

From the Executive Director

As noted in our June newsletter, the Watch Hill Conservancy has a three-point Mission Statement. It is our purpose to:

- ❖ Promote the preservation of the natural & built environments of Watch Hill
- ❖ Conserve, maintain, and enhance its scenic open space, historic values and character
- ❖ Support the vitality & sustainability of the community

Over the past summer, a number of people have asked me why the Conservancy has such a seemingly broad mission, rather than concentrating just on Napatree Point. When the Conservancy was formed in 1999, some 15 years ago, the group was ahead of its time. How so? Because without knowing it they captured a fairly recent concept called “Whole Place Conservation.”

Whole Place Conservation was first articulated in Europe when it was recognized that groups interested in land conservation and groups interested in historic preservation had similar goals and similar obstacles, and would therefore do well to work together rather than focus solely on their separate, narrower issues. Examples were given of historic properties that were preserved but the sense of place was gone due to the loss of appropriate setting that gave meaning to the architecture. Another example was the conservation of a natural setting without the preservation of the built environment that over time had become part of the cultural landscape.

Thus the United States National Trust for Historic Preservation now recognizes “Cultural Landscapes” as special places that boast a range of values. If you navigate the National Trust’s website you will discover that these places are considered more than the sum of their parts. The Trust emphasizes that “loss of one dimension diminishes our experience of the whole place.” Having said that, the National Trust also recognizes that “these complex sites can present challenges for organizations and resources.”

This could not be truer of present-day Watch Hill. Therefore, the Conservancy’s aim is to focus on not only conservation of the natural environment of Napatree Point, but also on the preservation of historic buildings such as the former Holdredge Garage and the ongoing vibrancy of the commercial aspects of Bay Street. It is Watch Hill in its totality that makes it a special place. [SA]

Lanphear Livery Update!

In October work began inside the 125 year old historic Lanphear Livery Stable at One Bay Street, known to many as the Holdredge Garage. The work being done will prepare the building for a vertical lift of 8-9 feet. If all goes well, the lift of the building will be accomplished before the end of November. The building will be detached and lifted from its foundation to a height that will enable new helical (also known as screw) pilings to be installed under the massive Queen Anne truss piers and other interior structural components. An interconnecting concrete slab will be poured in place, and concrete perimeter foundation walls constructed before the building is lowered back down. This work is scheduled as needed foundation stabilization work; preliminary to the restoration of the exterior and interior spaces for ground level retail shops and upper floor residential uses similar to those which have recently occupied the building. Interior demolition of the late 20th-century ground floor interior partitions has taken place and the building once again shows its ground level and second story carriage and car storage spaces, including a huge gear-driven vehicle elevator. The building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and has received a Hurricane Sandy restoration grant from the National Park Service. All of the ground level work will enable to the building to be more flood resilient than in the past.



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THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER, 2014 VOL. 7 NO. 3 WATCH HILL, R.I.

Warren Henry Manning in Watch Hill

Looking at Lighthouse Road today and the shingled summer cottages that grace its curvy decent to the ocean and Lighthouse Point, it is hard to image the imposing Larkin House hotel that once stood here on a barren landscape overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and Fisher’s Island Sound. All of this was transformed over 100 years ago when Clement A. Griscom purchased the property, demolished the hotel, and commissioned architect Henry Foote Hinkle and landscape architect Warren Henry Manning to create a private residential compound. This came at a time when the hotels in Watch Hill were being replaced by summer cottages and private clubs, a phenomenon occurring at similar resorts all along the New England coast at the time.

At Lighthouse Point, it is likely that the layout of the narrow road itself and the siting of the houses are perhaps the most important aspects remaining from Manning’s work. Early postcard views show the area as open with low hedges and planting beds. Hedges throughout Watch Hill were added over time to provide privacy and enclosure for cottage gardens and designed landscapes.

Today two cottages from the earlier hotel period remain on Lighthouse Road alongside four shingled cottages designed by Hinkle: Trespasso, Moana, Taurento, and The Point. Moana was designed by the architect as his own summer cottage. The others were occupied by Griscom and his extended family.

Landscape architect Warren Manning (1860-1938) had recently been retained to design Wilcox Park in downtown Westerly in 1898. He had also been hired by Charles Perry, Jr. to assist in the creation of the Perry family compound on Margin Street in Westerly. In Watch Hill, he was also commissioned to design landscapes for two cottages on Bluff Avenue just to the north of Lighthouse Road. These are Justholme (Weonit), and Hill House (The Kedge).



Photo by Richard Youngken

At the time Manning had completed an apprenticeship and several years of employment with Frederick Law Olmsted, the acknowledged dean of American landscape architecture and the co-designer of Central Park in New York City. Manning had grown up with his family’s large nursery business in Reading, Massachusetts. Armed with an extensive knowledge of shrubs, trees, and native New England plants, Manning became nationally known for his landscape designs for “home grounds,” city parks, and family estates. In Watch Hill and elsewhere in Westerly, he used Olmsted-inspired site planning, specimen trees, and shrubs.

Manning’s interest was not confined to landscape architecture. He also became interested in the Colonial Revival movement and restored his ancestral home and grounds in North Billerica, Massachusetts. Manning’s ancestors had built the original portion of the house in 1696. Manning not only restored the colonial center chimney house, but also portions of the adjoining farm landscape. Restoration work began in the late 1890s, a few years before the Watch Hill commissions.

Manning was also an advocate for American landscape conservation, including the National Parks and the use of native plants in landscape design – concepts that are current today.

Famous landscapes which Manning had a hand in while with Olmsted include Biltmore (the George Vanderbilt estate in Ashville, North Carolina) and the Boston Metropolitan Park System. In his own practice he completed over 1700 commissions. Active in all aspects of his profession, Manning was a key figure in the creation of the American Society of Landscape Architects. [RY]

Napatree Notes

Summer 2014 was a tremendously exciting season! Children and adults alike worked and played on Napatree. Our children’s *Investigator* program was filled to capacity this summer. See the *Investigator* section in this issue for more information about children’s activities. Make a note to register early for 2015: we had a waiting list in ’14!

Habitat Restoration

With the guidance of our team of Science Advisors, led by its Chairman, Prof. Peter V. August, we applied for and received a habitat restoration grant from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) through the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC).

The Watch Hill Conservancy (WHC) and Watch Hill Fire District (WHFD) engaged the services of the RI Natural History Survey (RINHS) to assist in the design and implementation of this project. The RINHS is a logical and exciting partner: they have a long history of performing ecological assessments of Napatree for the WHC, they lead the Rhody Native program and have extensive experience in invasive plant management. RINHS, WHC and WHFD scientific personnel developed a detailed planting plan which included specific guidance on site selection, preparation, removal of invasive plants, installation of native plants and maintenance.

Given the amount of material, water and personnel that need to be transported to the site over the course of the project and beyond, a reliable ATV was required. The Kawasaki ATV, while meticulously maintained, has had chronic mechanical problems. With help from the WHFD and the WHC, a brand new Polaris 6X6 ATV was purchased with this grant.

As significant as this award was, we were thrilled to receive a generous supplemental grant from the URI Coastal Institute.



Young Conservation League members working on Napatree

Photo by Janice Sassi

aged youth to perform stewardship on conservation lands in the state, will do much of the site labor for the project. The YCL is a joint project managed by the RI Natural History Survey, the Audubon Society of RI, and The Nature Conservancy. The catalyst grant from the Coastal Institute was designated to purchase plant stock from Rhody Native and to cover part of the costs of engaging the YCL kids to do site preparation and removal of invasive species on Napatree.”

Our work began with several explorations of various sites to carefully assess the existing native and invasive species and the suitability of the habitat. We were also delighted to find several rare plants. A list of desirable plants was developed with consideration for the needs of birds, insects, animals and climate change resiliency.

In July, a group of teenagers from the YCL spent several hot days working hard on Napatree, removing targeted invasives and doing some planting.

After careful consideration, the eastern end of Napatree had been chosen as the location for the main restoration site. Numerous redundant paths have been worn by people walking over and around fenced areas creating a labyrinth of unvegetated areas. We know from where Napatree was breached during Hurricane Sandy that the ocean will choose the area of least resistance, such as a well-worn path.

Next, limited removal and treatment of invasive species as warranted in the restoration project area was conducted by a licensed professional.

On Monday September 29th, volunteers from the RI Wild Plant Society, Rhody Native, Westerly Land Trust, and RINHS, joined by URI students and URI Master Gardeners spent the day digging, planting, and watering. Several paths were selected where habitat could be improved, to provide bird roosts and soft fruit to migratory birds, or shrub thickets to provide nesting cover and food for birds, as well as open spaces to allow isolation at different levels and encourage invertebrate diversity. More than 480 plants, including winged sumac, beach plum, Virginia creeper and other species were planted.

According to the Coastal Institute Director Judith Swift~

“The Coastal Institute catalyst grant to the Watch Hill Conservancy and Watch Hill Fire District provided critical funding to support the Napatree Point habitat restoration project; a significant partnership.” The overall goal of the project is to restore native trees, shrubs, and grasses to the Napatree Point Conservation Area (Watch Hill, RI) to increase the suitability of habitat for migrating and resident birds and insects. The Coastal Institute investment is to assist in developing a demonstration site that addresses coastal resiliency in natural habitats as a means to apply such principles to any coastal site vulnerable to storm surge, erosion, and overall habitat destruction. All the plants that will be transplanted to Napatree will come from the Rhody Native program, an initiative of the RI Natural History Survey to encourage use of native flora in landscaping and restoration projects.

The Youth Conservation League (YCL), a program to employ high school-aged youth to perform stewardship on conservation lands in the state, will do much of the site labor for the project. The YCL is a joint project managed by the RI Natural History Survey, the Audubon Society of RI, and The Nature Conservancy. The catalyst grant from the Coastal Institute was designated to purchase plant stock from Rhody Native and to cover part of the costs of engaging the YCL kids to do site preparation and removal of invasive species on Napatree.”

Some of our planting volunteers lead by Hope Leeson, kneeling, in blue.



Photo by Janice Sassi

State of Rhode Island v. Barbuto, et al: Decided

In our June newsletter we brought attention to the recent lawsuit filed by the R.I. State Attorney General against beachfront property owners in Misquamicut. In a 39-page decision filed Sept. 4th, Judge Stern held for the defendant property owners, rejecting the State’s argument that the entire beachfront was “public”, rather than only the portion above mean high tide, as traditionally argued. Noting that over the past 100 years there had been “on-again, off-again” disputes over Misquamicut Beach, the Judge summed up the disputed facts this way: “The issue of the legal status of a portion of the beach became active again when members of the community complained that things such as fences and no-trespassing signs were being put on the beach by adjacent homeowners.”

As we noted, the Attorney General’s case heavily relied upon documents dating from 1909 that may (or may not) have indicated property owners’ intent to offer the entire beachfront as public. Since there was no contemporaneous witness the Judge had to rely on the documents themselves and on expert testimony from today’s realtors, surveyors, and planners, as well as the property owners and those wanting to freely access the disputed beachfront.

Those attorneys amongst you will want to read the entire decision, which is on-line at the Rhode Island Courts’ website (www.courts.ri.gov/courts). Otherwise, the gist of the matter will probably suffice. Judge Stern determined that the “fundamental question” was whether the original beachfront property owners intended to offer the general public full access by signing off on a 1909 plat and an attendant document called an *indenture*. The Attorney General made much of the fact that both documents were recorded in the Westerly Land Evidence books. However, at several points in the opinion Judge Stern notes that clear and unambiguous evidence would be necessary for the State to prove its case. At the end of the day “intent” is challenging to establish legally; and the Judge found the State failed to do so.

Though the case is legally very fact-specific due to the historic nature of those key documents, the Court did not condone the beachfront property owners’ attempts to block public rights of way to the mean high tide or to erect obstacles to the public’s right to pass and re-pass along the shoreline.

The Attorney General may appeal the matter to a higher court, but for now Judge Stern has ruled that “the Court must decline the State’s invitation to find an inferential manifestation of a clear and unambiguous intention to dedicate the Disputed Area to the general public.” In other words, the beachfront property owners prevailed in their definition of which portion of the beach was considered public but the Court made it clear that their actions attempting to thwart access via legitimate rights of way would not be legally endorsed. [SA]

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Scooping with the Seine

“A million of fish!”

“Put him in the water so he can breathe!”

Welcome to the wonderful world of Investigator seine netting! Each year, our summer kids have a blast on the beach learning about fish. We use a long net (about ten feet long) in the waters off Napatree Point to scoop up all kinds of little creatures that we can look at and identify. Here’s the process:

First, Investigators each take an end of the net. The net is tied to poles that look like broom handles. One Investigator stays in shallow water, while the other works their way out into deeper water. This, by the way, sometimes was a bit of a challenge in the cool of the morning!

The next step is the “sweep”: the partner in deeper water slowly walks in a semicircle, basically “sweeping” up the fish that may be swimming ahead of the net. This can be a tricky business, since the pole holding the net has to be held just right, or the fish will get away.

Then, the net is tilted back and brought to the shore. This is the surprising part, since it’s sometimes difficult to see the fish that have been scooped into the net. But once the net is brought back onto shore, that’s where the real excitement begins! The net sparkles with dozens of fish where it seemed there were none around before.

“A bunch of fish!” “Don’t squeeze them too hard or you’ll squish their bodies!” Investigators quickly scoop the fish up and put them into our white pans for identification. There are silversides, puffer fish, pipe fish, shrimp, and even tiny flounder.

With the help of naturalists Steve, Jessica, and Hugh, Investigators make the identifications of lots of fish types, many of which they hadn’t seen before.

Finally, the time comes when the session is over. Investigators take the pans holding our finds and carefully empty them into the water. We’ll never know for sure, but it’s easy to imagine that these fish would have quite a “tail” to tell when they get home!



Photo by Hugh Markey

Crab Happy

An issue of the Investigator just wouldn’t be complete without a story of our kids’ favorite activity: crabbing! With homemade rigs of wire and string, along with a deliciously messy collection of chicken livers for bait, Investigators go at it once again on the rocks of Little Narragansett Bay. They venture out with crab rigs and nets, and in no time there is a steady stream of crabs being brought to shore and more bait for the rigs being brought back out. This is a real team effort, with some using nets, others using rigs, some bringing bait, and others counting and identifying the catch.

By the time one two-hour session is over, the crew brings in 59 male crabs and 33 females! There are Asian shore crabs and green crabs. Investigators record the biggest of each sex: the largest male is 8.5 mm. across, and the largest female is 6 mm.

When the crabs are caught, measured and identified, everyone’s favorite part is next: the crab race from the beach to the water! Each Investigator gets a crab and places it on the sand in front of him/her. After a countdown, the race is on! Some crabs make their way to the water pretty quickly. Others, though, seem to think better of the idea and dig themselves into the sand to wait for the tide to come and pick them up! Whatever they decide, the whole crew has yet another great day of learning and laughing on the beach!

We hope you did a lot of learning and laughing on the beach last summer, and that you’ll come out to see us again in summer 2015! Steve, Jessica, and Hugh will be waiting to take you out for more adventures when you return! [HM]



Photos by Hugh Markey



Lagoon Study

One of the most dynamic and ecologically important communities on Napatree is the 5.7 hectare (metric) lagoon between the maritime shrub lands and the barrier dune system. Dr. Nicole Rohr, intertidal ecologist and Assistant Director of URI’s Coastal Institute, has initiated a study of the lagoon of which we know very little. She is joined in the project by Peter August; James Turenne, the US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service’s RI State Soil Scientist; and Mike Bradley, analyst in the Environmental Data Center at the University of Rhode Island.

The lagoon provides essential habitat for a long list of important shorebird species; some are species of concern such as Osprey, American Oystercatcher and Least Tern. Hurricane Sandy closed one entrance channel connecting the lagoon to Little Narragansett Bay and opened two new ones. The resulting changes in tidal flushing, water quality, and biodiversity are likely significant but since we have no baseline data for the lagoon, we can only speculate as to how significant. Our long-term plan is to continually monitor the physical and biological conditions of the lagoon in order to establish a baseline status of the ecosystem.



This dynamic baseline provides us a target state which we can restore to and manage for. On June 12th, the volunteer team spent the day gathering subaqueous soil samples and data to create a bathymetric map. Turenne also imaged the lagoon bottom with a multi-beam imaging device and video recorder.

We have added the lagoon to our water quality sampling locations in connection with our participation in URI’s Watershed Watch.

When this data has been analyzed, we plan to initiate a biological survey in 2015.



Dr. Nicole Rohr of URI’s Coastal Institute working with USDA Soil Scientist James Turenne, imaging the bottom of the lagoon.

Vegetation Study

For years we have been interested in determining what vegetation exists on Napatree and how to manage it. Our naturalist Kevin Rogers, a URI Masters candidate in Natural Resources Science, has initiated GIS mapping that will be invaluable in this effort. In doing this work, Kevin obtained the GIS dataset used to make the RINHS 2005 map depicting Napatree’s natural communities. We intend to use this map to compare how things have changed on Napatree. Already, we see significant changes that will help us understand whether non-native species such as *Rosa rugosa* (introduced from Asia) is out-competing the native bayberry, which is an important food source. Naturalist Jessica Cressman, a MESM candidate at URI, has chosen this as her Master’s project. With guidance from professors Keith Killingbeck and Peter August, Jessica will provide a valuable baseline that will inform management decisions.



Beautiful invasive poppy located on Napatree.

National Land Trust Rally

We are thrilled that Napatree was one of just a few conservation areas chosen to be featured at the National Land Trust Rally’s session “Learn, Plan, Adapt, and Inspire: How Land Trusts Are Finding Successes and Opportunities to Support Climate Adaptation and Coastal Resilience”.

Dr. Peter V. August presented our work on Napatree to conference participants. Janice Sassi joined Peter in the discussion segment following.

Our projects will continue this fall and we are preparing for our annual Science Advisor meeting in November. We hope to have our State of Napatree 2014 on the Watch Hill Conservancy website by the beginning of January. [JS]



Napatree Naturalist and URI MESM candidate Jessica Cressman setting up a “Crittter-cam” to capture images of wildlife on Napatree.

In Memoriam: IN THE EASY CHAIR

AGE 72

OCCUPATION Attorney, executive director of the Watch Hill Conservancy.

RESIDENCE Westerly.

BORN, RAISED & GREW UP IN Born in New Haven, grew up in New Haven, Westerly and Stonington, with summers in Watch Hill.

FAVORITE WAY TO SPEND MY TIME By the ocean - either by an ocean breeze or in the surf - or reading by the fire.

PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT Promoting the preservation of the environment; writing “Watch Hill through Time;” being named to the town of Westerly’s Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee and the Architectural Review Board; and receiving the 2009 Citizens Service Award from the Watch Hill Fire District.

WHAT I HOPE TO BE REMEMBERED FOR For being a person of inclusivity, fairness and integrity; for my contributions to Watch Hill and Westerly and to the civic organizations that support them; and for protecting our natural and historic environment.

TOP ITEM ON MY BUCKET LIST A final “pilgrimage” to Canterbury Cathedral, England, on whose U.S. board I served for a number of years.

ALWAYS IN MY POCKET Mints.

WHAT I WANTED TO BE WHEN I GREW UP The Pope. This was unlikely, however, as I remained a Protestant Episcopalian. But since the president of the Watch Hill Chapel Society is known, humorously, as the “Pope of Watch Hill,” I guess I did achieve a measure of success.

PEOPLE WHO INFLUENCED ME THE MOST My father and two of his friends: Rachel Carson (“Silent Spring”), and ornithologist and preeminent naturalist Roger Tory Peterson; my Watch Hill aunt, Beatrice “BB” Westerfield; my Westerfield cousins; and my English godmother, Pamela Redmayne.

FAVORITE BOOKS The King James Version (1611) of the Bible, “Out of Africa,” “The Wind in the Willows,” “Cautionary Tales for Children,” “David Copperfield,” “Vanity Fair,” “Champlain’s Dream,” Caroline Moorehead’s “Dancing to the Precipice,” Paul Gallico’s “The Snow Goose,” Maria Rosa Menocal’s “The Ornament of the World,” Mary Lee Settle’s “I, Roger Williams,” Theo Aronson’s “Grandmama of Europe.”



Photo courtesy Sarah Chaplin Barnes Moore

FAVORITE AUTHORS Beatrix Potter, David McCullough, John Adams.

LAST BOOK READ David McCullough’s “The Greater Journey.”

FAVORITE SONGS Anything choral by Bach and anything operatic by Mozart; songs of Cole Porter; “My Country ‘Tis of Thee and “America the Beautiful.”

FAVORITE MOVIES “Gone With the Wind,” “Kind Hearts and Coronets,” “The Importance of Being Earnest,” “To Kill A Mockingbird,” “My Fair Lady,” “West Side Story,” “Streetcar Named Desire,” “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,” “The King’s Speech.”

FAVORITE TV SHOWS “Downton Abbey,” “The Tudors,” “Keeping Up Appearances,” “As Time Goes By,” “Waiting for God.”

FAVORITE PETS “Niko” (Nikolai Vladimirovich) and “Misha” (Mikhail Nikolaivich), two magnificent Siberian pussycats, “brothers” only in that they came from the same breeder.

FAVORITE FOOD Hot lobster with drawn butter, filet mignon/burger, Connecticut River shad roe, onion tart, cucumbers, crème brûlée, any lemon dessert - especially lemon soufflé and lemon meringue pie - and peanut butter.

AMOUNT OF TIME I SPEND A DAY ON FACEBOOK None.

TRAITS I MOST ADMIRE Fairness, pursuit of human equality in all things, courage to speak “truth to power,” willingness to admit error and change direction.

PET PEEVES Selfishness, unwillingness to compromise in government, sloppiness in grammar.

FAVORITE QUOTATION From St. Julian of Norwich, “All shall be well, all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”

MY FAVORITE THING ABOUT OUR LITTLE CORNER OF THE WORLD The ocean - in calm and in storm.

CAN’T LIVE WITHOUT The ocean.

LITTLE KNOWN FACT ABOUT ME My 17th-century ancestors were founders of Stonington and are buried in the 1649 Wequetequock Burial Ground - under “wolf stones” - the stones once placed to keep wolves from eating bodies.

BEST ADVICE I’VE EVER RECEIVED In any controversy, keep confrontation to a minimum. State your views, then let the facts -and the truth - speak for themselves.

ADVICE I BEST LIKE TO GIVE Don’t hold resentments. Let things go and do not let perceived wrongs fester. Remember it is and will be OK.

IF I RULED THE WORLD I WOULD Seek to remove all structures that support inequality and violence and help people to realize that we all are one.

IF I WON THE LOTTERY, THE FIRST THING I WOULD DO IS Pay off debts, give first to special friends, then give the rest to charity.

I DRIVE A 2013 silver Prius IV.

I WISH I DROVE The 1956 two-seater Ford Thunderbird in which I learned to drive.

ALWAYS IN MY FRIDGE San Pellegrino water and frozen yogurt or ice cream.

IF I COULD HAVE DINNER AND A CONVERSATION WITH ANYONE IN THE WORLD I WOULD CHOOSE Elizabeth I and Abigail Adams, because they were people of extraordinary intelligence, wisdom and force of personality; and Mahatma Ghandi, who may yet change the world.

Interview conducted and edited by Nancy Burns-Fusaro



Quick!

Can you name five things you learned on the beach this past summer? Reading this issue of the *Investigator* should jog your memory a bit! Talk over your favorite parts with your family!

The Jelly That Wasn’t a Jelly

Looking at them was like seeing diamonds scattered in the shoreline. They sparkled brilliantly in the wet sand as the sun caught them. There were thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, running the entire 1.5-mile length of Napatree Point Conservation Area. Shimmering, sparkling, a king’s riches lying on the sands, waiting to be picked up.

Trouble was, the moment they were picked up, it became obvious that these were as far from diamonds as you can get. The chains, the piles, the individuals quickly slipped through fingers. These were soft, gelatinous (jelly-like), and in some places there were so many that the journey from the sand to the water was a slick, slimy mess. So if they weren’t diamonds, what in the world were they? Baby jellyfish? And where had they come from? After calling on experts from the science community, the identity of the sparkling gobs came back: salps.

A salp is a harmless, plankton-like animal that can be found either as individuals or joined in chains or clusters similar to those in the pictures.

Two days later, the beach went from a nearly solid line of salps to none. What happened to them? In the intervening time, several factors had occurred that may have held an answer. First, the area (along with most of the state) had endured several inches of rain. Second, the occurrence coincided with a full (super) moon, which brings extreme tidal cycles. Third, the wind had changed direction. Finally, the previous day’s storms had brought heavy wave action and a likely change in currents. Where did they go? Even the scientists aren’t sure.

Thus, the mystery will only be partly solved. The diamonds sparkling in the sand were identified. How they got to Rhode Island’s shores and where they went afterward remains unknown. Climate change, food availability, chemical changes, happenstance – there are simply too many variables to be certain. Sometimes the correct answer is: we don’t know!



Photos by Hugh Markey