

Island Opinion

• EDITORIAL •

When winters were really cold

How cold was it? The latest round of arctic air has frozen the island ponds — enough for an informal hockey game this past weekend, as pictured on page one. Old-timers will tell you, though, they can remember when it was really cold . . .

It was a bitterly cold month of February in 1934. That's when the thermometer plunged to a shivering 17 degrees below zero. West Passage iced over and people walked from Fort Getty to Fort Greble on Dutch Island. On Feb. 19, ice jammed the wheel boxes of the ferry Beavertail as it left its West Ferry dock. The ferry was out of operation until March 6. The incident made people get serious about building the first Jamestown Bridge.

That same day, the ferry Governor Carr took 90 minutes to reach Newport from Jamestown because it had to break its way through the ice floes across East Passage. That winter the cold allowed islanders to harvest about 3,000 tons of ice, which was stored for summertime use.

During the winter of 1917-1918, Dutch Harbor and much of West Passage was frozen. The ferry J.A. Saunders was unable to deliver supplies from Jamestown to the soldiers stationed at Fort Greble on Dutch Island. So supplies were taken by ferry from Saunderstown. Soldiers walked out across the ice to the boat and took the provisions by sled back to Fort Greble. Then the bay iced over and the ferry was stuck at Dutch Island.

In January of 1918, the temperature fell to minus 12 degrees. To make matters worse, there was a serious coal shortage on the island to heat the homes. Two men reportedly walked from Wickford to the Conanicut Lighthouse at the north end of Jamestown.

There were some frigid times in the previous century. On Feb. 11, 1875, it was reported that the ferry from Jamestown became stuck in the ice in Newport Harbor. On Jan. 13, 1893, West Passage iced over. There were some 50 vessels, many three- and four-masted schooners, stranded in the ice from Jamestown to Wickford.

— Jeff McDonough



Voters spoke on highway barn

Once again, it has been suggested that the highway barn be placed on Lot 71 on East Shore Road where Eldred Avenue used to come in, now next to the entrance and exit to the cross-island expressway.

Here are some problems involved in considering this area:

First: There are restrictions on the use of this land because the state recognizes the archaeologically sensitive nature of this area and the residential character of

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the neighborhood.

Second: There are many children in neighboring houses who are not accustomed to having trucks of all sizes erupting into East Shore Road.

Third: Since the area is clearly visible from the cross-island expressway, the traveling public and residents would get a very industrial impression of Jamestown.

Fourth: There are many residents adjacent to Lot 71 who are dependent on wells

for their water. How will these be affected by their potentially polluting neighbor, especially as the wells are already sensitive due to their proximity to sea water?

Fifth: Let us not forget that the voters of Jamestown, years ago, bought the north end property with the explicit intention that the highway barn be built there. Recently, the voters of Jamestown re-affirmed this intention in an islandwide vote of almost 2-1. We live

in a democracy: What gives anyone the right to disregard this clearly voiced will of the people?

Lisa G. Tyre,
East Shore Road

Questions about recent letters

Two letters in last week's Press left me scratching my head.

The first letter dealt with the Environmental Protection Agency designating Jamestown as a sole source aquifer. Does Jamestown

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The news of 10 and 15 years ago is from the Jamestown Press. The news of 25, 50, 75, and 100 years ago from the Newport Daily News comes from the collection of the Newport Historical Society.

100 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, February 7, 1907:
Rift ice has again filled Dutch Island harbor and shut off communication by launch from Fort Greble.

Present indications point to a hard steamboat fight centered around Jamestown the coming spring and summer. The Saunders line (which ran an opposition ferry to the Jamestown & Newport Ferry Company) is having a new and larger boat built and there is a movement on foot by the Ferry Company to secure added facilities.

From the Newport Daily News, February 9, 1907:

The Jamestown Band will give another of their series of socials and whists tonight at the Gardner House.

Steamer Warren stopped here today to land an automobile which has been aboard since she grounded a week ago tonight on the Dumplings.

75 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, February 5, 1932:

(At a meeting of the Board of Trade) the subject of parks for Jamestown was discussed at considerable length, and it was voted to lay the matter over until the secretary could communicate with the Garden Club and the different societies in Jamestown to get their opinion and co-operation on the subject. . . . The work being carried on by the unemployment committee on the roads, and the cleaning of debris, received favorable comment.

From the Newport Daily News, February 6, 1932:

The American Legion Post has arranged for a Leap Year dance to be held in Holy Ghost Hall. Music will be furnished by the Racketeers.

From the Newport Daily News, February 8, 1932:

Mrs. B. C. Trowt gave a delightful Valentine party for her class of ukelele and harmonica pupils and their friends



This week in Island history

Compiled by Sue Maden
Week of February 8

at her home on Narragansett avenue Saturday afternoon.

50 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, February 5, 1957:

The Commerce Oil Co. is planning immediate conferences in Washington to meet Navy suggestions for changes in the proposed \$39,000,000 Jamestown refinery plans. Two principal alterations were requested by the Under Secretary of the Navy Gates in his letter last week. The first was to locate the berthing pier south of Gould Island so as not to interfere with torpedo practice. The second was to relocate six oil fuel storage tanks further west and in the lowland area at the water's edge.

From the Newport Daily News, February 8, 1957:

The Newport County Saltwater Fishing Club went on record last night in opposition to the proposed oil refinery in Jamestown.

From the Newport Daily News, February 11, 1957:

Judge John S. McKiernan in Providence Superior Court today rejected a petition by Jamestown residents for a preliminary injunction to prevent the state from issuing a permit to build a pier for the proposed \$39,000,000 Jamestown refinery.

25 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, February 5, 1982:
The town dump is running out of land and is posing a problem for town officials.

From the Newport Daily News, February 9, 1982:

The Jamestown Town Council Monday night adopted a

\$3.27 million budget for Fiscal 1982-83. The budget, up 9.6 percent from the current year, calls for a \$3.90 increase in the tax rate.

The U.S. Coast Guard last week joined a growing list of objectors to a redesigned, lower Jamestown Bridge across the West Passage of Narragansett Bay. The Coast Guard insisted on original design plans, calling for 135 feet of clearance.

From the Newport Daily News, February 10, 1982:

Building permits in 1981 were issued for 33 new single family homes in Jamestown.

15 years ago

From the Jamestown Press, February 6, 1992:

Town employees who are members of three different unions this week voted unanimously not to renegotiate their existing contracts.

The Jamestown Parent Teachers Organization has honored four longtime school volunteers by dedicating its 1992 cookbook to them. (They were Florence "Flo" Brazil, Ida Richard, Robert "Red" Greene, and Robert "Captain Bob" Seelinger.)

10 years ago

From the Jamestown Press, February 6, 1997:

Sailor and certified cold water diver William Geib of West Warwick has requested permission of the Coastal Resources Management Council to lease space in the bay a mile off the shore of Watson Farm Beach. . . . Geib's plan includes placing 252 cages 10 feet below the water level. Each cage will be three feet high, four feet wide and four feet long. They will be made of two to three inches of meshed, lobster-pot wire with horizontal shelves to hold approximately 36 bags of shellfish seed. With the cages, Geib plans to plant shellfish seed to grow about 2 million oysters a year. His plan also calls for 2,700 lantern nets that will hang about 10 feet underwater and suspend from an above-water line. The line will be attached to buoys that will be spaced 20 feet apart. . . . With the nets, Geib plans on growing roughly 600,000 scallops per year.