

Douglas Doe, "The Early Years of the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Volume 24, No 2 (Summer 1996).

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University

You may use content in this archive for your personal, non-commercial use. Please contact the *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* regarding any further use of this work:

masshistoryjournal@wsc.ma.edu

Funding for digitization of issues was provided through a generous grant from MassHumanities.



Some digitized versions of the articles have been reformatted from their original, published appearance. When citing, please give the original print source (volume/ number/ date) but add "retrieved from HJM's online archive at <http://www.wsc.ma.edu/mhj>.



The Early Years of the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge

Douglas Doe

Edward H. Forbush, the State Ornithologist of Massachusetts, prepared a report for the legislature in 1912 that would "serve as a basis for both restrictive and constructive legislation for the protection and propagation of shore birds." Forbush's report gave a detailed accounting of the decline of birds along the Atlantic coast drawn from surveys provided by hunters, ornithologists, hunting club records, and other observers. Hunting laws and regulations differed from state to state and sometimes from county to county. Virtually anything with wings was fair game for hunters, whether for the commercial market or for sport. Overshooting, destruction of habitat, spring shooting, and market hunting decimated the bird population all across the country.¹

Forbush advocated the establishment of sanctuaries along the Atlantic coast that prohibited the hunting of migrant birds. The sanctuaries would preserve the coastal habitat and provide

¹ Edward Howe Forbush, A History of Game Birds, Wild-Fowl and Shore Birds of Massachusetts and Adjacent States (Boston, 1912), pp. vi, 511, and 590.

safety from shot and shell. He considered federal control necessary to insure a uniform system, though the argument was made that hunting regulations were a state's prerogative. The Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Biological Survey was in charge of federal game protection, and Forbush recommended that the Bureau be charged with the protection of migratory birds.²

United States Senator Elihu Root's solution to the state's rights argument was the Migratory Bird Treaty of 1916 with Great Britain, which required the federal government to protect migratory birds within the United States, a provision which would be upheld by the Supreme Court. The Bureau of Biological Survey was given the responsibility to carry out the provisions of the treaty regarding hunting. Few sanctuaries were created in the following decade, and those that were allowed hunting. The population of migratory birds continued to decline throughout the decade and into the early 1930s.³

The New Deal brought life and money into the sanctuary acquisition program. Led by J. N. "Ding" Darling and his successor Ira N. Gabrielson, the Bureau used revenues from a newly created federal Duck Hunting Stamp, WPA funds, and any other available funds to create new refuges. The driving force within the Bureau was Darling's assistant, J. Clark Slayer II.⁴ Slayer, the Bureau's leading advocate for the creation of new refuges across the country, paid little heed to bureaucratic niceties. George Laycock provided a supervisor's opinion of Slayer. "We could trace his progress across the country by the anguished wails of the regional supervisors."⁵

² Ibid., pp. 590-592..

³ Dyan Zaslowsky and the Wilderness Society, *These American Lands: Parks, Wilderness, and the Public Lands* (New York, 1986), pp. 171-173.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 174-176.

⁵ George Laycock, *The Sign of the Flying Goose* (Garden City, New York, 1965), pp. 224-229. Slayer believed that "you had to howl like a gut-shot panther Everybody always had his hand out

E.H. Forbush and others recommended to the Bureau in 1928 that a refuge be established on Monomoy, a barrier beach located southeast of Chatham at the elbow of Cape Cod. A 1929 report found Monomoy "little disturbed being visited mainly by but a few hunters and fishermen." Monomoy was accessible by boat or by the beach connecting it to the mainland. The report's authors were not impressed with the waterfowl present during their brief survey, and they did not agree with Forbush's assessment. Forbush reported extensive bird populations and thought "that the only opposition to a refuge here might be from the owners" of the gunning and fishing shacks on the peninsula.⁶

The Bureau conducted an extensive two-year survey of Cape Cod in the 1930s, and concluded that Monomoy was an area that appeared "to be within the financial range of the Bureau's acquisition program and at the same time [was] an outstanding waterfowl area" for inclusion within the Atlantic flyway. Monomoy's isolation and low cost were important factors in its selection. Slayer's memo and the accompanying report sent to Gabrielson noted that there were other areas on Cape Cod that had equal or greater potential as refuge areas, but resort development and land costs were prohibitive. "This area can no doubt be acquired more easily than any other location on Cape

for a piece of the refuges. You had to know how to say 'no.'" See p. 228,

⁶ Neil Hotchkiss and Leonard E. Ekvall, Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Biological Survey, Monomoy, Barnstable County, Massachusetts, August 16, 1929, in Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Region Five, Wildlife Refuge Files, Monomoy. The Bureau was combined with the Commerce Department's Bureau of Fisheries to create the Fish and Wildlife Service in 1940. See Stephen Fox, John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement (Boston, 1981), p. 199. Since the "Wildlife Refuge Files" were used by the author, the regional office has moved to Hadley, Massachusetts. The files were used in conjunction with the "Realty Tract Files," which document individual land-takings within the Refuge.

Cod." The cost of acquiring the 1,900 acres of beach, dunes, and marshlands was estimated to be five dollars per acre. Adjacent shoal waters covered an additional 1,800 acres.⁷

The Bureau began negotiations with "ostensible" landowners in the fall of 1938, resulting in two proposed leases for 322 acres, with an option to buy during the term of the leases. "Reliable data concerning names of owners and the extent of ownership were impossible to obtain," so the Bureau suspended negotiations. Ownership of the land had become exceedingly complex over the previous century, as shares of the land were passed down through generations of Chatham families.

News of the Bureau's activity became public knowledge in the winter of 1939, and the reaction was not what Forbush had expected. Local opposition to the proposal was swift and widespread, and quickly produced a petition with 650 signatures protesting the Bureau's action. The weekly *Harwich Independent* reported the formation of a local committee composed of selectmen, hunters, and property owners, and urged its readers to "give them your hearty cooperation in any way that you can." The paper stressed the importance of Monomoy to the local recreation industry, and noted that 2,500 summer visitors had driven down to Monomoy Point the previous summer. Not all local residents opposed the creation of a refuge on Monomoy, however. R. E. Larkin, who was reported to own 280 acres on Monomoy, claimed in a letter to the *Cape Cod Standard-Times* that opposition came from "certain individuals in Chatham who have a selfish ax to grind, namely, to use Monomoy for their own purposes."⁸

⁷ J. Clark Slayer II, "Memoranda to Dr. Gabrielson: Proposing the Monomoy Island Migratory Waterfowl Refuge," August 12, 1938, in Wildlife Refuge Files, Monomoy; Richard E. Griffin, Jr., "Proposed Monomoy Island Migratory Waterfowl Refuge, Cape Cod, Massachusetts," July 10, 1938, in Wildlife Refuge Files, Monomoy.

⁸ Harwich Independent, March 16, 1939; Cape Cod Standard-Times, March 31 and April 8, 1939. The Standard-Times began publishing

Arthur Tarbell, Chatham resident and author, described Monomoy as a land where "melancholy and loneliness hover" with "haunting memories of ships and sailors who have here come to an untimely end." Old settlements became memories and the land was altered by the winds and tides. Whitewash Village came to an end when storm-tossed sands closed the harbor at Monomoy Point about 1860. During its two decades of existence, the village had supported an outfitting store, an inn, fishermen's cottages, and a school.⁹

The mainland's tenuous hold on Monomoy fluctuated with the ever-shifting barrier beaches that protect Chatham's eastern shore. Residents began to travel to Monomoy by horse and wagon around the turn of the century, when Morris Island and Monomoy were joined together by a barrier beach. A small cut through existed between Morris Island and the mainland, but it was shallow enough at low tide to allow travelers to cross. The town built Little Beach Road to the cut in 1893, to provide access to the Chatham Beach Hotel on the beach east of Morris Island and distant Monomoy. Thus began a decade-long effort by the town to establish and maintain land access to Monomoy for hunters, fishermen and their families, residents, and vacationers.¹⁰

in 1930s, as an offshoot of the New Bedford Standard-Times. The paper is now the Cape Cod Times.

⁹ Arthur W. Tarbell, Cape Cod Ahoy!: A Travel Book for the Summer Visitor (Boston, 1937), p. 259; G. H. Ballou, "Monomoy, in Harper's New Monthly Magazine, February 1864, p. 307; Minnie G. Buck, "Teachers at Monomoy Pt.," in Notes on the History of Chatham, Massachusetts (Cape Community College Archives, Barnstable, Mass. pp. 598-600 Ballou taught school on the Point from 1858-1861.

¹⁰ Cape Coder, June 10, 1948; Board of Harbor and Land Commissioners, Annual Report: 1903 (Boston, 1904), pp. 25-26; Chatham Monitor, May 9, 1893. The original name of the road was the Beach Hotel Road.

The Point, a "paradise of plenty," provided wild cranberries, deer, and "an abundance of shellfish of clams, quahaugs, scallops and waterfowl."¹¹ The Monomoy of the 1930s was

a lovely blue world from the mainland to the Point, through drifting sands and beach grass, past wrecks and the gray shacks of Halfway House, through banks of sea lavender, and pink sand flowers. There are terns and yellowlegs, butterbills and coots, gray gulls and white gulls, sandpipers and hawks. And at the Point there are lobster and quahaug shacks, and men catching bluefish and eels. There are broken-down cars, and wrecks from the sea.¹²

The "great god of gasoline . . . conquered" Monomoy in 1932, with the advent of "jumbo" tires, and the remains of the campaign lie buried in the sand of Monomoy to this day.¹³ Bus tours became a popular summer diversion for vacationers who made the twenty-mile round-trip in two hours. Hunters and fishermen gained easier access to "paradise," and Monomoy became more than a land of isolation and beauty. As the Refuge controversy began, the Cape Cod Standard Times published two front-page photographs of an estimated one hundred fishermen and their cars on Monomoy Point, with an editorial caption: "This bears out the claim of Chatham residents that the Point is valuable to them as a source of Summer business."¹⁴

¹¹ Cape Codder, June 10 and December 30, 1948.

¹² Eleanor Early, And This is Cape Cod (Boston, 1936), p. 156.

¹³ Tarbell, Cape Cod Ahoy!, p. 259.

¹⁴ Early, And This is Cape Cod!, p. 156; Cape Cod Standard-Times, April 12, 1939.

Chatham selectman Edwin F. Eldredge led the local opposition to the Refuge. An avid sportsman, Eldredge spoke out at a March 1, 1941, hearing held in Chatham by federal officials to discuss the proposal. Eldredge believed that the Refuge would "deprive Cape Cod of one of its finest recreational assets." Eldredge and the Lower Cape Surfcasters Association, among others, did not believe the government's "assurance that fishing would be permitted on the point and autos allowed to drive along the beach."¹⁵ No one in the audience of three hundred people voiced support for the Refuge proposal. The result was an answer to the *Harwich Independent's* call for "a voice so loud in opposition to this taking that little doubt will be left in the minds of those in authority that Cape Codders do not want" the Refuge.¹⁶

The Surfcasters Association had a special interest in beach buggy access, which they worked hard to retain. The land route to Monomoy was threatened in 1940, when a cut through the beach north of Morris Island was opened by winter storms. The selectmen worked with the Surfcasters Association and others "who were interested in being able to get to Monomoy Beach at all times" to close the cut with sandbags donated by the State Department of Public Works. In all, 5,000 sandbags were used to build a dike across the cut to ensure access to Monomoy.¹⁷

¹⁵ Cape Cod Standard-Times, March 3, 1941; interview with Thomas Ennis, August 23, 1993. Ennis was a member of the Chatham Planning Board during the mid-1950s and early 1960s. The Surfcasters Association was formed in the 1930s as surf fishing and beach buggies grew in popularity. The Association faded away during World War II and its gasoline rationing. See Joshua A. Nickerson II, Days to Remember (Chatham, 1988), pp. 181-182.

¹⁶ Harwich Independent, February 27, 1941.

¹⁷ Minutes of the Chatham Board of Selectmen, 1937-1942, March 11, June 3, and June 10, 1940 in Chatham Town Offices; Chatham Town Report, 1940, p. 41. The bridge solution pleased two different groups in the town. It provided land access to Monomoy

J. Clark Slayer's 1941 management plan stressed continued public access and use of Monomoy as a recreation area that was "compatible with the primary use of the area -- namely, the conservation of all forms of wildlife found there." A "stabilized interior road behind the dunes down the length of the Island" would provide access for the beach buggies. Fresh water ponds, developed by diking marshlands, would provide expanded feeding grounds for waterfowl. Slayer stressed another point, drawing on federal studies from the 1930s:

Both from the standpoint of public recreation and wildlife conservation, it is desirable that there be no further development of summer homes in the area. In this connection, it should be remembered that less than 1 percent of the Atlantic coastline is in Government ownership of a type which permits continued public use. Public use of Monomoy Island would cease with its ultimate development as a summer resort colony according to present trends.¹⁸

Slayer made it clear that human use of Monomoy would be secondary to the needs of wildlife. In addition, control of Monomoy would no longer be in the hands of local residents, who were to see Monomoy's isolation and their own shattered.

The government pledged to study the Refuge plan for another year, but the opposition did not disappear. In April of 1942, Eldredge presented another petition, signed by five hundred

and left the cut open for those who wanted to pass from Chatham Harbor to Stage Harbor without going around Monomoy. The dike forced boaters to take the long route. An 1891 attempt to deal with a cut at the same location produced similar opinions on maintaining or closing the cut. See Chatham Monitor, June 16, 1891.

¹⁸ J. Clark Slayer, II, "Development Plan for the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge, Chatham, Mass, March 24, 1941." in Wildlife Refuge Files, Monomoy.

fishermen, sportsmen, and others. Gabrielson's response was to delay the taking of Monomoy until after World War II had ended, but the War Department had its own plans to use the land.¹⁹

The government took Monomoy by condemnation on June 1, 1944, for use as an "Air to Ground Gunnery Bombing Range for Westover Field, Massachusetts." The Fish and Wildlife Service pledged in a public notice that

when the island has served its greatest immediate need in furthering our nation's war effort in the war, it will be utilized for migratory bird refuge purposes, and, at the same time, our earliest promises to the people of Chatham will be honored.²⁰

Whether it was necessary for the war effort or not, the local opposition did not acquiesce to the land-taking. Eldredge, who led the opposition, decried the bombing range. The selectmen asserted that the government had taken "away from our community the greatest attraction of its recreational industry." A joint committee of the State House of Representatives held a public hearing in Chatham on March 19, 1945, where Eldredge orchestrated the witnesses who testified against the refuge. Joshua Nickerson, a local business owner and developer who was active in local civic affairs, asserted that "Monomoy has rare charm and an unusual degree of accessibility" well-suited for Cape Cod's largest industry, tourism. Chatham resident Robert McNeece wondered "what the effect of the proposed federal development on the Point might have on Chatham's 'nice little

¹⁹ Cape Cod Standard-Times, March 31, April 7, and May 13, 1941.

²⁰ Gabrielson, Statement of the United States pp. 6-7; S. B. Locke, Regional Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, "Public Notice," June 16, 1944, in Realty Tract Files, Monomoy, Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Region Five.

community.' It is 'dangerous to this town to have any agency control that large part of our shoreline.'"²¹

The state hearings were held because of the opposition to the Monomoy Refuge and the establishment of the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge in 1942. The Parker River Refuge was a popular fishing and hunting area, like Monomoy, and it was located on the coast of Newburyport, north of Boston. The state repealed the legislation that allowed the federal government to purchase the refuges in order to prevent the acquisition of the land, but the action was after the fact, and acquisitions stood.²²

The military continued operations on Monomoy throughout the 1940s, despite the government's previous assurances that the Refuge would be established when the land was no longer needed for the war effort. The military's presence did not prevent the public's use of Monomoy, however, though the pilots' strafing and dive-bombing came too close for comfort on occasions. Winter's hunting season brought residents and visitors to the Point by buggies, boats, and planes that landed on the sand. Beach camps came alive with sportsmen, including some who had been making the journey for fifty years.²³

Eldredge did not remain quiet as the decade came to a close. He sent local Congressman Donald W. Nicholson a blistering letter charging that the selectmen had been double-crossed by the government. Chatham expected

²¹ Cape Cod Standard-Times, February 14, 20 and 23, and March 20, 1945.

²² Gabrielson, Statement of the United States, pp. 7-8; An Act Relative to the Acquisition by the Federal Government of Property in this Commonwealth under the Federal Law known as the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (1945). Gabrielson's statement was in response to the state's actions in 1945.

²³ Cape Codder, June 10 and December 30, 1948; interview with Fred Powell, Chatham, September 10, 1993.

a wildlife refuge after the war, with highways, cultivation on the island, picnic parks, breakwaters and all the good things that go with a wildlife refuge, and what do we get? We are apt to get a 'permanent target range.'²⁴

There was truth behind his statements. The highway was no more than the sand trail to be maintained behind the dunes. The government planned to erect sand fencing along the beach between Morris Island and Monomoy, to stabilize the connection and maintain land access. The area would continue to be used for "picnics, bathing, surf and other sport fishing, and cottage sites." The management plan included the construction of "fishermen shelters and camping areas." What would not be allowed was hunting when the Fish and Wildlife Service regained control of Monomoy, a prospect that was not promising as the summer began.²⁵

Lieutenant William M. King died in July of 1949 when his F-84 Thunderjet crashed into the dunes during routine gunnery practice. The military's response was to announce the expansion of the danger zone around Monomoy to be in effect every day from seven a.m. to seven p.m. The town's response was to crowd a meeting hall with six hundred residents and summer visitors, all of whom were in opposition to the expansion. Eldredge, Nicholson, and State Senator Edward C. Stone led the protests at the forum held by the military.²⁶

For Eldredge, the central point had not changed. The bombing range had to be eliminated.

²⁴ Cape Cod Standard-Times, June 30, 1949. The newspaper remained faithful the opposition, as indicated by the publication of this letter as the lead story on the front page.

²⁵ Gabrielson, Statement of the United States, pp. 10-14; Ira N. Gabrielson to Hugh Gray, June 29, 1944, in Realty Tract Files, Monomoy. Gray was associate editor of Field and Stream magazine.

²⁶ Cape Cod Standard-Times, August 26 and September 2, 1949.

We . . . feel they took it for a specified purpose with the promise they would establish not only a bird refuge but a recreation center They promised us a hardened road with a bridge at Morris Island to the mainland. Now . . . the government is saying to us that they want to make it a permanent danger zone, which takes away from us a \$1,000,000 recreation center as proposed, and deprives us of additional income from this recreation center.²⁷

The widespread opposition to the expansion of the range succeeded in ending the use of the range altogether. The military closed the bombing range in November, and the military's permit to use Monomoy was relinquished in February of 1951.²⁸

The army returned control of Monomoy to the Regional Office of the Fish and Wildlife Service, which did not share Slayer's enthusiasm for Monomoy. In an October 25, 1951, memorandum, labeled personal and confidential, Regional Director D. R. Gascoyne recommended to the Director of the Service that the Refuge be closed and turned over to the State Parks Division of Massachusetts, under the condition that it continue to be used as a wildlife refuge, and not for "summer-cottage or amusement-resort" development. Equipment did not last in the salt air environment, and it was "poor management to

²⁷ New Bedford Standard-Times, September 18, 1949.

²⁸ Cape Cod Standard-Times, November 19, 1949; A. C. Stewart, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers to Regional Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, February 27, 1951, in Realty Tract Files, Monomoy. Other refuges were used by the military during and after the war. Slayer was defiant during the 1956 controversy, when he exclaimed that "We have de-occupied Japan, the Philippines, and much of Germany . . . but not the refuges." Quoted in Laycock, Sign of the Flying Goose, p. 234.

retain control of 3,000 acres, most of which is sand dune, for the few waterfowl which may use the 600-800 acres which can be made suitable for them by diking." Funds would be better spent at other refuges on the Atlantic Coast, "all of which are excellent areas with an extremely high potential for development."²⁹

Director Albert Day had "misgivings about the value of Monomoy, [but] it was largely because of some first impressions I gained without having explored all of the effort and time that went into the original acquisition of this area." Buttressed by arguments presented by Slayer, Day turned down Gascoyne's recommendation and a request by the Navy to create another bombing range on Monomoy.³⁰

The development of Monomoy as a recreation area that was appropriate for the Refuge and fulfilled the promises made to the town was hindered by a problem mentioned by Eldredge in his 1949 remarks. The small wooden 350-foot bridge to Morris Island, which had been built in 1940, was destroyed by the hurricane of 1944. Not only was land access to Monomoy lost, but the cut through the beach continued to widen and Stage Harbor was becoming clogged with sand. The selectmen wrote to the Division of Waterways of the Department of Public Works in April of 1945, asking for help, but they received none. Fishermen and others ferried buggies across Stage Harbor to the Coast Guard boat-landing area on Stage Island, but the arrangement did not provide the access envisioned by Eldredge.³¹

²⁹ D. R. Gascoyne to Albert M. Day, October 25, 1951, in Wildlife Refuge Files, Monomoy. The Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey was the site of extensive development activity. Fresh water ponds and dikes were built to provide ducks a place to "rest and feed." See Laycock, Sign of the Flying Goose, pp. 78-79.

³⁰ Albert M. Day to D. R. Gascoyne, May 15, 1952, in Wildlife Refuge Files, Monomoy.

³¹ Selectmen Division of Waterways, April 6, 1945, in Selectmen's Files, Office of the Board of Selectmen, Chatham, Mass.; Thomas Ennis, August 26, 1993.

Without a bridge providing land access, Monomoy would remain isolated, and its use as a recreation area would be severely curtailed. The need for picnic and camping areas, fishing shelters, and other improvements would be limited if the public's only access to Monomoy was by boat. Monomoy's development as a public recreation area as advocated by Eldredge depended upon the land access provided by the old road across Morris Island. Without access across the cut through north of Morris Island, the half century effort to maintain land access to Monomoy Point would come to an end. Without the continuing influx of summer visitors to the Point, the pressure on the Fish and Wildlife Service to keep its promises would slowly ebb, as would the necessity.

At this point, political developments would result in movements in the right direction. Elected in 1952, Governor Christian A. Herter and his administration continued with the planning for a state beach program which had been started by the previous administration. The proposal, completed in August of 1954, envisioned the development of ten beach areas comprising fifteen and one-half miles of shoreline, at a cost of fifteen million dollars, to be completed by 1962. The acquisition of Monomoy for a state beach was targeted for 1959, in anticipation of the "effects of the completion of the Mid-Cape Highway and the proposed New England South Shore Expressway." The new highway reached neighboring Orleans in October of 1957.³²

The Monomoy plan proposed a 2,000 car parking lot, with "bathhouse facilities for 900 persons" along the northern two and a half mile section of the Refuge. The proposal included the acquisition of privately-owned Morris Island in addition to the Refuge lands. Monomoy State Beach was

³² Mass. Department of Commerce, Division of Planning, "Ocean Beaches -- A Master Plan Report -- August 24, 1954," in Massachusetts State Library, Boston; Cape Codder, October 3, 1957.

possible only "if current plans for closing the break-through by means of a causeway [were] carried out."³³

Monomoy was on Herter's short list of state beach sites, as was Plum Island of the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge in Newburyport. He held discussions with the new Fish and Wildlife Service Director, John L. Farley, about the possible transfer of the areas to state control. Farley informed Senator Leverett Saltonstall in October that the Service was proceeding with its own recreation plans for Monomoy. A picnic area on Morris Island would be serviced by the proposed causeway to be built by the town and state. The refuge manager reported that "those to whom I have mentioned this project have been delighted in knowing that such facilities will be available, especially in light of the planned dike which may provide easier access to the refuge."³⁴

The manager's memorandum detailed the public's use of the refuge. He reported that "summer residents of Chatham and nearby towns make fairly heavy use of our fine, sandy beaches." Beach parties were popular along the isolated shores that afforded "a natural beauty hard to find on the crowded Cape." Fishermen traveled to the Point by buggies ferried across Stage Harbor, as well as by boats and planes, with as many as eight to ten flights a day from Chatham Airport. The sportsmen, "without exception," wanted the Refuge to remain as it was, "because of the unmarred natural beauty of the island"³⁵

Conservationists opposed Herter's state beach plans for the refuges. Ludlow Griscom believed that it would "be disastrous and unfortunate if any such thing should happen."

³³ Division of Planning, "Ocean Beaches."

³⁴ John L. Farley to Leverett Saltonstall, October 2, 1953, and Memorandum, Refuge Manager to Regional Director, September 19, 1953, in Wildlife Refuge Files, Monomoy.

³⁵ Memorandum, Refuge Manager to Regional Director, September 19, 1953, in Wildlife Refuge Files, Monomoy.

Griscom, known as the "Dean of the Birdwatchers," was the expert on Monomoy's wildlife. A summer resident of Chatham since the 1930s, he lived on Taylor Point overlooking Stage Harbor, Morris Island, and Monomoy, from which he led hundreds of buggy trips down Monomoy.³⁶

Griscom championed the creation of the Refuge in the 1930s and 1940s, dealing directly with Gabrielson and Slayer. He wrote to Slayer in 1938 that

I view with concern the increasing traffic down the beach and the encroachment of the moors by squatters' camps and hunting lodges. . . there is no better place on the northeastern Atlantic seaboard for a Wildlife Refuge than Monomoy Island.³⁷

The loss of the bridge in 1944 put the brakes on increasing traffic, though Griscom, like others, ferried his buggy across the harbor. The dike and its road would provide many the opportunity to do what Griscom and other local residents so much enjoyed, driving across the Monomoy dunes and down to the Point.³⁸

The selectmen learned of Herter's program in the summer of 1953. Eldredge quickly sent a letter to Senator John F. Kennedy protesting the Governor's intentions:

³⁶ William E. Davis, Jr., Dean of the Birdwatchers: A Biography of Ludlow Griscom (Washington, D. C., 1994), pp. 176 and 122. Davis's work is drawn from interviews and Griscom's extensive papers and correspondence.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122; the description of Griscom's driving habits was provided to Davis by Wallace Bailey of the Massachusetts Audubon Society and a Morris Island resident.

We want to make one point clear, if there is any disposal of Monomoy Island by the Federal Government the property should be turned back to the Town of Chatham and no one else. . . . [We] believe that the Supreme Court of the United States will uphold our rights to this land if it is ever contemplated that it go to any other source than the Town of Chatham after it was taken by condemnation proceedings for a sole purpose and then not used for such a purpose.³⁹

Eldredge wrote that the town "built dikes and bridges" to keep "it accessible to the public," and "maintained the island in its original state."

Herter's proposal placed Eldredge in a very difficult position. If Chatham voters believed that the dike was being built as part of a plan to put a state beach on Monomoy, then support could, and probably would, crumble quickly. Eldredge's vigorous assault on the proposal was absolutely necessary in light of the town's reaction to the original land-taking. A road to a small Refuge picnic area and access for fishermen's beach buggies was acceptable, but the creation of state beach would have been as popular as another wildlife refuge. Eldredge insisted that the dike had nothing to do with state recreation plans on Monomoy, although Herter linked the two proposals in remarks to the press in September of 1953.⁴⁰

The governor's annual message to the General Court in January of 1954 repeated his desire to acquire Monomoy:

These areas will, I hope, be preserved in their natural state for the benefit of all who enjoy surf

³⁹ Edwin F. Eldredge to Senator John F. Kennedy, July 20, 1953, in Box 753, Legislative Assistant's Background Files, 1953-1960, in John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, Boston. The Cape Cod Standard-Times carried Eldredge's concerns on page one on July 22, 1953.

⁴⁰ Cape Cod Standard-Times, August 24 and September 29, 1953.

bathing, as well as for those who pursue the fast growing sport of surfcasting.⁴¹

The speech was duly covered by the local press, and it took Eldredge one day to respond.⁴²

His six page letter to Governor Herter is a catalogue of his grievances against the Fish and Wildlife Service and his opposition to any state control of Monomoy. The conservative Eldredge wanted control of Monomoy to be returned to local government, calling state and federal control a "rotten deal." It is doubtful that any of his constituents would have disagreed.

Without any thought of home rule or even considering the people of Chatham you have proceeded, not only to block us from any possibility of getting it back, but to put it under State Control the same as under the control of the Federal Government. The scruples of State or Federal Government are very very meager when they get control of anything. It just simply means we have another ten years fight to get it away from the State if we ever do.⁴³

He made it clear that if "we get it back we will not only promote it for recreational purposes but for the benefit of the

⁴¹ Addresses and Messages to the General Court, Proclamations, Public Addresses, Official Statements and Correspondence of General Interest of His Excellency Governor Christian A. Herter for the Years 1953, 1954, and 1955, 1956, comp. by Francis W. Tulley, Jr. (Boston, 1956), p. 145.

⁴² Cape Cod Standard-Times, January 6, 1954.

⁴³ Edwin F. Eldredge to Governor Christian A. Herter, January 7, 1954, in Box 753, Legislative Assistant's Background File, 1953-1960, in Kennedy Library.

commercial fishermen, return of fishermen's villages and bring it back to its natural condition."⁴⁴

Herter and Farley's discussions continued into the winter with a resolution in January of 1954. Farley believed that public use of the Refuge beaches might "represent the highest public use" that could be made of the areas without endangering the protection of wildlife. However, the consideration of Monomoy created "public relations problems" for the Service. Several conservation groups "seemed to be quite reluctant to extend the recreational program to Monomoy." The inclusion of Monomoy might jeopardize the Governor's recreation program; therefore, "a delay in consummating a program for Monomoy" was agreed upon."⁴⁵

The federal government's ambivalent and sometimes hostile attitude toward the Refuge continued through the decade. Thirty-two acres of Morris Island woodlands was returned to a local developer in 1954, as part of an out of court settlement of a 1944 land-taking claim brought by the private owners against the government.⁴⁶ In 1956 Slayer attempted to convince the Service to reverse the settlement and acquire all of Morris Island, but his efforts were rebuffed by the Regional Office. Apparently unknown to Slayer, the Service was "committed to bypass attempts to acquire lands on Morris Island." The Regional Office staff believed that "it would be embarrassing for the Service" to change that position, especially in light of "earlier comments to the Director concerning the relative unimportance of Morris Island to our Waterfowl Management Program."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ John L. Farley to Christian A. Herter, January 6, 1954, in Wildlife Refuge Files, Monomoy.

⁴⁶ U. S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, book 886, page 512, in Registry of Deeds Office, Barnstable, Mass.

⁴⁷ J. Clark Slayer II to Richard Pough, October, 1956, and Slayer to Regional Director, October 26, 1956, in Realty Tract files,

The Regional Office's policy toward Monomoy at the end of the decade had not changed since Gascoyne's memorandum. The root of the disenchantment with the Refuge was the poor return on the high cost of development of the exposed barrier beach when compared with other refuges. The Service considered Monomoy a place to be improved in order to increase "the number of birds produced or housed," especially ducks.⁴⁸ The conservation of the area for the benefit of the existing waterfowl and the area's natural resources was not the primary goal of the Service in the 1950s. The language used in the Regional Director's memorandum supports the image of the Refuge as a duck farm.

The Refuge was created because of the efforts of New Deal conservationists buttressed by the needs of a wartime army. There is the very real possibility that the refuge proposal would have fallen by the wayside if Gabrielson had waited until after the war, given the strength of the opposition on the state and local level. Once established, the Refuge was overseen by a Regional Office staff that was more concerned with the bottom line than conservation. Only through the efforts of Slayer and other conservationists, and their willingness to "how like gut-shot panthers" did the Refuge survive a decade of ambivalence and hostility.

Monomoy; Regional Supervisor of Lands to Regional Supervisor of Refuges, November 15, 1956, in Realty Tract Files, Monomoy.

⁴⁸ Regional Director to the Director, February 21, 1958, in Realty Tract Files, Monomoy.