


NARROW RIVER NOTES

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

Summer 2005

NRPA INVITES THE PUBLIC TO OUR 35TH ANNUAL MEETING KEYNOTE PRESENTATION ON THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS HABITAT IMPROVEMENT PLANS

The Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA) invites our members and the public to our 2005 Annual Meeting—our 35th. The meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 4th, at the Coastal Institute Auditorium, URI Bay Campus, South Ferry Road, Narragansett. Refreshments will be served at 7:00 p.m. and the meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m.

The Annual Meeting will feature a presentation about the plan by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, for habitat restoration in the lower River, mainly between Middle Bridge and Sprague Bridge. We are still in the process of getting a speaker from the Army Corps, so we can't tell you just yet who that speaker will be.

The Corps' New England District kicked off a feasibility study concerning Narrow River habitat improvements in March 2005, and held a public presentation near Sprague Bridge on May 5th, attended by U.S. Senator Jack Reed and R.I. Representative Don Lally. The study, which is being conducted in part-

nership with the R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council, is expected to take two years to complete. It will look at a range of alternative methods to restore wildlife habitats in the Narrow River, including eelgrass, shellfish beds, and salt marshes.

The alternative that has gotten the most attention is dredging, with lots of interest from boaters in the River in the possibility of deepening the channel from Middle Bridge through the Narrows. However, since the Narrow River is not classified as a "navigable waterway" used for "substantial interstate or foreign commerce," the Corps is not authorized to conduct dredging simply for improvements to navigation or the convenience of boaters. If the feasibility study determines that dredging is the best alternative for restoring wildlife habitat in the River, it may be done for that purpose.

The full range of alternatives to be considered in the study will be explored during the presentation. It

should be an interesting meeting—bring your questions!

The Annual Meeting will also include reports on NRPA activities and highlights from the past year. Updates on important issues affecting the Narrow River will be provided. These will include water use and habitat management issues, including the on-going process to update the harbor management plans in all three towns in the Watershed; water quality improvement projects; and land conservation efforts. Highlights from NRPA's education programs will be reviewed. Observations from this year's River Watch program will be reported and volunteer river monitors will be recognized.

The W.E.R. La Farge Memorial Award will be presented, and this year's kayak raffle winner will be announced.

The annual meeting provides a forum to meet NRPA members and to learn more about the Narrow River and its Watershed. We hope that you will join us.

—Robert D. Kenney

RHODE ISLAND FOUNDATION CELEBRATION

On a lovely spring evening on May 18th, South County Museum in Narragansett was the venue for a double celebration. In attendance were members and Directors of NRPA, friends of the late John Elder Dick, and representatives of The Rhode Island Foundation (TRIF).

After a pleasant wine-and-cheese reception, the first part of the evening's program was the formal announcement of the establishment of the Narrow River Preservation Association/John Elder Dick Endowment fund, to be managed in perpetuity by TRIF. In the photo to the right, NRPA President Richard Grant and Ben Middleton from TRIF are making the announcement to the gathering.

The endowment was established with



Photo by RDK

the generous bequest that Mr. Dick left for NRPA (see the Fall/Winter 2004 *Narrow River Notes*). Income from the endowment will permanently provide financial support for NRPA's conservation and education mission. Following the announcement, many of John's friends shared their remembrances of a very unique man. Richard Grant

shared a letter he had recently received from Mrs. Nancy Perry. Her husband Ray had recently passed away suddenly. Ray loved Narrow River, and Nancy's letter asked if there was a way to donate money in his memory to NRPA. Since

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The President's Cove



As we begin our membership drive for the 2005-2006 year beginning September 1st, we are riding a surge of interest in the Narrow River Preservation Association. Membership in 2004-2005 was up substantially from the previous year. Our fund-raising from memberships, Road Race sponsors, and other sources was also up. The Board of Directors is confident that interest will continue to rise due to the successful efforts by our Water Quality, Land Use, and Education committees. Throughout the Watershed, non-point pollution is being attacked. The River Watch program is in its 14th year, with more volunteers than ever, and many of the improvements being planned by the state are based on our consistent data.

DEM has made a commitment to Narrow River—"to bring it up to standard." Each new development or subdivision that is proposed is reviewed by NRPA to insure it meets all the standards of DEM, DOT, and CRMC. Clear examples of progress are the detention pond systems at Canonchet and Wampum Road/Circuit Drive. The efforts of the Education committee this year were rewarded when 29 teachers registered for the AWESome training course. That impact will be hugely magnified when the AWESome curriculum is taught to over 2000 students in classrooms throughout and beyond the Watershed.

NRPA thanks all our volunteers—especially our River Watch volunteers, our Land Use committee volunteers, and our Education volunteers. Without their help, the surge in interest in NRPA could not be realized. With our annual meeting coming up in October, we are looking for members with an interest in serving on our Board of Directors. We are also looking for a volunteer to do general office work a few hours a week. Please call or write NRPA if you have an interest in volunteering.

—Richard B. Grant

NRPA'S "RIVER HERO"



Photo by RDK

Richard Grant (right), NRPA President, and Meg Kerr (center), Executive Director of the Rhode Island Rivers Council, present a 2005 River Hero Award to NRPA's Annette DeSilva (left). The presentation took place on June 23rd at Waterplace Park in Providence, on the banks of the Woonasquatucket River. The River Hero awards were presented by the Rivers Council as part of the month-long celebration of Rhode Island Rivers Month in June.

There was one award for each of the state's nine watershed councils, honoring exceptional people who have volunteered their time and expertise to protect and restore Rhode Island's rivers. Annette's award was in recognition of her years of dedication as a member of the NRPA Board of Directors—overseeing our River Watch volunteer water-quality monitoring program.

—Robert D. Kenney

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.

2005 SCHOLARSHIPS: STUDENTS AWARDED \$500 FOR COLLEGE

For the eleventh year, NRPA has awarded \$500 scholarships to seniors graduating from high schools in the Narrow River Watershed. The 2005 NRPA Scholarships were awarded to Jacqueline VanSant of Narragansett High School and Jesse Malo of North Kingstown High School.

Applicants for the scholarships were judged on the quality of an original essay about the impact of human activity on a watershed, their participation in environmentally oriented activities in and out of school, a science teacher's recommendation, and academic achievement in sci-

ence and math courses.

Jacqueline and Jesse were both very active in environmental programs during high school. Jacqueline was a member of Narragansett's Envirothon team for four years. She also participated in recycling projects. Jesse participated on his school's Envirothon team, was in Science Fair competitions, and was a school aide for an Environmental Science class. In addition, he volunteered as a docent for Gilbert Stuart Museum, where he assisted with an environmentally related project.

—Melissa Hughes

EARTH DAY ROAD CLEAN-UP

On Saturday, May 7th, a group of NRPA board members gathered their forces and strategically placed trash bags and gloves along the route for the 18th annual Narrow River Road Race through South Kingstown and Narragansett. Litter was in abundance, especially at the corner of Route 1A and Bridgetown Road. Occasional rain did not dampen the spirits of the dedicated NRPA members and friends who braved the inclement weather to pick up roadside trash. The South Ferry Road crew, in old slickers and carrying trash bags, drew a few

raised eyebrows as they mingled with arriving wedding guests in front of the South Ferry Church. As the approximately 300 runners ran the race course a week later on the 14th, they were not offended by the sight of all that litter.

NRPA's extra effort to keep the Watershed clean and to make the Road Race as pleasant as possible was supported by a \$250 Earth Day mini-grant from the R.I. Dept. of Environmental Management. Buckley Heating and Cooling Company of Wakefield donated \$125 in matching funds.

—Richard B. Grant

AN EAGLE OUT MY WINDOW

I live on the River—just north of, and across the street from, Treaty Rock Park. At about 9:30 AM on January 18th, I looked out my window and was surprised to see six or seven grackles in a big cherry tree near the River in the corner of my lot. Grackles are unusual here in the winter, but some have been around this year. I wasn't getting a good look at them, however, because of the angle of the sunlight. So I left the window to get binoculars. Returning, I noted two blue jays joining the grackles, and then I saw something I'd missed—a big, hunkering hawk shape in the tree. Right; they're mobbing a hawk, most likely a red-tail, I thought, as I brought up the binoculars. Then, just as the binoculars reached my

eyes, the hawk took wing. It swooped low over the River and flew north out of my sight. But I saw the tail, and it wasn't red. It was pure white!

Like a shot, I was out the door, around the house, and out to the dock where I could see up the River. And there it was, on the top of a large tree that stands where the River becomes a narrow channel a bit north of my place. There was no mistaking it. I didn't even need binoculars to see that it was a big raptor, with a dark brown body and a pure white head and tail. A bald eagle, on the River, and it had been sitting in my cherry tree! Made my day!

—Richard Travisano, Middlebridge

PADDLING THE NARROW RIVER

Like "Wrong Way Corrigan," I made my way along Narrow River against the tides and currents of our culture. My folks cruised a sleek speedboat from Middle Bridge to the lakes near the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace. We brought water skis and I whipped along behind the motor this way and that, like a figure from a Busby Berkeley motion picture. That was in the late 50's and early 60's. But in the summer of 1964, I purchased my own Narrow River craft, and it was a simple canoe. Not even a fancy, elegant canoe, but a clumsy, wide, fiberglass job painted to look like birch-bark. Alone and lonely I paddled my own canoe to the dunes or the ponds, exploring the little tidal inlets where I might surprise an egret or the egret might surprise me.

Every summer I relive the quiet adventure of that last season in the waterfront Middlebridge house I shared with my parents, my brothers, and my nephews. My mother passed away in the summer of '65, forty years ago. Later, in the summer of '77, I bought my own house in Middlebridge and a series of canoes and kayaks, proclaiming that the River shows its best personality not when you churn the blades of your motor but when you merely turn the oars and paddles of a silent, ancient riverboat. Then you are at peace with the fellow creatures who share the shoreline with you. You watch and admire them: the herons and the horseshoe crabs.

I remember everything and everyone and I look back at the summer of '64 with a particular pang of poignancy. It was the end of one chapter and the start of another. As I row past that house I relive its pleasures and pains. My son Reuben joined the crew team at B.U. last year—the canoe of '64 led to a tradition. We have explored the lush swamp and historic millpond behind the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace in tandem, two oars and two more oars. I wish even more of us along Narrow River loved it for the comforts of its calm depths and not its noisier pastimes.

—Mike Fink, Middlebridge



FOUR STEPS TO A CHEMICAL-FREE LAWN FROM THE SOUTHERN RHODE ISLAND CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Step 1: Mowing for vigorous root growth. Adjust your mower to cut at a height of 2-3 inches. This is the single most important factor in maintaining a thick and healthy lawn. Also, be sure to avoid shocking plants by removing *no more than* one-third of the grass blade. A sharp mower blade is also beneficial, as it makes a clean cut that denies access to disease organisms.

Cost: \$0.

Tip: For free lawn fertilizer, leave grass clippings where they fall.

Step 2: Watering sensibly. Water no more than one inch per week and only one time per week, preferably on a sunny morning before 9:00 AM. This way, you will promote healthy root growth and resistance to insects and disease.

Cost: \$0; \$\$ saved if your lawn now gets more than 1" of water per week.

Tip: Use a shallow can, placed in the sprinkler area, to measure the weekly inch of water (this inch should also include any rain-fall during the previous week).

Step 3: Dethatching and aerating for improved movement of water, air, and nutrients. If your lawn has more than a half-inch of thatch and/or soils that are compacted by heavy traffic, grass roots are having a tough time getting needed water, air, and nutrients. You can dethatch and/or aerate with equipment from a local tool rental retailer. If soil is compacted more than 2 inches deep, find a professional who has equipment that can penetrate 6-8 inches. Ensure continual aeration by protecting earthworms in your soil.

Cost: dethatch = \$40-\$60; aerate = \$55-\$80.

Tip: When you dethatch or aerate, it's a perfect time to over-seed for a thick, healthy lawn.

Step 4: Fertilizing and controlling pests for a healthy soil. Healthy soil biology is a lawn's best defense against pests and disease. This biology is also essential in the uptake of nutrients by grass plants. The use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides can harm soil, setting up a cycle of dependency where increasing product is needed to combat ever



more lawn problems. If you've been using chemical fertilizers and pesticides, you'll need to reestablish soil biology (see: Soilfoodweb.com). Earthworms are good signs that your soil biology is intact.

Following are five guidelines to support beneficial soil organisms that will, in turn, support a healthy lawn and keep pest problems in check.

1. Get a soil test to understand soil pH and fertility. That way you'll know exactly what nutrients your lawn needs. URI Cooperative Extension offers a soil testing service through the University of Massachusetts. You can download the order form and sampling instructions from <http://www.uri.edu/ce/publications/soiltest.pdf>, or call the UMass testing lab at (413) 545-2311.
2. If your soil test shows that you need fertilizer, use organic or slow-release fertilizers, since they have beneficial bacteria and fungi that bind to soil particles. This keeps nutrients where they are more easily available to plants. These fertilizers include cottonseed, bone, or blood meals; fish emulsion; and composted grass clippings, vegetables/fruits, and manures.
3. Monitor and accurately identify any pest problems that you feel you need to address. For help, contact URI's Cooperative Extension at (800) 448-1011.

4. Try nontoxic pest control practices first. For example, you can use beneficial nematodes to attack grubs or apply milky spore powder as a preventative for Japanese beetle grub infestations. You can also now get less toxic products like soaps, horticultural oils, and plant-based insecticides to address many problems.
5. Spot treat with pesticides only when absolutely necessary.

Cost: soil test = \$13; organic/slow release fertilizers = variable.

Tip: When using fertilizer, be sure to sweep all fertilizer off driveways and walkways. The nitrogen from organic fertilizers can still adversely impact nearby waters if they are washed away with a hose or with the next rainfall.

CELEBRATION



*Richard Grant and Libby Monahan
Photo by RDK*

(Continued from page 1)

then, we have received \$700 in donations in Ray Perry's name, all of which will be added to the NRPA/John Elder Dick endowment.

The second part of the celebration was the presentation of the Rhode Island Foundation Merit Award for Outstanding Community Service to NRPA President Richard Grant. In the photo above, TRIF's Libby Monahan is presenting the certificate to Richard. The award is in recognition of Richard's many years of service to the community through his efforts and leadership on behalf of the Narrow River Watershed.

—Robert D. Kenney

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

THE NARROW RIVER'S NOTORIOUS REGICIDE, THEOPHILUS WHALEY

Is your surname Whaley, Waley, Whalley, or a variant thereof? Then you may be descended from one of the most enigmatic and notorious residents on the Narrow River. It all goes back to when Charles I literally lost his head over affairs. On January 30, 1649, a brisk winter's day, Charles I was beheaded. When his son Charles II was restored as King in 1660, he promptly issued warrants that the judges of his father be captured and sentenced to be "hanged, drawn, and quartered." And thus some were.

But at least one escaped that horrible fate. A Colonel Whalley, one of Charles I's judges, somehow felt the wilds of 17th Century America preferable and fled to Virginia. In 1679 we find him residing in "an underground hut" on the shore of the Narrow River where the Willet Farm, now called Casey Farm, had its acreage. His residence, built partly into the ground (an early form of passive heating?), stood about half a mile south of the Gilbert Stuart birthplace. Theophilus Whaley (or Wale as he sometimes spelled it) aroused great curiosity among his neighbors. He seemed a college-educated man, versed in Hebrew and Greek, and hinted at commanding in the Indian wars during his time in Virginia. He made his living writing for the residents, fishing, and

weaving. It was soon noted that Theophilus never really lacked for money. Gentlemen from Boston were observed to visit annually, including Judge Sewall of Salem witchcraft trials fame. Following their departure, Theophilus would have plenty of money.

Then there was the strange case of the ship of war that anchored in the west passage of Narragansett Bay opposite the Willet farm during Queen Anne's war. The commander, whose surname was Whale or Whalley, upon landing, asked to be taken to the residence of Theophilus, his cousin. On his departure, Theophilus again had plenty of money.

Sometime around 1711, feeling the onslaught of old age, Theophilus moved to a farm he had purchased in West Greenwich, where he resided with his daughter Susan. There he died and was buried at the verifiable age of 104!

Theophilus never verified that he was one of the regicide judges, always being careful to reply obscurely, but the suspicion gradually became a certainty. The Narrow River, flowing through the King's Province in Rhode Island, gave him shelter and a living, assisted by his Puritan friends.

An interesting thought occurs here. The name Theophilus means "lover of

God." It is the unknown person to whom the writer of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts addresses his works. Perhaps it was chosen by him as an alias, in that, he too wished to be unknown. Certainly his knowledge of Greek could have led him to that.

If your name is one of the variants—Whaley or Waley—perhaps you are descended from Theophilus Whaley, the notorious regicide. And remember, it happened on the shores of Narrow River.

—John Elder Dick

[Editor's note: This is the fourth in a series of "re-runs" of articles on local history published in Narrow River Notes by the late John Elder Dick, who passed away in November 2003. It originally appeared in the Fall 1995 issue.]

[Editor's note of caution: Although it makes a good story, the current consensus among historians seems to be that Theophilus Whaley of Rhode Island was not, in fact, the same person as Edward Whalley, the regicide, who most probably died late in 1674 in Hadley, Massachusetts. Theophilus may actually have been Edward's brother, Robert, or possibly some other close relative. —RDK]

A PEARLY MORNING

The River was like polished pewter, smooth and endless, diffusing into a light gray mist. Pilings and an islet a short distance off had lost their sharpness of image. We slid our canoes off to floating depth and pushed clear with the paddles, unfamiliar from disuse.

With but a vague sense of direction we pulled into the fog, elated by the flat comfort of the water, the clean feeling of the moist air in our nostrils. Sharp in contrast, three ducks splashed and quacked as they jumped into the air and winged off into the mist.

An outline appeared ahead, the low grassy marsh of the far side beginning to reveal itself with a hint of darkness above it, the first sign of the wooded hillside beyond. An egret, whiter than white, lifted silently and headed off to another

fishing spot free of encroachers.

We slid down the margin of the sedge, searching into the murk ahead for signs of a stream curving in towards the high land. A dilapidated duck blind materialized with a couple of black-backed gulls on it, watching the glassy surface. Beyond in the marsh, the sheen of the stream began to take shape. Paddling around a little point, we headed in, curving between the sheltering arms of green and gold.

Winding through the marsh, the stream narrowed and trees and bushes became clear ahead, rising and fading beyond. We paddled, poled, and pushed our way until we were in a rivulet the width of our vessel. The marsh grass was dewed with thousands of shiny drops, soaking with water of the

mist and the beginning of the ebb of the tide, the odor of salt and vegetation strong in the air.

Grasping wet bunches of grass, we pulled ourselves up onto the fen, watching for holes where an unwary step might drop us to our knees. We took our spade and the box of ashes and set off down the edge of the wet jungle to our right, sniffing the sweet aroma of wild roses. One of us decided we had arrived, and we pushed under the wet leaves of tall bushes and fought our way over skunk cabbage and under alder to standing room farther in. We stumbled on, paralleling the marsh until we came to a little open amphitheatre dominated by an old apple tree and a large shadbush.

(Continued on page 6)

WRITERS WANTED

Help me to make *Narrow River Notes* your newsletter. Do you have a short poem with a river or environmental theme? How about an article on local history, like the John Elder Dick pieces that we've been re-printing? Have you taken a good photograph in the Watershed? Do you have a question about anything in the Watershed that one of our Board members might answer? Or do you just have an opinion you'd like to express? I promise to consider any and all submissions. We publish three issues per year—spring, summer, and fall/winter—with the respective deadlines in the first week or so of February, June, and October. Send submissions or questions to me at drbobk@cox.net.

—Robert D. Kenney, Editor

PEARLY MORNING

(Continued from page 5)

Marking a rectangle at our feet, we began to dig a hole in the forest mulch. The dark, moist loam reminded us of her whose ashes we had come to deposit, of the picture of her on her knees with the large straw sunhat, digging with her bare hands in earth so similar. Down a foot or so, we ran into stones on which the shovel clanged and scraped. We levered them out and soon we felt we could place the box deeply enough so that it could lie undisturbed. We chocked it in carefully and stood with bared, bowed heads as one of us gave prayers mindful of her life and what she had meant to us. Carefully we put back the earth and the sod, smoothing it over and spreading

the leaves and ground cover until it was hard to tell we had been there.

As we paddled out of the creek a doe materialized off to the north, standing tall, sharp-limbed against the fog. She was watching as we disappeared, a spirit guarding the deserted forest and marsh.

—Irving C. Sheldon, Saunderstown



Rhode Island Rivers Council
Working together to protect and restore
Rhode Island's rivers and their watersheds

*NRPA is proud to be a member of the
Rhode Island Rivers Council.*

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