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RAVENSWOOD: WILDERNESS TO SPECIAL PLACE LECTURE FINDING AID & TRANSCRIPT

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Video Description

Learn about the early history of the Cape Ann area with this video that features a lecture offered at the Cape Ann Museum in collaboration with The Trustees of Reservations. Historian and archaeologist Electa Kane Tritsch begins by tracking the inhabitation of the Gloucester peninsula from early Native American activity to subsequent European colonization. Drawing upon old maps and legal documents, she then extends this timeline for the Freshwater Cove area through

27 Pleasant Street, Gloucester, Massachusetts 01930 USA

+1 978-283-0455

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to the present, including Gloucester native and philanthropist Samuel Elwell Sawyer, who acquired and then donated the 205 acres that formed the basis of Ravenswood Park upon his death in 1889. Since that time, The Trustees have expanded and maintained this naturalist’s haven for the study and enjoyment of visitors from both near and far.

Subject list

William Champlain	Freshwater Cove
Richard Varrell	Old Salem Road
Samuel Elwell Sawyer	Ravenswood Park
Mason Walton	The Trustees of Reservations
Electa Kane Tritsch	

Transcript

0:11 Linda Marshall:

Hi, my name is Linda Marshall and I'm the director of programs at the museum, and I want to welcome you all this afternoon. Thank you so much for joining us.

Before we begin, I just wanted to mention a couple of upcoming programs. Next Saturday at 3pm, which is November 22, We will be having a concert of classical guitar by Robert Squires in the Davis Gallery, which is the first gallery that you walk through as you enter the museum. And that program is free and open to the public. And also on Saturday, December 6, at 3pm, Lisa Peters, who is the director of research and publications at the Spanierman Gallery in New York, will be giving a lecture on Gershon Benjamin and that lecture is in conjunction with our new exhibition, which is currently on view on the third floor, *Gershon Benjamin and His Contemporaries*, so I hope you can join us for one of those programs.

1:10

Today we are very fortunate to have historian and archaeologist Electa Kane Tritsch with us presenting a lecture entitled, “Ravenswood - Wilderness to Special Place.” And we're very pleased to have been able to collaborate with the Trustees of Reservations on this program. It is my pleasure to introduce to you Ramona Latham. Ramona is the Cape Ann educator and interpreter for the Trustees, and she's going to tell us a little bit more about the program today

and also more about our guest speaker. And one quick note, please do join us at the conclusion of the program for some refreshments out in the atrium. Thank you so much, Ramona.

2:00

Thank you very much, Linda Marshall. My name is Ramona Latham and I am the educator and interpreter for the Cape Ann properties of the Trustees of Reservations. The Trustees is so pleased to be able to partner with the Cape Ann Museum to bring this great presentation on “Ravenswood — Wilderness to Special Place,” by Electa Kane Tritsch. The Trustees, as you may or may not know, is a 117 year-old land trust. We've been conserving special places for historic, ecologic and scenic significance for a long time, most importantly, for public enjoyment. I recently heard a statistic that 70% of our conserved land is closed to the public. The Trustees is well known for a high standard of excellence in maintaining special places. Although we've provided incidental education over all the years, we are now making a concerted effort in education. Our new education and outreach initiative allows us to tell the stories of our valuable places in our community. The Trustees has seven — Yes, seven — properties right here in Cape Ann. Can anyone name them? Besides Ravenswood Park...

3:35

Halibut Point, Agassi Rock, Stavros Reservation in Essex, Coolidge Point in Manchester by the Sea, Misery Island and one more — Mount Ann, one of the first properties the Trustees has ever received.

Our education and outreach initiative allows the Trustees to invite you to join us at these valuable community places. We have 100 special places across the state of Massachusetts. We have mountaintops and waterfalls and farms and beaches. And we want to help people understand that they are intrinsically connected to the land. We want you to see more deeply what has happened, what is happening, and what might happen in these special places. It seems static, but it's always changing. We want to get you outdoors. We want you to breathe fresh, fragrant, life-giving air. We want to celebrate the beauty and interest in woodlands, wetlands, and places that add value to our community and our life.

4:53

Our education programs include a summer camp at Crane Beach and at Crane Estate; a CSA, which is a community supported agriculture program, and a dairy operation at Appleton Farms, providing hands-on programs for all ages.

We have volunteer and expert-led walks and talks, focusing on significant cultural and natural aspects of the place. We have service learning opportunities for high-schoolers, conservation crew hands, map and quest production, trails stewards. We have after school programs for 9 to 11 year olds, neighborhood naturalists, junior conservationists. Understanding ecology is important to healthful living. Opportunities to connect to current conservation efforts through our website, Conservation Common, is available to all, and community conservation projects, such as the Clark Pond restoration in Manchester by the Sea at our Coolidge Point property; and sweet bay magnolia restoration and preservation at Ravenswood Park. You can learn more about these by talking to me, or contacting our office or through our website.

6:14

Ravenswood Park, long known as the People's Park — (is) 600 woodland acres right up the hill from downtown Gloucester. A gift to our city, and it provides us a refuge in green space, a winter wonderland, recreation, and a cultural landscape that has many, many stories — of Native American burial grounds, rock walls and cellar holes, old Salem Road; and of the people who have interacted with this special place. You are the current characters who, together, as trustees, enjoy, explore and are the stewards of Ravenswood Park. And for that, we thank you.

7:00

We'll hear more about the characters of the past in Electa's presentation.

Electa Kane Tritsch — (is)no stranger to the Trustees of Reservations. We couldn't do a lot of what we do without her research and her reports. She's highly regarded with the Trustees. She is well known to those involved with Massachusetts history, preservation and conservation. She has been a practicing archaeologist and historian for 25 years. During her career, she has worked as a teacher, archaeological survey director, museum curator and research historian, writing about the people who used, developed, treasured, exploited and preserved the land of Massachusetts.

7:55

Electa was editor and co-author of *Building Dedham*, a study of community development and change. Her essays have appeared in a wide range of publications. More recently, her novel, *Old Wives Tales*, explored the past of a small town New England while testing the line between fact and fiction. For many years, she has worked with Massachusetts communities, state agencies, and the Trustees investigating the varied ways in which men in their environments interact in the Commonwealth.

8:32

She has done a wonderful cultural history report on Choate, also known as Hog, Island in the Crane Wildlife Refuge. I have just learned that she has also helped research Copicut Woods

down in a 14,000 bio-reserve between Fall River and New Bedford, and of course, most recently, Ravenswood Park. She was a longtime resident of Medfield, and in 2004 moved to Concord with her husband Jeff, who's here today, to watch the Sudbury River flow by in her spare time. Their sons, John and Ben, are both in California pursuing careers in film and music. Please join together in a warm welcome to Electa Kane Tritsch.

9:31

Electa Kane Tritsch speaking: I have to make this (microphone) go away first. So I can see you.

Can you still hear me? No? Oh, is it turned on? It is turned on. Okay. We'll try this again. Is that better?

Okay, good afternoon. Thank you for coming. I think probably this is as good a place as any to be, despite Ramona's saying that we want to get you all outdoors to breathe the fresh air. Given what it's like outdoors in Gloucester this afternoon, you picked a good place.

Now I may have to ask you to bear with me a little because I'm dealing with state of the art technology here, and I'm not exactly a state of the art technology person. So I have lots of buttons to push — which could go wrong any moment, which is half the reason my husband is here this afternoon. But let's move on. Welcome. Let's see if I can start this right. Oh, I can. Okay.

10:35

See, this is Gloucester, right? Gloucester. Gloucester is the place where men fish. It's the place where women and families look to the sea. If they're not fishing, then perhaps they're cutting the granite from the ground. This wonderful panoramic photograph, which is in the Cape Ann Historical Association collection, is of the Pigeon Hill Quarry back in 1906. I just find that a mind-boggling picture.

Now, vaguely we also know that in Gloucester's past somebody must have farmed somewhere, but the land wasn't exactly encouraging. And look how it turned out. This is a painting by Louise Brumbach. I'm guessing it was around the first decade of the 20th century, and this is theoretically of Dogtown. It's not the way we think of Dogtown; it's not the way Dogtown looks today. But the glacial erratics and the stones pushed to the side to make stone walls are an indication of some of the problems that anyone wanting to farm in Gloucester ran into. So what was left of Dogtown were romantic cellar holes and stories of widows, and witches and a dog's town.

12:05

Now let me stop for a minute. Can we have a show of hands here as to how many of you are actual Gloucester residents? Who... yeah, that's great. Okay, well you know that there are other historic parts of Gloucester. There is more than one old road winding through town – like Western Avenue, for instance, which wends its way (now comes the next magic... magic here we go) wends its way from Manchester along here to the port, and eventually, with other names attached to it, circles Cape Ann.

12:48

On Western Avenue, there are 18th century houses aplenty — some of them facing stubbornly south despite the fact that the road Western Avenue (wait, see I pushed the wrong button)... the road Western Avenue is over here. Even the house attributed to James Sawyer, Jr., circa 1795, as its plaque says, is yet another 18th century house and again, I believe originally it faced south. (I'm going to have trouble with this pointer.) I think this side, this facade was the original front of the house, but don't quote me on that.

13:41

So, set among all of these antiquities is the entrance to Ravenswood Park, haven of dog walkers and stroller pushers from all over Cape Ann. But before we talk dog walkers or even colonists and merchants and public benefactors, let's put Gloucester into a little longer perspective, say about 10,000 years ago when the first evidence of Native American use of this area (note I don't say occupation), use of this area shows up in the archaeological record. But, don't you love this map? I keep coming back to it. It's my favorite. It's an old... it's an 1895-1917 USGS map of Cape Ann, and it's just wonderfully detailed, so bear with it.

14:39

But back to the Native Americans. From at least the late archaic period of about 6,000 years ago, recent history relatively speaking, Native American groups explored and traveled around Cape Ann, coming in the summer months, when the breeze was cool, the shellfish were plentiful, and few storms hindered travel. This was particularly important because most of them probably came by boat, taking advantage of the easy access up the Annisquam, the Mill and the Little Rivers and the sheltered landings (I'll do this right before we're finished) in Gloucester Harbor, and Essex Bay.

15:30

There are shell middens, especially along the Ipswich side up here, as well as other artifacts, which were found on the nearby uplands, that tell us that there were some food collection sites (food collection, meaning shellfish, for instance), and campsites here, but not many, apparently, as early Native Americans, like later Anglo settlers, preferred the richer resources and the

easier landscape of the Great Marsh, starting here, but going all the way up to the Merrimack. (They) preferred that over Gloucester's rocky peninsula.

16:19

But by the Woodland Period, which is about 1000 years ago — just yesterday in measured time or documented time, if an archaeological site can be a document — the population of Eastern Massachusetts had expanded to such an extent that small villages — really small villages — could be found almost anywhere. There was freshwater, workable soil, and otherwise abundant resources.

16:55

Take this wonderful piece of map for instance, drawn by Samuel Champlain in 1606, on the second of his two voyages of exploration, where he hit Gloucester. Here, of course, is what Champlain considered to be Le Beauport, the beautiful harbor of Gloucester. But more to the point of what we're talking about, are these wonderful little humps here of various sorts, which are wigwams with smoke coming out of the top, the center of them, and surrounded by planting fields, and notice how these are all represented as being fairly close to the harbor. Also notice that there are no wigwams on Eastern Point now. No surprise, right.

17:52

But it was an occupied location by the time the fishermen and later the colonists from Europe came here. Now, there was another geographical feature that Champlain thought particularly admirable, which unfortunately is just off his map over that away. (There we go again, right there.) And of course it's fresh water. That was the resource he was looking for. And that's Freshwater Cove. Champlain and his fellow seamen filled their barrels in Freshwater Cove.

18:32

But there was something else in Freshwater Cove besides water. And that was salt marsh hay: wonderful, natural, doesn't-have-to-be-planted, hay, which was one of the essential resources to any colonist and is part of his farm makeup. And we have to say that salt hay was definitely one of the perhaps few agrarian treasures of Cape Ann. There is a lot of salt marsh around Cape Ann.

19:09

So we have timber and we have hay, good commodities for settlers. But there was one obvious drawback for colonists. All of Cape Ann is cut off from the west by marsh — tidal marsh. And on the southwest coast down here, if you can get a glimpse from where you're sitting of the contour lines, you will get a sense of how incredibly rocky and how deep the ravines are along

the southwest coast above Freshwater Cove. This particular location is part of Mass. Audubon's Norman's Woe Wildlife Sanctuary, right along Western Avenue. It would be a challenge on foot to walk through these ravines; basically almost impassable if you had a loaded hay-wain (hay wagon) or a timber sledge in the winter.

20:21

Now, in the course of normal colonial settlement in Massachusetts Bay, these areas, West Gloucester, the whole of Cape Ann, (Why is it doing that? I didn't tell it to do that. Okay...) and all of Cape Ann were "outlands." This is a phrase that is found frequently in deeds — in colonial deeds. They're outlands because the land was terrible for cultivation. It was short on water, and it was terrible for transportation, except by sea, of course, but as any of you who is a boatman knows, that has definite limitations to it.

21:05

So this is not a place normally where one would want to settle. This is where you go to get a resource, and then you go back to the good stuff. There's one exception to this and the difficulty of getting to it, which is right here. You are coming from Salem, originally, through Manchester and along — not along Western Avenue because that was really steep — but up over as gentle a slope as possible, and then finally working your way down to the one piece of solid land. I know you don't think it's solid land — it was solid land — which gets you across to the peninsula of Cape Ann.

21:53

Now, the irony of that is that, that one piece of solid land was cut through to allow for faster boat traffic in 1660. So they kind of did away with their one easy route by doing that. But that road, thought to have been an Indian footpath before the colonists got here, improved over the years, and off and on known as the Salem Road, the road to Salem, the Old Salem Road, the Salem Path, is not a bad walk, as you see; or a ride, especially if you were on a horse.

22:37

Some of its limitations are pretty obvious. This is exposed bedrock ledge. And I hate to imagine riding over that on a stage coach for instance — this was the coach route for a while. But still, it managed to wend a circuitous way through the transportation minefields of glacial erratic boulders. It avoided the worst of the upland swamps that dot what is now Ravenswood to dip finally, fairly precipitously down to meet up with today's Western Avenue, and all of a sudden, an explanation for this stubborn house facing south away from the road. It's not away from the road at all — it's facing on the Old Salem Road. By the time this extremely crude map was drawn in 1795, this was the road to Salem.

23:42

What's not shown on this map — which doesn't show a lot of things — is that by this time in its history, Gloucester had already settled and unsettled two entire residential neighborhoods: Dogtown Common, certainly the best known of them, was on its last legs, inhabited by widows, African Americans, social outcasts of various sorts; while a roadside community that had once briefly flourished along the Old Salem Road, had largely been abandoned.

24:22

Here's the earliest deed that I found to land along the Old Salem Road. There are earlier documents; I just haven't found a deed. Let's look at this for just a minute, because it gives you some idea of what some of the problems were. It doesn't matter “who” as much as “what.” A “parcel of upland and fresh meadow” — well, fresh meadow is swamp, basically. I mean, today we call it wetlands — that's nice too. But it provided fresh hay the same way salt marsh provided salt pay, so fresh meadow is good stuff but it's wet.

All we're talking about is a little, tiny piece of land three quarters of an acre here. And in Gloucester on the north side of Salem Path, so called, as it leads through the capital “Woods.” The “Woods” — that's the wilderness.

25:20

And then we talk about the boundaries on this piece of property. One boundary goes along some more upland, upland meaning, not swamp. It is therefore useful, possibly for building a house, possibly for pasture; in rare occasions for cultivation. And then we have more meadow, or swamp. And then we have a really crooked boundary that is very carefully described, and note that we have a fast rock with stones on it. That means it's held fast in the earth. It's a piece of bedrock. Then we move along a little bit to another rock with stones on it, and then the highway. And then we go to a heap of stones. And then a pretty large long rock by the meadow to the west end of said rock and then we go over the meadow to another large rock. And then finally we go back to the first rock. Okay, that gives you some idea of what the land was like.

26:35

The question then is, why on earth did Richard Varrell want to buy this piece of property?

All right, we're going to go off now on a little bit of genealogy, or at least genealogically-related history. And I have no wonderful illustrations for this piece. So just sort of sit back and let your imagination do its own illustrating for a moment.

Richard Varrell — the one who's over there — was from Ipswich. He married a Gloucester girl. And so he moved to Gloucester to let her be near her family or something. I mean, that's as

good a reason as any, right? This was in 1728. By 1742, he had made the acquaintance of James Parsons, who was a blacksmith from a family who owned extensive lands in the vicinity of Freshwater Cove. Varrell talked Parsons into selling him the small beginning that we just saw the deed for.

27:43

Over the next 25 years, Varrell, who called himself a farmer — remember, he started with three quarters of an acre of land — slowly enlarged his homestead on the Salem Road. In 1751, he bought four more acres of upland and swamp. In 1766, he bought another four acres. These eight acres were right next to his home lot so he now had eight and three quarters acres on which to farm — well, that he owned to farm. Remember, he could be leasing somebody else's land and that doesn't show up in the deeds.

28:23

Meanwhile, Varrell's son, Richard Jr., right there, married Hannah Millet, daughter of a neighboring landowner, and they built a house across the road — Old Salem Road. Houses were built, fields and pastures were fenced. Richard Sr. built the barn and allowed his son-in-law, George Francis, right there, who married Hepzibah, to start a garden on one corner of his land. Believe it or not, George Francis had a deed to use this garden spot. It makes me think he didn't totally trust his son-in-law. But that's another story, I guess. Someone up the road was named John Donahue, and I can't find out anything more about him, but he had a house next to the Varrell compound.

29:16

And then in the late 1760s, something went wrong. Matter of fact, it may sound like echoes of what we've been going through in the past month or so. Richard Jr., a fisherman, borrowed money from a neighboring widow. Apparently his father also borrowed money, from Solomon Parsons. Neither father nor son could repay their debts. And by 1776, the 15 and three quarters acres of land that was their entire combined estate on the Old Salem Road was back in the hands of Freshwater Cove families.

Those who owned most of the land that would become Ravenswood lived elsewhere in Gloucester. They didn't live on the Old Salem Road. The Parsons family, for instance, to whom Varrell sold his struggling farm. When Parsons died, his inventory listed a piece of land bought of Varrell, three quarters of an acre. This had been Richard Varrell's home lot. The house was already gone in 1808.

30:33

Apparently, the neighborhoods strung out along the Old Salem Road was a brief episode in the history of Gloucester and did not long survive the Revolution. It may have started somewhat later than Dogtown, but it died at a similar time period.

Gloucester, like other Eastern Mass. and New England communities, suffered a major economic upset as a result of the war. Many Cape Ann vessels were destroyed by the British, while others were refitted for privateering. Fishing and trade, Gloucester's two major industries, came to a virtual standstill and what commerce remained relocated to Annisquam's better protected harbor. Food was scarce. During the war, some of it actually had to be imported to Gloucester from as far away as Virginia.

31:35

The Salem Road community, already on the economic fringe, apparently was one of Gloucester's wartime casualties.

This later map shows a glimpse of the settlement area. The big black line through the center represents the Old Salem Road, and written in illegible writing here are little labels saying old cellar, old cellar. This double square next to it, I believe is a stone outline of a home lot such as Varrell's. I think it probably was not his. But there are other lines sort of wandering off into nowhere that in fact are stonewall lines that you can trace today if you wander through this area.

32:31

So, in 50 or 60 years, a neighborhood grew, died and was erased. But you can see some of it if you know how to look today.

This is Richard Varrell, Sr.'s cellar hole.

This is the rocky hillside where Richard Varrell, Jr. built his house.

33:01

There's a stone wall wandering among the erratics up here, and if you go up far enough onto the hillside you'll find his cellar hole as well. This nicely trimmed, topped-off foundation is actually hidden off the road. It's a double cellar hole with a huge boulder in the middle of it. I have no idea how they, why they built whatever they built there. It might have been a barn; it might have been storage, because next to this double foundation on a later map is a label saying, Solomon's orchard. And in fact, if you wander along that part of Old Salem Road, you'll still see some wisps of apple trees along the side.

33:57

There are woodlot walls, but you might not see them, which is why I asked these two gentlemen to stand on one of the walls for me. So you can see there's a line of stones under their feet. We don't normally encourage people to stand on stone walls because, in fact, it more often than not makes the stones fall off, and you're then destroying a cultural resource. In this case, we gave them special dispensation.

34:28

And finally, one of the cultural resources of Ravenswood is this dead tree, old dead tree surrounded by a wall. In fact, the tree was there before the wall and was probably one of the original boundary markers of someone's woodlot. You read the deed you will find, “and a Black Oak marked...” and from there you go on somewhere else. And that stone wall followed in line of where the tree was to confirm the ownership of this particular woodlot.

35:08

The American Revolution marked the end of the Varrell community on Old Salem Road. It was sufficiently depopulated at that point that a pest house, otherwise known as a plague house, was actually built in the vicinity in 1777. Despite an assortment of maps for this area, that indicate where the mapmaker thinks the pest house is, or was, I don't believe they yet have figured out where it is.

I disagree with most of the maps on that point.

35:50

What is the pest house, though? It's a place where people... It's an abandoned house, for instance, an unoccupied house away from population, away from where people go. In this case, there was one that was actually constructed in Gloucester, and it was designed to house the victims of the current smallpox plague that was going through the community, to isolate them from the rest of the community. They went there and either survived because they were stubborn, or died. There was rarely any kind of medical attention, or any kind of nursing for the people who went to or were taken to the pest house. We don't know where the pest house was, it had to have been off Old Salem Road because this was still a trafficked, i.e., a well-used main road into town. So that's one of the mysteries yet to be resolved. Stay tuned.

36:55

And here, this is a modern cultural resources map for Ravenswood and along (I'm going to push the right button, yeah) along the Old Salem Road, you see a whole series of sites — Varrell, an unidentified house with a small boulder in the middle of the foundation. Another house, a farm, Varrell Jr. This is Solomon's orchard up here with the funny double cellar hole behind it. We noticed that there was a place called Flat Rock pasture. It's woodland, now — you won't

identify it unless you're really good at identifying different age trees. And, of course, the quarry road as well.

37:45

There's a lot going on in Ravenswood at one point in its lifetime, at least six building sites right along the road, not away from it. Why did this neighborhood disintegrate? Obviously, we heard the Varrells went bankrupt, basically. The pest house chased people away. But, most significant was likely the fact that the main stage route in 1791, 95 — I forgot to look up the date, sorry — the main stage route coming up from Salem and Manchester was re-routed along an improved and much flatter Western Avenue. So, it bypassed... its like old Route One. You know, when they build the new Turnpike, you lose all the commerce on old Route One because everybody drives on the new Turnpike instead.

38:51

By 1830 — a close up here — we find that the Old Salem Road is called the Old Pest House Road on a printed map of the area. And in fact this map maker decided that the old path to Salem was along Hesperus Avenue. We have the road to Manchester. He did notice the magnolias in there — in that black space says magnolia swamp. But notice what else he put on this map. The map maker, by the way, was told to identify which parts of the town were cleared land and which parts were wooded or swampy land. So what do we have here, up here, woodland and swamps, woodland and swamps. And then down here by the coast we have high land and pitch pine and shrubs. This doesn't sound promising. You notice though, that there is some cleared space over here, near Stage Fort.

(Are we losing the battery, am I running out of battery ... could be, we'll see.)

40:06

And you notice that the other thing that's kind of interesting is (Hello, there... I keep losing it) Sawyer's Hill. You can see Sawyer's Hill - it's right there. Okay, remember Sawyer's Hill.

In the final analysis, the renaissance of the Ravenswood area can be attributed to two factors, the rise of Gloucester as a summer resort, and the family history of Samuel Elwell Sawyer.

40:40

By 1872, this map, (I'm going to walk over here because I don't trust this pointer anymore) you see the Freshwater Cove village down here. You see roads and house lots laid out for a new summer colony over near Stage Fort Park. You see the open spaces that indicate cleared land. And up there...is Bond's Hill, and on the Bond's Hill area it says, "Bond's Hill, site of proposed reservoir."

And here is Samuel Elwell Sawyer in this wonderful evocative portrait by C. X. Zedgian (or something like that — I've never heard his name pronounced) which is found — you can go and study it up close — in the Sawyer Free Library — which Mr. Sawyer, the Boston merchant, had supported since 1850. But he gave it a home in 1884.

42:00

This house is a remnant of that time before the Revolution, that time when Dogtown Common still had residents and the Old Salem Road was still a community. This was a house built in 1764 by a merchant (Thomas Sanders) in downtown Gloucester.

Sawyer had been brought up, had grown up in Gloucester and loved the town and felt very proud of his roots in the town. In fact, as an adult, he spent his winters in Boston, as most merchants did at that point, and then came to Gloucester in the summer, staying at the old family place in Freshwater Cove.

After 120 years, Sawyer's find of Thomas Sander's house was probably a good buy. Chances are it was run down by then. And he had a bunch of extra money to put into rehabbing it and upgrading it for the town library, which he did, supervising every last nail and painting that went into it.

43:00

We've heard that many of his pet choice of paintings would not have made the "A" list these days. But he basically provided an entire collection of art for the Library and Lyceum, as well as many of the books for its shelves.

But those bargain buys got him thinking, and two years after he had bought this house, he took advantage of other bargain buys to begin another hometown project. He began acquiring property in the steeply wooded — that's the dots area — hillside above Freshwater Cove.

43:58

By the 1880s, these woods had lost most of their usefulness. New growth white pine and other weed trees were still important material to build the countless crates and boxes used by the fishing and shoe industries in the cape area. The road through the woods, though, was normally empty, and there were very few, I'm guessing, full-grown trees allowed to remain on the land.

But Sawyer, who had visited many of the park lands in Europe, and the picturesque country estates in the northeast; who had studied a report on Central Park and knew to his chagrin, the elaborate plans for Boston's Emerald Necklace (his land there was taken by eminent domain to be part of the Emerald Necklace) — Sawyer saw the woodlands potential as a naturalized park.

He had explored them since he was young. He knew where the ponds were, the vistas, the stands of magnolia.

45:06

He decided to bring together the wood lots of Freshwater Cove Woods, as he called it — Freshwater Cove Woods — for a new park in Gloucester. At first, it was very easy. People had inherited these wood lots from their parents and their grandparents and their great grandparents. There was nothing you could do with them. They didn't need them. Nobody used wood for fire anymore. They used coal. So Sawyer bought a lot of land for very little money. But then the word got around that rich man Sawyer was buying, and the prices went up, and if you track the deeds, the over 100 deeds that he had, for the lots that he bought, the price goes up consistently one after the other. Some of them he refused to buy because he knew he was being gypped.

46:03

But when he died in 1889, Sawyer had acquired 205 acres for a total of \$2,969, which isn't bad in today's money anyway. He stated his intentions very clearly. "The numerous wood lots now owned by me are to be retained for the protection and beauty of the Cove village. Sometime in the near future, they are to be laid out handsomely (remember this, "laid out handsomely"), with drive ways and pleasant rural walks, and then dedicated in the name of Ravenswood Park." This is the kind of counting every nail that he did with the library. He made sure that everything was taken care of for his park as well.

46:58

And there were other stewards of the land that Sawyer so carefully accumulated, certainly the most famous of them being Mason Walton. Mason was a Maine native, a teacher, whose dream of a family farm died with his wife in childbirth. Walton wandered through a series of jobs, the worst of which, according to him, was working at a bark peeling camp, which does sound pretty awful. Eventually, he came to Boston. He had dyspepsia, he is diagnosed with hay fever and a host of other ailments, and the doctors had no idea what to do with him. So, he said, "I was advised to go into the woods and try life in a pine grove." Probably his doctors didn't anticipate he'd take them quite so literally.

47:53

In the summer of 1884, he came to Gloucester and in the end, he said, "I selected Bond's Hill because it was surrounded by pine groves, and the hill was covered with blueberry and huckleberry bushes." Well, one winter on Bond's Hill convinced him that was not the best choice for a location, so he moved down off the hill onto the Old Salem Road, and got permission from Mr. Bond to build a cabin right next to his property.

And over his 33-year tenure at Ravenswood, Walton established himself as a nature guru of sorts. He was very much a man of his generation, he grew up close to nature. He read the transcendentalists, especially Thoreau, and listened to the lectures of his post-transcendentalist peers. He shared with them a fascination with the direct observation of the natural world, as well as a newly growing concern for its preservation.

49:03

At the same time, the late 19th century summer resort movement, coupled with its new emphasis on fresh air and exercise as the way to a healthy life, provided a critical mass of people who wanted to learn what Walton and others wanted to teach. There was no money in it, and there was no methodology in it. Natural History was a study for amateurs. My father was a naturalist, as he was called. He was an amateur.

Mason Walton was an amateur, but he spent a lot of time at it, and he was intelligent. It was a study within reach of anyone who cared to learn from the world around them. Thus Walton's acclaimed memoir, *A Hermit's Wild Friends* — a copy of it is on display out in the hall — opened with this acknowledgement of his peers: "He dedicates it to the lovers of nature everywhere. This volume is fraternally dedicated."

50:12

Walton died in 1917. Why was he so admired? Why was he revered, even? Well, he was a mysterious hermit. He was a man of nature. But he was also available to the curious passers-by, as Samuel Sawyer never had been. Walton studied wildlife; Sawyer just made money. Walton was an entertaining storyteller; Sawyer comes across as having been something of an opinionated curmudgeon. So, Walton is the one we remember, often to the detriment — well, if not detriment, at least loss — of Samuel Sawyer in this process.

51:00

During Walton's last years at Ravenswood, the trustees of Samuel Sawyer's will began to carry out his instructions to develop and beautify Gloucester's new park. They used Sawyer's bequest money to expand the park and to fill in the blanks of Ravenswood, buying adjacent parcels like this quarry — certainly not on the same scale as Pigeon Hill. In fact, it probably began as rock face quarrying. This is a piece of surface ledge right next to the quarry, what you see now, where the vernal pool is today. If you look closely, you will see that there are drill marks on this piece here and here. And here. That's how this piece of granite was fractured from the ledge that was there.

52:10

These one-man pits were found all over Cape Ann, especially in the late 19th century. Worked most often by a small crew on privately-owned land, they were making the most of the hard resources that existed — I'm sorry that came off as a pun, I didn't mean it to be — and they were riding on the coattails of the building industry that needed granite for virtually every building, every wharf, every statue and retaining wall that was built on the eastern seaboard.

This particular granite quarry was big enough to warrant a building of some sort — an office maybe? A tool storehouse? You can see the square outline of it in the ground across the current Ridge Trail from the quarry itself.

53:08

The Trustees continued their program of land acquisition until 1915. In all, they built Ravenswood from Sawyer's original 200-acre gift to his hometown to its present 600-acre size.

53:28

This (slide) never got moved. It's still in the wrong place. Let's move ahead for just a moment; we'll come back to this picture. Okay, 600-acre size.

One of the things... We will come back to that picture now.

53:46

One of the things Sawyer wanted besides a park for Gloucester was a chapel for the village of Freshwater Cove. And in 1900, the trustees looked into the possibility of building a chapel. They got a bid from Jay Pickering Putnam. And this is his drawing of what he thought a chapel might look like, at the edge of Ravenswood Park. It would seat 204 people. It would cost \$3,138 to build.

54:23

Apparently the trustees decided that was significantly more than they were willing to spend. So nothing more was heard of a chapel until the 1950s, when due to sectarian schism on the Cape, someone's memory was kind of itched and he remembered — whoever it was — remembered that there was this plan for a chapel in Sawyer's will. So they build, in 1957, this deck house design. It was called in the newspaper, "the new church for Cape Ann." And the newspaper goes on to say, "The structure of one story is designed to blend into the woodland surroundings of the park. It will be interdenominational in its appointments, which explains why there's a spire but no cross on it (and never was), so that any religious group will be able to worship there."

55:24

It didn't have a very long-standing congregation. It morphed into a community center and again was underutilized, I think is the polite phrase. When the Trustees of Reservations took over Ravenswood Park in 1993, it was redesigned, in the interior, as staff housing, so that there is now a Park superintendent who lives there and keeps an eye on things.

55:57

Now, it's about this design. This is a design that was drawn by Arthur Shurtleff — sometimes better known as Arthur Shurcliff, because he changed his name, after he drew this design — in 1915, with a number of additions and corrections to it. Shurcliff — excuse me, I'll refer to him as he was then — Shurtleff had just come off designing most of Castle Hill for Richard Crane, in Ipswich. He was a local designer, very well respected, and the trustees of Ravenswood Park hired him to design those pleasant drive ways and rural walks that Sawyer had specified even in his will. This is a classic Shurtleff drawing with those wonderful scroll-y trees indicating greenery and flourishing nature.

57:06

As a way of helping to understand Shurtleff's plan, I've done a really rough sketch, or overlay, of what is today and what was then. He started with two core driving roads, the red roads — Ridge Road and the Old Salem Road. And he connected them across the middle, the red line across the middle, on what is now the Evergreen trail. He didn't call it that. But weaving between and among these driving roads — and you have to understand this is literal. I mean, those of you who are old enough, probably remember driving through Ravenswood Park. Matter of fact, that was one of its problems in the mid-20th century — apparently the autos were driving too quickly and were dangerous going through the park.

57:59

But Shurtleff's way of dealing with the carriages that he envisioned — or the horseless carriages — was to do a whole series of trails that paralleled and crossed the driving routes, so that there were footpaths and then separate from them were the auto routes. One would not interfere with the other or interrupt one's appreciation of the natural world.

58:28

His choices for the trail locations reflect his sense of the picturesque. He puts trails all around the Magnolia Swamp. He puts trails through the hemlock grove, as well as an avoidance for extremely rocky terrain. He kind of ignored Ledge Hill in his plans for the park. He had intended to build three shelters in the park to either shelter from the sun or the rain. It's not clear what because they were never built, but his enduring contribution to Ravenswood today — to

Ravenswood as a special place — is this network layout of driving roads and walking trails that transformed a utilitarian overland path and abandoned wood lots into a romantic landscape designed for recreation and leisure.

59:29

Now, let Shurtleff get all the credit for romantic trails. We have to mention the Ledge Hill trail. This was not one of his designs. It is certainly a designed landscape feature, and it was probably designed — or laid out, is perhaps a better word — and built by Park caretaker Benjamin Wynn, between sometime during his caretaker caretaking era, 1937 to 1969.

The path is more erratic, it's more challenging than almost any other path in the park. But it also shows the greatest attention to detail. Look at the selected edging stones that define the route. Not in this picture, but those of you who have walked on the trail know that there are carefully, evenly laid steps on the steepest areas of it. Its meanders extend the trail experience. He could have gone straight ahead in a lot of places, but he didn't want to. He meandered, and so you wander with the trail and that makes sure that.....the visitor does not miss either the near or the distant vistas.

1:00:59

I'm going to take you on a last brief ride. So today, Ravenswood is a cultural as well as a natural landscape. It's an accumulation of features from at least 500 years, likely much longer, of humans taking advantage of what they found on the land. It lies within a context of protected open space in Gloucester. But despite all the efforts of Samuel Sawyer and the Ravenswood Park trustees, and the Trustees of Reservations for over a century — the challenge of protecting the historic Old Salem Road doesn't end, it keeps on going.

Some of the challenges are natural, such as erosion or trail flooding, wind damage from storms, or the woolly adelgid that is wiping out one of the hemlock groves. Other challenges come directly from our economy and from our culture. There are lands for sale around the periphery of Ravenswood Park, within the park itself. This is an illegal bonfire on the Old Salem Road. Thank heavens it got put out before it went down in the history of Gloucester as yet another of the fires that swept through Ravenswood in its history.

1:02:33

The charming casual little rock sculpture over here. No, no over here, sorry, is actually destroying the stonework that defines an archaeological site. And then of course, there's Turtle Rock. Now, I love Turtle Rock. I am sort of embarrassed to admit that and probably as a conservationist I shouldn't admit that. Because, well, let's put it this way. If it were old enough, it would qualify as rock art, right? Prehistoric something. But in fact, it's graffiti. You're looking at graffiti, defacing the natural landscape. So much for Turtle Rock.

1:03:27

Unknown speaker: Where is Turtle Rock?

Tritsch: Turtle Rock is on one of the trails in Ravenswood. It's near the quarry. Can I show you?

1:03:38

Unknown Speaker: It's off Old Salem Road just below the Hermit's rock.

1:03:40

Tritsch. Really? I thought it was on the Ridge trail near the quarry.

1:03:47

Let's come back to that. Hold on. Let me just finish. I've got two more slides, then you can be done with me and we'll straighten out this question.

Since the Trustees of Reservations have taken on stewardship of the property in 1993, one of their missions there, I guess is the word, is to pass the word for preservation and conservation of natural and cultural resources through the example of the way they manage the Park; through assistance to other people who want to conserve lands around it and elsewhere in Gloucester and Cape Ann; through a certain amount of regulation; through education; and finally, through a broadening and extension of the vision that made Ravenswood Park a special place, instead of a wilderness, that came out of what was really Samuel Sawyer's gift. There, now we can talk about Turtle Rock.

1:04:55

So, that's it. We'll leave Samuel up there to give him his due for a little while.

1:05:13

Now we need to deal with this Turtle Rock issue. Oh, I'm facing the wrong way or not — sorry. Let's back up and find one of those maps. Not that one. That one. Okay, who's going to show us on the map where Turtle Rock is? I'm not going to because I'm not sure. Ramona, you going to do that?

1:05:38

Latham: It's off Quarry Road just north of the Stillington area. Bond Hill is to the north.

1:05:59

Tritsch: Okay. Does that help? Are you all set?

Unknown Speaker: What year was Ravenswood gated from automobiles?

1:06:20

Tritsch: That's a good question. Let me see if I can answer it. And I'm not sure I can. The question was, at what year was the park closed — gated to automobiles so that they weren't allowed to be driven through it anymore? I don't think I have the answer to that. But does someone from Gloucester remember when that happened, approximately? The 1950s or the 60s would be my guess. No?

Stay tuned. I'm not sure. Any other questions? Yes,

1:07:01

Unknown Speaker: Can you show me where that vantage point was?

Tritsch: Yes, let's see if I can do that. It's basically right here, where Ledge Hill is. If you follow the Ledge Hill Trail, or no, it's here... which of the two trails? Go out to the hall, and in the hall is a map, a trail map of Ravenswood, not a cultural resources map, I get confused sometimes. And that will show you. It's shown as a vista point and it's fabulous all times of the year.

1:07:35

Tritsch: (in response to a question): It had been cleared. It became overgrown, and it has been re-cleared recently. Yes. So it is again, a vantage point. And there are benches up there you can sit on, too. Sir?

1:07:49

Unknown speaker: My question is, where on the map is Balancing Rock?

Tritsch: I didn't show it because we went and looked at it. And we're not convinced it was a very balancing rock.

Unknown Speaker: Well, you used to touch it, and it would go two or three inches each way.

Tritsch: It doesn't anymore. Unless I went in the wrong place. I was taken there...

1:08:23

Unknown Speaker: Were there any Native American burials in Ravenswood?

Tritsch: No, that was elsewhere on Cape Ann. As far as I know there are no Native American burials anywhere. Matter of fact, it's the wrong landscape for Native American burials. It's not where they would choose to bury people. The only possible burials that are probably well off any trail would have been from smallpox victims, and they would never be marked because they didn't want them to be dug up, needless to say, since they weren't sure how the smallpox got spread, among other things. As far as I know, there are no human burials in Ravenswood — documented. Ma'am?

1:09:15

Unknown Speaker: Do you know anything about the circular holes?

Tritsch: The circular holes, yes. Someone mentioned those.

Unknown Speaker: They're not terribly large, but they're always located near water.

Tritsch: Right. And I think what they may be or may have been was holes that... could even have started out as a tree fall. When the roots get pulled up in a tree, you end up with a hollow and I think they were dug out from that and surrounded with stones most likely as fire ponds. I mean, that's a big name for them. But I do not believe they have any pre-historic significance. I know that's been a suggestion. I think it's much more utilitarian than that.

1:10:06

You will find all through woodlands in all parts of the Commonwealth, including the Copicut Woods that Ramona mentioned earlier down in Fall River, there are these places which part of the year are just dry, and they look like strange round holes in the ground or hollows in the ground. But they were dug as fire ponds for at least part of the year, to collect what rain could be collected in areas that were not otherwise particularly wet.

Ma'am?

1:10:48

Unknown Speaker: Freshwater Cove – can you give us some more information about that? I'm from the area and have never heard of it. Where is it?

Tritsch: Freshwater Cove was a village that showed...it's right... Hold on... Let's find the map. We've got to go back to one of those earlier maps. Sorry. It's a lot easier to do it this way (clicking through slides). Come in. There. Okay.

Stage Fort Park is over here (pointing on the map). This is Western Avenue coming down here. And where all of these house lots are indicated, and there are houses there today, was the core of the fishing community of Freshwater Cove.

1:11:37

Unknown Speaker: So if you're on Western Avenue going toward Stage Fort Park, it's just before there on the right?

Tritsch: No, it's on both sides of the road. The entrance to Ravenswood Park is basically here (pointing on map). And so if you are at Ravenswood, and you're driving towards Gloucester it's pretty much all of the houses along (Western Avenue). This is Hesperus Avenue... Hesperus is the intersection of Freshwater Cove. But I think it also includes Dolliver's Neck, which is up here. And in fact, if you take this road down, it goes up to the water.

1:12:24

Unknown Speaker: Is there an actual cove by that name, or is it just the name of the community.

Tritsch: Oh, yeah... I showed that early on as the area with a lot of salt marsh hay, that's the cove. And it shows on all of the maps, often unlike other features.

Okay, maybe a couple more questions. And then there are refreshments, and we can continue the conversation out there.

1:13:04

Unknown Speaker: You said they went into Freshwater Cove for fresh water. Is there is a source of fresh water there? A spring?

Tritsch: Well, there is. Is it Buswell Pond? Do I have that name right? Okay. There are seeps that come out of the hillside, including the brook that leads down to the cove from Buswell Pond. So there might have been a number of different places where they could get fresh water right there.

In the back ...

Unknown Speaker: Where did you get / where can I find all these maps?

Tritsch: Lots of different places. But a good place to start would be the Gloucester archives...at the town hall. But I can also tell you that the maps that I showed you are all in my report that I wrote for the Trustees, a copy of which is at the Gloucester archives, and another copy is here in the library. So, there are versions of them there. If you want to know in more detail I'll tell you where I got them all.

Yes, Peg.

1:14:20

Unknown Speaker: Did you mention where the name Ravenswood came from?

Tritsch: No, I didn't. That was a whole sidetrack that I cut out to make this talk no more long than it was anyway.

Ravenswood is actually the name of a fictional place, a fictional manor in Scotland, in the book by Sir Walter Scott. There we go. Okay. I haven't thought about that for a while. Sorry. And it's not clear why Samuel Sawyer liked this name so much. Except he had wanted to name his park in Boston (the park that was going to be part of his development in Boston) Ravenswood. I think chances are he had been to the Scottish Highlands and really was enamored of the landscape there. And I also suspect, given the descriptions of Lammermoor, which is where Ravenswood was located, that the description fits the area of the Freshwater Cove Woods really wonderfully. So it's all speculation is the answer, Peg. He liked it.

1:15:41

Unknown Speaker: Can you point out Bond Hill on the map?

Tritsch: I can. Yes, it's right here, Bond Hill (pointing on the map). Site of proposed reservoir, in 1872. Here's the Old Salem Road coming down. This is the part that is still paved down here.

Okay, it's time to get up and get some fresh air.

Thank you so much.