

21 Things: Durham says NO

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From this vantage point on the bench at Wagon Hill Farm, one can still enjoy the the beauty of the bay, without the oil refinery that was onced proposed there. Photo by Shawn St.Hilaire/Fosters.com

DURHAM — While the wagon at Wagon Hill Farm in Durham may be one of the most photographed sites in New England, the farm's bench along the bay holds much greater historical significance.

The bench, which reads “March 1974, Durham says NO to Olympic Oil Refinery” was installed in 2011. It is made from granite and was quarried in Milford and inscribed in Stratham. The rock is a blend of two granite pieces merged millions of years apart. It is estimated that the original rock may be more than 650 million years old.

The bench commemorates the defeat of Aristotle Onassis' plan to build what would have been the world's largest oil refinery, covering 3,500 acres of land, on Durham Point. In 1974, three Durham housewives, Nancy Sandberg, Phyllis Bennett and Dudley Dudley were pitted against Greek shipping magnate Onassis and his supporters, New Hampshire Gov. Meldrim Thomson and Manchester Union-Leader Publisher William Loeb.

Although they were up against the richest man in the world, the three women were not without their resources. Dudley was a freshman legislator in the New Hampshire House at the time and introduced the key legislation that defeated the project. Bennett, who died in July, publicized the matter in her local grassroots newspaper “Publick Occurences,” and Sandberg went on to lead the citizens group “Save Our Shores.” The trio united residents against the proposed 400,000-barrel-a-day refinery and the town ultimately voted against zoning changes that would have allowed the refinery to be built.

Editor's note: This is the third in a series of 21 Things to Know and love about the Tri-Cities. View them all as they are published at www.fosters.com/21things.