

Remembering the Shack on Sedge Island



For more than a century, it was the icon, the Motif No. 1 of Narrow River. The red fishing shack on Sedge Island, built with windows and doors from demolished hotels in Narragansett Pier, was a favorite site for kayakers and boaters, a reference for sightseers and birders, a landmark for fishermen. Said one, “Whenever I fish by my-



self, it was always comforting to look over and see the old shack there as if an old timer is watching over me, laughing at me or telling me to cast another line.”

Land evidence records trace ownership of Sedge Island as far back as 1882, and include ownership

by families such as the Pollocks, Dixons, Spearins and Folletts, many of whom enjoyed the shack as a summer house.

The shack has stories of its own. In the 1930s, owner Peggy Dixon, the first woman in Rhode Island to have a lobster license, based her lobstering business at the little red shack.

The '38 Hurricane dislodged the shack from its foundation, but the Dixons found it floating intact nearby and towed the building back to the island with their skiff, fastening it back to the foundation so firmly that it stayed affixed until its removal in 2016.

In the 1940s, Girl Scouts enjoyed canoeing down the Narrow River from



the Girl Scout Camp to Sedge Island to spend a night in the shack each summer.

In 2004, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service purchased Sedge Island, including the shack, to become part of the Chafee Wildlife Refuge. The Service cared for the shack, making repairs and bolstering it against the elements several times. Despite its best efforts, the shack was degraded by the weather and tides and fell into such disrepair that it became hazardous.

In November 2016, while working on the Saltmarsh Restoration and Dredging project to promote eel grass growth and habitat for the Saltmarsh Sparrow and other indigenous species, the Service removed the dilapidated building.

Sedge Island is in the middle of the 550-acre John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge at Pettaquamscutt Cove, where migratory waterfowl including the



largest population of black ducks in Rhode Island, thrive in the rich habitat of the Narrow River Estuary. The refuge's

tidal salt marshes and forests attract many types of birds, including great egrets, herons, and several species of plovers and other shorebirds. It is also one of the few places in Rhode Island that is home to the salt marsh sharp-tailed sparrow.

For more stories and photos of the Sedge Island Shack, visit narrowriver.org/shack.



NARROW RIVER PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

This panel is a joint project of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, manager of the John H. Chafee Wildlife Reserve, and the Narrow River Preservation Association, the Designated Watershed Council for Narrow River. Painting by Pati Sylvania. Photos (l-r) by Richard Benjamin, John McNamara, David Figgins, John McNamara. May 2017.

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