

The Kennebec Land Trust was formed in 1988 by local citizens who wanted to work cooperatively with landowners and communities to protect our natural features, working landscapes and fragile ecosystems. KLT is a private, non profit, membership organization dedicated to preserving these treasures so that we do not spoil the very things that make our region a special place to live and visit.



Most of the properties protected by the Kennebec Land Trust are open to the public for appropriate use. Please join us!

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Directions to The Curtis Homestead
Take Route 202 to Monmouth. From Route 202, take the Bog Road to the west. The KLT parking area is about 1.5 miles on the right.

Brochure design by:
LPK – Cincinnati, Ohio
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Photographs by:
James St. Pierre

Map created by:
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History

The stone walls and abandoned farm lands at The Curtis Homestead Conservation Area are evidence of the patterns of land use that defined Maine's 19th century agricultural era. Abner Curtis Sr., formerly from Massachusetts, settled in this region in the District of Maine in 1800, during a time when proprietors for the Pejepscot Patent were selling large settlement lots.

Abner and a brother settled next to each other in the area that was soon to be known as Curtis Corner. The Curtis family might have selected this land because it already had a source of food for their oxen and cattle: The bog that borders the Curtis woodlands to the east could have been a source of meadow or swale hay before "English hay" was planted. Abner soon began the challenging work of changing forested acres to mowing lands, pastures and croplands. He married Lydia Turner of Leeds, and they had 12 children.

When the 1870 United States Agricultural Census was taken, the farm had five milk cows, two oxen, nine sheep and one horse. Abner Jr. and his family were growing Indian corn, oats, peas and beans, potatoes, orchard products and hay. In that year, the family made 500 pounds of butter and 125 pounds of cheese. This census information is a window to a time in Maine when many families had diversified, self-sufficient farms.

Curtis Corner served as "town center" for Leeds, providing almost everything to meet local residents' daily needs. In 1873, Curtis Corner was a very busy place. There was a general store where you could also get your mail at the post office, three cooper shops and a steam saw mill right next to the Curtis farm. The little one-room school was less than a quarter mile away.

Over the years, the land was farmed by Abner Curtis, his son Abner Curtis Jr., then his son Orin E., then Orin's youngest child, Archie. Archie and Harriet Curtis's son, Kenneth Curtis, became Maine's 67th governor. He served from 1967-1975 as a Democrat, a rare achievement in Maine politics up until that time.

A Long Look Back at the Human and Natural Landscape at The Curtis Homestead

13,500 Years Ago. The last of the Pleistocene Epoch glaciers recede from central Maine, leaving behind a scoured landscape. The Curtis Homestead has excellent examples of the resulting glacial outwash, erratics, glacial till and glacial marine clay.

10,000 Years Ago. The earliest known native people, Paleoindians, hunted in the Androscoggin and Kennebec River Valley. Known for their arrowheads with fluted points, they likely hunted caribou, musk ox, ground sloths and woolly mammoths in a landscape not unlike today's open peatlands at The Curtis Homestead.

10,000 – 3,000 Years Ago. Forests replace the tundra, first spruce, then white pine, oak and birch. Hemlock, beech and yellow birch were abundant. Native people used rivers, streams and lakes for transportation. In this region of Maine, many artifacts from this time period have been found near lakes and streams.

3,000 – 500 Years Ago. Native people began to use clay to make ceramic pots. If you look carefully at the soil underneath an uprooted tree near the bog, you can find the marine clay that they used to make ceramic containers.

500 Years Ago – Present. By 1650, epidemics and wars have virtually eliminated Native Americans from central Maine.

1700s - Surveyors began to map the interior of Maine.

1800-1900 - Fields, pastures and orchards replaced the presettlement forest. The Curtis Homestead was a typical example of the 19th century self-sufficient Maine family farm.

1950-1960s - Most of Curtis farmland began to revert to forests.

1967-1975 - Kenneth Curtis, son of Archie and Harriet Curtis, served two terms as Governor of Maine.

1979-1981 - Kenneth Curtis represented the United States as Ambassador to Canada.

Governor Kenneth Curtis gives visitors a tour of the land belonging to the homestead.



A Partial List of Common Plants

Trees

white pine (*Pinus strobus*)
red pine (*Pinus resinosa*)
eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*)
northern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*)
balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*)
black spruce (*Picea mariana*)
red maple (*Acer rubrum*)
sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*)
American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*)
red oak (*Quercus rubra*)
paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*)
gray birch (*Betula populifolia*)
yellow birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*)
balsam poplar (*Populus balsamifera*)
big-toothed aspen (*Populus grandidentata*)
American elm (*Ulmus americana*)
white ash (*Fraxinus americana*)
black ash (*Fraxinus nigra*)
American basswood (*Tilia americana*)
eastern hophornbean (*Ostrya virginiana*)
American larch (*Larix laricina*)
common apple (*Malus spp*)*

Shrubs

speckled alder (*Alnus incana*)
American fly honeysuckle (*Lonicera canadensis*)
morrow's honeysuckle (*Lonicera morrowii*)*
common juniper (*Juniperus communis*)
beaked hazelnut (*Corylus cornuta*)
shadbush (*Amelanchier spp.*)
hobblebush (*Viburnum lantanoides*)
poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*)
Japanese barberry* (*Berberis thunbergii*)
maple-leaved viburnum (*Viburnum acerifolium*)
striped maple (*Acer pensylvanicum*)
sweet gale (*Myrica gale*)**
blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)**
rhodora (*Rhododendron canadense*)**
sheep laurel (*Kalmia angustifolia*)**
leatherleaf (*Chamaedaphne calyculata*)**

Wildflowers

Canada mayflower (*Mainthemum canadensis*)
starflower (*Trientalis borealis*)
shinleaf pyrola (*Pyrola elliptica*)
bellwort (*Uvularia sessilifolia*)
partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*)
goldthread (*Coptis groenlandica*)
jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*)
gaywings (*Polygala pauciflora*)
trailing arbutus (*Epigaea repens*)
purple trillium (*Trillium erectum*)
bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*)
wild licorice (*Galium circaezans*)
pink lady slipper (*Cypripedium acaule*)

* Non-native
** Peatland species

young ferns



A Partial Bird List

Northern goshawk
Broad-winged hawk
Hairy woodpecker
Downy woodpecker
Yellow-bellied sapsucker
Killdeer
American crow
Chimney swift
Eastern phoebe
Blue-headed vireo
Black-capped chickadee
Blue jay
Mourning dove
American robin
Hermit thrush
Wood thrush
Brown-headed cowbird
Yellow-rumped warbler
Black and white warbler
Black-throated green warbler
Black-throated blue warbler
Blackburnian warbler
Northern parula
Yellow warbler
Ovenbird
Brown creeper
White-breasted nuthatch
White-throated sparrow
American goldfinch



Bog Brook

A WALK THROUGH TIME

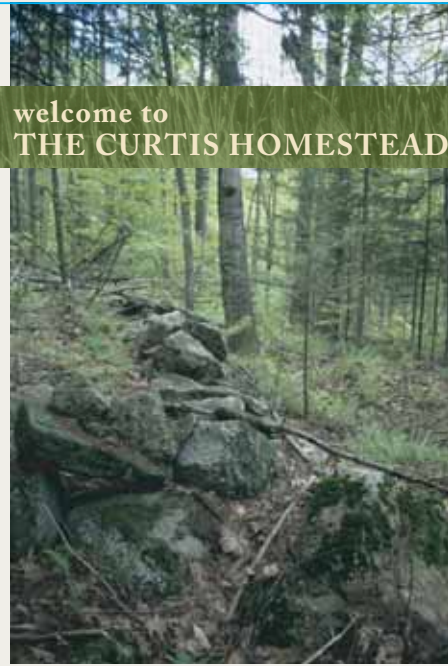


The Curtis
HOMESTEAD



KENNEBEC LAND TRUST

welcome to
THE CURTIS HOMESTEAD



In 2000, Governor Kenneth Curtis and his sister, Rebecca Curtis Meredith, donated 360 acres of their family lands in Leeds, Maine, to the Kennebec Land Trust. Today, The Curtis Homestead is part of a valuable community conservation area that encompasses fields, forests, wetlands and portions of Bog Brook.

Long before the Curtis family arrived in this part of Maine, long before there even was a Maine, this region was a prehistoric crossroads for native people who were traveling between the Kennebec and Androscoggin River watersheds. This area was likely used by Native American people for hunting, fishing and harvesting of native plants. These same resources brought the Curtis family and more recent residents of Leeds to this community.



Early Photograph of The Curtis Homestead built in ????. (photo 1948)

Ken and Rebecca Curtis's childhood memories include blueberrying on the bog, catching brook trout in local streams and harvesting timber with workhorses. Thanks to their generosity, the Curtis lands can be enjoyed by many future generations. This Kennebec Land Trust property is open year around for hiking, bird watching, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and other low-impact recreational activities.

Trails

The four trails on The Curtis Homestead feature areas that were the former cultivated fields, pastures, orchards, wooded pastures and woodlots at the Curtis Farm. Because the underlying geology, soil and topography influenced historical agricultural land use, the trails also highlight very different natural features!

Lower Fields Loop Trail: Easy 1-mile round trip, with short side trail to a bench at the edge of the bog. For a short distance, this trail follows the small brook that the Curtis family used for water for their cattle. The first part of the trail, with relatively even topography and glacial outwash soils, was in cultivation and hayfields as late as 1950, when Ken and Rebecca Curtis's parents, Harriet and Archie Curtis, were still farming.

The red oak tree to the right of the barn in the farm photograph is now surrounded by forest. Until 2000, the Curtis family farm and barn were located where today's parking lot and kiosk are. The white pine trees that you see as you begin this trail are part of the "botanical imprint" that marks the time when the Curtis fields were abandoned and the land became forested once again. White pine trees grow well in sunny areas where there were once hayfields or cultivated lands. It almost looks as if these trees were planted, but actually the seeds blew in from pine trees bordering the cultivated fields!

Upper Fields Loop Trail: 0.5 mile. Easy round trip, the first section of the Curtis Rock Trail. At the first stone wall, the trail loops back around to the field. Just 60 years ago, in 1940, the land on either side of this trail was not forested, but was in fields for hay or cultivated crops.

Curtis Rock Trail: 1.4 miles round trip. This easy/moderate trail starts north of the open fields and follows the wooded road that Archie Curtis used when he hauled out trees with his workhorse. This portion of the farm, with its varied topography, wetlands and large boulders was used for orchards, pasture land and woodlots.

Looking east from Curtis Rock, you can see Bog Brook, the "oak island" and the surrounding peatland. The peat is of variable thickness and beneath it is a thick layer of glacial marine mud. This marine mud was deposited approximately 13,000 years ago, after the last glacier melted, when shallow ocean waters covered this area! The "oak island", part of The Curtis Homestead Conservation Area, is an upland area with impressive red oaks and large white pines. The oak island is accessible in the fall when the water is low, and in the winter when the ground is frozen.

Woodlot Trail: 0.7 miles. This moderate trail passes through a mixed hardwood forest that was managed as the farm woodlot. The trail begins at Curtis Rock (a glacial erratic) and follows the eastern edge of the bog, providing several wonderful views with benches before looping back to an intersection with the Curtis Rock Trail.



Curtis Homestead Trail

