

## World's End: Hingham's Prized Possession

World's End is a quiet, peaceful sanctuary of a park, located in Hingham, Massachusetts, whose name is believed to have reflected the lengths to which farmers were willing to travel to reach the property due to its rich soil and high prices for land. This peninsula that juts into Hingham Harbor consists of 251 acres, over five miles of shoreline and a view of the Boston skyline 14 miles away.<sup>1</sup> Its beauty couldn't help but attract commercial interest, however none of its alternative fates - a housing subdivision, nuclear power plant, or the headquarters for the United Nations - ever came to be.

Originally, the region was composed of towering mountains that were gradually worn down to about sea level. Then, fifteen thousand years ago, glaciers moved bedrock and loose sediment to carve hills and islands in Boston Harbor, devastating the countryside, but thus forming World's End. Much later, when these hills had ample vegetation, Native Americans roamed. These indigenous people were soon followed by colonial agriculturalists, however, the shift in Formerly two discrete islands at high tide, these farmers connected the southernmost drumlin, Planter's Hill, to the mainland in the 1600s, and also dammed the salt marsh to grow hay and cleared almost all the trees for cropland.<sup>2</sup>

While there were multiple conflicting attempts to reconstruct the land of World's End, the Trustees of Reservations was successfully able to compromise with the preexisting commercial interest, thus preserving its natural beauty and preventing it from further destruction.

In 1856, World's End became part of a vast farming estate owned by businessman John Brewer. His property, which included the peninsula, Sarah Island, and Langley Island, was

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<sup>1</sup> Harder, Jeff. "Saving World's End and Wasque", *Trustees*. Accessed 30 October 2017.

<sup>2</sup> "About World's End", *Trustees*. Accessed 30 October 2017.

complete with livestock. Over the next thirty years, he acquired most of the 251 acres that now make up the reservation. In 1886, desiring to develop the farm into something greater, Brewer hired landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to draw up plans to dissect World's End into a 163-lot subdivision to be used as house lots. Olmsted, a landscape architect who designed Central Park in New York City created the official plan in 1890. Although the development never materialized, the carriage roads Olmsted designed were built and saplings were planted alongside them.

Wilmon Blackmar, a Hingham Civil War hero, married into the Brewer family in 1880 through John's daughter, Helen. John Brewer continued farming until his death in 1893, and soon after, the land came into possession of Wilmon. As an avid preserver, Wilmon terminated Olmsted's development plan and expanded the farm area. Wilmon Brewer passed away in 1905, and with no children, left the estate to his nephew, Wilmon Brewer, who shared his uncle's love for conservation.<sup>3</sup> In 1944, Sarah and Langley Islands were generously gifted to the Town of Hingham by William and Helen Walker, the latter of whom was Brewer's granddaughter. The Walker family, who were the property's last individual owners, kindly allowed visitors to wander the property and experience its beauty. Despite its ravages of hurricanes and natural disasters, World's End was wonderfully maintained by the couple.

With the end of World War II, times were changing, along with these changes came the idea of developing the United Nations. The United Nations was homeless when it officially came into existence on October 24, 1945. Many proposals were made for the development of World's End after WWII including that in 1945 by a committee appointed by Governor Maurice Tobin

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<sup>3</sup> Macmillan, Alexander. "Wilmon W. Blackmar: Hingham's First Medal of Honor Hero and the Preserver of World's End". Self written.

charged with the task of locating a site in the Greater Boston area for the United Nations Organization. It sought to establish its permanent headquarters in the eastern United States, with its relative proximity to Europe, preferably in a bedroom community around Boston or New York City. The site committee ruled out any urban locations because of the organization's sizable land requirements. The Hingham selectman and many residents were all for the proposal, excited at thought of a more diverse and lively town and proud of recently winning the war. However, when millionaire philanthropist John D. Rockefeller Jr. surprisingly offered a gift of six blocks of Manhattan real estate along the East River in December 1946<sup>4</sup>, the committee was drawn to the thriving city.

Despite World's End being inviolate, several large-scale developers made more offers for the land throughout the 1950's and 1960's. In 1965, the New England Electric System and the Boston Edison Electric Co. were heavily considering World's End as a nuclear power plant site, however, the plant was eventually built in Plymouth, where it remains today.<sup>5</sup> Although putting nuclear power at a setting called "World's End" would've been a beautifully symbolic gesture, this plan also failed due to the town's passionate objection.<sup>6</sup>

When the Walkers put World's End up for sale in the mid twentieth century, the idea that it might become a golf course or private residence was too much for locals to bear. "The people in Hingham and the surrounding area had, to some degree, become accustomed to how beautiful it was," says Tom O'Donnell, a Hingham resident, longtime town moderator, and veteran of The

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<sup>4</sup> Klein, Christopher. "The United Nations Headquarters That Never Was", *History.com*, 24 October 2013. Accessed 30 October 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Walker, William H.C., and Willard Brewer Walker. *A History of World's End*. Milton, Massachusetts: The Trustees of Reservations, 1973. PRINT.

<sup>6</sup> Cavanaugh, Ray. "A delightful view awaits World's End in Hingham, Mass.", *Providence Journal*, 18 January 2015. Accessed 30 October 2017.

Trustees' all-volunteer Standing Committee. He adds, "The notion that it would no longer be available for public enjoyment was horrifying for the people who were used to it."<sup>7</sup> Considering how fond of the land Hingham residents had become, the Walkers wanted to see the property reserved, but they did not want to lose any money through their preservation. Founded in 1891 by Charles Eliot, an open space visionary and protégé of Olmstead, The Trustees of Reservations are the nation's oldest statewide nonprofit land conservation trust. The Trustees expressed interest in taking over the land many years prior, when Lawrence B. Fletcher, the former Executive Secretary of the organization, made inquiries to attaining the area for the organization.

<sup>8</sup> The catch and compromise: the organization needed to raise \$650,000 to purchase the property by the December 31, 1967 deadline. That left them with simply two and a half months to raise the required \$200,000 initial payment. Locals who had faith in The Trustees stewarding their special place helped out by fundraising. Schoolchildren donated their allowances and passionate residents reached into their wallets. The use of state or federal funds was rejected, but local leaders were certain that the full sum could be raised from the private sector. In the end, 1,800 individuals made donations in only six weeks, and thus, the purchase was secure. After The Trustees paid \$200,000 up front, an office at town hall was set up. After purchasing it in 1967, the Trustees of Reservations designated World's End, a park available to all and today, it serves as one of the Trustee's most iconic properties. The pre-existing artificial landscape of World's End would have further been harmed with the propositions, however, with assistance from the Trustees Reservation, the land was able to be prevented from becoming more unnatural.

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<sup>7</sup> Harder, Jeff. "Saving World's End and Wasque", *Trustees*. Accessed 30 October 2017.

<sup>8</sup> "World's End Hosts 350.org Climate Action Event at World's End on 10.24.09", *Trustees*. Accessed 5 December, 2017.

Despite the compromise that solved many of the reservation's previous problems, World's End's recurring commercial appeal will continue to hinder its natural success. Even today, its popularity, vulnerability to storm surges and microbursts, and field's susceptibility to pests, disease, and invasive plant species prove to be challenges for the reservation. In 2016, the Trustees proposed an expansion plan that called for sixty percent more parking and a new 1,400 square foot visitors center within World's End. Fearing that this would take away from its alluring scenery, Hingham residents started a petition in order to stop this development. But for each problem, whether it's passionate supporters of World's End or The Trustees, there's a solution in the making. The thriving park and everything it has overcome is a testament to its staying power.

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