

# Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition

## saugatucket river run

saugatucket  
river run

Winter  
2006

### *Student recommendations for better river water quality :*

- Use biodegradable river-friendly phosphate, nitrogen, and chemical-free products in and around your home when you can, and
- If possible, scoop up after your pets outside. Watch that your dogs do not poop near storm drains and the river bank. Use the park pet bags if available.

### *Inside this issue:*

Charles  
Sweet's  
memories

*This winter watch your mail (email) for our cabin fever programs!*

## School Children Monitor River Water Quality

River water quality testing has ignited local students' desire to learn and do more for the river! Since the school year has begun, students at Wakefield Elementary School have been learning about watershed stewardship.

Sharon Pavignano and Robin Wildman have been teaching students how to perform water quality tests for organics in the river. The students have tested the water four times since September and have entered their data on the web at:

[worldwatermonitoringday.org](http://worldwatermonitoringday.org)

Mrs. Wildman's 5<sup>th</sup> grade students are now teaching other students throughout the school how to perform the tests. They also discuss the importance of taking care of the Saugatucket River, which flows adjacent to the school grounds.

Here are the results of the student testing of the water, beneath the pedestrian bridge connecting the schoolyard to Main Street:

Fecal Coliform Bacteria (from animal and human feces)

All 4 tests came back POSITIVE (*that's not good!*)

pH (test for hydrogen ions, a reading of 6-8 is good)

#1 test= 7, #2 test= 6.5, #3 test= 7,

#4 test= 7.5

Phosphates ( from soaps and detergents)

#1 test= 1.0 part per million

#2 test= 1.0, #3 test= .5, #4 test= .5

*These are good results*

Nitrates ( from fertilizers and pesticides)

All results were zero parts per million

*These are good results*

Dissolved Oxygen (DO)

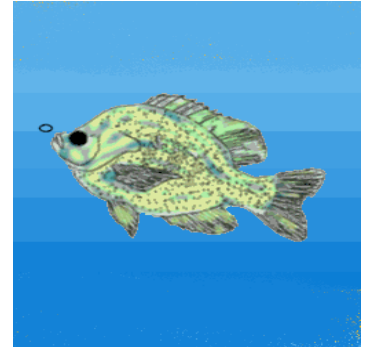
#1=6 parts per million, #2 test=5,

#3 test= 8, #4 test= 3

We are carefully watching the DO. If it dips below 3, it is *low and not good!*

Turbidity (water clarity)

*Good-excellent*



Based upon this testing, student recommendations are: use environmentally friendly products in and outside of your home and pick up after your pets when they go to the bathroom! Every little thing you can do will help the Saugatucket River come back! It has already come a great way back to better health.

**News Flash:** We have just received a generous grant from the GFWC Women's Club of South County for additional classroom supplies for water quality monitoring! And we are very thankful for their support.

## Fall Lecture Series, Membership Drive yields Results Email Addresses needed!

Our 2006 membership drive in November has yielded impressive results. We now are welcoming nearly a hundred new members and membership renewals to our roster and we have been steadily adding email addresses!

Thank you all, *including our generous event sponsors*, Rhode Island Foundation, RI Rivers Council, Ram Point Marina, Gates Insurance Agency, Wildwood Outfitters, Dove and Dis-

taff, Bird Watchers Nature View, Sosnowski Farm, Farmer's Daughter, Canterbury Farm, Karen Johnson, Munroe & Associates Architects, Wakefield Liquors, SK Land Trust, Camp Fuller, Dorothy Devine, Joanne Costanza, Julianna Ricci, and Richard Youngken for supporting our efforts in 2005 and we hope you will enjoy our programs in 2006.

This is our first email news letter and it is a trial to see if we can

reduce the costs of providing a printed newsletter and ease the burden of production and mailing. And we will welcome any comments, pro or con, via return mail or email. But we do need email addresses for this purpose. So if you receive this by post and wish to receive it via email in the future, please send us your email address. We promise that we will not share your email address.

# Saugatucket Memories: from Charles Sweet

In responding to a request from Maureen Whelan, here are some of my memories of living near the Saugatucket River and one of its tributaries.

The Saugatucket River is fed from several tributaries which include Saugatucket Pond (Peace Dale Pond), Indian Run Reservoir via Indian Run Brook, Indian Lake, California Jim's Pond, Asa Pond and Rocky Brook Reservoir, the pond beside the Peace Dale Grammar School plus several other small ponds. Other than the three drinking water-supply ponds in the tri-pond group (California Jim's, Asa and Rocky Brook), these ponds and lakes were man-made as mill water supplies for the Hazard mill in Peace Dale.

*“Like most older residents, I remember when the river water was brightly colored with the residue from the dyeing operation at the mill.”*

## **1. “How long have you lived/ worked on the Saugatucket River?”**

I never lived or worked on the Saugatucket River, but I have lived and worked very near it.

I was born on Columbia Street in Peace Dale, across the street from the Saugatucket. We moved to Spring Street when I was about two years old and lived there for twenty-one years. This property was originally owned by my great grandfather, Charles Sweet, and has been owned continuously since 1875 by either a Charles Sweet or his wife. I, Charles A., own it now and my mother, Mrs. Charles H., lives there. This property is right next to Indian Run Brook which empties past the end of the Village Green into the Saugatucket River near the Columbia Street bridge.

My wife and I have owned two properties, where Koolco, Inc. is located, for the past thirty years both of these prop-

erties border the Saugatucket River below the waterfall about one hundred fifty yards downstream from Main Street. We live at Silver Lake which is in the Saugatucket watershed.

## **2. “What are your memories of the river?”**

Like most older residents, I remember when the river water was brightly colored with the residue from the dyeing operation at the mill. The river was highly polluted until the municipal sewer system was installed during the nineteen seventies. Not only did waste products from the mill enter the river, but sewerage and street runoff also entered the river. Some of this sewerage came from quite a distance away through the storm sewer systems. Since the municipal sewer system was installed, the river water quality has vastly improved.

Around 1939 the Federal Government through the W.P.A. (Works Progress Administration) dredged the Saugatucket River from the bridge on Church Street in Peace Dale to the dam at Main Street in Wakefield. It needs to be dredged again, but I'm afraid that's impossible today.

Due to school overcrowding during 1941, part of the Neighborhood Guild was used for the seventh and eight grade grammar school class overflow students. During the summer in preparation for the fall classes, the town purchased desks for the classrooms. One day my cousin, Francis Sweet and I found the discarded heavy cardboard boxes, which the desks came in, on the ground outside the “Guild.” These boxes did not look like boxes to us...they looked like boats. We

took one each and launched them across the street in the Saugatucket where the River-Bend bridge is now located. We had a great time for about an hour, when our boats became a little soggy and were riding deeper in the water. That ended this excursion.

Another memory I have of the Saugatucket River is: during World War II, one of the locals, who had the rank of “General” bestowed on him by some other locals, frequently claimed that he observed German submarines in the river. Since he patrolled the Saugatucket during World War II looking for submarines, I would have thought the rank of Admiral would have been more appropriate. However everyone knew him as “General.”

We played in the “Brook” (Indian Run Brook), fished in it and caught fresh water eels in it. My brother, Ray caught many trout in this brook. This brook is fed from the Old Mountain Reservoir (aka Indian Run Reservoir, which we called “the reser.”) This pond was one of the backed up sources of water for the Hazard mill in Peace Dale, if needed, but was never used for that purpose. There are also two springs in Spring Woods feeding this brook. People in the area of Spring Woods regularly drew drinking water from one of the springs.

Saugatucket Pond, commonly Peace Dale Pond, was used as a reservoir for the Hazard (later M.T. Stevens) mill and after flowing through the mill property, it entered the Saugatucket River.



## Charles Sweet Continued

I do not know, but I would guess that the river was called the Saugatucket first and then when the pond was made, it was called Saugatucket Pond, and at some later date a larger area was designated as the Saugatucket Watershed. There are two outlets from Peace Dale pond. One is a channel with the water flow controlled by a valve in a gate house on the Hazard property (the Homestead) at the east end of the dam. The waterfall is the other outlet. There was always a wooden walkway with a hand-rail crossing over the falls. Buckeyes, which I think are Alewives, used to swim up over the falls to spawn in the pond each spring (and still do). During this event people would catch the Buckeyes as they were trying to go up the falls. Buckeyes used to be preserved in salt for later consumption. I remember Buckeyes on a stick stuck through their eyes, hanging at the A & P store on the Peace Dale Flats. This walkway was removed around 1980 due to potential liability to the property owner.

There were also two ice houses on the pond. One was called the double ice house and the other was the single ice house. I do not know why the names single and double, unless it was because the double was two stories high and the single was only one. I do not ever remember ice being stored in the single ice house, but I watched many times while ice was being cut and sent up the conveyor into the (double) ice house where it was stored for later use. Sawdust was spread between the layers of ice to keep them from freezing together. The blocks of ice were

about two feet by three feet by one foot thick and weighed about three hundred pounds each. We used the pond mostly for fishing and ice skating. My cousin Francis caught a thirty-five inch pickerel which we thought was a record, but we learned that the state record at that time was thirty-six inches. Many times during the winter there would be several hundred people, both adults and children, skating on the pond even at night. It was a very popular spot and the Hazards allowed people to pass through their property to get to the pond. I spent many happy hours there. The area at the north end of the pond was called Tug Bog. I read that it was called by that name for the peat (which was called tug) that was harvested, but this was before my time. My father always referred to the area as Tug Bog.

### 3. *“Why did you move to this area?”*

I did not move here, I was born here.

### 4. *“What did you do on or near the river?”*

I have described many of the things done on the river and its tributaries. In addition, I spent many hours on the Old Mountain Reservoir (Indian Run Reservoir), which we called “the reser.” In the summer, we took swimming lessons from the two swimming instructors, Margaret (Dixon) Dillman and John Joss. Lessons were given from beginners through junior lifesaving. During one winter, Margaret had a number of us perform in what was billed as an “ice-capade.”

This reservoir also had a dam with a sluiceway which could be

opened to let the water out of the pond to service the dam or clean the pond. This was done once that I can remember and I remember it well. When the pond was drained, there was only a stream about ten feet wide that remained. My cousin Francis and I fished there every chance we had while the pond was drained. We caught fish as fast as we could bait the hook. Our cats had a feast.

There was also an ice house at the southwest corner of the pond adjacent to the waterfall. I can remember ice being stored in this ice house, but I never saw it being cut from the pond. It was probably used to store the overflow from Peace Dale Pond.

### 5. *“What part of the river do you enjoy the most?”*

At age seventy-four, like a lot of things now, I am limited to the enjoyment of looking at the river, but I do enjoy that.

### 6. *“Do you have any concerns or questions about the river?”*

The river and its tributaries are filling up with junk and sediment. The Town used to have workers go along some of the brooks and clean out the fallen trees and accumulated junk, but this is not done any more (except by volunteers). When a tree falls in a brook or river and is left there, debris and sediment build up behind it. This causes the water upstream to spread out and the water flow downstream is reduced, which allows vegetation to grow encroaching on the brook or river. This in turn causes the brooks and the river to become narrower and consequently the normal velocity of the water flow is faster taking (cont. p4)



*“Many times during the winter there would be several hundred people, both adults and children, skating on the pond even at night.”*

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## Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition

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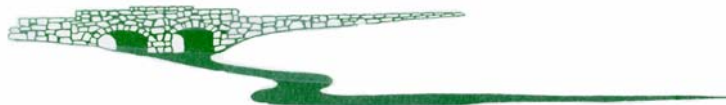
We're on the Web  
[www.saugatucket.org](http://www.saugatucket.org)

*Educating on the  
Saugatucket River  
Watershed.*

*Board members:  
Dorothy Devine  
Barbara Kilcup  
Geoffrey Marchant  
Glenn Ricci  
Maureen Whelan  
Robin Wildman  
Richard Youngken*

### Knock Knock Who's There?

*We are ready to hit the streets and welcome new residents to the watershed. We have been working to develop "welcome to the watershed" kits as a way to introduce people to the Saugatucket and how they may reduce impacts to water quality in their neighborhoods. Most of all we wish to point out great ways to see and recreate along the river. Should your neighborhood or organization like us to give a short presentation about the watershed. Let us know (leave a message on our phone 782-0149 or send a note) and our traveling volunteers will entertain with cool facts and exciting ways to enjoy the Saugatucket.*



### Reminder

It's not too late to renew your SRHCC membership! For those of you who have not sent in your membership renewals for 2006.

#### Membership Categories

Pumpkinseed	\$10.00	Yellow Perch	\$50.00
Pickereel	\$25.00	Smallmouth Bass	\$100.00
		Trout (other)	_____

Please send in your donation now! Help us celebrate the Saugatucket!

Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition  
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## Charles Sweet Continued

more sediment with it. All this sediment eventually ends up in Salt Pond, one of our great natural assets. The brook in the Village Green across from the Neighborhood Guild has been reduced in width to about three or four feet during dry periods, which allows bushes and vegetation to get a foothold in the stream bed. This used to be alleviated by the wood plank dam just before the Columbia Street bridge. Up to two planks could be inserted in two concrete slots to raise the level of the water in the brook passing through the Village Green by about sixteen inches, which discouraged vegetation growth and maintained the aesthetic look of the brook through the Village Green.

### 7. "If you could change one thing about the river, what would it be?"

I would like to see all of the junk, sediment and fallen trees removed.

### 8. "What do you hear people say about the river?"

Lately, it seems people are getting more interested in the Saugatucket again. I think it would be nice if the interest included the tributaries, because they are really part of the river. The Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition Newsletter has helped.

### 9. "What wildlife have you seen on the river?"

I have always seen ducks and geese on the river, however geese can be seen most anywhere now. During the time I was growing up in the area, the river did not have any fish in it, just snapping turtles and the Buckeyes each spring traveling up it to get to Saugatucket Pond.

### 10. "What is your best river story?"

I do not know what my best river story would be, but I have related several good ones here. I have mentioned the brook that passes

through the Village Green.

Before cars had automatic transmissions with "a park position," they had only the hand brake and the normal resistance of the wheels to turn when the manual transmission was left "in gear to keep the vehicle from rolling." Many people at that time did not engage the hand brake when parking the car. They just left the transmission in gear. Usually the resistance was enough so the car would not roll easily, however when the car was parked on an incline like the one from the Neighborhood Guild parking lot to the brook (Indian Run Brook) it sometimes would roll even though the transmission was engaged. During the twenty-one years I lived near the brook, I saw five cars that had rolled down the incline into the brook from the Guild parking lot. It usually took an hour for the wrecker to rescue each car.