

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Historical Perspective of the Upper Narragansett Bay

Last revised: 12/1/14

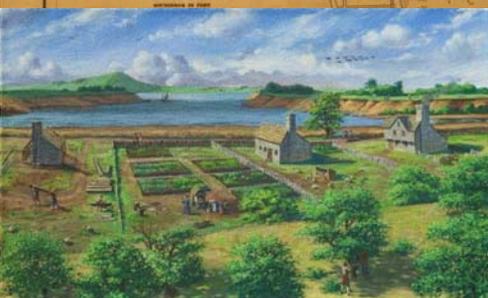
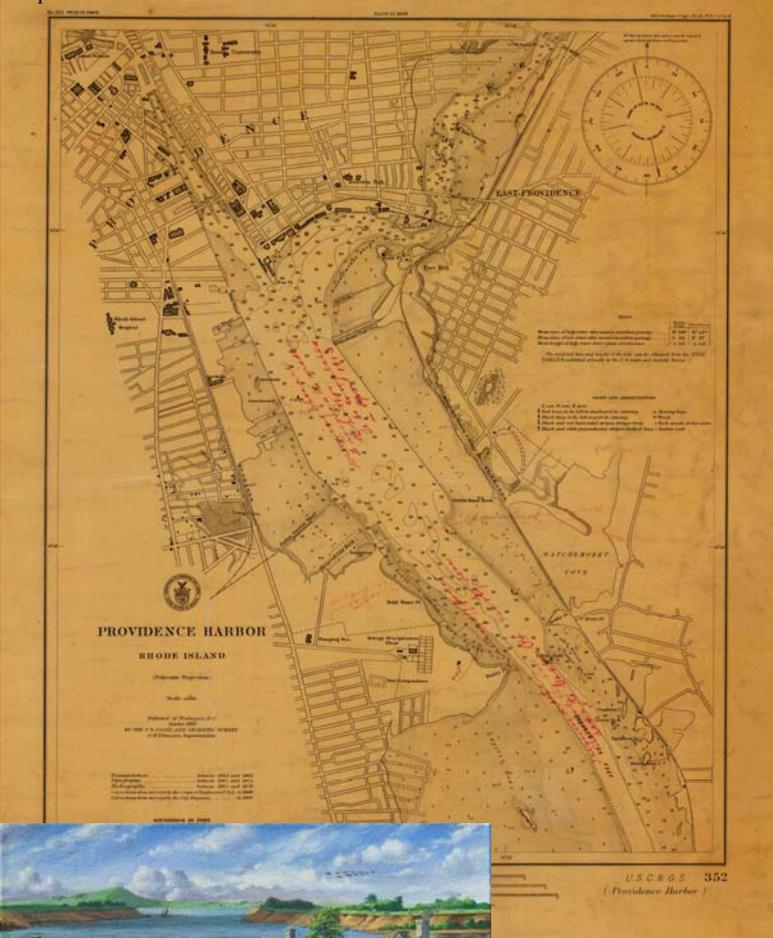
Narragansett Bay has a rich history of being a productive estuary. Eelgrass beds were abundant throughout the upper Bay and the Providence River held a wealth of oysters that made it one of the most productive shellfish areas in the country.

- Narragansett Bay's oyster industry peaked in 1910.
- Leased oyster beds covered 5,000 acres in the Providence River and upper Bay (Fuller, 1905).
- The Bay was producing 7,000 metric tons of oysters a year (Rice et al., 2000).
- Oyster population began to decline due to anthropogenic inputs and the Hurricane of 1938.



Oyster-shucking houses with piles of oyster shell at Field's Point 1911  
Photo in 41°N (vol 4; issue 2) from 1912 annual report of the RI Shellfisheries Commission

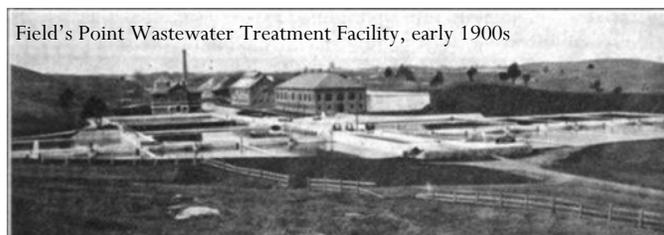
Map of the Providence and Seekonk Rivers, 1910



A rendition of the "Great Salt Cove" area (circa 1650) near the headwaters of Narragansett Bay where the Statehouse is located.

**Providence and Seekonk Rivers in 1910 (left):**

- Eelgrass and oyster beds are seen throughout the area.
- The Seekonk River has areas of depths > 25 ft.
- Starve Goat Island, just below Field's Point, is where Johnson & Wales and Save the Bay now are.



Field's Point Wastewater Treatment Facility, early 1900s

**Other changes to the Bay include:**

- Over 1,100 dams have been constructed in almost every tributary of Narragansett Bay.
- Approximately 50% of the estuarine marshes have been ditched and/or impounded.
- About one-third of all coastal wetland buffers have been lost to development.
- Major dredging of the Providence River and siltation of the Seekonk River.

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