

Rhododendron State Park

Park History

Captain Samuel Patch settled in the town of Fitzwilliam on the land surrounding the rhododendron stand in 1788. He or his son, Sam Jr., built the family cottage, affectionately known as the “Old Patch Place,” sometime between 1790 and 1816.



Ownership of the house left his family about 1841 and after a series of other owners, Stephen Follansbee purchased the property in 1865. At this time the property first came to public attention, but not just for the majestic rhododendrons. Mr. Follansbee sold bottled mineral water, potted rhododendrons, and silica which he advertised as, “silverette, Flour of the Forest.” This commercial activity, which included a mail-order business, represented the peak of activity at this site which has been forgotten and re-discovered many times during its 200-year history.

In 1901 a subsequent owner, Levi Fuller, planned to “lumber off” the property. In reaction to this threat to the rhododendrons, Miss Mary Lee Ware of Boston (and Rindge, NH) purchased the land. She gave it to the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) in 1903 with the stipulation that the rhododendron grove and pine forest “...be held as a reservation property protected and open to the public....forever.”

The AMC remodeled the “Old Patch Place” as a hostel/clubhouse adjacent to the Metacomet Trail which they had established. The building was ideally located to offer hospitality and shelter. When the operation of a hostel was no longer possible, the AMC transferred the property to the N.H. Division of Parks and Recreation. Since 1946, the property has been operated as the State Park system’s only designated botanical park. The “Old Patch Place” cottage near the park entrance was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

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