

History of Sunshine Farm

By Avery Yale Kamila

The Civil War was raging when Rev. Daniel Blake built Heron House in 1864 on the rocks of Pleasant Point. One of the earliest cottages on the lake, Heron House's porches overhung Pleasant Pond, where great blue herons forage. Elsewhere, as summer settled on sweltering American cities in the era before air conditioning and air pollution controls, residents longed for fresh air and cool breezes.



Heron House on Pleasant Point on Pleasant Pond, circa 1900

Far from the battlefields and hot cities, farmers in Litchfield had ample woodlots and fields that offered miles of waterfront ideal for visitors. Then, as now, pure water and locally-grown food were attractive amenities. Soon, Litchfield farmers began renting camping sites, offering summer board in their farmhouses, and letting lakeside cottages by the week or for the full summer season. Heron House was one such cottage.

A DELIGHTFUL SPOT.

Pleasant Pond at Litchfield is Attracting a Large Summer Colony.

GARDINER, Me., July 29.—One of the most beautiful places in Maine for an outing is at Pleasant Pond, in Litchfield. And the fact that the large number of cottages are nearly all occupied shows that this lake is growing more popular each year. At the present time there are at least 25 cottages located on the shores of this beautiful lake, and several new ones are being bullded. A large percentage of these cottages are owned and occupied by Gardiner people..

Lewiston Sun Journal, July 29, 1899

By 1864, the Kennebec and Portland Railroad had been bringing passengers to the railway depots in Richmond and Gardiner for more than a decade. Passengers bound for Heron House on the train would be met by a farm wagon and transported to the shores of Pleasant Pond, which in early Litchfield records is called Cobbossee Conte Pond and The Pond.

Rusticators arrived in increasing numbers at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century. Newspapers reported on the new summer scene on Pleasant Pond, with front page dispatches filled with news from “the season at Pleasant Pond.”

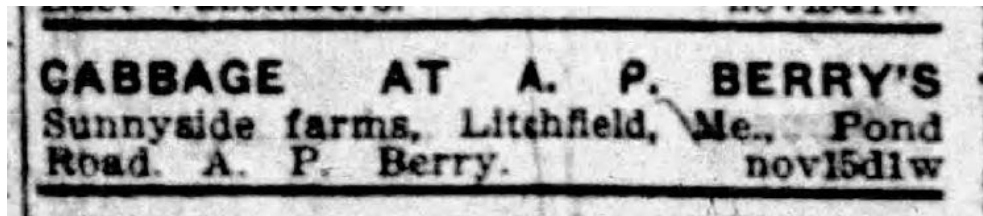
In the 1890s, guests could board a steamboat in Boston to Gardiner, Maine, where a carriage ride across town took guests to



Heron House on Pleasant Point.

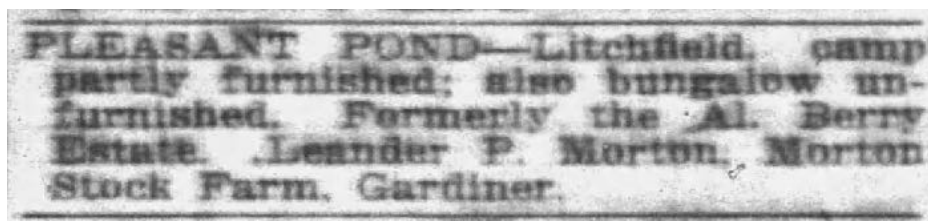
the steamer *Glenn*, which ferried passengers and supplies to Heron House from the New Mills Landing. In 1899, there were only 25 cottages, including Heron House, dotting the shores of Pleasant Pond.

*Kennebec
Journal,*
Nov. 17, 1911



In 1903 “Albert Berry and family of Chicago, arrived on the New York Limited, Friday, to pass the summer,” according to the *Kennebec Journal*. Later, the Berry family established Sunnyside Farm on what is now Sunshine Farm, advertising cabbages for sale in 1911, medium sized seed potatoes in 1916, and fancy seed oats in 1917.

Some time in the late 1800s or early 1900s, an apple orchard was planted on the property. A few of these ancient fruit trees remain at Sunshine Farm, continuing to bear fruit. This was also the time when the Honeymoon Cottage and the Cobbossee Cottage were built, although their precise dates of construction remain unknown.



*Kennebec
Journal,*
June 21, 1920

By 1920 Farmer Berry had passed, and new owners placed advertisements in the local newspaper’s Summer Places for Rent section. The ads offered both Heron House and the Honeymoon Cottage, but did not list a rental price. The owners lived in the farmhouse attached to an enormous barn, which used to sit on Plains Road across the street from Sunshine Farm Road. A fire destroyed the barn and farmhouse in 2011.



Sunshine Farm barn under construction in 1975.

In 1975, the waterfront side of the former Sunnyside Farm (bisected by Plains Road) was separated into its own parcel and sold to the Yale Kamila family from Richmond, who renamed it Sunshine Farm, employed organic land care techniques, and built a barn, a pony stable, and, later, a garage on the property.



Heron House being moved off Pleasant Point to higher ground.

Heron House, located on its original site at Pleasant Point, often flooded when the spring rains raised the level of the pond. The new owners moved the house to higher ground.



Swimming lessons in Pleasant Pond.



Arts and crafts in the Honeymoon Cottage.

For a number of summers, the farm was home to the campers of the Sunshine Farm Day Camp. Campers created arts and crafts in the Honeymoon Cottage and took swimming lessons in Pleasant Pond.

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, the farm was covered in massive crop fields growing organic vegetables. The vegetables were sold at the Farmers Market in Augusta and the Common Ground Country Fair, when it was originally held at the Litchfield Fairgrounds.



Sunshine Farm
crop fields in
1970s.

During the late 20th century and early 21st century, commercial farming ended at Sunshine Farm. The vegetable gardens shrank while the orchards and berry bushes expanded.



Lion Dandy, by John Bisbee



Thistle, by John Bisbee



Whale Bone Corset, by John Bisbee

A collection of three sculptures by Brunswick artist John Bisbee, known for forging and welding steel nails to create geometric shapes, were installed on the front garden lawn in the 21st century.

The property, including ornamental gardens, orchards, trees, and lawns, continues to be managed organically. In the 2010s and 2020s this management meant ongoing mechanical removal of multiflora rose and Japanese honeysuckle, and the planting of native plants that support birds and wildlife.



Honeymoon Cottage, the garage, and Heron House in fall 2025.