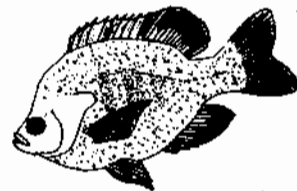




Issue 14 - December, 2004

*Maureen Whelan & Robin Wildman, Acting Chairs  
Sue Fisher, Treasurer  
Ginny Leslie, Executive Director & Newsletter Editor*



## **200-year-old Water Rights Still in Effect Today**

By Richard Youngken

On Thursday, September 16<sup>th</sup>, we welcomed Dr. Patrick Malone, one of Rhode Island's most gifted and well-known industrial historians as our first guest speaker in our Fall 2004 Lecture and Outdoor Activity Series. In a thought-provoking talk with slides, Dr. Malone focused on the fascinating history of mill development in Rhode Island while giving us some thoughts to ponder about the Hazard, Rodman and Robinson investments in the Saugatucket River watershed.

Mill developers often acquired property upstream from their mill sites to stabilize and increase the capacity of water for enhanced factory production. Often rights were acquired to property, old dams enlarged or a new dam built and more land flooded. This happened with many of Rhode Island's rivers, including the Saugatucket and as a result, we are left with a complex environmental legacy. In the Saugatucket, not only were Peace Dale Pond, Indian Lake and Indian Run Reservoir created as water reservoirs for the mills in Peace Dale, but so too were the three ponds of the Asa Pond complex. So-called Wakefield Pond, along which the new River Walkway is being built, was created by an earlier dam for small grist and saw mills in the 1700's; it was enlarged to create additional power for the textile mills in Wakefield. Ownership of these flooded areas is likely to rest with those who own the mill buildings; the waterpower rights were important aspects of the mill property to transfer with ownership of the mill buildings.

many achievements is the North South Trail Island from Gloucester to the Ocean.



*Lack of public access to Peace Dale Pond is a legacy of the mill era. The water in the pond, and the land underneath it, belong to the owners of the Peace Dale mill complex, just as they did almost 200 years ago.*

**Bob O'Neil, now the manager of the Lily Pads office building on Peace Dale Pond, was interviewed by Maureen Whelan.**

**Q: How long have you lived on the Saugatucket River?**

I've lived in Peace Dale my whole life but not originally on the river. I've been on the river since the early 40's. I guess I know the pond above the dam the best.

**Q: What are your memories of the river?**

I grew up playing in and around Peace Dale Pond. We used to swim and fish in it all the time. I remember the ice house. There was a conveyor belt running from the river to the third floor to store the ice. They somehow insulated it with straw and even in the summer they would have ice there.

As kids we used to cut through the Hazard estate to get to the river. The pine forest, which is looking terrible now, used to be a wonderful place to play. The trees were so tall and thick that it was always dark in there; hardly any sunlight got through.

There was a gravelly beach near the Costanzas' peninsula and we'd swim there a lot. At Lily Pads, we'd swing out from a rope on a tree branch. I remember that there used to be a sanitarium on one of the peninsulas on the pond. On another there was a Boy Scout camp.

Don Allen's father used to rent out row boats from their small dock. Don still lives on North Road.

**Q: Why did you move to this area?**

I've been in Peace Dale forever. For a while we were on Kingston Road near our oil company. Later we moved to the Oaks, a great place to grow up.

**Q: What do you do on/near the river?**

I currently manage the Lily Pads office building. It's one of the original five or six Hazard homes and it's a wonderful old building. My tenants love it.

**Q: What do you like best about the river?**

The river is a great asset for this town. As a mill town, life used to revolve around the river. I hope people appreciate it. It seems so peaceful and beautiful.

**Q: What part of the river do you enjoy the most? Why?**

Peace Dale is my favorite, of course. But I also would love to see the reservoir in Old Mountain Field restored. That used to be the town swimming area. They'd give swimming lessons there. And the town would drain it and clean it every year. But the original dump upstream had a terrible impact on the water quality.

**Q: Do you have concerns or questions about the river?**

I'd like to know about the water quality in the pond, and in that reservoir. I agree that there should be more access to the river but I worry about the trash and pollution that it could bring. I also worry about safety and liability.

**Q: If you could change one thing about the river, what would it be?**

I'd like to see the improvements continue. I think it's great that there is an organization now that focuses on the river. I hope we can make the river more "useable". When town sewers came in the '70's, everything improved.

**Q: What do you hear people say about the river?**

That it's not as clean as it was originally, but it's not as bad as it was when we were little and it would run different colors depending on the dye job at the mills. I remember the awful smell sometimes, when the raw wool was being washed. River Bend used to be the site of the grease plant and the wool used to be put outside to dry. People used to say that it was here in Peace Dale that some uses for lanolin were discovered.

**Q: What wildlife have you seen on the river?**

Turtles, ducks, deer, geese, water snakes, eels. The otters were the best, sliding along the ice. We used to call the otter the Peace Dale Nessie, after someone said they had seen a small "seal-like" creature in the water. And those wild turkeys on North Road now aren't really so wild. They ran up to me in my parking lot as if begging for food.

**Q: What is your best "river story"?**

I heard that years ago long before the telephone companies were operating, Caroline Hazard had a phone line installed across the river to connect all the Hazard family homes. That must have been something.

## **75 Acres on Point Judith Pond Protected**

The South Kingstown Land Trust and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have purchased two adjoining parcels on the west side of Point Judith Pond. The two lots include mature oak forests, vernal pools, wooded wetlands and Whaley's Pots, a unique brackish inlet with high wildlife values. The 50-acre parcel purchased by the USF&WS will be managed as part of the John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge. Together, the purchases will provide valuable habitats for a wide variety of wildlife species, including shorebirds, migrating songbirds, wood frogs, and spotted salamanders.

Anne Howland, whose family owned the land for generations, said "We are very pleased and grateful that these lands and waters, which have meant so much to our family for so many years, will be preserved and kept intact for future generations.

A spokesman for the USF&WS commended U.S. Senators Lincoln Chafee and Jack Reed for their support. We salute the Service and the South Kingstown Land Trust for their years of efforts to protect this beautiful acreage.

## **South Kingstown receives grant to study run-off in Old Tower Hill Road area**

South Kingstown has approved a \$50,000 grant agreement with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management to explore ways to cut down on the pollution that flows into the River.

Most of the Saugatucket's water quality problems stem from pollutants that are washed into the River whenever it rains, including automotive fluids, road salt, pesticides and fertilizer, and litter. This grant will allow the Town to study ways to reduce the amount of pollutants from roads and parking lots in the Dale Carlia Corner area in Wakefield, one of the busiest intersections in the watershed.

For the last several months, the Coalition has been working with representatives from RIDEM, the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, the Southern Rhode Island Conservation District, and the Rivers Council to explore ways to alleviate some of the sources of non-point source pollution into the River. We commend the town for undertaking this important study and look forward to a cleaner River as a result.

## **They did it!**

### **Big blowdown removed from River**

For quite some time, canoeists and kayakers who explored the Saugatucket River upstream from Wakefield couldn't get past a large downed tree just before the Church Street bridge. But thanks to the amazing efforts of a very dedicated crew on an astonishingly wet and windy Saturday morning in September, this major obstacle was chain-sawed into pieces and removed from the River. It's now easy to paddle upstream into Peace Dale!

In addition to the huge trunk and several big branches and vines, the crew also helped remove a bicycle and quite a bit of litter from the river and its banks. So for the first time, the Saugatucket River was part of the International Coastal Clean-up held every year around the world.

Thanks go out to several University of Rhode Island students, Christine Allan and Carole Costanza of the Peace Dale Neighborhood Revitalization Committee, Charlie Obert of the Pawtuxet River Watershed Council, and the truly dedicated Joe Machowski, chain saw maestro. We also appreciate the shelter from the storm provided by our friends at Bay Self Storage.

We hope to hold a few "Paddle the Saugatucket" days in the spring from the new dock along the River Walkway in Wakefield. We hope you'll be able to join us and appreciate the efforts of this dedicated crew.



### **Welcome new members!**

As of this year, individuals, couples, families, businesses and organizations can JOIN the Coalition. We welcome the following new members who have sent in their dues since the last newsletter:

**Smallmouth Bass (\$100):** Joanne Costanza, Wildwood Outfitters

**Yellow Perch (\$50):** John Ferry, Joan Garceau

**Pickerels (\$25):** Sue Barker, Joel Dirlam, Iris Donnelly, Lora Harris and Scott Galczynski, Martha and Karl Hartman, Meg Kerr, Marilyn Malina, Carol and Jerry Pesch, Glen Ricci, Linda Steere

**Pumpkinseeds (\$10):** David Bruyere, Jeannette Gamache, Patricia Barrett



Wakefield, Rhode Island 02880

P.O. Box 209

SAUGATUCKET RIVER  
HERITAGE CORRIDOR  
COALITION

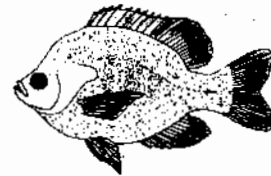
**membership form**

I am already a member. Here is my contribution for 2004.  
 Please add my name as a member of the Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my contribution for conservation  
of the Saugatucket River:

- \$10 Pumpkinseed
- \$25 Pickerel
- \$50 Yellow Perch
- \$100 Smallmouth Bass
- (Other) \$\_\_\_\_\_ Trout



All who care about the Saugatucket are welcome to join us at  
our monthly meetings at 313 Main Street, Suite B, Wakefield,  
the second Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m.

Please make checks payable to S.R.H.C.C.  
Mail to: P.O. Box 209, Wakefield, RI 02880.

I would like to help out with:

- River & Trail Cleanups
- River Access & Trail Development
- River Office Volunteer Staff
- Garden Planting & Care (Saugatucket Park)
- Education / Publicity / Exhibits / Displays
- Land Acquisition & Protection
- Grant Writing, Fundraising & Membership
- Self-Guided History/Ecology Tour Design
- Attending/Reporting on Relevant Town Meetings
- Mailing/Phoning /Database

Questions? Ideas? Call us at 782-0149  
or email [saugatucket@saugatucket.org](mailto:saugatucket@saugatucket.org)

Here are some other ways I can help (please specify):

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