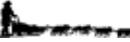


## EVENTS

**Winter lights along the Greenway:**  
**Saturday, December 6, 4 PM.** Enjoy the East Boston Greenway lit up and a holiday sing-along with local performers. *Meet at EB Greenway Caboose near South Bremen and Marginal Streets. Event sponsored by BNAN. (Rain or snow date: December 7.)*

 **Boston Harbor TASL census (water bird count):**  
**Sunday, January 11 and Sunday, February 8, 8 AM - NOON.** *Call leader for details: 781-863-2392.*

 **Mushing the Greenway:**  
**Sunday, February 1, 10 AM to NOON.** Northern Exposure Outfitters of Brookfield, MA, bring their team of trained sled dogs to the Greenways to introduce the fundamentals of this winter sport. Participants have an opportunity to interact with these talented dogs, try their hand at harnessing and watch the team in action. *For more information call BNAN at 617-542-7696 or email info@bostonnatural.org. Do not bring personal dogs to the program!*

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# Belle Isle News

Published by Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

Number 76



December 2008

## Harvest Festival October 5

Once again, a crowd of several hundred people enjoyed the horse-drawn hayrides, pumpkin decorating, "Blanket-the-Globe" quilt making with Casey Ehrlich, "Snakes of Massachusetts and the World" with Rick Roth and the Cape Ann vernal pool team, children's art with Peggy Connolly, the Sierra Club information table, the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center information table, Karyl Stoia and her hybrid car, and our excellent live band FineLine with Lori and John Wadkins.

Thanks to our generous sponsors:

- The Boston Foundation
- The East Boston Foundation
- The Winthrop Marketplace
- The East Boston Saving Bank
- State Rep. Bob DeLeo
- State Rep. Kathi-Anne Reinstein
- State Rep. Carlo Basile.

And thanks to all the members of the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh whose membership dues also support the Festival. See you next year!  
*Starting with the photo of pumpkin carvers (below) and continuing on page 5, see Barbara Bishop's pictures of the 2008 Harvest Festival.*



*Pumpkin carvers*



*Illustration by Peter Duran*

## MANNY THE MUSKRAT

SAYS:

The Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) program, sponsored by Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN), wrapped up another successful summer with teens doing much needed projects in the city's parks, Greenways and

Urban Wilds while providing a unique summer job opportunity for them to learn about their natural environment.

13 Boston teenagers from the YCC program worked at Belle Isle Marsh and the East Boston Greenway. Their work at Belle Isle included trail clearing and

*Continued next page*

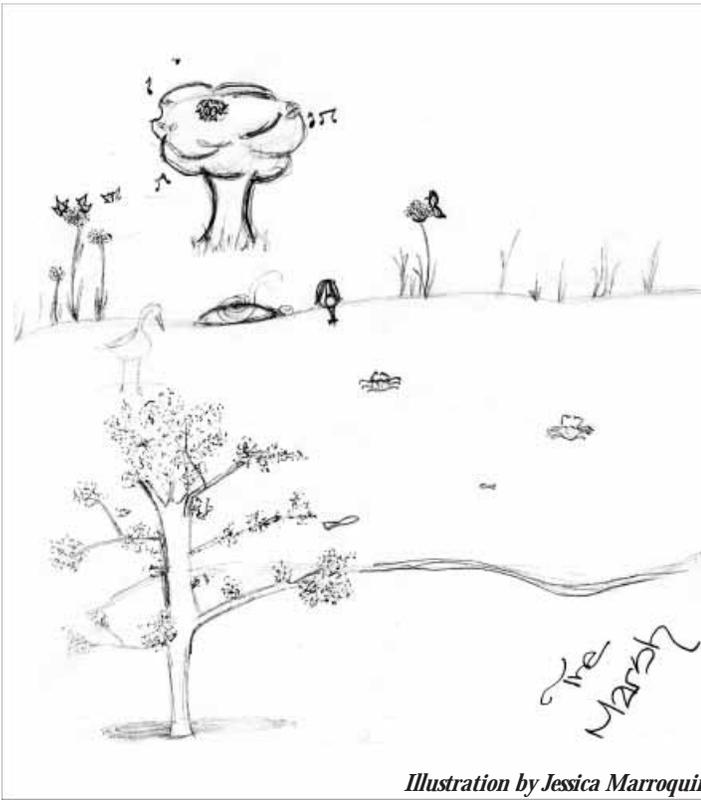


Illustration by Jessica Marroquin



Illustration by Melanie Sakhta



YCC teens working on the illustrations

Jessica Bradford  
Joseph Caldarelli  
Rick Falcucci  
Johana Fuentes  
Kenneth Irizarry  
Emilia Macinnes  
Lewis Manfra

Jessica Marroquin  
Sally Mei  
Andres Perez  
Alexis Reyes  
Juan Rivera  
Melanie Sakhta



Illustration by Andres Perez

### Manny the Muskrat (from page 1)

creating educational signs for the DCR, a few of which are reproduced here.

All teens were between the ages of 15 and 17, attending a variety of public, private and charter high schools. All but one of them live in East Boston.

Teens worked with DCR's Matthew Nash and BNAN's Peter Duran to create drawings and comic strips to educate visitors to Belle Isle about responsible park use and the value of a salt marsh. You can also see some of the signs posted at the Belle Isle Park main parking lot bulletin board.



## We Got No Ice

Have you tried walking across the frozen marsh on a frigid January day? It has been a few years since we had that sort of freeze in Massachusetts.

Weather in these parts varies tremendously from year to year. There was a dip in last year's average winter temperature compared to winter temperatures over the previous 3 or 4 years. Overall, globally, a significant warming is seen in average temperatures. The scientific consensus is that global climate change is "anthropogenic," meaning that it is human-caused.

On Saturday, November 15, I attended the *Responding to Climate Change* conference, hosting members of diverse organizations including MassAudubon, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, MassWildlife, Union of Concerned Scientists, and Massachusetts Sportsmen's Council. The stated focus of the conference was to explore the ramifications of changing climate and rising temperatures on wildlife.

The very first speaker, Melanie Fitzpatrick of Union of Concerned Scientists, made it clear that there was no chance that global temperatures would return to (for example) pre-1980 levels. The graph that most struck me was the one presented here.

Climate researchers project global temperature rise as a series of forks in the road, based on what we do over the next few decades. Most models give a range of temperatures that will result if we do *nothing* to alleviate the causes, if

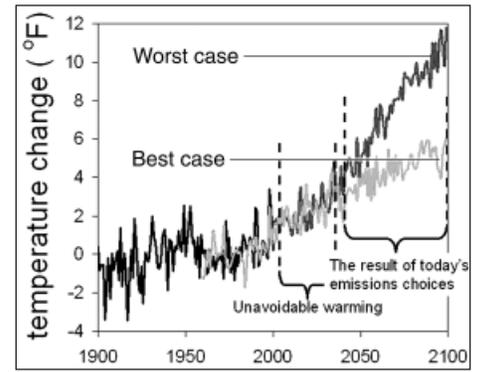
we do *some* things or if we do *everything* we possibly can. So the graph shows the forks leading to different outcomes. But note that in every case, the tines of the fork rise together until around the 4<sup>th</sup> decade of this century. This means that no matter what we do, global temperatures will rise until about 2040. The average rise by then is projected to be about 2° Celsius (about 4° Fahrenheit) higher than the year 2000.

From 2040 on, the models predict different outcomes, with the best outcome (if we can contain the causes of temperature rise *right now*) being a steady very slight rise, and the worst outcome (if we do nothing about the causes) a near doubling of global temperature rise to almost 3.5°C (7°F).

So, where are we? What does this mean in practical terms? 4° - 7°F doesn't sound like a lot of change, does it? Ms Fitzpatrick had a great graphic in answer. Look at the map on this page. It shows Massachusetts where it is today on the east coast. And there is Massachusetts (figuratively) sliding down the coast as the years go by and the temperature rises. By the year 2100 Massachusetts is experiencing the climate of South Carolina! Even if we do everything we can, we will slide down at least as far south as Maryland, climatically speaking.

Keep in mind that temperature rise is not the only effect projected by climate change. Changes in precipitation, rise in sea level, growing seasons for crops and the viability of insects, birds and other creatures are all variables that will be affected seriously. Remember the drought in Atlanta, Georgia? The water shortage there has now lasted over 18 months.

Because the projections make it clear that a 4°F rise in temperature is unavoidable over the next 30 years, most of the discussion at the conference was about how humans, agriculture, the landscape and wildlife would need to adapt to those changes. And no one in the community of people researching



global climate change can really answer any of those questions yet, but at least they are asking the questions.

I think we won't be walking on frozen marsh much any more. In fact, I'm wondering how much marsh we'll have by 2040. Sea level rise has already made itself obvious in the Carolinas. Can we be far behind?

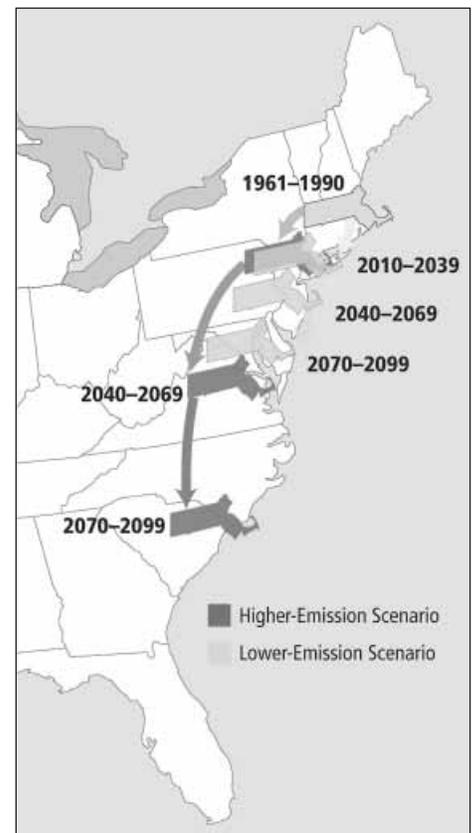
**Soheil Zende**

For additional information, see

<http://www.ucsusa.org/> and

<http://www.ipcc.ch/>.

Graphics for this article courtesy of Union of Concerned Scientists.



### Endangered species fund

Our new endangered species fund will help DCR's efforts to protect Piping Plovers, Least Terns, American Oystercatchers and other species on the beaches next summer. In addition, the funds will be used to build a second Osprey platform in the marsh, and possibly to move or repair the first one.

Thanks to everyone who contributed. Major contributions were received from Century 21 Mario Real Estate, State Rep. Bob DeLeo and MassPort. Thank you!

### Belle Isle Boatyard

August Oil is the new owner of Belle Isle Boatyard in Winthrop. Owners Larry Holmes and John August are well known in the area as honorable people and we look forward to working with them as stewards of the marsh. Their application for a license to store up to 6,000 gallons of fuel as the total amount allowed in stored boats' gas tanks at the site was approved by the Winthrop Licensing Board at a hearing on November 3rd. Fire Chief Paul Flanagan stated that there must be a minimum

of ten feet from the stored boats to the nearest dwelling, and he explained that they must be licensed for the maximum capacity of boats stored on that site. Contrary to what I thought, boats are actually less flammable with a full tank than with an "empty" tank than contains vapors. Chief Flanagan said that in his 30 years of firefighting there have been about 25 boat fires, and that no fuel tanks had exploded.

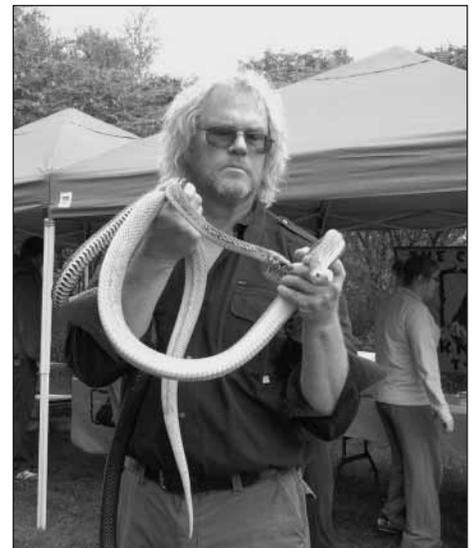
The boatyard's abutters were concerned about fire safety, trespassers and vandalism. They noted the

*(Continued next page)*

## More Harvest Festival photos



*Hayrides*



*Snake man*



*Nancy Tufo and Linda Rainville with "Blanket-the-Globe" quilt*



*Hospitality table: Eleanor Casey, Bob Esbach, Raggedy Ann, Karyl Stoia, Daniela Foley, Erica Foley*

## President's Corner *(continued)*

increased number and size of the boats at that site. After a discussion, they were satisfied when the new owners agreed to place the boats so as not to block views of the creek. Larry Holmes explained that the previous owners should have applied for a license to store fuel at the boatyard but did not. He also said they hope to operate a kayak rental business at the site next year. The success of the Boatyard is a reflection of the confidence boat owners have in the new owners. Belle Isle Boatyard and FBIM hope to work together to increase awareness of the beautiful place we all call "our" marsh. Kayaker Gail Miller recently shared Belle Isle Creek near the Boatyard with a Harbor Seal, the first sign of our winter residents moving in!

## Other abutters

In other waterfront news, the former Viking Oil Company at 120 Banks Street in Winthrop still has one oil truck on site which local officials are working to have removed. The fence company that occupied the waterfront Mirak property next to Woodside Hardware has moved out. The building on Saratoga Street which has been an Osco, Brooks and Rite-Aid, will next be a CVS. The MWRA is planning to install a new pipeline along Bennington Street in Revere and East Boston to better serve Logan Airport's needs. They say the project will have minimal impact on the environment.

## The Oasis

Finally, the owners of the Shops at Suffolk Downs have begun construction of a new building which may house at least five businesses at the site near the "tank farm" and across from the Stop and Shop and Target on Furlong Drive. Old maps show that part of Belle Isle Creek was once the main route for Clipper ships sailing from Chelsea Creek to Boston Harbor. Old photos of Suffolk Downs show the area between McClellan

Highway and Bennington Street as wetland—Belle Isle Creek, Green Creek, Sayles Creek. Birders continue to find wildlife there, but blocked culverts, paved parking lots and further development threaten the species that live there today.

## Forums

FBIM is planning two Monday night forums. The first will be an update on the Revere coyote project, with Dave Eatough, a teacher at Revere High School. His previous presentation on the coyotes at Belle Isle and in our area was outstanding. We

received many requests to have him speak again on his project of tracking coyotes. Coyotes are more common in this area and people have heard them howling or seen them in residential neighborhoods. Dave's presentation will teach us more about coyotes.

Our second forum, lead by FBIM member Susannah Corona, will be a panel discussion on endangered species on our beaches and how to protect them.

Our forums are free and open to the public.

**Barbara Bishop**  
*President, Friends of Belle Isle Marsh*

## Billionaire Babies

Sophia and Abigail are budding biologists at 3 and 5 years old. They have scoured Winthrop Beach for all manner of rockweed, eel grass, razor clams, and limpets.

One Sunday morning in late summer, Sophia and Abigail were joyfully skipping along the paths at Belle Isle Park when they came upon a distinguished looking gentleman with a very long telescope. It was Soheil out on his weekly search.

What an opportunity! By standing on the bench at the Boardwalk, the young girls could peer through a telescope for the first time....To their amazement there were great blue herons and snowy egrets and hundreds of swallows and other wonders of the marsh to behold. The goldenrod was dazzling in the bright sun. So much to see and so much to learn.

Now, when Sophia and Abigail close their eyes, they can imagine the sights and sounds of the salt marsh any time they want. What a great way to go to sleep at night.



*Photo by Soheil Zendeh*  
**Sophia and Abigail at the Boardwalk**

Because of their explorations, Sophia now has her own business called SophieStones. She decorates and displays the stones from Winthrop Beach. Abigail sells AbbyBags gift bags, hand decorated with great care and imagination. They are so proud of what they are doing and of who they are, even at their young ages.

Sophia and Abigail are lucky to have found Soheil and to have this natural landscape available to them to enrich their lives.

**Linda Samuels**  
*Winthrop resident earned BS in zoology from University of Cincinnati*



*Illustration by Joseph Caldarelli*

## BOOKS IN REVIEW

### *The House on Ipswich Marsh: Exploring the Natural History of New England*

by William Sargent; University Press of New England, 2005.

### *The Prophet of Dry Hill: Lessons from A Life in Nature* by David Gessner; Beacon Press, 2005.

Here are two nonfiction works with similar concerns: both deal with nature and the environment from a local angle—one set in Ipswich, the other on Cape Cod—but they are wildly divergent in terms of style and point of view.

In *The House on Ipswich Marsh: Exploring the Natural History of New England*, William Sargent looks at a year in the life of Ipswich Marsh from his vantage point in The Pink House on Jeffrey's Neck. Sargent, a self-described "misplaced Cape Codder", is a scientist and naturalist who moved to Ipswich in 2003 after receiving a grant from the New England Biolabs Foundation, intending to study the behavior of Bobolinks in nearby meadows. However, Sargent's small study of a small bird evolved into a year-long odyssey he describes as "...my story of a field, a marsh, a house, and about a billion years of the biological and geological history of this little corner of the planet known as the North Shore of Boston."

Conveyed with a lucid and simple writing style, Sargent's story depends for its effects on straightforward observation and the accretion of small details. Each of four sections of the book looks at one season—spring through winter and back again—and we follow Sargent as he tramps over meadows, through marsh mud and pine woods, from Jeffrey's Neck to Smith Island, Crane's Beach to Joppa Flats, and back to the house on the marsh. Through close observation of details, Sargent leads us to larger understanding. He's not one for grand pronouncements; he follows the old adage "show, don't tell", and his style is

plain, reportorial prose, not poetry. But there is beauty in it, nonetheless. Here's Sargent coming upon an unexpected discovery deep in the marsh:

At last I'm within fifty feet of the animal and it still hasn't seen me... Suddenly it hits me. I'm looking at a newborn fawn still hobbling around on uncertain legs. It is probably only a week old and still too young to run. As if on command the fawn collapses into the marsh grass and disappears. But I have marked the spot and keep my eyes on it while I continue my advance. As I approach, the fawn becomes even stranger. It has a beautiful reddish brown coat and large soft ears. Yet its ears never twitch and its eyes never blink. Finally I'm sitting next to the fawn and can see her telltale row of white spots... She hasn't moved a muscle; she still holds her head to the side in a characteristic pose. I move in closer to take a close-up and I can almost hear her say, "Damn, damn. What have I done now? Oh, what did mother say? Gotta keep still, gotta keep still."



If Sargent is prose, then David Gessner in *The Prophet of Dry Hill: Lessons from A Life in Nature* is sheer poetry. Gessner, a young naturalist and teacher, returned to his native Cape Cod with the idea of writing a biography of the great naturalist and writer John Hay. Hay had written Gessner to compliment him on an article Gessner had written about over-development, the scourge of Cape Cod. In his mid-eighties, Hay had lived on Dry Hill in Brewster since 1945. Then a newly published poet, Hay sought a conscious break with the discontents of the world recently at war, and a deeper connection with the natural world. He found that connection away from the city in the 50 acres of Dry Hill.

Gessner's original plan fell by the wayside as the two men's relationship evolved; no longer biographer and subject, the reserved and sometimes cantankerous Hay and his younger admirer became friends. Though

proclaiming himself "too old for apprenticeship", Gessner nevertheless gives up the idea of writing a biography and completely immerses himself in Hay's writings, thought and point of view, seeing the world around Dry Hill through new eyes, reaching a sometimes ecstatic appreciation of nature that is poetry itself. Consider this passage, in which Gessner is describing to Hay some gannets he had spotted feeding:

They dove from great heights into the water, dozens of them, as if pulled into a vortex. From the shoreline I watched them circle, wings beating, searching the sea from a hundred feet up, then banking down, turning, gliding, fluid until the very moment of the dive, when they would pull their wings back and shoot into the water like feathery spears. As they dove, the sun broke through the gray and radiated in every direction, spraying out in a wagon wheel of light.

Although Gessner's writing abounds in the kinds of minute observation that marks his mentor's work, he is also attempting to do something very difficult: describe the state of quiet ecstasy that deep connection with nature can bring. It is something that the great John Muir achieved, and Gessner's work is worthy successor to the tradition of John Muir and John Hay.

**Liz Regan**

*Readers unfamiliar with John Hay can find a collection of some of his essays in The Way to the Salt Marsh: A John Hay Reader, edited by Christopher Merrill; University Press of New England, 1998.*





## Trees, Storms and Increase

Leaves fall from trees in autumn. In a New England full of oaks and maples, that's nothing unusual. It's the sort of event that we often use to explain change to children. On the other hand, we are not comfortable with falling trees. That's actually a normal process as well but it's a much bigger kind of change that often implies destruction which always makes us uneasy. A tree fell last month on Bayswater St. right off the end of a Logan runway. The tree fell into a yard and nuzzled up to a house. Nothing was really damaged except for a crunched wrought iron fence. Still I nearly fell off my bike in surprise. Stranger still was that the tree completely disappeared a few days later. No trace remained except for the accordion bend in the fence. Thirty odd years of growth and then nothing.

Last week I was walking along a path in Rosie's thicket and found another downed tree. The wind had caught it and snapped it cleanly across the lower trunk. For a moment I wondered why someone had chainsawed the tree down but there was no sawdust or tooth marks. It was just a strong gust at work. The thickets are full of blown down limbs and trunks. In the rain it can seem like a grisly boneyard. A fallen tree is always a bit unsettling.

All this got me to thinking about Hurricane Carol in 1954. I was very small but I clearly remember the amazing sight of the maple tree in my grandparent's yard laying across Spencer St. in Dorchester. I was flabbergasted to see such a big strong tree blown over.

It's the kind of change that you don't really appreciate until you have a lot more to lose than childhood innocence. Big storms are the sort of all out chaos that rightly scares everyone. Trees come down, roofs blow off and beaches move.

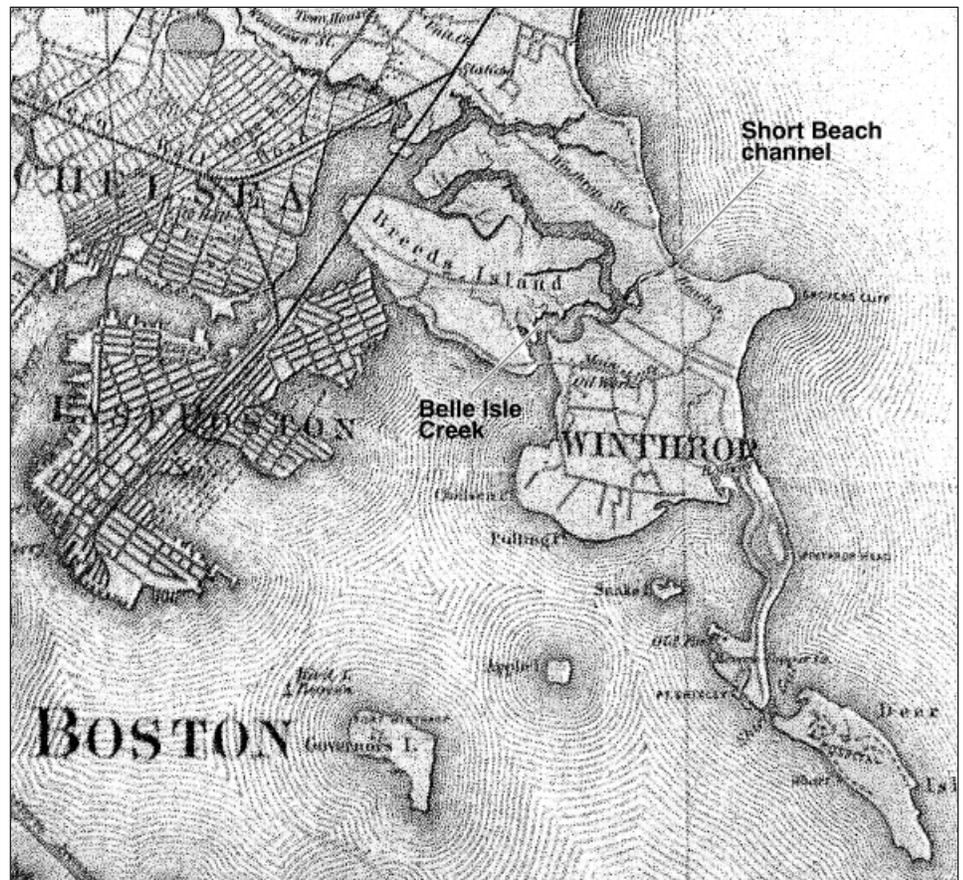
Short Beach moved in September 1938. The hugely destructive hurricane blew into New England unannounced and spread a huge swath of destruction. Locally it dammed up the small inlet from Belle Isle Creek that led directly into the ocean. It was not a terrifying event in itself. After all a lot of people died that September 21. It was actually not much of anything. The road was fixed and no trace was left of the connection but history had changed. A small piece of our local history was gone.

Increase Mather is not a name we much remember anymore. He lived

in 17th century Boston and was an important political and religious leader. He spoke out against Sir Edmond Andros the tyrannical royal governor of New England and fearing arrest and worse, Mather fled town. He got out by boat when a local guide led him through the creeks and marshes north of Boston avoiding the usual water routes. He came up Chelsea Creek and then over to Belle Isle and then out to sea. That little outlet through Short Beach was closed by the Hurricane of 1938. There are connections that disappear in time as seasons and strong winds move on. There's a past that still lingers but it's harder to find.

*George Cumming*

The blog **OrientSee** is at <http://www.georgemcumming.com/>.

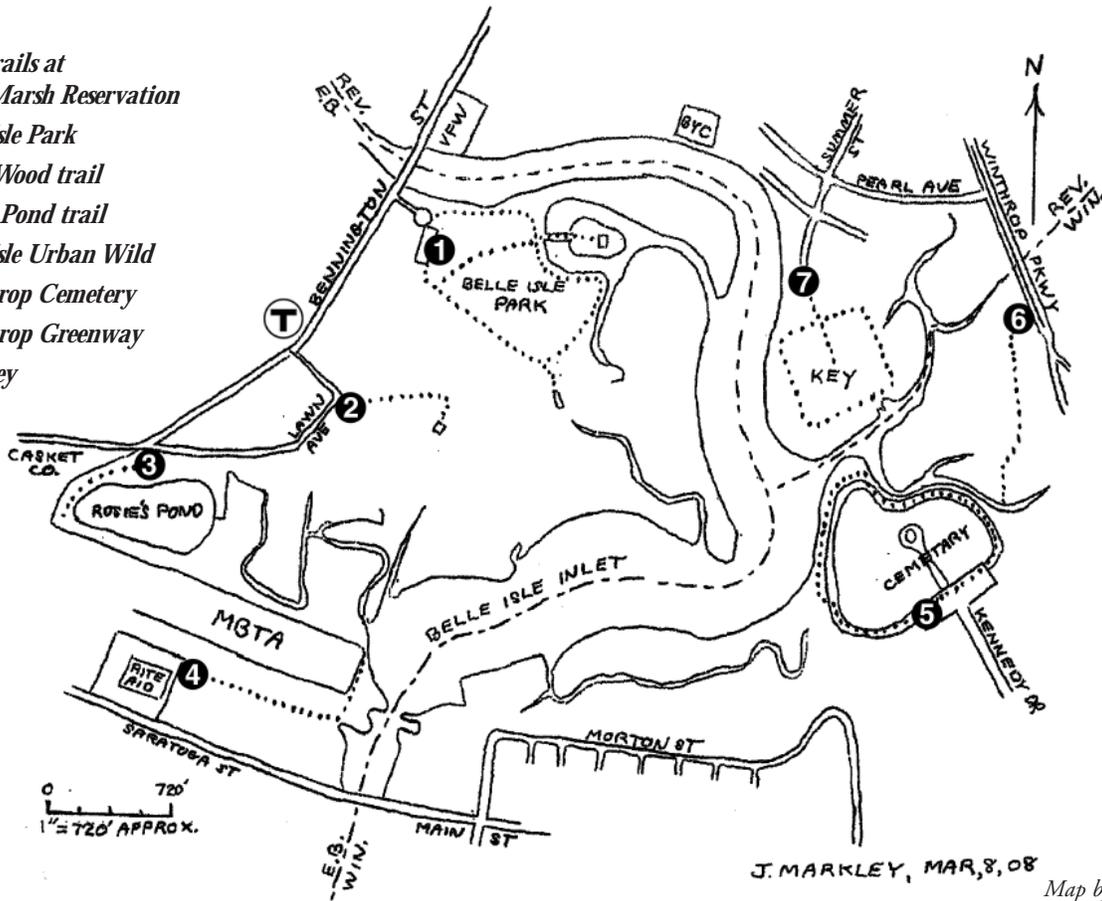


*East Boston, Chelsea, Revere and Winthrop. Short Beach channel through which Mather may have escaped at top right of map.*

*Geological map of eastern Massachusetts and Boston and vicinity by W.O. Crosby, 1877. From Harvard University map collection.*

**Walking trails at  
Belle Isle Marsh Reservation**

- 1** Belle Isle Park
- 2** Geoff Wood trail
- 3** Rosie's Pond trail
- 4** Belle Isle Urban Wild
- 5** Winthrop Cemetery
- 6** Winthrop Greenway
- 7** The Key



Friends of Belle Isle Marsh (FBIM) membership dues:

- Family \$15
- Individual \$8
- Seniors and Youth (under 16) \$5

*FBIM is a registered nonprofit corporation; contributions are tax-deductible. Thank you for your continued support.*

*FBIM is a volunteer organization dedicated to the preservation of this marsh. We believe that protection ultimately depends on public awareness of the value and beauty of this natural resource. Our focus, therefore, is mainly educational.*

*For extra newsletters to share or leave on tables at your coffee shop, public library or boat club, etc., call 617-567-5072 or email:*

friends of belleislemarsh@comcast.net

*Our web address:*

<http://www.friendsofbelleislemarsh.org>

*This issue was produced by Soheil Zende  
with help from Barbara Bishop, Daniela Foley,  
Gail Miller and Christine Zende*

SZ08

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