

# QUABBIN

## *Voices*

*The Friends of Quabbin Newsletter*

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*We must hear and listen to all of Quabbin's many Voices; Voices of the Past, as well as Voices of the Present and of the Future; Voices of the Trees, the Sky, the Rain that falls, and all the Wild Things; Voices of the People who depend on this valuable resource for their daily needs of clean water, and Voices of those who draw upon it for deeper needs of the Soul.*

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## LOCAL AUTHOR & JOURNALIST MICHAEL TOUGIAS TO SPEAK AT FOQ ANNUAL MEETING APRIL 7

Michael Tougias has written twelve books about New England and is currently working on his thirteenth, *Quabbin: Yesterday and Today*. As many FOQ members know, Michael often writes about the Quabbin area in his local newspaper columns. He is extremely knowledgeable about both the cultural and natural history of the area. Michael also leads visually impaired groups on nature walks and presents slide shows on Quabbin history for groups interested in visiting the reservation. Many of his books feature nature walks and background on the discon-

tinued towns and the building of the Quabbin Reservoir. Two of his books are about the King Philip Indian War, much of which took place in central and western Massachusetts. The Swift River Valley, mostly unsettled at that time, was reputed to be one of King Philip's outposts and meeting places as his warriors trekked from attacks on the eastern settlements like Brookfield and Lancaster, to those in the Connecticut River Settlements like Hadley and Deerfield.

Join us as Michael shares his knowledge and slides at our Annual meeting!

*Thanks to the United Church of Ware for Hosting FOQ's Holiday Party. A great time was had by all and we are pleased to be returning there for our 2002 Annual Meeting!*

*Left, poet Gail Thomas speaks with an FOQ member. Right, foreground: Susan Read talks with board member Don Lambert.*



### 2002 FRIENDS of QUABBIN ANNUAL MEETING

April 7, 2-4 PM

**Greenwich Foundation  
Memorial Room**

**United Church of Ware  
49 Church Street, Ware**

*Parking available in front of the church or on street. The Memorial Room is in the rear of the church.*

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## QUABBIN VOICES

is the periodic newsletter of the  
Friends of Quabbin, Inc.

Edited by Lois Barnes  
Design & production by Lisa Yeisley

*The views and opinions expressed in this  
newsletter do not necessarily reflect the  
views of Friends of Quabbin, Inc.*

## FOQ ACTIVITIES

Despite the closing of the Visitor Center the the reservation after the tragic events of September 11th, FOQ has had two very successful get-togethers. The annual **Holiday Party**, which took place as usual on the first Sunday in December, was held in Ware at the Greenwich Foundation Memorial Room instead of the closed Quabbin Visitor Center. Every one seemed to have a very good time. The party cake proved to be a real conversation piece since Quabbin was misspelled "Quaben", and was served by volunteers who did a great job of getting together and serving refreshments in an unfamiliar place.

After a preview by Lisa Yeisley of the Walter King documentary she's preparing for Memorial Day, poet Gail Thomas read from her wonderful book on Quabbin, *No Simple Wilderness*. She signed copies for an enthusiastic and delighted audience of FOQ members, former residents, board members and guests. Gail's book is now available at the Visitor Center.

### Welcome Back Party

On January 8th we enjoyed a very lively celebration of the reopening of the **Visitor Center** when Clif Read welcomed back the former residents at Tuesday Tea, and the many other members who attended the event. Please note: all members of FOQ are welcome at **Tuesday Tea**, held the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month.

*Photos: Right, from left: Nancy Wilder, Julie Pluta, Bob Wilder, Mary Boronski, Ruth Jazab. Far right: Lucile Thresher, Marge Vincent, Cynthia Shae, and Marge's friend Edith.*

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



by

Bob Clark

I was not around to witness the tranquil Swift River Valley towns or to witness the destruction of homes and landscape and the construction of dams, dikes, aqueduct, and buildings. My memories of Quabbin are of a watershed with a young forest gradually obliterating the effects of the 1938 hurricane and the human use of the land. It was a time when I could hike every day for more than a week without seeing a single person. It was also a time of major adjustment for flora and fauna and the expansion and introduction of long-absent species into the region.

Beaver, New England coyotes, fishers, turkeys, common loons, blue-gray gnatcatchers, bald eagles, black bear, and moose took advantage of this rapidly changing landscape, some with slowly increasing populations and others with dramatic increases. All have had an effect, both positive and negative, on other plant and animal species. Newly formed beaver ponds and rivers with brushy edges were great for green herons that are difficult to find now that the beaver's overuse of their habitat has eliminated the habitat for green herons. However, beaver ponds provide great habitat for blue-birds, tree swallows, grackles, wood ducks, hooded mergansers, and other ducks. Whip-poor-wills were common and now rarely seen or heard, as the forest has matured. Common loons slowly increased their nesting in Quabbin and now nest on a number of lakes in the state, while the introduction of the bald eagle has been another slow but dramatic success. The mix of forest type, age classes, and open land in fields and meadows provides for

many species, and the proportion and stability of that mix will shape the populations of species in the future.

In most years, as spring approaches, the increased runoff from melting ice and snow increases stream levels sometimes creating minor flooding and opening the ice-choked mouths of streams. The mouths of streams are always great places to look for otter and early bird migrants. As spring progresses, many bird migrants will use Quabbin as a place to rest, feed, and to occupy territories for the coming breeding season. It is always a thrill to hear the barking calls and see repeated flocks of five hundred to a thousand snow geese against a deep blue sky. Warblers are night migrants and will spend their days feeding and singing in large mixed flocks that provide excellent opportunities to observe them. Look for Louisiana waterthrushes along rocky-banked bubbling streams and northern waterthrushes in quiet, recently wooded beaver ponds with overturned trees that provide roots and soil for the foundation of their nests.

I hope you can observe the migration this spring, both bird and amphibian, and make new memories of Quabbin. There are few better places to observe, learn, and enjoy the wonders of nature. I hope you will also come to our Annual Meeting that promises to be a great one.

Wishing you a wonderful spring,  
Bob Clark



# Information Requested on Homes and Buildings Taken for Ware River Diversion

A letter from member Burton Ford of Barre says:

“We live adjacent to Quabbin Watershed above the diversion point at Coldbrook. Why not Document: Displacement of families there, the location of buildings removed from the watershed area, the beauty of the upper Ware River valley, the roads through the area, the stone walls through the area. There are remarkable stone cellars or barn foundations. There is an existing stone cattle pass under the road. the Jacob Riis retirement home site is there and much more waiting to be recognized.”

A few years ago J.R. Greene published a small volume, *The Other Lost Valley: An Album of the Villages Lost to the Ware River Diversion*. This is basically a book of early 20th century photos of important buildings and businesses of that area, with a brief commentary by J.R. Unfortunately it is out of print and is, as far as we know, the only publication which documents the areas taken from the towns of Barre, Hubbardston, Oakham and Rutland. In his introduction, J.R. mentions “the historic neglect of this region,” and writes on page 5, “Since there were only about 350 people involved, it was not a major population shift, but it was as painful to many as it was to those who had to leave the Swift River Valley for the same reasons.”

It is probably the fact that fewer people were involved and the lack of current tourist attractions in the area that account for the apparent lack of interest in what is actually a rich historic region. As Greene’s book states, 21,000 acres were taken, including a large number of mill sites, public buildings and other historical points of interest, including the state prison in West Rutland.

This is a fertile topic for historic research. The MDC archives have albums showing the buildings and homes taken, and document to whom they were sold. ❀



*These photos are of the home and filling station owned by the family of Frank Potter who, as a boy, lived in the Coldbrook area of Oakham and recalled for our Oral History Project his memories of losing his family home and seeing the landscape of the area changed forever.*

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## Greenwich’s Liz & Pomeroy Deserve a Quabbin Marker

The FOQ board of directors has voted to endorse a proposal made by Doris Dickinson to install a sign marking Mounts Liz and Pomeroy. Doris, who is doing archival work for Belchertown and whose husband grew up in Greenwich, was inspired by an editorial from a 1964 editorial in the Belchertown Sentinel, which she read aloud at the Visitor Center reopening celebration in January.

“Now that such a beautiful sign has been erected by the MDC to point out the site of the former town of Enfield, I should like to suggest that consideration be given to the designing of a SECOND SIGN. This could be put up just west of the Quabbin Dike and would point out the significance of the two picturesque islands which have been the subject of many photographs. Most visitors do not know that these islands are Mount Liz and Mount Pomeroy, once proud landmarks for the town of Greenwich, which was the “mother town” of the more often remembered Enfield.”

Funding for such a sign will have to be found; given state budget cutbacks, it’s unlikely that MDC can come up with the funding. *Quabbin Voices* would

appreciate hearing from anyone interested in helping, or with funding suggestions. As it stands, even the Visitor Center is so short-staffed that their very successful school outreach program is seriously threatened. ❀



*Doris Dickinson reads the editorial that inspired her proposal at the Visitor Center reopening celebration in January*



*“Enfield Lookout” by Elizabeth Howe Lincoln*



# INTERPRETIVE SERVICES REPORT

by  
Clif Read

**A**lthough security at Quabbin Reservoir has eased from last fall, as of late February sections of the reservation remain closed to public access and there are other changes in place which are likely to be permanent fixtures on the Quabbin landscape. At present all areas of the Reservation and Park are open with the exception of land between Gates 40 and 50, and the area south of the Administration Road and Winsor Dam between the west (main) and middle entrances. The MDC anticipates reopening these sections sometime late winter or spring, but it all depends upon world events and the status of security personnel deployed at the reservoir. Currently the National Guard is stationed at important locations in the reservation and will continue their deployment at least into March.

Even when the remaining portions of Quabbin are reopened to public access, Winsor Dam and Goodnough Dike will remain closed to vehicle traffic. Pedestrian and bicycle access will continue to be permitted at both sites. We have actually observed a dramatic increase in walkers at Winsor Dam since a majority of the Park was opened in mid-December, so this area will only increase in popularity among regular visitors. Up-to-date information about the status of public access at the reservation is available through the Visitor Center telephone message system - (413) 323-7221 - and the MDC's webpage - [www.state.ma.us/mdc](http://www.state.ma.us/mdc). We will work to have information posted, or at the very least links established, on the Friends of Quabbin web page - [www.friendsofquabbin.org](http://www.friendsofquabbin.org).

Many individuals have asked about on-going security measures at Quabbin in the post 9/11 era and what role the general public can play. The MDC and State Police have significantly in-

creased testing, surveillance and monitoring of all Division of Watershed Management property and resources. But Quabbin's immense size makes it impossible to patrol the entire area on a 24/7 basis. People are encouraged to assist the MDC and the State Police by reporting things which seem out of the ordinary or might indicate an environmental quality problem. This list may include unauthorized persons or vehicles in no-trespassing or restricted access zones, access gates left open or unlocked, or persons carrying suspicious materials or acting strangely. Fish kills, strange materials or odd environmental conditions are also noteworthy and should be reported.

Information can be passed along to a number of different sources; personnel will see that it is delivered to the appropriate staff. The State Police Barracks at Quabbin Reservoir is staffed 24 hours a day and can be reached at (413) 323-7561. The MDC Watershed Rangers phone number is (413) 323-0191, although they don't always have personnel to answer the phone. Information can also be given to the Visitor Center staff (413) 323-7221, or the Quabbin Administration Office (413) 323-6921.

Planning for the 2002 Quabbin Fishing Season is underway as the MDC struggles with new budget and staffing issues which will make normal operations a real challenge. April 13<sup>th</sup> is being eyed as opening day this year, conditions permitting, but the exact schedule and staffing level remains to be seen. Between the state budget difficulties which have trimmed the agency's budget, and passage of the early retirement package for state employees that has reduced the Quabbin work force by 10 (a 15% decrease), it is making operations much more difficult. More detailed information on the fishing season will be posted on the website and phone message as it becomes available.

Since last summer rainfall levels throughout the northeast have been consistently below normal, raising

concerns among many water managers that a prolonged drought may seriously impact drinking water supplies this summer. Many reservoirs have dipped below 50% capacity, prompting officials to announce voluntary and mandatory water bans in many communities. Shallow private wells have dried up, resulting in a boom for well drilling companies who are kept busy seven days a week tapping new water supplies for homeowners. Quabbin Reservoir currently stands at 9.6' below capacity, or 82.6% full, making it the lowest level since 1989 when the water level dropped to -18.5' or 67% of capacity. Without an appreciable snowpack in the watershed, the usual dramatic increase in reservoir storage from snow melt and spring rains will not occur over the next few months, leaving the reservoir at a lower level entering the summer months. Although it is significantly lower than in recent years, Quabbin is still in relatively good shape compared to other water supplies throughout the region. The reservoir's level bears watching and appropriate measures will be taken if the pattern of below average precipitation persists into the summer.

The Canon Envirothon is approaching and we are still looking for volunteers. If you are interested in contributing time to this environmental education program for high school students which will be taking place at Hampshire College in Amherst between July 29<sup>th</sup> and August 4<sup>th</sup>, please be in touch with me. Expertise in the environmental field is not necessary, just an interest in helping out with this international event being hosted by Massachusetts this year.

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## Welcome New Members

Michael Tougias of Franklin, MA  
(See page 1)  
Stephen P. Puffer of Amherst, MA  
Mr. Puffer, now 87, worked on the reservoir project for four years and has many stories to tell.

# At A Glimpse: MDC-DWM's Gull Control Program 2002 Quabbin Reservoir

by Lisa Gustavsen

A visitor to the Quabbin Park on an early winter evening, may glimpse a curious sight: boats launching from the Winsor Dam hangar, piloted down the reservoir by folks in bright yellow suits. Watching the scene develop, a visitor with binoculars may notice the boat traveling along the reservoir in pursuit of large incoming flocks of herring, great black-backed, and ring billed gulls attempting to land on the water. With a screamer shot from the boat or following horn blasts, the boat may then zip north herding the gulls north of Gate 8 island. These scenes are typical of MDC/DWM's Gull Harassment Program in full operation at the Quabbin Reservoir from late fall until early spring. The MDC-DWM's primary goal of the Gull Harassment program is to discourage gulls from utilizing the reservoir as a night roost and continue to maintain regulatory compliance with all applicable drinking water regulations.

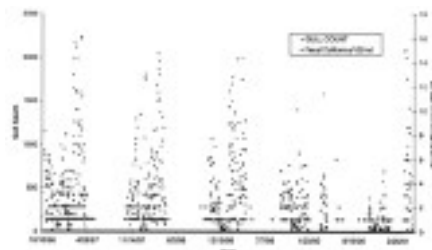


**Figure 1: The nightly program begins: launching the jet boat from hangar**

## Background

As part of the MDC/DWM's on-going and ever changing watershed protection efforts at both the Quabbin Reservoir and the Wachusett Reservoir, the DWM formally initiated the Gull Harassment Program in 1991 in response to elevated levels of fecal coliform detected in water samples taken from the Chicopee Valley Aqueduct site (Site 201) (Deslauriers, 1992). These levels were quickly linked to a new phenomenon of large flocks of gulls gathering to roost on the reservoir near the CVA intake begin-

ning in the late fall through the winter (Wildlife biologists later determined that most of these birds were coming from the Massachusetts Cape to winter closer to food supplies.) The MDC's Gull Program began with a handful of staff using very basic equipment such as long johns, small fishing area boats, and good night vision. By 1998, MDC-DWM had refined its gull control program using scientific research and field observations. The results have been highly successful as measured by dramatically reduced fecal coliform bacteria counts collected from water samples (Figure 2) taken at Site 201. The program itself had grown to an active two prong approach of habitat modification, reducing local winter food supplies at landfills and other locations, complemented with behavior modification by actively harassing gulls attempting to establish nightly roosting sites on the reservoirs (Lyons et al., 1998). Away from the reservoir, MDC/DWM continues to be a strong advocate for stricter control measures at regional landfills.



**Figure 2: Quabbin Reservoir Gull Counts and Fecal Coliform Bacteria (CFU/100mL) vs. time as measured from water samples taken at MDC Site 201 (CVA Intake)**

The MDC/DWM's success in its gull control efforts is evidenced by its continued compliance with the Federal Surface Water Treatment Rule's Fecal Coliform standard. Figure 2 shows FC levels at the CVA intake from January, 1990 to May, 2000. As the figure shows, FC levels last climbed above the 20 per 100 ml standard on December 29, 1994, when they reached 25 FC per 100 mL. Since then, FC levels have

gone into double figures (16 and 15 FC per 100 ml) only twice. This illustrates the success that the Gull Program has had over the years (Reyes, 2001.)

## MDC/DWM's Gull Harassment Program 2002-Quabbin Reservoir

Over the past decade, the program has evolved. Staff now wear survival suits functioning as floatation devices and use boats with radar for harassment activities.



**Figure 3: Staff gearing up: Survival suit**

Habitat modification methods used by MDC-DWM staff at the Quabbin Reservoir rely primarily on human presence and noise in order to make the reservoir an unpleasant or dangerous nightly roosting area. Human presence is established using active boat patrols in a defined area while the gulls are arriving on the reservoir, typically just before dusk. The human presence is reinforced using shellcrackers (aka "screamers" and "bangers") fired from shore or the launched boat using 12 gauge shotguns or .22 caliber pistols. Human presence and the use of pyrotechnics is typically enough to prevent gulls from landing to roost. However, DWM staff utilize lethal control methods such as sharp-shooting, to reinforce the harassment methods throughout the program.

Presently, MDC's nightly gull count ranges between 100-4,000 gulls attempting to roost on the Quabbin reservoir at night, yet the fecal coliform bacteria counts have remained low (0-2 CFU/100mL) a result of the active program. \*

[Article references available upon request.]

# Much Recent Literary and Video Interest in the Quabbin Story

by Lois Barnes

A horror story by Stephen King, a much-viewed underwater video on PBS, and a recent flurry of publicity over former Massachusetts Governor Weld's latest book attests to a growing exploitation of the Quabbin Story. A lot of what is written bears little resemblance to the true story or to historical fact. Some of us who still have memories or memories of loved ones who lived in the Swift River Valley have a difficult time with this taking over of what we view as our personal history.

In the last issue of the Swift River Valley Historical Society newsletter, SRVHS President Elizabeth Peirce commented on the video "Under Quabbin":

"Recently you may have seen a documentary film on TV entitled "Under Quabbin." This was made and produced by an individual with a passion for diving. At SRVHS, we consider it an invasion of privacy. We believe that whatever was left behind should be forever undisturbed. To snoop around to see what other people have left behind is similar to entering a dead person's home to see what might be there for the taking. Families were caused great suffering by orders to leave the valley, and the pain is still there despite some opinions. Permits for this exploration were not granted by the MDC (local office), the filmmakers bypassed through channels of greater influence. We apologize to the souls of those torn from their final resting places, and all others whose hearts were broken by their eviction from Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, Prescott and parts of New Salem. Any secrets left behind should be just that. No need for exploitation."

While reading former Governor Weld's *Stillwater*, supposedly about the ending of the Quabbin towns in the 1930's, I felt as though I had been

caught in some kind of a time warp until I finally realized that what I was reading was Mr. Weld's memories of his own growing up in a place and time much different from my own.

It seemed to me, as I am sure it will seem to many other historians of that period, that Mr. Weld's often repeated claim that his memories of the taking of his wealthy family's home on Long Island was comparable to what happened in the taking of the Swift River Valley is both specious and invalid.

In the book there seemed to be little, if any, attempt to recreate the feelings of the times. After all, by the 1930's most people in the valley had radios and heard the daily news: families homeless and starving in the cities; troops called out against the veterans' march on Washington; thousands of young people wandering the country looking for work; the corruption of developing big-city machine politics. There is little recognition in *Stillwater* of the ten-year trauma endured by several hundred families - their lives not only disrupted by the technological change destroying their valley, but also by the general anxiety and hardships of the worst depression in America.

I also found the stereotype of the valley people distasteful, as one reviewer quoted Weld, "simple people. . .without any instinct for confrontation. . .whose imagination rarely extend beyond the place and moment where they are, and blind acceptance of what they're dealt makes them especially susceptible to a corrupt scheme. . ." I would say this is at least denigrating, if not actually insulting, to the people of the valley. On the contrary, most of the people I remember in the valley blamed the corrupt politicians in Boston. Governor Curley may have been viewed as a great man by his constituents, but he was hardly a heroic figure to the poverty-stricken valley residents. I think this would have been a much better book if Weld had written a little more about the corruption of the

machine politics of the day and a little less about the dullness of the valley people and their failure to recognize skullduggery in their midst - of which, in fact, there was very little at the local level. I certainly enjoyed Weld's lampooning of politicians in his earlier books, and those acquainted with Massachusetts political skullduggery will appreciate the significance of the use of Ripton as an imaginary fifth valley town.

The truth of the matter is that the people of the valley, with little representation in Boston, were victims, powerless against the political clout of the legislators in Boston threatening the use of Eminent Domain. After all, the experience of their forefathers in Shays' Rebellion was hanging or banishment. Today, those of us who are left want the world to know the way we felt. What happened to us is now happening all over the world in so-called undeveloped countries.

In contrast to Weld's book, I am very much looking forward to the publication of both Michael Tougias's book on Quabbin, a carefully researched work using direct quotes from former residents, and Jackie Koler's *Someday*, a novel for young adults. Jackie has received library awards for her historical novels of teens growing up in earlier periods. She spent many hours at the Visitor Center and at Tuesday Tea interviewing former residents and researching this novel about a young girl growing up in Enfield. Set in the same time period as Weld's novel, Jackie's seems to me a much truer representation of how the technological changes occurring so rapidly then, even as they are today, affected the life of one teenager growing up in that small dying town in the 1930's. ❀

## Join Biodiversity Days 2002 May 31 – June 3

**T**ake part in community celebrations of the natural heritage of 48 Connecticut River watershed towns in Massachusetts. The Connecticut River Watershed Council and several cosponsoring organizations are participating in Massachusetts' Biodiversity Days with a focus on the Connecticut River and its tributaries – the Chicopee, Deerfield, Westfield and Farmington Rivers.

Biodiversity Days 2002 challenges citizens to discover and identify the wealth of animal and plant species which live in our communities. Participants will find, inventory and learn about the flora and fauna in their hometowns. Results of the inventories are posted on the Biodiversity Days website maintained by the state's Executive Office of Environmental Affairs and accessible to all.

We need volunteers to lend their sharp eyes and lead nature walks or join a team led by an expert naturalist. From May 31 to June 3 we will

be holding nearly a hundred nature walks to count all of the plant and animal species we can find.

Help us organize field trips in these towns near the Quabbin: Barre, Belchertown, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Ludlow, North Brookfield, Palmer, Ware and Warren.

To volunteer, contact Debbie Shriver, Connecticut River Watershed Council at 413-772-2020 or [crwc@crocker.com](mailto:crwc@crocker.com).



*“Beaver Pond”  
by Elizabeth Howe Lincoln*

## ODD & ENDS

### FOQ ANNUAL MEETING

**April 7, 2-4 PM**

**Greenwich Foundation  
Memorial Room  
United Church of Ware  
49 Church Street, Ware**

### Living History Day

For former residents will be celebrated again at Pathfinder Vocational School on May 21st. Call and make reservations for lunch and program with Mrs. Martha Barrett 413-283-9701 ext. 233

*And from our December issue, did you guess who?*



*Who else but our own  
Harrison Thresher!*