

FORM H – PARKS AND LANDSCAPES

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Assessor's Number Area(s) Form No. Forms within

16-95,16-96, 17-30		MRN.945	
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Town/City: Marion

Place (*neighborhood or village*): Marion Village

Photograph



Address or Location: 1-2 Front Street / Silvershell Beach

Name: Silvershell Beach

Ownership: Public Private

Type of Landscape (*check one*):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> park | <input type="checkbox"/> farm land |
| <input type="checkbox"/> green/common | <input type="checkbox"/> mine/quarry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> garden | <input type="checkbox"/> training field |
| <input type="checkbox"/> boulevard/parkway | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (<i>specify</i>): beach | |

Date or Period: 1890s -1955

Source: Map & title research

Landscape Architect: N/A

Location of Plans: N/A

Locus Map



Alterations/Intrusions (*with dates*):

- Bath house (1992)
- Basketball court (1992)
- Guard hut (late 20th c.)

Condition: Good

Acreeage: 14.06

Setting: Cleared waterfront terrain characterized by sandy beach, shoreline riprap, stone jetties, and grassy areas.

Recorded by: Lynn Smiledge

Organization: Marion Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): July 2024

INVENTORY FORM H CONTINUATION SHEET

MARION

1-2 FRONT STREET

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.

VISUAL/DESIGN ASSESSMENT

Describe topography and layout. Note structures such as bandstands, gazebos, sheds, stone walls, monuments, and fountains. Note landscaping features such as formal plantings, agricultural plantings, and bodies of water. If possible, compare current appearance with original.

Silvershell Beach is a Town-owned, open recreation area that includes a sandy beach waterfront on the western shore of Sippican Harbor of approximately 800 feet. The 14-acre beach area incorporates a large grassy picnic/recreation area, playground, basketball and volleyball courts, bath house, guard hut, boat launch, and a sizeable unpaved parking lot. It is accessed via a paved spur that extends south from the end of Front Street and passes a small guard hut at the entry to the lot. The parking lot occupies the southwest quadrant of this irregularly-shaped property and is surfaced with crushed seashells, an historic and environmentally-appropriate permeable surface treatment for an area subject to wind and tide damage.

Stone jetties reach into the water at the south end and midpoint of the sandy crescent beach. Wood bollards and stone riprap border the eastern part of the parking area at the shoreline. A concrete boat ramp at the southwest corner of the parking lot next to a kayak rack serves as a launch for small boats and paddlers.

The bath house, adjacent basketball court, and playground are surrounded by grass and sited near the center of the northern half of the property. The bath house and court were built in 1992 according to town records, apparently replacing an earlier building on the site that may have been destroyed by a hurricane the previous year. The one-story bathhouse is a long, seven-bay-by-one-bay structure with a shallow gabled roof. Constructed of cast stone, it rests on a concrete pad and has no openings apart from the center three bays, which are open from front to back (north to south) and enclose a concession stand at the center bay. A paved walkway leads from the bath house to the parking lot entry and the beach.

West of the beach parking lot lies "an innovative system of constructed wetlands that helps protect clean water and shellfish beds in Spragues Cove. This stormwater wetland system, built in the mid-1990s with help from the Buzzards Bay Coalition, treats polluted runoff from local roads to reduce harmful bacterial contamination in the cove" and has created a habitat for many species of birds."¹

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Discuss history of use. Evaluate the historical associations of the landscape/park with the community.

The Village of Marion, the commercial and residential center of the town, is set on the western shore of Sippican Harbor. Silvershell Beach occupies waterfront property facing the harbor at the south end of Front Street in Marion Village. The beach is owned and operated by the Town of Marion and is open to Marion and Rochester residents for year-round recreational use. In addition to its sandy beach and rock jetties, it includes an adjacent park with basketball and volleyball courts, a playground, concession stand, and a bathhouse. A boat ramp for small boats and kayaks provides easy access to the harbor, nearby Stewart's Island, and the shellfish beds in Sprague's Cove.

Before 1860, this area of Marion was largely uninhabited. Like other coastal towns, Marion's economy had been dependent on fishing, coastal shipping, and related businesses such as the production of salt from sea water. With the arrival of the railroad, affluent urban dwellers from cities like Boston and New York were now able to travel in comfort to seaside destinations like Marion. The town began to attract many notable political, literary, and art world figures seeking a gentile seaside respite, and soon wealthy individuals began to build their own permanent summer residences. This desirable waterfront area, once home to salt works, became the site of grand summer cottages with nearby Silvershell Beach a major attraction.

¹ Buzzards Bay Coalition @ <https://www.savebuzzardsbay.org/places-to-go/silvershell-beach/>

INVENTORY FORM H CONTINUATION SHEET

MARION

1-2 FRONT STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

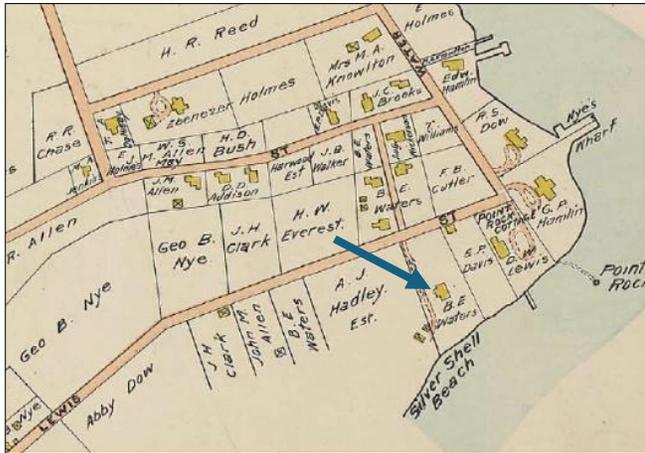
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An article that appeared in the *Boston Globe* in 1893 provides evidence that Silvershell Beach had become a popular resort amenity by the late 19th century. "Silvershell" was applied not only to the beach itself, but to the larger area around Water Street where imposing summer homes were being built:

"Rev. John Brooks and family of Springfield are at a Silver Shell beach cottage.....Silver Shell beach is coming to the front as a bathing beach. Real estate and cottage owners in that section have taken to erecting new bath houses and popularizing it as a bathing resort. D.W. Lewis of Boston has bought an acre plot at Silver Shell beach and will erect a fine summer residence there for occupancy another season."²



In 1882 the Rev. John C. Brooks had built a summer home north of Silvershell Beach at the corner of Water and Allen Streets (1 Allen Street, Rev. John C. Brooks House, MRN.304). The Lewis house at 2 Lewis Street (ca. 1895, Point Rock Cottage/David W. Lewis House, MRN.158) was built on the waterfront just east of Silvershell Beach.

The Town of Marion acquired the beach property in three transactions, starting with the acquisition of a parcel stretching from the southeast side of Front Street to the sea from Franklin and Jane Hobbs in 1932.³ That purchase was followed in 1939 by the acquisition of a parcel west of Front Street from Horatio C. Allen of New Bedford. Horatio Allen, a physician, was the son of Lizzie W.R. Allen and John Allen, active players in the Marion real estate market in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁴ The balance of land, comprising two parcels east of the second parcel, was purchased by the Town

1903 map. Arrow shows former Hobbs house.

in 1955 from the executors of the estate of Jane W. Hobbs. The latter purchase included a 1923 license for a pier.⁵

In his 2008 *Picture Postcard History of Marion*, Pete Smith provides a concise recent history of the beach:

"Prior to 1953, Silvershell was a small, rocky, unimproved beach with only a crumbling wharf used by fishermen and intrepid swimmers. In 1953, the Town set out to improve the Silvershell area. Stone jetties were set along the northern and southern boundaries and truckloads of sand were brought in. In 1954, Hurricane Carol pummeled the Hobbs House, and in April, 1955, the Town voted the sum of \$30,000 to purchase the ruined house and 7.67 acres on which it stood."

The Hobbs House noted by Smith is shown on the 1903 map at left with the blue arrow. It was sold by Emma Waters, the widow of Benjamin E. Waters, to Franklin W. Hobbs in 1910.⁶ Smith continues, "With this acquisition, Silvershell Beach took on the proportions we know today. Almost miraculously, the much-improved beach was being enjoyed by swimmers and sunbathers by the summer of 1955."

An unreferenced, undated newspaper clipping in the collection of the Sippican Historical society shows a photograph of the groundbreaking for a new bathhouse located at the former site of the Hobbs property referred to above. The photograph appears to date to the 1960s, suggesting that the current bathhouse may have replaced an earlier structure in a similar location.

Silvershell Beach is used today for swimming, boating, picnicking, and general recreation.

² *The Boston Globe*, Boston, MA, July 30, 1893.

³ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 1630, Page 86, May 19, 1932.

⁴ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 1779, Page 113, March 9, 1939.

⁵ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 679, Page 370, June 29, 1955.

⁶ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 1045, Page 119, Jan. 1, 1910.

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View east from boat launch. Parking area at left behind wood bollards.



Bath house, south elevation.



Recreation area and playground.