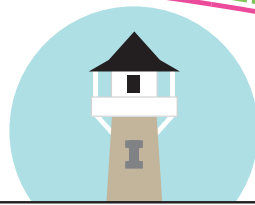




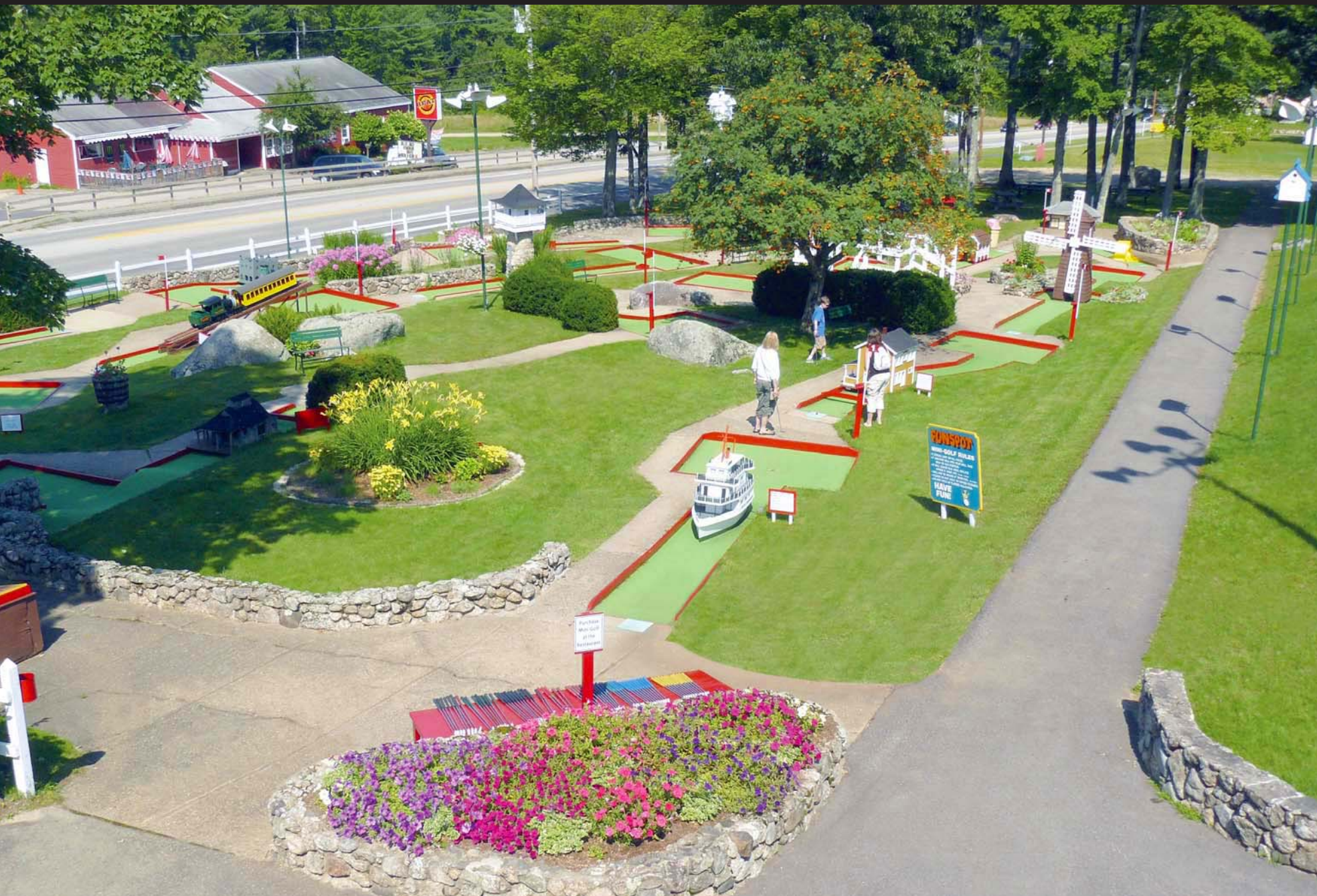
**SUNSPOT**



*Famous Landmarks  
Of New Hampshire*

# MINIATURE GOLF

**At The Largest Arcade In The World**



**Celebrating Over Half A Century Of Fun!**

# 2009 Marks The 46th Year Of The Oldest And Most Enduring Mini-Golf Course In The Area.



by *Brendan Smith, Weirs Times Assistant Editor*

Those familiar with Funspot know that today the business, and building, has grown by leaps and bounds and is now the largest arcade in the world, noted last year by the Guinness Book of World Records. Attention to detail and an understanding of customer perception have contributed to Funspot's continued success. Nothing serves as a better example than the "Famous Landmarks of New Hampshire" Mini-Golf course.

## 1964

The Mini-Golf course at the Funspot Family Entertainment Center in the Weirs was the first attraction at Bob and John Lawton's new location on Rte 3, after having their indoor mini-golf and arcade "The Weirs Sports Center" above Tarlson's Arcade on Lakeside Ave in Weirs Beach since 1952.

"We needed more room so we bought 21 acres on Rte 3," explains Bob Lawton. "The first thing we built was the mini-golf course."

"We drew up detailed plans for the course before we started to build anything," says Bob.

"We cleared dozens of trees, pulled stumps and graded the lot. There were beautiful large rocks that I knew would enhance the ambience of the course so we designed the course around them. They still add so much to the look and feel. Laying out the course was really a lot of fun."

Each one of the playing surfaces of the 18 holes was dug down to a depth of 3-feet and filled in with gravel and concrete. At first, Bob and John had a company come in and do the work. After the first couple of holes were done they decided to do the rest of the job themselves.

They hired a group of boys from the State School who they picked up each day, gave them lunch and drove them back home at night.

Work on the mini-golf course began in Mid-May with anticipation of opening by July 1st. The actual opening was a month later.

"We wanted to make sure that we did everything right," said Bob.

Today, 46 years later, not one of the concrete playing surfaces on the course has suffered a crack or other deterioration.

John Lawton, who passed away in 2003, was a master at stone wall building. Over the course of the next several decades he meticulously built 599 feet of stone walls throughout the mini-golf course. Their presence today is a great tribute to his fine hand and eye as well as his infinite patience.

## The Landmarks

The best attraction of any mini-golf course is the ornaments and the Funspot "Famous Landmarks of New Hampshire" course has had the most original one's around for most of its 45 years.

The course didn't start with the landmarks theme in mind.

Besides a replica of the M/S Mount Washington, there were just a few generic ornaments originally for a few of the holes, all of which gave a New Hampshire feel, all of which are still there today. The windmill on Hole Three, The Barn on Hole Five, the Church on Hole Thirteen and the Outhouse on Hole Sixteen. All of these, including the Mount, were built by Jim Clough of Winnisquam, who also built Waldo the Whale on Hole Nine and the gazebo which overlooks the course. Originally, the whale had no name and in the first year, 1964, Funspot held a contest to name the whale. Lisa Mueller of Cincinnati, Ohio, who was eight at the time, won the contest. She was given a lifetime pass to use the Mini-Golf and returned to play right into her thirties.

Bob and John Lawton always had the idea for the landmarks. The question was who was going to build them.

"One afternoon, shortly after we had opened the mini-golf, I was driving to North Conway with my family," recalls Bob. "There was a house we passed by, opposite of the Kancamagus Highway, that had these birdhouses outside that were obviously hand-made and well crafted. So I stopped."

That's when Bob met Fred Thompson and the creation of the landmarks took off.

"Fred was a World War II veteran," Bob recalls "He was known around North Conway as 'Popcorn Freddy.' He sold popcorn out of a wagon on the streets of Conway. I told him what I wanted to do."

What Bob and John had in mind was scale replicas of many of New Hampshire's more famous sites.

Bob would spend countless hours at many of the real landmarks taking measurements both outside and in (if needed). He spent pretty much a whole day inside Kimball's Castle in Gilford making sure he had all the dimensions correct. He then drew scaled down diagrams of the proper size to fit the mini-golf. Once the measurements were done Bob brought them to Fred who then went to work.

"I'd take a ride up there just about every week to see how the work was coming along," Bob said. "Fred was very talented. He did all the work in his kitchen. Everything was built to scale. All of the pieces he made were constructed from scrap lumber that he got free from the Yield House in North Conway."

The first landmark to be built was Spindle Point (Hole 11) in 1965. Others to follow were the North Conway Train Station (Hole 12), the Cog Railway (Hole 10), The Jackson Covered Bridge (hole 14), Kimball's Castle (Hole 15) and the Sap House (Hole 8). Fred also built the Summer Cottage (Hole 2).

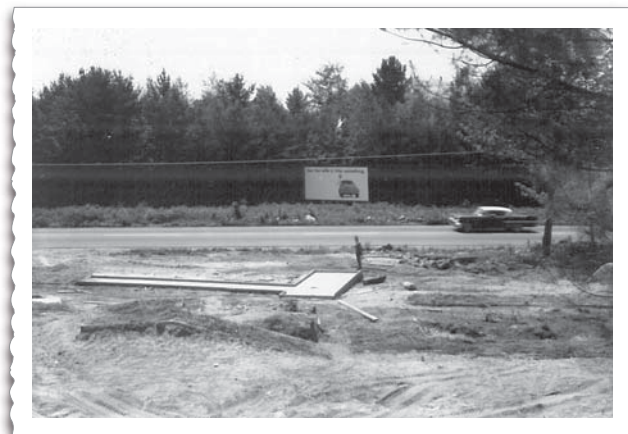
## The First Years

The opening of Funspot's Mini-Golf in 1964 was a tremendous success. The people came and the word spread quickly.

"Business was good that first year," Bob said. "We found out quickly that we didn't have enough parking to handle the crowds."



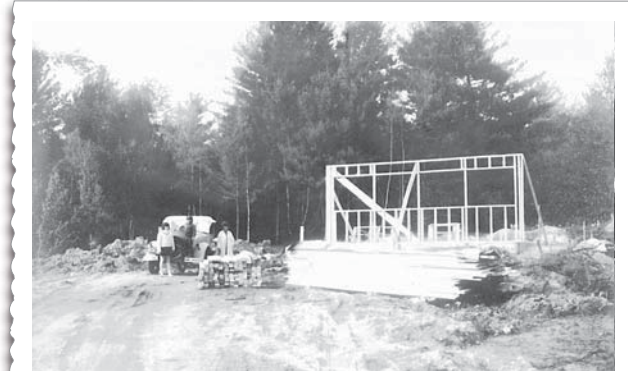
*Site on the east side of U.S. Route 3, Weirs Beach, New Hampshire looking north, towards Meredith, where Funspot is now located.*



*Early construction on the course showing the hole which is now the Spindle Point Observatory.*



*By mid-July, 1964, construction was nearing completion. Several boys from the state school were brought in to help.*



*The front wall of the arcade is up in May, 1964. Bob's family is seen near his 1930 Model A Ford. The front wall of the arcade building is now the front wall of the Braggin' Dragon restaurant.*



*The first building constructed in 1964 housed the arcade portion of Funspot. This building has been added on to many times over the years and now serves as the Braggin' Dragon Restaurant at Funspot.*

By the next summer Bob and John had purchased some land that adjoined their Rte 3 property to help with the parking. At the same time they began to expand the inside of Funspot as well. The original building is where the Braggin' Dragon Restaurant is today.

"The mini-golf really was the start of it all when we opened the Rte 3 location," Bob recalls. "The best part of the mini-golf course which made it so much fun, and which I insisted, was that each hole had the potential for a hole-in-one."

No one is sure if anyone has ever accomplished that feat.

#### 46 Years

This year, like every other year, has seen the ongoing hard work which is the ritual of getting the Landmark course ready for another season.

After the summer season ends all of the ornaments are taken down and carefully moved to Funspot's maintenance shop. The North Conway Railroad Station alone needs a crew of six to move it.

Once at the shop a great deal of time is spent over the winter months, repainting, and sometimes rebuilding, these carefully handmade pieces.

"Cal Hahn, our head of maintenance has been an

integral part of keeping these delicate pieces together over the years," says Bob. "You have to remember these are made of wood, unlike the fiberglass ornaments you see at some other courses today. They are exposed to a lot of elements during the summer. Cal has basically rebuilt many of the pieces without ever losing the look of the original. Cal's son, Bubba, also a part of the maintenance crew, also has a hand in the yearly refurbishing of the ornaments."

Each piece is also repainted, another job that takes many man hours, with Bob doing most of the painting himself.

Then, in the Spring, the crew spends a few days reassembling the course, carefully placing each ornament and landmark in its proper place. This even includes hooking up the electric to some of the pieces.

When the Summer season hits, the crowds come back to play and everything looks exactly the same as it did every year, for the past 46 years.

The Funspot Landmark course has been a fixture in the lives of many people and their summers here in New Hampshire.

One great example of that is the Mathson Family of Winchester, Mass., who have been holding their annual family "Mini-Golf Tournament" at Funspot since 1983 (see page 6).

#### The Future

The Funspot Landmark Mini-Golf Course still goes through changes and improvements as it heads towards its fiftieth anniversary.

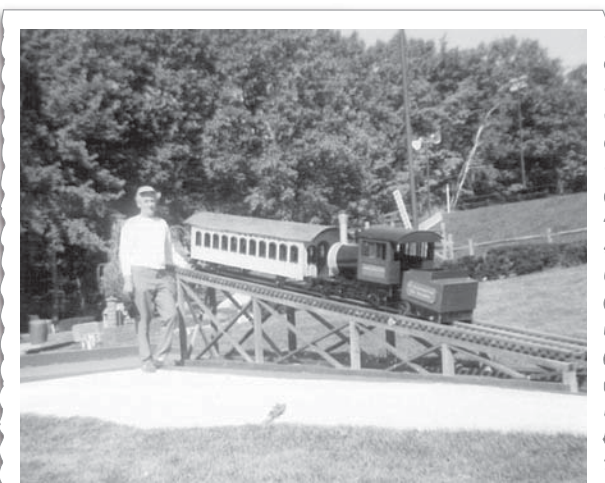
"We know what this course means to so many people," said Bob. "We get so many comments and pictures taken with families playing the course. It's become a tradition in the area and we still work hard at keeping it in the best shape we can."

Those familiar will notice that there has been changes in the landscaping as some older trees and bushes have been removed to make for a more enjoyable view of the course. It is still one of the most recognized summer features as you drive down Rte 3 in the Weirs. It's also one of the best bargains in the area at only \$5 per round.

A replica of Bob and John Lawton's original mini-golf, built in 1952 in the "Weirs Sports Center" on Lakeside Ave in Weirs

Beach, has been recreated in Funspot's upper level. It is a complete self-service operation which is fun for the whole family and great for any age level.

The Funspot Famous Landmarks course is open every day and night through Labor Day. Funspot is open year-round, every day except Christmas.



*Master craftsman, Fred Thompson of Conway, NH, stands next to the Cog Railway, one of several scale models he built from Bob's plans. In Conway & North Conway, Fred received the nickname "Popcorn Freddy" since he was known for the popcorn cart he operated there. If you have any further information on Fred, please contact the Weirs Times at 366-8463 or info@weirs.com.*



*One of the original ornaments for the mini-golf, the Mount Washington. This photo was taken on Main Street, Laconia, enroute to Funspot. The Mount was built by Jim Clough of Winnisquam. Two of Bob's children, Tim & Sandra are seated on the trailer.*



*The mayor of Laconia cutting the ribbon at the grand opening, August 1, 1964. L to R: Randy Lawton, Mayor Hugh Bownes, Jean Lawton, Bob Lawton, John Lawton and Barbara Lawton.*



*A beautiful nighttime photo take shortly after opening in August, 1964.*

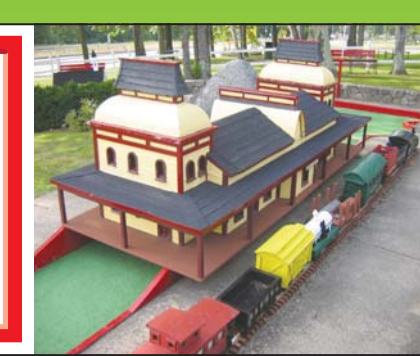


**M.V. Mt. Washington**  
 Model of the famous M.V. Mt. Washington which sails from Weirs Beach on Lake Winnepesaukee every day during the summer.

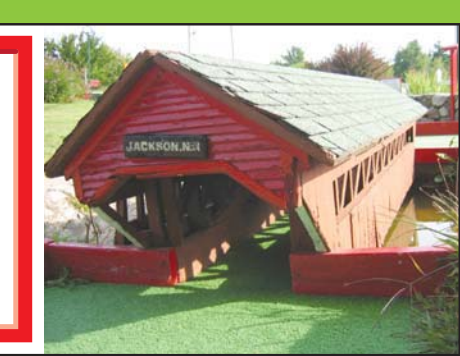


**Cog Railway**  
 Model of the train climbing Jacob's Ladder trestle on the famous Cog Railway. Opened in 1869, this was the world's first mountain climbing railway. It is 3.5 miles long, carrying thousands of visitors every year to the summit of Mt. Washington.

**North Conway Railroad Station**  
 Built in 1871 from plans made by the son of the president of the railroad after a visit to Russia, this unique structure is well know to summer and winter visitors.



**Jackson Covered Bridge**  
 The famous Honeymoon Bridge was built in the 1870s and reconditioned in 1939. It is 138' long and is the "main entrance" to the town of Jackson.



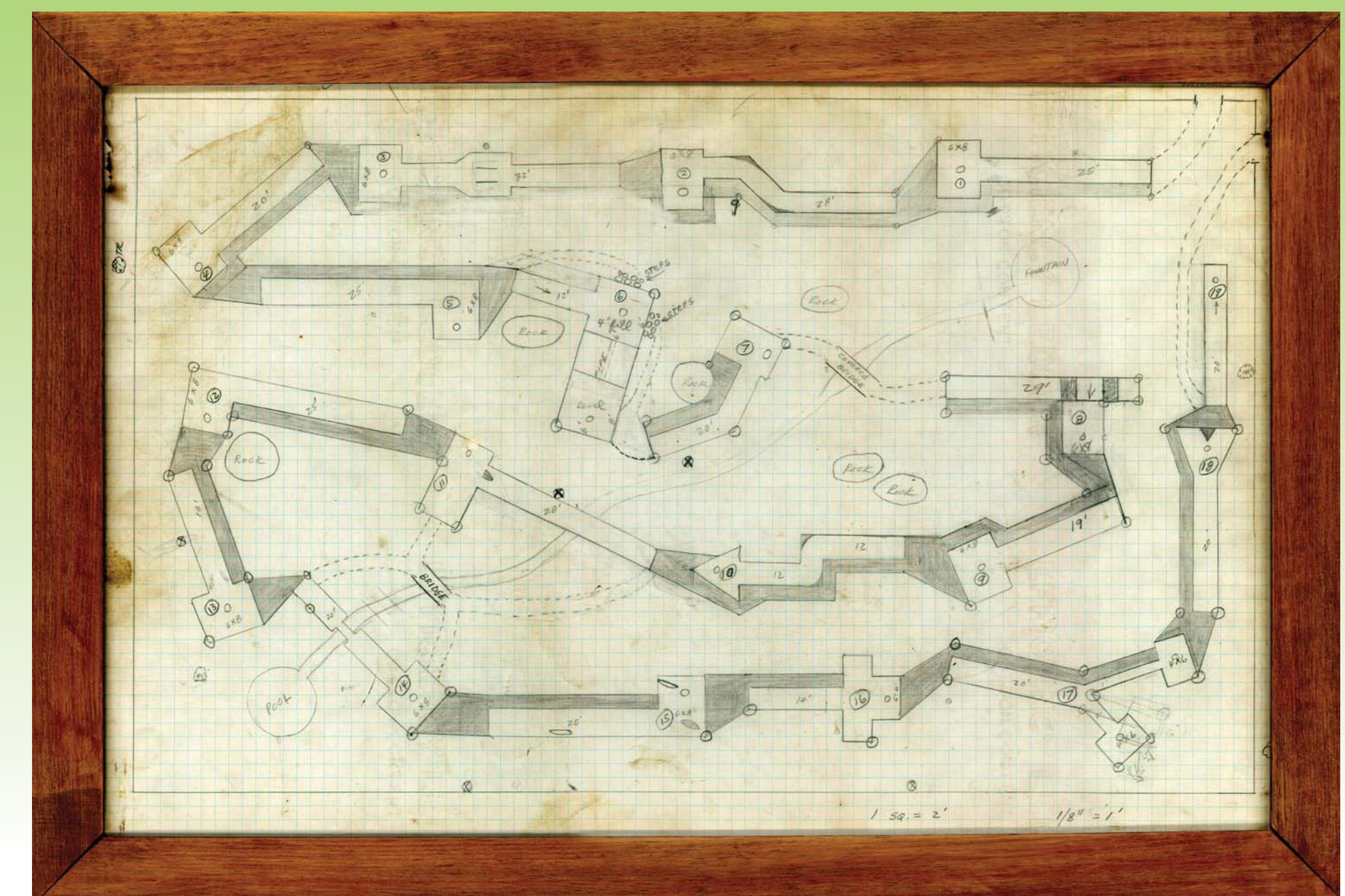
**Lakes Region Summer Cottage**  
 Familiar to generations of "summer people" and visitors to the Lakes Region are numerous cottages like this one. They are family headquarters for swimming, boating, fishing, and other activities which abound here. The wide front porch makes a nice spot for relaxing and just "sittin' and rockin'."

**The Famous Landmarks of New Hampshire Mini-Golf**

**Waldo The Whale**  
 Named in 1964 by Lisa Mueller, our whale model was built by Jim Clough and Elwin Smith of Pine Grove Cabinet Shop in Winnisquam.



**Spindle Point Observatory**  
 This is a model of the famous Spindle Point Observatory. Built in 1892 by Col. Charles Cummings, this structure is one of the best known landmarks in the Lakes Region. It stands at the tip of Meredith Neck in Lake Winnepesaukee, opposite Weirs Beach.



**Out House**  
 Once a familiar fixture in the backyard, the outhouse has become a thing of the past. A Sears & Roebuck catalog was often seen inside.

**Windmill**  
 No traditional mini-golf would be complete without the prerequisite windmill. This ornament was seen on many courses during the early years of miniature golf.



**Native American Totem Pole**  
 This ornament was carved by Funspot's head of maintenance, Cal Hahn, from a treated telephone pole in the late 1980's.



**Barn and Silo**  
 Model of the typical red barn and silo which dotted the landscape throughout New Hampshire.

**One Room School House**  
 Many a famous New Hampshire man learned "reading, writing and 'rithmatic" in a building like this during the 19th and 20th centuries. A few are still standing!  
 This is a model of the Branch School which remains located on U.S. Route 3 in West Campton.



**Sap House**  
 In the early spring when the sap of the sugar maple begins to run, the sap house comes into use. Here is produced the famous maple sugar and maple syrup from the granite hills of New Hampshire.  
 This is a model of the sap house built in 1939 on Rte. 3A, West Plymouth owned by Rep. Manson Smith.



**West Alton Railroad Station**  
 One of 20 stations on the 17.5 mile Lake Shore Railroad which ran from Lakeport to Alton Bay starting in 1890 through 1935. The original West Alton Station was built in 1889 and has been beautifully restored into a home.

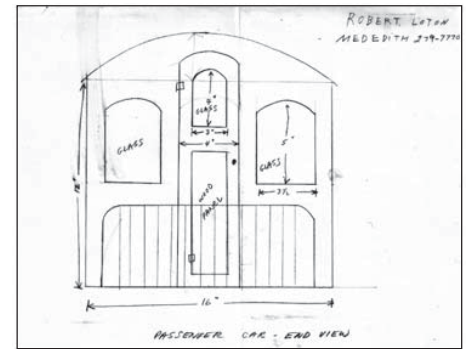
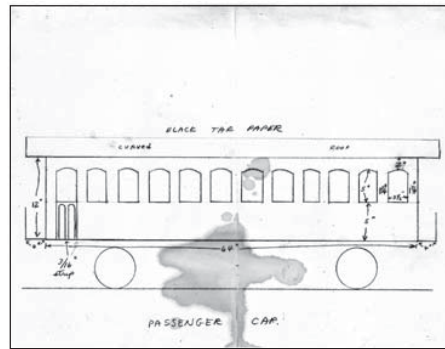
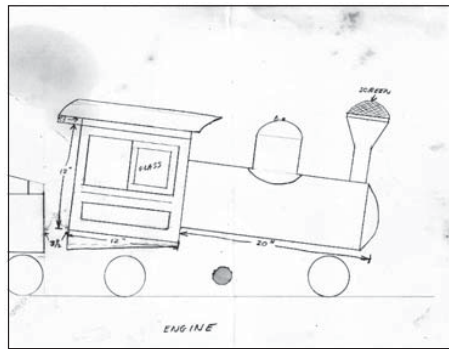
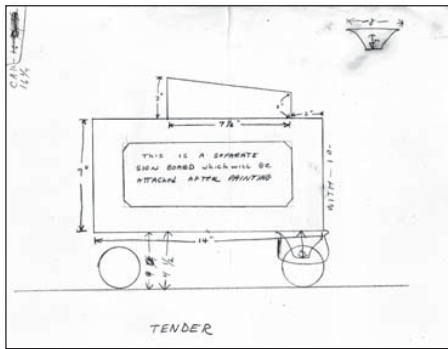
**Church**  
 One of the first ornaments placed on the mini-golf in 1964. The church model was built by Jim Clough and Elwin Smith of Pine Grove Cabinet Shop in Winnisquam.



**Kimball's Castle**  
 Built in 1888 from the original which stands on Rhine River in Germany. Stucco was applied to the stone walls and removed 35 years later due to water damage. Builder, Benjamin Kimball was a B&M Railroad executive. His family & guests occupied the main building, with servants quarters in the kitchen wing.



The original plan for the Funspot Mini-Golf, drawn by Bob Lawton in 1964.



Four scaled-down drawings of the Cog Railway created by Bob Lawton. These drawings and others were the plans used by Fred Thompson to create the replicas seen today on the Funspot mini-golf.

## CONWAY MAN MAKES REPLICA OF NORTH CONWAY STATION

Reprinted from *The Reporter*, September 19, 1968



Rita and Bob Dickens of Conway were some surprised to see a miniature replica of the North Conway Railroad Station at Funspot in Weirs Beach, a miniature golf and fun grounds operated by Bob Lawton. Mr. Dickens took a picture of his wife standing by the little station. They were even more surprised to learn that the replica had been made by a Conway man, Mr. Fred Thompson of North Road, and no one in Conway had heard about it.

Mr. Thompson started about two years ago making doll houses and bird houses and feeders as a hobby. Mr. Lawton had some of that year. Last year, Mr. Thompson made a miniature lighthouse for Lawton's Funspot and a train 16 feet long consisting of a passenger car, the box car, the coal car, the wood car, flat car and caboose. This year Mr. Lawton wanted a station to go with the train so he gave Mr. Thompson the plans he had drawn up and Mr. Thompson started making it last winter. He finished it in June when it was set up at Funspot in Weirs Beach along by the train.

Next year, Mr. Thompson hopes to make another copy to exhibit at the Fryeburg Fair. He also makes replicas of covered bridges and has one made, 6 feet long, a copy of a bridge in Vermont. It's worth \$125, Mr. Thompson says.

In former years, Mr. Thompson worked at some of the woodworking plants in the area. He and his wife, Elizabeth, live just off Route 16 on North Road in Conway. His woodworking hobby helps to keep him busy these days and he is happy to make these special orders.

Rita and Bob Dickens, who are neighbors of Fred Thompson, are the owners of the Double-R Kennels located on North Road.

# WANTED

Do you have stories, photos and memories of playing the Funspot mini-golf? Please share them with us for the expanded special mini-golf insert to be printed in the spring of 2010 and uploaded to our website [www.FunspotNH.com](http://www.FunspotNH.com) All information may be mailed to Funspot, PO Box 5428, Weirs Beach, NH 03247 or emailed to [memories@FunspotNH.com](mailto:memories@FunspotNH.com)



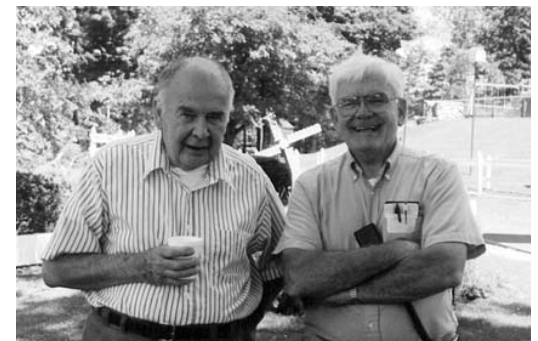
Photo of the Sap House located on Route 3A in West Plymouth, NH from which the scale model was built.



Master stone mason John Lawton building the wall next to the water wheel. From the mid 1960's up until John's death in 2003, he constructed 599 feet of walls on the mini-golf!



Pete Herbert, Bob and John's first full-time employee, next to the North Conway Railroad Station in the early 1970's.



One of the last photos taken of John Lawton (left) with his brother Bob in the summer of 2003. John passed away in October of that year.



Bubba Hahn, Bob Lawton, Chris Ferguson and Cal Hahn installing the cottage for the 2009 season.

## For The Birds!

One of the largest Purple Martin colonies in New Hampshire is located on Funspot's mini-golf course! Each year these birds migrate from South America arriving on the mini-golf on April 15th and make the long trip back on August 15th.



# F

## amily Mini-Golf Tournament Still Going Strong After 34 Years



by *Brendan Smith, Weirs Times Assistant Editor*

In an age when families find themselves increasingly separated by distance in this fast-paced world, the Mathson family, formerly of Winchester, Mass., has found a way to keep the family spirit alive. In fact, they may just hold the record for the most consecutive years participating in a family event. But no one is really counting, they're just too busy having fun.

John Mathson and his children: Margaret, Paul & John, were at the Funspot Family Entertainment Super Center in the Weirs on Tuesday, August 19th, as part of their 34th Annual Mini-Golf Championship. It was their 26th year at Funspot. They would play four minigolf courses in the area during the day – 8 hours in all. Separate tournaments in preparation for the “Mathson Masters Tournament” to be played the next day.

“Funspot is what we call the Prestige Tournament,” said Paul Mathson. “It is the classic course, old style and the best. We also play at Jay’s in Alton and the ‘Pirate Tournament’ at the Pirate’s Cove courses in either Meredith or Tilton.”

They played three rounds on each course Tuesday with a separate winner for each and then one round at each on Wednesday with the total winner declared the Masters champion.

“We started this in 1974 and it has been a family tradition every summer since,” explained John Sr. “We hadn’t discovered the Funspot course

until 1983 and we immediately added it to our list. It is the best course.”

Opened seasonally in 1964, Funspot’s 19 hole course is built on the theme of historic New Hampshire landmarks. The first hole has a scale model of the Mt. Washington cruise ship which was built by Jim Clough of Winnisquam and has been maintained and rebuilt over the years by Funspot maintenance foreman Cal Hahn. Other historic landmarks include the Spindle Point observatory; the Jackson covered bridge, the West Alton Railroad station, the North Conway Railroad station and the Cog Railway.

“My brother John and I designed the course to be as challenging as possible,” says Funspot owner and General Manager Bob Lawton, “Yet we made sure it was possible for a player to get a hole-in one on every hole.”

It is not believed that has ever been done. Surely not by any one of the Mathsons, and certainly not on this day. It was an unusually cool and windy day for August as the family took their turns on the Funspot course. Margaret, much to the friendly chagrin of her father and brothers, emerged the winner of this round.

“That means we have to buy her dinner,” laughed Paul. “Then again, we always buy her dinner.”

*The Mathson family with Funspot founder, Bob Lawton, during their annual family mini-golf tournament.*

As much fun as the Mathson’s have with their annual tournament, it is still a sign of great family values as they make sure to get together for the event every year even though they have become separated by miles. John still lives in Massachusetts and his children Margaret, Paul and John now all reside in different parts of New Hampshire. There is no sign of the tournament waning over the years as the children have kids of their own who are now growing up and ready to participate.

“Some of our kids feel they are ready to challenge us,” said Paul. “But we do have a strict qualifying guidelines.” A player must shoot at least one stroke below par to qualify.

“They’re all getting better and I’m sure they’ll be here competing with us in the near future,” said John. “We hope that the Funspot course will be around for years to come as our family, and our tournament grows.”

The Funspot Mini-Golf closes after Labor Day. They do have a Retro Mini-Golf Course inside which is open all year. It is a reproduction of the original mini-golf that Bob Lawton built with his brother John above Tarlson’s Arcade in Weirs Beach in 1952. It is perfect for all ages and is completely self-service.

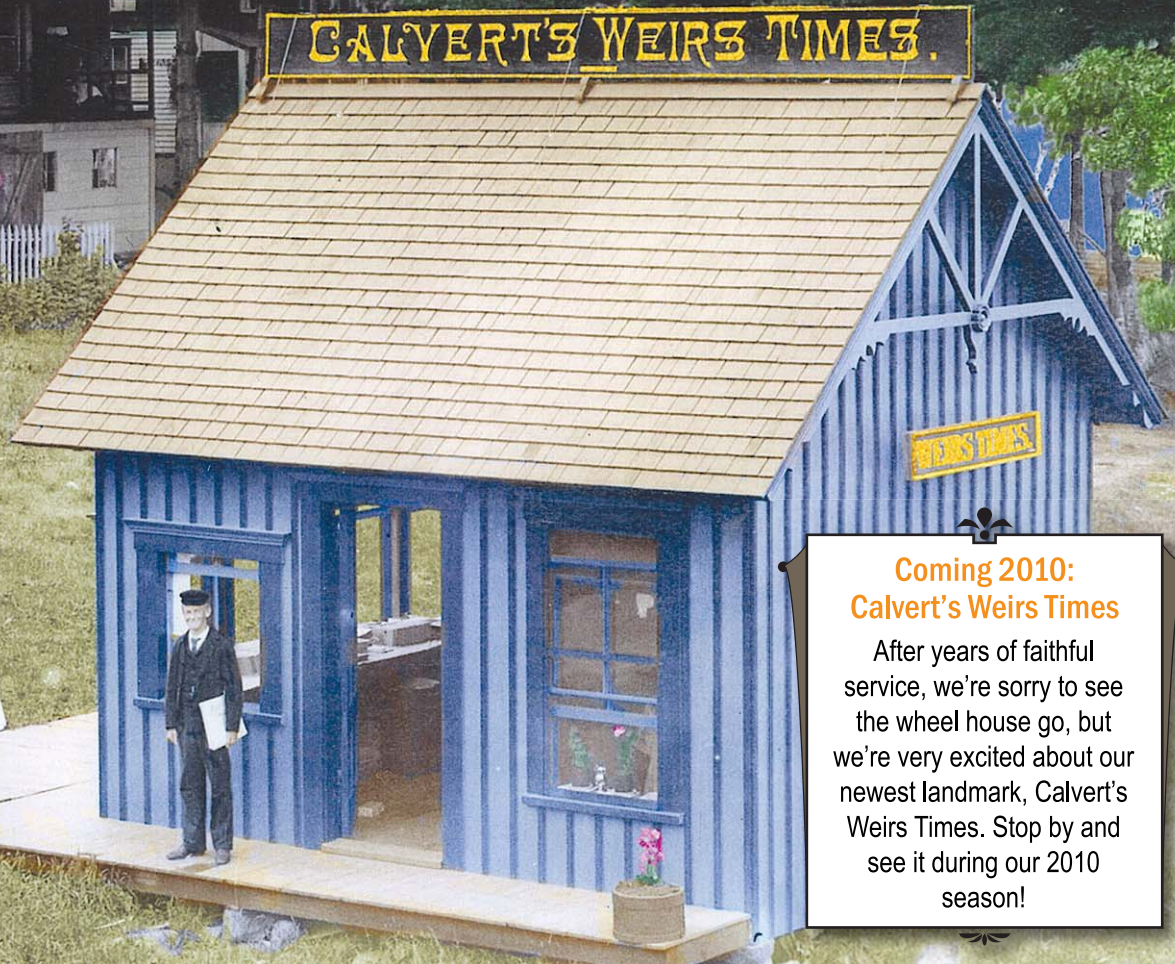


## Funspot Whale Gets His Name!

In 1964, the year Funspot on Route 3 in Weirs Beach, NH celebrated its grand opening, a contest was held to name the whale on hole 9. That contest was won by one of our pint-sized visitors, Lisa Mueller of Cincinnati, Ohio. To this day, our whale still proudly bares the name “Waldo!”



Retired 2009: Mill & Water Wheel

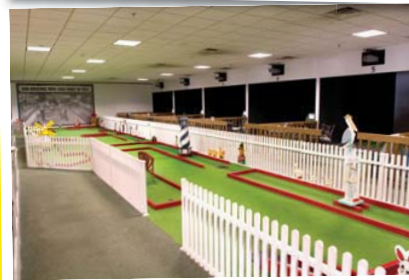


**Coming 2010:  
Calvert's Weirs Times**

After years of faithful service, we're sorry to see the wheel house go, but we're very excited about our newest landmark, Calvert's Weirs Times. Stop by and see it during our 2010 season!

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