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History of Lunksoos Camps: The Story of Dacey Landing and Lunksoos

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History of Lunksoos Camps

The Story of Dacey Landing and Lunksoos

The present day Lunksoos Camps are located approximately one mile north of the confluence of the East Branch Penobscot River (wáhsehtək^w) and the Wassataquoik Stream (wáhsehtək^{ok})¹. The Penobscot River and its branches and tributaries are sacred to present-day Penobscot people as well as to the broader collection of tribes known as the Wabanaki². The Native peoples depended on this area for both its waterways for travel and the forest for sustenance. Yearly the people would travel from the coast to the interior and return with meat, fish, native plants for medicines and animal furs. The Penobscot people of the Wabanaki Nation consider the Penobscot River and Katahdin as a centerpiece of their culture. While the Native people used the land, little is known about their travels outside of cultural stories. Penobscot place names are everywhere on the landscape. Wassataquoik is a rendering of the Penobscot word for “place where they spear fish,” the East Branch has been referred to as the “stream of light,” Lunksoos refers to a wild beast, possibly a mountain lion and Katahdin is roughly translated as “greatest mountain.”³

While the native people regarded the area as their home, the European immigrants saw it as wilderness. The history of East Branch exploration by non-native Americans begins with a survey commissioned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1793. In 1783, shortly after the War of Independence, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts had reached a turning point facing huge war debts and its paper currency was worth only ten percent of its value. They could no longer tax the people so they turned to sales of their wildlands and opened a land office to survey the lands and place them on the market⁴. In 1793 William Bingham, a land speculator, began acquiring millions of acres in Maine which was to include the contract for an acquisition of a million acre tract in the northern part of the district⁵. They would be unable to close the deal until the land was surveyed.

The 1793 survey of the area was done by 51 year old Park Holland of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts and 41 year old Jonathan Maynard of Framingham, Massachusetts⁶. A few years earlier they had made their mark as military officers, as well as being close friends, which lead to their appointment by the state of Massachusetts (Land Committee) to survey the lands called the Great East Branch of the Penobscot River⁷. Their task was to survey a tract of land that was six miles wide on both sides of the river to be reserved for the “Indians.” They arrived in Bangor on August 8, 1793 to start their work, finally reaching Nicasou⁸ at a place they called in their journal, the Big Crotch where the East Branch and West Branch of the Penobscot River join on August 30th⁹. On September 1st they decided to break the work up with Park Holland pushing east then north until he reached the French settlements on the St John River then headed back to the southwest finally rejoining Jonathan Maynard somewhere on the East Branch of the Penobscot River. Jonathan Maynard continued up the East Branch of the Penobscot River surveying as he went. Maynard

¹ Unpublished Paper. Neel, M. 2019

² The Wabanaki includes four tribes, the Passamaquoddy, Micmac, Maliseet and Penobscot tribes

³ Cook, D. S. 2007. Above the gravel bar: the native canoe routes of Maine. 3rd. edition. Polar Bear & Company, Solon, ME.

⁴ Ring, Seventh Report of the Forest Commissioner, 45-46.

⁵ The area of the purchase was allowing the Penobscot River to the Canadian border.

⁶ Bennett, D. Wilderness From Chamberland Farm. Island Press, Washington DC. 2001. P48.

⁷ Porter, Joseph W. 1888 Bangor Historical Magazine Volume 3. Benjamin Burr Print, Bangor.

⁸ Currently called Medway

⁹ Jonathan Maynard Field Notes 1793, John Neff Communication 2017.

History of Lunksoos Camps

reached the location of the future Hunt Farm on Tuesday, September 3rd describing the land in his notes as being wide, flat and fertile. On September 4th he reached the area just below the mouth of the Seboeis River where he described the land as flat, fertile and growing wild hops as if they were planted in rows. On Wednesday, September 11th he reached Stair Falls and in his field notes he described what he calls the handsomest falls he had ever seen in his travels with eight to ten steps just as in a regular stair case. He finally reached a series of four ponds fifty three miles upstream, where he saw an otter in the river, so he called the ponds in the river Otter Lake¹⁰. As the party returned from their push into the wilderness, the whey were near starvation and according to folklore the party had reserved a small dog that had accompanied them as a last resort for a source of food. The little dog saved himself by finding a porcupine which the party captured and ate. The next day they came upon an Indian encampment on the banks of the river where they were given smoked salmon which had been caught and cured by the native peoples. The men feasted until they were nearly all sick from the effects of an overdose of smoked salmon. From his notes he was able to draw the first very detailed map of this section of Maine. The survey was over 175 miles longer than expected which was far more land surveyed than was realized.

Finally, in 1825 after Maine became a state the "Monument Survey" of the area was started and Maine began selling off lands that had not perversely been sold by Massachusetts. The rich land barons from the south purchased as much of the land as they were possibly able to buy. The sales of these northern lands took place in Bangor with parcels of land often times changing hands



The ford in 1901 was a shallow location where wagons and horses could cross the river. In the background you can see the Hunt Farm and the famous Elm Tree. Courtesy of the Patten Lumbermen's Museum

several times in one day with no concern for what might be on the land. The land in township T3R7 was purchased by Edward Smith in March of 1825. He then quickly sold the land to a group of gentlemen from the Gorham area as an investment for the sum of \$2781 or about twelve cents per acres in 1830 which at the time was a considerable amount of money. The group of men from Gorham included a physician Elihu Baxter¹¹, a gentleman James Smith, and a merchant Charles Hunt. In June of 1831 the thirty one year old Charles Hunt sold his share¹² of the land to his older brother, who was more adventurous William H. Hunt of Carthage who at the time was a thirty nine years old for \$1200 or 13 cents an acre¹³. Local folk lore says that the land that William Hunt purchased was sold for one and a half cents an acre which would have made the selling price considerably less than his brother originally paid for the land.

¹⁰ After the dam was built it became known as Grand Lake Matagamon.

¹¹ Elihu Baxter was the father of James Phinney Baxter whose son Percival Proctor Baxter would become the face of Baxter State Park

¹² The southern half of T3R7 and Dr. Charles Adams would purchase the northern half later.

¹³ His lands included the bend in the river, the ford, and all lands north to the township border.

History of Lunksoos Camps

Attracted by timber and cheap land in 1833 William H Hunt and his friend, Hiram Dacey¹⁴ from Skowhegan left their families and headed north first going to Danforth then finally along the Aroostook Trail¹⁵ onto Island Falls to T4R6¹⁶. William Hunt left his wife, Nizolla (Nizolla Gould of Dixfield), that he had married in 1812 with their eight children plus one on the way to tend their Carthage farm. Local lore says the men travelled by road from Stacyville to the East Branch of the Penobscot River, but there is no evidence of a road or trail going to the river at the time. It is more likely that they traveled from Patten, because in 1828, the lumber baron, Amos Patten of Bangor had purchased the land for timbering and started logging in the area just to the west in T4R6 now known as Patten¹⁷ working his way toward the Seboeis River. From Patten the two men travelled west using Amos Patten's logging roads into the wilderness until they reached the Seboeis River. It was there that William Hunt and Hiram Dacey constructed a raft to be used to float down the Seboeis River to the East Branch of the Penobscot River looking for land and a place to settle in the newly purchased land. It would make sense because the men had the information from the journal of Jonathan Maynard where he had noted two different locations along the river. The better location was the one selected by Hunt, on the east bank of the river about a mile below the mouth of the Wassataquoik Stream where there was an expanse of relatively flat and fertile soil on a high bank overlooking the river. While William Hunt allowed his friend to build a home on the other sections just downstream of the Seboeis River where Maynard had found hops growing in a field that he described as if they had been planted in rows¹⁸.

Hiram Dacey would build his cabin and farm on the west side of Lookout Mountain just a few hundred yards downstream from the current location of the Lunksoos Camps in 1833¹⁹. It would become called Dacey Clearing and he would build a cabin with a stone foundation, that can still be found today, and cleared the land for his farm. Folk lore says that he was able to build his cabin without using a single nail. By today standards it would seem not to be possible but in his day most wilderness cabins were built without using nail. The method of construction was to use wooden pegs to hold things together. Not only did his



All that remains of the Dacey Clearing is an old stone foundations and metal artifacts. Hendrickson Photo

¹⁴ Spelled in a number of different manners, Dace, Dacey, Dacy, Deasy, Deasey, and Daisey perhaps due to education levels of the time to add to the confusion he gave his name to the mountain called Deasey Mountain and the firetower map calls it Daicey Mountain.

¹⁵ The Aroostook Trail had been spotted from Molunkus to T4R6 in 1830 to bring settlers into the area.

¹⁶ Townships are primarily designated by the numbers 1 through 19 from south to north, while the ranges are counted from the easterly line toward the west, these numbers show the position in the state.

¹⁷ Coolong, Debbie. 2017. *The History of Patten and Mount Chase*. Oliver Press. Mount Chase, ME.

¹⁸ Jonathan Maynard Field Notes 1893, John Neff Communication.

¹⁹ Dacey Clearing with its stone foundation was built in 1833 with the house completed by 1838 by Hiram Dacey to be abandoned by 1845 with rumors of not being happy with all the traffic and moving deeper into the wilderness.

History of Lunksoos Camps

location have land good for farming and raising cattle it had two brooks that ran down the side of the mountain for a good source of water. The boards for the cabin came from the Hunt Farm saw mill. While the bank was indeed covered with what looked like wild hops but they were actually a vine plant called ground nuts which can still be found in the area today. While there is little known about Hiram Dacey's time at his river farm, it appears that around 1845 he found the area, a bit crowded for his liking. It was rumored that he moved further into the wilderness beyond Katahdin.

Hiram Dacey was gone when Henry David Thoreau made his trip down the river on July 31, 1857. The cabin would have been there but he did not mention it in his book, "In the Maine Woods."²⁰ On his last trip Thoreau would travel with his friend Edward Hoar and Joe Polis as his guide. His relative George Thatcher who lived in Bangor acted as a travel agent and introduced Thoreau to Polis who George Thatcher had known for many years. Thoreau passed right by the Dacey Farm without stopping or mentioning it in his journey. His guide, a great story teller, spotted a set of large animal tracks near the location of the current Lunksoos Camps in the river mud. Joe Polis told Thoreau that the tracks were the tracks of the devil cat or cougar better known as a wolverine. The woodsman's name was Lunkxus, a corruption from native American language, which was later changed to Lunksoos in stories. The woodland creature was feared by the Abenaki for its fierce defense of its territory. This left a strong impression on Henry David Thoreau and the name would later become the name for the camp just downstream from the location where they had seen the tracks²¹.

Little is known about the Dacey Farm until it was purchased in 1881 by Chauncey Patterson²² who realized its potential for a center of lodging for those going into the wilderness. Patterson leased the Dacey Clearing²³ from Simon Gates. The same year Patterson constructed a better road from the Hunt Farm to Dacey Clearing²⁴. The purchase was made under the condition he would not use the camp of recreational sports²⁵. He also constructed a new road²⁶ from where the Stacyville road hit the Hunt property at the edge of the town-line²⁷ directly to the Patterson House which was known as the Mountain Road. While the original cabin was almost gone and beyond repair Patterson moved a bit up hill and built



Patterson House was built so guest would be able to stay at the location without breaking the lease from Simon Gates.
Courtesy of Patten Lumbermen's Museum

²⁰ Thoreau, H.D. 1864. *The Maine Woods*. Ticknor and Fields, Boston MA.

²¹ Information about his trip came from Thoreau's last essay, *The Allagash and the East Branch* by Henry David Thoreau 1846 published after his death.

²² Patterson, a tavern owner on the Aroostook Road in Sherman had purchased the Hunt property in 1874 and it was sold to Simon Gates a hotel owner from Winn who ran the stagecoach.

²³ Dacey Clearing with its stone foundation was built in 1833 with the house completed by 1838 by Hiram Dacey to be abandoned by 1845 with rumors of not being happy with all the traffic and moving deeper into the wilderness.

²⁴ Dacey Clearing had been leased from William Hunt in 1833 by Hiram Dacey. William Hunt had purchased the land from his younger brother Charles.

²⁵ Neff, John W. 2006. *Katahdin: an historic journey*. Appalachian Mountain Club Books, Boston, MA.

²⁶ Constructed in 1882 to avoid going by Hunt Farm

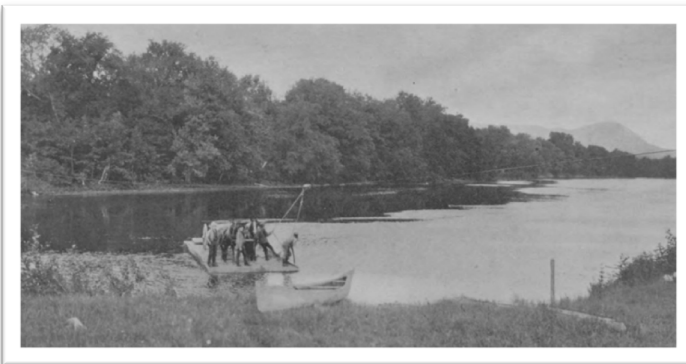
²⁷ The town-line between T3R7 and Stacyville where John Stacy had a building.

History of Lunksoos Camps

a new camp he called the Patterson House in 1885. The new building would be built just over the property-line on land leased from Charles Adams so that Patterson could serve guests which he was forbidden from doing by his lease with Gates. The Patterson House was a large single room with a large porch and skylight window. The original Dacey buildings were abandoned and a man names Israel Robar, a hermit/squatter, took up residence in what was left of the buildings. Patterson's business boomed until 1891 when the lease changed hands being taken up by Fred Ayer²⁸ and Luther Rogers²⁹³⁰ the facility would be used as the headquarters for their logging operation³¹. While they continued to operate the Patterson House for both recreational and logging interests they changed the name to the East Branch House.



The cable ferry operated at the end of the Mountain Road from 1892 until 1922 when logging and recreational activity moved west to the Millinocket area.
Courtesy of Patten Lumbermen's Museum



The cable ferry operated to carry loaded wagons and the people across the river. In the background you can see the 1914 Lunksoos camp
Courtesy of Patten Lumbermen's Museum

In 1892 Ayers and Rogers purchased the Patterson interests from Israel Robar who was paid to move out and became a cook at one of their camps further up the Wassataquoik at what would be called Robar Dam and camps. They needed the lands as the Mountain Road passed right in front of the old Dacey building. In 1892 due to increase business from the rail station³², the difficulty in fording the river and promotion of his location he built a cable ferry where the road connected to the road from the Hunt Farm that was used to carry sports and logging equipment across the river. It was a simple system

with a double cable attached to trees on both sides of the river that could be removed during the winter. It was run at an angle up the river going from east to west upstream. This was common for

²⁸ Owner of the Eastern Manufacturing Company in Brewer

²⁹ In 1861 Luther was among the first to enlist from Patten, where support for the civil war was strong. He joined Maine's 8th Volunteer Infantry Regiment, Company B, as 2nd lieutenant. At the siege of Petersburg, VA on June 18th Luther received 2 gunshot wounds. One was to his leg and the other through his shoulder.

³⁰ Luther Rogers had been cutting timber in the Trout Brook s area since 1857.

³¹ Neff, John W. 2006. Katahdin: an historic journey. Appalachian Mountain Club Books, Boston, MA.

³² Trains reached Stacyville and Davidson in 1895.

History of Lunksoos Camps

cable ferries so a barge loaded with supplies could be ferried³³ across the river using the current while the lighter barge going down river would float with the current. The ferry could carry a fully loaded wagon pulled by four horses which made the loads extremely heavy. The landing on the west bank of the river was where the road going up the Wassataquoik started. This cable was used to pull loggers, recreational guests and their gear across the river. The end of logging, the damage from various forest fires, the pulp river drives and access to Katahdin from the Millinocket area all



Lunksoos Camp was constructed in 1895 by Luther Rogers to serve recreational sports.
Courtesy of Patten Lumbermen's Museum



Lunksoos Camp were designed to bring all the comforts of home to the wilderness.
Courtesv of Patten Lumbermen's Museum

adventure. The structure was three story affair with large open decks on the first and second floor offering a view of Katahdin to the west. On the third story which was used for storage the word "Lunksoos" was spelled on the front using birch logs. It was the era of great sporting camps where the traveler could stay overnight, get a home-cooked meal and hire a guide which brought the comfort and safety of home to the

caused a lack of use of the ferry that ceased operation in 1922 when it was finally removed.

In 1894 rail service arrived in Stacyville increasing the popularity of Lunksoos with the final part of the trip to the camp being made using wagons over rough roads. In 1895 after removing the Dacey Cabin they constructed

an elaborate log sporting camp, calling it Lunksoos³⁴ Camp from the Thoreau



The Camp had stairs that went up the outside to access the open area it the top for a bug free viewing area.
Courtesy of Patten Lumbermen's Museum

³³ Ferrying is the act of moving from one side of the river to the other using the current with minimal downstream drift

³⁴ George Witherle was the first to pronounced "Lunkasoo" coming from the Algonquin native name for wildcat.


History of Lunksoos Camps

wilderness³⁵. The building expanded several times over the years. First an outside staircase was added to a bug-free sitting area on the roof with a beautiful view of Katahdin. In 1896 an addition to the north end added more space which was followed the next year with an addition to the south end for an enlarged kitchen. In 1900 several smaller cabins were added to the north end. The walls of the rooms were in traditionally covered with birch bark and the rooms had heat from wood stoves. One of the advertising points for the camps, originally was it had a year round spring at a temperature of 52 degrees, measured by George Witherle, just below the building with another spring



Lunksoos would make additions to increase the size of the camps until they burned in 1908
Courtesy of Patten Lumbermen's Museum

The Nearest Large Camp to Mt. Katahdin --IS-- THE



Lunksoos House ::

at the Ferry, Penobscot East Branch, 8 miles from Patten.

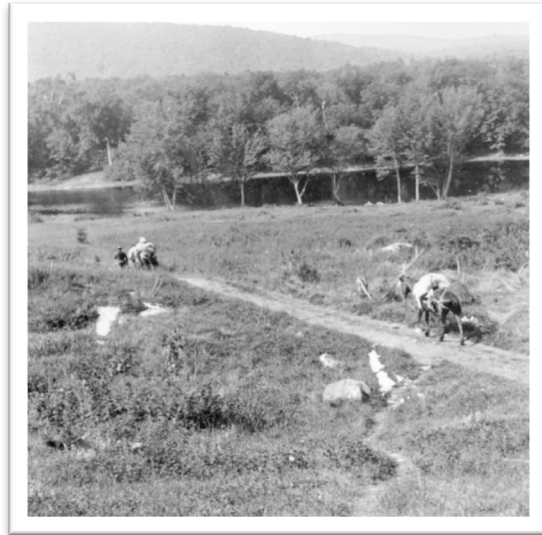
Close by the famous Wisataquoik river, and surrounded by splendid trout ponds. Here deer are abundant and moose plenty, and there is ideal canoeing on river, streams and lakes. The Lunksoos House offers first-class accommodations in every respect; is an especially desirable resort for families; has private lodges and also string of camps on the Wisataquoik trail which are the only camps at the north spur of Katahdin. Daily mails. Trains met. Guides, teams and saddle horses furnished.

RIDE TO KATAHDIN

The only saddle trail in to Katahdin basin starts from the Lunksoos House, following the Wisataquoik valley, passing Katahdin lake and south end of Turner Mt., crossing Sandy stream, rounding the head of Sandy pond, and then climbing up roaring brook to the South basin, where a comfortable camp is located. The easiest, most picturesque way to visit Maine's greatest mountain. Prompt attention given all requests for circulars or special information. Address

L. B. ROGERS & SON, Patten, Maine.

further up the hill behind the camps. Luther Rogers son, Edwin was listed as one of the proprietors. There was and daily mail delivery, a string of camps to Katahdin and boast of the only saddle trail to the Katahdin basin started to appear. The full page advertisement in the 1905 edition of the Bangor & Aroostook magazine "In the Maine Woods" shows the importance springs are to the sporting camp. By



The 1903 road from Patten to Lunksoos was called the Happy Corner Road, making it easier to reach the camps.

1905 advertisement for the camps in the magazine "In the Maine Woods"
Courtesy of Bangor & Aroostook Railroad

1901 the

Stacyville Road which had not been improved in years and was almost impassible. This when coupled with the fact that the train had reach Patten encouraged Luther Rogers to construct a road in 1903 directly to the train station. The road became known as the Happy Corner Road³⁶. The town of Patten, in 1894 voted to pay the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad \$15,000 for laying the tracks

³⁵ Little, D., Neff, J. and Whitcomb. Penobscot East Branch Lands: A Journey Through Time. Elliotsville Plantation, Inc. Portland, ME.

³⁶ Named by the lumbermen coming out of the woods after a long winter because they realized that they were almost home to their families.

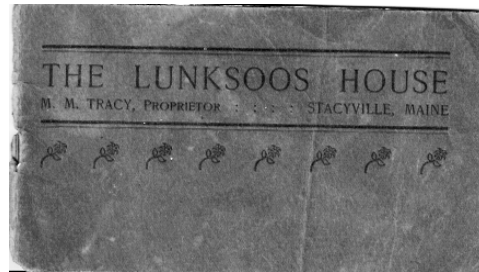
History of Lunksoos Camps

between Patten and Sherman. In 1895 a station was constructed and by 1896 the rail was being used for travel³⁷.



Lunksoos Camps burned in 1908 and were replaced with these camps in 1910 which burned again in the mid 1950s.
Courtesy of Patten Lumbermen's Museum

In 1901 the Ayer and Rogers Operation had stopped operation and the logging operation was taken over by the Katahdin Pulp and Paper Company. The camp buildings ownership reverted to Dr. Charles Cook³⁸. In 1905 the camps were leased for a short period of time by Madison Tracy. In 1908 for unknown reasons Lunksoos burn to the ground. With birch bark walls, dry timber,



candles, lanterns and wood stoves for both heating and cooking it could have been for any reason as fires in these old camps were very common. The camp was rebuilt in 1910 by Dr. Charles Adams and Edwin Rogers³⁹ of the Ross Lumbering Operation who began promoting the Saddle trips to the Great Basin and beyond. The new lodge was very similar to the lodge that is currently at the location. It was a two story affair with a large porch for relaxing. The Ross Lumbering Operation held the Lunksoos lease continuing to push the roads west deep into the Great Basin. The camps were once again leased in 1920 to Edward Draper to be used for his pulp wood logging operations. It was in 1920 perhaps one of the most important visitors came to Lunksoos Camps, Percival Baxter. On August 5, 1920 a group met at the home of Bert Howe in Patten to visit and climb Mount Katahdin. This was Percival Baxter's first climbing trip to the mountain. The party stayed at Lunksoos where they crossed the river to head up the Wassataquoik to Katahdin⁴⁰. Edward Draper continue to operate the camps until late 1923 when they were taken over by Harry P. Rodgerson⁴¹. In 1931



Lunksoos Camps as rebuilt in the late 1950s and as they sit today as part of Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument.
Courtesy of Author

³⁷ Coolong, Debbie. 2017. The History of Patten and Mount Chase. Oliver Press. Mount Chase, ME.

³⁸ Avery, M. 1929. The Keep Path and its successors: the history of Katahdin from the east and north (concluded). *Appalachia* 17:224-237.

³⁹ Luther Rogers son.

⁴⁰ Little, David, Neff, John and Whitcomb, Howard. Penobscot East Branch Lands: A Journey Through Time. Elliotsville Plantation, Inc. Portland, ME.

⁴¹ Neff, J. 2019. Accommodations at the Edge of the Wilderness, an unpublished document.

History of Lunksoos Camps

the ownership of the buildings passed on to Nelson and Lena McMoarn⁴² of Stacyville but the era of the great sporting camp was quickly coming to an end, perhaps it was the automobile that gave people the ability to travel and greater freedom to take short vacations. But it was Nelson McMoarn, who on July 25, 1939, came to the rescue of twelve year old Donn Fendler after his wilderness ordeal. The rescue placed the Lunksoos Camps in the national news. The rescue was at the end of the Great Depression and the country needed a heroes that could show the courage and persistence of the American people. The McMoarn's continued to hold the lease until the mid-1950s, when the property was sold. The new owners burned down the old cabins and rebuilt structures that still stand today⁴³.

In the winter of 1969 the land⁴⁴ and camps were purchased by Roland (Roly) Farmer and operated off and on for the next twenty three years⁴⁵. In 1992 it was purchased by a local guide named Robert Chasse and his wife Carolyn to be used as a hunting camp. In the same year Chasse added two more buildings to the camps. Robert Chasse sold the camps to Leon Bertsch and Janet DeGraw on June 14, 2002 and there were two more cabins added and a building for storage. On November 29, 2007 there was a Snowmobiling Access Agreement made with the state for the Hunt Farm lands giving Lunksoos Camps access to the snowmobiling passing through the area. The camps changed hands again in 2009 to a Florida couple for land investment. William and Sandra Todds of Lutz Florida rented the camps but were reported to never have visited them⁴⁶. On March 22, 2011⁴⁷ Roxanne Quimby purchased the 13.8 acre Lunksoos parcel, which included a lodge and four cabins, from a Florida couple⁴⁸ to be used as an artist and writer retreat.

On May 9, 2011 in a meeting in Millinocket, Roxanne Quimby shared with the public her intent to make the lands a gift to the federal government in 2016, the birthday of the National Park System⁴⁹. The purchase on her part was considered to be a tactical move to prevent the property from becoming a commercial business. According to Phyllis Austin, she continued to work toward the purchase of a parcel of 900 acres to the south including Whetstone Bridge which never took place. On August 12, 2016 Roxanne Quimby transferred her lands in the Katahdin region to the federal government⁵⁰. The deed was filed in Millinocket of August 23, then on August 24, 2016, President Barack Obama designated about 87,500 acres east of Baxter State Park as Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, one day before the National Park Service turned one hundred years old. Lunksoos Camps now serves as a work center for the national monument.

⁴² Spellings vary by location Dnn Fendler's book spells the name McMoarn while the US Census and Stacyville tax records spell the name McMoran

⁴³ Neff, John W. 2006. Katahdin: an historic journey. Appalachian Mountain Club Books, Boston, MA.

⁴⁴ 13.83 acres of land around the current Lunksoos Camps as a survey report December 27, 1994

⁴⁵ Neff, J. 2019. Accommodations at the Edge of the Wilderness, an unpublished document.

⁴⁶ Contact of Sale search, April 2008

⁴⁷ Sambides, Nick. 2011. Quimby buys historic Lunksoos Camps on Penobscot. Bangor Daily News April 19 2011. (purchase pay was \$334,539)

⁴⁸ Austin, Phyllis. 2015. Queen Bee: Roxanne Quimby, Burt's Bees, and Her Quest for a New National Park. Tilbury House, Thomaston, Maine.

⁴⁹ Bowley, Dianna. 2011. Roxanne Quimby discusses her plans for her wildlands. Bangor Daily News May 6, 2011.

⁵⁰ Quick Claim Deed from Hancock County was accepted on August 17 by Rachel Manus of the Department of Interior, National Park Service.