

# THE BLUE HILL FALLS: A RARE FORCE

Blue Hill Falls is one of eight reversing tidal falls in Maine. The Falls were formed around 3000 years ago, when sea level rise breached the ledge underneath the Blue Hill Falls Bridge, cutting Mill Island off from the mainland and creating the unique reversing falls. Due to their constrictive geometry and dynamic hydrology, tidal falls were popular locations for catching fish, as well as for dams associated with water-powered mills.

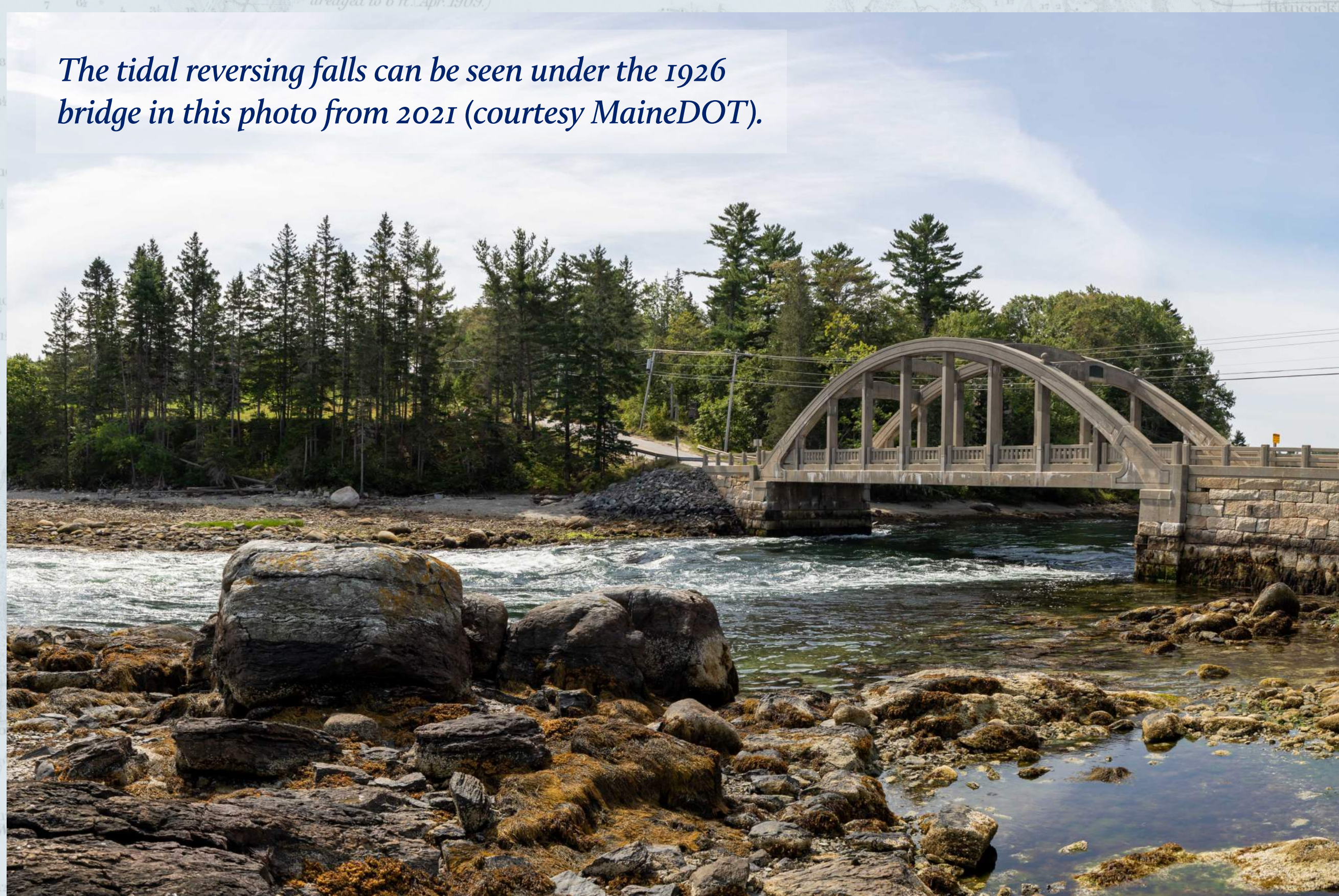
## GATHERING AT THE FALLS

Native Americans were drawn to the Falls as an ideal location for catching alewives and other migratory fish. Fire pits and remnants of the groundstone tools they used to catch fish have been found in the area, suggesting that they likely spent enough time at the Falls to establish a camp (image of spear point courtesy Maine Historic Preservation Commission).

The Falls were likely part of what attracted European settlers to Mill Island. The first settlers arrived in April 1762 from Beverly, Massachusetts. Pictured are pottery shards recovered at the site of John Roundy's house, which he built at the southern end of the island (image courtesy Maine Historic Preservation Commission).



*The tidal reversing falls can be seen under the 1926 bridge in this photo from 2021 (courtesy MaineDOT).*



## CROSSING THE FALLS

The first bridge over the Blue Hill Falls was constructed out of wood in the 1850s. Iron eventually replaced wood as the structural material in 1883. In 1926 a reinforced concrete tied arch bridge was built, the first of only four constructed in the state. The design was well suited to this location since it required minimal in-water work at the dangerous reversing falls. The bridge was replaced in 2023.

*The 1926 tied arch bridge under construction (courtesy Maine DOT).*



## SUMMERING AT THE FALLS



*A group of rusticators is seen c.1910 overlooking the reversing falls and the 1883 iron bridge (courtesy Blue Hill Historical Society).*

The beauty of the area began drawing summer visitors, known as 'rusticators,' to Blue Hill in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Early accommodations could be found at a farmhouse-turned boarding house on Parker Point just north of the falls. Large hotels and grand summer 'cottages' were soon built in the area.

One of the most distinctive houses is the Arcady Estate, fashioned after a Tuscan villa. It was built in 1913 by Ann Paul Nevin, the widow of renowned pianist and composer Ethelbert Nevin.

*Pictured at right: The Arcady Estate's dramatic terraced lawn and the double-height loggia at the rear of the house (courtesy Maine Historical Society).*

