



THE WATCH HILL CONSERVATOR

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Watch Hill, Rhode Island 02891

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THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2011 VOL. 4 NO. 1 WATCH HILL, R.I.

Charles M. Royce: Catalyst for Change

As the first anniversary of the opening of the new Ocean House approaches, it seems appropriate to note that event and recognize the man behind the vision: fund manager and philanthropist Charles M. “Chuck” Royce, a summer resident of Watch Hill. His vision for the future of Westerly is both broad and deep, and includes enhanced cultural amenities, a broad and stable economic base, aesthetic improvements, higher employment, and increased vitality throughout the town. Can this vision become a reality? Look closely: it’s happening.

In this and the following pages, historic preservation planner Richard Youngken provides some background and context for Royce’s initiatives throughout the town, relating them to longstanding planning efforts on the part of the Town and other entities. A companion article reprints in part a personal and business profile of Royce, authored by Nancy Burns-Fusaro, which first appeared in the Westerly Sun on the eve of the public opening of the Ocean House.

In the world of significant urban revitalization projects, time and again it is the vision, financial backing, and leadership of one individual or a consortium of investors that serve as keys to implementation. Examples from nearby places include Walter Beinecke on Nantucket and Doris Duke in Newport. In both cases there were nay-sayers, disbelievers, critics, and those who felt left out or grew impatient, but Beinecke’s and Duke’s perseverance led to astonishing results nonetheless. Beinecke changed Nantucket’s tourism direction from low-paying with high environmental impact to high-paying and beneficial. Duke saved the heart of Newport’s colonial city – its residential neighborhoods – making the City by the Sea a living, breathing historical area for visitors and residents alike to enjoy. Both visionaries saw investment potential and economic development as key ingredients in saving the places people love, and acted quickly, strategically, to save what needed saving, including core buildings and anchor institutions. Each took the bull by the horns, proceeding to act on his or her convictions and the advice of a team of knowledgeable experts, knowing that government agencies, while in support, may not be able to act quickly and decisively. Closer to home, beloved Wilcox Park is the inspired result of Harriet Wilcox’s foresight over one hundred years ago when she said “The people [of Westerly] shall have a park.”

Chuck Royce is such a visionary and financial contributor to Westerly. He and his associates have shown, through prudent and strategic contributions, that their conviction that downtown Westerly is a place worth saving – a thought expressed by others including professional planners, community activists, and government leaders – is well-founded. Revitalized, downtown can bring back substantial and sustainable economic vitality: jobs, cultural amenities, and a desirable place in which to live and work. Royce continues to contribute in many ways: assisting with institutional capital campaigns, assisting in securing loans from other investors, and imparting confidence to move forward, even in these economic times. In fact one could argue that this *is* the time to invest in Westerly’s future. There are additional economic spin-offs as well throughout the town, including a significant number of new jobs.

Recently Royce spoke about his role in Westerly’s revitalization: “I do what I do in Westerly because it is a very special place, and I do the things I do with the hope to make it even better.” As with Beinecke, Duke, and Wilcox, this comes from the heart, not the wallet.



Photo Richard Youngken

THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY

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Watch Hill, Rhode Island 02891
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For information about community events, lectures, concerts, nature walks, educational programs for children, and others, see the Conservancy’s website below.

www.thewatchhillconservancy.org

Utilities Project Update

The first phase of the Conservancy’s utility undergrounding project is complete. The poles and wires are down from the Merry-Go-Round, through Larkin Square and all the way down Fort Road to the Misquamicut Club Beach Club. Planning for Phase 2 (which includes Bay Street and Larkin Road) is also complete, with regulatory approvals in hand. The Conservancy is gearing up for construction of the next phase (placing the primary conduit lines underneath the roadway) in conjunction with the Town’s storm drainage project. The projected timeframe for this next stage of work is October ’11 through April ’12.

Ruven Liebhaber

Project Development Manager

Photo Richard Youngken



Saving the Ocean House was a community interest before Royce invested in that property. Even though the historic building could not support the extensive renovations that would have been required to meet 21st-century building codes and address parking issues, Royce and his team realized that it was the sense of place and the feel of the old hotel that were the essential ingredients that needed to be retained. He and his team have demonstrated through the hotel’s reconstruction that they can produce remarkable and inspiring results. In 2010, preservation leaders from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and from around the state met in Watch Hill and applauded Royce’s efforts, recognizing that even though the old hotel had to come down, the new Ocean House retains its iconic memory and preserves its pride of place in the fabric of Watch Hill. (The investment of the Royce Family Fund and Lang Wheeler in saving the Weekapaug Inn is in a similar mode, although the existing inn’s condition allows it to be rehabilitated with the assistance of historic preservation tax credits).

Downtown Westerly has seen decades of citizen planning and redevelopment brainstorming initiated by the Downtown Westerly-Pawcatuck Joint Development Task Force. In two successive community-driven plans (1985 and 1998), keys to successful revitalization were identified: investments in preserving historic buildings; rehabilitating upper level apartments; creating artist loft spaces; enhancing Wilcox Park; providing parking, and creating a River Walk along both sides of the Pawcatuck River. Together, they would increase visitation and the commensurate economic activity, and broaden the tax base. In retrospect, we can see that many improvements, large and small, have taken place based upon these ideas, thanks to Main Street managers, downtown property owners, business leaders, town government, and state legislators. The activities of Royce and the Westerly Land Trust seek to implement and build upon these initiatives.



Royce does not stand alone in his enthusiasm for or commitment to downtown Westerly. By redirecting plans to include recreational activities for the gateway area, such as a public skating rink and farmers’ market, he and his team want to ensure that future Main Street redevelopment will complement existing commercial uses on High Street. Without control and clean-up of the area, however, nothing would happen except continuation of strip development blight.

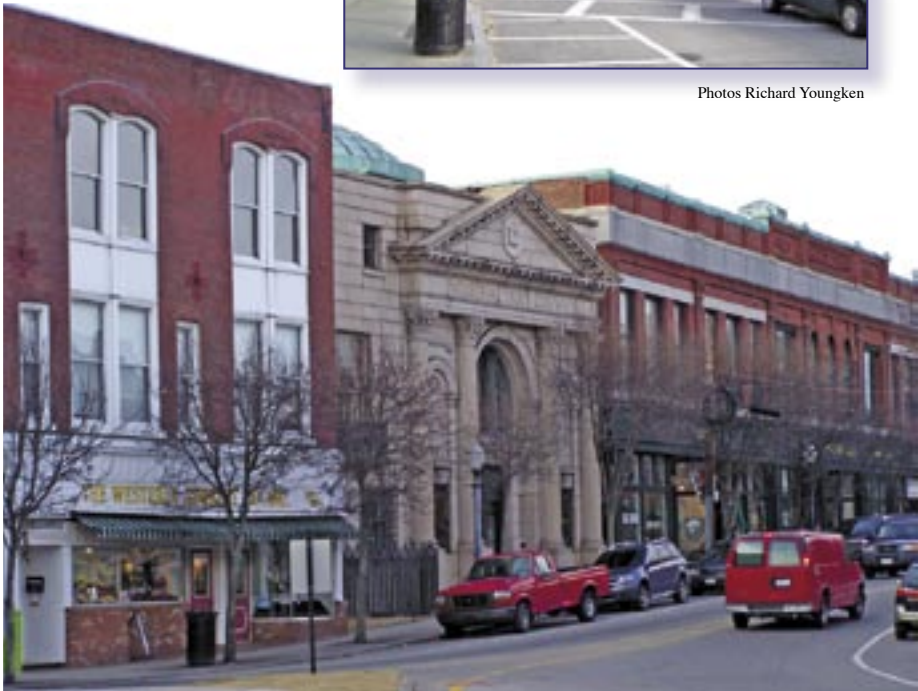
Royce and the Westerly Land Trust have taken on the strategic role of buying key properties as they have become available, in order to make possible the implementation of these and other planning concepts. Town leaders and community supporters have applauded this initiative as the right first step in helping to lead downtown Westerly toward a beneficial economic future – toward implementation of a vision that has been enthusiastically approved and adopted by a wide spectrum of the community over several decades. They realize that a Harriet Wilcox or a Chuck Royce may happen on the scene only once in a lifetime.

Westerly’s regeneration is slow and steady; a return to good health takes time. There are many small diverse projects, either completed or underway, funded wholly or in part by Royce, that are hardly noticeable, yet together will yield tremendous benefits. These include renovations to the downtown United Theater and adjacent Cox building for performing arts, recording studio, and gallery space; rehabilitation of the old Industrial Trust Bank as a community gallery and meeting space; remediation of hazardous waste at locations on Main Street and removal of ugly gas station canopies and billboards in this gateway area; saving the Bridge restaurant building from collapse into the Pawcatuck River; renovation of the Knickerbocker Café building opposite the train station, and supporting the downtown YMCA’s capital campaign. There are more. The Westerly Land Trust is playing a key role in moving things forward with several of these projects, supported by the Royce Family Fund.

The current KeepSpace planning effort, sponsored by the Westerly Land Trust and Rhode Island Housing and the focus of community meetings, is building upon past revitalization and planning efforts. Watch Hill Conservancy Executive Director and member of the Town’s Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee Chaplin Barnes commented, “The new Comprehensive Plan has incorporated the KeepSpace principles, formally identified Westerly’s Urban Service Area, and has set policies for its redevelopment and adaptive re-use.” Implementation may be easier this time because there is more to work with: acquired parcels ready for redevelopment, key revitalized buildings, and potential public grant funds. RCY



Photos Richard Youngken



NEWS AND NOTES

Save the Dates

Saturday, June 25, 6-9 p.m. The Watch Hill Conservancy’s *Celebration of Summer 2011*, at the Misquamicut Club Beach Club, Fort Road, Watch Hill

Saturday, August 13, Annual Meeting of the Watch Hill Conservancy, at the Misquamicut Club Golf Club, Ocean View Highway, Watch Hill

Events of Interest

Saturday, March 26, 2011, 7:45 a.m.-4:30 p.m., 8th Annual Rhode Island Land & Water Conservation Summit: “Working Together to Protect Our Communities”. URI Memorial Union, Kingston Campus

This day-long conference provides Watershed Council, Land Trust, and Conservation Commission board members, staff, volunteers, Municipal Commission members and others interested in land and watershed conservation with the information, skills, and connections they need to be effective. Choose from over 25 workshops offered during the Summit; network with RI conservation leaders; visit exhibits; learn how to be more successful. For details, see Landandwaterpartnership.org

Thursday, April 28, 2011, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Rhode Island Natural History Survey Conference 2011: The Ecology of Rhode Island: Science and Management of Salt Ponds and Coastal Lagoons. Quonset O Club, North Kingston

This year, RINHS’s annual ecology conference focuses on southern New England’s salt ponds and coastal lagoons. These special landscapes help characterize coastal Rhode Island and other parts of southern New England. They form a complex boundary between sea and land and are loci of dynamic natural processes, diverse habitats, and intense pressure from human activity. See RINHS.org for more information.

Saturday, April 30, The 26th Annual RI Statewide Historic Preservation Conference: Destination Block Island: Tourism and Community in an Historic Place. Block Island. See Preservation.ri.gov/conference for details

NAPATREE NOTES

For those who are fortunate enough to live in the Napatree area, Labor Day is not the end of things to do at the beach. Because this pristine 1 ½-mile-long barrier beach juts into the ocean, it is a critical stop for migrating birds, butterflies, and dragonflies. Autumn visitors are treated to spectacular weather and the opportunity to observe swaths of monarchs, swallows, and a wide variety of raptors. Winter is equally beautiful with its many different views.



Seasonal clean-ups are vital to protecting the fragile ecology of Napatree. On September 24, 2010 the Washington Trust Company came to Napatree with a wonderful, enthusiastic crew which removed over 1040 pounds of trash from Napatree! Their help was much appreciated.

Now, mid-winter, we are thinking of summer and planning our activities for the 2011 season.

March 19th: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service will conduct a piping plover training session at the Kettle Pond Visitor Center in the Ninigret Wildlife Refuge, 50 Bend Road in Charlestown. If you are interested in learning more about this threatened species, please join us for an interesting morning. The training is free and open to the public. For more information, call 364-9124.

April 2nd, 9 a.m. to noon: Annual beach cleanup. Volunteers welcome! We will meet at the entrance by the Misquamicut Club Beach Club. Plastic gloves, trash bags, and refreshments will be provided. Rain date: April 9th.

Starting in mid-April, we begin our horse-shoe crab monitoring and tagging in connection with *Project Limulus*. Dates: April 15-19, May 1-5, May 15-19, May 30-June 3, June 13-17, June 29-July 3, and July 13-17. We need 4-6 volunteers per session. Please email the naturalists at Napatreenaturalist@live.com for more information.

June 4th, 9-11 a.m. Saturday morning walks begin. Explore Napatree Point Conservation area with our Naturalists. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the entrance to Napatree by the Misquamicut Beach Club gate. This free program runs every Saturday through Labor Day weekend, weather permitting.

July 5th: Investigator program begins for ages 7-14. Under the direction of Stephen Brown, Science Chair at Pine Point School, and assisted by teachers Hugh Markey and Tim Twohig, the children explore the wonders of Napatree. Each Tuesday or Wednesday session offers the choice of a morning or afternoon meeting. Children can attend once or every week. Registration is required as this popular program fills up. Contact the naturalists at Napatreenaturalist@live.com after May 31st to register.

Watch for our June issue for special walks and programs!

Reminder! According to the Westerly town ordinance, from May 2 until Labor Day, dogs are allowed on Napatree only from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m., and must be leashed.

Jan Sassi

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: \$ _____

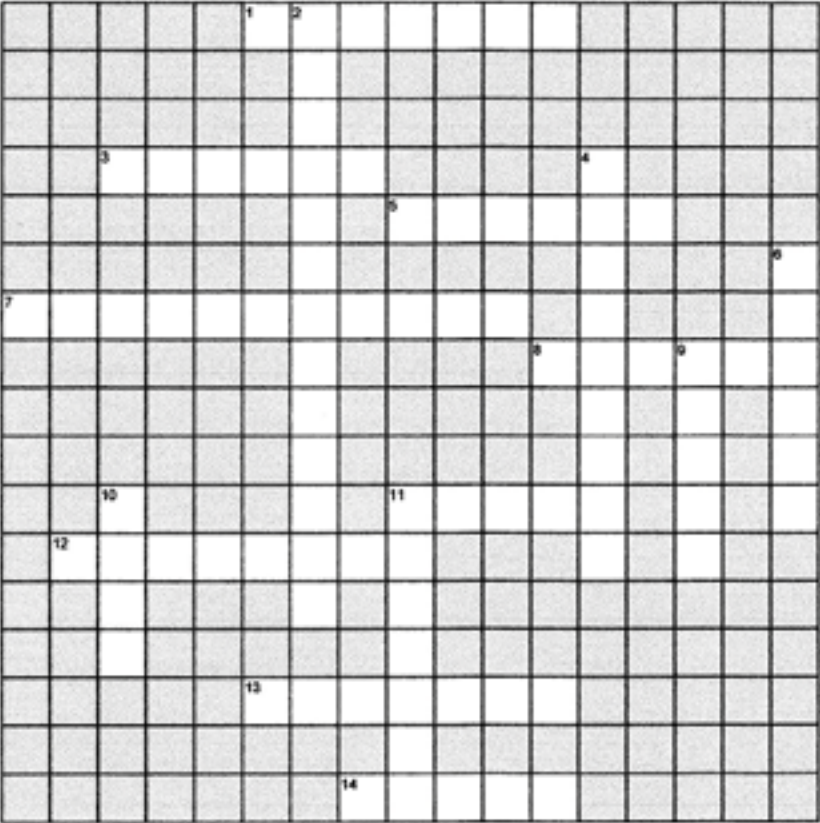
OTHER CONTRIBUTION Total: \$ _____

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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.



The Puzzler
Hugh Markey



EclipseCrossword.com

Across

- 1. A mussel is this type of shellfish, which means it has two tubes to bring salt water in and out of its body.
- 3. The star of this month's Critter Corner!
- 5. This is the kind of bird The Watch Hill Conservancy uses as its logo.
- 7. These chemicals, used in lawns, can hurt mussel colonies.
- 8. Blue mussels cling to rocks with _____ threads.
- 11. Mussels cling to these and other hard objects.
- 12. You're invited to come out here this summer!
- 13. These were the big metal objects divers found.
- 14. He was in charge of the ship. Oliver Hazard_____.

Down

- 2. Kids coming for summer beach walks are called these!
- 4. Combs, moons, sea nettles, and lion's manes are all these floating animals.



The Napatree Investigator
Editor—Hugh Markey

The Watch Hill Conservancy and the Watch Hill Fire District operate summer educational programs at the Napatree Point Conservation Area in Watch Hill. The Napatree Investigator is a publication of the Watch Hill Conservancy.

The Watch Hill Conservancy
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Websites: www.thewatchhillconservancy.org
www.napatreenaturalist@live.com



Photos Richard Youngken



A PASSION FOR
PHILANTHROPY

Reprinted in part from the *Westerly Sun*, May 9, 2010, with permission

Chuck Royce is standing on the enormous front porch of the Ocean House overlooking a sweeping view of Little Narragansett Bay. The Atlantic Ocean, a deep cobalt blue on this sunny May morning, sparkles behind him in the distance. Four years, \$146 million and countless hours of negotiating, planning, and collaborating have been invested here; another of his dreams has just been realized.

Construction of the new Ocean House – its core a near-replica of its namesake, the storied, grand yellow hotel with a 136-year history, sitting atop one of the most spectacular spots on the East Coast - is, at last, complete. Now it's on to what Royce calls "the fun part" - ensuring that the hotel becomes the world's next five-star resort, and promoting it as "a wonderful community resource."

"We desire and expect the community to use the hotel," Royce said in a telephone interview earlier this month. Royce, enigmatic and soft-spoken, is difficult to pin down and a tough man to interview. The father of four, grandfather of three and stepfather of two, he is reluctant to talk about himself. He deftly shifts conversation from himself to other people, or to one of his many projects. He does enjoy talking about Westerly, however, and about the potential he sees in this coastal community. "As I've gotten to know Westerly," he says, "I've grown more and more attached."

Royce is a dreamer and visionary, say those close to him. He likes to imagine vibrant communities bursting with culture - music, art, history, theater, film - and full of people realizing their potential.

"He's not only a dreamer, but he wants people to be part of his dreams," says Nicholas C. Moore, an attorney and partner in Bluff Avenue LLC. "He always wants the community to be involved."

Community is a word used frequently by Royce, and a word that comes up often when friends, associates and family members discuss Royce and his accomplishments.

"The Ocean House is really all about community," says Avondale resident William McKendree, vice president of the Westerly Land Trust and an expert in organizational design and strategy development. "When Chuck sees things that might enhance a sense of community, he fosters them."

Known locally as the bow-tied Wall Street financier in the fedora - the man behind the Ocean House, the Weekapaug Inn, the restoration of the yacht *Aphrodite* and the purchase of a number of downtown buildings - Royce is a philanthropist and preservationist whose altruism benefits educational and cultural institutions from Providence to Manhattan.

Royce grew up in Washington, D.C., and graduated from Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School. He holds a bachelor's degree from Brown University and an MBA from Columbia School of Business. He served as director of research at the brokerage firm of Scheinman, Hochstin, Trotta, and then as a security analyst at Blair & Co. In 1973, at age 33, he took over the Pennsylvania Mutual Fund.

A Greenwich, Conn. resident, Royce first visited Westerly with friends in the 1980s and has been hooked ever since. The area reminds him of the beaches of his youth along the coast of Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore. He bought his first house in Weekapaug, his next on Larkin Road in Watch Hill, just down the street from the Ocean House.

In Westerly, he is a major benefactor of the Westerly Land Trust, whose mission is "to preserve and enhance Westerly's sense of place." "There would be no land trust without Chuck Royce," says Westerly attorney Thomas J. Liguori, Jr., who has known Royce since 2004 when he began working for him on the Ocean House project. Royce has been instrumental in the Land Trust's purchase of several parcels along the Pawcatuck River, the Industrial Trust Building on High Street, and the Montgomery Ward/Cox Building and the United Theater building on Canal Street. He is passionate about the revitalization of downtown Westerly and sees the restoration of the United as a key to the downtown's revival.

He has had great success with a similar project - the restoration of the Avon Theatre in Stamford, Conn. An icon in downtown Stamford from the time it opened in 1939, the theater was closed in 1999. Royce and his wife Deborah, a former actress, purchased the Stamford building in 2001. After a meticulous renovation, they reopened it to much acclaim in 2004 as a not-for-profit art house cinema that shows independent and foreign films and Hollywood classics, and hosts educational programs. Louisa Greene, the theater's director of development and marketing, says the theater has gained a national reputation and has contributed to an economic boom in downtown Stamford where outdoor cafes and art galleries now line the city's once empty Bedford Street.

"Chuck definitely has a love of Westerly," says attorney Moore, who spent his childhood summers on East Beach and several others working at the old Ocean House. Moore first met Royce in 2004, when Moore was serving as legal counsel for a group of property owners opposed to Royce's original Ocean House plans. The two men developed a rapport during a summer full of land easement negotiations. Eventually, Royce offered Moore a position with his company and the young attorney jumped at the chance. "We are blessed to have him in Westerly," Moore says. "He is a remarkable listener and is able to pierce through nonsense until he comes to the heart of an issue. It's truly one of his gifts - his ability to get to the heart of the matter, to the core."

Tom Liguori recalls how concerned Royce became when he learned that a Connecticut-based company had purchased the Ocean House from its previous owners and planned to tear it down and build luxury homes on the site. Royce, says Liguori, recognized the importance of preserving the iconic Watch Hill landmark and the surrounding views as the symbol of a seaside community and he set out to save it. When it became clear that saving the crumbling edifice was impossible, Royce grew determined to rebuild it. At their second meeting, says Liguori, Royce outlined specific goals and objectives. The first goal was to make the property available as a community resource. The second goal was the preservation of the land and views.

"Working for Chuck is like going to graduate school every day," says Liguori. "He's also very liberal in the credit he gives to others. He's never boastful and tends to tell about the great job others are doing. He quietly supports many local and regional institutions, projects, and programs but prefers to keep his role out of the limelight."

"He's also highly regarded in preservation and arts communities," adds Liguori, "for the quality of everything he does."

Nancy Burns-Fusaro



Photo Richard Youngken

Watch Hill in the Town of Westerly

WHERE DOES WATCH HILL FIT IN?

Gearing up for the November 2010 elections, the Public Works Committee of the Westerly Town Council and the Town Manager proposed to the Council that the voters be asked to approve a \$6.5 million bond issue for a variety of important infrastructure and safety improvement projects to be undertaken at various locations throughout the town – from Canal Street to Bradford to Misquamicut and Watch Hill – as well as general resurfacing of roads and sidewalk repairs.

In Watch Hill, it was proposed that funding be applied to a Bay Street drainage project (long planned by the Town) together with the undergrounding of utilities (part of the Conservancy’s \$7 million project in Watch Hill Village) as a single Bay Street infrastructure improvement project. Coordination of the two efforts had been contemplated by both the Town and the Conservancy for several years, long before there was any question of Town funds being available to help with the undergrounding. Undertaking the two projects together would result in economies for both entities and in the reduction of disruption to traffic on Bay Street. (Undergrounding of utilities was also proposed for Canal Street.) No specific amounts of funding were committed to any of the projects included in the bond proposal, but a list of priorities was established, together with estimated costs. It was suggested that the Bay Street drainage project (Town priority number 3) might receive \$1.8 million, while the Bay Street undergrounding (Town priority number 9) might receive matching funds of \$250,000.

In early October, an editorial appeared in the *Westerly Sun*, objecting to any allocation of public funds for utility undergrounding, and an article followed, questioning how a plan originally announced by the Conservancy (2008) to privately fund utility undergrounding in Watch Hill should now have become part of a taxpayer-funded bond. Economic conditions, of course, had drastically changed over two years, and involving the Conservancy, which had already raised \$1.1 of private funding, would, as the Town Manager had pointed out, result in qualifying the Town’s Bay Street drainage project for federal funding. Anonymous communications to the *Sun*’s blog denounced any support for the undergrounding project and charged that the Conservancy and the Watch Hill Fire District appeared “quick to put their hands out for our tax dollars, while at the same time they do everything in their power to limit our access to Watch Hill (parking, beaches, and Napatree).” Numerous letters and comments indicated the intention of writers to vote against the bond if it contained any money for the Watch Hill undergrounding project.

Not wishing to be responsible for the failure of a bond that it saw as important for the Town, the Conservancy offered to withdraw its project from the list of those scheduled to receive funding, and the project was dropped from the bond. In the end, the bond passed with the overwhelming support of the voters.



Photo Richard Youngken



Watch Hill is inextricably bound to the Town of which it is a part.

Even without any funding from the bond issue, the Conservancy is still hoping to cooperate with the Town on the Bay Street project (thus saving money for both the Conservancy and the Town), and the Conservancy will be seeking funds from other sources to make that cooperation possible.

But apart from the practical matter of how the project is ultimately undertaken and paid for, the controversy that led to the Conservancy’s having to withdraw from the bond leaves a bad taste in many mouths.

It is disturbing to think that the possibility that a small portion of funds (\$250,000 out of \$6.5 million) raised by a town bond might be spent on a project benefiting a Town-owned street in one particular part of the town could arouse such a storm of hostility. That there appears to have been a concerted effort (if only by a vocal few) to oppose the recommendations of the Town Council and Town Manager and their plans to make a modest contribution to improving the infrastructure of an important part of town, as if Watch Hill were not even part of Westerly, makes these events especially troubling.

Watch Hill is inextricably bound to the Town of which it is a part. It is a significant source of tax revenue for the Town; its residents support town-wide not-for-profit organizations through generous donations; the Village’s various businesses provide jobs and generate economic activity; and in fact Watch Hill’s parking, beaches, and other amenities are fully accessible to all citizens of the town.

The Conservancy believes that there needs to be a wider understanding of these realities.

Chaplin B. Barnes, Executive Director, Watch Hill Conservancy

RULES OF THE (OFF) ROAD

Stepping onto East Beach on a winter’s day, one is taken aback by the deep circles of tire tracks, displaced sand, and tire ruts running parallel to the dunes, only a few yards from the crest, well above the median high water mark. While vehicles are allowed on this beach, something is amiss here.

Westerly is one of the few towns in Rhode Island that allow private vehicles to drive on beaches in the off-season (between Labor Day and Memorial Day). Both the Town and the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council regulate vehicular traffic on both barrier and coastal beaches, for several good reasons. First and most importantly, sand cover is critical to the stability of the dunes and beaches. If it is significantly disturbed, its ability to safeguard the dunes and their wildlife – both resident and transient – is severely compromised. Public safety for all beach users, including drivers, is critical as well.

Town and state laws allow the public to use the beach, as long as regulations are observed and common courtesy is exercised. Regrettably, some drivers do neither. “If you go to East Beach in September or October, you go at your peril,” laments one local resident. “I left my towel on the beach while I went for a swim, and came back to find someone had driven over it. That’s annoying, but it’s about more than that. It’s downright dangerous for cars and trucks to be on the beach where people are walking or swimming.”



So far, there have been no serious accidents or fatalities on East Beach. But is it only a question of time?

Florida beaches have long-standing traditions of beach driving that date to the early 20th century. While drivers and other beachgoers have maintained a largely peaceful co-existence, the deaths in 2010 of two four-year-old children – one at New Smyrna and one at Daytona – have prompted a campaign to end beach driving.

In Rhode Island, fishermen and others have legal vehicular access to some beaches, but they are expected to observe the regulations about where and when they can drive, and to observe speed limits (5 mph near pedestrians). Stay clear of the dunes; CRMC regulations prohibit driving within 75 feet of the dune crest. Respect private property, and stay below the mean high water mark, which is actually further seaward than the mean high tide line. Fill in ruts and tracks; displaced sand speeds the rate of erosion and threatens the stability of the dunes.

For more information about driving on Rhode Island beaches, see the Coastal Resources Management Council website at CRMC.ri.gov, select *Topics*, then *Off-Road Vehicles*. To report violations, contact the Town of Westerly at 348-2506 or the CRMC at 783-3370. JY



Photos Richard Youngken



MOORINGS OR ANCHORAGE IN THE KITCHEN?

The Westerly Harbor Management Commission has been working to create a first-ever Harbor Management Plan for the Town, directing some thought toward providing moorings in the Kitchen area of Little Narragansett Bay instead of allowing the area to remain solely an anchorage.

Coastal cruising guides routinely list the protected and free public anchorage off the northern side of Napatree, known to many as the Kitchen, as one of only a few boat anchorages in Long Island or Fishers Island Sounds. Most other places are encumbered with moorings that are either privately owned or rented by commercial interests.

Why is it important to retain free public anchorages, wherever they exist? First, they are rare assets in the popular and expensive world of boating. In the last several decades, with the popularity of fiberglass and the availability of boats to a wider segment of the population, boating has become increasingly popular, bringing with it a need for access, dockage, and moorage along the coast. Moorings, which are fixed to the bottom with heavy anchors and chain and remain in place, even in severe storms, safely secure boats in crowded harbors, hence their popularity. A boat can be left at a mooring unattended for long periods of time, provided it is securely attached and the mooring line does not chafe through. Moorings are less expensive to rent or keep than marina slips and docks. They do, however, require on-land parking and dinghy storage nearby. Obviously, for fragile Napatree, crowded Fort Road, and the harbor area, providing parking for additional moorings would be a problem.

Anchors, in contrast, are used by boaters for shorter stays such as picnics and overnighting, particularly if they are cruising along the coast and spending a night or two at destinations along the way. The Kitchen has been such a place for many years. Visitors to Napatree often arrive from small boats anchored there. Visiting yachts may anchor for the night before moving on along the coast, instead of picking up a rental mooring in Watch Hill Harbor or a guest mooring from the Yacht Club.



Chart courtesy NOAA

The CRMC-approved management plan for Little Narragansett Bay strongly recommends against any moorings off Napatree in preference for a transient anchorage. It also recommends special care and littoral buffers to protect Napatree’s sensitive environmental features and endangered species habitat. The Conservancy and the Fire District, owners of more than 90% of Napatree, concur, but not all of Napatree is in their hands. There are a few remaining private lots which have littoral rights to moorings and these rights must be recognized.

All of Napatree west of the end of Fort Road is designated as a conservation area. As its stewards, the Conservancy and the Fire District continue to enhance their program of monitoring this area, measuring water quality, and educating all visitors, including transient boaters, about its sensitive environment. Together with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, they continue to urge the Westerly Harbor Management Commission to establish, as required by CRMC, proper buffer zones to protect Napatree wildlife, shellfish, and eel grass beds from any mooring fields or anchorage areas the Commission may seek to create.

RCY

FEMA Flood Maps Redrawn

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) responded to the devastating spring 2010 floods in Rhode Island by offering disaster recovery funds and assistance. President Obama declared the entire state of Rhode Island a disaster area. In Westerly, the Pawcatuck River had overflowed its banks and inundated the north end of town, including an electrical substation and many homes and businesses. Large sections of town were without power for days, and two tons of debris washed downstream into the Bay and onto Napatree. This was not a coastal storm, but a week of deluging rain on a saturated water table. Nonetheless, it prompted FEMA and its state counterpart, the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA), to redraft the state’s flood hazard maps to more accurately depict potential flood zones.

How does this affect coastal flood planning in Watch Hill? Most significantly, the new flood lines for storm surge have been drawn further inland, effectively placing all of Bay Street in a danger zone. On Napatree, the velocity zone for ocean storm surge effectively covers the entire sweep of the barrier beach, emphasizing its vulnerability. Not only does the barrier beach itself take a beating in severe storms, but under certain conditions tides can wash over it and into the harbor, putting all of Bay Street at risk. With the redrawn flood lines in this area, state and federal agencies can modify building and zoning regulations to take into account this significant change in the potential impact of storm surges and hurricane-driven floods. The Watch Hill Conservancy, the Watch Hill Fire District, and the Town of Westerly are already taking steps to mitigate flood damage, as evidenced in efforts to upgrade the infrastructure of Bay Street and to bury utility lines along Fort Road and Bay Street.

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Coastal Fellows 2010

Katherine “Kathy” Hallal and Kathryn “Kate” James were the two Coastal Fellows (University of Rhode Island interns) chosen by the Watch Hill Conservancy to participate in the 2010 Napatree Conservation Program. Working diligently from May through November, they attended to their specialized research projects while helping to educate the public out on the Napatree Point beaches and assist in various ongoing Conservancy efforts. The work of the Fellows, along with a semester-long class last fall, culminated in individual scientific posters showcased at a Celebration and Ceremony held on December 10, 2010 in URI’s Center for Biotechnology and Life Sciences.

Kate, at the behest of the Conservancy, concentrated on non-native invasive flora during her stint. She conducted a comprehensive field inventory of all plants on the eastern end of Napatree, ultimately identifying three invasives (rugosa rose, Asiatic bittersweet, and tree of heaven), one aggressive species (common cocklebur), and one plant considered a state “species of concern” (seabeach sandwort). Each new plant species was thoroughly catalogued using GPS and subsequently mapped. This map, in conjunction with background research into techniques for monitoring and controlling invasives at similarly sensitive barrier beach ecosystems, has provided the Conservancy with baseline management recommendations to help maintain and restore Napatree’s natural and balanced beauty.

Kathy was able to merge a passion of hers, marine science, with a more unfamiliar endeavor. She surveyed spawning Atlantic horseshoe crabs from April to July along Little Narragansett Bay on Napatree, and performed weekly and monthly water quality sampling and testing off the shore of Napatree in the Bay through November. There is a strong nationwide effort, particularly along the eastern seaboard, to track horseshoe crab populations. Their numbers are beginning to dwindle as they’re harvested, largely without regulations, for bait as well as for the biomedical industry. Kathy collected data and compared it to previous years in an attempt to discover any trends between unusually low crab numbers and temporal and environmental variables such as time of day, dissolved oxygen, or wind speed. Although gaps in data prevented identification of any definitive patterns, mornings, westerly winds, and full moon tides all exhibit strong potential for correlation with locally depleted spawning populations. Her findings will aid the Conservancy in future monitoring of Napatree’s horseshoe crabs and in the larger movement to safeguard these unique creatures.

Kate James using GPS to catalogue rosa rugosa



Map created 2010 by Juliana Berry



Kathy Hallel sampling water to assess quality. Photo Juliana Berry

Map credit: Juliana Berry and Kate James
Map created 2010 by Juliana Berry



The public, media, family, and friends were invited to honor Kate’s and Kathy’s achievements at the December event, and hundreds attended. They had the opportunity to educate a whole new set of people on the exceptional and irreplaceable spit of land we call Napatree, home to distinctive flora, fauna, and natural communities nestled in a single mile and a half stretch.

Juliana Berry



Kathy Hallal and Kate James studying horseshoe crabs. Photo Brianne Neptin



The Wreck of the *REVENGE*

Duncan and Ware's classic *Cruising Guide to the New England Coast* warns: "If you plan to...negotiate Watch Hill Passage, we would like to alert the helmsman. You will note the sideways set of strong current through this area – southward on the ebb, northward on the flood. If not aware of these conditions and the possibility of the buoys being towed under, one can inadvertently be swept towards the rocks and reefs bordering the passage."

According to the *Eldredge Tide and Pilot Book*, a bible for New England sailors, tides here can reach 2.5 knots. When combined with the turbulence and chop from a strong southwest breeze and the narrowness of the passage between numerous reefs and exposed rocks, these tides can make navigating the area a hair-raising experience. Only the most knowledgeable sailor should attempt it, even with the high-tech navigational aids available today.

Historically, with no such technology as LORAN, GPS, or computer-generated charts, passage through these waters was even more treacherous. Chap Barnes mentions in *Watch Hill Through Time* that from the Colonial period until 2005 (when his book was published by the Conservancy) "more than one hundred vessels are reported to have been wrecked at Watch Hill or on its surrounding reefs." A light beacon was erected on the Watch Hill Point to warn of danger in Colonial times and was replaced by a wood-framed lighthouse in 1806. This was not enough, however, to save the USS *Revenge*, under the command of young Oliver Hazard Perry, from disaster on January 9, 1811, when, in early morning fog, the pilot steered the 70' schooner onto Watch Hill Reef.

Charles C. Buffum Jr., a Westerly native and Perry descendant, announced early this winter that he and fellow divers had found remnants of the *Revenge*, including an anchor, several cannon, and canister shot, all of which had been dumped overboard in a vain attempt to lighten the ship when it ran aground on the reef. Given the conditions, it's remarkable that they were able to find anything; significant tidal surging, heavy bottom growth, and turbidity hampered their efforts. Buffum and his team invested five years of slack tide, cold-season diving in their search. They found that nothing is left of the wooden hull due to shallow water exposure, turbulence, storms, and wave action, but it is likely that iron fastenings remain hidden among the rocks.

Revenge anchor

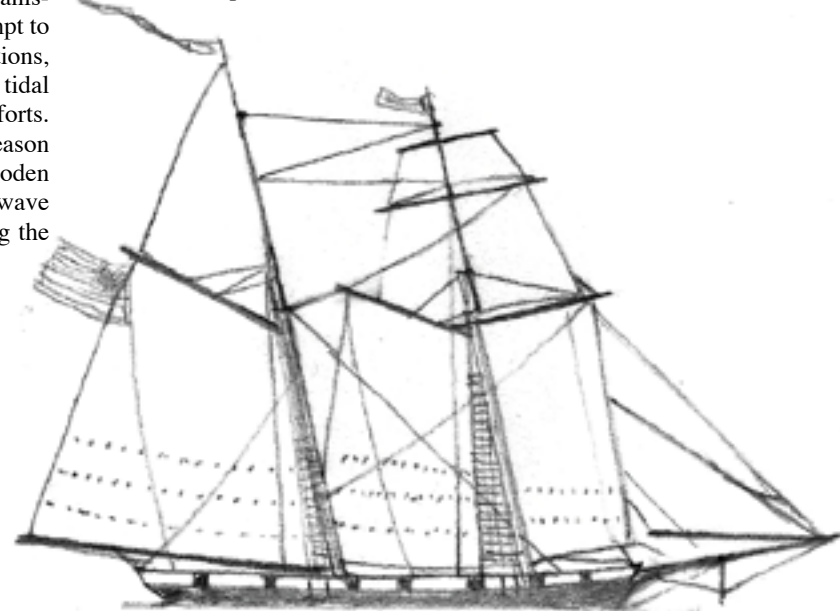


Buffum announced his discovery in January at a well-attended press conference at the Ocean House, striking for its location within sight of the reef and the demise of Perry's ship and for the number of off-season residents attending (more than 200!). He pointed out that Perry was exonerated of responsibility at the subsequent court martial, the pilot taking the blame. The disaster, however, adversely affected Perry's prospects for a sea-going Navy career, likely leading him to accept an inland command on Lake Erie. This led, in turn, to Perry's victory at the Battle of Lake Erie in 1813 and his subsequent status as a national hero: he was the first U.S. naval officer of the War of 1812 to defeat an entire British squadron.

Buffum and his colleagues underscored their discovery of the *Revenge* with a note on the extreme diving conditions of the reefs around Watch Hill Point, the number of wrecks in one area that can make it difficult to distinguish any findings, and the best practices of underwater archeology. These wrecks fall variously under the jurisdiction of the State of Rhode Island, and, if, like the *Revenge*, they are Navy ships, the U.S. Navy. Foreign governments may also have a claim if the craft sailed under another country's naval flag. Maritime law is complex, but all agree: wrecks are protected by law. Photography and video photography are permitted; moving or removing any artifacts is prohibited, without the requisite approvals.

Underwater archeology presents peculiar challenges for the historic preservationist. How do we protect these sites, some of which may contain human remains? How do we extract important information without disturbing the site? How do we interpret that which can't be seen? In keeping with its commitment to the protection of historic sites and structures, the *Conservator* will follow this story and inform its readers of further developments.

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Revenge cannon



Photos Tom Packer

Drawing Richard Youngken



NAPATREE INVESTIGATOR NEWSLETTER

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Shipwrecks Off Napatree

When Napatree Investigators join the Watch Hill Conservancy Naturalists on our summer explorations, we usually concentrate on the animals and plants found along the shore. But did you know that there are lots of shipwrecks just a short distance from where we walk? Over this past winter, divers announced that they found the remains of a ship that sank two hundred years ago off Napatree Point! The schooner, known as *Revenge*, was under the command of Rhode Island naval hero Oliver Hazard Perry and went down in January, 1811.

Salt water and marine critters such as shipworms have long since chewed away the wooden parts of the boat, and all that remains is metal. As of this writing, divers have found six cannons, an anchor, and other metal objects they feel are probably from the *Revenge*. The cannons are covered in barnacles and blue mussels (see "Critter Corner"), but it's easy to see they are cannons.

The *Revenge* ran aground in a fog while investigating the Rhode Island coast. All of the sailors and crew survived, and Oliver Hazard Perry went on to play an important role in the U.S. defeat of the British in the War of 1812. The *Revenge* is just one of hundreds of ships that fell victim to the reefs that are found just off Napatree Point. So next time you find yourself on a beach walk with the Investigators, remember that you're standing just a short distance from naval history!



Cannon photo Tom Packer

Critter Corner: The Blue Mussel

Whether you're an Investigator exploring the rocks on the ocean side of Napatree Point or a diver looking over the 1811 wreck known as *Revenge*, chances are you've come across the blue mussel clinging to a hard surface. This is a blue and black shellfish that can be as tiny as your baby fingernail or as big as your thumb. The blue mussel is a **bivalve**, which means it has two tubes that bring water into and out of its body. When it does that, the blue mussel helps clean the water, taking in bacteria and other materials that can be harmful to the environment. This process makes it a **filter feeder**.

Colonies of blue mussels cling to rocks with the help of very strong string-like features called byssal thread. This is squeezed out by a gland and hardens when it hits to the water.

Did You Know?

- You can eat mussels! They are often served in restaurants.
- Mussel populations sometimes suffer from fertilizers that wash into the water from lawns and fields near the shore.
- If you pull mussels off from the rocks to look at them, they will die. Please look, but don't touch!