

Long Point cut will heal, but no one knows when

By Gregory Katz

When the historic flood tide washed over Wood End two weeks ago it uncovered a series of cross-hatched hemlock poles that were probably designed in the 1800s, to prevent Long Point from separating from the mainland.

Now in the wake of the flood Provincetown faces the same problem again. The flood left a 150-yard cut that allows the tide to inundate the salt marsh in the West End, developing a new tidal inlet.

Oceanographers and marine biologists are confident that the cut will close itself off naturally if it is left alone. But no one will predict if the process will take months or years. No one knows if Provincetown residents can use Long Point for picnics and recreation this summer.

Experts agree that the tidal action is not threatening the valuable salt marsh previously protected by the barrier beach. Dr. Steve Leatherman of the University of Massachusetts said the sand pushed inland of the cut would provide a good substrata for the marsh and encourage its growth. He said the tidal action now washing over the marsh may actually help the marsh by flushing it out and preventing stagnation.

Leatherman said the only way the marsh would be threatened is by direct wave action, which he said would not develop.

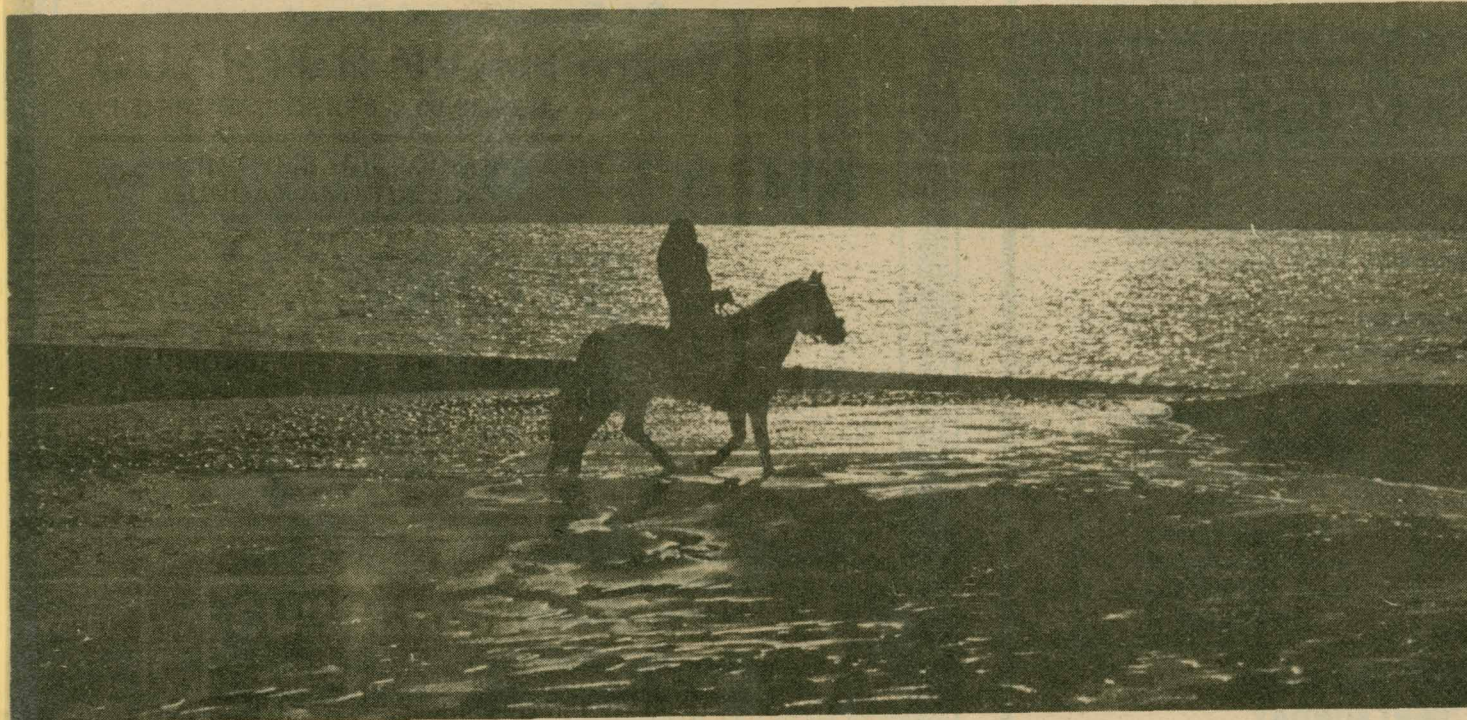
After visiting the site, Leatherman said he did not think the breach would widen and turn Long Point into a real island.

But Bob White, chairman of the shellfish commission, wants to see the cut taken care of immediately. He said there is a foot of excess sand on the shellfish flats and they will be destroyed unless something is done. The shellfish commission was to meet last night to discuss the problem.

At first observers thought the wooden poles revealed by the cut were part of a saltworks operation. But this was ruled out when it became clear that the wooden setup could never have been used to catch water, an essential part of old saltworks.

Selectman George Bryant, an expert in turn-of-the-century saltworks, said pine was usually used in salt operations. Bryant said the wooden poles are hemlock.

He said the "sandbox" was in remarkably good shape and showed ingenious design. The rotted poles were made from four-by-six-inch posts. They are crosshatched with two-by-twelve-inch boards. Bryant said the presence of the posts shows that the sand has been this low in the area before.



One way to get to Long Point

Advocate photo by Gregory Katz

attitude toward the town. Selectman George Bryant said if Long Point becomes an island, the Seashore would probably designate it a bird sanctuary and restrict Provincetown's use of it.

The Highland Fish and Game Club has written to the Seashore, the town and various congressmen protesting the Seashore's inaction. They fear the salt marsh will be ruined by the constant tidal flow of water.

Club President Matt Costa said Tuesday that the salt marsh is vital to the town's fishing future. He said if Long Point is allowed to become an island it will eventually wash away.

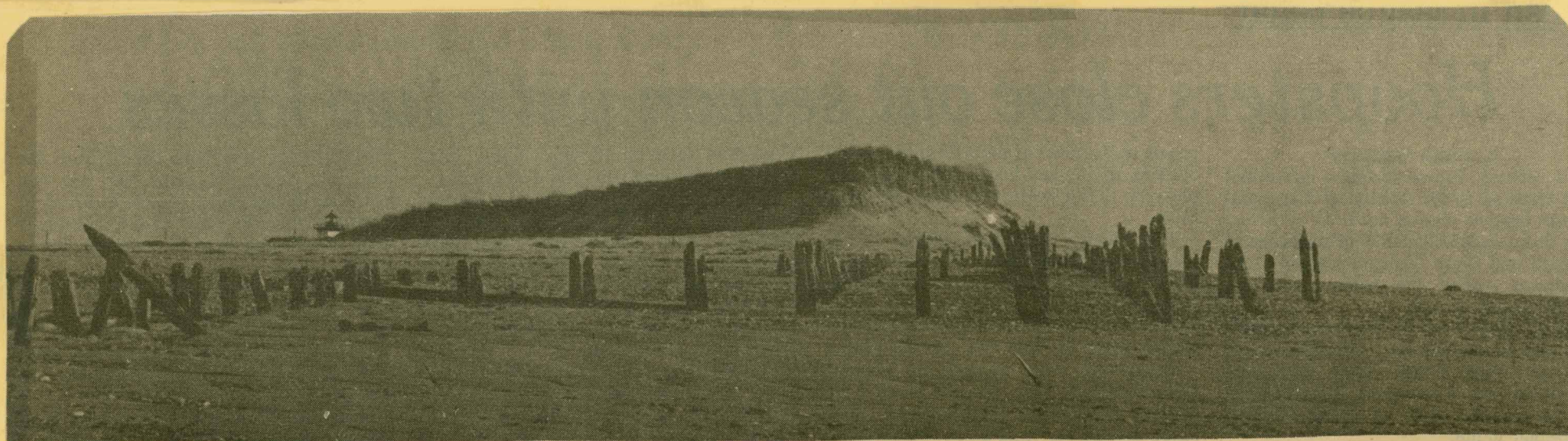
"It takes 1000 years to build a salt marsh, but you can kill one in six months," Costa said. He said the marsh is filled with plankton, protein and many small fish that are vital to the ocean ecology.

Costa is also worried that shellfishing in the area will be destroyed because of the cut. This area has not been very productive in recent years and some people think allowing water to flood the area might help the clam flats.

The Seashore will definitely repair the washed out road to Herring Cove Beach, which it refers to as Moors Road. The inland side of the road has collapsed and it has been closed since the flood.

Hadley said the Seashore would fix the road as quickly as possible. He said the entire road is not in good shape and it may make more sense to repair the entire length of it instead of just repairing the washed out section.

Hadley did not want to make a firm commitment about repairing the Hatches Harbor dike until he consults an engineer. He said repair work would be hampered because the area is remote.



Hemlock cribs that fought the sea at Wood End at least 100 years ago.

Advocate photo by Gregory Katz

No one can project when Long Point cut will close