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## HELEN KELLER'S BATHING SUIT COMES HOME

Helen Keller's bathing suit has been donated to the Wrentham Historical Society and was on display at the September meeting about Anne Sullivan. Elsie Winter George had saved the suit for years and her daughter Margaret continued to hold it until recently when she decided that it should return to Wrentham.

And how did Elsie happen to have Helen's suit? A bit of Wrentham history is needed here. In 1900 the railroad was an important part of the town and the station was a busy place. The railroad at that time owned land beyond the station and the coal sheds clear down to the shore of Lake Archer. The Patrick Murray Winter family had moved to town and the three older boys, John, Murray and Allan, had started the Winter Brothers Tap and Die business near the railroad station. (Elsie served as bookkeeper, paymaster and packer until she married Walter George.) With the business doing well, and having a good reputation, the brothers obtained permission from the railroad officials to construct a small boathouse/bathhouse on railroad-owned land on the shore of the lake. The young men had canoes and built a sailboat and the place became a nucleus for the young people of town. There were many festive times, with boat parades, water games and races, often in competition with folks from the Franklin St. end of the lake.

Helen Keller already knew and loved Wrentham and its lakes from summer trips to the Red Farm on Franklin St. But when Helen bought the house on East St. and moved to Wrentham, the east end of the lake was much closer. Elsie's older sister Christina seems to have been the one who first became acquainted with Anne Sullivan, Helen's teacher and companion. Chris invited Anne to bring Helen down to the boathouse. Since most of the young people worked all day, the boys soon gave Anne a key so the two ladies could come and go as they desired. For convenience Helen would leave her suit hanging in the boathouse, where it remained after they moved away from town.

When the railroad sold the land, the boathouse had to be torn down, but Elsie rescued her own suit and Helen's and kept them these many years. Helen's suit is in good condition. It has a black dress-like top with pointy hem-line trimmed with white bias tape, which was worn over big black bloomers. Elsie's suit, also donated, is a much-worn dark blue romper-like suit trimmed with braid, and a separate knee-length skirt goes over it. Black stockings, rubber bathing shoes, and a bouffant cap or scarf over the hair completed the costumes.

The demise of the Winter's boathouse was not the end of things, as Walter George had bought a small piece of property down the hill from Creek St. and built a boathouse and cottage there. So the bathing suits and the activities just moved down the shore a bit. Walter married Elsie Winter and their family had many wonderful summers at the lake. In the mid 1930's Elsie's younger brother, Charlie (who had married Walter's sister Fannie) bought the property next door to Walter's and the two cottages now became the aquatic center for the younger Winter/George generation and their friends.