

A History of Trash in Waterboro

Trash in Waterboro has for a long time been a lively topic, given the economics of its disposal. This year it became even hotter with the introduction of the pay-per-bag system. This began a new chapter in the long history of the treatment of solid waste in the Town Of Waterboro. As a long-time recycler and composter, and a recent arrival (9 1/2 years here), I became curious about how we have come to the present heated moment in relation to our trash. As there are many other newcomers in town (given the population growth in recent years) who may have moved here from communities where they simply drop trash in bags or barrels on the curb, I hoped some history might be informative. I thank those long-timers who shared their memories with me and hope anyone with more accurate or additional information will feel free to add or correct this account.

In the early days of this historically farming and logging town there was much less a concept of "trash," as families had a use for most anything left over from production or consumption. Food waste went to pigs or chickens. There were no such things as cat or dog food, as animals ate what the family did. Contents that were purchased in glass containers provided another jar for canning at harvest time, and the few tin cans that were available were often used for plants taken in for the winter. These became decorated with paper from wallpaper catalogs. Cans not reused were stored in barrels or burlap bags until spring when they were disposed of by burial or burning. When a shirt, sweater, or pants wore out, they were cut up for making gloves, mittens, or hats. Still other fabric pieces were used in quilt making. The patterned cotton used for flour sacks often became dresses and skirts, with the scraps left going into quilts. What waste they had was disposed on the household's own property.

Prior to the 1950's, there were various places around town where people disposed of their trash. Often at the end of a road as it joined the main road, the households on the road would develop a common dumping place. One of the places where townspeople remember dumping was behind Jud Roberts' store in the early 1900's. This is now Odd Fellow's Hall near the East Waterboro Post Office. There was a dumping area behind the Waterboro High School, now the Lion's Club and the Massabesic Medical Center. Jim Earl Jr. recalls a small dumping area behind the Getty Station where his family and a few neighbors dumped. During the '40s and 50's there was a dumping place on West Shore

Road. There is some dispute about whether there was a dump in Otto Brandt's gravel pit on Townhouse Road. From 1948 until 1953, the first centralized Town Dump was on Leon Bean's property on the Old Alfred Road, between where Friendship Park is now, and the old Waterboro salt shed, the large green building built by Willis Lord and still standing next to the power lines. Each year small amounts of money were paid to various townsmen to use various means to push the trash back so more could be dumped. This site was soon discontinued as it was deemed to be on too public a road.

John Smith, former Fire Chief in Waterboro, remembers the rapid increase of trash after he returned from W.W. II with the development of the plastics industry. According to Jim Carll's records, in 1954 and 55, the Town of Waterboro paid a small amount to the town of Hollis to transport trash to land near the site of the present equestrian park on Rte. 5 in Hollis. Forrest Abbot remembers the constant presence of smoke from the site.

In the mid fifties, Clint Wakefield gave permission for the town to have a burn pit on his land on Bennett Hill Road and this became the second centralized dump in Waterboro. Howard Stone (Stoney) was the dump manager, and Roger Thyng assisted him. At the end of each day they would burn the trash. Stoney collected metal and other materials that could be sold, running what was probably the first recycling program in town.

During the late seventies, the Maine D.E.P. asked that all open burning dumps be closed and capped. As incentive, the state offered to pay 75% of the cost of capping the old dumps. In '79 or '80, selectmen Dennis Abbot, Bob Fay, and Andrew (Bimmy) Woodsome were in office when the Town of Waterboro voted to join with six other towns and have town trash hauled to the newly formed non-profit Regional Waste System at Running Hill Road in Westbrook. About five acres of land uphill from the old dump and on the other side of Bennett Hill road were purchased from Clint Wakefield for the new Waterboro Transfer Station. Richmond Stevens, succeeded by his wife Hazel after his death, became the Transfer Station director and managed the shipping of recyclables and trash to RWS. At RWS a landfill of about 160 acres had been lined to capture flowage from anything stored there. Loads of trash were brought to a baler and baled into 30 cubic feet "cubes" which were then stowed in "pods." Rainwater that drained through the cubes was drained off into the Portland wastewater treatment

system. RWS established a recycling plant in 1990, housed in the former baling facility.

At the new Waterboro Transfer Station, recycling was instituted using silver metal storage containers provided by RWS and commonly called “silver bullets.” These containers were also placed next to the Lake Arrowhead Office, until improperly dropped off items led to their discontinuance.

In 1989 RWS joined with other solid waste management facilities nationally in building a “Waste to Energy” plant. In contrast with the concept of an incinerator that simply burns trash, this facility burned 90% of the waste it received to produce electricity. The Waste to Energy facility located off outer Congress Street in Portland continues to generate electricity that is sold to Constellation Energy Group. In addition to generating electricity, burning trash reduces the trash volume by 90%. After the trash is burned, the ash that remains takes up just 10% of the space occupied by unburned trash in the landfill that replaced the baling facility in Westbrook.

In 2003, the Town of Waterboro bought out the Transfer Station and it became a new town department. Staffers became town employees, and the town continued the contract for shipping waste to RWS. Over the next few years, the Transfer Station grew, through purchases and tax liens, to its current size of about 108 acres.

I am working on another piece that will describe what happens to everything we bring to the transfer station, whether it is recycled, reused, transformed, or turned into electricity, once it reaches RWS or other destinations.

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