

## The Story of the Chocorua Dam and Park

### The Chocorua Dam

Chocorua Village is defined by the pond and waterfall at its center, visible to everyone who drives by on Route 16. Beneath the glassy surface is the historic wooden Dam, which creates a peaceful pond in the otherwise fast-flowing Chocorua River as it tumbles southward to join Tamworth's Swift River and the Bearcamp River before flowing into Lake Ossipee.

This is one of the last A-frame timber dams in New Hampshire. It was constructed in approximately 1889 by Charles Bowditch, a Boston investor and anthropologist, who spent summers with his family at Lake Chocorua. He purchased the site in 1888, removing the earlier millworks to eliminate the associated pollution and improve the scenic character of the village. The Bowditch family owned the property for 58 years, operating the dam strictly for aesthetic and recreational purposes.



Prior to 1889, a series of older dams were located near this site, providing water power for various mills. One of the earliest dams was built around 1785 by the Tamworth Iron Works, which used bog ore dredged from Lake Ossipee to produce iron for the manufacture of chains, augers and nails.

From 1946 to 2015 the Dam and residence (on what is now Route 113) were owned by Raymond and Edna Flanagan, who first ran it as the Spruce Up Inn. They performed repairs on the Dam as recently as 1978 and 1989, and after Raymond's death, Edna continued to live there and look after the Dam. When Edna died, the family attempted to sell the property, but were unable to find a buyer willing to take responsibility for the Dam. Requests were also made for the Town or State to take over the Dam, but neither had the resources or interest to maintain and operate the structure, which was in need of significant repairs. The Dam had become a liability, and there was growing concern that the Dam might even be removed in order to eliminate the associated costs and risks.



## How the Dam Became a Park

In Spring 2014, a number of Tamworth residents with an appreciation for the Dam's scenic, historic, and engineering qualities, formed a "Dam Committee" to explore options for repairing and preserving the Dam. Since a number of the struts that support the lip of the dam had already fallen away, it was clear that the structure needed urgent care, and perhaps a complete reconstruction. It was also apparent that the Flanagan house would be more marketable if the Dam were not part of the same property.

Also in Spring 2014, the former Ice Cream Shop (on Route 16 just downstream of the Dam) was being offered for sale by the Daigles, who had operated a number of businesses at the site since the 1970's. The Daigles were enthused about the group's idea to purchase the property and remove the aging building, using the lot as the nucleus for a Park that might ultimately span the river and include the Dam itself.

Thus began the multiple phases of creating Chocorua Park:



**Phase 1** (April 2014) - Dam Ice Cream Shop property was purchased by an interested Chocorua resident.

**Phase 2** (July 2014) - building was demolished, with salvageable materials donated to Habitat for Humanity and other local causes. Removal of the building immediately opened up views of the river that were previously hidden from public view.

**Phase 3** (August 2014) - Park was regraded, plantings moved, old foundation stones used for benches and "stonehenges", chairs & picnic table added, and a Gazebo donated by neighbors. A ramp was built allowing easy access down to the river and providing a close-up view of the Dam (albeit through a chain-link fence!) The Park quickly became a popular spot for residents and visitors alike to enjoy the river.



**Phase 4** (May 2015) - The entire Flanagan property, including the Dam and the islands in the river, were purchased by the Park owner. (Although it was originally hoped to purchase the Dam

*without* the house, this proved impractical, necessitating the purchase of the entire property.) Community volunteers spent three days clearing brush and thorns from the property. A second picnic table was placed on the island and the foot bridges were repaired and reinforced. The chainlink fence that separated the properties was removed, restoring public access to the dam and the pond. The Dam quickly became a popular fishing spot, as it was decades before.

## **Repair of the Dam**

To preserve the structural integrity of the Dam, the Park owner and others on the Dam Committee developed a plan to replace the missing upright timbers (struts) that support the lip of the dam. On June 10, 2015, the penstock was opened half way, lowering the water level approximately six inches, and allowing inspection and measurement of the wooden structure that is normally hidden behind the waterfall. With this information, and the assistance of a professional engineer, detailed repair plans were formulated. Since the NH Dam Bureau agreed that the work could proceed as a “repair”, the considerable time and cost associated with any “reconstruction” work was avoided. And because the water level in the pond would only be lowered about four feet, and there would be no digging or machinery in the river, no further permits were necessary, allowing the design and planning to proceed rapidly so the work could be performed while the river was at its lowest in mid-summer.



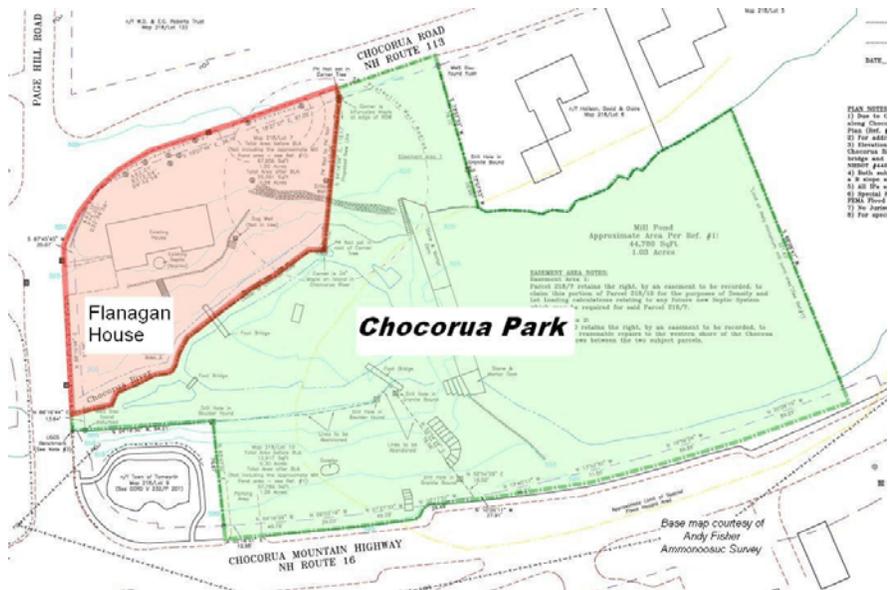
**Phase 5** of the Chocorua Park development process began on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015, with the replacement of all sixteen of the primary struts that support the lip of the dam. Local lumber mills produced the new 8x8 inch struts from locally-harvested Eastern Hemlock. The actual timber work was conducted by experienced timber framers, cutting a tenon at the base of each new strut that fit into the existing slots (mortises) in the existing sills. With the assistance of Dam Committee members and other volunteers, the timbers were raised into place and held between two hemlock “repair plates”, which in turn were fastened to the existing structure using substantial 3/4 inch bolts. Five of the secondary struts were also replaced, and a new “wear plate” was installed along the lip, helping to reinforce and straighten the edge of the dam and produce a more uniform waterfall. While the pond was lowered, a number of holes were plugged in the upstream face of the dam, eliminating most of the water that previously leaked through the stonework. This intensive effort was completed in just seven days, allowing the pond to be quickly refilled for the continued enjoyment of residents and visitors alike.

## **Additional Repairs and Improvements**

Although the 2015 repairs were originally seen as a temporary repair, the overall condition of the structure turned out to be quite good, so a near-term replacement of the dam is no longer seen as a necessity. However, there are still a number of other repairs to be performed, including replacement of the 4x4 wooden gate, and repair of the trash rack and penstock valve.

## Other Developments

In early 2016 a detailed survey of the Park was conducted by Ammonoosuc Survey. In addition to providing essential data for ongoing Park activities, the survey was the core of our application for a **boundary line adjustment**, so that the Flanagan house could be separated from the dam. In April 2016, the Tamworth Planning Board *approved* our application, so that the house can now be



transferred to a separate owner (perhaps the headquarters for a local organization?), with the dam and surrounding land remaining part of the Park.

Meanwhile plans continue for new park facilities, such as a new bridge and stairs to provide access to the island from Route 113, development of signage and interpretive materials, and perhaps even the construction of a demonstration water wheel!

## Who Owns the Park?

At present the Park is privately owned by Chocorua Park LLC, which encourages public use and enjoyment of the property. Over the long term, our goal is to transfer the Park to a suitable non-profit organization that is willing to take on the unique responsibilities associated with the property. If an existing organization cannot be found, we will explore the formation of a new organization specifically for this purpose.



## Can I contribute?

Yes, you can mail donations to the Chocorua Community Association, P.O. Box 185, Chocorua, NH 03817, or donate online at [npo.gustgive.org/chocorua](http://npo.gustgive.org/chocorua). The Chocorua Community Association supports projects which enhance the livability of Chocorua Village, and has established a dedicated account for the maintenance and repair of the Dam and Park. The CCA is a registered 501(c)3 organization and your donations are tax-deductible.

**For the latest information, photographs and details on upcoming events please visit our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/chocoruapark](http://www.facebook.com/chocoruapark)**

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