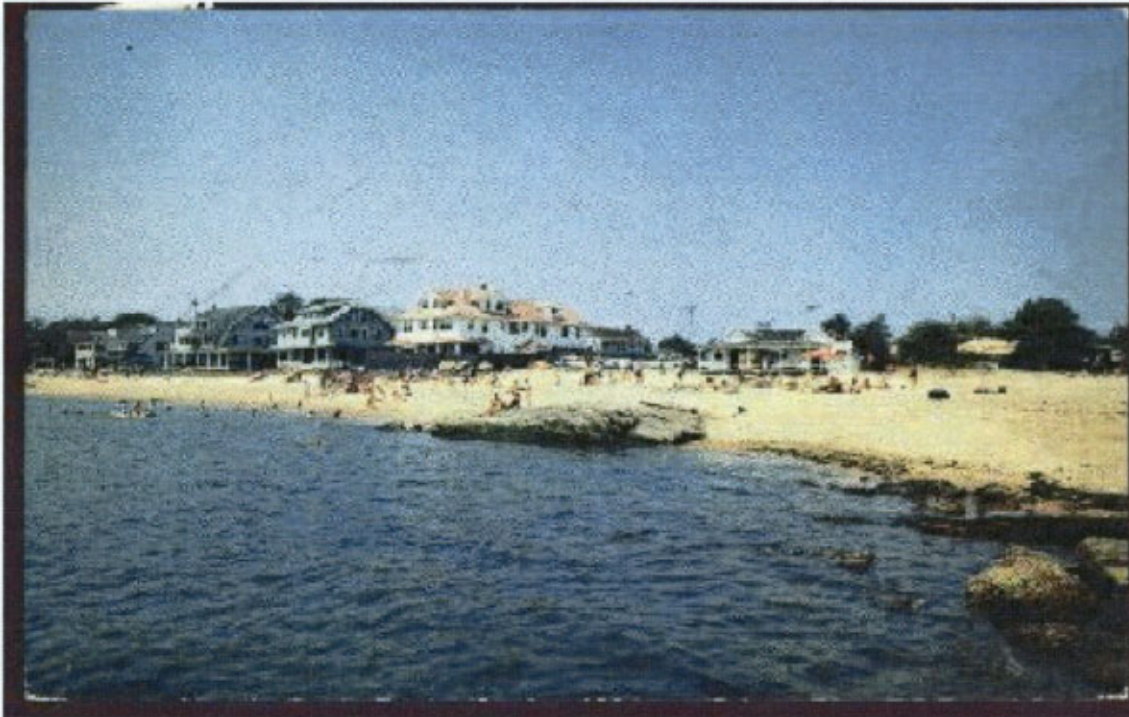


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Number 22

East Wharf Revisited



East Wharf Beach Showing the Bathhouse

With the demise of shipbuilding in Madison after the disastrous fire in 1897, new life came to East wharf. The Bushnell family, who owned a stretch of beach west of the wharf, built a bath house on the wharf. That bath house burned in 1926.

Some time around the beginning of the 20th century, Fred and Wallace Williams built a fish house at the wharf to serve as a base for their fishing operation just off shore. The Williams brothers maintained large fish pounds - large areas enclosed by nets supported on poles - where they caught menhaden and an occasional shark or sturgeon.

Aside from a place to store their fishing gear, the fish house served as a gathering place for Fred and Wallace and their friends including Fred Daniels and Bill McCann. The fish house was abandoned by 1923 and eventually disappeared.

In 1903 soon after the destruction of the shipyard the town of Madison erected a bath house containing 12 rooms for the use of the public. This first in a series of public facilities was described as: "*...a very great convenience to our people who own no shore front and have no place upon which to build a bath house of their own. Such people are shut off from bathing privileges except under great difficulties.*"

By 1913 the bath house had fallen into disrepair because: "*The tides have so damaged it that repairs will have to be made or else the house must be torn down and entirely moved away. It would be sadly missed is removed.*" At a later time it burned down and the Madison Lions Club offered to build a new one. In 1930 they advertised for bids "for the erection of two brick bath houses upon the East Wharf Property".

They eventually built two bath houses and presented them to the town. One bath house was for men and one for women each containing forty steel lockers, ten dressing rooms, a toilet, a shower and a drinking fountain. The town paid two attendants to take care of the bath houses and paid the water and electric bill. A town constable was always on duty and Mrs. King, who had charge of the school lunchroom and who knew every child in town, was on duty in the women's bathhouse. The new bath houses were well received and it was noted that "the lawless spirit which resulted in the yearly destruction of the old bath house...entirely disappeared and in its place has come proper appreciation and respect for public property."

In 1957 the Lions Club stepped in again and replaced the roof. In 1980 it was decided that the bath house should be completely replaced and a group of Yale graduate student were commissioned to design and build a new bath house and gazebo. In 1982 with the completion of the present facilities the old bath house was torn down and East Wharf entered a new phase in its life.

With all the changes and its evolution from shipyard to a place to spend a sunny afternoon, East Wharf remains a very special place for Madison residents. Farmer Dudley's gift continues to delight us all. Thank you, Farmer Dudley. Thank you, Madison Lions Club and all the others who have helped preserve and enhance one of Madison's choicest spots.

Directions to East Wharf: From the center of Madison drive east past the library to the next traffic light. Turn right on East Wharf Road and follow it to the parking lot at East Wharf.