

Trail Renaming Will Honor Those Who Came Before

By Lincoln Furber

When visitors move down the Ferry Way Trail at the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Newington, NH, they are following in historic footsteps. In the mid-1600s, colonial settlers arrived in this part of the New World and thus joined Native Americans already there. Part of this land area protruded into what came to be called the Great Bay and, like its surrounding territory, it was the site of trading, hunting, fishing and farming, as well as violent clashes between the newcomers and those who had been there for many, many years.

At one spot along the shoreline, it was only about a 200-yard span to the far shore across the Great Bay's rushing, tidal waters. And, as more settlers arrived and busied themselves trying to eke out a living here, at least one of them saw the need for a link between the two shores at this location where he lived. So, in 1694, William Furber sought and received a license to set up a ferry. The square-ended craft carried people, animals and goods across the 40-foot deep, fast-moving current. It went between what is still called Welsh Cove, where Furber's house was, over to what was then called Mathes Neck, now Adams Point. Old records show that there were two docking places at the neck on the east side of the strait. A trip to the first one cost an individual three pence, and a man and his horse eight pence. If they docked at the second one, it was six pence for one person and twelve



The trail initially runs along the former weapons storage area fence line before heading off on a two mile loop through wetland, meadow, and forest.

pence for man and horse. The ferry continued being run by Furber descendants in later years.

William Furber's house at the ferry was actually a garrison, a not uncommon fortified structure at the time to cope with Indian attacks and also to house soldiers. William Furber himself had the military rank of lieutenant. At one stage of his service he was court martialed, apparently for dismissing his troops due to a lack of supplies for them. In addition to a fine, he was forbidden to hold public office. But this punishment soon evaporated because he served as a representative to the General Assembly of the Massachusetts government in 1703 and 1704, and in 1707 had the duty of running boundaries for five area townships.

This man who started the ferry was the namesake son of the first Furber to come to the New World. At age 22, he had sailed out of Bristol, England, in June 1635 with a few other immigrants aboard the galleon "Angel Gabriel", a ship which was once in the fleet of Sir Walter Raleigh. On this voyage, however, she was a doomed vessel. For on August 14, 1635, the very night the ship finally arrived in what is now Pemaquid Harbor, ME, a massive hurricane tore up along the northeast coast. The "Angel Gabriel", with some passengers and crew members still aboard, was demolished. No trace of her has ever been found. Some of the passengers and crew had managed to get ashore to the small fishing settlement at the harbor before the storm struck. Young William Furber was one of these lucky ones. And, very soon, as an indentured servant



An observation deck along the Ferry Way Trail affords a view of Great Bay and the site where the Furber Ferry once operated.

to a prosperous family of passengers who had also survived, he went with them down to Ipswich in Massachusetts. Two years later, his debt paid, William Furber moved up to Dover, NH. There, he married, acquired land, raised his family and lived out his life.

Fast forward to the mid-1900s when the federal government took over this Newington property to create an air force base which eventually served as the home of two Strategic Air Command units. The government takeover of the area resulted in, among other things, the physical removal of some historic landmarks, including a cemetery where early colonists like William Furber were buried. The moving damage, as well as great age, has virtually obliterated all the gravestone markings.

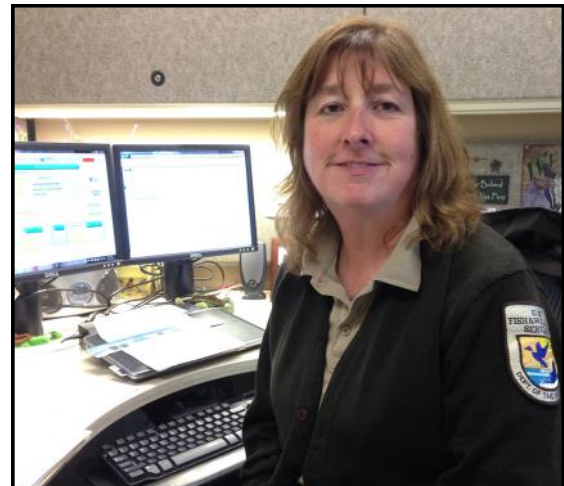
In 1989, the government closed the air base with its various facilities, including missile storage units. Then, at the urging of concerned citizens of Newington and other nearby towns, as well as interested environmental groups, a national wildlife refuge was created on part of the former air base land. This Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge, with its vibrant woods, ponds and fields, now has two classic walking trails, one of which has the name Ferry Way Trail. This is a two-mile-long loop that runs down to a point of land projecting into the Great Bay. And this point is the genesis of the trail's name because it was at this narrow stretch of water that the second William Furber established his ferry in 1694. The crossing over to Adams Point eventually came to be known as Furber Strait, and the point itself became Furber Point.

In the coming year, this ancient track will be renamed the William Furber Ferry Way Trail by the Fish and Wildlife Service to note its historic connection to the ferry that was created more than 300 years ago. In addition to the trail's renaming, a small monument will be placed at the viewing platform site at Furber Point with a plaque briefly describing the origin of the trail's name. This name change and the new stone marker will be commemorated at Furber Point with a small event in August 2014 by some of the descendants of the first William Furber. They will also be observing what they believe would be William Furber's 400th birth year. (His exact date of birth is unknown.) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials at the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge in Newburyport, MA, manage the Great Bay Refuge as well as two others.

They have provided invaluable support and assistance to the William Furber descendants who, in January 2013, proposed renaming of the trail and the placing of a marker at Furber Point.

Activity at the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge seems to be at a minimum these days, but for all present and future Refuge visitors who love wild places, the centuries old heritage of one of this refuge's two beautiful trails will now be known.

Welcome New Additions to the Refuge Team!



Peggy Hobbs, Administrative Officer



Tajuan Levy, Maintenance Worker