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# BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND GAME SHELLFISH LABORATORY OR WHAT YEAR WAS DR. BELDING'S SHELLFISH LABORATORY ESTABLISHED IN WELLFLEET (AND WHERE)?

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## Summary

The shellfish lab was established in Wellfleet in 1908, free of charge, “[t]hrough the kindness of Mr. L. D. Baker”.

[ref. 1908 “Report of the [Mass.] Commissioners on Fisheries and Game” <https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/781623>]

Although the 1908 Fisheries report claims the laboratory was on Commercial Wharf, the 1910 report includes a photo and caption that provides evidence that the laboratory was on the beach-end of Chequesset Pier, behind the inn.

The laboratory was used from 1908 through the 1912 season, and was dismantled in the spring of 1914.

## 1905

From Dr. Belding’s report in the 1905 “Report of the [Mass.] Commissioners on Fisheries and Game”:

[ref. <https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/781620>]

1. Dr. Belding states he “began work as biologist for the commission, June 26 [1905] ...” [p. 33]
2. There was no laboratory at all in 1905: “A handicap to the work, which became more apparent as the summer progressed, was the lack of a laboratory. At least a temporary laboratory is essential to a systematic observation of many details in the life history of these shellfish.” [p. 33]

## 1906

From Dr. Belding’s report in the 1906 “Report of the [Mass.] Commissioners on Fisheries and Game”:

[ref. <https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/781621>]

1. Laboratory established in Chatham (Monomoy Point). Plymouth and Ipswich appear to be research locations without a laboratory – “Work has been conducted chiefly at the commission’s laboratory at the Powder Hole, Monomoy Point, at Plymouth and at Ipswich.” [p. 46]
2. “It was found absolutely necessary to have at least a temporary laboratory. Such was equipped at Monomoy Point, which offered the best situation then known for work upon all four shellfish. [p. 47]

3. “The laboratory consists of a two-room cottage, one room 10 by 12 feet, the laboratory proper, the other 10 by 11 feet, the living room. The laboratory was fitted with work bench, aquaria, sink, shelves, etc. While not elaborate, it answered its purpose, providing accommodation and working facilities for three men.” [p. 47]

## 1907

From Dr. Belding’s report in the 1907 “Report of the [Mass.] Commissioners on Fisheries and Game” [ref. <https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/781622>]

1. The Monomoy Point laboratory “has now outlived its usefulness” – “While the experiment station at Monomoy Point has been extremely well adapted to the preliminary work of the past three years, it has now outlived its usefulness. Further work, if extensive and practical, demands a broader field and greater opportunities. Besides its limited opportunities, the location of Monomoy Point (on the end of a peninsula, ten miles from the nearest town, Chatham) has many disadvantages for the situation of a laboratory. The lack of transportation facilities renders travelling expensive and wastes valuable time. Tools, working material, provisions, etc., are hard to procure when desired for immediate use, and manual labor can not be hired.” [p. 27]

## 1908

From Dr. Belding’s report in the 1908 “Report of the [Mass.] Commissioners on Fisheries and Game” [ref. <https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/781623>]

1. “Courtesies. — The commission wishes to express its deep appreciation to Mr. L. D. Baker of Wellfleet for providing suitable laboratory facilities, as well as for many other courtesies.” [p. 18]
2. “Location of the Work in 1908. — While still continuing the work at the Monomoy Point laboratory and on the various experimental plots for studying the growth of mollusks along the coast, central headquarters were established for the summer at Wellfleet, which offered abundant opportunities for shellfish investigation.” [p. 18]
3. “The Laboratory at Wellfleet. — Through the kindness of Mr. L. D. Baker the commission was given, free of expense, the privilege of occupying one of the buildings on Commercial Wharf<sup>1</sup>. The largest of the three rooms, an apartment of some 30 by 20 feet, was converted into an excellent laboratory by the erection of suitable tables and benches for microscopy, while the central part of the room was given up to a series of tanks, hatching jars and aquaria, which were supplied with running salt water through a system of galvanized-iron pipes. The laboratory was further equipped with a stove and a sink supplied with running fresh water. In one corner a small office 8 by 10 feet was partitioned off, affording space for desk, filing systems, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> The laboratory was actually located on Chequesset Pier. See 1910 entry.

Adjoining the laboratory were two smaller rooms, which furnished sleeping accommodations for four persons.” [p. 18]

## 1909

In Dr. Belding’s report in the 1909 “Report of the [Mass.] Commissioners on Fisheries and Game” [ref. <https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/781624>] there are several references to continued research being conducted at Wellfleet and Monomoy, but no specific references to the laboratory in Wellfleet.

## 1910

Dr. Belding’s report in the 1910 “Report of the [Mass.] Commissioners on Fisheries and Game” [ref. <https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/781625>] describes research conducted at Wellfleet and notes on the laboratory there. He also continues to thank “Mr. L. D. Baker of Wellfleet for laboratory facilities.” [p. 19] But, in contradiction to the 1908 report which stated the laboratory occupied one of the buildings on Commercial Wharf, this caption and photo firmly place the laboratory on the shore end of Chequesset Pier. A comparison of this 1910 photo from the Fisheries report with a broader view of the Chequesset Pier when the inn opened in 1902 (from the WHSM collection), provides visual evidence that the laboratory building was located on Chequesset Pier (in 1910).



“Fig. 48. — The exterior of the laboratory at Wellfleet, showing the hatching tubs. This building, formerly an oyster house situated on the Chequesset Inn wharf, was provided in 1908 for the use of the department by Mr. L. D. Baker of Wellfleet. One large room, 20 by 30 feet, is used for the laboratory, while two small rooms adjoining are utilized for sleeping quarters. The situation over the water affords satisfactory facilities for experimental work on sea forms.” [p. 284-285]



Photo of Chequesset Pier and Inn, 1902 (Wellfleet Historical Society and Museum Collection [[W0932](#)])



Photo of Chequesset Pier and Inn, 1903 or later, showing the east end of the laboratory building – the same side shown in the 1910 Fisheries report photo (Wellfleet Historical Society and Museum Collection [[W0793](#)])

## 1911

In Dr. Belding's report in the 1909 "Report of the [Mass.] Commissioners on Fisheries and Game" [ref. <https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/781626>] there are several references to continued research being conducted at Wellfleet and Monomoy, but no specific references to the laboratory in Wellfleet.

## 1912-14

In the combined "Report of the [Mass.] Commissioners on Fisheries and Game" for 1912, 1913 and 1914 [ref. <https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/781627>] Dr. Belding again expresses thanks to L. D. Baker for providing a home for the laboratory [p. 81]:

*"The commission desires to express its appreciation of the courtesy of the estate of L. D. Baker of Wellfleet in furnishing facilities for laboratory accommodations. The Wellfleet laboratory was situated upon a wharf, the property of the L. D. Baker estate, and all possible opportunities were afforded the commission to carry on investigations upon the shellfisheries and other salt and fresh water fisheries."*

But, this report also provides the apparent end to the story when it stated the laboratory was not used in 1913, and was dismantled in 1914. [p. 80]:

*"Laboratories. – During 1912 the Wellfleet laboratory was the headquarters for the pond and mollusk work. The men in the field shipped their specimens and towings to the laboratory, where these samples were examined and recorded. This laboratory has been mentioned in previous reports and does not require further description. It was not used during 1913, and in the spring of 1914 was dismantled."*

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