

# The Kennebec Land Trust News

No. 5

Spring 1992

## Vaughan Woods: Protecting an Historic Landscape

by Jym St. Pierre

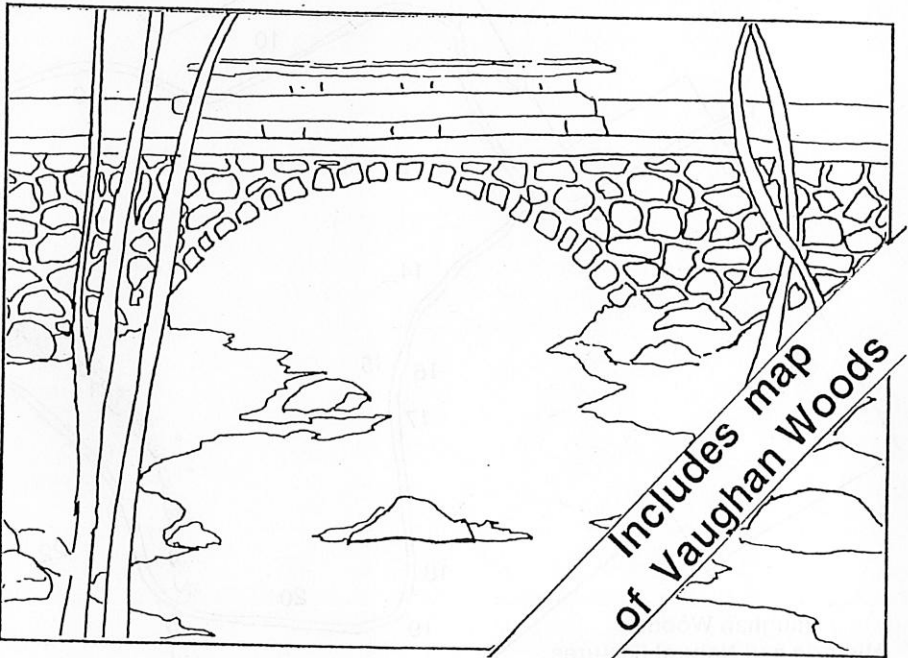
The owner of the Vaughan Woods recently granted a conservation easement to the Kennebec Land Trust. The Vaughan Woods is an area of tremendous natural and historic importance. The easement protects the property from development and inappropriate uses. To appreciate the importance of this action it is helpful to know the place of Vaughan Woods in the history of our region.

The landscape of the Kennebec River and Lakes region is chiefly the legacy of ancient glaciers as well as the influence of human land uses over the past two and a half centuries.

After the last Ice Age glaciers retreated from this area about 13,000 years ago the Kennebec River valley, which had long been depressed under the great weight of the Pleistocene ice, became submerged beneath the swollen ocean. The land soon rebounded until it was several hundred feet above sea level. Finally, by about 11,000 years ago, the sea had risen again and the landscape looked a good deal as it does today.

Archaeologists indicate that successive waves of people lived in this part of the world after the glaciers melted. For thousands of years they must have traveled the Kennebec River, stopping at a prominent point of land called Bombahook on the west shore, nor far below the head of tide.

In the autumn of 1625, a small band of Pilgrims from Plymouth Plantation, sailed up the Kennebec River. They found trade with the natives living in the vicinity of Bombahook to be lucrative, returning in their small homemade ship with hundreds of pounds of beaver and other pelts. Two years later the Plymouth traders erected a house at the head of tide. For more than thirty years Plymouth merchants traveled up the Kennebec River to



trade with the Abenaki at Cushnoc (Augusta) and Bombahook (Hallowell).

In the late 1620s, a patent was granted to the Plymouth Colony covering an area 15 miles inland on each side of the Kennebec River from Merrymeeting Bay to Skowhegan. Business, at first profitable, declined and the patent was sold in 1661 to four prominent Boston investors. One, Benjamin Hallowell, held title to Great Lot 22 which stretched west from the river to Cobbosseecontee. The French and Indian Wars intervened and the Cushnoc trading post was abandoned. However, in the mid-18th century the heirs of the Kennebec Proprietors reasserted their claims to the lands along the

Kennebec River.

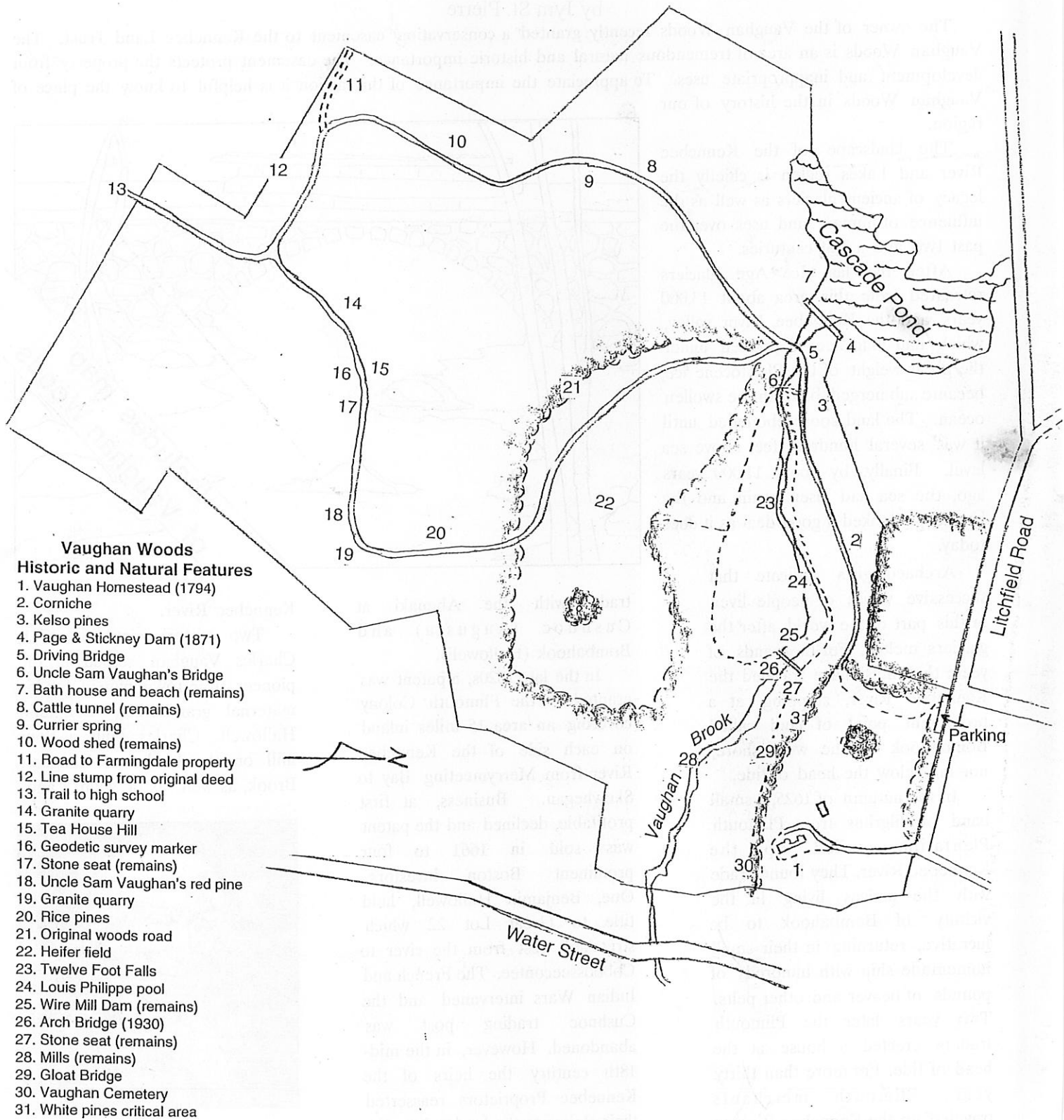
Two centuries ago, in 1791, Charles Vaughan settled in the pioneer river town named for his maternal grandfather, Benjamin Hallowell. Charles built a flour mill on the banks of Vaughan Brook, as well as a wharf and



Benjamin Vaughan

# VAUGHAN WOODS

Hallowell, Maine



warehouses at Bombahook Point on the river, and a large farm nearby. In 1797, a few months after the Massachusetts legislature set off the town of Augusta from Hallowell, Charles oldest brother, Benjamin Vaughan, arrived with his family. They settled in a fine house with a commanding view of the river.

The national and international diplomatic achievements of Benjamin Vaughan comprise a fascinating story. Born in Jamaica, he was raised in England, earned a medical degree in Edinburgh and became a successful politician, diplomat and investor. Following a narrow escape during the French Revolution and three

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*-- Diana Gibson*

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years of exile in Europe, Benjamin Vaughan joined his wife and seven children in America. In September, 1797, they came to Maine, traveling rough roads for five and a half days to Hallowell through Readfield and Winthrop.

Benjamin Vaughan lived in Hallowell for more than three decades, transforming the Vaughan Homestead property into an agricultural showplace. During that time he was a personal confidant of many notable figures, including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Monroe and Charles Bulfinch. Among the visitors to the

Vaughan Homestead were John James Audubon, Daniel Webster, the presidents of Yale and Harvard, and Tallyrand.

Most of the land covered by the original Benjamin Hallowell patent has long since been sold, including some parcels near Vaughan Brook which were eventually recovered by the family. In the 1930's William Warren Vaughan, great grandson of the pioneer settler, removed several dams, factories and houses along the brook and built a series of paths and stone bridges through a portion of the property behind the Homestead. It is this area, now much grown up to forest, that has come to be known as the Vaughan Woods.

In 1988, Mrs. Diana Gibson and her husband George invited the Kennebec Land Trust and the Nature Conservancy to discuss permanent land protection options for the Vaughan Woods. Diana Gibson is a seventh generation lineal descendent of Benjamin Hallowell and fifth generation descendent of Dr. Benjamin Vaughan.

In December, 1990, arrangements were finalized. On New Years Eve day the Gibsons gathered family and neighbors in their historic home and granted a conservation easement, forever protecting the Vaughan Woods, to the Kennebec Land Trust, with The Nature Conservancy as legal backup.

In addition to the Vaughan Woods, the conservation property includes two small lots along Vaughan Brook and the Kennebec River and two marshy islands in the river, totalling 152 acres. The Woods, the largest parcel, has a system of footpaths that provide a pleasant walk in all seasons through mixed forests and open fields. The trails skirt a stand of old-growth

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pine, hemlock, oak, and beech and cross several picturesque stone bridges over Vaughan Brook. The easement grants permanent rights so that the public can enjoy the scenic values of the area.

Today, two centuries after the first Vaughans came to live along the Kennebec River, a new chapter in the history of the Vaughan Property has begun. According to Diana Gibson, "This property has been associated with our family for more than 200 years. We wanted to ensure that it would be protected from development forever, and we are delighted that a local group like the Kennebec Land Trust will help us achieve that goal."

KLT Board member Jeff Pidot tells us that the terms of the conservation easement will keep the Vaughan Woods as open space and for low intensity recreation on foot. Jeff says, "Diana and George Gibson and the Vaughan family have lovingly taken care of this land for generations. Now they can feel confident that there are legal assurances the area will stay the way it is."

Information about the Vaughan family and property is available through the Hubbard Library in Hallowell and the Maine State Library in Augusta. Suggested readings include:

Baker, H. K. "The Vaughan Homestead," in *The Hallowell Book*. 1902.

Marvin, Mary Vaughan. *Benjamin Vaughan 1751-1835*. 1979.

Marvin, Mary Vaughan. *Bits and Pieces of Recollections*. 1960.

Murray, Craig C. *Benjamin Vaughan: The Life of an Anglo-American Intellectual*. 1982.

Nason, Emma Huntington. "The Vaughan Family," in *Old Hallowell on the Kennebec*. 1909; reprinted 1989.

Norton, Edward P. "Benjamin Vaughan," Charles Vaughan," and "Vaughan Homestead," in *Legends and Otherwise of Hallowell and Loudon Hill*. 1923.

Vaughan, William W. *Hallowell Memoirs*. 1931.



