

NARROW RIVER NOTES

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

Fall/Winter 2004

RHODE ISLAND RIVERS COUNCIL

The Rhode Island Rivers Council was created through a statute passed by the General Assembly in 1991 to coordinate, oversee, and review efforts to improve and preserve the quality of the state's rivers and other water bodies and to develop plans to increase river use. The R.I. General Assembly took action because "state jurisdiction over rivers, environmentally, culturally and economically, is scattered among state agencies and in some instances, state policies and plans [concerning rivers] are con-

flicting." Although Rhode Island is better known as the Ocean State, we have 1,498 miles of rivers and streams, and 20,917 acres of lakes and ponds, and all of those miles

and acres need to be protected.

The Rivers Council consists of 15 members—appointed by the Governor, Lt. Governor, and House and Senate leadership, or designated by RIDEM, CRMC, the state Dept. of Administration, and the League of Cities and Towns. It is not a regulatory agency with enforcement powers; its functions are limited to planning, coordination, and empowerment. The Council has a number of objectives, missions, and responsibilities:



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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BENEFACTOR: JOHN ELDER DICK'S WILL BENEFITS NRPA

Well-known Middlebridge resident and long-time Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA) member John Elder Dick passed away in November 2003. At the NRPA annual meeting in October, it was formally announced that he had left a sizeable bequest—\$97,000—to NRPA in his will. This generous gift will permanently benefit NRPA's mission to protect the River and the Watershed and educate the public about the River's value.

John Elder Dick was my close friend; I knew him as a multi-faceted man. To readers of *Narrow River Notes*, he was the person who wrote many interesting articles about the River and surrounding areas. To many residents of South Kingstown, he was their (or even their children's) English teacher in the High School. He was also a columnist for the *South County Independent* newspaper—writing about Middlebridge, as he

was also a great historian of the area. John also wrote poetry; his friends always had a new poem each year enclosed with Season's Greetings.

John was a great lover of dogs and cats, always adopting a stray that someone else did not want or abused. He loved the Narrow River and could see it from the windows of his house on Middlebridge Road. The neighbors knew him by the flag of Scotland on top of his flagpole. If you happened to telephone him, only to hear his answering machine, you would swear that man with the heavy Scotch brogue must be a newcomer; but I'm pretty sure he was born in Providence, Rhode Island. Walking his dog several times a day gave him the opportunity and the excuse to explore may side streets and trails along the River, say hello to old neighbors, and welcome new residents.

He was always concerned about people who were poor or needy—trying to help whenever he could by contributing to the needy in South County through the Jonnycake Center in Peace Dale. He used to volunteer in the soup kitchen at St. Stephen Church in Providence on many holidays. He was a volunteer for Hospice Care in South County. So this loving man, who passed away much too young, left behind a heritage to the three organizations he admired. The bulk of his estate was divided

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The President's Cove



Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. It is worth saying more than once to the people who responded to our membership drive, which kicked off in late August. Elsewhere in this newsletter we'll be thanking you by name (see pages 6-7).

We went over the top. As of October 27th, over 300 members had joined or renewed, including 157 new members. The amount of money raised so far from the membership drive has also gone far beyond expectations—to the tune of more than \$15,000.00. We will also be holding a “phonathon” on November 30th, to try to catch up with old members who have not yet renewed. This will raise the bar even more.

What made the difference this year? We attribute this increase in members and membership contributions to a very successful year for our activities—headed up by our dedicated Board of Directors and with lots of assistance from you, our members. We just held our Annual Meeting on October 5th. I presented a “year in review” summary, so I won't bore you by repeating it all here—much of this issue of *Narrow River Notes* is devoted to what we covered at the Annual Meeting. The 2004 W.E.R. La Farge Memorial “Friend of the River” Award was presented to Seniors Helping Others for their many years of assistance (included helping out with mailing the newsletter in your hands), and the winners of this year's Kayak Raffle were there to collect their prize. Meg Kerr, chair of the Rhode Island Rivers Council, presented the keynote address. Our 2003-2004 successes included, among others, another successful River Watch season, moving full speed ahead on state of the art detention pond systems in Narragansett, opening of a new and improved Middle Bridge, a prototype summer camp program, college scholarship and science fair awards, dealing with CRMC legal issues concerning development in lands of critical concern, our 17th successful “Narrow River Run,” and enhanced membership outreach efforts, which include expanded media coverage, the NRPA web page, a new brochure, and an improved newsletter format.

The Board of Directors thanks each and every supporter for these contributions towards our land, water, and educational programs—all designed to improve water quality and ecological conditions for the communities of life within the Watershed. With your continued strong support, we will be able to continue our successes for many more years.

—Richard Grant

JOHN ELDER DICK: BENEFACTOR

(Continued from page 1)

between NRPA, the Jonnycake Center, and the Animal Rescue League of Southern Rhode Island.

NRPA was very fortunate to be one of the three. The Board of Directors has decided that his largesse will be invested as an endowment that will bear his name, managed through the Rhode Island Foundation. He will be remembered forever, because part of the income from the endow-

ment will provide a perpetual source of support for NRPA's activities. Other income will be re-invested, along with future donations, so the endowment will continue to grow. It would be wonderful indeed if John's friends and acquaintances would make donations in his name to NRPA, as his obituary did not mention a memorial or other way to honor and remember him.

—Rose Epstein

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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Narrow River Notes

Published tri-annually by Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA)

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6239

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.

NEW BRIDGE—OLD PROBLEM

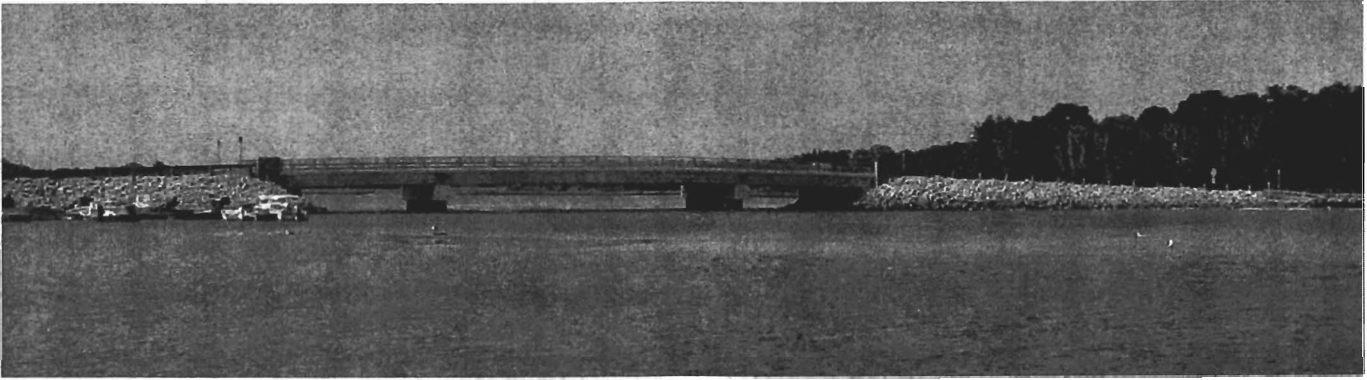


Photo by Robert D. Kenney

WIDER MIDDLE BRIDGE SPAN DOES NOT MEAN BETTER FLUSHING

The new Middle Bridge, connecting Narragansett and South Kingstown over the Narrow River, has now been open to traffic for a few months. A formal re-opening ceremony took place on May 26th, led by RI DOT director James Capaldi, Representative Donald Lally, and others. The new bridge has a sidewalk on each side and 4-foot shoulders for the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, and fishermen. Most importantly, the opening under the bridge that the River flows through is substantially wider than it was in the previous bridge. Input from NRPA was instrumental in getting a bridge design with a wider opening, but many people seem to have unrealistic expectations about the wider span increasing River flow and improving flushing above the bridge.

One of the dramatic problems with the area between Sprague Bridge and Middle Bridge is that the channel is shallow. Actually, it is too shallow for most motorboats to navigate without increasing speed beyond the 5-mph speed limit or lifting the motor. The longer span of the new Middle Bridge did not solve this problem. So the most important thing for people to understand is that the longer span, in and of itself, **will not result in greater "flushing"** under Middle Bridge. Only a dredging program carried out between Sprague and Middle Bridges will accomplish that by deepening the channel. The wider span, in combination with dredging, will benefit in the following ways:

1) Increase ease of navigation by

boats, personal water craft, kayaks, and canoes;

2) Decrease future buildup of sand;

3) Leave options open for future dredging to enhance flushing.

NRPA was consulted about the construction of a new bridge to cross Narrow River. NRPA's board of directors approved a longer span and a wider bridge. **NRPA understood at that time that extensive dredging downstream of Middle Bridge would have to be carried out if a longer span was to have an effect on flushing.** We knew at that time that the exact configuration of the dredging was not totally understood because not enough modeling runs were carried out. Additional modeling studies will still be needed before any dredging can take place. In addition, the approaches to the old causeways on both sides of the Bridge were very low and flooded at least once a year. The new bridge has been built but, although the causeway may be slightly more elevated than before, the approaches remain unchanged and will still flood.

NRPA has had a long involvement in the process of replacing the Middle Bridge (Bridge #14). We first expressed our views in response to a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers report entitled *Effect of Middle Bridge on flooding of the Pettaquamscutt River, Narragansett and South Kingstown, RI*. RI DOT commissioned a study by Applied Science Associates (ASA) entitled *Influ-*

ence of the Middlebridge Road Bridge on Circulation in the Narrow River. The two studies led to the conclusion that if no dredging of the River was carried out downstream of the new Middle Bridge, widening the span would have minimal effect on the flooding, flushing, or water quality upstream (north) of the bridge. NRPA agreed with these results.

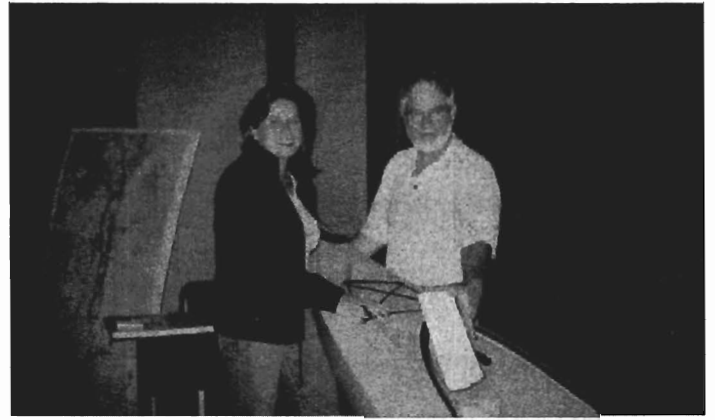
NRPA then contracted with ASA for additional model runs, which were presented in a report entitled *The effect of changes in channel cross-section and in Middlebridge Road Bridge span width on dynamics in the Narrow River Estuary*. This latest ASA study explored a number of dredging options that would increase tidal flow up the River to Middle Bridge. **Specifically, NRPA asked for an example in which tidal flow was increased enough by dredging to warrant a longer Bridge span.** The modeling did indeed show that extensive dredging of the lower River would provide support for building a longer bridge, but the number of runs that NRPA was able to fund did not explore all options for dredging.

In respect to the hard work of many individuals over a lot of years, the new Middle Bridge is surely a beautiful connection between South Kingstown and Narragansett. But, without dredging, the longer span will have minimal effect on the flushing of Narrow River north of the new bridge.

— Richard B. Grant
& Jon C. Boothroyd



2004 Friend of the River Award Winners Seniors Helping Others



2004 Kayak Winner Sheila Harrington of Saunderstown, RI

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY: THE NORSE SETTLEMENT ON NARROW RIVER

There exists a strong possibility, preserved in the Icelandic sagas, that there may have been a Norse settlement on the shores of Narrow River for some 10 or 20 years around the year 1000. Frederick N. Brown III has written an account that is remarkable. In it he establishes many points of reference from the sagas of Leif Ericksson and Thorfinn Karlseffni that point to an area south of the Middle Bridge called in the sagas "Leifsbudir." Let's examine them.

A summation of Leif's saga gives us the following information:

They withdrew from "a gourd-shaped island with water so sweet," and sailed north, crossing a sound that lay between the island and a cape that pointed northward, into a vast fjord, then rounded a headland, where to the west were white, sandy beaches, then entered a river that flowed north-south and then fell into the sea. Block Island is distinctly gourd-shaped, Rhode Island Sound lies between Block Island and Cape Cod (which points northward), Narragansett Bay is actually a fjord, deeply bisecting Rhode Island, Point Judith would seem to be the headland, with the white, sandy beaches of Scarborough and Narragansett on their west, then one encounters the entrance to the only river along that coast that flows north-south to the sea—Narrow

River!

There are many other points of identification that coincide to suggest that this may have been the land of "Hop" and what became the settlement of "Leifsbudir" on the shores of Narrow River. Astonishingly, as further mentioned in the sagas, Leif's ship grounded on a sand bar at the mouth of the river (the bar is still there at the mouth, near the Dunes Club) and was rowed up to where a lake lay to the south (Pettaquamscutt Cove). There was a meadow there (it is still there), and houses were built. High ground was to the north. Arable land was all around, and farms were built (Jireh Bull had his there in the 17th century). There was a defensible place north on high ground. Maple trees abounded. Deep-sea fishes were caught in the lake and marsh area. The Natives were described as "small, dark, ugly, with broad cheeks and coarse hair" (these descriptions are by Norse standards, let us remember), and they observed that the Natives used paddles instead of oars.

So where are we? Well, having roamed this area south of Middle Bridge for years—if you follow the marsh path south of the Bridge, on your right you will see a large meadow. West of it the land rises

into a cliff-like area, with a large outcropping of rock. This rock commands a view from Pettaquamscutt Cove and the Narrow River to the sea. The sagas record that, when looking from here, a war party of Natives was seen "appearing as charcoal strewn on the water." I have been many times on that rock, and yes, that would be the appearance. Incidentally, there is a story in the area that this was King Philip's outlook during King Philip's War.

So there we have it—evidence for a Norse settlement here for several years around the year 1000 C.E. Check the points of agreement out for yourself. What happened here? How did they survive? What encounters had they with the Natives? Well, in a future installment we'll find out. And remember, there is a strong possibility that for a brief period there was a settlement called "Leifsbudir." And it happened on the shores of the Narrow River.

— John Elder Dick

[Editor's note: This is the second 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 Spring 1995 issue. If you would like to read Frederick Brown's extensive materials for yourself, visit the NRPA website at www.narrowriver.org—click on "Resources," then on "Viking landings?"]

THANK YOU RIVER MONITORS

NRPA extends our sincerest thanks to the 2004 Narrow River Volunteer Monitors. Their many hours spent sampling and monitoring the River's water is greatly appreciated. Without the assistance of these volunteers, the River Watch program would not be possible. Through their monitoring efforts, we have been provided with a greater knowledge of the health of the River.

This year's volunteers included:



Jennifer Carey; Deedee Chatham; Sue Davis; Earnest and Nancy Flewellin; Marie, Claire, and John Hoey; Melissa Hughes; Pat and Kelsea Krueger; Barry Martasian; Judith Paolucci; Rosemarie Pomarico; Harriett Powell; Sarah and Harry Quan; Robert Schelleng; John Shannon; Bruce and Barbara Smith; Sue Van Ness; and Julie West.

Thank you very much!

— Annette DeSilva

RHODE ISLAND RIVERS COUNCIL

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1) to develop a Rhode Island Rivers Policy and Classification Plan that is designed to improve and protect river quality;

2) to advise the state and local agencies concerning programs and measures to improve and protect river and watershed quality and to promote river use consistent with the Rivers Plan;

3) to foster public involvement in river planning and decision-making through public education and promotional activities;

4) to support and strengthen grassroots watershed organizations by formally designating watershed councils and by providing them with financial support through grants.

The accomplishments of the Rivers Council are many. Their original Rivers Policy and Classification Plan was revised and updated in 2003, incorporating coastal waters and bringing the plan into complete agreement with the relevant federal guidelines. The Council has established strong partnerships with local land trusts, the R.I. Land Trust Council, and the R.I. Association of Conservation Commissions. The Rivers Council sponsors numerous workshops and training seminars for non-profit organizations on topics such as building sustainable organizations, wet-

land protection, water use, public relations, board development, membership building, and working effectively with local government. The Council was a co-sponsor, along with NRPA, of the First Annual Environmental Awareness Day at Narragansett Town Beach last July.

One of the most important functions of the R.I. Rivers Council is the designation and support of grassroots Watershed Councils for specific rivers or systems. NRPA is the designated Watershed Council for the Narrow River. These Watershed Councils are granted legal standing to represent their river in legal proceedings, e.g., before CRMC, zoning boards, harbor management commissions, town councils, etc. NRPA's designation as a Watershed Council enabled our taking the lead, over the past year, in hearings before a CRMC subcommittee, in opposition to amending the Narrow River Special Area Management Plan to allow construction of docks in areas designated as "lands of critical concern." Watershed Councils are also able to establish river watch programs, and to apply for federal and state grant funds. Over a three-year period, 2001-2003, the Rivers Council made \$157,500 in grant awards to

the various Watershed Councils. The involved organizations were able to use these grants as matching funds, and were able to leverage them into a total of more than \$800,000 in funding and volunteer time.

Nine Watershed Councils have been recognized so far, and four of the nine work here in South County. Not all of them work with "rivers" in the narrowest sense—the statute creating the Rivers Council included a broad definition of "river" as "a flowing body of water or estuary ... including streams, creeks, brooks, ponds and small lakes." In addition to NRPA, the other Watershed Councils are the Salt Ponds Coalition, Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association, Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition, Pawtuxet River Watershed Council, Woonasquatucket Watershed Council, Blackstone Watershed Council, Buckeye Brook Watershed Council, and Kickemuit Watershed Council.

To find out more about the Rhode Island Rivers Council, or to read their last couple of annual reports and the annual reports from the nine Watershed Councils, visit their home page at <http://www.planning.state.ri.us/rivers/default.htm>.

—Meg Kerr
& Robert D. Kenney

TO ALL WHO RESPONDED TO OUR MEMBERSHIP APPEAL:

\$1000 and up

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\$500 – \$999

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Rosalyn Sinclair

\$200 – \$499

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(Continued from page 6)

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WANTED: A FEW GOOD WRITERS



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 reprinting? 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



PHONATHON REMINDER

On Tuesday, November 30, NRPA is holding its annual membership drive, targeted at those members who have not yet renewed. We ask for your support in order to continue our programs in areas including education, water quality, and River stewardship. If you are one of those people we talk to (or even if you aren't)—don't forget to send in your renewal. Send it by the end of the year to make sure you can count the deduction on your 2004 tax returns.

Thanks!



PLEASE JOIN US OR RENEW!

Narrow River Preservation Association welcomes your support:

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