



THE WATCH HILL CONSERVATOR
222 Watch Hill Road
Watch Hill, Rhode Island 02891

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THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2010 VOL. 3 NO. 1 WATCH HILL, R.I.

MARIAN CRUGER COFFIN

Marian Cruger Coffin (1876-1957) was one of a small number of women landscape architects during the early days of that profession. She completed the landscape design program at MIT in 1904 and trained with Boston landscape designer Guy Lowell before opening her own practice in New York, having had difficulty finding a position in traditionally male-dominated firms. One of her most important commissions was for her friend and cousin Henry Francis du Pont; together, they worked on his *Winterthur* estate gardens for thirty years (1928-1957). Through the du Ponts, Coffin gained other commissions and, as her reputation grew, established a base of well-known patrons, including Childs Frick (Roslyn, N.Y.), Edward F. Hutton and Marjorie Merriweather Post (at *Hillwood*, in Brookville, N.Y.), and Marshall Field (at *Caumsett*, in Lloyd Neck, N.Y.). These country house landscape and garden commissions are among the more than fifty estate projects Coffin designed from the mid-Atlantic to New England. Coffin is also known for several municipal and institutional commissions, including the landscape of the University of Delaware, the New York Botanical Garden, and the harbor-front park in Watch Hill Village (1936).



In 1921, Coffin purchased a summer home, *Wendover*, on East Hills Road in Watch Hill, and continued to refine and expand her gardens there until her death in 1957. The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission report, “Historic Landscapes of Rhode Island” (2001), describes the gardens of *Wendover* as “Coffin at her best,” and “one of the most interesting and intact in Watch Hill. This site, moreover, is Rhode Island’s only pre-1950 landscape architect’s home.”

Nearby, on Watch Hill Road near Winnapaug Road, Coffin designed extensive and complex gardens for Kathleen and Malcolm B. Anderson beginning in 1946. With paths and walkways meandering through naturalized rhododendron and azaleas, this garden is similar in plan to Coffin’s design for *Winterthur*.

In its efforts to preserve the historic character of Watch Hill, the Conservancy seeks to learn more about the architects and landscape designers who worked here. As in other resort communities, social and business connections played a role in securing commissions, but connections are not always clear or obvious. Many questions regarding Coffin and her work remain unanswered: who, for instance, introduced Coffin to Watch Hill in the first place? Research is on-going as we seek to learn more about this important aspect of Watch Hill’s unique history.

Marian Coffin at *Wendover* (left and above)
Photos courtesy The Winterthur Library; Winterthur Archives



Photos, Julia Royster

THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY
222 Watch Hill Road
Watch Hill, Rhode Island 02891
(401) 348-6540

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For information about community events, lectures, concerts, nature walks, educational programs for children, and others, see the Conservancy’s website at www.thewatchhillconservancy.org.

The Watch Hill Conservator
Joan Youngken, *Contributing Editor*
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COASTAL PONDS & GLOBAL WARMING

Less dramatic than the ocean, the small coastal ponds and wetlands of New England are nonetheless vital features in the region’s cultural and natural history, and, as scientists are now beginning to emphasize, in its future as well. Formed eons ago by glacial action and the rise and fall and wash-over of ocean waters, their delicate ecological balance is in constant flux as a consequence of major storms, pollution, changing wildlife populations, and other factors.

The health of ponds and marshes, large or small, is a function of their *resilience*, or ability to recover from sudden or extreme change, or to adapt to less abrupt change. Climate change, even over a prolonged period of time, can alter an ecosystem drastically, compromising its value as a natural or cultural resource. Rising sea levels, exacerbated by major storms and erosion, can, abruptly or over time, cause over-salination of ponds and marshes, altering or destroying natural habitat and rendering the area inhospitable for migrating birds and wildlife. Gradually rising water temperatures can upset the balance between predator and prey and between fish and their food; healthy ponds can become choked marshes that can no longer support a balanced system. The prognosis for our ponds is not good if the current rate of climate change continues.



But these same systems, on the one hand so vulnerable to trauma, may actually help to mitigate the devastating effects of climate change. Dan Laffoley, marine vice chairman of the World Commission on Protected Areas at the International Union for Conservation of Nature maintains that “to save the planet, [we must] save the seas.” Writing in the *New York Times* (December 27, 2009), he reminds readers of the importance of the ocean and coastal waters, including ponds and marshes, as carbon sinks, i.e. systems that absorb and store carbon dioxide, which otherwise traps heat and contributes to global warming.

“Sea-grass meadows,” he explains, “which flourish in shallow coastal waters, account for 15 per cent of the ocean’s total carbon storage, and underwater forests of kelp store huge amounts of carbon, just as forests do on land... Worldwide, coastal habitats are being lost because of human activity...It is now clear that such degradation has not only affected the livelihoods and well-being of more than two billion people dependent on coastal ecosystems for food, it has also reduced the capacity of those ecosystems to store carbon.”

Laffoley concludes by suggesting that conservation and preservation of oceans and coastal wetlands both help humans and other creatures to adapt to global climate change, and help to mitigate the damage in the first place by reducing greenhouse gases. His recommendation? “Set aside parts of the coast and sea where nature is allowed to thrive without undue human interference – and ...restore habitats like salt marshes...”, and, one might add, habitats like eel grass fields in coastal waters and ponds, something which is currently being undertaken in Little Narragansett Bay by Save the Bay, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and other groups.

The Watch Hill Conservancy supports this approach, which aligns with its stated goal: to promote the preservation of open space and our natural environment, including our coastal waters and beaches, dunes, fresh water ponds, wetlands, inland waterways, woodlands, and fields. It is imperative to preserve and protect these fragile ecosystems. Even as they are at great risk from climate change, they can, if properly stewarded, be part of the solution.



Photo, Richard C. Youngken

OCEAN HOUSE TO OPEN WITH PUBLIC TOURS AND DESIGNER SHOW HOUSE BENEFIT

Late spring will bring the much-anticipated opening of the Ocean House. Two initial public events are planned.

The public will be invited to tour the hotel – rooms and suites, spa, restaurants and lounges, meeting rooms, and more – on May 30, before guests arrive. This preview will satisfy the curiosity of all who have been watching the construction process and wondering what’s been going on beneath that bright yellow exterior.

In addition to seeing the hotel, in early June the public will have an opportunity to support a favorite charity by attending *Show Your Cause*, a Designer Show House at the hotel from June 8 – 22. Five of the hotel’s private residences, decorated by some of the top designers in the Northeast, will be featured on the tour, and a luncheon will be served in the hotel’s state-of-the-art restaurant, Seasons. All proceeds from ticket sales will be donated to the charity of choice designated by attendees. “We are pleased to announce this exciting charitable event as part of our grand opening season,” said Donna Simmons, Ocean House Real Estate Director. “*Show Your Cause* will enable us to give back to the local community and provide a special preview of the extraordinary residences, accommodations, and amenities at the Ocean House.” The *Conservator* encourages those who attend the event to specify that the proceeds from their tickets be donated to the Watch Hill Conservancy.



Illustration, courtesy Ocean House

Watch Hill Through Time

Chaplin B. Barnes



Name

Address

City/State/Zip

Daytime phone

I will pick up my book(s) at the office of The Watch Hill Conservancy, 222 Watch Hill Road, Westerly, Rhode Island. *For pickup please call 401 348-6540 in advance.*

Please mail my book(s) to the address listed above.

book(s) at \$80 each	\$
+7% sales tax for pickup/delivery in Rhode Island (\$5.60) per book	\$
+ shipping/handling fee of \$5 per book to be mailed	\$
Total Due	\$

Payment is enclosed. Please make check payable to *The Watch Hill Conservancy*.

Please bill my credit card account: __MasterCard__ VISA

Name on card

Account No. Exp. Security code (last 3 digits on signature strip)

Signature

Billing address (if different from above mailing address)

Please mail order forms & payments to: The Watch Hill Conservancy, 222 Watch Hill Road, Westerly, Rhode Island 02891, or fax order (with credit card information) to: 401 348-6541.

Watch Hill Style

Richard C. Youngken



Name

Address

City/State/Zip

Daytime phone

I will pick up my book(s) at the office of The Watch Hill Conservancy, 222 Watch Hill Road, Westerly, Rhode Island. *For pickup please call 401 348-6540 in advance.*

Please mail my book(s) to the address listed above.

book(s) at \$25 each (Call for orders of 25 or more books)	\$
+7% sales tax for pickup/delivery in Rhode Island (\$1.75) per book	\$
+ shipping/handling fee of \$3 per book to be mailed	\$
Total Due	\$

Payment is enclosed. Please make check payable to *The Watch Hill Conservancy*.

Please bill my credit card account: __MasterCard__ VISA

Name on card

Account No. Exp. Security code (last 3 digits on signature strip)

Signature

Billing address (if different from above mailing address)

MEMBERSHIP FORM

The Watch Hill Conservancy is a not-for-profit organization. Your membership supports the protection of the natural and cultural resources of Watch Hill, a variety of programs, and educational publications, including this newsletter.

Member name: _____

Preferred mailing address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

INDIVIDUAL: \$25
No: ____ Total: \$ _____

BUSINESS: \$75
No: ____ Total: \$ _____

FAMILY: \$100
No: ____ Total: \$ _____

SUPPORTER: \$250 - \$499
No: ____ Total: \$ _____

SPONSOR: \$500 - \$999
No: ____ Total: \$ _____

PATRON: \$1,000 - \$2,499
No: ____ Total: \$ _____

BENEFACTOR: \$2,500 - \$5,000 or more
No: ____ Total: \$ _____

OTHER CONTRIBUTION Total: \$ _____

Mail to:
THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY
222 Watch Hill Road
Watch Hill, R.I. 02891

Please include names of family members 18 and under. If you are making gifts of memberships, please include the names and addresses of those to receive these gifts.



News & Notes

Underground Utility Project

Efforts on the part of the Conservancy and Watch Hill Fire District to advance the goal of burying utility wires and removing poles in the Village of Watch Hill continue. As of fall 2009, the engineering studies for the project were completed. Since a major part of the project is located in a floodplain (Bay Street and Fort Road) and is therefore under the jurisdiction of the RI Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), the Conservancy applied to the CRMC for its approval. Meanwhile the Conservancy is exploring funding opportunities for the next phase of the project, i.e., construction. With encouragement from key state offices, they are focusing on federal funds which may be available to mitigate hazards in an area notably vulnerable to storm damage and flooding.

Lighthouse Museum

The Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers Association will open a new, expanded museum in the summer of 2010, moving from the former Oil Building to the newly-renovated Foghorn/Electrical Building. The larger building will be a better home for the Museum's exhibits, particularly the original Fresnel lens. Details of the opening will be available in the spring.



Photo, Richard C. Youngken

Watch Hill Yacht Club Cabanas

This past fall saw the removal of the old WHYC cabana complex from Napatree Beach. Building committee member Harvey C. DeMovick III reports that the wreckers removed the old structure fairly easily. Removal of the asbestos is a significant relief. In the event of a severe coastal storm, the entire complex was at risk of disintegrating, sending literally tons of hazardous debris into the harbor and onto Bay Street. As of publication, the new pilings (nearly 200) will be in place and construction will be starting on the decking. Completion of the new cabanas is scheduled for late this spring.



Photo, Richard C. Youngken

Save the Date(s)

Napatree Beach Clean-up

Saturday morning, April 3, 9:00 a.m. – noon. Interested volunteers should contact napatreenaturalist@live.com for more information.

Conservancy's Summer Celebration

The 2010 annual benefit for the Conservancy will take place on Friday, June 25th, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. at the The Misquamicut Club Beach Club, Fort Road (Napatree Point), Watch Hill. In this spectacular setting, the party celebrates the beginning of summer, Napatree, the sea, and the sunset. With cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, live and silent auctions, the party is the first and one of the most popular events on the Watch Hill summer calendar. To receive a Save-the-Date card, please contact the Conservancy at 401.348.6540.

Annual Meeting

The 2010 Annual Meeting of the Conservancy will take place Saturday, August 14th, at 10 a.m., at The Misquamicut Club (Golf Club), 60 Ocean View Highway, Watch Hill. Prentice K. Stout, retired Marine Education Specialist at URI's Graduate School of Oceanography, noted lecturer and the author of the highly-regarded history and natural history of Rhode Island's Point Judith Pond and the Harbor of Refuge, *A Place of Quiet Waters*, will be the speaker. The recipient of the 2000 Distinguished Naturalist Award of the Rhode Island Natural History Survey, Stout will focus his remarks on the ecology of the coastal ponds and the shoreline. The meeting is open to members and the public.

Events of interest (conferences and workshops)

- Rhode Island Land and Water Conservation Summit. Saturday, March 27, at the URI Memorial Union. Join leaders of community-based conservation organizations and local governments for a day of workshops and discussions. For details see www.landandwaterpartnership.org.

- Rhode Island Natural History Survey Conference: Emerging Threats to Amphibian Conservation in New England (and potential management responses). Friday, April 9, 2010, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Quonset O Club, North Kingstown, R.I. For more information see www.rinhs.org.

- Rhode Island Historic Preservation Conference. Saturday, April 24th, Little Compton and Tiverton. This year's theme: "Preservation is Local" – featuring the issues, initiatives, and successes for community preservation projects. For details, see www.preservation.ri.gov/conference

Piping Plover and Least Tern Census 2009

A December report from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which operates its Napatree and East Beach plover conservation programs under Memoranda of Understanding with the Watch Hill Fire District, the Watch Hill Conservancy, and other beach owners, reveals the two Watch Hill beaches as the most active and productive of piping plover sites monitored in the state in 2009. Twenty-two pairs of the federally threatened piping plovers nested on East Beach and fledged 53 chicks there; on Napatree, 10 pairs nested and fledged 16 chicks. The totals for sites monitored in Rhode were 69 nesting pairs and 105 chicks fledged.

Wendy Green, Wildlife Biologist with the US Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service in Charlestown, credits the educational programs of the Conservancy and Fire District with much of the success on Napatree. "The combined efforts of the naturalists educating the public and helping to enforce leash laws have made a big difference. The ten nesting pairs out there in 2009 was the first time on record that there were over six pairs nesting on Napatree. There is a large population right next door at East Beach in Watch Hill that could have easily expanded over [into that area]. The productivity out there this year was excellent and that is a tribute to everyone's hard work."

Nesting pairs of state threatened least terns, which are also monitored by the Service, dropped from 193 in 2008 to 124 at sites throughout the state monitored in 2009, with East Beach attracting 71 nesting pairs and fledging 31 chicks, and Napatree attracting 7 nesting pairs and fledging 1 chick. Together East Beach and Napatree accounted for 32 of the 35 least tern chicks fledged at Rhode Island sites in 2009.

The Conservancy is committed to supporting the Fish and Wildlife Service's efforts to recover the piping plover and least tern populations and to increase their productivity. Your support of our educational programs has a direct impact on the wildlife population of Watch Hill. Thank you!



Photo, Julia Royster



Photo, Wendy Green, Wildlife Biologist

SCHOLARS TAKE NOTE

Architectural historians have long studied the "cottage" architecture of New England's coastal resort communities, from Long Island Sound to Bar Harbor. Following the publication in June 2009 of *Watch Hill Style*, the Conservancy's primer on the unique character of Watch Hill's summer cottages, they have taken notice of this previously under-studied community. In August 2009, a small group of preservationists and historians from the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Mass., came to Watch Hill for a lecture by Richard Youngken and a brief tour of the Village. In early June of this year, Richard Guy Wilson, Director of the Victorian Society in America, will include a brief stop in Watch Hill on his first-ever South County tour with the VSA, which holds an annual summer school in Newport.

Richard Youngken, architectural historian and author of *Watch Hill Style*, explains the interest on the part of other historians. "Watch Hill is a unique concentration of late 19th and early 20th century styles: Craftsman, Shingle Style, and Colonial revival, often integrated into a single summer house. Historians are looking more and more at these styles as they try to learn more about that period's social culture, architecture, and architects and landscape designers. Watch Hill is a largely intact enclave with remarkably well-preserved examples of those styles."



Photos, Deb Stallwood

EAST BEACH ASSOCIATION BIN REMOVAL PROGRAM

GEORGE W. MARKHAM

The East Beach Association (EBA) is phasing out the trash bins at East Beach. Since the shift to a pack-in/pack-out approach to rubbish management was initiated only mid-summer 2009, there have been limited opportunities to evaluate its success, but some very positive aspects are worth reporting. Most notably, in addition to enthusiastic support for this unusual approach to conservation on the part of the Conservancy, Improvement Society, and Fire District, EBA has received overwhelming support from the Westerly Police Department in its commitment to enforce the litter ordinance and support the EBA's efforts.

The bin removal program centers on the EBA's efforts to spearhead a large-scale shift in the way visitors view their role in maintaining East Beach. To do this the EBA strives to educate using various methods of communication, primarily face-to-face discussion, in an attempt to invoke a sense of stewardship in all visitors. When similar programs have been implemented in other public spaces across the country, such an approach, combined with enforcement, has been shown to be the most effective method to change the way individuals see their role in maintaining a public good.

Due to some of the confusion surrounding such a counter-intuitive approach as choosing to solve a litter problem by removing trash bins, the EBA has honed an educational message outlining the issue, and trained its staff to deliver it to the thousands of beach-goers so the reasons for this change are made clear.

It is easy to imagine some of the resistance that EBA staff encounters in their late-day interaction with hot, sunburned visitors being told they can't leave their rubbish on the beach. Yet after hearing the staff diplomatically deliver their carefully-crafted message, most visitors are willing to comply (albeit, some begrudgingly). Recognizing that such a change can put a damper on an idyllic day at the beach, the EBA is ready to make accommodations during this interim period as visitors get used to the new rules. The staff also uses this interaction to provide information that will help beachgoers understand the need for the change, and to suggest alternative methods of wrapping food to make it easier to "pack out".

Phase-out will continue through the next two summers and, barring any problems, be permanent by the summer of 2011. The EBA will concentrate on staffing the access points during peak hours to ensure all visitors have been made aware of this change.

While ever-hopeful that programs such as these may someday make organizations like the EBA obsolete, the Association is sadly aware that there will always be a need for its custodial services to ensure the level of cleanliness that all expect.

EBA is confident that the successful outcome of this program will have a significant impact that will reach far beyond East Beach. Adopting a sense of stewardship for those public spaces we love is too important to leave to benefactors, civic groups, and other agencies. It is, ultimately, everyone's responsibility.

George W. Markham is president of the East Beach Association.



Photos, Richard C. Youngken



Westerly Comprehensive Plan

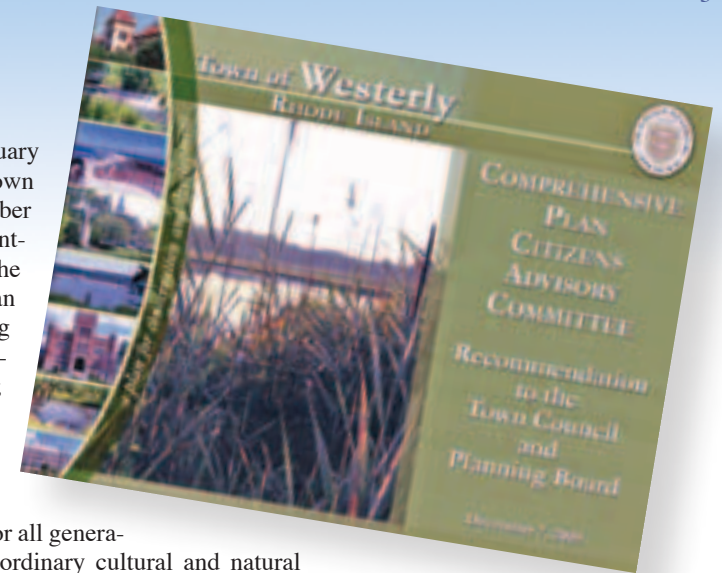
Westerly's new draft Comprehensive Plan (see *Conservator*, February 2009) was completed in November 2009 and presented to the Westerly Town Council and the Westerly Planning Board at a special joint session on December 7, 2009. In preparation over more than two years by the Town Council-appointed Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee, the new Plan is the Town's first since 1992. As required by law, the new Comprehensive Plan addresses all aspects of future development in the Town, under goals relating to natural resources; transportation strategies and assets; economic development; housing; infrastructure; character and heritage; resort community; institutions; and regional solutions. The Plan also includes 57 actions proposed to implement the goals over the first five years of the fifteen-year Plan. As noted in the Introduction to the Plan, it "...strives first and foremost to achieve an appropriate balance between conservation and development." The Plan's stated Vision is "...to preserve Westerly's quality of life for all generations as a safe and friendly community with a distinctive heritage, extraordinary cultural and natural resources, and fiscally-sound government." The Conservancy played a role in the preparation of the Plan through its five-year strategic plan, *Watch Hill Vision 2012*, prepared in 2007 for submission to the Plan process. The Conservancy's Chaplin B. Barnes serves as a member of the Comprehensive Plan Committee.

Key elements of the Plan are its emphasis on preservation of the Town's unique character and heritage, including open space and natural resources; its commitment to limit commercial sprawl and to reverse the effects of existing sprawl; its focus on redevelopment/revitalization of commercial/industrial districts and residential neighborhoods; and its support for the development of Westerly's historic districts (Watch Hill being one) in accordance with superior design that reflects their historic character. In connection with the latter goal, the Plan specifically encourages the enactment of design standards for historic districts similar to those adopted for the Village of Watch Hill.

Preparation of the Plan involved the active participation of some 700 Westerly residents, in public meetings and workshops, focus groups, letters, email messages and phone calls, and a community survey. Under state law adoption of the Plan by the Town requires favorable action by both the Planning Board and the Town Council. The Planning Board met January 19th and the Town Council February 8th. Both approved the Plan unanimously, with very minor suggested changes. The Plan is now in effect, except as to any provisions requiring State action. The Plan will now be submitted to the Rhode Island Statewide Planning office for its approval. Within 18 months of the adoption of the Plan by the Town, the Town must conform its zoning ordinance to the new Plan.

Readers can access the Plan and related documents in hard copy at various locations throughout the Town (Town Hall, Library, Fire District offices, etc.) as well as on the Town's website, <http://westerly.govoffice.com/>. Included in the available documentation are the December 2009 power point presentation to the Town Council, the draft Plan itself, and two appendices which support the Plan with important background information and documentation. [CBB]

Cover credit, Town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan, December 2009



NAPATREE INVESTIGATORS: BACK ON THE BEACH THIS SUMMER

Summer 2010 will mark the fourth year in a row that naturalists with the Watch Hill Conservancy have taken youngsters out onto Napatree Point as part of its popular education program. The Investigators are children ages eight to sixteen with an interest in learning about the amazing marine environment that makes up Napatree. Programs are offered twice weekly, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, from July 6 – August 18. Each day consists of a morning session from 8:30 to 11:30 and an afternoon session from 12:30 to 3:30. Children are invited to sign up for one session or several. Watch for registration details in the next issue of the *Conservator*.

In addition, Saturday morning nature walks for adults and families will be conducted by naturalists Steve Brown and Hugh Markey, beginning on May 15th and running through the summer. The two-hour walks will start at the entrance to the Napatree Point Conservation Area at 9:00 a.m.

For further details about the Investigators, and information about spring programs and beach walks, contact napatreenaturalist@live.com.

Enclosed with this issue is the first issue of *The Napatree Investigator*, which was sent out last fall to the participants in the summer 2009 Napatree Investigators program. If you haven't already seen it, you may want to know about it. Dates for the 2010 program are July 6 – August 18. Please note and alert any children and their parents who you think might wish to participate. Full information, including a registration form, will be included in the June issue of the *Investigator*, which will be mailed with the June issue of the *Conservator*.

Photo, Julia Royster

