



WOMPATUCK NEWS

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Friends of Wompatuck State Park

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Reverend John Eliot preaching to the Native Americans. Chief Wompatuck began his life as a Praying Indian.



Sculptor Gary Nisbet created "Wallflower" out of demolished cinder blocks from Wompatuck State Park's former bunkers. The exhibit is on view at the Art Complex Museum in Duxbury.

Park History - A Brief Overview

By Jim Rose, FOW News Editor and Historian

Wompatuck State Park comprises nearly seven square miles of land encompassing the towns of Hingham, Cohasset, Scituate and Norwell.

The property first belonged to Indian chief Josiah Wompatuck (White Deer), son of Chief Chickataubut (House-a-Fire) of the Massachuset tribe. Chickataubut died of small pox in 1633 leaving his brother, Kuchamakin, to raise Wompatuck.

Because of the widespread devastation from small pox, the Massachuset tribe was indirectly incorporated into the Wompanoag nation.

Wompatuck was exposed to Christianity at an early age and was considered a Praying Indian. He adapted well to the culture of the English, learning their language and customs.

In 1653 he deeded the land of present day Norwell, Scituate and Cohasset to the English settlers. In

1665 he deeded the land of Hingham.

Although involved in the Christian way of life, the Praying Indians occasionally resorted to warfare. After the Mohawk tribe attacked Praying Indians near Boston, Wompatuck led a retaliatory raid in New York and was killed in 1669. His son Charles Josiah became Sachem Chief in 1671.

In the 1700s, early settlers and ship captains held title to this area, but the land was never extensively developed. The tall trees were used for masts on schooners. Stonewalls were constructed to denote boundary lines.

During the 1800s, local residents utilized the land's resources. Families maintained wood lots to heat homes. Streams powered the Stockbridge and Triphammer Mills for shingle manufacture. Quarrymen extracted granite for local construction projects.

Farmers tilled the fields for crops and graze land for livestock.

The Lincoln family, who descended

from Hingham's first settler Samuel Lincoln, commercially bottled Mount Blue spring water.

During the Civil War all able-bodied men were enlisted to fight and many never returned. In their absence the land was not used much and the forest started to reclaim it.

Early in the 1900s there were many private landowners and it wasn't until the outbreak of World War II that once again this land would become the property of a single owner.

In 1941, the United States Navy acquired the property from private landowners to expand the already existing Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot (now Bare Cove Park). This new area was called the Cohasset Annex. Many cement bunkers (115) were constructed and this area was turned into a huge supply depot.

During World War II it was the main ammunition supply point for the North Atlantic Fleet engaged in the

continued on page 2

Park History - A Brief Overview (continued)

“Battle of the Atlantic” against German U-boats (submarines). Explosives such as depth charges, torpedoes, bombs, fuses, projectiles, cartridges and rockets were produced and stored here.

When World War II ended the Annex reverted to maintenance only. In 1950 it was reactivated for the Korean Conflict and the Depot was fully operational again.

After the Korean Conflict ended in 1953, the Cohasset Annex resumed ordnance production, maintenance and storage.

In the mid 1950s, the U.S. Navy based Guided Missile Service Unit 215 at the Cohasset Annex. The unit serviced and supplied the Navy with its first ship-to-air guided missiles. The Cohasset Annex also supplied the U.S. Navy with its first nuclear depth charges.

Due to budget constraints, the Navy closed the Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot and the Cohasset Annex on June 30, 1962. The federal government deactivated the Cohasset Annex in 1963 and the land was declared surplus property.

In 1967, the Department of Natural Resources purchased 3,496 acres to convert into a public park. For a few months in 1968, the U. S. Army used a portion of the land to manufacture land mines for the Vietnam War.

On May 25, 1969 the area opened to the public for limited outdoor recreation as Wompatuck State Park. The park took several years to complete and on June 16, 1973 the State had a dedication ceremony for Wompatuck State Park.

In 1986, the park grew with an additional 600 acres parcel gained from the government. On January 1, 2004 the park acquired a further 125 acres from the closed U.S. Army Reserve Center to complete the total acreage comprising it today. ■

Annex Worker, Peter Stonis, Dies at 97

By Jim Rose, FOW News Editor and Historian



Peter Stonis

Peter Stonis passed away on Saturday, May 21 at his home in Rockland, Massachusetts. Stonis was a WWII Army combat veteran. He was wounded in action at Guadalcanal. He received the Bronze Star and Purple Heart for his valour.

After the war, Stonis worked at the Annex as a crane operator and train engineer.

I first interviewed Peter Stonis for the Veterans History Project in 2004. Like most Annex veterans, I found his story fascinating and unique.

“I joined the Army in 1941,” said Stonis. “I started basic training at Camp Edwards on Cape Cod. From there, I was sent on maneuvers in North Carolina. We slept in cotton fields and Black people’s porches. It was tough but I enjoyed it.

“After my training I was sent to the West Coast and eventually to Guadalcanal in 1942. Our unit in the Americal Division suffered many casualties. The enemy pinned us down and threw Banzai charges at us at night. Their 16 inch shells sounded like freight trains flying over us and shook the island when they hit. Four of our cruisers were sunk in a place called “Iron Bottom Bay.”

“I was wounded on November 20, 1942. I also came down with malaria. It took me ten years to get over the disease.

“My division sent me home to recuperate in 1943. I was discharged in 1944.

“After the war, I started work as a heavy equipment operator at the Squantum Naval Air Base. In the 50s I went to the Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot as a heavy equipment operator and also drove trains and operated cranes.



Stonis pictured on left with fellow workers at the Annex in the 1950s.

“I enjoyed the Depot. I felt like I was really accomplishing something. I built the fire roads around the Annex. I also cleaned up the Back River of spilled ammunition using a clam shell crane. We had all kinds of things end up in that river. I found machine guns, pistols, grenades, bullets, five-inch shells, twenty-millimeter crates...you name it!

“My specialty was to load and off-load ammunition from trains and barges to trucks and warehouses. Whenever a Navy ship pulled into Boston Harbor, they would store the ammo at the Depot and sometimes replace the powder in the shells.

“When the place shut down in 1962 I moved on to the Boston Naval Shipyard as a crane operator.

“I retired and ended up living in Rockland. The town made me grand marshal of the Memorial Day Parade when I was 94. Not bad for an old war vet.”

Stonis was a valuable source of historic information for the park. He always showed up at events wearing a jacket and tie. You couldn’t meet a kinder and gentler guy. A real class act that couldn’t be duplicated. He was always willing to help and never cared about his own welfare. Stonis co-founded Chapter 79, Disabled American Veterans in Quincy.

He was buried in his WWII uniform at the Bourne National Cemetery on May 26. He will be missed but not forgotten. ■