

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

Old State House - 150 Benefit Street - Providence, RI 02903

Telephone 401-222-2678 Fax 401-222-2968

www.preservation.ri.gov

NEWS
Preserve

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RI PBS presents *Woven in Time: The Narragansett Salt Pond Archaeological*

Woven in Time: The Narragansett Salt Pond Preserve



Woven in Time: The Narragansett Salt Pond Preserve, is a documentary about the only surviving and recently preserved pre-contact (1100-1400) Native American village on the New England coast. A film of extraordinary beauty and poetry, *Woven in Time* is a story of 'place' - how land and spirit are interwoven and how uncovering this village could lead to a shared stewardship for this beautiful and bountiful territory of marshes, ponds, oceans and forests.

Rhode Island PBS presents *Woven in Time: The Narragansett Salt Pond Preserve* on Sunday, November 22 at 6 p.m. as part of the ongoing Rhode Island PBS series, *Rhode Island Stories*. The film will encore Tuesday, November 24 at 8 p.m. on WSBE Learn.



This land, adjacent to a suburban housing development and a shopping center on Point Judith Pond, is where the Narragansett people place their origins story. In the 1980s, archaeologists unearthed the remains of a centuries old village that managed to survive 'untouched' in a highly built section of the Rhode Island coast. The parcel then became the center of an almost 30-year battle between the right of property ownership and the social and cultural importance of preserving one of the most important archaeological sites on the East Coast of the United States.

Funded by the Rhode Island Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration, the ***Woven in Time*** film project does not shrink from the harsh relational reality - and ultimate cooperation - between the state of Rhode Island and the Narragansett.



Filmmaker Marc Levitt spent a year and a half interviewing more than 50 people from the Narragansett, state government officials and political figures, archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, and local citizens. He has constructed the film in the same 'narrator free' style he employed in his first documentary, *Stories in Stone*.

Featuring drone photography, animation, music drawn from Rhode Island, national and international sources - including a recurring theme by the well-known avant-garde composer, Moondog - ***Woven in Time*** is a lyrical, thoughtful and beautifully realized exploration of what it means to be 'from' somewhere.

Woven in Time: The Narragansett Salt Pond Preserve is directed and produced by Marc Levitt, with animation by Dennis Hlynsky, edited by Irene Su, Director of Photography Richard Goulis, additional photography by Thomas Payne and Mike Turecamo, drone photography by Kyla and Andrew Trench, and music by both local and international musicians including Campbell Brothers, Phil Edmonds, Hang Massive, Thawn Harris, Steve Jobe, Matt McClaren, Moondog, Jesse Robbins (Red Eagle), Josh Schurman, Cathy Clasper-Torch, and What Cheer Brigade. Frances Bisogno is the sound engineer, and recording took place at Jack Gauthier's Lake West Studio. The Executive Producer is Michael Hébert.



Background for the Salt Pond Archaeological Site

The Salt Pond Archaeological Site, located at the head of Point Judith Pond in Narragansett, is a large, complex, and nationally-significant Narragansett Indian coastal village from the Late Woodland period. The village site studied thus far was used between 1100 and 1300 A.D. The site contains rare evidence of Narragansett daily life before European settlement. It contains human burials and ceremonial places, as well as evidence of houses and other structures and cooking and food storage places, and a wide range of artifacts. The diversity and complexity of the site is unmatched—no other Native American coastal village has ever been found in the Northeast. Significant features have been found in every part of the site area that has been investigated. Further, the Narragansett Indian Tribe has identified Salt Pond as a place of cultural and spiritual importance to the Tribe.

Archeological investigation of the Salt Pond Site was performed by Rhode Island College (1986-1988) and the Public Archaeology Lab (PAL, Inc.) (1993-1995; 2006-07).

The project area was an ideal location for a major Indian settlement. It is on the shore of Point Judith Pond, the largest and most ecologically rich of Rhode Island's salt ponds, and it is near the major Indian trail (Post Road) along Rhode Island's south coast. Early European accounts of the New England natives suggest the character of the village. In 1524 Verrazano visited Narragansett Bay and recorded what he saw, including a village whose residents grew corn and who lived in houses "circular in form...made from semi-circles of wood (i.e., arched saplings, bent in the form of an arbor) covered with mats of straw ingeniously worked, which protect them from rain and wind."

More than 2,000 features have been identified; about 370 features have been partially excavated. The outlines of at least 22 structures have been revealed by their post holes. These include a number of circular to oval wigwams and a few large rectangular structures. Thousands of artifacts have been recovered, including stone tools, fragments of ceramic vessels, stone pestles and grinding stones, a pipe fragment, bone needles and a bone harpoon, as well as charred corn kernels and fragments of fish and mammals. Some of the largest features, three-foot-deep round pits, held corn. The recovery of corn at this site – in the context of an organized village - has revolutionized understanding of the development of agriculture and the creation of permanent settlements in southern New England. The great number and variety of the features are a tangible archive for understanding the everyday village life of the Narragansett people in the centuries before European contact.

The Narragansett Indian Tribal Historic Preservation Office has stated that this site "by appearance, feel and reported evidence is an ancient medicine compound of the Turtle Clan of the Narragansett Tribe . . . an ancient and important place of Narragansett history, tradition and spiritual practice."

In 1991 a 50-house residential development was proposed on the Salt Pond parcel. Archaeology performed before residential development could begin revealed the extent and significance of this extraordinary site, and several Native American burials were identified. Work was suspended due to archaeological issues and unrelated lawsuits. Archaeology resumed in 2006

fully revealing the character of an intact village setting, and RIHPHC petitioned for withdrawal of development permits.

The Office of the Rhode Island Attorney General joined RIHPHC's efforts to protect the 900 year-old Indian village from destruction. Following lawsuits and regulatory hearings, the owner's right to develop the property was upheld, but strict conditions were imposed to require extensive additional archaeology before any construction could begin. Preservation of the Salt Pond Site was finally secured when the RI Department of Transportation purchased the property as "Alternate Mitigation" for archaeological impacts from highway work in Providence.

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