

The Sleepy Seaside Village of Jamestown, RI

by Terry Conway

It's a small island with big appeal. Sheep grazing and farming began on Conanicut Island in the 1630s, and even today there is a quiet rural character to this Rhode Island gem of rolling hills, green pastures and heavy timber that sits in the middle of Lower Narragansett Bay. Located twenty-five miles south of Providence and the mainland two miles to the west, Conanicut Island is just nine miles long by one mile across. The highest elevation is 135 feet and the island offers an abundance of open space and lightly traveled roadways.

There's that sense of being an islander... a little apart from the rest of the world. Older neighborhoods and historic properties, including lighthouses and the remains of old military fortifications offer a vivid connection to the past. The Jamestown Windmill once was used to grind flint corn, a key ingredient in Rhode Island's famous johnny-cakes.

The sleepy village of Jamestown presents a striking contrast to Newport—its bustling, high profile neighbor three miles to the east. It's a seaside resort that doesn't feel like one, even at the height of the summer season. For centuries, the island served as a summer camp for the Narragansetts, the largest of the area's Native American tribes. The island of "Quinicut" was purchased from them by a group of colonists in 1657.

The first regular ferries began running 20 years later and remained the only way to access the island until well into the 20th century, when the high

suspension bridge connecting Jamestown and Newport was completed – much to the chagrin of longtime residents.

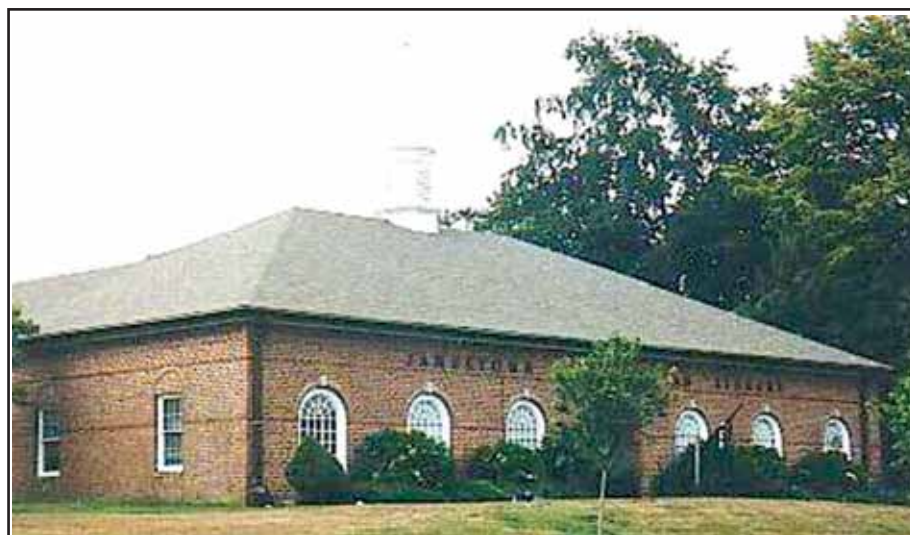
Jamestown, almost alone in the state, has retained an open waterfront with a half-mile boardwalk and large tracts of shoreline still accessible to the public. One such beach is part of a two-mile trail system encircling Watson Farm, a 285-acre working farm with cattle, sheep, horses, gardens and miles of picturesque trails. It's operated by Historic New England with the aim of preserving some of the town's original rural character. Climb aboard the big swing hanging from the towering poplar tree in front of the 1796 farmhouse.

The Sydney L. Wright Museum displays American Indian artifacts that date from 3,400 years ago to colonial times. Located in the Jamestown Philomenian Library, Dr. Wright and

his wife, Catharine, rescued the site, where many objects were found and saved from certain destruction and conceived the museum. They engaged an archeologist to excavate the Narragansett Indian burial ground and nearby area, now known as the West Ferry Site.

On the southern half of the island, you'll find Mackerel Cove, the only swimming beach on the island. Stop by Del's frozen-lemonade truck, a landmark fixture nearby. Continue on to Beavertail State Park at the southernmost tip of the island - the best place to watch the sunset as well as the sailboats skimming across the bay. It's also the site of the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum and the small aquarium, where visitors can watch surfcasters face the salty spray of the Atlantic in hopes of hauling in a giant bluefish. The 1749 lighthouse was the first in Rhode Island and third in the country. The museum artifacts include the original lens used here from 1897 to 1991.

The East Ferry Landing, near the intersection of Conanicut and Narragansett Avenues, is the focus of the village center. Enjoy a sandwich at the East Ferry Deli, where fishermen rub shoulders with yacht club men on the brick patio overlooking the main harbor. The Bay Voyage is a charming inn with another spectacular view of the bay and serves classics such as lobster, steaks, lamb, duck, salmon and venison. Festive, elegant and delicious are a few



Jamestown Philomenian Library which contains the Sydney L. Wright Museum.

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words for Jamestown's signature restaurant, Trattoria Simpatico, which features a menu offering regional Italian cuisine. A jazz trio plays on sunny days, while patrons dine alfresco under a 275-year-old copper beech tree. An herb garden, fieldstone walls, and white linen complete the picture.

The Bon Voyage Inn earned its name from



Bay Voyage Inn

being ferried across the bay to its current location on Bryer Point Beach. You can all but pull your kayak up to the reception desk. Once a private home, this Victorian-style inn was built in the mid-1800s and overlooks beautiful Narragansett Bay.

Jamestown locals, from the town judge to fishermen, flock over to "the Ganny" or "the Narry" - the Narragansett Café - on weekends for 25-cent pool games and the live eight-piece horn band (no cover charge).

The northern end of the island is where Capt. William Kidd, privateer and swashbuckler, spent the last free days of his life, and, according to legend, it is where Kidd buried a healthy chunk of his treasure. Today the treasures of this secluded island continue to attract

residents and visitors in search of a simpler and more easy-going way of life. For more information call 401-423-3650 or visit www.jamestown-ri.info/.



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