

08-03-18 Watersheds, Waterways, and the Wonders of Nature

In Halifax, we have an appreciation of the word “watershed” because of the intricacies of the politics and geography and our changed and changing environment. After a boat ride along the North River last weekend, I thought about the idea of appreciating waters from the land. Boy, do I have some places to explore being added to my current list!

Being a landlubber, it was fun to sit in a comfy pontoon boat and relax while listening to a docent-like tour of the North River. We learned about the great ship building era in the 1700 and 1800’s. Along the way we could see numerous plaques commemorating the ship yards of old. In 1919 the North River Historical Society formed, with its first mission being to document the shipyards before the knowledge of them disappeared. Some of them sounded familiar, such as Briggs and Brick Kiln, known to me as local family names and local streets, although I never knew the history behind them.

Among the many ships built there, two stood out as memorable. The brig, *Beaver*, was docked in Boston on December 16, 1773 and, yes, you guessed it; it’s load of tea was thrown into the harbor, now known as the Boston Tea Party.

The other ship mentioned on the tour was the *Columbia*. It weighed 200 tons and was the first American ship to carry the American flag around the world and the first of the “new world” people to explore the Columbia river, named to this day after a ship built on the North River!

The great gale of 1898 that changed the mouths of the North and South Rivers, bringing an end to the ship building era for the North River, which was perhaps fading anyway by then with a changing world and a depletion of the great forests.

It was difficult to visualize the forest depletion as we navigated along the winding river, for, after the beautiful marshes at the water’s edge, with a dock here and there leading to some beautiful homes, we mostly witnessed blocked views, blocked by thick forests. The first and perhaps the largest wooded area we passed was the hills of the Nelson Memorial Forest. I suspect it is one the hidden gems of the South Shore, as I am told the signage is not obvious from the street In Marshfield. This was the case for other trails and even a beach, the one and only on the river. In some places camping is allowed and we did, indeed, see evidence of nature lovers who had brought their tents and “bare necessities” by kayak and

canoe. These small vessels and tents provided the bits of color along the way of blue waters and green marsh grasses under the canopy of Saturday's stupendous blue sky filled with gorgeous cumulus clouds.

Many of these forested areas and trails are open to the public but not necessarily well known, especially how to access them. Some, such as North River Wildlife Sanctuary, serving as the base for South Shore Sanctuaries (including Daniel Webster and North Hill Marsh) are more easily accessed. Others may take some research through Audubon, the North and South River Watershed Association, and the Conservation Commissions in the connecting towns, for all these organizations own and protect much of the land along the North River.

And that was the biggest take-away for me. People with foresight and determination to preserve nature and make it available for people to enjoy, had accomplished just that and it is there for us to do just that!

Another way to learn about these nature preserves is through the gift of documented walking experiences of John Galuzzo. I love listening to his *Walk of the Week* on WATD. One of his many books, *The North River: Scenic Waterway of the South Shore* is available on Amazon. He includes detailed directions and instructions for getting to these gems!

While there are twelve towns in the watershed, a handful touch the North River itself. We began at Rhot's Marine in Marshfield and traveled through Scituate, Norwell, Pembroke, and turned back at the bridge of the Southeast Expressway, long before the river reached Hanover and its final destination of Hanson. How many thousands of times have I traveled over that bridge, always admiring its beauty and yet, never ventured closer? Too many times; that is how many.

We were accompanied by a family of ospreys, graceful snowy egrets, a few seagulls, diving cormorants and swooping swallows and purple martins. We did not see the seals or the bald eagles. Maybe next time. I was thankful this place had been saved.

We need to stay strong and determined to save nature and our water in Halifax and the surrounding watersheds so that our ancestors can say the same of us.

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