

**Suzanne Colvin, née McCausland (1950s-60s):** Members of Suzanne Colvin’s family, the McCauslands, have lived right off Sewall Street for generations, all the way back to the 1920s. They all have their own special memories of Howard Hill, which served as their ice rink, their playground, and their backyard. Suzanne Colvin now lives in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C., but she never fails to come to Maine for a few weeks in the summer to reacquaint herself with its forests and lakes.



Suz remembers that as a child, her father, along with some friends, once dug a network of tunnels up around Howard Hill’s Lookout Rock, enjoying the dirt. In the winter, when digging was no longer an option, the elder McCausland would skate on the two man-made ponds on the property, Upper and Lower Johnson’s Pond, as he called them. Family legend tells of a time when, as a young boy, he carved his initials into Lookout Rock to make his mark on this land forever. The big winter carnival put on yearly by William Howard Gannett in the 1920s and ‘30s was a bright spot in the cold winter months, and the family looked forward to it every year. There were ski races, Gannett dressed up in furs, and there was even a Carnival Queen. One year this last honor fell to one of Suzanne’s childhood neighbors!

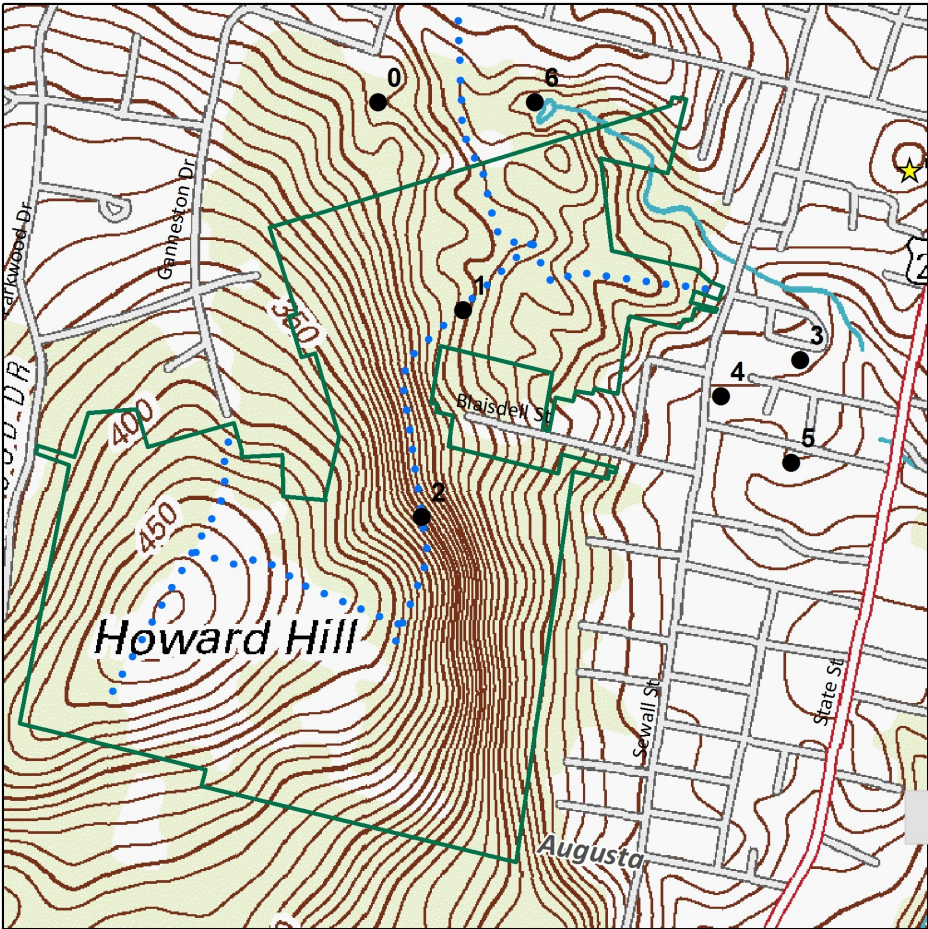
The members of Suz’s generation also have many stories to tell of their childhood jaunts to Howard Hill. There was a path starting at a house just a few doors up from hers, leading through Howard Hill and over to Buker School on the other side. The neighborhood kids would walk this trail every day to school. Suz remarks on the freedom of this childhood habit, especially considering the lack of adult supervision. “I don’t think I’d let my kids do that now,” she says, but she seems glad that she was able to make the daily walk without worry.

Trails left from logging became mythic to these kids, full of possibilities and history. All these memories from her family have contributed to Suz’s love for Howard Hill specifically and the land in general. “That land...means a lot to Augusta,” she says of the property. “I would love to see it preserved...like the Rail Trail so that people can go up there and hike on a continuing basis, so that kids can be involved in activities up there. Because where we live now, it’s so built up, it’s the city.” She hopes that this bit of green can continue to provide adventures for future generations in the city as it has for three generations of her family.

**Coffin Family (1940s-50s):** “My woods, my forever woods” is how Carolyn Ladd refers to Howard Hill, or Gannett’s Woods as it was commonly known in her childhood. “But I’ll share it with everyone else,” she adds. Along with her sister Mary Sturtevant and her brother Dick Coffin, Carolyn grew up on Sewall Street, a short walk from the woods that became their backyard and playground. The girls share memories of wildflowers: lady slippers, jack-in-the-pulpit, Solomon’s seal, and in the springtime, trillium. Yellow violets were their favorites, though.

“A boy just big enough to grab one of my father’s fingers in my whole hand, that’s how far back my

### Howard Hill Sites of Interest



**LEGEND**

0-Second Pond aka Upper Johnson’s Pond

1-Remains of General Sherman’s Bridge

2-Lookout Rock

3-Gary’s Childhood House

4-Suzanne’s Childhood House

5- Coffin Childhood House

6-Johnson’s Pond

— Kennedy Brook

..... Walking Trails described by interviewees

— Conservation Boundary

memories go,” says Dick. In the warmer months he fished for hornpout in Kennedy Brook, which runs through the property, and in the colder ones he went skating and built bonfires on Johnson’s Pond, which feeds the brook.

Howard Hill gave the Coffin children both an opportunity for independence - they played with friends for hours across the hundreds of acres - and a chance for family time. One of their fondest memories is walking with their father just before Christmas. They strolled over the snowy hill, picking up pine boughs as they went. Stopping for some red carnations at the shop of a local florist, their dad made an arrangement that combined the carnations with the pine branches. Then he and the children continued on their walk, going to their aunt’s house to give her the bouquet as a present, the nicest one she ever received.



Dick went on to a career in conservation, working for Land for Maine’s Future - a career he describes as “very much a natural extension of my childhood on Howard Hill.” The Coffin children’s love for the woods behind their house instilled in each of them a sense of stewardship for the land. Nowadays, Mary describes the property as a “refuge.” Dick talks not only of his personal enjoyment of the place but also of the benefits of undeveloped woodland for air and water quality. “The gullies are deep and the cliffs are still there and I love it,” Carolyn says when asked why she believes the land should be preserved.

This family, like many all over Maine and in the capital area, loves the landscape of their state, its white pines and wildflowers, rocks and rivers. They know how experiencing nature as a child can change your life and broaden your world. They are grateful to the Gannetts for opening up their land to the public and keeping it undeveloped. They hope that it can once again belong to everyone.



**Gary Sawyer (1950s-60s):** Gary Sawyer grew up on Brooklawn Avenue in Augusta and remembers playing as a young boy on Howard Hill. “It was our playground,” he says of the property, the place where he went most days with his friends. He speaks of landmarks, fully describing the physical characteristics of the land. A big, sheer granite scarp, which he remembers as being about fifty feet tall, was a popular site. “We called [it], I think, Lookout Rock, or something equally inventive... But that was fun because you could really look out over neighborhoods and say ‘I can see George’s house over there.’ And there was almost a natural, I want to say, saddle or a seat in the rock which was kind of nifty.” He too remembers Johnson’s Pond and skating there in the winter, an experience he calls “fabulous.” He tells of another pond, Second Pond, and pokes fun at its uncreative name while describing wintertime hours spent there.



The remnants of an old bridge, which according to Gary was called General Sherman’s Bridge, provided a sense of the human history of this place and wove itself into his memories. “It impressed us greatly as six-, seven-, eight-, nine-year-old kids” with a span of thirty to forty yards and only its great buttresses left standing. Other traces of the past provided entertainment as well. Gary describes “a huge cable that was incredibly well anchored [on Lookout Rock] and went all

the way to the bottom. So the challenge of course was to get all the way to the bottom. And you might do it once, if you were brave. If you were really probably stupid you’d do it a second time, because this metal cable had been there for I don’t know how long and had these little metal spines on it.” Tales like these may make parents worry, but Gary and his friends liked the freedom and watched out for each other. “I don’t remember any super accidents,” he assures me.

Speaking of Howard Hill’s wildlife and plants, he says, “There were huge trees, and we were very impressed with that. I mean they were just untouched, almost virgin territory. Just hadn’t been logged or whatever for who knows how long... It wasn’t like Bambi, but there would be sightings sometimes of deer and things. It added to the whole magic of things, because we all had a little neighborhood and little ticky tacky houses and a front lawn and a back lawn and a barbecue out back. We didn’t have wildlife and so that was kind of magic... in a lot of ways. Wildlife... we saw signs of it. And it just made it like: this is the way the woods are supposed to be. Whatever reader we had in school gave us the impression that the woods were where animals lived. And sure enough they did. And we were running around and doing whatever we were doing in the same spot they were, and that was pretty cool... It made it real.”

Gary has helped create ballfields and open fields for kids in Augusta, and he knows the importance of having space to play in. He speaks of the need for housing in the capital across all income levels and hopes it will be developed in conjunction with small parks and green space.

“In certain parts of the city, you hardly have a lawn in front of you,” he laments, suggesting that keeping Howard Hill undeveloped, with trails and trees for exploration and discovery, is one possible step toward ensuring that all kids have the chance to adventure in nature.

**A Brief Howard Hill Timeline**

**Late 1700’s** – Captain James Howard purchases land on the east side of the Kennebec River, including Fort Western. His relatives own part of Howard Hill.

**1890s** – William Howard Gannett and his wife, Sarah Neil Hill Gannett, reside on 160 acres with extensive gardens on “Betsy Howard Hill”.

**1930-1969** – Howard Hill, also know as Gannett’s Woods and Ganeston Park, is designated as a state game preserve. This is the time period in which the memories shared here take place.

**2009** – KLT, in partnership with the City of Augusta, begins actively pursuing conservation options for 164 acres on Howard Hill.



The Kennebec Land Trust (KLT) works cooperatively with landowners and communities to conserve the forests, shorelands, fields, and wildlife that define central Maine. KLT protects land permanently, offers opportunities for people to learn about and enjoy the natural world, and works with partners to support sustainable forestry and farming.

**KLT 331 Main Street P.O. Box 261  
Winthrop, ME 04364 207-377-2848 tklt.org**

***Thank you to those who helped with this project:***  
*Carolyn Ladd, Mary Sturtevant, Richard Coffin, Gary Sawyer, Suzanne Colvin, Jane Matrisciano, Norm Rodrigue, Biran Kent, Mike Seitzinger, Jean-Luc Theriault, and Theresa Kerchner.*

***Images courtesy of:***  
*Dale Waldron, Eric Doucette, Norm Rodrigue, Theresa Kerchner and Maine Historic Preservation Commission.*



**HOWARD HILL**

**Memories from  
Augusta residents**

**By Avery Siler  
Kennebec Land Trust Intern  
2015**