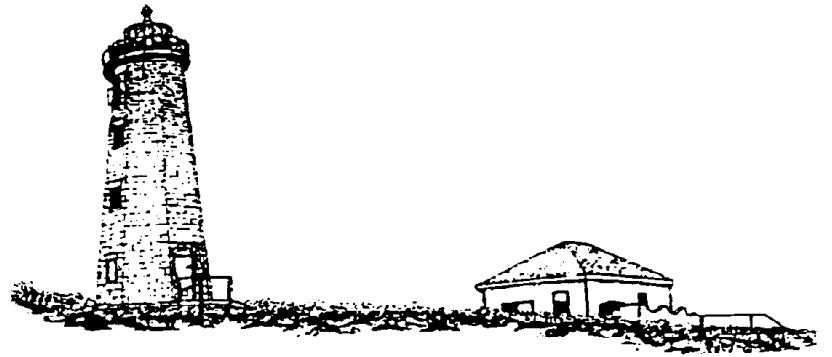


# Benton Beach Beacon



July 2013

## Aftermath of Hurricane Sandy: Family Volunteers Make a Difference

By Joel E. Helander

Never before – or at least within memory of anybody living – has the Benton Beach property experienced such damaging blows as from Hurricane Irene (2011) and Hurricane Sandy (2012).

Two times, back-to-back, our waterfront properties were pummeled by surge tides and high winds. And two times, restoration of the beach property put our resources and patience to a test. Through sheer creativity and family volunteerism, the property has been 90% restored. It's been a long slog on 'round two' (the second restoration) and there is still ongoing work.

During the October 29, 2012 hurricane, which was actually a severe tropical storm by the time Sandy reached Long Island Sound, Vineyard Meadow was under 5–6 feet of angry water and all of the Beach Road was submerged. As quickly as the water crested to coincide with the

time of high tide, the water receded, leaving heart-wrenching damages everywhere. The surge tide backed up to the little dam in Joel's pond, which was far higher than the 2011 surge.

Long Lot pasture was a debris field of all kinds of flotsam, especially lumber, branches, and a thick mat of reeds and other vegetation. The entrance to the parking lot was blocked by the historic little Beach House, wrenched from its four concrete piers and relocated by 50 feet or more.

The tidal surge swept over Roger's Island (campground) and the beach proper, leaving a heavy cover of 3-4 feet of sand. The remaining trees on the south side of Roger's Island were stripped away. The entrance area to the granite breakwater was denuded of 2-3 inches of soil and the low granite curbing reset here by Bill Leete in 2011 was disheveled. Two or more granite blocks in the breakwater were washed overboard.

The good news – and blessing – of the 2012 event is that the Beach Road, including the causeway over the Vineyard Creek, survived intact. The dock survived intact; the breakwater survived relatively intact; the frame of the shade canopy remained intact. Despite the incursion of some sand into the salt meadow by





**A sobering site: the Beach House was swept off its foundation by a midnight tidal surge.**

up to 6 feet in two areas, the beach was not breached or relocated onto the fragile tidal wetland. Most remarkably, Uncle Edwin's famous Polynesian umbrella survived again. Thanks to bold pre-storm evacuations by many family members and the use of Uncle Edwin's backhoe, the compostable outhouse, picnic tables, decktops, doctops, etc. were moved to safe, higher ground near the driveway to Beauty Mountain.

The eeriest part of Sandy is the way she struck with peak wrath and fury at about midnight close to the one-year anniversary of the Halloween '12 Nor'Easter and Irene on 8/28/2011. This time, however, there was no rain and a full moon! The wind came in short, powerful gusts – not a long, wailing gust. Despite cloud cover that waxed and waned, we could see the friendly beacon of Faulkner's Lighthouse flashing on the Soundscape. Under the darkness of moonlight, we could see enough silhouettes of rocks and trees, including a white band of waves breaking over the beachhead, to sense the relentless power of Mother Nature wreaking havoc right before our eyes.

Unlike Irene, Sandy's late appearance in middle of autumn did not give the Board of Benton Beach Corporation much lead time to tackle restoration. Ordinary, day-to-day maintenance of the beach property falls to the Board, but the process for emergency situations demands special time and deliberation. There is a period

of research on the ways and means of restoration, financing strategies, and delegation of tasks. By the time the Board assembled master plans for restoration, winter was upon us. The Blizzard of 2013 over February 8-9 prevented the start of any work projects. Heavy snow remained on the ground for many weeks and not until the eve of spring could meaningful projects begin. Moreover, access to the beach parking lot was completely blocked by the relocated Beach House.

The path was opened to proceed with projects when David Ott and Peter Ott jacked up the Beach House as a preparation to moving it. The moving job was accomplished by the sheer ingenuity of Mike Johnson and Eliot Benton, plus a small family contingent. Using hemlock skids from the North Guilford saw mill and the winch crane on Mike's truck, the Beach House was located to a temporary staging site in the parking lot. More preparatory work was performed by David Ott over two full mornings when he removed fallen trees from Roger's Island, dragging them out with a tow line on his Ford Expedition.

Long before this time, the low contractor's bid (\$1,500) for pushing back the onslaught of sand and re-aligning stone was awarded to Tanners Tree Service, LLC from Clinton, CT. The high



**The "A Team," Eliot Benton and Mike Johnson, prepping the new galvanized steel trailer upon which they hoisted & mounted the Beach House.**



bid was \$4,800. Mike Tanner is Board Member Todd Chemacki's friend, who gave special consideration to allow Todd to work with him. Together, the two men accomplished this heavy job over three days, April 8-10, alternately using a payloader and excavator.



**The beach house sitting in the parking lot waiting to be placed on the metal trailer frame.**

On April 6, there was an intensive, day-long effort in Long Lot pasture to remove the debris field so that Jonathan Page's cattle could be turned in on a timely basis. The success of the day would have been impossible without the valuable services of Mike Johnson using his 1961 John Deere 440 tracloader and Eliot Benton using his large dump trailer. Two 12-hour days (Saturdays) were spent on this endeavor, with the added assistance of an army of others: Jennifer Benton-Ruiz, Max Ruiz, Megan Johnson, Todd Chemacki, Donna Chemacki, Joel Helander, Ellen Fales, Kate Fales, Chip Fales, David Ott, Lynne Ott, Mark Collenburg, Cheryl Ann Leslie, Bryne Leslie, Maxwell Leslie, and Madison Leslie. Lumber suitable for firewood or other projects was salvaged and hauled to the beach, considerable brush was burned, and shredded vegetation



**Todd Chemacki running the excavator.**

matter was hauled to Uncle Edwin's compost pile. At least two runs were made to the stump dump.

The low bidder (\$1,106) for screened topsoil was Testori Brothers Excavation, LLC of Madison, who delivered 40 yards of rich dirt to Roger's Island on April 23. Once again, Jennifer Benton-Ruiz's significant partner, Mike Johnson, came to our aid by renting a bulldozer and personally spreading the loam. The next day, Saturday, April 27, an impromptu work party reported to the beach to rake and seed the new island lawn. Hay bales were purchased at a discount from Midge (Mrs. Vernon) Dudley at Clapboard Hill.

On May 3, Todd did a yeoman's work digging out the canopy area and re-setting the stringer timbers. The official annual work day occurred on the following Saturday, May 4, when more attention to restoration detail was performed. The decktops were laid down under the canopy and select boards replaced. Todd, Eliot, David, Kate, Ellen, and Joel cut up debris from trees



**The Long Lot pasture cleanup would have been impossible without Mike Johnson's John Deere tracloader. Jennifer (right) takes a break.**

that had been piled temporarily in the parking lot, including tidal flotsam. Two trailer loads of materials were hauled to the stump dump. Eliot mounted and connected the solar fan in the compostable outhouse. Eliot and David laid down the dock pieces and have spent long hours over various days re-configuring the stringers to these pieces so that they fit snugly. A crew of Sarah, Jennifer, and Ellen worked on sanding the rust on the canopy frame, followed by spraying a galvanized rust inhibitor. Lynne cleaned out the fireplace, including the lining of the chimney. Sarah and Victor cleaned out the Beach House, still precariously perched in the parking lot waiting for its makeover. Victor helped rake, hoe, and shovel sand from the

edges of the pink granite blocks behind the beach.

After research and some debate, the Board came to the ultimate decision to accept Mike Johnson's unique proposal to fabricate a steel frame trailer using 3x5" steel tube to which the Beach House could be permanently bolted. An axle and wheel system would support the frame and there would be four corner jacks to elevate the building to a desired elevation. As a professional welder (Bluff Head Welders), Mike volunteered his labor on this job. By May 15, the job was completed and Mike towed the trailer to Glastonbury to be galvanized. In a driving rain, Mike delivered the new trailer to the beach on June 10. The dynamic volunteer forces of Mike Johnson and Eliot Benton came together again on Saturday, June 29, when they prepped the trailer to receive its novel load and – ingeniously – mounted the Beach House upon it. As a master carpenter, Eliot now intends to make structural repairs to the little structure, including select vertical siding replacement. When completed, the Beach House can be



**The Entrance to Roger's Island. All vegetation from the south side of the island was ripped away. Sand was 3-4 feet deep in some spots.**

**The beach sand required significant re-grading.**



**Keep off the grass.**



positioned on its former site (albeit with a north/south orientation), stabilized with jacks, whereupon the axle with wheels can be removed. In a hurricane emergency, the Beach House can now be trailered off site.

On May 18, a contingency of energetic family members, e.g. Donna, Sandy, Lynne, Kate, Ellen, and Jennifer, stained or painted picnic tables.

This broad outline of beach property restoration doubtlessly contains omissions. Many mini work days have



been conducted on Saturday mornings and other times to tackle all kinds of miscellaneous repairs and chores. These include: re-extending the barbed wire fence line into the tidal creek, trips to the town's transfer station, stump dump, trap rock quarry, Cherry Hill Construction Co., lumber yards, etc. It would be a dangerous exercise – for fear of further omissions – to name all the family members and friends of family members who have volunteered their time and labor for even the smallest of jobs. Little, but significant contributions have been made continually and cheerfully, such as Ellen's repair of the toilet seat, the efforts of Peter Ott's Scout Troop 474 to set the outhouse on its bed of trap rock, and Uncle Edwin's generous use of his backhoe on multiple occasions.



**Marjorie Benton Spalding, at 96 years old, “supervising”, as she rests on bales of hay**

Together, these volunteers have made a great difference in our second beach restoration. No single workday could have accomplished what was so sorely needed. Cash donations in the amount of \$3,020 have been received as of July 1. On the last day of her life, Aunt Peggy Benton made a commitment of nearly \$4,000 as a gift to purchase a new canopy cover (custom fabricated and installed on 5/31). Donna salvaged new, double-glazed Simonton

windows (for the beach house) from a roadside trash collection.

The value of in-kind volunteer services provided by family members (and friends) for the year 2013 most assuredly amounts to many thousands of dollars. This summer, we should be whole again. Goodbye, Irene and goodbye, Sandy. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

## 33 Clambakes

by Edwin Benton

I am not sure the terminology of “bake” is correct because the actual cooking is accomplished with steam.

The project begins early on the morning of the event or I may start the day before. The location of these parties was, with few exceptions, Benton Beach off Vineyard Point Road in Guilford, CT.

Five to ten feet from the existing fireplace I would dig a hole in the sand 18-20 inches deep and 3-4 feet in diameter. This pit would be lined with rocks – each one 8-12 inches in diameter; always careful to never use rocks with reddish hue which indicated by the color that they had been heated by previous clambakes. The number of rocks may be 15-25.

While this preparation was going on, I would enlist the help of several clambake enthusiasts to commandeer a boat or canoe (or both) and gather rock seaweed. Low tide was another ingredient needed for this particular endeavor. We never seemed to have too much seaweed. My 12-foot canoe with the center third filled seemed to suffice.

It is important to use only rock seaweed, which grows on the rocks. It should not be allowed to dry out. On occasion, to assure enough steam, I would add a few quarts of fresh water.

One year, the seaweed was washed by heavy rain during the night before the clambake. I felt it was a huge improvement in the quality of the food because it cut down the strong seaweed taste. After that happenstance incident, we always washed the seaweed with fresh water first.



Starting about 8:30 to 9:00 am, I would start a fire in the center of the rock-lined pit.

The scheduled time for arrival of the food was 11 am; at this time with wonderful, eager helpers, we would now remove the fire and hot coals over to the adjacent fireplace. This was a hot, difficult, and dangerous operation. It required extra-long handled shovels and pitch forks. A safety precaution was to always have two five-gallon pails of water nearby. This safety feature might have evolved after one of Nancy and Jim Kerner's twin daughters stepped on a hot coal with her bare feet. I bet she can remember that clambake!

We are now going to load the pit oven with food; minimum of time is of the essence.

First, we push and pull the dangerously hot rocks into the center of the pit so there is no longer a ring of rocks around the outside of the pit but instead a flat layer of rocks on the whole bottom of the pit.

We now throw three quarters of the seaweed onto those super-heated stones; the other 25 percent of the seaweed is saved for the top of the food pile. For a time now the heat from those super-heated stones is choked off.



Next a wire mesh of half-inch diameter openings 4 foot wide by 8 foot long is placed on the seaweed; 4 feet of the 8-foot length is placed directly over the area of the stones, which we have covered with seaweed.

Now the food goes onto this wire mesh. Lobsters are the first because they are the things that take the longest to cook and demand the most heat. We would do the corn with the husks still on. This makes a nice buffer cover and encasement of the lobsters, which require the most heat, and also restricts them from crawling away.

Chicken, fish, mussels, oysters, clams, potatoes, and whatever else someone might want to cook is thrown in. Cheesecloth containers were sometimes used to separate different foods; otherwise it is just one big pot-luck of food.

Quickly the four-foot leftover section of the eight-foot length of wire mesh is pulled back over the food; steaming heat is already commencing to come up through that seaweed. The remaining seaweed is put on top of the now encased food.

Last comes an eight-foot by eight-foot sheet of clear plastic over the whole oven. Sand is shoveled around the top edges, which acts as an enclosed seal for the oven door.

A potato has been paced at the very center and top of the oven but under the plastic. After three hours of cooking, this potato is our key as to whether the food is cooked. If a fork will not go easily into the potato, we must let it cook longer.

If we had the food in place and the oven door closed

by 11:30 am, a three-hour cooking time brings us to 2:30 pm. We have been swimming, boating, and beach frolicking during this period; we are all hungry. The oven door is opened and the feast begins.

It has been ten years since I organized the 33<sup>rd</sup> final clambake. Despite the hard work and the ridiculousness of the whole thing, I loved every minute of those wonderful years.

## The Cattle of the Long Lot Pasture

By Ellen Fales

For the past two summer seasons, our BBC pasture has been home to several Polled Hereford cattle. Watching these beautiful animals all summer long has brought great joy to those who live in the area surrounding the pasture. The owner of the cattle is Jonathan Page, who at this moment tends a flock of 21 Polled Herefords and is very happy to be able bring a few to our pasture for the summer.

Jonathan Page, the son of Allison Leete Page, grew up on Moose Hill Road in Guilford, a stone's throw from his family's Leete Farm. The Leete family is descended from William Leete, one of the first settlers of Connecticut and a Governor of New Haven and the Connecticut colonies. The family has owned the Leete Farm and surrounding land for many generations. Jonathan, a graduate of Guilford High School class of 1978, has been raising his Polled Herefords on 50 acres of the family farmland for the past 7 years. The Leete farmland consists of woodland, fields, and salt marsh; very similar to our pasture, so the animals feel right at home. Jonathan stresses that this is a hobby and he is passionate about it. He works long hours at his job for the Whirlpool Corporation but devotes his time when home to his cattle and the farm.

Jonathan's flock currently consists of 21 head: one bull, 6 steers (castrated males), 9 female cows and the rest calves. Breeding is tricky and unpredictable. Last year, Jonathan bred 6 cows, but only 2 ended up having calves; this year his luck improved and he had 7 out of 9. He can really only breed his bull one or two times

within his own flock, to prevent inbreeding. He does lend his bulls out to other farms. The gestation period for a cow is 9 months. Jonathan tries to plan the births for late March to early April and calves stay with their mothers for 8-10 months. When he brought the cattle to our pasture this year in the second week of April, he brought a mother and her 3-week-old calf, a 2-year-old unbred female, a bull calf steer and one older steer. Since then, he has made a couple changes. The unbred female has gone back to the farm to be bred and the mother and her calf have gone back to the farm also, replaced by a couple other female cows. Jonathan's herd also consists of some show quality animals, purchased as far away as Oklahoma. There animals are valuable for their breeding lines.

Polled Hereford cattle are a staple of the beef industry. They have been bred to be genetically hornless and are highly resilient cattle, able to withstand harsh weather conditions and insufficient grazing, if needed. They typically possess a large muscular frame and white face and are one of the gentlest natured cattle breeds. The meat of Polled Herefords has at times been compared to that of the Angus, a very high compliment. Jonathan is meticulous about raising these cattle, is proud that the beef is completely free of any antibiotics and that the cattle are grass fed and free range. He does not feed them any grain regularly, although they do love it; he reserves grain as a way to make them come when he calls them. They are not pets; they are not halter broken and lead a very low stress life. Besides pasture grazing, one of the main staples of the cows' diet from the end of August through the winter months is the pressed apple by-product of cider making, obtained from Bishops Orchards. This nutritious feed carries them nearly through the winter, supplemented by hay, which Jonathan also grows, cuts and bales. The beef from these cattle is sold locally to about 20 private customers and also to two local restaurants: La Cuisine on Route 1 and to Pine Orchard County Club, both in Branford.

We feel very fortunate to be able to enjoy these cattle over the summer months and hope to be able to do so for many years to come.

## To My Ever-loving Parents

by Lynne S. Ott

**[Editor's note:** *The following poem was written by Lynne S. Ott on Tuesday, July 26, 1955 when she was 13 years old.*]

*Here's a little line or two,  
From your daughter Lynne-de-Lou  
Just to tell you that we're well  
Everything is going swell*

*On the breeze way  
We sit, read, and play,  
And feel the breeze all the day,*

*Sunday at six PM we had another ride again,  
To the Perkins' we went,  
Lovely two hours we had spent,  
Donna and I gave a play to help pass the time  
away.  
I played Beth, Donna played Sue,  
For boyfriends we had a few.*

*One was Roger, one was Ken,  
On the phone we talked to them.  
Ken had yellow dreamy hair,  
and for him I had a flare,  
On Roger, Donna had her eyes  
To her she thought him paradise*

*When Uncle Elton came home Friday night,  
a narrow escape he had with his life,  
When he was coming in the drive  
Five feet from where he usually rides  
His steering wheel went round and round  
Like the Ferris wheel at the fairgrounds.*

*The garage man he did call,  
To have it fixed and a new bolt installed  
To Hyed's Drug Store we went last night,  
No money I spent, I thought not right,*

*Aunt Carol ran a barber shop,  
Last Saturday in the heat so hot,  
She washed five heads,  
To get them clean and bright,*

*She curled Donna's Hair, and mine so tight,  
so they were  
curly by the next night.*

*My hair looks neat and very snappy,  
If you were here you'd really be happy.  
And now my dears  
I'll see you soon  
Hope you make it Friday noon.*

*Aunt Carol says it'll be at night,  
So she says she'll leave a light.  
Good bye to you from Lynne-de-Lou  
Here's a kiss one and two:*

XX

*These are kisses from one who misses you.*

*Your loving daughter,  
Lynne*

## Notes

### Calendar of Events:

Please contact Ellen Fales for all beach requests at (401) 783-2429, or [ebfales@aol.com](mailto:ebfales@aol.com) (preferred). You may also text her at (401) 932-5895. All Calendar of Events activity will also be posted on the BBC website. Scheduling is not necessary for small, spontaneous gatherings. Please also note that scheduling **does not** grant exclusive use of the beach during the event.

**July 6 (Sat), 9am - July 7 (Sun), 4pm:** Todd and Kim Chemacki campout, 20 people

**July 12 (Fri), 4pm - July 14 (Sun), 4pm:** Eliot Benton campout, 20 people; up to 35 on Saturday (daytime) for a birthday party

**July 19 (Fri), 1pm - July 23 (Tue) 12pm:** Fales-Schaefer campout, 10 people

**July 26 (Fri), noon - July 28 (Sun), 5pm:** Tim and Sharon Chemacki campout, 20 people

**August 10 (Sat), 2pm:** Benton Family Annual Picnic (downpour date Sunday, August 11)



**August 23 (Fri), 4pm - August 25 (Sun)**  
**4pm:** Eliot, Rachel, and Olivia Benton family  
campout, 15 people

**September 8 (Sun), noon - 5pm:** Fales  
Family picnic, 20 people

### **Benton Beach Website**

Electronic versions of the newsletter, board of directors meeting minutes, the calendar of events, photos, and other notices are all available on the Benton Beach website, [www.bentonbeach.com](http://www.bentonbeach.com). The website is password protected. The username and password should only be shared among family members.

Username: `bbcfamily`

Password: `sticktogether`

### **Mailing Addresses**

If you have recently moved, please make sure the Benton Beach Corporation secretary has your current mailing address.

### **Content Submission**

Please submit any articles or family updates to Tim Chemacki for incorporation into the next issue (*preferably by email*).

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