

# THE FISH FAMILY

## A LONG LINE OF SUMMIT AREA RESIDENTS

*by Robert A. Hageman*

Perhaps many of you have seen the truck of Thomas W. Fish Landscape Nurseryman Inc. around town or have even had Tom plant flowers, shrubs or trees on your property over the years. He has been in business since 1977. But did you know that the Fish family has had a presence in the Summit area for the past century and a half?

In looking over some census reports and other documents of the Fish and Whapham (Eliza was married to John Fish as we shall see later) families, their origins can be traced back to the early 1600's in E. Sussex, England. We will begin with John Fish (1832-1894) and the property he bought in 1867.

### Fish Purchases Property

In 1867 John bought 32 acres of property surrounding a residence at 354 Mountain Avenue. The property's boundaries would today be encircled by Mountain Avenue, Club Drive, Drum Hill Drive and Little Wolf Road.

This tract of land was part of 300 acres which was sold to Joseph Doty in 1720. Joseph was a grandson of Edward Doty who was one of the Pilgrims who came over on the Mayflower.

The entire thirty-two acres purchased by John Fish in 1867 remained in the family until 1955 when twenty-six acres were sold by John's two sons (Herbert and Percy) to Wellmore Builders, Inc. for residential home development.

### John Fish

John Fish was a mechanical engineer who had invented the only steam boiler using saltwater. He commuted everyday to his office at 160 Maiden Lane in New York City. Early on the morning of January 20, 1894, while commuting on the Morris and Essex Railroad (Dover Express), he met his death along with ten others in a major accident in the Hackensack Meadows.

*("Fish" continued on page 3)*



*John Fish*

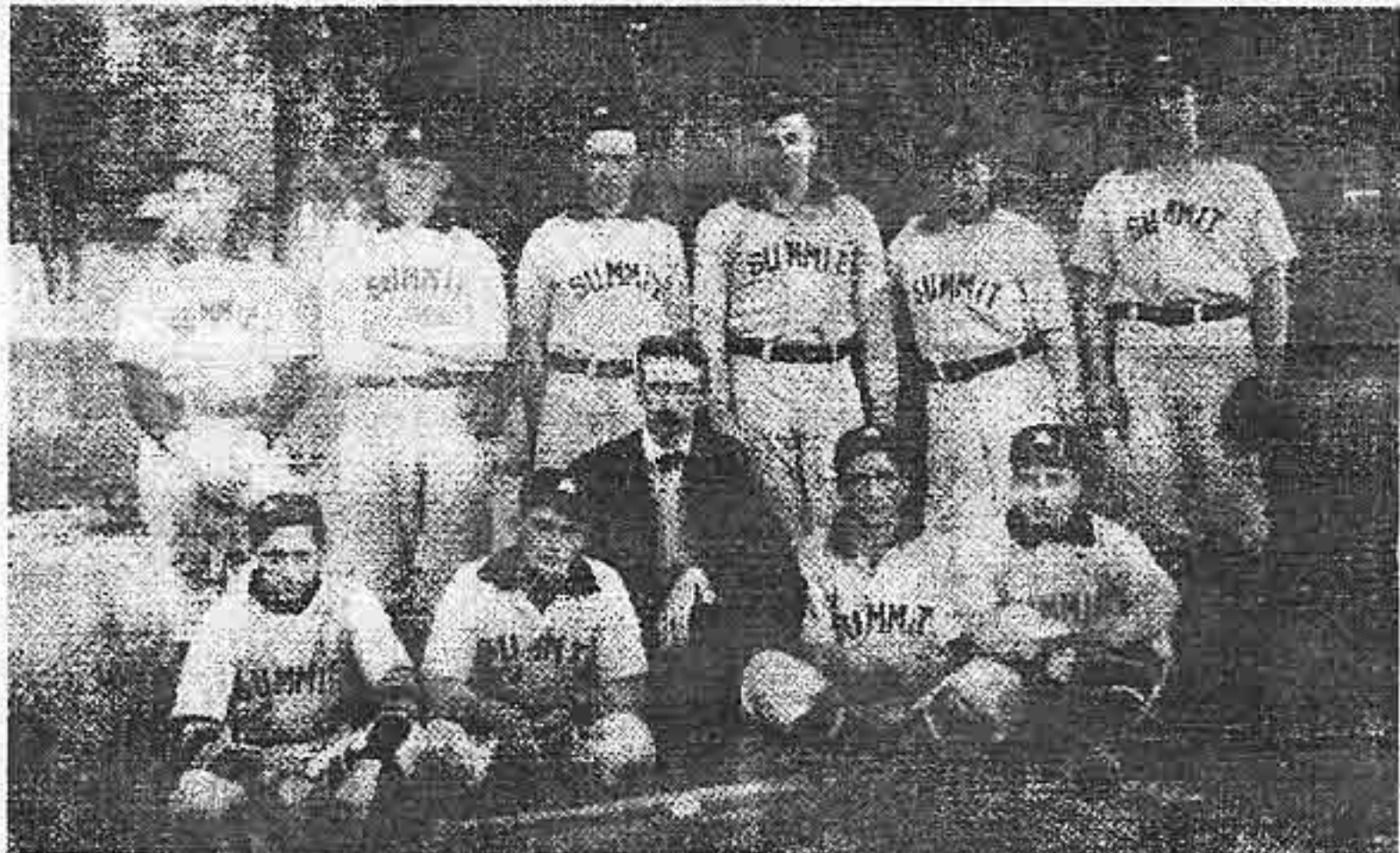
Five others were seriously injured. Five of the dead were Summit residents. John was only sixty-two years of age.

John was an original member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) and attended its first annual meeting in November, 1880, which was held at the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey.

At one time he was also a prominent figure in the affairs of the Democratic party in Summit serving as a member of the Township Committee.

### **Marriage of John Fish Produces Two Sons**

In 1870, John's first wife died tragically in a fire at their home. After several years he married Eliza Whapham (1846-1926). The marriage of John and Eliza produced two sons: Herbert (1881-1962) and Percy (1883-1973). As shown in the photo taken in 1904, the brothers played baseball for Summit against neighboring towns in the semipro league. Summit's baseball field was located on the southwest corner of Broad street and Summit Avenue.



*Herbert Fish (upper left) and John Fish (on manager's left) with the Summit semi-pro baseball team, circa 1904*

Percy, the younger son, was a dyebender for the Patten Chemical Co. of Patterson, New Jersey. He was later a member of the Old Guard and Calvary Episcopal Church. Percy died in 1973 in his home at 354 Mountain Avenue at the age of 90. His wife Mabel (a native of South Dakota) passed away in 1960. She was a church organist. Their marriage produced a son, John Gordon Fish who lived in California.

Herbert, the older brother, was a printer who owned a print and book shop on Springfield Avenue. With the Depression and very little business coming through the doors, his shop was closed. He brought the printer to his home at 356 Mountain Avenue where he set up his operation. He died in 1962 of a stroke at the age of seventy-nine years.

Herbert's wife, Isabella (Boyé), passed away in 1955 at Overlook Hospital at the age of seventy. She taught Sunday School at St. John's Church for twenty-five years

## Walter and Robert

Herbert and Isabella's marriage produced two sons: Walter (1918-2007) and Robert (1928-1980). Robert was a young fifty-two years old when he died in Brunswick, Maine. While living in Summit until 1963, he organized the Summit Redwings youth hockey team. In Maine he was very active in the Brunswick Youth Hockey Program. Robert was a carpenter by trade and served two tours of duty in Korea.

Walter (Tom Fish's father) remained at the family home in Summit through the years and passed away on November 23, 2007 at the age of 89. Sadly, his death came during the time I was researching the family and prior to setting up a time for an interview, although I had met and spoken with him about one year ago. Tom nicely filled in and was able to elaborate on some of the information I had (see photo of Walter and Tom planting a tree near the War Memorial Monuments on the Village Green in 1992).

## Walter Fish

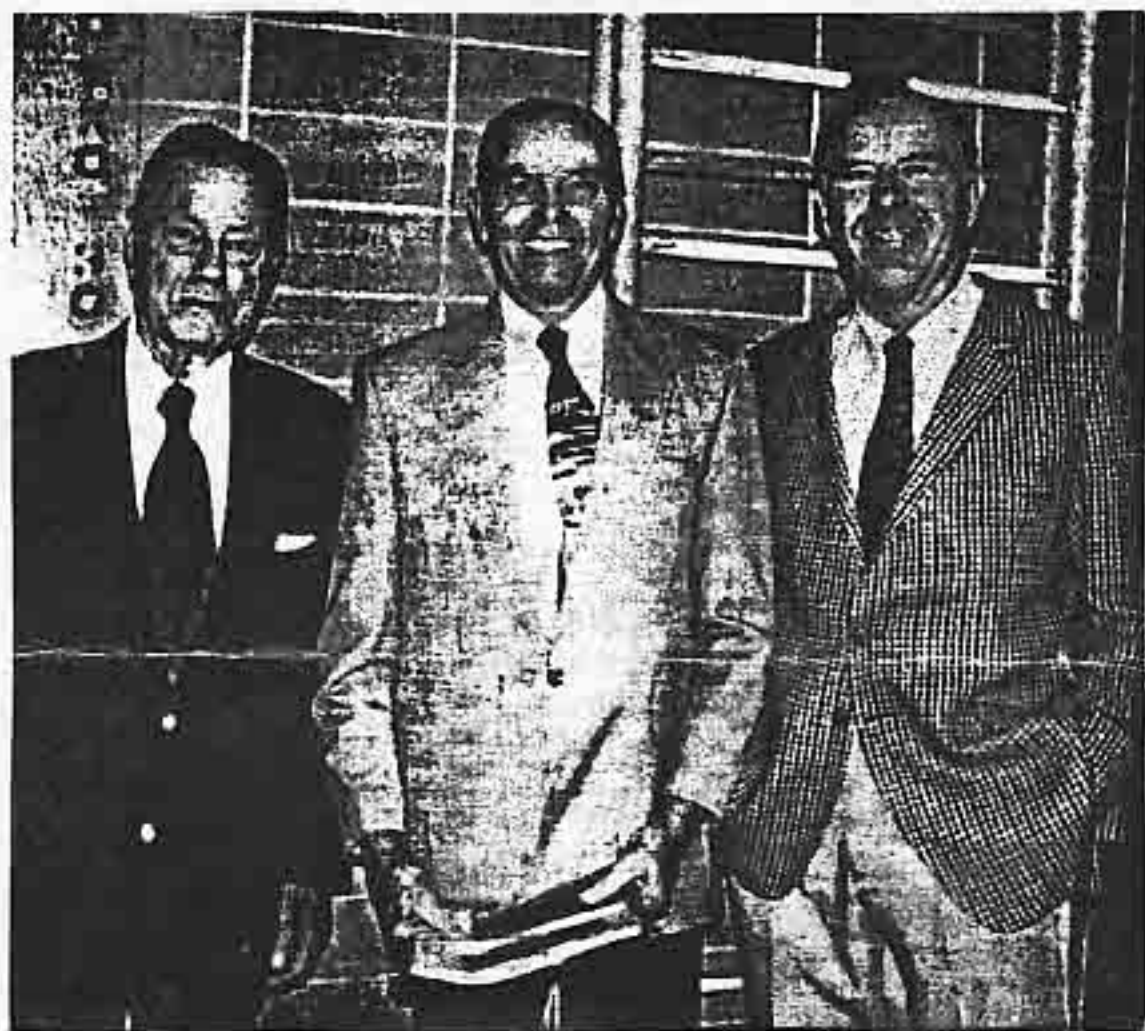
When Franklin School opened its doors in 1927, Walter was one of eleven students to enter the fourth grade. The photo which was in the Summit Herald of February 22, 1997 (see next page) shows three of the original members of the fourth grade: Jack Rossell, Walter Fish and Peter Wood. All of these gentlemen were members of the Guys 'n Dolls of 36 - a club of the Summit High School class of 1936 alumni who got together every month for lunch

Walter was a classic outdoorsman in both his profession and interests. When he graduated from high school in 1936 he worked locally in building and construction with Leavens Builders, constructed a log cabin in Maine for the Rowe Photography family in Summit, worked on a ranch in Montana in 1938-1939 and then worked as a tree surgeon for the Union County Park Commission until the War.

He was in the military from 1941-1945 serving in the U.S. Army Air Corps reaching the rank of sergeant. During his tenure, he was stationed in the Panama Canal Zone, the Galapagos Islands, and areas around Latin America where he helped to set up and operate radar bases. Walter was released from the service in October, 1945.



*Walter and Tom Fish planting a Tree  
on the Village Green*



*Jack Rossell, Walter Fish and Pete Wood,  
original students at Franklin School*

### **Wayne and Tom**

Walter and Florence's marriage produced two sons: Wayne, the eldest, was born in 1949 and Tom was born in 1954. Both graduated from Franklin School and Summit High School. Wayne lives in Pennsylvania and is a sportswriter for a chain of newspapers. He graduated from Colorado State University in 1971 with a BA in journalism

Tom, as mentioned earlier, has stayed in Summit with his landscape and nursery business which he started in 1977. His outdoor and horticulturist father was a great influence on Tom's chosen profession. Tom graduated from Summit High School in 1972 and received his BS degree in Ornamental Horticulture from Delaware State College in 1976. He is also a past president of the New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association. It is fitting that Tom's landscaping business is still conducted on a piece of the property his great grandfather, John Fish, acquired in 1867.

*Thank you to board member Harold Ahern for some of the research input that went into this article.*

From 1946 until his retirement in 1975, Walter served as a foreman and tree surgeon with the Union County Shade Tree Commission. During this time, 10,000 trees were planted and 30,000 trees were maintained under his supervision.

Walter's special interest was lepidopterology (a branch of entomology dealing with butterflies and moths). He would give talks to children in the 4-H, volunteered at Reeves-Reed arboretum, and also involved himself with woodworking, taxidermy and bird watching. He especially liked to hunt ruffed grouse.

Walter married Florence Elizabeth in 1947. She passed away June 23, 2006 at the age of eighty-six years. She and Walter were married for fifty-nine years. During World War II, Florence worked as an assistant in the blueprint department of the Eastern Aircraft Division of General Motors in Linden, New Jersey. While living in Summit, she served on the Volunteers of Franklin School from 1954-1971 and became chairwoman of this organization. She was also a volunteer at Fair Oaks Hospital for ten years.



*Walter Fish in Big Timber, Montana  
1939-1940*