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MAST 2101

9 December 2021

Riverside Park

Riverside Park is in New London, CT has gone through a lot through many years. The park is that the City of New London created the park back in 1893. Throughout the years, the park has gone through a lot of changes, some are good, and some are bad. Of all the changes, this one event was a tragic one but has brought people together, and that is Sandy Hook. The bad effects on the park is the Goldstar Memorial Bridge, the Coast Guard Academy, selling or keeping the park, and how the community feels about the park and how the city keeps updating the park.

A little history about the park is that again it was created 1893 by the city of New London. The land was bought from the Post Hill Improvement Company. 17 years later, 33 more acres was given from S.D Lawrence and F.B Brandegee, who were part of the Palmer Brothers Company. The park has been a very popular spot for people to come and enjoy the beautiful view of the water. There were a lot of different activities for people to enjoy throughout the years like games, swimming, and watching the Yale-Harvard Regatta, which happened once a year.

Back in 1932 the Coast Guard Academy was being built. Before the construction began, Riverside Park had a total of 33 acres. When the construction of the academy began, the

city had to give parcels of land for the academy and the park was reduced to a whopping 18 acres. but the Coast Guard decided to expand its academy. “In 1930, the size of the park began the first of several reductions in size, as the City of New London transferred portions to the United States of America for construction of the US Coast Guard Academy, recorded in Volume 180 Page 535 on July 3.” (Riverside Park Conservancy) In 1932, the construction of the Coast Guard Academy was finished. The result of the expansion, the park was reduced to 18 acres. What the park lost was a beach. People loved going to the park to lay and relax on the beach, and swim in the water. Without the beach being part of the park, less people came to the park.

Not only did the Coast Guard Academy effect the park, but the Goldstar Memorial Bridge also played a major effect to Riverside Park. Let’s look at the park before the bridge existed. Before the bridge, there were postcards of Riverside Park that describes what the park had looked like, “Early postcards show winding drives, grassy lawns, and spectacular views of the Thames River...” (Finlay) After the bridge, the park was hidden and wasn’t recognized from people from the other side of the city. “Urban renewal, and the construction of I-95 and the Gold Star Bridge, severed the connection between the Riverside Park neighborhood and the rest of the city and caused the park to become isolated.” (Riverside Park Conservancy) Before the construction of the bridge began, the park wasn’t as popular when it was first created because the Coast Guard Academy took almost half of the park. In 1941, the construction of the Goldstar Memorial Bridge began. That has affected the park because it hid the park from looking at it from Groton side, and being at the park near the water, the bridge blocks quite a view. Before the bridge, Riverside Park was a very popular place. Families came here to have picnics, relax along the water, take a stroll around the park, and watched their kids play. When the

construction of the bridge started, people didn't want to go because of the view of the water. Who would want to sit and try to relax by the water and see and hear construction?

Another fact about how the bridge effected the park is that it somehow ended up on the wrong side of the highway. "Riverside Park, a popular destination in the early 20th century, also wound up on the "wrong side" of the highway." (Nancy Finlay) What this means is that I-95 was supposed to be almost on to of Riverside Park, according to the original plan. The original plan for I-95 was supposed to go through Hodges Square in New London. During the time of the construction, Hodges Square flourished with businesses. There were bakeries, markets, and a whole bunch of parking. What stopped the original plan was that:

"Eventually officials approved an alternate plan that "saved" Hodges Square, though cynical city officials predicted that the businesses would "wither away" once the highway entered service and the area found itself cut-off from the rest of the city." (Finlay)

What Nancy is saying is that no matter where the bridge went, Hodges Square and Riverside Park were going to be affected. The outcome of both is that businesses in Hodges Square faded away and with Riverside Park, the popularity of the park decreased. No matter where the bridge went, it was going to affect Riverside Park, but the original plan could have diminished the park.

At some point in November of 2011, the City of New London was going to sell portions of the Riverside Park to the Coast Guard. The reason being is that the City Council voted to hold a sale on 9.14 acres near the water of Riverside Park land. The commander of the city, Commander G. Scott Gesele, says that ""It will save the city a little money and we're OK with it.

It gives residents an opportunity to vote on an important issue.”” (Kathleen Edgecomb) Now what does the community want? A lot of the comments are not good. One says that the City doesn't know what they're doing and also mentioned that the Coast Guard can't spend money on land that they don't own.

On November 8, 2011, the City put the question to the people of New London, ““Shall the City of New London sell a portion of Riverside Park to the Federal Government?”” (RPC) When the referendum was getting closer, supporters of Riverside Park. After voters of New London rejected the sale of the park, the Riverside Park Conservancy Inc was formed.

Now let's talk about the better part of the park. The tragic event, Sandy Hook, happened December 14th, 2012. One of the victims was Emile Parker, who loved going to Riverside Park and spending time playing with friends. In 2013, a playground was built in the memory of Emilie. Normally, any type of playground is built by some company, in this case, this one was built by the community. This playground was built by volunteers and took three and a half days to build it. What does this say about the community? For people to come out and volunteer means a lot, especially for Emilie's parents. The day when the playground officially opened, “About 250 to 300 people packed the playground site to support Emilie's parents and family as they unveiled a memorial, sign and playground after 3½ days of volunteer work.” (Johanna Somers) Not only people attend, but there were also bagpipers and drums performed. For a band and hundreds of people to attend this type of event says a lot. Not just focusing on the playground addition, but the people

What could the Riverside Park Conservatory do with access to the water? Does this mean that are people able to go to the park by boat, kayak? To this day, there is no dock or any beach for kayaks to go on and no dock for boats to dock. Before the Coast Guard Academy extended its property, Riverside Park did have a beach and people enjoyed it. Now since the Coast Guard has the beach, could a beach be built? Or could there be any type of dock built? Looking at the park on a boat, there are rocks right along the water, and not only that problem but you have the train tracks. At the park, there are no crosswalks over the tracks and those are use by freight trains. To solve that problem, there could be a bridge that goes over the tracks, but that leads to another question, where would you put the bridge. On the water side of the tracks, there isn't much land, and with not a lot of land, not a lot of room to put the landing. If there was a dock, the stairs could be built. In December of 2010, there were talks about putting in a floating dock for all types of boats. Counciller Micael Passero said, "...the city would have to replace a walkover across the railroad tracks at the park to gain access to the water, and a floating dock system could be built to accommodate all sorts of boats." (Kathleen Edgecomb) The idea of having docks and a walk bridge is up in the air, but has it happened, no.

If there could be a beach for paddlers to land on, could there be any jobs that open? Paddling along the Thames River is quite the site. There is a lot to look at on New London side. From going form the sound into the river, you have Ocean Beach Park, a lot of unique houses and sculptures, New London Harbor Light, Fort Trumble and the occasional The Eagle, the City of New London, the park, and a lot of nature and little coves you can go in. That's a lot to see on one side of the river. What if there were kayaking tours that would start at the end of the river

and head up? Tours along the river would be a good idea, but not a lot of people are water people, but there are probably a lot of people who would do that.

On that note, back in 2010 there were talks about putting up kayak rentals at either Ocean Beach Park, Greens Harbor Beach, or Riverside Park. City Counciler Rob Pero was the first to suggest about having kayak rentals because he said, ““We've done a lot to get our riverfront and port more active," Pero said. "This is ideal to get more activity on the waterfront.”” (Kathleen Edgecomb) Since New London is right along the water, why not have other types of watercraft activities. When suggesting where to put the kayak rentals, at first, Riverside wasn't on the list, but Councilor Michael Passero said, “...the city should also look at setting up boat rentals at Riverside Park, which abuts the Thames River north of the twin spans of the Gold Star Memorial Bridge.” (Kathleen Edgecomb) Another reason why Passero suggested putting rentals at Riverside Park because “The water there is calm, and it's away from the commercial shipping lanes farther down the river.” (Kathleen Edgecomb) Since there isn't a lot of boat traffic on the upper end of New London past the Goldstar Memorial Bridge, the waters are a lot calmer and don't have to worry about ferry boat wakes.

In 2018, New London's newspaper wrote an article about the city's councils' improvements they plan on for Riverside Park. The reason why they plan on making improvements to the park is to attract more visitors. What they want to install was a pavilion, moving 1.25-acres of land from Winthrop Elementary School to the park, and a ramp for people with disabilities. The community was fine with these updates because they understood. In 2019, the city planned on installing off-the-grid lights. Brian Sear, who is the Public Works Director said “...installation of the lights fits in nicely with ongoing efforts to open the park up and make

it more inviting. It is also an area where it would have been problematic to run electrical wires.” (Greg Smith) The community did not agree to this. Since the park closes after dark, why would someone want to install lights? And is that really going to make more people come to the park just because of lights? The comments made by people who live in New London are not the greatest. Most of the comments are on the lines of ‘this isn’t worth it’. No matter what updates you do to the park, who knows if more people are going to come because of where the park is located. The area where the park is, it’s not in a good section of New London. According to a couple of maps, the park is in a lower income section of New London.

With all the changes the park has gone through, according to the Riverside Park Conservancy, they say that “All the while, some New Londoners continued to visit the park and value it as a hidden gem whose unique landscape and sweeping views offered peaceful respite from the stresses of their everyday lives.” (RPC) The park is still visited by the community but isn’t as popular back in the old days. Riverside Park has evolved from the changes from the creation of the park, to today. From the Goldstar Memorial Bridge, the Coast Guard Academy, Sandy Hook, and the City of New London itself, the park is still standing, as in not abandoned. With the ideas lurking around to improve/update the park,

Riverside Park & Environs

Park: Existing Conditions



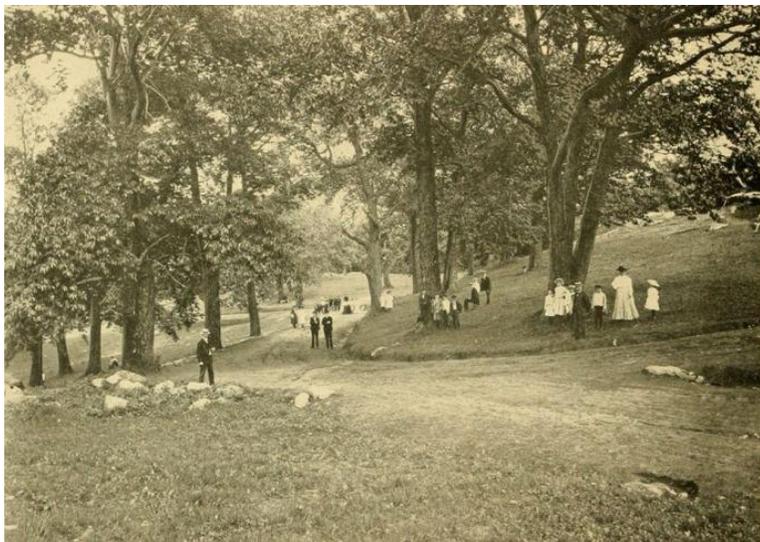
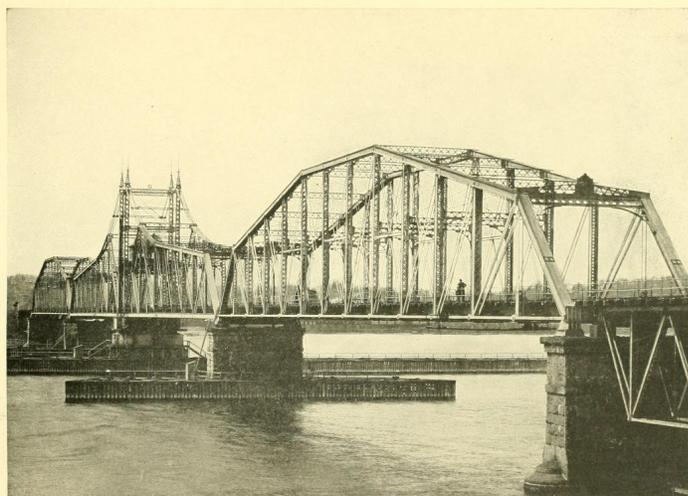


Photo from 1908. People walking
on the trail and enjoying the view of
the river. From Views of New
London



RAILROAD BRIDGE OVER THE THAMES
From Winthrop Neck to Groton stretches the Thames River Bridge, one of the greatest engineering feats of the century, 1,423 feet long with a 503-foot draw, and the longest double track drawbridge in the world. It is proportioned for a moving load of two 80-ton locomotives followed by a train load 3,000 pounds per foot.

The Railroad Bridge that can be seen
from Riverside Park.

From Views of New London

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