

Ledyard Sawmill Pond History



April 2025. Drone photography Mint Productions



The current pond and dam

Description

The 2 1/4 acre pond is fed by the 800-acre Lee Brook watershed. Lee Brook stream flow is highly seasonal and responds quickly to rain events. Most summers the brook flow reduces to a trickle and the pond level lowers below the spillway crest. Late fall, winter and spring are the highest flow rates. During the coldest winters, the pond (and the turbine pit in the mill lower level) freeze. It's likely that mill was never operated year-round on this site.

The dam is about 150 feet long and 4.5 feet high (~9 feet from top to bottom of spillway). A 5 1/2-inch wood flashboard is placed on the crest of the 16.5 foot wide stone masonry spillway prior to mill operating seasons to raise the pond level. Flashboards are removed at the end of each visitor season (and removed during the season if a very heavy rain event is forecast).

The depth of the pond is probably ~five feet in the middle tapering to the edges. Dredging in the 1960s deepened the pond to an average of 5-6 feet (see below).

Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection information

Dam No. 7219

Dam Name: Lee Brook Pond Dam

Dam Status: Active in Use

Dam Hazard Class: Class A. Low Hazard

(B) A Class A dam is a low hazard potential dam which, if it were to fail, would result in any of the following: (i) damage to agricultural land; (ii) damage to unpaved local roadways; or. (iii) minimal economic loss.

<https://deepmaps.ct.gov/datasets/connecticut-dams-public-use/explore?location=41.446646,-71.986622,16>

Ledyard Sawmill Pond History

(See maps, photos, and newspaper articles on following pages)

1845. First record of a mill on the property.

The Sawmill Park property was purchased by farmer, wheelwright, and soon-to-be miller Albert Brown from his older brother Avery in 1836. Avery owned and operated a sawmill about 1/2 mile upstream from Albert's new property. It's likely Albert dammed the brook in the early 1840s since he first started paying property taxes on mills in 1845. The water flow in Lee Brook is insufficient to power a mill without raising the water level with a dam. Over the years, Albert operated a shingle mill, gristmill, and finally a sawmill on the site.

1845-1890. Mills operated by Albert Brown and his sons.

Following Albert's death 1868, Albert's widow and sons (Israel, then Aaron) operated the mill until 1902.

1902-1937. Property transferred through foreclosure to Horace Main.

Horace Main had inherited the mill and property from the estate of his father William Leeds Main (which had foreclosed on Aaron Brown a few years earlier).

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, the sawmill operated at least part-time which would have required the pond/dam to be in sufficient condition to hold and release water. A circa 1930 photo shows stacks of logs near the mill and plenty of water in the pond (although the northwest corner of the pond looks quite shallow and weed-choked (which might be expected since foliage in the photo indicates it was taken during the summer when the pond is typically low).

1937-1966. Property owned by Harry C. Main.

Harry Main had lived on the property since about 1902 when his father inherited the mill and farm property. Harry in turn inherited the property in 1937 when Horace died. The mill stopped operating in the 1930s.

1966. Property purchased by the town of Ledyard.

The Town of Ledyard purchased the Sawmill Park property and sawmill building from Harry Main in 1966.

Photos from the 1960s show the dam is mostly intact when the town bought the park property. Aerial photos show the pond was about same size in the 1965 as in the 1930s.

1966-1975. Sawmill and dam restoration.

Work on the park and restoration of the sawmill occurred from about 1967 to 1975 with a grand opening of the restored mill as a museum in April 1975. The restoration work included dredging, dam/spillway repairs, and rebuilding the head gate penstock which direct water into the lower level of the mill. The pond was dredged in 1967 and again in the early 1970s; one of the goals of dredging was to make the pond suitable for swimming. In addition to the dredging, sand was transported in for a swimming beach. A 1966 Norwich Bulletin article claimed the pond had been known to locals as the "old swimming hole". In the late 1970s, it became clear that significant maintenance would be required to keep the pond usable for swimming and it was closed for swimming sometime after 1977.

1975-present.

The Ledyard Up-Down Sawmill museum is open for visitors Saturday afternoons for sawing demonstrations in April-May and October-November.

There were modifications to the dam in 1983 following a dam overflow in June 1982 which damaged the mill foundation: A buried concrete wall was added to the dam embankment in front of the mill building and the penstock was rebuilt.

The pond is approximately the same size now as when it was last dredged in the 1970s, but the average depth is no doubt reduced from flooding rain events and from the 50-year accumulation of washed-in leaves and other plant matter. Over the past 25 years the obvious increased area of aquatic plant growth (water lilies, cattails, etc.) indicates the pond is getting shallower.

Historic and pre-restoration photos and map

1854 map shows the pond and Albert Brown's gristmill site.

Walling and Baker 1854. Map of New London County, Connecticut. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3783n.1a000066/> Accessed 4/25/2026



Circa 1930. Sawmill and pond view from NE.

Janice W. Bell Historical Research Room, Ledyard Bill Library.



Late 1960s. Pre-restoration.

Janice W. Bell Historical Research Room, Ledyard Bill Library. 2011.1.46



Late 1960s. Pre-restoration.

Janice W. Bell Historical Research Room, Ledyard Bill Library. 2011.1.214



1967. Dredging during restoration

Late 1960s. Likely soon after 1967 dredging.

Janice W. Bell Historical Research Room, Ledyard
Bill Library. 22011.53.1



Late 1960s. Likely soon after 1967 dredging.

View from dam toward parking lot.

Janice W. Bell Historical Research Room, Ledyard Bill



Photos from Janice W. Bell Historical Research Room, Ledyard Bill Library

2011.1.176



Alan Ganong 7/13/2026

2011.1.213



New London Day, August 31, 1967, p. 24

THE DAY, NEW LONDON, CONN., THURSDAY, AUGUST 31, 1967



Clearing Mill Pond In Ledyard

For Swimming, Picnics

Mill Pond Property Being Readied

LEDYARD — Workers for New London County Soil Conservation are excavating an old mill pond off Iron St. and leveling land around it to start creation of a swimming and picnicking place for the town.

Bulldozers manned by Calvin Main of Ledyard and Joseph Spring of Preston are clearing the bottom muck of the pond after its draining last week into a bypass near an old sawmill the Historical Society is interested in restoring.

Main said they are clearing a tract opposite the sawmill to be used as a beach. Here the grade is gradual and the depth will be more than seven feet, away from shore to provide a swimming hole.

The depth of the pond will average five to six feet after the silt has been cleared and the pond depression deepened. The bulldozers were getting to a gravel bed yesterday.

Main said picnic places will be provided to the northwest and southeast of the pond where the bulldozers have already rough graded the land. Much of the rich silt from the Pond has been mixed with the soil.

A road will be extended from Iron St. to go around the pond.

The town purchased the mill pond, sawmill and 11 acres last year from Harry C. W. Main, who lives nearby. The Parks and Recreation Committee requested and obtained budget money to begin improvement of the pond and to provide a municipal swimming place.

The New London County Soil Conservation is able to do the job at cost price under provisions of the state for aid in any projects aimed at conservation of land, ponds and woods.

The pond will be expanded from its original two and a quarter acres to two and a half acres, Main said.

Head engineer for the project is Winthrop Benjamin of Preston.

2011.1.211



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1974-1977. Re-dredging.

Page 20 The Day, New London, Conn., Monday, July 1, 1974,

Council Approves Money to Dredge Pond

LEDYARD — The Town Council has approved a \$3,000 special appropriation to pay for the dredging of the Main Sawmill Pond. Several councilors, however, objected to the "eleventh hour" appropriation request.

Mayor Arthur H. Jerbert, bringing the appropriation request to the council on behalf of the Parks and Recreation Commission, explained that a portion of the dredging could be accomplished using \$300 from this fiscal year and \$200 from the next fiscal year. He recommended that the entire pond be dredged.

The appropriation is needed immediately to fund the work,

he added. The council customarily waits two weeks before taking action on an appropriation request.

The pond, eventually to be used for swimming as a part of the town-owned Main Sawmill Park, will be dredged to a maximum depth of six feet. The bottom will be covered with sand, and the material recovered from the dredging will be used to fill a depression in the area being developed as a beach. Silt, from about four inches to two feet deep, will be removed from the pond bottom.

Finance Committee Chairman Howard R. Flora opposed the appropriation because the

commission had not stressed the importance of the dredging during the fiscal 1974-75 budget deliberations. Also, the commission could not provide the council with an accurate estimate of what the operation would cost at that time.

"I hate to be opposed to a good project, but we have to set down procedures," he declared.

"I agree with Howard," Council Chairman Walter G. Eichler said. "This would be very poor planning and practice. We have to live within our budget."

Robert Johnson, a member of the Parks and Recreation Commission, who attended the

meeting, replied that the extent of the dredging needed had been underestimated until the pond was actually drained.

Councilor B. Kenneth Koe supported the appropriation but conceded that the method was improper.

"But I don't hold to an inflexible policy," Koe said, "and this is a good thing for Ledyard."

Councilor David A. Holdridge added his support.

"Let's cut through the red tape and get this project done," he declared.

The issue passed by a 6 to 3 vote with Councilors Flora, Eichler and Bruce J. Dunbar opposing the appropriation.

The Hartford Courant,
Jul 10, 1974 p. 49

Ledyard

Pond Dredging Nearly Done

LEDYARD — Sawmill Park ought to commit the money to diately able to contact Janet Sit-son will be open for public ba-thing. Benjamin so that the park could be ready for use soon.

Dredging operations on Sawmill Pond were completed this week. Previously partial dredging during the past two years has failed to keep the water clear of sediment and vegetation.

This week's excavation was conducted by Winthrop Benjamin, as were the earlier ones, using \$500 appropriated by Ledyard Town Council members.

Ledyard's new beach area will be three times the size of the recently opened Indian Pond, which is on Iron Street. The bottom will be sandy, with maximum depth at six feet.

Originally, the town did not have enough money available to pay for a thorough dredging of the historic pond site.

Mayor Arthur H. Jerbert at the last regular council meeting, June 28 had asked for \$3,000, the estimate for the project's cost.

But the mayor and Benjamin learned July 3 that at least one more day was needed to complete the task, as well as an additional \$500.

Because a gentlemen's agreement was made that the \$500 was not to be expended, but would be turned back into the general fund next June 30, Mayor Jerbert decided to conduct an informal telephone poll of council members to see if he

ty to see what she had to say. As council policy dictates, five "yes" votes are needed to pass a motion.

Counting council Chairman Kenneth Koe, William Evans, Bruce Dunbar, Joseph Bryson, and David A. Holdridge, responded affirmatively to the idea. The mayor was not im-

High Bacteria Count Cited

State Closes Sawmill Pond

Ledyard

LEDYARD — State health inspectors have banned swimming at Sawmill Pond.

The pond is one of the few fresh water swimming areas easily accessible to Ledyard residents, but a high coliform (bacteria) count in the pond has made it unsafe for swimming, state officials said.

Donald Griese, parks and recreation director, said Friday he sees no way of immediately remedying the problem. He said water gets dirty when the amount of water decreases and the number of people using it increases. The bacteria can cause dysentery, he said.

"There is a stream that normally feeds the pond. But because it's been dry here, the stream stopped flowing I don't know how many months ago," Griese said. He said rain would help clean the pond.

"Now if I had a gigantic block of ice we could haul into the pond, the water level would rise and there would be a more normal distribution of bacteria," Griese said with a laugh.

All swimming areas probably contain some coliform, but routine tests conducted recently by the state Depart-

ment of Health have determined that the amount of bacteria in Sawmill Park is dangerous to humans.

The pond was dredged by the town and is part of the Sawmill Historic District.

Griese said the pond will be tested every few weeks until it can be reopened.

Aerial and satellite images 1934-2025

April/May 1934

UConn Map & Geographic Information Center (MAGIC)

<https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/hg/aerialphotos/1934>



March/April 1965

UConn Map & Geographic Information Center (MAGIC)

<https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/hg/aerialphotos/1965>



Feb 2020 Northwest corner of pond is filled in compared to 1934 and 1965 images.

Google Earth. Accessed 4/26/2026



August 2025

Google Earth. Accessed 4/26/2026

