1st to January 31st each year.
- February: the Waldo County Commissioners commit their county budget and send municipal assessments to all of the towns in the county.
- April: the voters set the municipal budget for the year (which began on February 1st), the due date for taxes, and the interest rates.
- June: the school budget is set by the voters of the district. As we found out last year, this can be an extended process and require multiple votes, delaying our tax commitment.
- July: (if the school budget is passed) The Assessors commit the taxes for Searsmont. If you want the actual breakdown for town, county, and school assessments from 2013, see the Assessor's Report in the Town Report.
- July-early August: Tax bills are sent to property owners.
- September 30th: traditionally, the due date for taxes
- March-June of the following year: the tax lien process begins on outstanding tax accounts.

As you can see, we are halfway through the tax year before the commitment process can occur, making the cash flow in the middle of the year a challenge. In the past, we have had to take out a Tax Anticipation Note in order to pay bills on time, and, while the interest rates can't be beat right now, the TAN lawyer that is required adds a hefty cost to the process.

What is a tax club?

A tax club is a monthly payment plan offered to residents who want to spread their tax payments out over several months. As long as payments are made on time, no interest will be charged even after the due date.

Why start a tax club?

The tax club helps the property owner by breaking up the tax bill into smaller regular payments, much like you have with an escrow account or budget utility plans. For those with fixed incomes or who have trouble saving for a big tax bill, this type of payment is often easier. For the Town, it evens out the flow of money available to operate on over the course of the year, hopefully lessening the need to borrow money until taxes come due.

Who can participate?

Any real estate property owner who has no balance due on prior tax years.

How does it work?

The taxpayer requests to participate by completing an enrollment form that is submitted to the Tax Collector. The tax collector prepares a payment coupon book for the taxpayer, with a coupon to be submitted with their payment each month. After taxes are committed, the payment book is revised so that their tax bill is paid in full by the end of March.

The Tax Club program has to be approved annually by the voters at Town Meeting. If approved this year, the first year enrollment will be from April to mid-May for 11 equal payments, with the first payment due by May 31st. In future years, enrollment will take place in February and March, and the payments will begin the end of April and span a 12 month period. An enrollment form is included with this newsletter for those who are interested in participating if it is approved at Town Meeting.

Town of Searsmont
TAX CLUB ENROLLMENT AGREEMENT

I, _____, as the owner and person responsible for the payment of annual real estate property tax on property located at _____ in the Town of Searsmont, and State of Maine, do hereby enroll in the Tax Club as established by the Inhabitants of the Town of Searsmont at their Annual Town Meeting, and agree to these terms:

1. Membership is available to any individual or business that has a tax obligation on real estate property with the Town of Searsmont;
2. The taxpayer's account(s) must be current, i.e., no balances due on prior year taxes. Tax Club enrollment period is April 1 to May 15, 2014.
3. Tax Club payments begin in May and end in March of the following year. The first payment is due May 31st.
4. Tax Club payments are due by the last day of each month.
5. Payments may be made in person or by mail. If paid by mail, they must be postmarked by the due date to be considered "on time".
6. Monthly payments are calculated on the previous year's tax bill(s), divided by 11 equal monthly installments. Once the new tax rate has been established for the year (usually in July or August), the increase/decrease shall be calculated and divided over the remaining tax club payments.
7. No interest will accrue on tax club payments, nor will any interest be paid on any tax payments before the taxes are committed.
8. Tax payment coupon books shall be issued by the Tax Collector on each account enrolled in the Tax Club; a revised payment book will be distributed after taxes are committed and the new tax rate is established.
9. **Late payments will cancel enrollment in the Tax Club on all accounts owned by the individual and/or business.** If this occurs after the interest start date, interest will be applied to the unpaid balance(s) from the date of the last payment or the interest start date, whichever is later. Late payments may prohibit enrollment in future Tax Clubs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I have read the above terms and I agree to follow them. I understand that if the payments are not made on time, it will result in removal from the Tax Club and penalties will be charged as stated.

Taxpayer Signature

Telephone Number

Printed Taxpayer Name

Date

Return this document no later than May 15 to:
Tax Collector - Town of Searsmont, P. O. Box 56, Searsmont, ME 04973