

Summary of talk at the Little Compton Town Landing to Sogkonate Garden Club, July 7, 2021
By, Robert Marra

History of the Town Landing:

The Landing was part of the Brownell family farm. The Brownell and Simmons families farmed much of the land on Grange Ave. The farms used the Landing as pasture and cows also came over from Chase Point to graze the area. Here is a photo that shows what Grange Ave looked like in 1910. Notice the lack of trees and shrubs.



In 1905 Richmond Brownell sold the 4-acre parcel to Hester Buhler Simmons for the sum of \$10 plus a mortgage for \$134.92.

Hester was the wife of Samuel Simmons who was raised in Little Compton. The Simmons family heirs still own the house abutting the Landing.

Hester was born in New Orleans in 1866 after her family moved from the Mount Independence Plantation in Mississippi during the Civil War. New Orleans escaped destruction during the war since it was occupied early by the Union. The family plantation owned slaves.

Samuel and Hester were married at New York City in 1896. She had moved to New York City after attending finishing school in Philadelphia.

Hester would spend summers in Little Compton and when Samuel died in 1929, she left New York and moved to St. Petersburg, Florida and became a snow bird. Here is a sketch of her cottage.



Hester died in 1948 and left the Landing to the Town of Little Compton with the stipulation that the land “be open and free to all without commercialization”.

The circa 1949 photo below shows the cottage on the far right of the landing. Note the absence of the wellhouse and the house on the far left that still exists today.



From 1950-1990 the Landing remained a green haven with few visitors. As it became a popular spot, and overused the site became a shadow of its former beauty. Here is a photo of what it looked like in 2018.



Beginning in 2011 neighborhood residents gathered to discuss what could be done to protect and restore this unique recreational asset. Frustrating meetings occurred (2012 to 2018) including seven schematic designs (gratis by a friend / Landscape Architect); these produced little progress. Other Town priorities seemed to block progress. On the advice of a sympathetic Town Official three residents of Grange Ave gathered signatures to add a Citizen Stoke at the annual Town Financial Meeting (TFM, 2018) to fund a design and plan to restore the Landing. 100 resident Town Voters signed the petition and with the support of the Town Budget Committee and Town Council, \$15,000 was approved to produce a town landing future design and plan. An official Town Committee was formed with meetings conducted in accord with RI Open Meeting procedures. A Plan was developed, vetted at public meetings and approved by the Town Council. With this Plan in hand, by December of 2019 the Committee wrote and applied in the name of the LC Town Council for an \$80,000 Recreational Grant from RI DEM. The Town allocated \$19,000 for its commitment to the project. This grant competed against other projects throughout the State. In April of 2020 Little Compton was awarded the Grant of \$80,000. The question of the Landing being open to only Town residents was settled by the Town Council

committing as a stipulation of the Grant that the site be open to all. It is a clear affirmation of Hester’s intention as stated in her Will.

A construction bid was issued and in September of 2020 Wilkie Engineering was award a contract and work started in October of 2020. Total cost was estimated at \$100,000. Construction has taken place in two stages: Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. The only delay has been the completion of planting shrubs and three trees due to our Spring drought.

In the Fall of 2020, our Committee began a fundraising campaign with selected mailings, ads and four articles that appeared in the Sakonnet Times. Over 100 donations were received with Bay Coast Bank giving \$10,000 and four individuals giving \$5,000 each. In total, \$65,000 was collected and is set up as a segregated Fund to support the future of the Landing.

Summary:

What was learned by the experience? Citizens with the will, persistence, and an articulated plan can achieve results by working within the framework of our local government. It takes time to build a consensus and find a path. We have a wonderful team with a desire to do the best for the environment and the recreational experience.

Our Team:

Committee: Chuck Appleton, Joanne Gregory, Rob Marra, Jeanne McAllister and Jim Tumber. Don Medeiros, Engineer and Project Manager, Chris Wilkie Excavating, Tony Teixeira-Town Administrator, Carol Wordell-Town Clerk, Wenley Ferguson-Save the Bay, Chris Faria-Landscape Architect.

Here are recent photos of this beautiful spot!



