

1950 - Present

"Still Enjoying a Golden Era"

1950 to the present day has been a time of progress at Hampton Beach. In 1957, a memorial honoring sailors and soldiers lost at sea was built on the boardwalk and the bandstand was replaced by the Seashell complex in 1962. The 99-year lease that had given the Hampton Beach Improvement Company rights to the beach's development expired in 1997. A multi-agency partnership completed the *Hampton Beach Area Master Plan* in 2001 to imagine the development of the beach over the next 50 years. The construction of a new Seashell Complex in 2012 achieved a goal of the plan that continues the 200-year legacy of improvement at Hampton Beach.

The Marine Memorial

In 1957, the New Hampshire Marine Memorial was dedicated to honor New Hampshire residents lost at sea fighting for their country. The memorial was requested by local Manchester resident William E. Downs. His son, William D. Downs, was lost at sea during World War II and he wanted to have a cross and gravesite established to honor his son. However, Mr. Downs was told by the federal government that no such thing was available for soldiers lost at sea. He attempted to have a marine memorial erected in Washington D.C., but was unsuccessful. Downs then appealed to New Hampshire Governor Sherman Adams.¹



William D. Downs
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

Adams supported Downs and after some initial uncertainty, it was decided a marine memorial would be built in Hampton. After funds were appropriated, donated, and raised towards the project, a contest to choose the design was held.² The winning design was by Alice Cosgrove of Concord, N.H.³ It was decided that the statue would be carved out of New Hampshire granite, and artist Vincenzo Andreani, of Marr and Gordon, Inc. was hired to carve it.⁴



The Hampton Beach Bandstand,
1901-1962
(Pictures courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

The main theme of Cosgrove's design was a "woman watching over the shores, laying a wreath on the waves."⁵ This woman was portrayed as a Gold Star Mother, or a mother whose son or daughter lost their life at war, looking out to sea. The Marine Memorial was dedicated on May 30, Memorial Day, in 1957⁶ to "all New Hampshire sons and daughters lost or buried at sea during World War II."⁷ In describing her own design, Cosgrove said, "Reverently she lays a wreath upon the soft waters which embrace them. As she looks across the waters, she asks that the winds and waves be gentle, as a mother

who covers her sleeping child at night."⁸

Inscribed on the base of the statue are the words that Cosgrove chose herself; "Breathe soft, ye winds, Ye waves in silence rest." These words are from a poem called "An Epistle to a Lady," written by John Gay in 1714. On the curving wall behind the statue, it said, "In memory of New Hampshire's heroic war dead lost at sea in defense of our country." Below that, the names of the men and women to whom the memorial was dedicated were listed.⁹ At first, the Marine Memorial was dedicated only to those lost at sea during World War II, but it was later expanded to every New Hampshire soldier lost at sea in every war America engaged in.¹⁰



The N.H. Marine Memorial, on the boardwalk
across from the Ashworth Hotel
(Picture courtesy of Department Resources of Economic Development)

The Seashell Complex

Near the end of the 1950s, the State decided it was time to update the area around the bandstand. Many of the buildings, including the Chamber of Commerce and the bandstand itself, were outdated and no longer as efficient as they once were. In 1959, the State began planning a project to reconstruct the development across the street from the Casino. A building

complex was designed by W. Brooke Fleck, an architect from Hanover, N.H., to modernize the area.¹¹ The bandstand was torn down in 1962 to make room for this construction project.¹²

Like the bandstand, the new Seashell Complex was built at the activity center of the beach.¹³ The facility was completed in 1963¹⁴ and included a lifeguard office, the Chamber of Commerce, new public toilets, the police station, the comfort station, the ticket and popcorn stands, as well as a main stage to host the concerts and shows that were once featured on the bandstand.¹⁵ The Seashell Complex was designed to be efficient, easily accessible, and limit any more developmental impact on the beach.

The design was based on a National Park System program called "Mission 66." This program started in 1956 with a goal to elevate the National Park buildings to "modern standards of comfort and efficiency," while still conserving the natural resources the parks protected.¹⁶ Throughout several National Parks, new buildings were constructed that had a modern design to meet all of these standards, as well as bring the outside world in. Many of these new buildings were visitors' centers. The Seashell building was modeled after the Mission 66 designs; it was considered a Modern Movement style, in both accessibility and architecture.¹⁷ It was all-inclusive and was designed in such a way that it complemented the beach rather than overwhelming it.

The Modern Movement Seashell Complex, built in 1962
(Picture courtesy of Department of Resources and Economic Development)



Hotels and Motels to Condominiums

In the 1970s, the atmosphere of the Hampton Beach area changed as people started buying and renting condominiums rather than staying in hotels and motels. The majority of people soon preferred to live in these individual spaces rather than the hotels that had dominated Hampton Beach for the previous one hundred years. This resulted in many of the hotels being replaced by several three to four story condominiums which "substantially altered the earlier appearance of Hampton Beach."¹⁸ Many of

the people who visited the beach now intended to stay longer and preferred to have a place of their own to return to each time.

The Hampton Beach Area Master Plan

In 1997, the 99-year Hampton Beach Improvement Company lease that was signed by the Town of Hampton in 1898 expired. The expiration returned stewardship of the developed areas of Hampton Beach to the Town.¹⁹ To continue the development and improvement of the Hampton Beach area, the *Hampton Beach Area Master Plan* was adopted in 2001 and was funded by a partnership of the NH Department of Resources and Economic Development, Division of Parks and Recreation.²⁰



A drawing from the 2001 *Hampton Beach Area Master Plan* that depicted the future development of Hampton Beach
(Photo courtesy of Department of Resources and Economic Development)

The *Hampton Beach Area Master Plan* proposed several actions that would streamline

the area around the Seashell and make it more efficient. The plan recommended spreading the new facilities out in such a way to make them more accessible.²¹ It proposed four steps to significantly improve the area around the 1962 Seashell:

1. *Relocate the South Beach Visitors Center from the beachside to the intersection of the State Route 1A and (Ocean Blvd north bound) and the current South Beach entrance drive*
2. *Demolish the existing Seashell complex and construct new facilities on the same footprint*
3. *Build new public facilities near Haverhill Avenue and the Marine Memorial*
4. *Provide site improvements*²²

These four goals made up one of the first steps in the *Hampton Beach Area Master Plan*. Ultimately, the goal was to create a "more pleasant and accommodating area for visitors and residents."²³

The New Seashell Complex

The first Seashell complex had already hosted 48 summers of almost nightly concerts, shows, and other forms of entertainment.²⁴ However, the stage was not impervious to the changing tastes and damaging ocean winds and weather. According to an article in a 2012 *Hampton Union* article, officials said that "the complex no longer met the needs of today's tourists and started to show its age."²⁵ In October of 2010, the Seashell was demolished to make room for the new and updated facility. The article stated, "People are sad to see the old Seashell Stage torn down but are glad that a new and improved version will be built."²⁶

Everything the original complex had, plus some additions, were included in the new construction. The complex includes a main stage, seating for 750 people, modern bathroom facilities, a function hall, two pavilions just north and south of the main stage, space for administrative offices and facilities, a first aid station, and visitor information center.^{27, 28}



An aerial view of the 2012 Seashell Complex
(Photo courtesy of Samyn-D'elia Architects)

The redevelopment also includes two new bathhouses on the northern and southern parts of the main beach, improved signage on the streets, improved parking organization, and small shaded areas.²⁹ Other new amenities include outdoor "rinse-off" showers, coin-operated lockers, and bike racks.³⁰



Governor John Lynch cuts the ribbon at the Grand Opening of the Seashell Complex on June 1, 2012
(Picture courtesy of Seacoast online)
<http://www.seacoastonline.com/articles/20120602-NEWS-206020313>

The Seashell complex was opened to the public in 2012 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on June 1 at the start of the summer season. New Hampshire Governor John Lynch cut the ribbon on the \$14.5 million development saying that the Seashell complex was just the beginning of the changes at the

beach.³¹ The *Hampton Beach Area Master Plan* does in fact imagine the enhancement of the beach over the next 50 years.

In a 1988 New Hampshire magazine, Robert Herbert, editor of the *Hampton Union*, said of the center of Hampton Beach activity, "in the summer, it's the generator that runs the town's economy."³² This was true then and it continues to be true of the area today. In the same article, the chairman of the 350th Anniversary General Committee, Jerry McConnell, praised Hampton Beach for its friendly atmosphere, regardless of the growth it has experienced over the years.³³ As in the past few decades, "Hampton Beach is still enjoying a golden era, and its waves break as majestically as they did 100 years ago."³⁴ John Greenleaf Whittier's poem about Hampton Beach remains true, even to the present day:

*Good by to pain and care! I take
Mine ease to-day:
Here where these sunny waters break,
And ripples this keen breeze, I shake
All burdens from the heart, all weary thoughts away.*³⁵



Hampton, N. H., in the Future

What else does the future hold for Hampton Beach?
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

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- ¹ Randall, Peter E. *Hampton, A Century of Town and Beach*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher and the Town of Hampton, 1990, 676.
- ² Ibid 677.
- ³ New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development. Division of Historical Resources. *Hampton Beach Area Form*. By R. Walsh, J. Keane, and Carol S. Weed, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. Concord, N.H., 2009, 10.
- ⁴ Randall 677.
- ⁵ *Hampton Beach Area Form* 11.
- ⁶ Randall 677.
- ⁷ *Hampton Beach Area Form* 11.
- ⁸ Randall 677.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ *Hampton Beach Area Form* 11.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Holman, John M. Lane Memorial Library, "The Hampton Beach Bandstand." Last modified 2002. Accessed August 13, 2013. <http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/bandstand/beachbandstand.htm>.
- ¹³ *Hampton Beach Area Form* 11.
- ¹⁴ Holman
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Allaback, Sarah. *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2000. http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/allaback/vc0.htm (accessed August 10, 2013).
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ *Hampton Beach Area Form* 11.
- ¹⁹ Ibid 12.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development. Division of Parks and Recreation. *Results of Phase IA Site Assessment, Hampton Beach State Park Redevelopment*. By Carol S. Weed, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. Concord, N.H., November 2009, 1.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ *Hampton Beach Area Form* 12.
- ²⁴ Cronin, Patrick. "Structure Gone but Memories of Entertainers Still There." *Hampton Union*, October 01, 2010. <http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/beach/seashellstageHU20101001.htm> (accessed August 8, 2013).
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid.

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- ²⁷ Hampton Union Staff. Lane Memorial Library, "Hampton's Top Stories of 2012." Last modified 2012. Accessed August 29, 2013. <http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/recent/2012reviewHU.htm>.
- ²⁸ *Results of Phase IA Site Assessment 1*.
- ²⁹ Hampton Union Staff.
- ³⁰ *Results of Phase IA Site Assessment 1*.
- ³¹ Hampton Union Staff.
- ³² Danihel, Marya. Lane Memorial Library, "Hampton: 350 Years of Success By The Sea." Last modified 2004. Accessed August 29, 2013. <http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/vignettes/nhprofiles1988.htm>.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Varrell, William. *Summer By The Sea: The Golden Era of Victorian Beach Resorts*. Portsmouth, NH: The Strawberry Bank Print Shop, 1972.
- ³⁵ SeacoastNH.com, "Whittier's "Hampton Beach"." Last modified 1998. Accessed August 27, 2013. <http://www.seacoastnh.com/poems/hampton.html>.