

Chapter 5. Cultural and Visual Resources

Chapter Summary

Pleasant Bay's visual and cultural resources, while often taken for granted, are integral to the ecological integrity of its natural resources. The area's history, scenic qualities, and sense of tranquillity also have a major influence on how we use and enjoy the Bay today.

The rich history of human habitation around the Bay reveals that a continuum of human uses has altered and influenced resource conditions, and patterns of land use. Native Americans, who may have inhabited the area a far back as 10,000 years ago, focused on sustaining the natural resources necessary for their own survival. It was not until the arrival of European settlers in the 17th and 18th centuries that rapid changes in the land took place. The development of homes, farms, and commerce spurred the formation of our present day villages, but also resulted in the clear cutting of forests and the depletion of fertile top soil. Ways we use the land and waters of the Bay today have evolved from the habits and plans of these earlier native and immigrant inhabitants.

For the most part, recreational uses have outpaced commercial uses of Pleasant Bay. Shellfishing, finfishing, and aquaculture are still commercial activities in the Bay. However, the Bay is more commonly known for the recreational options it offers. The most popular and highly valued recreational uses of the Bay -- nature viewing, beach walking, bird watching, and beach activities -- suggest that most people use and value the Bay for the quality and accessibility of its scenic and natural resources. Boating, sport fishing, and shellfishing are also popular uses of the Bay. However, growing demand for the Bay by a wide variety of users is increasing threats to public safety due to use conflicts, and is resulting in adverse impacts on the Bay's natural resources. Among the cherished resources threatened by encroachment from land and water-based uses are the Bay's scenic areas, and its sense of tranquillity.

5.1 History and Heritage of Pleasant Bay

Our understanding of Pleasant Bay's uniqueness is not complete without a look at the origins of human habitation around the Bay and how they shaped, and were shaped by, the land and water.

5.1.1 Brief History of Settlement

It is known, based on artifacts found in Chatham, that habitation in the area by Native American hunters may have been as early as 8,000 to 10,000 years ago.¹ Noted area historian W. Sears Nickerson hypothesized that Viking seafarers may have landed on

¹ *Pleasant Bay Area of Critical Environmental Concern Nomination Report*. August, 1986.

the shores of Cape Cod near Pleasant Bay in the first century.² Recorded visits by Western Europeans began in 17th century with Gilbert (1602), Champlain (1606), Hudson (1609), Sutcliffe (1619), Dermer (1619), and the excursions south by Pilgrims in the 1620's.³ Notes and journals left by these explorers have aided our understanding of the history of the Bay. Samuel de Champlain, for example, created many maps and images that are instrumental to our understanding of the physical and human history of the area.

Centuries before and, of course, during these explorations the area was inhabited by Native Americans. The area from Chatham to Pochet and Town Cove in Orleans, and inland to Cliff, Long, and Grassy Ponds in Brewster and Harwich, were part of The Monomoyick Tribal Lands. The area north of Pochet, which roughly translated means "it halves or divides," belonged to the Nawset Tribe.⁴ The Monomoyicks took their name from the place where their main village was located, namely lands bordering the Bay and the Monomoyick River, now known as Muddy River.⁵ Early visitors recorded the name variously as "Manamock", "Manamoyake", and "Monomoyack". Later the Indian name for the Bay was forgotten and replaced by the literal translation, "The Great Bay", until it became "Pleasant Bay", probably in the 18th century.⁶

White settlers, mainly from the Plymouth Colony, moved into the region in the mid-17th century. Joseph Rogers, in 1647, settled in Pochet. Chatham's first settlers⁷, William and Anne Nickerson, built their house at the head of Ryder's Cove in 1664⁸. The ensuing population of the area by settlers happened apace. Commerce developed quickly too. The first industry in the area was a tar kiln built next to Tar Kiln River. Later in the 17th and 18th centuries fishing, shellfishing, lobstering, and shipping were major commercial activities.⁹

The quick pace of habitation by settlers resulted in significant changes in the region's landscape. As most inhabitants relied on farming for their subsistence, residential settlement of the area was scattered. It was not until fishing emerged as a commercial activity that villages began to take shape. Within a century most of the virgin forest was cleared to make way for homes, farms, barns, boat yards, salt works, windmills, and other village necessities. After decades of intense farming, much of the

² D.B Carpenter. *Early Encounters: Native Americans and Europeans in New England From the Papers of W. Sears Nickerson*. Michigan State University Press. 1994.

³ *Pleasant Bay Area of Critical Environmental Concern Nomination Report*. August, 1986

⁴ D.B Carpenter. *Early Encounters: Native Americans and Europeans in New England From the Papers of W. Sears Nickerson*. Michigan State University Press. 1994.

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⁷ D.B Carpenter. *Early Encounters: Native Americans and Europeans in New England From the Papers of W. Sears Nickerson*. Michigan State University Press. 1994.

⁸ *Pleasant Bay Area of Critical Environmental Concern Nomination Report*. August, 1986

⁹ *Pleasant Bay Area of Critical Environmental Concern Nomination Report*. August, 1986

region's top soil was depleted. Thus, the new residents' use of the land differed sharply from the long-term stewardship practiced by the Monomoyicks.¹⁰

Beyond the 17th century, the physical and cultural characteristics of the Bay continued to be influenced by the advent of settlers and their evolving habits, commerce, and technology. The arrival of railroad in the late 19th century brought with it growing numbers of seasonal residents and visitors, many with considerable disposable income, to enjoy the Bay for recreation. By the early 20th century, numerous hotels, inns, cottages, country clubs, and camps catering to seasonal inhabitants were established. The new seasonal infrastructure added a set of recreational pursuits to the fishing, shipping, and shellfishing activities that continued to sustain many local families. Sailing, swimming, sport fishing and, later in the century, power boating became regular fixtures in Bay life.¹¹

5.1.2 Heritage and Artifacts

Centuries later, physical and cultural reminders of the region's early inhabitants are woven into the present-day fabric of life around Pleasant Bay. A striking example of how early settlement has shaped current land use is found in the following passage from W. Sears Nickerson¹²:

Route 28 between Chatham and Orleans follows very closely what was once the Wading-Place Path of the Indians. Packed hard by countless generations of moccasined feet, this ancient single-file trail was the Indian highway from the Land of the Monomoyicks down the Cape into the Nawset Country. It came out of the Indians' Cotchpinicut [or Cotchpinecote], Chatham's Old Harbor of today, and crossed the little creek near the present Acme Laundry which they called Pamuet, the Step Stones, from the fact that they had rolled big boulders into it so they could step across dry shod from stone to stone. Route 28 crosses at exactly the same spot.

From Step Stones it followed along the Ryder's Cove shore to the lodge of Mattaquason, the Old Sagamore of the Monomoyicks, which stood near where the Christopher Ryder House stands today. Nearby was the grave of the Pilgrims' famous Indian friend Squanto who died here after he had piloted Governor Bradford in over the Bars and up to the headquarters village. Just across the Path the immigrants William Nickerson and his good wife Anne raised their cabin, the first settlers in the town of Chatham, and on the knoll beyond, their graves still overlook the homestead they hacked out of the wilderness.

¹⁰ *Pleasant Bay Area of Critical Environmental Concern Nomination Report.* August, 1986

¹¹ *Pleasant Bay Area of Critical Environmental Concern Nomination Report.* August, 1986

¹² D.B Carpenter. *Early Encounters: Native Americans and Europeans in New England From the Papers of W. Sears Nickerson.* Michigan State University Press. 1994.

Nickerson and others offer numerous, often colorful, accounts that enrich our appreciation of the history of the Bay and its early residents. Unknown or forgotten to many area residents is the mysterious Legend of Paw Wah Pond. According to legend Chief Quansett refused Chief Pau Wah's request for the hand of his daughter, Wild Dove. Pau Wah then raided Quansett's wigwam, but failed to capture Wild Dove. Humiliated by defeat, Pau Wah retreated to the Pond now known by his name. There Pau Wah was sent by the Water Spirit to the bottom of the pond where he still lives. Legend has it that, to trade for fish, one must throw tobacco in the pond as an offering to the exiled Chief.

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A tale of more precise historical record is the fate of the ship Sparrow Hawk. Sparrow Hawk, a small English ship carrying immigrants to Virginia, went aground on the Bars of "Monomoyake Bay" during a storm. Passengers waded to shore where, aided by Indians, they made their way to Plymouth and secured the assistance of Governor Bradford. The Pilgrims helped to repair the ship, but upon returning to sea it was again wrecked by a storm, this time beyond repair. There it lay until a gale in 1863 unearthed the wreck. It was recovered and is now displayed as the only survivor of the fleet of Pilgrim days.¹⁴

These accounts vividly convey how early patterns of human activity influence us today, and how significant events in the settlement of the colonies intersected with the land, water, and people of Pleasant Bay. Perhaps more compelling than stories are the physical remains of past generations: the remnant shell mounds, occasional unearthing of artifacts evidencing ancient settlement, historic buildings still in use and, of course, the numerous place names that recall the challenges and characteristics of Pleasant Bay long ago. These resources, both legend and artifact, are part of the richness of Pleasant Bay.

5.2 Sights and Sounds of Pleasant Bay

The visual beauty of Pleasant Bay is perhaps the most widely appreciated of its attributes, even among those who may have never stepped on its shores. The stunning views of the Bay from Route 28 between Chatham and Orleans render that stretch of road one of the most scenic drives on Cape Cod. The Bay's twenty-five town landings, and other shorefront conservation lands each offer a unique vignette of life on the Bay. Breathtaking views across the Bay and onto shore are possible from the eight small islands through the Bay, and of course, by boat. North Beach offers unparalleled views of the Bay and open ocean.

These scenic vantage points, while still widely used, are threatened by waterfront development, overgrown vegetation, and a proliferation of shoreline structures and marine vessels. While to a degree these elements are part of the Bay's ambiance, their

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continued growth may choke one of the Bay's most highly valued and accessible attributes.

Like its scenic views, the natural sounds of the Bay are being intruded upon by a variety of Bay uses. The gentler sounds of wind, surf, and sea birds are often overcome by noise pollution by shorefront activities or, more commonly, motor boats and personal watercraft. The noise from the latter, often likened to the sound of a chain saw or motorcycle, is a common source of complaints to area harbormasters. As well as being a nuisance to others on the Bay, these audio intrusions can disrupt habitats and, ultimately, result in a displacement or loss of animal species.