

'47 Fire

FROM PAGE A1

standing when we got back.” It was, but many weren’t. The fire burned a massive, unforgiving swath through York County.

Over the course of 11 days in October, 1947, 196,391 acres in Maine burned. The fires took homes, barns, businesses and summer cottages.

Most of the acreage that burned was in York County — 109,110 acres primarily in Waterboro and Lyman, but including locations in Alfred, Shapleigh, Newfield, Limerick, Parsonsfield, Hollis, Kennebunk, Saco and Dayton. Another 21,910 acres burned in North Kennebunkport, and in Biddeford, around West Street, Guinea Road, Fortunes Rocks and Granite Point.

Stephen Spofford, Kennebunk’s town historian, in a lecture hosted by the Brick Store Museum Saturday, said 20,120 cars burned in Fryeburg, Brownfield, Denmark and Porter, in Oxford County.

Another 17,188 acres burned at Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park.

In Durham and surrounding towns and in Washington County a total of 28,068 acres burned.

Spofford drew from his own research and from frequent talks with Joyce Butler, the author of “Wildfire Loose: The Week Maine Burned,” who spent three years researching the fire.

Rita Drew was 17 and a student at Gorham Teacher’s College as the fires were burning in York County, including on north Alfred, where she was raised. Drew said she remembers looking toward York County from the attic of her college dormitory and seeing the red glow in the sky.

The summer and fall of 1947 was hot and dry — there were 108 days without rain, according to stories in a special 8-page Journal Tribune supplement produced 10 years ago to mark the 60th anniversary of the fire. According to that account, in Shapleigh the fire broke out Oct. 17. In Waterboro, 88 homes were lost and 45 cottages burned. Lyman was ravaged in about two hours, with the village of Goodwin’s Mills saved because of a bulldozed fire break that encircled it. Spofford on Saturday noted the Maine Turnpike was being built at the time, and work was halted so bulldozers and other heavy equipment could be used to help fight fires.

The National Guard was brought in to help.

Accounts from folks



COURTESY PHOTO/Linda Hanscom

The George Hanscom store at the intersection of Route 111 and Kennebunk Pond Road prior to the fire of 1847.



COURTESY PHOTO/Brick Store Museum, Kennebunk

The site of the George Hanscom store at the intersection of Route 111 and Kennebunk Pond Road after the 1947 fire swept through.

interviewed for the 2007 supplement included memories from Roland Goodwin, of Shapleigh, who was 23 in 1947.

“Fire had gone through a swamp in Waterboro. We were putting out hot spots and the wind started up. There was a dark cloud overhead and we thought there would be a shower but it was Newfield burning,” said Goodwin in that 2007 interview. “We started down West Road and stopped at a farm just before (what is now Massabesic High School). A man had a dairy farm and he was getting ready to shoot his cows. We convinced him to wait.”

Janet Weymouth Colwell shared her memories coming home to Newfield after staying with relatives upstate:

“Coming through Newfield Village all you saw was chimneys and dead trees,” Colwell said in the 2007 interview. In West Newfield, the fires seemed to jump around, taking one house but sparing another. After the fire, a prefab building was brought to serve as a school because the schoolhouse had burned. The vault was one of the few items in the burned-out Town Hall that was saved — and even some items inside the vault were scorched, she said.

On Oct. 20, 1947, an underground fire burning in North Kennebunkport jumped U.S. Route 1 and headed for Goose Rocks Beach and Fortunes Rocks. At Goose Rocks Beach, 100 houses burned and the fire

burned to the sea, Spofford told a full house at the Saturday program.

“It drove people into the water,” he said.

At Cape Porpoise and the surrounding area, 82 houses burned.

On Oct. 23, the fires came over Ossipee Hill in Waterboro, as feared. Two-thirds of South Waterboro burned, three-quarters of East Waterboro burned, Spofford said.

Linda Hanscom, 7 at the time, pointed out the the South Waterboro devastation as seen from the intersection of Main Street (Route 202) and West Road. To the west on Main Street, toward Alfred, all of the homes were destroyed, while east on Main Street, most were spared. It is noticeable today — large, older homes on one side of the intersection, smaller, newer homes built after the fire on the other.

In Lyman, 192 buildings, including 100 lakeside camps, burned. In Dayton, the Town Hall, school and 29 homes were burned, along with a dairy farm owned by the Meserve family, Spofford said.

Photographs on display from the Brick Store show burned-out properties, firefighters working in their everyday clothing, using any means at their disposal, including shovels and brooms, to beat out fire. The museum’s exhibit is ongoing.

Survivor Stories Project set for Thursday

FROM STAFF REPORTS

BIDDEFORD — The Survivor Stories Project will be presented Thursday to mark Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

The one-time performance, hosted by Caring Unlimited, York County’s domestic violence resource center will be presented at 6 p.m. at Engine Gallery, 128 Main St., Biddeford. The event is free and open to the public. Doors will open at 5:30 p.m.

The stories to be shared were written by survivors of domestic abuse and collected by Caring Unlimited. Organizers say they will be read by a cast

of volunteers from the local community, and the authors will remain confidential.

“For survivors, writing their experiences can be a powerful part of the healing process, and for others to hear these true stories, in the survivor’s own words, raises awareness about the reality and prevalence of the abuse our family members, friends and neighbors experience here in York County,” said the agency’s spokeswoman, Emily Gormley.

The Survivor Stories Project has been met with praise from authors, volunteer readers, and audience members.

“What a beautifully

thought-through, powerful evening of sharing and bearing witness! The stories I heard and the one I shared will stay with me. They are a real call to action for us all to do better by one another,” a volunteer reader told the agency.

Nationally, October is recognized as Domestic Violence Awareness Month. In York County throughout the month Caring Unlimited will host a number of events and educational opportunities.

For more DVAM events visit: www.caring-unlimited.org.



COURTESY PHOTO/University of New England

Adam St. Gelais, project manager for a University of New England seaweed grant, holds a piece of kelp.

UNE gets \$1.3 million grant for seaweed production

By DINA MENDROS

Associate Editor

BIDDEFORD — People have been using seaweed as a food source for many years, but more recently seaweed, or macroalgae, is being used as feedstock for animals, and for fuel and chemical feedstock.

With the potential of using seaweed as fuel and other products, the U.S. Department of Energy through the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy awarded \$22 million in grants to 18 projects around the country that aim to accelerate the production of macroalgae.

Among those receiving funds is the the University of New England, which received a \$1.3 million three-year research grant. UNE and the other DOE awardees are part of a new program called Macroalgae Research Inspiring Novel Energy Resources, known as MARINER. Through MARINER, the U.S. plans to become a leading producer of seaweed, to help improve the country’s energy security and economic competitiveness. The main advantage of macroalgae is that it can be used for fuel and a host of commercial products without competing with food crops for land and water.

“From Alaska to the Gulf Coast, the United States has offshore resources capable of producing enough seaweed to handle as much as 10 percent of our demand for transportation fuel,” said ARPA-E Acting Director Eric Rohlfling. “By focusing on the technological challenges to growing and harvesting

macroalgae efficiently and cost-effectively, MARINER project teams are building the tools we need to fully put this resource to work contributing to our energy future.”

UNE officials said in a press release that are excited about receiving the grant.

“This award will support UNE’s network of eager, young scientists and entrepreneurs in all of our marine programs,” said UNE President James Herbert, Ph.D. “With the help of this funding from the Department of Energy, our students will be part of a movement to pioneer the next generation of marine products.”

The UNE team will develop a 3D modeling tool to simulate hydrodynamic-induced mechanical stresses that seaweed farms face in the open ocean. Team members will focus on predictive modeling to determine the structural performance of new and existing farm designs in the Gulf of Maine. Their model will be capable of simulating hectare-sized farms, in much smaller sizes which would speed up the engineering, testing and permitting process for new, large scale, seaweed farming systems. UNE already has a small experimental seaweed farm off Wood Island. The team will create a larger farm — four acres — in Saco Bay for research purposes.

“With this grant, UNE will become a center of expertise, practice, and partnerships for developing Maine’s seaweed and sea vegetable economy offshore,” said Professor Barry Costa-Pierce,

Ph.D., director of UNE’s Center for Excellence in the Marine Sciences. “DOE’s investment in UNE will support partnerships with researchers and businesses in nations throughout the Atlantic Ocean, developing Maine as a global leader in research and development in aquaculture, especially in the expanding seaweed bioproducts and food economies.”

Because large-scale macroalgae fuel production remains an extremely ambitious prospect, overcoming the early-stage R&D challenges presented by MARINER requires cross-disciplinary collaboration, according to the DOE. ARPA-E project teams are based on partnerships to encourage sharing new ideas and creating innovations.

UNE is partnering with Professor David Fredriksson, Ph.D., of the United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, who is a co-principal investigator on the grant, as well as scientists Andrew Drach, Ph.D., of the Callentis Consulting Group in Austin, Texas, and Tobias Dewhurst, Ph.D., of Maine Marine Composites in Portland. Adam St. Gelais of UNE will serve as project manager. Over the past three years, UNE and the U.S. Naval Academy have built a close research relationship under a Cooperative Research and Development Agreement, and this award is a result of that partnership.

— Associate Editor Dina Mendros can be reached at 282-1535, ext. 324, or dmen-dros@gmail.com.

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