



# WOMPATUCK NEWS

Issue Number 6

Friends of Wompatuck State Park

Winter Edition, 2008



## Feb. Meeting Minutes

**Treasurer's Report:** Eric Oddleifson said balance is \$6857; insurance is update.

**Membership Report:** Bill Boles re-elected President, Steve Cobble re-elected Vice President, Eric Oddleifson elected Treasurer, Alma McDermott elected Secretary, Carol Anne Brown elected Membership Director. FOW needs to keep track of when people joined. We discussed how far back in '07 to get '08 membership, perhaps 6 months. Oddleifson mentioned there were some people who gave donations of \$100 or more. They could be exempt. Brown will send out e-mails to those who are renewing. A letter to them would include a link to the website and our FOW stickers. We could give a FOW T-shirt to renewals of \$50 or more.

**Trail Care Events for 2008:** The damage is bad in the park and we'll need to get rid of a lot of dead wood. Some trails could also use some gravel because of erosion issues. Park Service Day is 5/17; NEMBA Trail Days are: 3/16, 6/7, 8/24, and 10/12. Steve Gammon suggested we could do some planting of flowers and some bricking on Park Serve Day. Steve Cobble would like us to work with RTP - Recreational Trails Program. He will work on a grant with NEMBA since we are not a 501c3 company. The information will be available on the DCR website. NEMBA also offers \$500 grants and Cobble would like us to use that to purchase a set of tools for FOW trail days and a muck truck. He had a proposal to work on abandoned rail beds. We can't move the railroad ties due to hazardous waste problems, but we may be able to create a path that goes around them and create an unpaved rail trail.

**Hike with the Hingham Land Conservation Trust 3/29 from 10-12 PM:** The Trust is excited to bring their members to the Wompatuck trails. Bill Boles hopes that through this hike, we can acquaint them with some of the nice parts of our trail system. It was suggested to do a loop which starts and finishes at the Visitor Center, or use a van to transport everyone to another location and end up at the Visitor Center. It will be put onto the website and e-mails will be sent to interested parties. Oddleifson suggested we e-mail Vicki.schow@comcast.net with website updates.

**Web page:** Website comes up very nice on a Google search.

**Pow Wow Update:** Native Americans will give overview at the March meeting.

**Friends of Wompatuck T-shirt:** Boles would like to see our FOW logo on it. Oddleifson said he spent about \$600 for about 100 volunteer shirts, which comes out to about \$6-\$7 each for a colored shirt with the set-up fee and wording. Boles would like to reward people who join at a higher level with a shirt. We could also sell them at events. It was suggested that we find out if a local school has a printing-type program that does T-shirts to lower the cost.

**New Business:** Gammon briefed FOW on an environmental grant program given by Entergy, a power plant company. Although the program has a March 10 deadline, he thought we could come up with a project to enter. It's an annual event, so if we can't come up with something now, we could apply in the future. Gammon suggested a boardwalk on Doane Street, since it's very flooded. Bill said if we take a picture of it now, that would help with the grant process. Specifically, the grant "provides support to community based projects that address energy efficiency and provide sustainable solutions to preserve the environment." It was suggested that we use it towards replacement of windows. Malcolm Neilson asked if we could promote the camping aspect of NEMBAfest and get a portion of the fee used to reserve campsites. Gammon liked the idea.

**Old Business:** Andy Mills suggested we put Bunker N9 directions in the front display case and photo/history on the website. The project should be complete by late summer. FOW brochure staff met February 24 for design/copy issues.

Alma Ramos-McDermott, Secretary...see you at the next meeting Monday, March 10!



Photo courtesy of Donald Olsen

This Hingham U.S. Navy 65-ton diesel locomotive was sent to Pennsylvania after depot closed.

## Former Ordnance Workers Remember When Ammo Trains Rolled Before Greenbush

By Jim Rose, FOW News Editor and Historian

The Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot was the last operation to run trains on the Old Colony railroad before the Greenbush line opened last year. The Old Colony carried passengers on the line from 1845 until shutdown in 1959; the depot closed its doors in 1962. Having begun in 1904, the ammunition depot provided ordnance for the U.S. Navy fleet during World War I, World War II and the Korean Conflict. A few of its employees remaining in the South Shore still have warm memories of their past jobs working with the Navy trains. Since they are getting on in years and they worked with my late parents there, I thought I would interview them.

When Hingham resident Sam Amonte hears the horn sound from the new Greenbush railroad, he nostalgically recalls his 1950's employment as a brakeman for the ammunition depot. "My job was to hook-up and brake-away ammunition boxcars, operate the rail



Sam Amonte

switches and wave warning flags at street intersections," said Amonte. "I enjoyed my job. A lot of Hingham people worked there, including my two brothers Rocco and Patsy, who were heavy equipment operators. Although the work had an element of danger, we had safety procedures. We all got along and had a few laughs at the same time." Well known to many Hingham residents, Amonte ended up working as a police officer for the Town of Hingham for 36 years.

Peter Stonis of Walpole spent his depot railroad days as a hoisting engineer. "At the Mainside (now called Barecove Park), we operated a 65-ton locomotive and an 80-ton locomotive," Stonis remembered as he studied photos of railroad cranes in the depot's "Shot and Shell" newspaper dated 1955. "Over at the Cohasset Annex (now Wompatuck State Park), we also had a 65 and an 80. My specialty was to load and off-load am-



Peter Stonis

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## When Ammo Trains Rolled Before Greenbush *(cont. from page 1)*

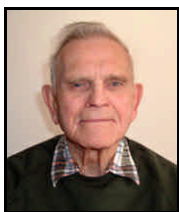
munition from the trains to trucks and warehouses. Whenever a Navy ship pulled into Boston Harbor, they would store the ammo at the depot." When questioned if there were any accidents, "only when a train would jump the track now and then," he said. "We would send a crew down and fix it. No big deal. Oh, and also when I was given an 'all clear' to depart and someone left a heavy metal loading plank attached to the train. I ended up wiping out three pillars supporting the loading dock roof."

Former Leadingman of Transportation Donald Guilfoyle of Hanover was the supervisor in charge of the rail operation. "We all loved working at the depot," he beamed. "The job gave me a feeling of accomplishment. I scheduled the departures and pick-ups. We hauled everything from bullets, bombs, depth charges, torpedoes, 16-inch projectiles and rockets. Besides the locomotives, we operated boxcars, flatcars, section cars, railroad cranes and a small utility train called a hurdy-gurdy. The trains would travel back and forth from the Hingham Mainside to the Cohasset Annex and also out of state." U.S. Navy records from 1959 list: 70 boxcars, 22 flatcars, 4 sectioncars and 2 railroad cranes.

Bill Handrahan of Hull was an inspector then. Besides checking tolerances and safety procedures, he also made sure carpenters blocked and braced in the bombs etc. so they



**Donald Guilfoyle**



**Bill Handrahan**

wouldn't role. This operation was done at the Cohasset Annex classification yard. "Many of the boxcars would be stored overnight at the Annex in barricaded concrete sidings," Bill recalls. "That was in case of an explosion, the blast would be contained and sent straight up."

Former Ordnanceman Jim Larsh, who lives in Middleborough, remembers when blocking gave way inside a boxcar: "A 16-inch shell broke free from the cribbing," Larsh said in an ominous overtone. "The warhead rolled off its seat and the tip of the projectile penetrated the side of the freight car. That warhead weighed over a ton. If that thing ever blew, the whole of the South Shore would have heard it. Plus, no telling how many casualties it would cause. I also remember when kids broke into an ammo car, I believe in the Readville yard of Dedham. It was a shipment of mortar shell propellant increments that Seattle, Washington was sending down to us. The boneheads threw them all around the area, not knowing what they were. Luckily, none exploded. The Navy had a big investigation after that. Also at the depot, if you came up with a good idea the Navy could use, you got a reward. It was called a 'benny-sug' for beneficial suggestion. I got 15 bucks for a truck scale idea. It now sounds like peanuts, but a loaf of bread was around a dime then."

Hingham resident and former guard and Ordnanceman George Bartlett recounts the strict safety procedures. "We all had to wear safety shoes there," Bartlett said. "The shoes had a big steel toe to protect us in case a shell dropped on it. We also

had to wear anti-spark grounding clamps on the shoe. And naturally, there was no smoking on the job. They had designated areas for that. The Navy periodically gave out a 'Commanding Officer's Good Housekeeping Plaque' award for safety. I loaded a lot of bombs to and from boxcars at the Annex Transfer Building. The state park still uses it for storage."

Tom Beary from Whitman helped close down the depot with my father. He was a brakeman and also Head Ordnanceman. "When I think back to those depot trains, I think the funniest incident occurred at Hingham Mainside on the docks of the Back River," he said with a boyish smile on his face. "When we were loading one of the freight cars, the driver of the forklift wasn't watching where he was backing with his full load and drove himself off the dock into the drink. The few of us still around with our fading memories always seem to remember that hilarious accident. The driver didn't get hurt, and we eventually recovered the forklift. How can you forget a caper like that?" (Sadly, Tom died February 21.)

All of the former depot workers interviewed approve of the new Greenbush line. Sam Amonte says, "Greenbush is great! I only pay \$2.50 as a senior for a trip into Boston. By the way, did I ever tell you the time we used the train to steal a hot stove at the depot?" Thank God Sammy became a cop. ■



**George Bartlett**



**Jim Larsh**



**Tom Beary**



*Concrete barricaded sidings for ammo trains.*



*Hingham train engineer Herk Henningson*



*Rock painted "Friday 13, 1956" by train engineers Herk Henningson, Jack Conway and Earnest Spillane (along bike trail E13-C10).*