

THE CREATION OF INDIA POINT PARK

by Frances Betancourt
US 100 Fieldwork in the Urban Community
Professor Malone, Brown University
May 2, 2002

INTRODUCTION:

India Point Park sits at the head of Narragansett Bay marking a gateway to the city of Providence and serving as one of the city's waterfront parks. This parcel of land has played a variety of roles in the lives of Providence citizens for nearly four centuries.

Over the course of the semester, I have worked with Sarah Zurier of the Friends of India Point Park (FIPP) and The Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) to trace the evolution of this land from a center of maritime activity, to a scrap metal yard, and finally to a waterfront park. I have created a timeline of this progression.¹ This report holds the story of the creation of India Point Park and the critical role that the citizens of Providence played in its construction.

Mary Elizabeth Sharpe, a Providence citizen, began the dream for a park at India Point. From 1962 until her death in 1985, Mrs. Sharpe kept a detailed compilation of records and documents concerning the progress of the park. Her daughter-in-law Peggy Sharpe has continued the collection. Peggy Sharpe has loaned these papers in two briefcases to the FIPP. I have read these briefcases in their entirety.

In addition to reading the briefcases, I conducted ten interviews with those who were instrumental in the founding of the park. To assist with my interview technique I spoke with Michael Bell, folklorist at RIHPHC. The resources provided by the Providence Archives Department and The Providence Department of Planning and Development were also valuable to my research. The Providence Journal as well was a key source.

My research will be used by The Friends of India Point Park, a group founded in the fall of 2000 at a Fox Point Citizens Association meeting, dedicated to "upholding the integrity of India Point Park as an informal, natural open space."² It is my intention that this work will be helpful to FIPP as a means to protect and preserve the park.

THE DREAMER OF THE DREAM:

The dream of India Point Park began with Mary Elizabeth Sharpe. As early as the 1940's, the wheels began to turn in Mrs. Sharpe's head. Henry Sharpe Jr. (her son) recalls as a child, driving over the Red Bridge with his mother looking towards the bay and saying "There really should be a park over there!"³ Once an idea was planted in Mrs. Sharpe's head, her determined demeanor led to its success. It should be noted here that about this time another Providence visionary, Brad Swan, a *Providence Journal* columnist also articulated the dream of a park at India Point in his 1949 article "Xanadu on the Mohassuck".⁴ Yet, it was Mrs. Sharpe's charisma, knowledge and steadfast support that carried the park to its completion.

Born in 1884, Mary Elizabeth Evans was the oldest of four children. Her father once a professor at Syracuse University, was lured west by the gold rush never to return. Her mother, ill at the time, was forced to raise their four children by herself. Mrs. Sharpe was just fourteen and had to leave school to support her family. She opened a store on the corner below her house in 1889.⁵

"I sell a great variety of things including home baked stuff, drugs and groceries. I am doing finely. So far I have made about five dollars a week, but I expect to do better."⁶

¹ See Appendix I.

² Promotional Material for Friends of India Point Park 2001 (Courtesy of David Riley).

³ Peggy Sharpe, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 2, 2002.

⁴ "Xanadu on the Mohassuck" (Courtesy of Bob Schacht).

⁵ Sermon written by, Bob Schacht. circa 2001 (Courtesy of Bob Schacht).

⁶ Letter written by Mrs. Sharpe to Mrs. Calvin (family friend) December 27, 1899. (Courtesy of Bob Schacht).

It was in this store that Mrs. Sharpe got her start as a young businesswoman. The candy was delectable and the word began to spread. Her Sunday school teacher suggested that Mrs. Sharpe bring a box to a luncheon she was having later in the week. Thus, she packaged the first box of candy by “Mary Elizabeth.” The candy was a huge success and the business grew exponentially. Over the next few years, she expanded her business to Newport, RI, a fashionable summer locale and later stores opened in Boston, Buffalo and Atlantic City.⁷

During World War I sugar and butter were in limited supply. This made it very difficult for Mrs. Sharpe to produce her candy. However, she was able to overcome this problem using her resourcefulness. Mrs. Sharpe discovered that sweets such as molasses and maple sugar were not to be rationed and so she substituted them into her menu.⁸ Not yet thirty, her ingenuity won national acclaim. Forbes magazine ran a profile of her, and she was deemed the most successful businesswoman in America.⁹

Mrs. Sharpe met her husband Henry Sharpe in 1916 on an Eaton’s Ranch pack trip to the newly created Glacier National Park in Montana. Mr. Sharpe was Rhode Island’s leading industrialist, President of the famous Brown and Sharpe Mfg. Co., once the largest machine tool company in the world. Mr. Sharpe was on his summer vacation there, and Mrs. Sharpe was eager to try a riding holiday in the “Wild West”. After meeting, they continued to date but were separated near the close of World War I. Mrs. Sharpe went to France, where she organized a special diet kitchen for the wounded in army hospitals. Mr. Sharpe stayed in Providence to run Brown and Sharpe Mfg. Co., which produced essential equipment for the war effort.

After the war the two, nicknamed “The Industrial King” and “The Tea Room Genius”, were married in June of 1920.¹⁰ The Sharpes settled in Providence in the fall of 1920. From this point onwards, Providence and the State of Rhode Island were blessed with the presence of both Sharpes. Their generosity and goodwill have touched upon every niche of society. When her husband died in 1954, Mrs. Sharpe began to immerse herself in the culture of Providence.

Mrs. Sharpe was a prominent woman with a love for gardening and landscaping and thus used her status well to invest herself in causes which would beautify the City. She served as Director of the Community Landscaping Division at IMPACT RI, Inc., an organization dedicated to improving the aesthetics of the Providence cityscape. Mrs. Sharpe and her friends composed the majority of the committee and meetings were frequently held at her home. At IMPACT, Mrs. Sharpe led projects to protect landscaped areas, plant trees and flowers on streets and encourage police enforcement of no-dumping policies.¹¹ Throughout the 50’s and 60’s, President Wriston of Brown University asked her to oversee the landscaping of the University, which she did for thirty years. She designed the paths of Wriston Quadrangle as well as the planting on Pembroke Campus.

In December of 1961, Mrs. Sharpe contributed \$5,000 “for the beautification of city parks and trees.”¹² \$3,000 of this gift was given to the largest park in Providence (Roger Williams Park) for the refurbishment of its Japanese Garden.¹³ She even took one of the park gardeners, Ronnie Vescera, to Japan to see how Japanese gardening was done. The remaining \$2,000 of the gift was used to start a “street tree fund”, dedicated to planting trees along streets throughout the city. Her generosity inspired the community. Sears and Roebuck Co. pledged \$5,000 worth of stock towards Roger Williams Park two days later.¹⁴ For Mrs. Sharpe, this was just the beginning of a decade-long quest to beautify the city of Providence.

⁷ “Our Horatia Alger- A Remarkable Woman of Our Church”, Sermon written by, Bob Schacht. Circa 2001 (Courtesy of Bob Schacht).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Outline of Community Landscaping Program for IMPACT RI 1961. (Courtesy of Peggy Sharpe).

¹² *The Providence Journal*, December 21, 1961, 1

¹³ Bob McMahan, interview by author, Providence, RI, March 21, 2002.

¹⁴ “\$5,000 Gift accepted for Beautifying City”, *The Providence Journal*, December 21, 1961, 1.

A DREAM FOR A PARK:

The India Point area along the edge of Narragansett Bay was once a hub for maritime activity when the first Port of Providence was established there in 1680.¹⁵ The arrival of merchants John Brown and John Francis in 1787 and a profitable trade with the East Indies produced a booming waterfront.¹⁶ Even with the closing of the Brown shipping industry in the early 1800's, India Point continued to thrive with the arrival of the railroad until the Great Depression of the 1930's. However, the area became an eyesore when the 1938 Hurricane wrecked the waterfront.

From the 1940's until the 1960's India Point was a scrap yard. "Piles of rusted scrap edged against the sky was the typical view most associated with the India Point in the 1950's and 1960's."¹⁷ In the middle of the land plot stood the Cohen Junkyard. Old cars and pieces of scrap metal were brought to the junkyard. The metal was crushed by giant scissor-like machines, placed on ships and exported. Two parcels of old railroad land occupied the eastern and western ends. The eastern section belonged to the Boston and Providence Railroad and the western end to Penn Central Railroad.

The 1950's and 1960's marked the most difficult era for Fox Point. The Great Depression and the Hurricane caused the downfall of the neighborhood and halted commerce at India Point. The waterfront was the source of income for many Portuguese, Cape Verdean and Azorean residents of Fox Point. With the destruction, they were forced to turn their backs on the water to search for employment elsewhere. In an attempt to reconnect Fox Point with the water, The Providence Plan Commission first publicly proposed a waterfront park at India Point in the *1956 City Beautification Plan* as well as in the first *East Side Renewal Plan* in 1962.¹⁸ However, serious challenges existed both in the acquisition of land and monetary resources, forcing the abandonment of the project.

The completion of Interstate 95 in 1966 furthered the downfall of Fox Point. Providence needed a highway to link itself with other cities along the East coast. Cost was of great concern to highway designers. Thus, building the highway on cheap land, "meant the difference between having a highway at a reasonable cost and having a plan for a highway which could not be financed."¹⁹ As a result, the road sliced through Fox Point creating a barrier between the neighborhood and the waterfront.²⁰ Fox Point residents were frustrated and upset by the highway. Government officials did not recognize their opinions and needs as houses were torn down to accommodate the road.

In April 1962, Mrs. Sharpe wrote a long editorial for *The Providence Journal* entitled "Providence Could Be a Beautiful City." Due to the relatively small size of the Rhode Island community and Mrs. Sharpe's distinction within it, the article received substantial attention. Government officials and citizens alike took note, and Mrs. Sharpe saw the opportunity for change. She acknowledged the city's potential for beauty, by describing its rolling hills, rivers, and valleys. Encouraging citizens to "Think Green!"²¹, she convinced them that Providence really could be "the beautiful city it deserves to be."²² To help citizens visualize, Mrs. Sharpe focused on a specific area, the land "south of George M. Cohan Boulevard between Fox and India Points."²³ She opened the eyes and ears of Providence citizens to the possibility of a waterfront park at India Point, by filling their imaginations with breathtaking images of waterfront vistas seen from lush park space.

Imagine what it could be [referring to scrap area]. This with its sweeping view down the bay, is an area for living and recreation.

¹⁵ Wylie Hight and Lydia Hill. "India Point Park: Historic Development, Current Underuse, Future Revitalization." (Brown University, Providence, 2000).

¹⁶ See Appendix II.

¹⁷ Bob McMahon. "India Point Park: Master Plan 1987." (Providence Parks Department, 1988), 5.

¹⁸ Paul Campbell, interview by author, Providence, RI, March 22, 2002.

¹⁹ Emily Dreblow. "India Point Park: Past, Present and Future." (Brown University, Providence 1998), 8.

²⁰ See Appendix III.

²¹ Mary Elizabeth Sharpe, "Providence Could Be A Beautiful City", *The Providence Journal*, April 11, 1962, 25.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

Sweep it clean and start over...Along the waterfront would be a park and playground, planted with trees.²⁴

A park was not constructed in response to the article, but awareness was raised and a seed of hope was planted in many minds.

In October of 1964, Mayor Walter Reynolds sent a letter to T. Dawson Brown, Chairman of the Projects Committee for IMPACT RI. In his letter Mayor Reynolds suggested that development of the India Point area could be funded under the State Green Acres Program.²⁵ The program was an impetus under Governor John H. Chafee in 1964 to push for the funding of open space. The program was created in response to a federal effort to protect and establish parks and open space.²⁶ IMPACT RI had previously shown interest in the India Point area by requesting to review the decision by which park plans were scrapped from the *1962 East Side Renewal Plan*.²⁷ Much to the dismay of IMPACT RI and many citizens, this movement took place too close to the mayoral election, and funding was not received.

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson held a White House Conference on Natural Beauty. The conference produced strong recommendations for the restoration and preservation of waterfront areas. As a result, a new federal funding program entitled "Parks in Cities" under the Open Space Program was delegated for such projects.²⁸

AWARENESS RAISED, ACTION TAKEN:

The Providence Journal was a true supporter of city beautification. An unsigned editorial from the fall of 1966 called for citizen leadership to raise funds for the development of a park. Similar to Mrs. Sharpe's editorial, the article acknowledged India Point's potential for development as an oasis for citizens and weary travelers to rest.²⁹ Mrs. Sharpe's dream of a park was becoming contagious.

As the Journal was raising interest, Mrs. Sharpe's friends were taking action. Fox Point resident Florence Campbell and Brown University Professor Samuel Driver constructed a study detailing the possibilities for a park. The original sketch was presented to the Fox Point Community Association³⁰ in 1967.³¹ Although the desire for a park was present, many barriers remained. There was still the problem of finances and gaining the political leverage necessary to acquire the land at India Point before the dream could be realized.

A FOOT IN THE DOOR:

In 1967, key civic leaders were also plotting their own plans for a park. Bob Schacht, a close friend of Mrs. Sharpe and the legal counsel to Governor John H. Chafee (a cousin to Mrs. Sharpe through marriage), had the foresight to initiate the acquisition of the Cohen Junkyard property, which occupied 2.7 acres of the India Point waterfront. The state owned waterfront property of equal value directly across the bay in Providence. Schacht enlisted the support of Governor Chafee, and a land swap was proposed.³² Cohen agreed to move his operations to the state pier in Providence on the west side of the bay. Through the trade, the state had come to control the 2.7 acre India Point site with Governor Chafee stipulating that it be set aside as parkland. The Senate and the House passed the pier transfer in

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ "Mayor Reynolds Wants India Point Made Green Acres Project", *The Providence Journal*, October 28, 1964, 22.

²⁶ George Johnson, telephone interview by author, April 23, 2002.

²⁷ "Mayor Reynolds Wants India Point Made Green Acres Project", *The Providence Journal*, October 28, 1964, 22.

²⁸ Speech by Peggy Sharpe, 1972.

²⁹ "Editorial", *The Providence Journal*, September 7, 1966, 38.

³⁰ The Fox Point Citizens Association was founded in 1993 (Harry Bilodeau).

³¹ Speech by Peggy Sharpe, 1972.

³² *Ibid.*

the spring of 1969.³³ This was a key foot in the door. The acquisition of the two parcels of railroad land was the only remaining obstacle.

In May of 1969 Sirrouko Howard, the Rhode Island HUD Administrator, learned that both the Boston & Providence and Penn Central railroads were anxious to divest their property at India Point.³⁴ He knew Mrs. Sharpe and her dream for a park through her involvement with IMPACT RI. He notified Mrs. Sharpe of this and suggested that now was the time to take action and acquire the land before the chance was lost.

DREAM TO REALITY:

Thrilled by the news, Mrs. Sharpe arranged for a meeting of individuals interested in a waterfront park in the summer of 1969. This informal meeting later led to the formation of the India Point Park Committee (IPPC). The original members of the committee included Carol Haffenreffer, Sam Driver, and Peggy Sharpe.³⁵ Many of the members were friends of Mrs. Sharpe or worked with her at IMPACT RI. Bob Schacht served as the legal counsel for the committee. His background as Director of Business Regulation for Rhode Island, and Special Assistant Attorney General for railroad matters involving the New Haven Railroad bankruptcy, as well as, the Pennsylvania Railroad/New York Central Railroad merger during 1996-1968, made him the ideal negotiator for the job.

With the recent White House Conference on Natural Beauty, there was a possibility of receiving a 50/50 grant from HUD. The Federal Government under, "The Parks in Cities Program", had allocated \$15 million dollars for parks in low-income neighborhoods. To qualify for the grant, the neighborhood of the park needed to have a median income of \$5,000 or less. Fox Point was eligible.³⁶

The possibility for a federal grant was there, but the city needed to match it. The city had no extra money, and the park at this point was merely a dream of the IPPC. Plans for the park lacked credibility, making public funding impossible.

To the good fortune of Providence, Fred Lippitt (a close friend of Mrs. Sharpe's) reminded her that when Interstate 95 was constructed it cut through Roger Williams Park. As credit for the loss of parkland, the federal government gave the city \$153,000 to be used in the future for parks.³⁷ Over the years, the city had completely forgotten the credit.

The next week, armed with this piece of information, Mrs. Sharpe went to verify the existence of the funds with Mayor Joseph Doorley. Accompanying Mrs. Sharpe was John Cummings, an old friend of Mayor Doorley and supporter of the park.³⁸ Cummings was the Chairman and CEO of Industrial National Bank (now Fleet Bank). Mrs. Sharpe and Cummings had met through the Providence social scene. It was Mrs. Sharpe's idea to bring Cummings along, knowing he would provide key leverage with Mayor Doorley.

According to Schacht, the two of them marched into Mayor Doorley's office that morning and Mrs. Sharpe said:

'Mr. Mayor I have a proposition for you. I think we should build a park at India Point. You, the city have \$153,000 in a savings account that you have to spend on parks and we can get federal money two for one.' He replied 'I DO?'³⁹

The mayor called the city treasurer to verify, and it was true! If the Mayor chose to use the money for India Point, Mrs. Sharpe declared that she would match it! The mayor had received a proposition he

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Peggy Sharpe, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 2, 2002

³⁵ See Appendix IV.

³⁶ Mary Elizabeth Sharpe Briefcases, circa 1968.

³⁷ Robert Schacht, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 4, 2002.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

could not refuse. With the support of Mayor Doorley, Schacht prepared the deed to request federal funding for the park.⁴⁰

By the end of 1969, Mrs. Sharpe had the support of all levels of government. The city endorsed plans for the new park when it contributed the money from Roger Williams Park. The state initiated the junkyard swap in 1967. Former Governor John Chafee, now Secretary of the Navy under President Richard M. Nixon ensured the collaboration of the federal government. With this extraordinary patronage, it was evident that a federal grant would be received.

THE ARCHITECT:

In late 1969, civic interest in the park was growing throughout Providence. All the cards were falling into place. It was time to select an architect. Mrs. Sharpe had a keen ability for spotting young talent.⁴¹ She preferred a fresh perspective and youthful energy to experience. This preference was risky, but Mrs. Sharpe knew she had found the architect when Albert Veri, a young graduate student at Harvard's School of Architecture came to Providence in early 1970 to make a presentation on urban design to the Providence Preservation Society.⁴² Mr. Veri had minimal experience and had no idea who audience members Mrs. Sharpe or John Nicholas Brown were.

A few weeks later while traveling in South America he received a cablegram from Mrs. Sharpe. In the cablegram Mrs. Sharpe mentioned that she was anxious to have Veri design a project. Upon returning to Harvard, he received a phone call from Mrs. Sharpe. She invited him to lunch at her house in Providence. Veri assumed that the project was of minimal scope, possibly a street corner improvement.⁴³

When he arrived at her home it became clear that the project was of larger scale than a street corner. Upon entering the house, Veri was greeted by Rhode Island Governor Frank Licht, Providence Mayor Joseph Doorley, Secretary of the Navy and Former Governor John Chafee, John Nicholas Brown, and Mrs. Sharpe.⁴⁴ Veri did not mention the attendance of other citizens. After lunch the group drove down to India Point. Huge piles of scrap metal greeted the group. Veri, unfazed by the debris, looked out into the bay and realized that this would be a wonderful opportunity for a park.⁴⁵ He agreed to design a preliminary plan.

THE FUND DRIVE:

Mrs. Sharpe and Mayor Doorley called upon the public to donate money when the park project was announced in late January 1970. An article explaining the park funding and plans for design was printed in *The Providence Bulletin* on January 22, 1970. The article stressed that the park was to be created by the citizens of Providence for the citizens of Providence. The public learned that construction Phase I included the land acquisition and general clean up of the area, amounting to \$763,226.⁴⁶ Mrs. Sharpe's gift and the city money from Roger Williams Park equaled fifty percent of the sum. Under the "Parks in Cities Program" HUD matched that amount. Citizens were called upon to give money for Phase II of the park. Phase II included the renovation of the wharf, construction of play areas, picnic areas, a parking lot, and trees.⁴⁷ The goal for the fund drive was \$150,000, to in turn be matched by HUD. Local newsletters, mail solicitations, and *The Providence Journal* targeted the public. The completion of the park was slated for late summer 1971.

The India Point Park Committee (IPPC), a strong task force of community leaders was formed under the direction of Mrs. Sharpe to lead the fund drive. East Side resident Betty Buxton served as Executive Director of the Fund Drive. The IPPC was fortunate to have John Nicholas Brown, a founder

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Albert Veri, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 11, 2002.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Peggy Sharpe Briefcases- list of finances 1970.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

of the Providence Preservation Society, as the Honorary Chairman of the Committee. Mr. Brown, a longtime friend of Mrs. Sharpes, was renowned for his involvement in philanthropic, civic and cultural activities in Providence and nationally.⁴⁸ Mrs. John Watkins (her husband was the publisher of *The Providence Journal*) was Chairman. In addition to the original members others included Mr. John Fortes and Miss Florence Campbell of Fox Point, Natalie Joslin from the Providence Preservation Society, as well as a collection of state and city officials.⁴⁹ The initial meeting of the committee was held February 17, 1970, at John Brown's invitation to The Hope Club. Members were assigned key donors to solicit.

The IPPC decided that The Providence Preservation Society would sponsor the fund drive and serve as the legal entity to receive contributions.⁵⁰ Natalie Joslin coordinated this arrangement. Joslin held a meeting with the Fox Point residents on the committee during the first week of March to plan fund raising activities with Fox Point. Florence Campbell and Gabriel Castro, Fox Point residents and IPCC members agreed to put together a list of Fox Point citizens who could potentially give twenty-five dollars.⁵¹

The approach to fundraising was two tiered to encourage the involvement of all community members. The more affluent parts of Fox Point and the East Side could afford to give substantial amounts to the park. The majority of public funds raised came from this upper class community. Many of the Cape Verdean, Portuguese and Azorean residents of Fox Point lacked the financial resources to make significant contributions to the park, so they were encouraged to give what they could.

(Mrs. Joslin) stressed that the committee is looking for pennies, nickels and dimes from children as well as more substantial donations from adults. 'This is the community's park and we all want the community to share in its creation and development.'⁵²

Fundraising efforts were unsuccessful in reaching the majority of older Fox Point citizens particularly those of Cape Verdean, Portuguese, Azorean, and Irish heritage.⁵³ This may have been due to a number of factors. First, many lacked the financial stability.⁵⁴ Second, many older citizens did not rely on *The Providence Journal* for information. Instead news traveled through word of mouth or the Fox Point Boys and Girls Club.⁵⁵ The older immigrant community was separated from the opulent white East Side society both physically and financially. Immigrant residents of Fox Point were aware of park construction but chose to focus on potential uses for the completed park because they lacked the financial ability to contribute to park funds.⁵⁶

On May 16, 1970, a public picnic was held in the park to be. At the picnic longtime Fox Point resident Alberto Pereira introduced "The Ballad of India Point". The festivities were held to promote public donations.

The fundraising efforts were completed in June 1970, through the hard work of the IPPC and the general public. The total amount raised was \$166,000, surpassing the goal of \$150,000.⁵⁷ The Rockefeller Foundation propelled the fund drive with a substantial gift. Larger donations were also received from the Rhode Island Foundation, affluent citizens and other corporations. Overall solicitation of Providence garnered one hundred and forty three gifts totaling \$3,239.⁵⁸ One hundred and eight donations amounting to \$1,470.40⁵⁹ were in response to advertisements placed in *The Providence*

⁴⁸ Joyce Botelho, telephone interview by author, Providence, RI, April 29, 2002.

⁴⁹ See Appendix V.

⁵⁰ Catherine Horsey, interview by author, Providence, RI, March 22, 2002.

⁵¹ Peggy Sharpe Briefcases- document prepared by Bob Schacht.

⁵² "Public Gifts Urged for India Point Park", *The Providence Journal*, May 3, 1970, N1.

⁵³ Robert Schacht, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 4, 2002.

⁵⁴ Yvonne Smart, interview by author, Providence, RI, March 26, 2002.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Alberto Pereira, interview by author, Providence, RI, March 26, 2002.

⁵⁷ Robert Schacht, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 4, 2002.

⁵⁸ "India Point Park Fund Gets \$9,568 More", *The Providence Journal*, May 10, 1970, N35.

⁵⁹ "India Pt. Park Drive \$8,000 From Its Goal", *The Providence Journal*, May 23, 1970, 1.

Journal and *The Providence Bulletin* over a two-week period.⁶⁰ The application for a matching grant from HUD for \$166,000 was filed in the summer of 1970.⁶¹

Throughout the fund drive Mrs. Sharpe kept the momentum going. Her excitement for the park was contagious. She had the ability to keep everyone interested whether it was through attending community functions or hosting luncheons at her home with government officials. This enthusiasm was particularly evident in her involvement with Fox Point Elementary School. The children from the school were thrilled that a park was coming to the neighborhood, and they wanted to participate in the fund drive. Mrs. Sharpe encouraged the children to take responsibility for the park and treat it as their own. The school held a Portuguese American Folk Festival on June 10, 1970. Children sang songs, danced, and performed *Cinderella* for the crowd. Some students were so thrilled that plans were made to sell lemonade and kool-aid for the park. One child remarked that he gave his entire week's allowance just for a place to play ball.⁶² The proceeds from Fox Point Elementary and the Folk Festival totaled \$214.⁶³ The money and a scroll with the signatures of children who donated were presented to Mrs. Sharpe during a ceremony overlooking the park on June 20, 1970.

The majority of the money was raised by the wealthy, but substantial efforts were made to encourage donations from the entire community.⁶⁴ There were a significant number of smaller contributions indicating the participation of a larger number of people. More importantly, the necessary money was raised in an efficient manner through citizen involvement.

THE PARK HITS A SNAG:

“A threatening shadow- not bigger now than a man's hand but potentially dangerous – lies across plans to create a waterfront park at India Point.”⁶⁵

An agreement was reached quickly to acquire 5.9 acres of land owned by the Boston & Providence Railroad in the spring of 1970.⁶⁶ The negotiations with Penn Central had gone well, but the sale of the 2.7 acres of Penn Central land had not been finalized. The railroad was interested in divesting its land share at India Point, but the sale was halted in June 1970 when the Penn Central went bankrupt.⁶⁷ Prior to the bankruptcy, a price less than the actual value for the land had been agreed upon. When the company went bankrupt, by law it could no longer sell the land for a price less than market value.⁶⁸ The money allocated for acquiring this parcel by the government and Mrs. Sharpe could not cover the listed price. Thus, development of the park was slowed while a reasonable price was negotiated.

Fortunately, the India Point Committee was blessed by Schacht's expertise. Before serving as legal counsel to Governor Chafee, Schacht was Director of Business Regulation for the state. As Director of Business Regulation, he was given a special appointment as Assistant to the Attorney General for all railroad matters.⁶⁹ Schacht's knowledge of the railroad industry was key in expediting the acquisition of the India Point land for a fair price. The sale was approved in late 1970. The state purchased the land from the railroads in the spring of 1971.⁷⁰

COMMUNITY INPUT:

As the price for the last land parcel was being negotiated, final designs for the park were completed, and the public was given the chance to express its opinion. Mr. Veri's office was located on the corner of Governor and Wickenden Streets in the heart of the Fox Point neighborhood. Mr. Veri

⁶⁰ See Appendix VII.

⁶¹ Mary Elizabeth Sharpe Briefcases.

⁶² “A Tree Grows at India Point”, *The Providence Journal*, June 20, 1970, 19.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Robert Schacht, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 4, 2002.

⁶⁵ “Problems at India Point”, *The Providence Journal*, August 26, 1970, 19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Robert Schacht, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 4, 2002.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

instituted an open door policy, which encouraged all who were interested to be involved.⁷¹ A large map of the park was placed on the office wall. Neighborhood children would come in and place objects for the park where they wanted them to go. Mr. Veri recalls nearly 150,000 people voicing their ideas by phone, mail or in person.⁷² A Rhode Island man who had moved to Florida had gotten wind of the park and called to state his thoughts. Mr. Veri received nearly sixty letters from children at Fox Point Elementary located just across the street from his office.⁷³ Many of the letters requested that he not forget to plant trees or build a playground. Older citizens of Providence for the most part were aware of the plans, but interest and time may have been deterring factors in viewing them.

In addition to his open door policy, Mr. Veri worked closely with John Fortes, a Cape Verdean resident of Fox Point and member of the IPPC. Mr. Fortes served as Mr. Veri's drafting table assistant.⁷⁴

Major decisions regarding the park were left up to the IPPC and government officials. Citizens who wished to express opinions could do so by speaking with Florence Campbell, Gabriel Castro or John Fortes, all Fox Point residents. The more formal route of ward representatives, senators or representatives could also be accessed. John Murphy, Councilman from Ward #1 (Fox Point), and Lila Sapinsley, State Senator from India Point District, were on the India Point Committee. Mr. Alfred Travers Jr., State Representative of India Point District, and Edward Xavier, Councilman from Ward #1 (Fox Point), did not serve on the Committee but were involved in park affairs.⁷⁵ There were many avenues for citizen input but it is the citizen's responsibility to be informed and take advantage of such opportunities. However, many Portuguese, Cape Verdean, and Azorean Fox Pointers may not have wanted to express their ideas for fear that they would not have been listened to. As well they could not contribute substantial funds to the park, and many believed that the park was a white upper class gift to Fox Point. Mary Elizabeth Sharpe was commonly referred to as "the lady who gave the park."⁷⁶

CONSTRUCTION PHASE I: "A Tree Grows at India Point"

With the land acquired and designs ready, construction began in the fall of 1971. The City hired Campanella Construction Corp. of Warwick to develop Phase I of the park. India Point was unusual in that it reclaimed an improperly used urban area for public use.⁷⁷ The goal of Phase I was to "clear and remove debris from land and water areas" as well as to ready the park for activities such as walking, sitting and picnicking.⁷⁸ Trees were planted along the waterfront directly across from Fox Point School, thus creating the Promenade area.

Two remaining obstacles for the design were harmonizing I-195 with the park and building a bridge over I-195 to connect Fox Point neighborhood to the north side of the park. When I-195 was constructed through the neighborhood, the Federal Government covered 90% of the cost and the state 10%.⁷⁹ Thus, the state requested that the Federal Government pay for 90% of the pedestrian bridge.⁸⁰ The Federal Government agreed. In conjunction with Phase I, the State Department of Public Works constructed an eight-foot wide steel bridge with a guardrail surrounded by wire caging to link the park and neighborhood.⁸¹ Switchbacks were added on the park side of the bridge to ease the connection.⁸²

Samuel Engedahl of the Department of Transportation (DOT) was instrumental in the construction of the pedestrian bridge. As chief engineer of the project he worked closely with Governor

⁷¹ Albert Veri, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 11, 2002.

⁷² Albert Veri, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 11, 2002.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Robert Schacht, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 4, 2002.

⁷⁵ Peggy Sharpe Briefcases- VIP's introduced at Dedication 1974.

⁷⁶ Alberto Pereira, interview by author, Providence, RI, March 26, 2002.

⁷⁷ Bob McMahon, interview by author, Providence, RI, March 21, 2002.

⁷⁸ Peggy Sharpe Briefcases- document prepared by Albert Veri 1972.

⁷⁹ "Federal Aid Sought for Rte. 195 Span", *The Providence Journal*, February 17, 1970, 31.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Peggy Sharpe Briefcases- 1972 speech.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Frank Licht and led the bridge project through a variety of DOT regulations including permitting the planting of trees along the highway.⁸³ The bridge was completed in the summer of 1972.⁸⁴

As part of Phase I, the first tree was planted at the park on Arbor Day 1972. The tree, a gift from the Rhode Island Federation of Garden Clubs, was planted at the foot of East Street marking the entrance to the pedestrian bridge.⁸⁵ Children from Fox Point Elementary School sang songs and performed skits at the ceremony. Mrs. Sharpe led the ceremony and told the children: “This is really your park. I hope you will all enjoy it and will want to take care of it.”⁸⁶ Phase I was completed in the summer of 1972.⁸⁷ The park was open for general use.

PHASE II: FINAL TOUCHES:

The HUD matching grant (\$166,000) for Phase II was approved in the summer of 1971. Construction began in the fall of 1972.⁸⁸ Mr. Veri was retained for the design. The goal of Phase II was to “complete the overall concept of the Park: A Park for Everyone!”⁸⁹ Under Phase II, the park was developed with three sections. Each offered various activities for all age groups. The design was intended to be a “repetition of nature and historical character of an area that is to serve people of all ages.”⁹⁰ Thus, Veri chose to leave remnants of machinery from the scrap metal yard as well as old dock pilings from the Brown shipping trade with the East Indies.⁹¹

The Greensward consisting of the eastern 5-½ acres was developed as a large open green space surrounded by trees for shade and benches for resting. Today it is used as the soccer field. The Promenade area located along the waterfront directly across from I-195 was constructed in a “mall-like fashion” with trees lining the walk. Along the walk, native wildflowers were planted, benches and picnic tables were installed. Development of the promenade also included repair of the wharf.⁹²

The western end of the park offers excellent views of the bay, providing quiet areas for picnicking and playing.⁹³ The area was separated from the Promenade and the Greensward by large shade-giving evergreen trees. A system of meandering walks linked the three areas of the park. The walkways were built of finely crushed stone. Veri used the stone so that visitors to the park never had to walk on asphalt or concrete.⁹⁴ A parking lot was constructed at the western end of the park. Phase II was completed in the spring of 1974.⁹⁵

A PARK FOR EVERYONE:

September 7, 1974 was truly a special day for Providence. The dedication of India Point Park marked the completion of a decade long quest for beautifying the city of Providence. The park was completed through the determined efforts of the people of Providence *for* the people of Providence. Citizens from all corners of society showed support for the park. The dedication was attended by more than 500.⁹⁶ Festivities included a rendition of “The Ballad of India Point”, the introduction of the state and city officials and the IPPC with a description of their role in the park, the arrival of The Coast Guard bark *Eagle*, and a reenactment of the arrival of Roger Williams who had landed nearby in 1636.⁹⁷

⁸³ Albert Veri, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 11, 2002.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ See Appendix VIII.

⁸⁶ James Kaul, “India Point Tree-Planting”, *The Providence Journal*, April 29, 1972, 3.

⁸⁷ Peggy Sharpe Briefcases- document prepared by Albert Veri 1972.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Gina Macris, “A Park at the Water’s Edge”, *The Providence Journal*. November 3, 1973, 37.

⁹¹ Albert Veri, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 11, 2002.

⁹² See Appendix IX.

⁹³ Peggy Sharpe Briefcases- document prepared by Albert Veri 1972.

⁹⁴ Gina Macris, “A Park at the Water’s Edge”, *The Providence Journal*. November 3, 1973, 37.

⁹⁵ Albert Veri, interview by author, Providence, RI, April 11, 2002.

⁹⁶ Wayne Worcester, “India Point Park Dedicated in Rites”, *The Providence Journal*, September 8, 1974, B13.

⁹⁷ Wylie Hight and Lydia Hill. “India Point Park: Historic Development, Current Underuse, Future Revitalization.” (Brown University, Providence, 2000).

Governor Phillip Noel remarked to the crowd, “What all of us can remember as an eyesore and a monument to man’s waste, is now a monument to what can be done by the American people...It’s a glorious day, we used to think of this as a dream, Mrs. Sharpe’s dream.”⁹⁸ The dream is now a reality to be used by all.

THE PRESENT:

Today, The Friends of India Point Park have picked up where Mrs. Sharpe and the IPPC left off. Led by David Riley and Marjorie Powning, the Friends are “dedicated to upholding the integrity of India Point Park as an informal, natural open space.”⁹⁹ Over the past year the Friends have organized park cleanups, worked with the Parks Department to increase maintenance, met with city, state and local officials urging them to protect and improve the park and organized a dynamic group of over one hundred citizens.¹⁰⁰ Due to the work of the Friends, plans are underway for the possible expansion of India Point Park. Expansion will include linking India Point to downtown and the East Bay bike path, creating an “emerald necklace” gracing the eastern shore of Providence.¹⁰¹ Through the determined efforts of such citizens, Mrs. Sharpe’s dream is still alive today.

⁹⁸ Wayne Worcester, “India Point Park Dedicated in Rites”, *The Providence Journal*, September 8, 1974, B13.

⁹⁹ Friends of India Point Park Statement of Purpose and Concerns, 2001.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*