

Island Opinion

• EDITORIAL •

Imagine an oil refinery on Conanicut Island

An oil refinery in Jamestown, you say? No way! Think about it for a moment.

Where today there are beautiful homes in East Passage Estates we would instead see massive crude oil storage tanks. The refinery itself would be located in West Passage Estates. Three large smokestacks would tower 240 feet above sea level.

A major port facility on the east shore of Conanicut Island would be where the oil tankers would offload the crude.

Instead of an island with a rural north end, we would have had the industrial north end, complete with the general pollution of our air, land and water. The north end would have been a blighted landscape.

It nearly happened a half a century ago. Jamestown almost became the home of the "world's most modern oil refinery."

Jamestown would not be the place we love today. Narragansett Bay would be a different place, too.

It was 50 years ago this week that a small group of islanders known as the Jamestown Protective Association won a landmark court ruling against a company that wanted to build the oil refinery in Jamestown.

The U.S. District Court judge, who had heard arguments in the case five months earlier, effectively barred the Commerce Oil Refining Corporation from building a massive oil refinery on the north end of the island that would have forever changed Jamestown in ways that most of us would not have liked.

Every Jamestown resident should read the book "Dismissed with Prejudice," by Mary Stearns McGaughan and Terrence F. McGaughan. There are several copies available at the Jamestown Philomenian Library.

The book relates the true story about how a few islanders took on an oil giant, a real David vs. Goliath tale. The odds were not in their favor. Fifty years ago everyone wanted the oil refinery in Jamestown. It would create 250 jobs. The Town Council approved of the idea and so did the majority of the island residents. The proposal to build the oil refinery pitted neighbor against neighbor here in Jamestown.

The governor and the state legislature wanted the oil refinery. Even the Providence Journal was in favor of building the oil refinery in Jamestown.

Those islanders who formed the Jamestown Protective Association opposed the politicians and the oil industry tycoons. They simply did not want an oil refinery to spoil Jamestown.

You could say that they were our island's original NIMBY's, an acronym which stands for "not in my backyard."

A legal battle was waged. Injunctions were filed asking the court to bar construction of the proposed refinery. The oil industry fought back. They sued the 17 Jamestown property owners who opposed the refinery for \$2 million each.

Finally, the case went to trial. Experts for both sides testified over the 41 days.

Ultimately, the court decided that the refinery should not be built. The judge ruled invalid the zoning ordinances that had been changed to allow the construction of the refinery. The judge said it was also illegal to exempt the refinery from the town's building code. And the judge could not find any evidence that the public welfare was protected, so the license to operate the refinery was revoked.

Those of us who now live in Jamestown should be ever grateful to those 17 Jamestown residents who stood in the way of progress. Their battle was fought before we were concerned about our environment. Smokestacks were a good thing in those days because they meant jobs. Those JPA members had the courage to preserve their little corner of the world. If fact, the leader of the JPA, Dr. William Miner, went on to become one of the founders of Save the Bay.

Fifty years after the court ruling, Jamestown is a place we call home. And we don't share our island with an oil refinery.

— Jeff McDonough



Many thanks for lock-in success

The Jamestown Teen Center would like to thank all who helped to make the "Dodge the Holiday Blues" lock-in and dodge ball tournament a success.

I would like to thank the Jamestown Education Foundation for providing us special funding. I would like to thank Jessica from the Women's Resource Center of Newport and Bristol Counties for helping to facilitate the event.

I would also like to thank Teen Center Coordinators Ben and Nico, from the Boys and Girls Club and Martin Luther King Community Center, for bringing teens from your program and making sure the night went

smoothly.

The Jamestown teens had a great time meeting teens from Newport and wish to get together for events in the future.

Thank you to Joey Foxx and Deb Ruggiero from HOT 106 and Citadel Broadcasting for coming to support our teens. Thanks to Freddie Bingell from the House of Pizza for making sure the teens had enough pizza and to the Accidental Artist for providing us supplies for our holiday crafts.

I would also like to thank all the parents who donated food and supplies for the evening. Finally, I would like to thank the Teen Center staff

for staying up all night and making sure the teens were well supervised and having a great time. Thank you everybody, we wouldn't have been able to do this without your support.

Debbie Tungett
Teen Coordinator

Welcome housing authority director

I would like to thank the V.F.W. for giving the seniors a Christmas party at the Pemberton Apartments. A good time was had by all.

Also, thank you to the Jamestown Housing Authority for the community

breakfast held at Pemberton Apartments. Everything was delicious and everyone had fun.

I would like to say goodbye to Sirje Carl as the director of the Jamestown Housing Authority. Everyone had a good time at the retirement party held on Dec. 30 in the Pemberton Apartments community room. Good luck, Sirje, on your new adventure.

I would also like to welcome Ronald DuPont as our new executive director. Ron has been at Pemberton Apartments for over three years as deputy director. Good luck in your new position, Ron.

Beverly R. Snyder
Jamestown

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• LETTERS •



This week in Island history

Compiled by Sue Maden

Week of January 8

The news of 10 and 15 years ago is from the Jamestown Press. The news of 100 years ago came from the collection of the Newport Historical Society.

100 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, January 4, 1909

Codfish are being caught by the trawlers in the east bay but not yet in sufficient quantity that is profitable at the prevailing price of about a cent a pound.

From the Newport Daily News, January 8, 1909

Messers Marshall and Gamache are outfitting auxiliary catboat Birdie which the former recently purchased at Block Island, to be used for codfishing.

75 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, January 1, 1934

Commencing Tuesday hot lunches will be served each noon at the Thomas H. Clarke school to the children unable to go to their homes during the noon hour. Others wishing hot soup or cocoa will be served for the small sum of five cents. Mrs. Edwin Conant will prepare the lunch, with Anne Drury as dietician.

From the Newport Daily News, January 2, 1934

The dance at the Grange hall and Holy Ghost hall were well attended on New Year's eve.

While digging a trench recently in the front yard

at the Carr homestead in Carr's lane, the oldest house on the island, a cannon ball, nine inches in circumference, and imbedded over two feet in the ground, and badly rusted, was dug up by one of the workmen. It is supposed that the ball was fired by one of the British ships, anchored in the harbor, during the war of the Revolution, at which time many houses in Jamestown were fired upon and burned by the British.

From the Newport Daily News, January 3, 1934

(At the town council meeting) A. A. Boone reported progress made on the cemetery project and removing the hedge between Central Baptist church and town property, both included in the new unemployment program now under way. ... The following petition, assigned by residents of the town was received, reported, and placed on file: "We hereby respectfully petition the Honorable Town Council to take the proper steps to secure the necessary Federal aid in order that all unemployed men may receive a like share of work to the end that hire may be an equal and equitable distribution of employment in Jamestown."

From the Newport Daily News, January 6, 1934

(At a business meeting of the Republican Club) the committee on the ping pong table reported that the material for the table had been donated by some of the members and the table had been built by W. L. Arnold and will be ready for use in a short time.

50 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, January 3, 1959

The Narragansett Bay Home Owners Assn. Inc., opposing the establishment of a refinery in Jamestown, said today it believed an agreement between the Com-

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