

G.H. Riverside Park

NL river park sets perfect stage for picnic

By EILEEN McNAMARA
Day Staff Writer

New London. For Robert Paul, Saturday's festivities at Riverside Park was like stepping back in time. With kids swarming around, hot dogs cooking on open grills and music from a live band, the day-long celebration of the Yale-Harvard Regatta reminded Paul of 50 years ago when he was a lifeguard at Riverside. "Oh, the park was beautiful then, just beautiful," the 69-year-old city resident said.

The newly-refurbished Riverside Park was selected this year as the site for the all-day activities that accompanied the 131st annual Yale-Harvard Regatta on the adjacent Thames River. The picnic was one of many events being held in New London as part of the city's 350th anniversary celebration this year.

Scores of people roamed the wooded hillsides of Riverside Park, taking part in historical re-enactments, listening to oral histories, enjoying hot dogs and hamburgers, and playing games.

Like Paul, Liz Traggis of New London remembers when Riverside was a popular park and swimming place. Years ago, she said, special trains ran along the tracks near the river, bringing regatta spectators to the park.

With the high hillside that overlooks the Thames River, Riverside was one of the best places in the city to take in the crew races, she said.

"It's New London's best kept secret," she said.

Riverside is no secret for 8-year-old Jessica Crandall and her brother, Robert, 6. The two come frequently, accompanied by their sitter, Holly Ford.

On Saturday, Ford, the Crandalls, Cody Matthews, 3, and Tanya Henderson, 10, sat on a stone wall overlooking the river, eating the picnic fare. Later, the group walked down to the small beach at the far end of the park for a swim.

At the other end of the park, Royal Sheely, outfitted in the garb of a Highlands Scotsman, pointed at a Colonial map with his foot-long dirk while he explained to bystanders the role Scottish regiments played in local history.

Nearby, a half-dozen people sat on a long, low stone wall under a spreading maple tree and listened while



■ Bill Walach, far left, plays mandolin for the Please & Thank You String Band at Riverside Park in New London Saturday.

■ Russ Gigliotti, who was born and raised near Riverside Park, reads the regatta program at the park.

Skip Welsenburger
The Day

Wade Stoner, dressed in a Colonial-era outfit, explained what life was like for early settlers.

Both men are members of the Quoketaug Rangers of Pawcatuck. The group does historical re-enactments and on Saturday demonstrated hatchet throwing, musket firing and archery.

For history buffs, oral histories were presented by the Good Old Days, a local group.

A number of childrens' activities were held at the park's pavilion, including giant bubble-making, pony rides, face-painting and story telling. There was also a llama for petting.

Foxwoods Resort Casino donated the food that was cooked on open grills and sold to the crowd. Workers from Citizens Savings Bank volunteered as cooks.

Music was provided by groups like The Sea Notes Barbershop Chorus, The Silver Coronets and Please & Thank You.

Dorothy Leib, co-chairwoman of the 350th Anniversary Committee, said the turnout was impressive.

"I'm very pleased with the number of families that are here today and all the children who turned out. New London is about a mix of people and we certainly have a mix of people here today." ■

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