

A HISTORY OF CLARK POND  
GREAT NECK  
IPSWICH, MASS  
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The end of the Great Ice Age in Massachusetts, or Pleistocene epoch, some 10-15,000 years ago, signifies the beginning of the present Great Neck area. For thousands of years, the land was covered with a glacier up to several miles thick. Deposits of earth and rock moving beneath the glacier formed the clay drumlins of Great Neck and Little Neck which are the cornerstones of this landscape. Since that time, rising tides and the formation of sand barrier beaches created an environment for salt marsh. Clark Pond was originally an intertidal salt marsh supported by fresh water sources draining from the surrounding hills and tidal salt water from the ocean. The former pond was likely a tidal flat with fresh water creeks running through it that became a salt water bay during high tide.

As the tides rose and the salt marshes formed, Indians used this area for summer camps. The Clark Pond area was ideal for this as a sheltered tidal flat adjacent to a fresh water stream. Indians could pull their canoes out of reach of the tide, and fish and clam within the basin. Excavations of shell heaps on the banks of Clark Pond have produced well documented evidence of this existence from 6000 years ago to the early 1600s.

During the European settlement of the area, the Great Neck area was purchased from the Indians by William Jeffery (Jeffries Neck). The land was administered by the Town from 1634 to 1713 as common grounds and from 1713 to 1896 by the Proprietors of Jeffries Neck Pasture. Although originally forested, it was primarily used as pastureland for grazing cattle since 1633 when the Indians were displaced. By 1896, Alexander B. Clark had gradually bought the interests of the Proprietors and by vote of the Proprietors, the whole real estate was sold to him for the sum of \$8,000.

The Clark Pond area remained as a tidal flat until the 1890s. A map of Essex County showing Clark Pond in 1893 clearly shows the pond open to the ocean at high tide (see 1893 map). Around 1897, A. B. Clark built a stone dam at the northeast corner creating a fresh water pond for duck hunting and built gunning blinds into the bank (see 1890s photo). Also around this time, ice was harvested from the pond and stored in buildings for summer use. In the 1930s, the pond was drained by the State with ditches to limit the breeding of mosquitoes. The dam was apparently breached at that time.

In the 1940s, the pond area was leased to Ben Moseley who repaired the dam and created a roadway along the beach to access a gunning booth/duck blind in the vicinity of what is now the middle parking lot. Use of the road apparently diminished as in the early 1950s it was mostly overgrown (see 1956 photo).

After a subsequent division of portions of this land from the Proprietors back to the town in 1927, property was subdivided, originally leased as house lots, and then eventually

sold (beginning in 1951), for the present community. The 1940s and 50s were the beginnings of significant development of the area. More and more house lots were leased for summer camps. Land was sold and leased with rights to beach access, one of which was the beach road off Clark Road (then Belleau Woods Road). To accommodate beach goers, and as an incentive to purchase more house lots, in 1956 a parking lot was enlarged at the southern end of the pond and the boat ramp to the ocean was paved. To accommodate further desire for beach access, around 1964, the former beach road along the eastern side of Clark Pond was reconstructed to a second parking area in the vicinity of the Mosely duck blind.

After its construction in 1964, the beach road was frequently overtopped and washed out with winter and spring storms. Practically every year to the present, the road was washed out and rebuilt, sometimes two or three times a year. Various repairs to the roadway included re-building the road with sand from the beach. This aggravated future washouts as waves from the ocean would not break until they hit the road. More recent improvements included hauling in gravel for the road and extending a stone rip rap sea wall eventually beyond the reach of most large ocean waves.

The wave action has reduced significantly due to the southerly extension of Plum Island since the early 1990s and its shoals blocking direct ocean access. Sand has built up significantly in the area in front of the beach road and creates a more gradual transition from ocean waves. Also, the increasing formations of salt marsh on the tidal flats in front of the road have diminished wave action and increased the collection of sand. The road still overtops, although less frequently in recent years. The post-Christmas storm of 2010 is the most recent significant example. This nor'easter which combined with an astronomical high tide, deposited large logs and other debris over the beach road into the pond from where they had been on the southern end of Plum Island. This flow into the pond was exacerbated due to the recent eradication of the phragmite vegetative barrier. This flow of logs and debris demonstrates how the ocean waves, which during that storm crossed the Plum Island bar, have a direct bearing on the beach road. This storm also brought the salt water and debris well up the northern creek and over the dam and into the pond at the northeast end.

The northern end of the pond with its outlet to the ocean has also experienced changes. Early wooden footbridges constructed over the creek allowed for pedestrian beach access from the north. These have washed out several times over the years during coastal storms. The wooden bridges were replaced with various attempts at a stone path and concrete culvert in the 1960s which also washed out in severe storms. Several other attempts at footbridges replaced the culvert further inland, which was mostly protected from storm surges. An aluminum bridge constructed in the late 2000s serves as the current access over the creek. Changes in wave patterns from the ocean, similar to their effect on the southern end of the pond, have resulted in an enlarging sandy beach area. This and the developing salt marsh have created a barrier which helps to protect the creek and footbridge from storm surges.

In the early 2000s, the outlet to the pond had overgrown with debris and plant growth to the extent that the outlet to the ocean was no longer clearly defined. High spring floods from the pond were redirected across the beach. Subsequently, in 2006, the channel was dredged and cleared and a well defined channel now exists. This allows pond water to flow over the dam to the ocean, as well as allowing flood ocean tides up to (and over) the dam. Although the pond level is regulated by the elevation of the dam, the level has increased in recent years as a family of beavers has occasionally built a small mud and stick dam on the pond side of the dam. In some past summers, large portions of the pond have dried up and exposed a layer of thick mud.

On the western end of the pond, a road which is now the extension of Clark Road (formerly Casino Road) was constructed around 1960 to facilitate development and allow for connection of drinking water from the water tower to North Ridge. This road crossed the freshwater stream to the pond with a culvert. A portion of the wetlands associated with the northwest corner of the pond was also filled in to create the road.

After the beach road was constructed, and more and more people came to Great Neck, there was increasing uncontrolled use of the beach. Overrun with four wheel drive vehicles, and late night parties, the area became an increasing problem for the Proprietors of Great Neck to manage. Various inquiries as to how to manage and protect this land resulted in the then Association of Great Neck purchasing the pond and the surrounding beach from the Proprietors in 1983 for a nominal fee. This allowed the Association to control and manage the property and to set up regulations protecting the use of the pond and beach. This also allowed for funds to be collected and applied for beach and pond management. To lower the tax burden and to provide additional protection, the pond and surrounding area was placed in a conservation easement back to the residents. Subsequently in 2007, several parcels of land bordering Clark Pond on the west and south ends that had remained with the Proprietors, were acquired by the Town as part of the 85 acre Great Neck Conservation Area. Currently, a bird observation deck is being constructed overlooking the western end of the pond on one of those parcels.

**Changes in Vegetation.** During the 1950s, the marsh area around the pond was predominately vegetated with purple loosestrife. That was gradually replaced with cat-o-nine tails. Subsequently, some of these cat-o-nine tails stands have been replaced with phragmites. All are invasive species. In 2009, an attempt to eradicate the phragmites was undertaken.

**Changes in Wildlife.** The area over the years has supported a broad variety of wildlife. The combination of fresh and salt water environment attracts many species. Ornithologists from all over Massachusetts come to the area to observe the fresh and salt water nesting and migrating birds. Many upland and water based mammals are also present. Over the years, the number and variety of wildlife has diminished due to the increased development, human interference, changing climate, and changing and destroyed vegetation.

Changes in Use. During the times of the Indians and early European settlers, the pond and its immediate surroundings were used as a source of food (shellfish, birds, and mammals) and drinking water. The pond may have also served as a sheltered tidal bay for canoes and other small boats. The late 1800s and early 1900s saw the use of the pond for duck hunting and harvesting of pond ice. Currently, the pond supports a more passive use by the residents and visitors as hunting, fishing, and boating are no longer allowed. Ice skating and ice boating are the only active uses. The pond and its surroundings are enjoyed by many for its scenic beauty and observation of its wildlife inhabitants. In addition to many birds and mammals, several families of mute swans have nested on the pond in recent years and their raising of their many generations of young have been followed by many residents and visitors. Because of their prominence, the swan of Clark Pond was adopted as the logo for the Association of Great Neck. Hopefully, the beauty of this area will be maintained for all to enjoy.



Map of Great Neck, Ipswich MA circa 1893.



GREAT NECK looked like this in earlier times. Seen from Clark's Pond in foreground is the Clark Farm which

later became the Ipswich Bay Yacht Club.

c. 1890



AUGUST 7, 1956