

LONGFELLOW POND AND OLLIE TURNER PARK

STATION 1 - THE POND: Longfellow pond was formed in 1815 when Rosemary Brook was dammed to supply power to a nail factory. The pond was named for Nathan Longfellow, who operated a mill that made wallpaper from 1836 to 1870. The pond was drained in the early 1950's in order that the Algonquin natural gas pipeline could be laid across it. A short time later, the south edge of the pond was straightened and cleared and the Oakland Street parking lot was installed using dredge spoils. This open edge contrasts with the marshy areas further along the path which allow pond life to be observed.

Longfellow Pond lies in the 149.3 acre Wellesley Town Forest. The pond and woodlands are home to many species of fish, songbirds, and water fowl. Listen for pheasants and look for Canadian geese and Mallard ducks. Look in the water for the round nests made near the shore by sunfish.

STATION 2 - THE SHORE: The path that runs along the eastern edge of the pond was once a cart path named Old Rosemary Brook Road. Marsh plants abound on this shore, including cattail and arrowhead. Cattails provide shelter for birds and animals and were used by Indians for mats and thatch. The brown "cattail" is the female flower. Sedges and duckweed are plants that begin the process of changing the pond to marsh. Some wildflowers that like the wet soils near the water's edge are purple loosestrife, wild iris, and Joe-Pye-weed.

STATION 3 - THE HASTINGS HOUSE: Aaron Hastings was an early settler of Wellesley. He built his home by Longfellow Pond in 1833 and its chimney can still be found. A granite grave marker was placed alongside the path by the Hastings family in 1848 to mark the spot where earlier gravestones had been removed.

The plants that are found in the forest are different from the ones growing beside the pond. The woodland species prefer drier soils and shade. Look for False Solomon Seal, Black Oak, Witchhazel, and Viburnum. Mockorange and Daylilies grow near the site of the Hastings House. These plants were brought to the area by the early settlers.

STATION 4 - THE GRAVEL PIT: Notice the ridge that runs parallel to the eastern edge of the pond. This is an esker. When glaciers moved through this area about 15,000 years ago, they carried with them gravel and boulders from Vermont and New Hampshire. Water that flowed under the ice created a narrow ridge of gravel that remained after the ice melted. Esker gravel was used for road construction. An excavation pit can be found at the base of the esker. When the mining for gravel was stopped, the pit was regraded and planted.

STATION 5 - THE DAM: There were three industries that once operated from this end of the pond: the nail factory, the paper mill, and three ice houses. Before refrigeration, ice was cut from the pond in the winter and stored in sawdust in the ice houses for use in the summer. In the water you can see the remains of the ramps that were used to move ice from the pond to the ice houses.

The wildlife at this end of the pond includes rabbits, muskrats, turtles, frogs, and insects. The brook contains baby eels, crayfish, and salamanders.

STATION 6 - THE OLLIE TURNER PARK: This 5 acre park is a good area to observe plant succession. At the edge of the forest is the low growth that would cover the field if it were not mowed. The early successional plants are sun-loving. After low shrubs take over the field, species such as Aspen, Birch, Poplar, and White Pine move in. They cast a shade that does not allow their own seedlings to survive. Instead, the seedlings of shade-loving plants thrive, such as Maples, Oaks, Ash, Hemlock, and Hickory. These trees can replace themselves in the shade and then become the dominant climax species.

STATION 7 - THE FOREST: While walking along the path, try to identify the following plants: Hemlock, Birch, Red Maple, False Lily-of-the-Valley, Solomon's Seal, Roses, White and Red Pine, White Oak, Green and White Ash, and Hay-scented Fern.

The forest has several layers that support different species. The upper part is the canopy, where leafeaters, beetles and caterpillars live. The next layer is the smaller trees, the understory, where songbirds and squirrels are found. The shrub layer is made up of shrubs and seedlings which provides food and shelter for small mammals, birds, and insects. Near the ground is the herb layer with its ferns, mosses, grasses, mushrooms and wildflowers. This layer is home to snakes, mice, toads, and insects. The forest floor is made up of dead leaves, pine needles, twigs, seeds, fruits, and animal droppings. Earthworms, millipedes, fungi, and bacteria live on this organic material and cycle it back into the food chain.

We are grateful to the Wellesley Conservation Council, which has prepared a detailed study of this area entitled "The Web of Life Around Longfellow Pond".