

Taking a look at the Shaffer Landfill

By Marlies Henderson
Special to the Minuteman

Vinyl records have A and B-sides. There are pros and cons to everything, even if it may take decades to find out the positive impact of a disaster. If hazardous waste is the downside, the upside is a solar farm and recreational potential. My brother-in-law Steve grew up in East Billerica and tells me about the Pond Street Dump and Content Brook. The pronunciation is con-tent, because the early settlers were very content with the grasses growing along this stream which provided enough current for running a lumber sawmill in the 1700s and 1800s. In the 1900s, so much industrial waste was dumped in the area, agencies referred to it as Con-tent Brook; unintentionally referencing its toxic content.

Nevertheless, Steve played contently with other neighborhood kids along the banks of the brook and roamed the garbage landfill, which was a crater rather than the hill it is today. It blatantly displays its

beneficial purpose: Harvesting the energy of the sun.

Following proper treatment, containment and capping, Superfund sites can be reused as solar farms and even as recreational parks. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is committed to initiate safe and productive reuse of Superfund sites, create new employment opportunities and new recreational areas, which has proven successful through case studies at hundreds of sites all over the US.

How did Content Brook turn into Content Brook? The first settler in East

Billerica was William French. By 1764 he built a saw mill, sold it four years later to Thomas Richardson, and a long line of Richardsons after him dominated the area for the next 130 years, building and providing accommodations for the diggers of the Middlesex Canal and the builders of the railroad after that. When the lumber supply was exhausted, the land was sold to Boston & Maine Corporation in the early 1900s, when the Iron

Horse rail yard was built. Incorporated as Gray-Pond Realty Trust, Phillip Shaffer bought the land in 1966 from Boston & Maine Corporation. Shaffer allowed all of Billerica's trash to be dumped there, free of charge to the community. Used as a dump site since 1946, it was shut down in 1986 and added to the Iron Horse Superfund site to be cleaned up. At the expense of \$14 million the landfill was capped in 2004, which was paid for by a group of about 40 companies who have accepted responsibility — not including the Town of Billerica and Phillip Shaffer.

Dump owner Shaffer surrendered entitlement to revenue generated at the site, and recently offered to give the 106 acres between Gray and Pond Streets, the southern boundary of which is one mile of Middlesex Canal, to the Middlesex Canal Association. Liability issues need to be sorted out, but wetland restrictions and the solar farm indicate the potential for an easement along the canal so a path can remain in use as a trail.

Additionally, the Middlesex Canal Association and the Commonwealth's Middlesex Canal Commission explore feasibility of connecting the potential Phillip Shaffer Canal Park via a footpath on the former canal alignment through Iron Horse Park to the canal on Dow Chemical property of the west side of Iron Horse Park.

The Middlesex Canal Association (MCA) has invited Don McElroy, the EPA remedial project manager for the Iron Horse Park Superfund site to speak about the Shaffer Landfill at the MCA 2015 winter meeting.

The topic is the "Shaffer Landfill: Present and Future." Public is invited: Sunday, Feb. 8, at 1 p.m. in the Reardon Room of the Middlesex Canal Visitor Center. The free Middlesex Canal Visitor Center/Museum is open noon-4 p.m., Saturday and Sunday except on a holiday. It is located at the Billerica Falls of the Concord River, 71 Faulkner St., Billerica, MA 01862. For more background information, see <http://tinyurl.com/ShafferLandfill-2013>.

sightings and the rest.

The two weeks of gab leading up to the Super Bowl can be excruciating for fans and players alike. Asked for the umpteenth time to speculate about the big game, Patriots head coach Bill Belichick showed again his flair for the obvious. "It is what it is, and what hasn't happened, hasn't happened."

When it finally happened, fans got a game that put the distractions in the background and for once lived up to the hype — and then some.

This year, all agreed that the playoffs had sent the two best teams to the Super Bowl. The Seattle Seahawks played like the reigning champions, with talent on the field and a coach, Pete Carroll, who is still warmly regarded here in New England. After some initial stumbles, the Patriots

near-defeat into improbable victory.

In homes across New England, the hoots and hollers that followed Butler's catch woke the youngsters and shook the rafters. The only debate now is whether Brady and Belichick are simply the best quarterback and head coach in the game today, or the best in the history of the NFL.

It snowed again Monday all across New England, and wind chills will be below zero as the triumphant Patriots roll through Boston to celebrate with their fans. But all who love football are warmed by the fine game that ended a troubled NFL season, and the glow of a Super Bowl win makes it easier for local fans to survive the dark weeks before the start of Red Sox spring training.

What a game. What a team. Thanks, Patriots.

WRITE TO US

The Minuteman welcomes letters to the editor. Here are the guidelines:

Letters should not be more than 400 words. Letters that exceed this word count may be returned to the writer to be cut, or shortened by the editor.

Guest commentary columns must be pre-approved by the editor to be considered for publication. The Minuteman will not publish anonymous letters. Letter writers should write no more than one

hometown and daytime phone number (number will not be published).

No letters criticizing political candidates will be printed in the edition prior to an election.

Letters should be received by Monday at noon.

Email billerica@wick-edlocal.com; send to The Billerica Minuteman, PO Box 9191, Concord, MA 01742 or fax 978-371-5711.

If your letter does not appear please call 978-371-5726 before resending. The