



NARROW RIVER NOTES

Narrow River Preservation Association: Preserving the Narrow River and the Watershed

Spring 2004

17TH ANNUAL NARROW RIVER RUN CITIZENS BANK IS AGAIN THE PRESENTING SPONSOR

Help the Narrow River and the Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA) by running one of the few 10K races in New England! If 10 kilometers is a little more than you're ready for this early in the running season, you can still show your support for the River by entering one of two additional events. We will also be offering a 5K run and timed 5K walk in addition to our traditional 10K race along the River.

The courses run through the scenic Watershed and end at the Narragansett Town Beach, where buses will be on hand to take participants back to the Bay Campus after the Race. Since Middle Bridge is still closed, the route will be the same one we used last year.

Proceeds from the run will benefit NRPA's many programs, such as environmental preservation of the River and Watershed, educational programs, science fair awards, college scholarships, and the Narrow River Watershed Watch program.

The 17th annual Narrow River 10K Run/5K Run/5K Walk will be held on

2003 Narrow River Run

Saturday, May 8th. Citizens Bank is once again our presenting sponsor, and many South County businesses and individuals are contributing time, goods, and money to make this event a successful benefit for the River.

Registration for all events will be held at the Mosby Center on the URI Bay Campus, starting at 8:00 AM on May 8th. Participants in both 5K events will be bused to the start on West Bay Drive. The 10K run will begin at the Bay Campus.

Prizes will be given to the first male and female in each age category for 5K

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NARROW RIVER LOSES A BEST FRIEND

A Tribute To John Elder Dick

Middlebridge; November 11, 2003 — it's Veterans Day and another veteran has died, a man whose loss will be felt by all. John Elder Dick, the "Scribe of Middlebridge," passed away yesterday at his home in a room overlooking Middlebridge Road, where he could see his beloved Narrow River. Many knew him as the man who wrote wonderful stories about the area.

John was a long-time member of NRPA and served for a time on the Board of Directors. He wrote a series of historical articles for *Narrow River Notes* in the middle and late 1990s, helped other writers compile information for their projects, and was published in magazines and newspapers. His friends were the recipients of an annual Christmas poem enclosed with his card. Yes, John was a poet, as well as a writer, and the most knowledgeable person I knew about the history of South County. No matter where we drove he had a story — about a particular house, the street it was on, the area before it became housing developments, the families who owned the farms, and even what crops they grew.

Very many of you may have been fortunate enough to be one of his students studying English in the South Kingstown High School. If you were, you knew more about *Moby Dick* and author Herman Melville than any one else. He

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UPDATE ON WALMSLEY LANE DOCKS CRMC PROCESS MOVES SLOWLY FORWARD

No decision has yet been reached by the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) regarding the petition by six residents of Walmsley Lane/River Road, on the west shore of Narrow River, to amend the Special Area Management Plan. Their petition requests removing the prohibition on new dock construction in all areas designated as "Lands of Critical Concern." CRMC appointed a Subcommittee of three Council members, and the Subcommittee held a series of public hearings through the summer and fall.

Because of the generosity of many contributors, NRPA was able to engage an attorney and expert witnesses to par-

ticipate in the hearing process as an "Intervener." We like to feel that we are intervening on behalf of the River.

The final legal briefs were submitted by the petitioners' and NRPA's attorneys in January. There are several more steps in the process before a final decision will be made, and this process could take several more months. The Subcommittee will first hold a workshop to formulate their recommendation. The workshop is open to the public, but no public comments are allowed. The workshop has not yet been scheduled. The Subcommittee Report will then be put on the agenda for a full

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The President's Cove



There are two main reasons that NRPA consistently ranks as one of the top watershed organizations in the region. One is our dedicated Board of Directors, who oversee all of our programs. The other is the level of effort put forth by our volunteers who participate in those programs.

How do we attract people to serve on the NRPA Board or as a volunteer? That is a problem that pops up on my presidential "to do" list every once in a while. Sometimes it happens that somebody from out of the blue shows an interest, the position is easily filled, and the problem goes away as quickly as it came. But at other times it is not so easy — now is one of those times. We need to add a few members to the Board and to find some new volunteers. The problem has been building for a little while, but we have been waiting for the Executive Service Corporation to complete a top-to-bottom review of the organization that began late last summer. Now, with their work complete, and with our Board numbers reduced, we need to bring the Board back up to working strength with five or six new members. We need new Board members who have an avid interest in doing something tangible to improve the environment in the Narrow River and its Watershed.

It is pretty simple to join our Board. First of all, you should call me at 782-8083, call the office at 783-6277, or consult our web page at www.narrowriver.org. I will arrange to acquaint you with the host of programs in which we are involved, help you find an interest in one or more of them, and provide a personal contact to assist you in joining. If you have some new ideas for one of our programs, we might even ask you to be the chair of that program. Or if that sounds too scary at the start, you could sign on to work closely with the current committee chair for a year, and then think about taking charge yourself. Right now we need someone interested in chairing the Road Race committee next year. We need some help with AWESome — our major educational program — especially assistance in attracting new teachers into using Narrow River as a living classroom. You could help out with science fair judging or our college scholarship program. We could use Directors with expertise in land-use planning, water quality, or legal and regulatory issues. Of course, we always have to think about fund-raising, so we have a committee that is active year-round. Although serving on the Board is not that time-consuming (we meet once a month), perhaps you can only spare the time to participate as a member of one particular committee. We would be happy to have you volunteer. We are always looking for new ideas, and new sources of human energy.

Call me if you are interested, and I will pick you up and drive you to our next meeting. We meet the first Tuesday of each month at 7:30 PM on the URI Bay Campus. Sitting through a meeting is the best introduction to the full range of our programs. You're sure to find something that interests you, and it just might be an opportunity for you to help Narrow River. We have been diligently working for the past 30 years at being an advocate for the natural and human communities in the Narrow River Watershed. We have made great progress, but there is plenty more to do and we could really use your help.

— Richard B. Grant, President

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS WANTED

This is your newsletter. Have you written something about the River? It could be fiction, science, history, opinion, poetry (the poem in this issue was sent in by a reader). Have you taken a photo that you think other readers would like to see? Do you have a question that you would like us to answer? Send any contributions to the editors at P.O. Box 8, Saundertown, RI 02874 or nrpa@netsense.net.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA) works to preserve, protect, and restore the natural environment and the quality of life of all communities within the Narrow (Pettaquamscutt) River Estuary and Watershed.

www.narrowriver.org

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NRPA is part of the United Way
Workplace Campaign. This is our
donor option number.

If you plan to make a United Way
donation, please consider designating
a portion of your gift to NRPA.

A VISITOR FROM THE NORTH: HARP SEAL SIGHTED IN THE NARROW RIVER

Marine mammals are not something you expect to see in the Narrow River, but a marine mammal is exactly what showed up in late February. It was late on a Friday afternoon when we received a call at the marine mammal lab on the URI Bay Campus. A South Kingstown resident, who lives on the River just a little north of Lacey Bridge, reported that there was a seal on the ice near the shore. The seal had been around for two days, but now was being harassed by coyotes. Mystic Aquarium had already been notified and was sending someone down the next morning to assess the situation. Since “hauling out” on land or ice is normal behavior for seals, standard practice for most stranding response teams is to wait at least 24 hours after the first report before intervening with a seal out of the water.

Upon investigation on Saturday morning we found that the seal was still there, but there were no coyotes in sight. It was a relatively small animal. It could be identified by its color pattern — silvery gray with a few large, irregular dark patches — as a juvenile harp seal, very likely a one-year-old. By Saturday afternoon, the seal was gone. It had most likely gone back into the water and was on its way out of the River and back out to sea. As far as we can tell, this is the first report of a seal in the River during



A juvenile harp seal hauled out on a sandy beach, a typical location for seeing them in southern New England. Photo courtesy of Amy Van Atten, National Marine Fisheries Service.

recent times.

Although a seal in the Narrow River is very unusual, it wasn't that long ago that a harp seal anywhere in Rhode Island would have been an exceptional event. Harp seals are a very different species from the harbor seals you can see piled up on the rocks off Rome Point, Brenton Point, Rose Island, Prudence Island, or other locations in Narragansett Bay. They are one of the species collectively called “ice seals,” whose lives are intimately tied to the winter sea ice. Harp seals occur across the northern part of the North Atlantic Ocean, from eastern Canada to Greenland, Iceland, Norway, and Russia. (To learn more about harp seals, see the March 2004 issue of *National Geographic*.) It is only within the last 15-20 years that strandings of harp seals in Rhode Island and Connecticut have become relatively regular. Those strandings are almost always in the late winter and early spring, and they are almost always one-year-old seals. The typical location to see a harp seal locally is a flat, sandy beach; our best guess is that is because of the similarity to sea ice.

Canadian harp seals are born in March in one of two locations — the Gulf of St. Lawrence or off the east coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador. Pupping occurs at such a seemingly hostile season because the mothers haul out on the pack ice to give birth, and they stay with their pups until they are weaned at only 10-12 days of age. The

pups are born wearing a pure white, very soft coat of fur. That fur coat is good insulation in the frigid air, but the pup needs to put on a thick layer of blubber before it can go swimming in the icy waters below. Not long after weaning, the pups shed their white fur, leaving behind their new, silvery juvenile coats that we see them wearing when they show up in Rhode Island a year later. It won't be until reaching adulthood, around 4-8 years old, that they'll show the mature pattern — a silvery-white coat with a black face and a black “harp” mark (like a thick upside-down V) on the back.

Their first winter is the hardest season for young harp seals. Their mothers abandon them at weaning, so they need to learn how to feed completely on their own. The youngsters eat mainly krill —

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A TRIBUTE TO JOHN ELDER DICK

(Continued from page 1)

formed an adult study group for his “Breakfast Club” buddies — teaching them to understand and appreciate his favorite writer.

John and I worked together on the Middlebridge Sewer project. Through his dedication, we were able to secure a very favorable cost and the means to pay for it. We attended every South Kingstown Town Council meeting for a long time. Even though Barbara Hackey smiled when she saw us, I could see her thinking “not again!”

For the past fourteen years we always went to vote together, even when his end of Middlebridge was in a different district than mine. He fought to have it in one district; I like to think it was his determination that made it so.

Everyone who John knew has his or her particular stories and memories to relate. To me, he was my best friend, a person I knew I could always count on in so many ways I can't begin to enumerate. I for one will miss him greatly, as will his many admirers. — *Rose Epstein*

WALMSLEY LANE DOCKS

(Continued from page 1)

Council meeting, and the Subcommittee will formally present their recommendation. Finally, the issue is then put on the Council agenda, for a later meeting, for decision. At that final meeting, there will be another opportunity for public comments supporting or opposing the Subcommittee recommendation.

Check our web page (www.narrowriver.org) for updates on the workshop and meeting schedule. Maybe by the Summer issue of *Narrow River Notes* we can report some good news.

— *Robert D. Kenney*

NRPA RIVER WATCH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

NRPA is looking for volunteers to join our River Watch program. No previous experience in water-quality monitoring is required. All new volunteers receive both classroom and field training from the University of Rhode Island's Watershed Watch personnel. Manuals and all necessary monitoring equipment are also provided.

This year's monitoring season will run from May until October. The program consists of biweekly measurements of temperature, algae concentration, salinity, water clarity, and dissolved oxygen. Each volunteer is assigned a River location for monitoring. Some locations can be sampled from the shore, while other locations require a boat or canoe. Volunteers are needed for both areas, particularly those requiring boats or canoes.

Volunteering to be a water quality monitor is a great way to learn more about the water quality of the Narrow River and, at the same time, to provide a much-needed service to NRPA. Volunteers can come from all walks of life, ages, occupations, educational backgrounds, and interests. Over the years,

River Watch Volunteers

volunteer monitors have assisted in providing valuable information on the health of the River. We would like to continue the success of the River Watch program by enlisting additional volunteers.

Classroom training is recommended for all new volunteers. The training is designed to help people learn more about water quality in general, and about the Watershed Watch program. New volunteers have a choice of attending classroom training on either Thursday, March 25th at 7:00 PM or on Saturday, March 27th at 9:00 AM. The training sessions will be held in Room 100, Coastal Institute in Kingston, URI

Kingston Campus. Volunteers only need to attend one of the sessions. Field training will be offered in April. The training does not cost anything, but in order to be sure that there are adequate materials for everyone, it is requested that you pre-register by calling (401) 874-2905 or by emailing uriww@etal.uri.edu.

Additional information about the Watershed Watch program can be found on the web at www.uri.edu/ce/wq/ww/html/ww.html. Any questions regarding water monitoring can be directed to NRPA at 783-6277.

Please Mark your Calendar — New Volunteer Classroom Training (choose one):

- 1) Thursday, March 25, 2004; 7:00 – 9:30 PM, Room 100 Coastal Institute in Kingston, URI Kingston Campus
- 2) Saturday, March 27, 2004; 9:00 – 11:30 AM, Room 100 Coastal Institute in Kingston, URI Kingston Campus

If you miss the classroom training, it's still not too late to volunteer — new monitors are always needed and can be worked in almost any time.

— Annette DeSilva

HARP SEAL IN NARROW RIVER

(Continued from page 3)

small shrimp-like animals that are relatively easy to catch near the surface. Sooner or later, however, they need to learn how to dive deeper and to catch larger fish. Not every seal gets the hang of it in time. Young seals that are not completely successfully at making the transition from krill-eating to fish-eating lose weight. Their layer of blubber insulation gets thinner and they lose more of their body heat to the cold water, requiring them to eat even more to make up for the losses. It becomes a vicious cycle, and eventually some of the seals starve to death. As in most wild animal populations, mortality is highest during the first year.

If a live seal remains out of the water for over 24 hours, or is obviously injured or sick, Mystic Aquarium will send a crew to evaluate the animal, and if necessary to capture it and take it back to their facilities for medical care and rehabilitation. That, of course, assumes that the

capture process does not put the stranded crew at risk, which is a consideration for a seal on soft ice. For the usual skinny and hungry harp seal yearling, rehabilitation means pigging out on frozen herring and capelin until it gets nice and fat again, and then a truck ride back to the beach where it was captured (or north to Cape Ann, Massachusetts, if it has gotten to be summer already) for release back into the Atlantic.

All marine mammals, alive or dead, are fully protected by federal law. Only persons with special permits can do anything with stranded seals, dolphins, or whales. All marine mammal strandings should be reported to Mystic Aquarium at (860)-572-5955. You can also report strandings, or sightings of live and healthy marine mammals, to us at the URI Graduate School of Oceanography at (401)-874-6664 or rkenney@gso.uri.edu.

— Robert D. Kenney and
Melissa R. Patrician

POET'S CORNER



Narrow River/Winter Moonlight

Full moonbeams fall
(this terribly cold winter night)
shattering on the frozen river ice,
into ten thousand slivered crystal shards
which (glittering gemlike) slide, until
they collect
in dazzling lightdrifts along the shore.

And if you slip outside and stand
as still as the very cold itself
you can (if the wind is light) just hear
the amazing quiet din
of the splintering sliding light —
and you can (blinking with the cold) see
ten times ten thousand sparkling points
(which you might think had been placed
carefully, just so, almost without
breathing
by Seurat himself —

that is, if your nose wasn't freezing).

— Richard Travisano

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY: THE EXECUTION OF THOMAS CARTER

Among the many events that have occurred on the shores of the Narrow River in its three and a half centuries of recorded history, few have remained as engraved in memory as the execution of Thomas Carter. A mile south of the Bridgetown Bridge, one is opposite the old town training lot at the foot of Torrey Road in South Kingstown. Here, at the foot of Tower Hill, the militia trained and public events were held. Our story begins on Tower Hill Road, where a granite monument, erected by Joseph Hazard opposite the house of Dr. Joseph Kaplan, marks the spot where Thomas Carter, in the winter of 1751, bludgeoned to death William Jackson, a trader in leather. He then disposed of the body by dragging it down to Pettaquamscutt Cove and shoving it under the ice. A few days later, an Indian spearing for eels speared Jackson! Carter was swiftly apprehended by Rowland Robinson, High Sheriff, and a writ issued by George II to his sheriff in "Rhode Island, King's County" stated that on "Friday, the 10th of May, A.D. 1751 you be drawn to the place of execution and there between the hours of eleven o'clock forenoon and two in the afternoon to be hung by the Neck until you are Dead, your body to be cut down and Hanged in Chains near the place of execution till consumed ..."

And thus it was that, on that day, Carter was taken from the jail in King-



ston, brought to the church on Tower Hill, had a hellfire and brimstone sermon preached to him, was duly hanged, and was welded by Joseph Hull, the town blacksmith, into an iron cage which swung over the road at the foot of Torrey Hill. It is recorded by a Mr. J. Wilson "that his body swung there many years by the winds. Crows and other scavenger birds made short work of the flesh, until only the skeleton remained creaking and swinging in its cage over the road. Finally, the gallows rotted down, and the blacksmith, Joseph Hull who had made the cage, removed it." His bones found some use! Schoolboys being what they are, one of the students in Master Ridge's school kept one of them under his seat to crack walnuts with.

Middle Bridge road is an old trail. Imagine yourself traveling it in the 1750's. Travelers during the 1750's coming along late at night, with only

the fitful light of a moon, must certainly have set spur to their horses when, their senses alerted by the creaking, they looked up at that macabre warning of His Majesty's Justice swinging above!

Rumors and stories abound. One was that his sister for a while stationed herself there to throw rocks at the birds pecking the flesh. Another was that the townspeople finally petitioned that the remains be removed for decency's sake.

Carter had the distinction of being the last man hanged in chains. Joseph Hazard erected the stone pillar, which still stands on the site of the murder. Stop some day and read it. The hangman's bill was 50 pounds sterling! It happened on the shores of Narrow River!

— John Elder Dick

Editor's note: This was the first article on local history published by John Elder Dick in Narrow River Notes. It appeared in the Winter 1995 issue. To help keep his memory alive, we intend to reprint his articles in future newsletters whenever space permits.

ANNUAL NARROW RIVER RUN

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and 10K runs. The first 400 entrants will receive a limited-edition "2004 Narrow River Run" T-shirt. There will be other prizes and plenty of post-race refreshments at the Town Beach.

For more information and a registration form call 783-6277, or visit our web page at www.narrowriver.org. The registration fee is \$15.00 if postmarked by May 3rd and \$20.00 after May 3rd up to and including the day of the race.

— Lesa Meng, Road Race
Committee Chair

MORE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The NRPA Education Committee is looking for volunteers to help out with upcoming summer field programs for children (ages 6–13) that we will be conducting with the Town of Narragansett's summer day camps. Opportunities include: environmental educators to run programs; people with field experience to lead a specific activity — such as water quality, seaweed pressing, plant or animal identifications, photography, or sketching; or people with little experience but lots of interest in the Narrow

River and/or kids! We will provide training, so you can learn about the Narrow River, too. The time commitment varies and we will accommodate your schedule. It could be as little as a few hours once this summer to as much as a full day each week for 10 weeks. Call the NRPA office at 783-6277 or send an email to nrpa@netsense.net. If there is no answer, leave a message and someone will get back to you.

— Veronica Berounsky

PLEASE JOIN US OR RENEW !

Narrow River Preservation Association welcomes your support:

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<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$500	<input type="checkbox"/> Patron	\$50	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$20
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				<input type="checkbox"/> Other	\$_____

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*The Narrow River Preservation Association is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.
 The mission of NRPA is to preserve, protect, and restore the natural environment within the Narrow (Pettaquamscutt) River Estuary and Watershed.*



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