

# Benton Beach Beacon



April 2019

## Diving at Benton Beach

From nearly its inception, the Board of Directors of BBC has recognized the inherent dangers to personal safety on Benton Beach. It has recognized the potential liabilities that the organization has, and on this subject the meeting minutes have many references going back many years. It is particularly recognized that the long dock ending in water depth ranging from 0–6 feet, depending upon the tide, is a prime liability.

Our local insurance agency has farmed out the family corporation to a “surplus lines” or “commercial” carrier because of the beach

liabilities. Although our policy recognizes most of the BBC property as a cattle pasture, it also recognizes “a beach used for swimming and other recreation...” Due to this, the policy has a special exclusion i.e. it “does not provide any coverage or defense of claims...arising from swimming and/or diving in any body of water.”



Due to so many concerns, several actions were taken by the BBC Board in 2014: a local attorney provided advice on the subject of liability; a guest/waiver release book was introduced for certain special events; the dock handrail was extended; and a “Shallow water, no diving” warning sign was placed at the end of the dock

Alas, diving (defined as a head first plunge) have

continued from the dock at various heights of the tide. In order to help reduce BBC liability and increase personal safety for others, a clearly posted water depth gauge (in increments of feet/inches) was installed before the end of the summer '18 season. This marker should help raise awareness of our shallow water situation at Benton Beach.



The literature on aquatic safety and diving has consistent themes and standards. Some of these are shared here:

From: European Spine Journal, 2009 (“Cervical spine injuries resulting from diving...”)

Data is based on study of 34 hospitalized patients between 1996 and 2006. 97% of the patients were young men and 88% of all injuries occurred in the summer. 70% of patients had fractures in cervical vertebrae, C-5 thru C-7. Average hospitalization time was 21 days; average time in rehab centers was 10.6 months. There was profound impact on personal and professional lives of these patients, such as divorces and job losses. Dangerous diving can have drastic consequences. Education is the key

to prevention with such advice as 1) link hands with arms extended in the diving position; 2) don't dive into water that is less than 2x your height; 3) diving into clear water is important because immersed objects can be identified and avoided.

Mayfield Brain & Spine Institute, Ohio (“Shallow water diving can lead to devastating injuries”)

When the entire weight of one's body hits the bottom [of water] the force transmitted to the cervical spine is incredible. The physics of what happens is unforgiving. These accidents, which are completely preventable, can leave an individual dependent on machines for the rest of his or her life. As many as one of every 10 injuries to the cervical spinal cord is caused by a diving accident. The victims are predominantly male. According to the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, an estimated 11,000 spinal cord injuries occur in the United States each year. Males suffer 81% of these injuries. Diving is the 4th leading cause of spinal cord injury among males.

Boy Scouts of America, Aquatics Safety, 2001

Diving refers to any water entry where the feet are not making first contact with the water. All water entry must be feet first where the water has less than 7 feet of unobstructed depth. No diving is permitted in water with less than 7 feet of unobstructed depth. Any elevated entry from a height greater than 40 inches must be feet first and only from a fixed platform or solid footing no more than 60 inches above the water surface. Clear water depth should be 10 to 12 feet.

American Red Cross: Swimming & Water Safety, 2009

Most diving accidents happen in water that is 5 feet deep and less. The Red Cross recommends that you not dive head first into water that is less

than 9 feet deep. If the depth is not marked, do not dive! If there are ‘no diving’ signs posted, obey them. They are there because the water is too shallow or the area is not large enough for diving.

Foundation for Aquatic Injury Prevention,  
Linden, Michigan, 1999/2018

Very few people know that they can in fact break their neck and/or suffer spinal cord injury from diving into water five (5) feet or less. Our nation’s 100 million average recreational swimmers do not know what “shallow water” is. Very few recreational swimmers consider a depth of five (5) feet shallow water. Diving is not simple. There are very complex laws of physics which are totally unknown and not understood by the average recreational swimmer. The fact is that once your body leaves the deck or diving area, your body is completely out of control and that for an average recreational swimmer there’s nothing you can do to change your trajectory or entry speed at that point.

***“Families are held together by choice.  
Members are alike and unlike,  
There is comfort in the sameness  
And excitement in the differences.  
Respecting and relishing both,  
We are family.”***

-Maya Angelou

## Cousins

by Martha Benton

Cousins. I grew up surrounded by cousins - just one of the many benefits of being born into a farming family. Grandpa gifted land to his six children with the hope that they would raise their families within a stone’s throw of each other. The sons did just that and the daughters who had followed husbands to other locals stayed close with summer visits and day trips to

the little family beach on Long Island Sound.

Impromptu beach gatherings happened on virtually every sunny, summer day and for those relatives who had settled further afield there was an annual family picnic to bring the extended family together at least once a year. Sometimes a clambake. Sometimes a potluck. Sometimes every family filled their own wicker basket and shared desserts and beverages but always a great time.

Those glorious beach days were filled with a never ending supply of cousin playmates and babysitter aunts. At low tide we went out on the rocks and played in the tide pools. We turned over rocks to catch the scurrying little crabs that hid there. Minnows nibbled our toes

as we crushed ribbed mussels and fed the fleshy insides to the hermit crabs. We flung seaweed at each other and sometimes had periwinkle fights until the adults warned that “someone was bound to lose an eye.” At high tide we floated in life preservers, torpedoed off the dock in tubes, and practiced our dives from the mudflats. We explored the barnacle covered dock pilings with oft leaking face masks and swam to the rock to jump off. On especially hot days the aunts and uncles would join us bobbing in the harbor while my mom’s bathing capped head and flying elbows could be seen knifing through the water toward the outer reach of the harbor.

We developed selective hearing when our moms called our water-logged, brown as a berry bodies out of the water for lunch, buying ourselves just a little more time. Banned from the water after eating lest we get crippling cramps and drown,





we collected shells and sought out flat stones to skip across the receding water. Out of swimsuits and back in shorts we posed on the dock as family photographers captured those cousin connections in lasting Kodak moments.

When the light began to fade and the sun set on another day we hastily made plans for summer sleepovers. We begged our mothers to let this cousin stay or let us go until mutual agreements were reached and kids packed into station wagons. We headed off for nighttime whispering on fold out cots accompanied by the steady hum of fans blowing muggy, night air on our sunburned skin. We would wake with too little sleep and sand in the sheets but we didn't care. It was pure summertime bliss surrounded by cousin companions.

## Indian Rage

*by Joel Helander*

The late Eliot H. Benton's grandchildren went Indian-mad in the early 1960s. During the summer vacations, Jill, Heather, Kenneth, and Joel spent long hours riding their bicycles or playing in the fields and woods of Sachem's Head. It would seem as if Jill's imagination had been fired up by a unit in school on the Eastern Woodland Indians or else she had been reading too many comic books. I'm not sure and it may not matter. The fact is, Jill set the fashion for our rage on Indians. When the rage passed in our early teens, we started up the "Turkey House Gang" and finally, "The Willow Club," but these are stories for another time.

Bim and Mike Easton from Vineyard Point greatly contributed to the Indian rage. The Easton brothers seemed half Indian to begin with; at least they could be as wild as Indians when playing on the Benton properties. They were the ones who built dugouts near the beach and set up a wonderful wigwam in a little glen on the lot now owned by Feigs. It was fabricated from long poles and, of course, we called the blanket coverings bear skins. This secret fort was out of view from the world and accessible only by narrow cow paths.

Bim and Mike sometimes wore only loin cloths and carried big hickory bows with homemade arrows. They went out on hunting parties, spearing snakes and frogs in the swamps. Using bright paints, Jill marked a granite ledge with Indian sign language. It all looked like a sketch of an Indian village in our history books.

The cousins divided into war parties and painted themselves with blackberries. They made attacks on each other with wild war whoops hideous enough to frighten a real Wild West Indian. Martha or Holly had a doll with a wig, and in the raids made upon the Indian party to which they belonged, this doll was always taken and scalped. Eventually, the wig was returned, only to have the doll carried off in the next skirmish. The poor doll was as bald as a cue ball. Its wondrous that we didn't dismember it or try to eat its gizzard. In Deforest's History of the Indians of Connecticut, there is an account of Uncas, the Pequot Indian, who did just that.

Jill prepped her hair a la Indian with dainty plumes (probably seagull feathers) and beads and dressed the scalped doll like an Indian princess. We dug red clay near the tide line just west of Benton Beach, made crude pottery with our hands, and baked it in the sun.

Our crowning delight was to have our Grandfather Benton tell us true Indian stories. He told us that his Grandfather Daniel moved down to Sachem's Head District from Nut Plains District (near Guilford Lakes Elementary School) in the year 1810. He told us about Indian tribal warfare on Bloody Cove Beach in the year 1637 that resulted in the beheading of an Indian chief (or "Sachem"). This happened on Uncas Point on the north side of Sachem's Head Harbor, and thus was christened the place name of "Sachem's Head." He told us that his grandfather remembered the stump of the ancient oak tree that had borne in its fork the grizzly head of that Sachem. He told us about secret Shaumpishuh Cave over on West Lane and how his father remembered from boyhood (before the Civil War) an old Indian living there. Often, this old Indian was seen wandering in the woods looking for a certain type of sapling for making baskets.

We enjoyed Grandpa Benton's vivid memory and rousing stories. We always delighted in the halting manner of his story-telling. We always thought that he was right, and sometimes tried to reenact his stories.

My favorite reenactments related to the Pequot Indian nation and the (unfortunate) campaign of the English settlers to drive Pequots away—to the regions of the setting sun in the West whence white men never went. Our final scene invariably ended with the tomahawk beheading. Uncas shot the Sachem with an arrow and beheaded him. By the time my mother and father came down to Sachem's Head to bring me home, if Jill's head had really been cut off as many times as it had been in our reenactment, she would not have been more than once inch tall.

Into the new millennium, Indian rage continued, but with new scenes and different actors. It hit

the Helander Family after Lorri and Forrest brought Hope and Joya to the new, extraordinary Pequot Indian Museum in Ledyard, Connecticut. During their family camp-out on Benton Beach, the Helanders biked to several locations to sift for Indian artifacts. Their prized find was a result of ten hours of digging: a Susquehanna broad point (spearhead), which was made 2800–3400 years ago.

## Benton Beach In History

*by Joel Helander*

Once upon a time, Benton Beach was a part of the Great Oxpasture of Guilford—a common and undivided tract of land where the first settlers pastured their livestock. The “fifth division” of lands in 1729 surveyed and divided the Great Oxpasture into 260 lots. During the decade of the 1730’s and 1740’s, Jordan Leete began his lifelong habit of buying land; he bought and sold fervently, and there are 53 transactions recorded in his name for oxpasture land. His purpose was to build one choice farm, where he built a house as early as 1746. A low-lying section of land at the foot of the driveway at 111 West Lane—around the corner from Benton Beach—is the approximate site of the Leete House.

The Jordan Leete farm encompassed 100 acres, including 11 acres of salt meadow known as Vineyard Meadow, which included today’s Benton Beach. Benton Bay was all meadow in Jordan Leete’s day. One of the Great Oxpasture “highways” (public town road) stretched across the meadow to connect Turkey Point with Vineyard Point. Remnants of this ancient roadway could still be seen in our bay at dead low tide until rocks were removed in 1992. Grandpa Benton (Eliot H. Benton) remembered this road from his boyhood days. There are

stories of the Cianciolo family driving their horse-drawn wagon over it as they delivered fruits and vegetables to the summer cottagers, circa 1910.

It came to pass that Jordan Leete’s brother, Solomon, owned and occupied Jordan’s house in the valley of the Great Oxpasture. In 1777, the British burned this house to the ground. Between 1789 and 1814, Hooker Bartlett purchased the 11-acre Vineyard Meadow in long strips from Leete heirs. South boundaries in the land deeds refer to the “sea beach”, which is, of course, today’s Benton Beach.

Bartlett was a farmer in Guilford center who lived in an old saltbox that stood on the southwest corner of Norton Avenue and Whitfield Street. He trekked down to his Sachem’s Head shorefront with oxcart and team to gather seaweed and seashell fertilizers, but the fine meadow grasses were his prize. Every farmer in his day harvested quantities of weed-free salt hay for mulching and bedding. Inasmuch as Bartlett did not own frontage on the Vineyard Road, a right of way evolved, which was the beginning of Benton Beach Road as we know it. For Bartlett, it was never a road to the beach, but a road to his esteemed interior meadowland. The land records of Guilford are very specific about this road as early as 1814, when Hooker Bartlett’s deed reserves a right to pass and repass, yet he was responsible for keeping the causeway bridge in good repair.





Photo by J. Helander, 1986

John H. Bartlett (1796-1864) succeeded his father's title to the Vineyard Meadow and beach. Samuel A. Barker, who lived in Jennifer Koncz Cowie's former home (161 Falcon Road) acquired the property in 1862. He used the meadow for 22 years before selling out to Dan L. Benton, Jr., who was Grandpa Benton's grandfather. Herbert Benton, who was Grandpa Benton's father, acquired the meadow and beach when he received the upland and farmhouse (370 Vineyard Point Road) "for love and affection" in 1888. The property was essentially a wedding gift from his father. Mrs. Martha Shryock of Vineyard Point used to say that when the Shryock family first came to the Point (1898), the shoreline to their east was known as "Bartlett's Bay" and "Bartlett's Beach".

Like the Leetes, Bartletts, and Barkers, Herbert Benton harvested hay from Vineyard Meadow. He also harvested another natural resource from his little beach in the lap of the meadow: sand. Mother nature has always blessed the beach with uncanny amounts of good sand. Winter storms constantly replenish the supply. Assisted by his son, Eliot, Herbert Benton loaded and delivered beach sand for \$1.50 per load. His farm wagon was equipped with a special boxed bed for this job. Howard C. Noble of Prospect Point in Sachem's Head, purchased hundreds of loads of sand to be used in building projects. The budding summer colony needed quantities of sand for mixing concrete used in new construction.

Herbert Benton represented the first of six generations in the Benton line to revel in free

moments at Benton Beach. That's six generations since 1888 and Erin Falvey became the first member of the sixth generation:

Herbert Benton (born 1843)  
 Eliot H. Benton (born 1889)  
 Marjorie B. Spalding (born 1916)  
 Janice S. Falvey (born 1948)  
 Mathew D. Falvey (born 1968)  
 Erin M. Falvey (born 1989)

Herbert dug clams and launched a double-ended skipjack for oystering. Eliot and Mabel Benton parked their Dort automobile on Vineyard Point and paraded their six children to the beach for picnics, but for swimming it was never used.

The modern history of Benton Beach begins in the early 1960's when the potential for a swimming place was realized. Eliot Benton and Milton Benton overhauled the ruinous meadow road and it became Benton Beach Road. An elementary dock was built on cedar poles hammered into the meadow flats and a bulldozer hired to scrape rocks out of the bottom of the bay. Dorothy Perkins initiated the beach house project in 1963. This involved moving an old carriage shed from the west lawn of the farmhouse. In 1973, Edwin Benton engineered the construction of the granite breakwaters.

There have been countless other improvements at the Benton Beach in our lives. Everyone may have their own story or memory, and you are invited to share it as a contribution for future issues of our newsletter so the modern history of Benton Beach is recorded.

[NOTE: This article was originally published in the Benton Beach newsletter, February 1991, when Curtis E. Perkins served as its first editor. Thank-you, Donna Chemacki, for retyping it as a Word document.]

## Notes

### Ott Updates

*Provided by Lynne Ott*

Emily is enjoying Alaskan adventures while working as an occupational therapist in the Anchorage school system.

Danielle is studying Communication Disorders as a sophomore at Southern Connecticut University. She also teaches yoga and works with the wellness program which makes her happy.

Peter is a senior at Southern studying finance. He is working as his Dad's Assistant and digital Advisor at AXA Equitable.

Lynne is using her improved mobility due to surgery on her right knee that Dr. John McCallum performed on June 19, 2018. A big thank you to family for all the help and love after surgery which helped make for a speedy recovery.

Written by Marjorie Benton Spalding

January 28, 2014 (provided by Lynne Ott):

*Lynne is caring for me 3:30-5:30*

*It's snowing - it's blowing*

*The white flakes*

*Are showing on the ground*

*Big flakes, round and round flakes*

*Small flakes, fast flakes*

*Snowflakes.*



## 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.

**Phone:** (860) 615-4993

**Email:** [space.explorer@gmail.com](mailto:space.explorer@gmail.com)

## Benton Beach Website

Electronic versions of the newsletter, board of director 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*).

Timothy Chemacki

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