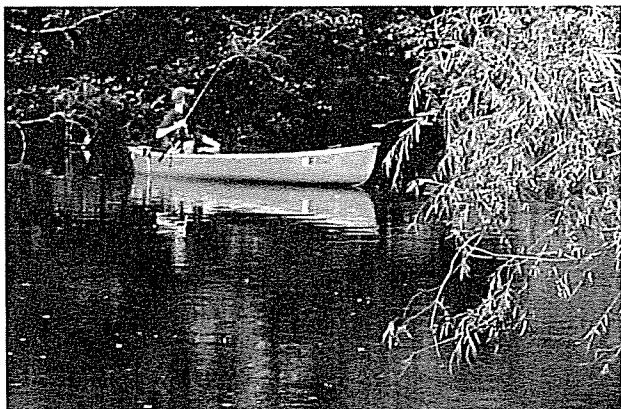


Sweet Yesterdays: Saugatucket Diary

by
Charles A. Sweet



*Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition
Advocates for Environmental Awareness
Photo Credits: Ora E. Wry and
Charles A. Sweet, Archives*



Wakefield Elementary School borders the Saugatucket River. Students are studying the quality of the water and its impact on the river. The results are shared. Their dream is a clean supply of water for sustaining life, where people can fish, swim, or use a canoe.

SAUGATUCKET RIVER

In responding to a request from Maureen Whelan of the SAUGATUCKET RIVER HERITAGE CORRIDOR COALITION, I submit the following as some of my memories of living near the Saugatucket River and one of its tributaries.

The Saugatucket River is fed from several tributaries which include Saugatucket Pond (Peace Dale Pond), the Indian Run Reservoir via Indian Run Brook, Indian Lake, California Jims, Asa Pond and Rocky Brook Reservoir, the pond beside the Peace Dale Grammar School plus several other small ponds. Other than the three ponds in the tri-pond group (California Jims, Asa and Rocky Brook), these ponds and lakes were man made as water supplies for the Hazard Mill.



Peace Dale Pond, Canal, Waterfalls: these provided power to Hazard Mill, currently Palisades Industries. Gate House can be seen at far right.

Questions from Maureen Whelan:

1. "How long have you lived/worked on the Saugatucket River?

I never lived or worked on the Saugatucket River, but I have lived and worked very near it. I was born on Columbia Street in Peace Dale, across the street from the Saugatucket. We moved to Spring Street when I was about two years old and lived there for twenty-one years. This property was originally owned by my great grandfather, Charles Sweet and has been owned continuously since 1875 by either a Charles Sweet or his wife. I, Charles A. own it now and my mother, Mrs. Charles H. lives there. This property is right next to the Indian Run Brook which empties past the end of the Village Green into the Saugatucket River near the Columbia Street bridge.

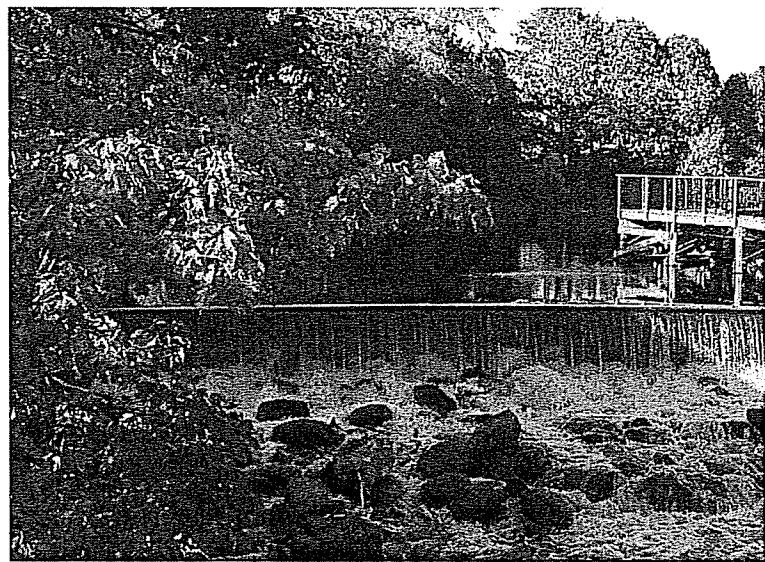
My wife and I have owned two properties, where Koolco, Inc. is located for the past thirty years and both of these properties border the Saugatucket River below the waterfall about one hundred fifty yards downstream from Main Street. We live at Silver Lake which is in the Saugatucket watershed.

2. "What are your memories of the river?

Like most older residents, I remember when the river water was brightly colored with the residue from the dyeing operation at the mill. The river was highly polluted until the municipal sewer system was installed during the nineteen seventies. Not only did waste products from the mill enter the

river, but sewerage and street runoff also entered the river. Some of this sewerage came from quite a distance away through the storm sewer systems. Since the Municipal Sewer System was installed, the river water quality is vastly improved.

Around 1939 the Federal Government through the W.P.A. (Works Progress Administration) dredged the Saugatucket River from the bridge on Church Street in Peace Dale to the dam at Main Street in Wakefield. It needs to be dredged again, but I'm afraid that's impossible today.



*Saugatucket River Falls and Walkway
Main Street, Wakefield*

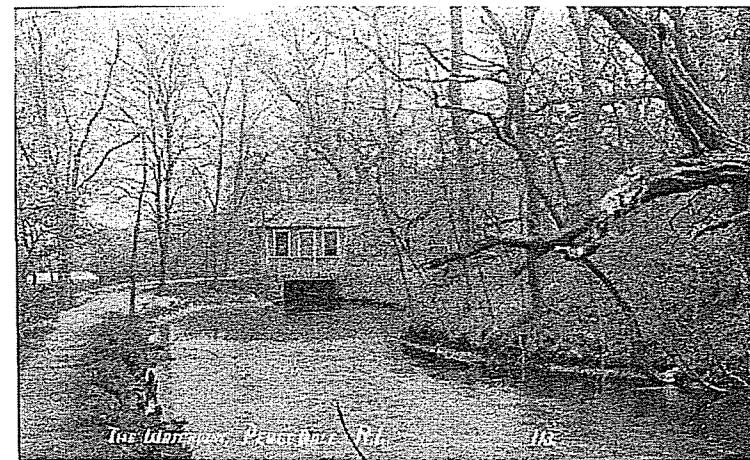
Due to school overcrowding during 1941, part of the Neighborhood Guild was used for the seventh and eight grade grammar school class overflow students. During the summer in preparation for the fall classes, the town purchased desks for the classrooms. One day my cousin, Francis Sweet and I found the discarded heavy cardboard boxes which the desks came in, on the ground outside the "Guild", except these boxes did not look like boxes to us...they looked like boats. We took one each and launched them across the street in the Saugatucket where the River Bend bridge is now located. We had a great time for about an hour, when our boats became a little soggy and were riding deeper in the water. That ended this excursion.

Another memory I have of the Saugatucket River is during World War II, one of the locals, who had the rank of "General" bestowed on him by some other locals, frequently claimed that he observed German submarines in the river. Since he patrolled the Saugatucket during World War II looking for submarines, I would have thought the rank of Admiral would have been more appropriate. However everyone knew him as "General".

We played in the "Brook" (Indian Run Brook), fished in it and caught fresh water eels in it. My brother Ray caught many trout in this brook. This brook is fed from the Old Mountain Reservoir (which we called "the reser"). This pond was one of the backed up sources of water for the Hazard

Mill, if needed, but was never used for that purpose. There are also two springs in the Spring Woods feeding this brook. People in the area of the Spring Woods regularly drew drinking water from one of the springs.

Saugatucket Pond, commonly Peace Dale Pond, was used as a reservoir for the Hazard (later M. T. Stevens) Mill and after flowing through the mill property, it entered the Saugatucket River. I do not know, but I would guess that the river was called the Saugatucket first and then when the pond was made, it was called Saugatucket Pond and at some later date a larger area was designated as the Saugatucket watershed. There were two outlets from Peace Dale Pond. One was a channel with the water flow controlled by a valve in a gate house on the Hazard property at the East end of the dam. The waterfall is the other outlet.



*Gate House for Gate Valve, Road, Canal at outlet from Peace Dale Pond:
Archival Photograph from early twentieth century from Charles A. Sweet.
Peace Dale Pond is now called Saugatucket Pond.*

There was always a wooden walkway with a handrail crossing over the falls. Buckeyes, which I think are Alewives used to swim up over the falls to spawn in the pond each spring. During this event people would catch the Buckeyes as they were trying to go up the falls. Buckeyes used to be preserved in salt for later consumption. I remember Buckeyes on a stick stuck through their eyes, hanging at the A & P store on the Peace Dale Flats. This walkway was removed around 1980 due to the potential liability to the property owner.

There were also two ice houses on the pond. One was called the double ice house and the other was the single ice house. I do not know why the names single and double unless it was because the double was two stories high and the single was only one. I do not ever remember ice being stored in the single ice house, but I watched many times while ice was being cut and sent up the conveyor into the ice house where it was stored for later use. Sawdust was spread between the layers of ice to keep them from freezing together. The blocks of ice were about two feet by three feet by one foot thick and weighed about three hundred pounds each. We used the pond mostly for fishing and ice skating.

My cousin Francis caught a thirty-five inch pickerel which we thought was a record, but we learned that the state record at that time was thirty-six inches. Many times during the winter there would be several hundred people, both adults and

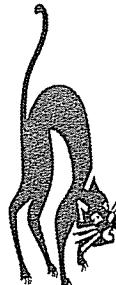
children, skating on the pond even at night. It was a very popular spot and the Hazards allowed people to pass through their property to get to the pond. I spent many happy hours there. The area at the north end of the pond was called Tug Bog. I read that it was called by that name for the peat (which was called Tug) that was harvested, but this was before my time. My father always referred to this area as Tug Bog.

3. "Why did you move to this area?"
I did not move here, I was born here.

4. "What did you do on or near the river?"

I have described above many of the things done on the river and its tributaries. In addition to those comments, I spent many hours on the Old Mountain Reservoir, which we called "the reser". In the summer, we took swimming lessons from the two swimming instructors, Margaret (Dixon) Dillman and John Joss. Lessons were given from beginners through junior lifesaving. During one winter Margaret had a number of us perform in what was billed as an ice capade.

This reservoir also had a dam with a sluiceway which could be opened to let the water out of the pond to service the dam or clean the pond. This was done once that I can remember and I remember it well. When the pond was drained, there was only a stream about ten feet wide that remained. My cousin Francis and I fished there every chance we had while the pond was drained. We caught fish as fast as we could bait the hook. Our cats had a feast.



There was also an ice house at the southwest corner of the pond adjacent to the waterfall. I can remember ice being stored in this ice house, but I never saw it being cut from the pond. It was probably used to store the overflow from Peace Dale Pond.

5. "What part of the river do you enjoy the most?" "Why?"

At age seventy-four, like a lot of things now I am limited to the enjoyment of looking at the river, but I do enjoy that.

6. "Do you have any concerns or questions about the river?"

The river and its tributaries are filling up with junk and sediment. The town used to have workers go along some of the brooks and clean out the fallen trees and accumulated junk, but this is not done any more. When a tree falls in a brook or river and is left there, debris and sediment build up behind it. This causes the water upstream to spread out and the water flow downstream is reduced, which allows vegetation to grow encroaching on the brook. This in turn causes the brooks to become narrower and consequently the normal velocity of the water flow is faster taking more sediment with it. All this sediment eventually ends up in Salt Pond, one of our great natural assets. The brook in the Village Green across from the Neighborhood Guild has been reduced in width to about three or four feet during dry periods, which allows bushes and vegetation to get a foothold in the stream bed. This used to be alleviated by the wood plank dam just before the Columbia Street bridge. Up to two planks could be inserted in two concrete slots to raise the level of the water in the brook passing through the Village Green by about sixteen inches, which discouraged vegetation growth and maintained the aesthetic look of the brook.

7. "If you could change one thing about the river, what would it be?"

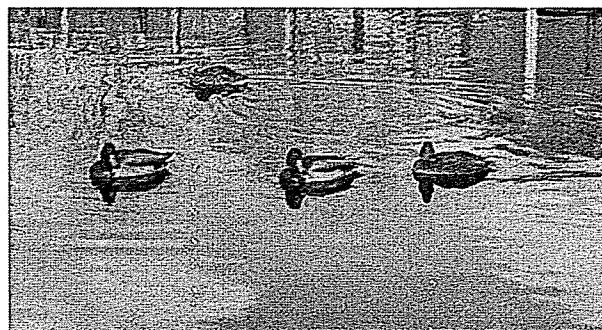
I would like to see all of the junk, sediment and fallen trees removed.

8. "What do you hear people say about the river?"

Lately, it seems people are getting more interested in the Saugatucket again. I think it would be nice if the interest included the tributaries, because they are really part of the river. The Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition Newsletter has helped (the name is almost as long as the river).

9. "What wildlife have you seen on the river?"

I have always seen ducks and geese on the river, however geese can be seen most anywhere now. During the time I was growing up in the area, the river did not have any fish in it just snapping turtles and the Buckeyes each spring traveling up it to get to Saugatucket Pond.

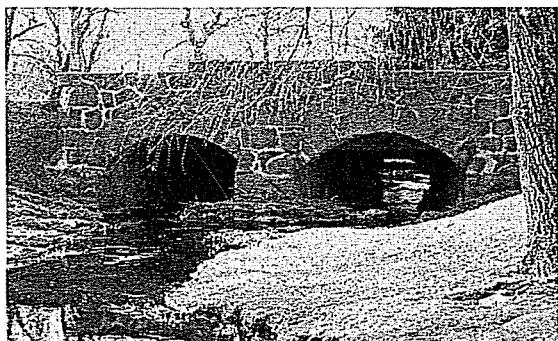


Recent improvements in water quality and interest in the Saugatucket River are good for all of us. Mallard ducks near the walkway are very happy.

10. "What is your best 'river story'?"

I do not know what my best river story would be, but I have related several good ones above. I have mentioned the brook that passes through the Village Green. Before cars had automatic transmissions with "a park position", they had only the hand brake and the normal resistance of the wheels to turn, when the manual transmission was left "in gear to keep the vehicle from rolling." Many people at that time did not engage the hand brake when parking the car, they just left the transmission in gear. Usually the resistance was enough so the car would not roll easily, however when the car was parked on an incline like the one from the Neighborhood Guild parking lot to the brook, it sometimes would roll even though the transmission was engaged. During the twenty-one years I lived near the brook, I saw five cars that had rolled down the incline into the brook. It usually took an hour or more for the wrecker to rescue the car.

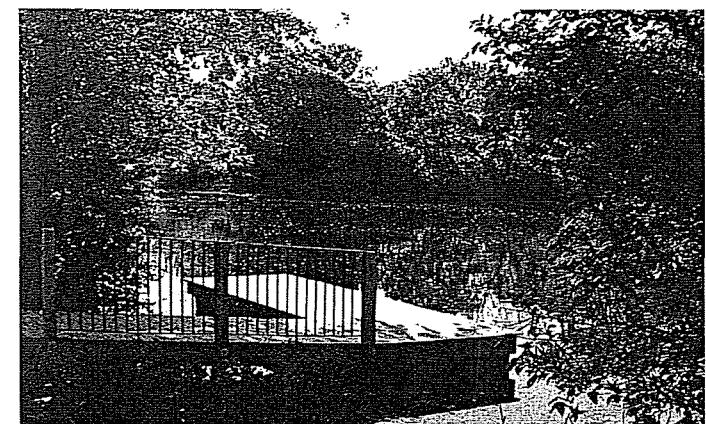
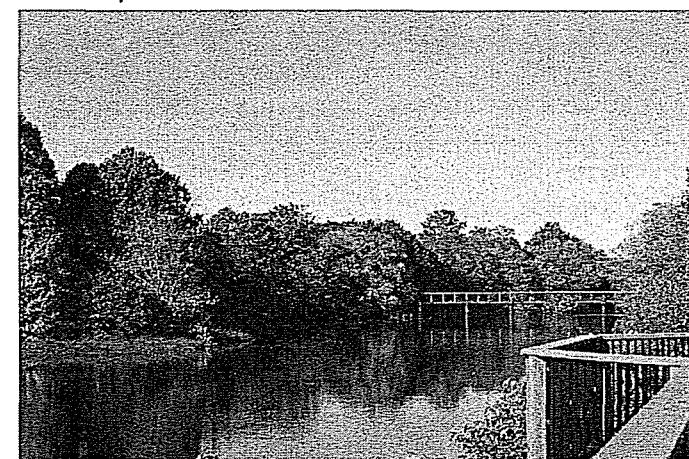
*Recollections of Resident: Charles A. Sweet
August 18, 2005*

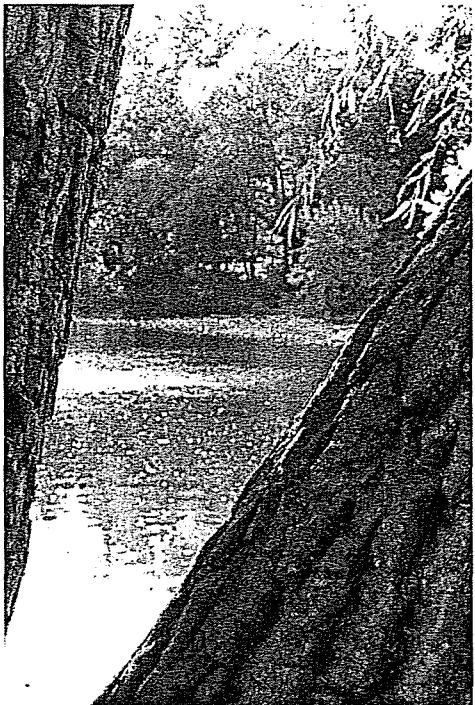


Bridge at Village Green, Peace Dale. Indian Run Brook runs through the Village Green on its way to join Rocky Brook and the Saugatucket River at River Bend.



Recent improvements along the Saugatucket River in Wakefield include a Riverwalkway, Benches, Picnic Table, and Caleb Davis' Memorial Dock.

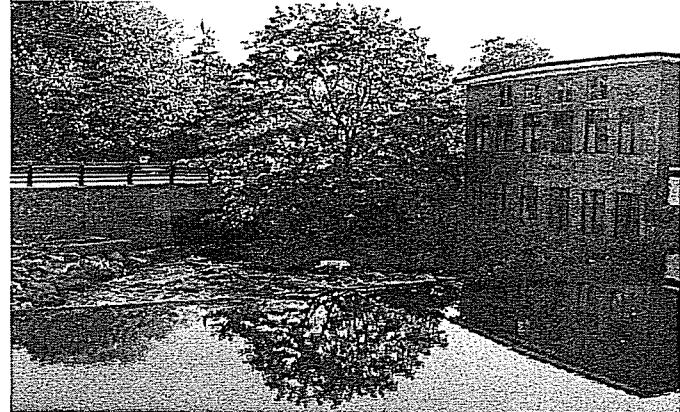
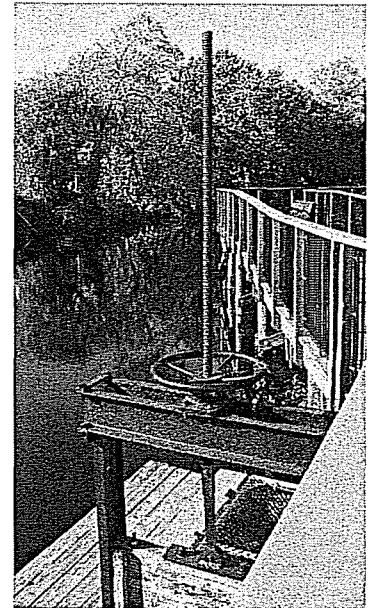




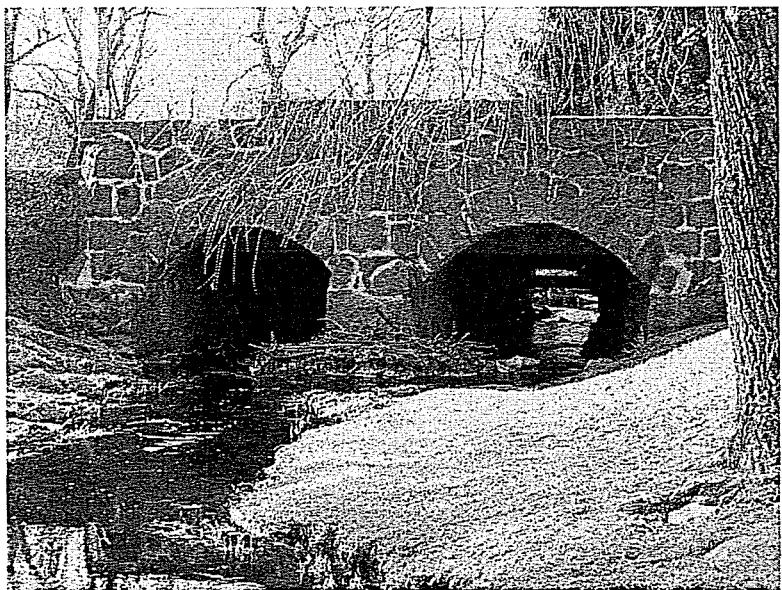
The Saugatucket River extends a little over seven and one-half miles. The Saugatucket Watershed provided power for the mills in Peace Dale and Wakefield. It provided water for human consumption and recreation. Today, the river is important to all who live near it. It is also attractive to our many guests and visitors.



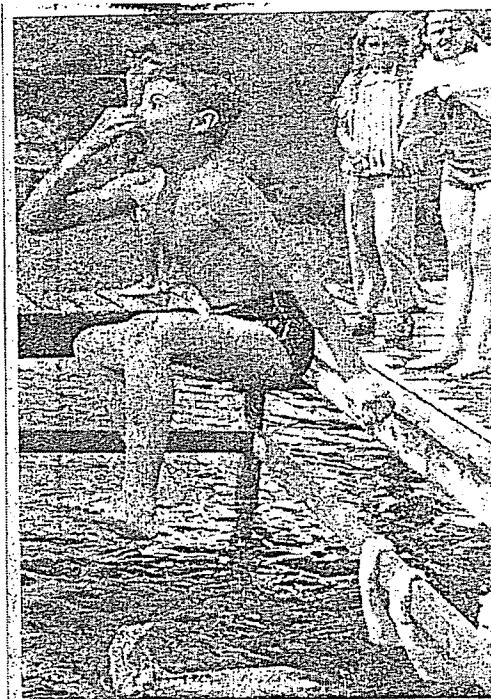
Saugatucket River in Wakefield: Views from Caleb's Dock. Caleb Davis was a merchant who was a founding member of SRHCC.



The Saugatucket River : Photographs from banks near Koolco, Inc.; the Gate Valve at the fish ladder near the new walkway; and the water falls near the Wakefield Mill which currently houses professional offices.



Village Green, Peace Dale : The Neighborhood Guild faces south. Years ago, a few planks were placed before the bridge to dam the water . The brook was wider then.



LAND SO SAYING, Francis Sweet takes the customary swimmin' hole dive at the Old Mountain Field swimming area for children in Peace Dale as recreation programs were launched in that town yesterday by the Neighborhood Guild. Youngsters

Francis Sweet joins many of his friends at the Old Mountain Reservoir in this archival photo from Charles A. Sweet's collection. There were swimming lessons offered through the Peace Dale recreation program administered through the Neighborhood Guild. Seven decades later, we hope that our efforts will allow cleaner water to flow through the watershed. Swimming, boating, and other forms of recreation may become possible again.

The Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition *
 was established in 1994 to preserve and promote the Saugatucket
 River. In April 1999 we were designated the official
 watershed council for the Saugatucket River by the
 State of Rhode Island's Rivers Council.

You too can join the *SRHCC in 2006
 Volunteers help us to

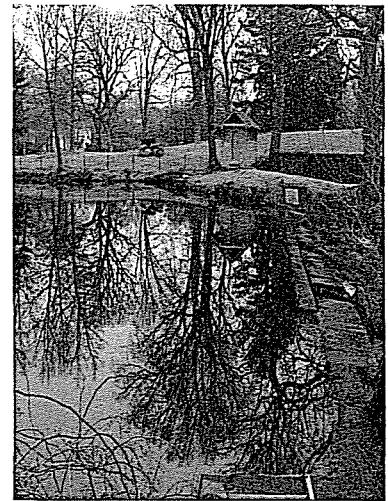
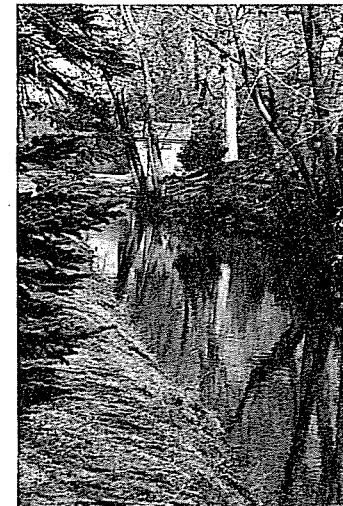
- Design Riverwalk Educational Signs;
- Assist South Kingstown with Riverwalk events;
- Expand the Riverclassroom program;
- Plan, design and build the Riverclassroom;
- Conduct river and trail clean-ups;
- Produce on-line newsletters;
- Plan and promote a Blue Trail on the River;
- Work with North and South Kingstown to
 preserve the River's headwaters;
- Continue to monitor the River with URI's
 Watershed Watch program;
- Work on water quality issues in the
 River and Point Judith Pond; and
- Monitor new developments to protect the
 Saugatucket River.

The SRHCC gratefully acknowledges and thanks Charles A. Sweet for the text. Ora Wry volunteered to produce this booklet illustrated with her current photographs and the archival photographs from Charles A. Sweet. As a retired teacher, Dr. Wry shares her time as a volunteer with the students of Wakefield Elementary and the GFWC Women's Club of South County, Inc. who supports The River Classroom Project through its fundraising. If you would like to donate to the Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition, we are a 501 c 3 non-profit organization.

This publication was funded through grants from the Rhode Island Foundation and the Rhode Island Rivers Council.

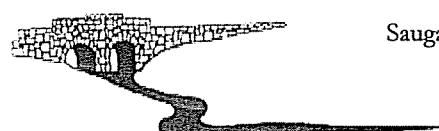


Rhode Island Rivers Council
 Working together to protect and restore
 Rhode Island's rivers and their watersheds.



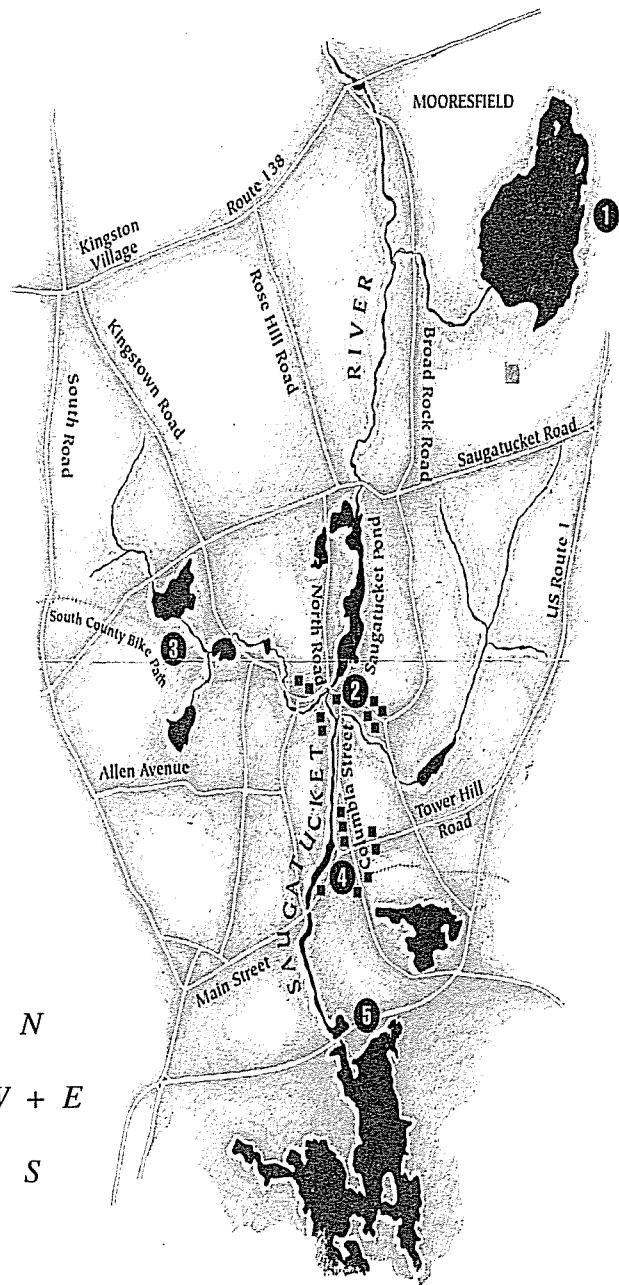
Saugatucket Pond
 with Canal and
 Gate House on Pond.

A stone and plaque reminds us of the dedication of the Hazard Family to South Kingstown. When we study the ponds, brooks, canal, lakes, and tributaries, we marvel at the industry of this family and all the workers associated with their grand enterprise.



Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition
 PO Box 209
 Wakefield, RI 02880

Saugatucket River Watershed



Indian
Lake,
Map
Area 1.

Peace Dale
Pond,
Indian Run
Brook and
Rocky Brook

Meet at
Palisades
Mill

Map Area 2
Asa Pond,
California

Jims,
Reser-
voire, and
Rocky Brook

Map
Area 3.

Wakefield is in Map
Area 4.

Old Mountain Pond,
is east and
Waterfalls in
Wakefield on
Main Street
is west.

Map Area 5
Route 1 near
Ram Point in
Point Judith Pond