

Benton Beach Beacon



August 1997

Long Distance Travellers Visit Benton Beach

Like so many times before, the old beach became a place of fun and reunion during June, July, and August of 1997. The travel records go to Susan & Ned Peak, Eleanor & Curt Perkins, and Laura Waugaman who journeyed from the states of Louisiana, Missouri, and Washington, respectively.

Abbra and Aaron accompanied Eleanor and Curt, flying East on their privileged airlines pass and renting a car for interesting day trips. They settles in the Sachem's Farm cottage on the Fourth of July and alternately enjoyed both the family poolin Killingworth and the beach for several days. Aaron came equipped with his skateboard for practicing new tricks and Abbra was happy to be able to do things again with her cousin and playmate, Claudia Collinson.

On their three week whirl wind tour of the Northeast, the Peak family managed a 24-hour campout at the beach. They arrived July 31 in two cars and found welcomed relief from the heat on the Bayou country. Jason did not come on this trip, but Joshua, Ketherine, Elizabeth, Kimberly, and Andrew all expressed their love for the Northeast. Andrew is attending Webb Institute for Naval Architecture in Glen Cove, Ling Island, NY. Kim spent time with her parents scouting colleges in Vermont and New

Hampshire. A rare and wonderful visit was made with the Kerners in Brunswick, ME.

Laura Benton Waugaman coordinated a two week summer vacation to coincide with the celebrated clambake. Unfortunately, Randy was unable to fly East because of a job change, but 4-year-old Princess Sarah made the trip, also, sharing time with both Grandfather Edwin Benton and Grandmother Charlene Benton.

Ma He, Ma Hi, Ma Ho!

by Joel Helander

Eliot H. Benton (1889-1981) will always be rememberes as one of the patriarchs of our family. He toiled hard an Sachem's Farm and raised six childres who are themselves the progenitors of the extended family: Marjorie Benton Spalding, Dorothy Benton Perkins, H. Milton Benton, Carolyn Benton Helander, Edwin E. Benton, and Roger W. Benton.

Despite Gradfather Eliot Benton's frugal upbringing, he developed unique childhood friendships wit the children of the first generation of affluent summer residents. Many of his best buddies summered on Vineyard Point adjacent to sprawling Sachem's Farm. The boys formed their own "Vineyard Point Tacht Club," in flattering imitation of the new Sachem's Head Yacht Club. They built toy yachts with canvas sails and raced them close to shore. Prizes were given and there were club dues. The boys invented a novel yell which identified the VPYC and the story has been told that as long as any of these boys, grown to manhood, came to visit Eliot Benton, they

always practiced the yell in the backyard! Here it is:

Ma hem ma hi, ma ho, a rumstick,
Aboomanick, nit kat, ninny kat,
Soap fat merang.
Hobble gobble nickerdacker,
Hobble gobble firecracker,
Hobble gobble rahzo,
Johnny blow your bahzo,
Sis boom bah.
S H, S H, Sachem's Head!!

Myterious Death at Benton Beach

When the campfire flicjers low and the full moon climbs high over Benton Beach, it's story-telling time. Sometimes the legends and the underworld stories challenge credibility, but the best stories are the true stories rooted in Sachem's history.

The story of the tragedy of Daniel Brown Leete who wandered to the waterfront with a musket has been popular, as well as the beheading of the Pequot Indian Sachem or secret Shaumpishuh Cave. Has anybody heard about Reverend Finch's tragic death on Benton Beach?

This true life story is told in the backfiles of many Connecticut newspapers just 118 years ago this month. Rev. Henry O. Finch, who was Acting Pastor of the First Congregational Church in Guilford and due to be formally installed as its pastor, was found dead "on a small beach southeast of Vineyard Point, Sachem's Head."

These were the days before the shore section of Sachem's Head had been subdivided into cottage lots. Vineyard Point was a vacant pasture lot owned by the Newhall family, who were carriage manufacturers in New Haven. The Newhalls were gracious in allowing campers to use the point for overnight campouts. It is believed that 26 year old Rev. Finch and members of his Bible class took advantage of the resplendent Vineyard Point location for their outing. the date was August 27, 1879.

According to the *Shore LineTimes*, Rev. Finch arose about 6:00 a.m. and started down to the beach to gather moss and sea grass. When he left, Benjamin Mason said that he would blow a horn when breakfast was ready. Rev. Finch said they did not need to wait for him since he might go over to Mr. Chamberlain's (a tenant in the former Daniel Brown Leete House) to go fishing. When Rev. Finch never returned, Benjamin Mason went searching and found the body lying face-down on the sandy beach, which was undoubtedly Benton Beach next east of Vineyard Point. Samuel A. Barker, whose family was associated with the hotel business in Sachem's Head, owned Benton Beach and Vineyard Meadow at this time.

According to the *Times*, Rev. Finch's clothing was not completely wet, indicating that the cause of death was not necessarily drowning. However, Doctors Talcott and Reynolds from Guilford believed drowning was indeed the cause because of the condition of the lungs. There was also interesting speculation that he died from a heart condition due to "the fact that the right hand of the deceased, when discovered upon the beach, was found placed over the heart." The final opinion seemed to be that he had a seizure or "fainting fit" because there was said to have been a history of such a disorder in his family. If a seizure occurred near the water and he fell in, Rev. Finch may have actually drowned.

The young minister's death caused a profound sensation throughout the church community and Guilford community. The *Times* said that "scarce a dry eye could be seen in the streets..." Another newspaper said that "his special gift was not the power of his intellect, but the faculty of gaining an immediate access into the hearts of those whom with he came in contact, and swaying their lives for good."

The pall bearers at the funeral in the First Congregational Church were all the young men from his Bible class. Afterwards, a large procession carried Rev. Finch's coffin down Whitfield Street to the railroad depot, where he was transported by train to his hometown in Keensville, NY for burial.

If anyone would like to see a handsome portrait of Rev. Henry Finch, there is one hanging in the

hallway of the First Congregational Church parsonage.

The relationship between Benton Beach and Rev. Finch is one of dubious distinction, but what happened in 1879 is a matter of fact and history which properly belongs in the annals of Benton Beach history.

Fun and Merriment at 36th Annual Clambake

The celebrated clambake on the sands of Benton Beach has come to pass, leaving memories of fun and merriment.

Like clockwork, the seafood went into the hot pit of seaweed at 12 noon. Three hours later, it was cooked to exquisite perfection and the steaming delicacies were dumped into their big trays. Families and guests continued to pour in until the appointed hour and the official head count stood at 56 people, according to Marjorie Benton, who tabulates this information in her diary.

Kudos to Edwin Benton who has mastered the fine art of New England clambakes. Once again, he has coordinated a happy event for many people. Edwin's numerous deputies include wife Kasha who purchased the food and organized the buffet table; Eliot B. Benton who helped dig the pit and install the stonework; Roger Benton and Dan Schaefer who harvested/scrubbed fresh oysters from the creek and also fueled the bonfire; John Collinson who mowed the grounds on the morning of the event; Forrest Helander who harvested seaweed from a secret location; Laura Waugaman who helped wash the seaweed; Marjorie Spalding and Carolyn Helander who made the set-ups early in the morning; and to everybody who cleaned up or contributed in their own way.

It was a hot day with a variable sea breeze and half the crowd went down to the water early after eating. Everywhere there was a frenzy of activity, from the small fry laughing and shouting at the water's edge to the children doing cannonballs off the end of the dock to the

grown-up cousins huddled on the rock in the bay.

David Ott introduced the novelty of his hand-pump rocket launcher, which was fired for swimmers to retrieve.

As the tide dropped, the captain of the "Goose Island Express" took his vessel back to its berth at the Town Marina. Then the sun dropped low and several family groups huddled on blankets and logs around an evening camp fire that finally burned low about 9:00 p.m.

Hooray for the '97 clambake! Its fun and merriment will not soon be forgotten.

[PHOTOS]

The Peak family from Slidell, Louisiana spent 24 hours on Benton Beach during their vacation trip to the Northeast. L to R: Katherine, Kim, Joshua, Susan, Ned, Elizabeth, and Andrew.

Eliot H. Benton (standing, third from the right) poses with the Vineyard Point yacht Club (V.P.Y.C.) on the rocky shore of Vineyard Point, circa 1900.

Ken Spalding's Teen Help Acknowledged

Ken Spalding's work as supervisor of the AmeriCorps College Conservation Corps of Maine, a program of the Maine Conservation Corps of which Ken is the Director, was recently acknowledged in the Monday July 28, 1997 issue of the *Kennebec Journal*, Maine's oldest newspaper.

This summer the program employed roughly 65 "economically disadvantaged" teen-agers between June 23 and August 14. Youngsters in the 14 to 21 year old age group worked in small teams, primarily repairing existing trails, and making new trails, but also building small bridges and picnic tables, planting trees, doing minor carpentry work, installing signs, staining observation decks, mowing grass, and a number of other labor-intensive tasks in places such as

the Appalachian Trail, Nahmakanta Public Lands, Pine Tree State Arboretum, Jamie's Pond, and Savage Park. Funding for the AmeriCorps comes primarily from federal and private grants, though the state of Maine does provide about \$60,000.

“One of the things we want to see happen is for our corps members to gain confidence and self esteem,” says Ken. He believes that this program is a great way for financially underprivileged youngsters to gain a foothold in the job market. Not only does the Corps promote awareness of and allow members to play a role in improving our natural environment, but also “builds character and promotes teamwork.” [This editor agrees wholeheartedly with these notions!!!]

Congratulations to Ken Spalding for a job well done! It is always hear how someone in our family has made a significant improvement to our world.

Notes

- **Calendar of Events:**

Please call Donna Chemacki (203-245-2998), Benton Beach, Inc. secretary, for scheduling a special beach event. This is not necessary for small, spontaneous gatherings.

- Please submit any articles or family updates to Tim Chemacki for incorporation into the next issue.

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