

## Take a Walk on the Whale's Back

By: Nancy Coffey

In the 1830s they called it the Whale's Back. Today it is a highlight among the many lovely trails through the city owned J.C. Phillips Nature Preserve. That long sinuous hill that runs along the bank of Wenham Lake is an *esker*, made up of graded sand and gravel sediment that was carried by rivers deep under ancient glaciers. The Wenham Lake esker breaks into two branches, much like the river that formed it.

The human history of the Phillips Preserve is linked to that of Moraine Farm, which bounds the property on the southeast. The John Phillips house at Moraine Farm was built in 1882, and Frederick Law Olmsted created the landscape design. Olmsted's original carriage path along the lake is now part of the trail system of the preserve.



*David Brewster*

John Phillip's son, William Phillips, was born on May 30, 1878 on Moraine Farm. William Phillips home, Highover, was built in 1913 on Prospect Hill in the center of what is now the Nature Preserve. The house was destroyed by fire on

October 11, 1968, but remains of the house and its lovely cedar lined grand allee can be seen at the top of the hill.

Wenham Lake encompasses a surface area of 250.6 acres and is 49 feet deep at its



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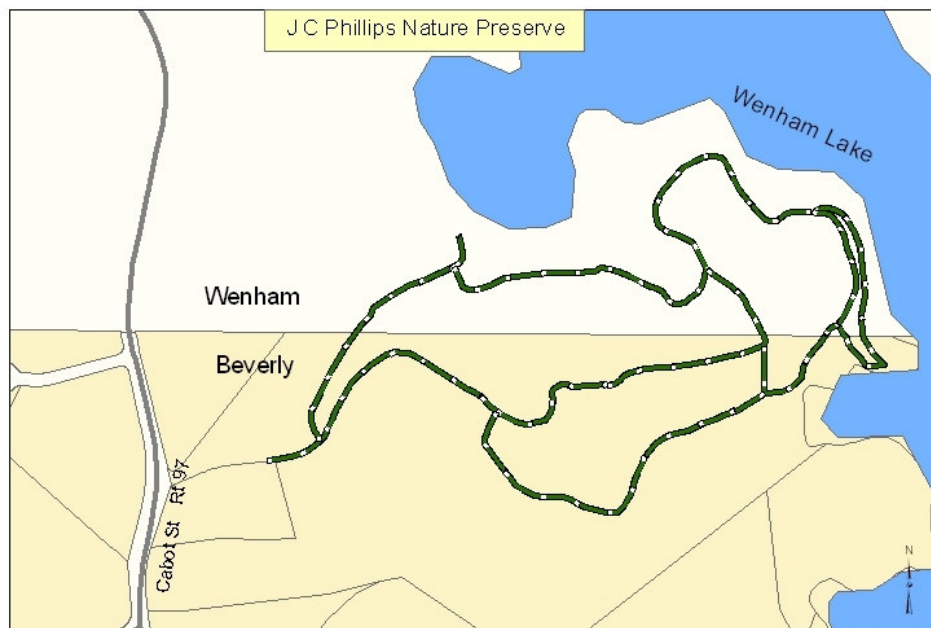
greatest depth. It has been recognized as a local treasure since earliest times. For the first two centuries of European settlement, it was harvested for alewives. Spring fed, the lake provided pure water that in winter produced crystal clear ice. Beginning in 1805 Wenham Lake Ice was packed in straw and shipped all over the world throughout the nineteenth century. It was said to have been Queen Victoria's preferred ice. Ice harvesting on the lake ended in 1935.

The lake now serves as the main public water supply for the cities of Salem and Beverly. In 1894, it was connected to Longham Reservoir and in 1910-1911 a canal was dug to connect the lake to the Ipswich River.

The city of Beverly purchased the 85-acre J.C, Phillips Preserve property in 1987 both to protect the watershed area and to provide Beverly residents with pristine hiking trails along the lakeshore. The preserve is open year

round for hiking, snow shoeing and cross country skiing. Leashed dogs are permitted on the trails. Many of the trails are wide and easily accessible.

### J.C. Phillips Nature Preserve Trails



Map created by Roland Adams