Many Native American relics were unearthed. Waterford Week – a 10-day annual summer celebration in its 30th year. See www.WaterfordCT.org.

East Lyme Day – mid-July weekend day each year. Vendors on Main Street and fireworks display. Check the Town’s website www.eltownhall.com.

Kayak Regatta – Last Saturday in August each year sponsored by Beckwith Shipyard (Early 1800’s)

Single-Rail track first came through Niantic in 1852.

Beckwith Shipyard - Revolutionary War era

Golden Spur Amusement Park - Site of the World Famous Diving Horses (1905-1924). (See pictures of these horses diving from a 20’ tower in Tri-town Foods on Rt. 161).


Beckwith Shipyard (Early 1800’s)

Oswegatchie Hills (Known earlier as Sargeant’s Head) – Proposed as a Nature Preserve. Possibly the last mile of undeveloped waterfront in Southern Connecticut.

Old Quarry Dock for Barges (1819) - Serviced a granite quarry in Oswegatchie Hills which provided granite for several famous buildings, many in New York City.

Saunders Point (1650) - One of the oldest points of settlement in East Lyme. Inhabited by the Nehantics for thousands of years prior to white settlers.

Pine Grove (1800’s) - Developed by white settlers originally as a religious tent colony. Also inhabited by the Nehantics prior to white settlers.

Old Stone House (1815) - Built after the 1815 hurricane (On hill behind Bayreuther’s Boat Yard).

Land surrounding Smith Cove - Many Native American relics were unearthed here.

National Guard Camp - Active for about 110 years.

White Storrs House - Site of skirmish in 1781 between the militia and local residents trading with Long Island.

Boats Inc. Property - Site of the home of Avery Smith, developer of Niantic Village.

Railroad tracks - Single-Rail track first came through Niantic in 1852.

Site of Rope Ferry - Operated in the Colonial Period.

Land along east shore – Running south from Keeny Cove almost to Rope Ferry Road was known as the “Wigwams.” Tradition has it that the Nehantics wintered in the Wigwam woods. Several skeletons were washed out of the bank during different Hurricanes; four were found in 1944 as covered in The New London Evening Land along east shore.

Trolley Trestle (1905 - 1924) - Trolley ran between Amusement Park and New London.

Beckwith Shipyard - Revolutionary War era

The Nehantics

The first people who called the Niantic River area home, the Nehantics, were direct descendants of the original humans who arrived in the Americas an estimated 15,000 to 18,000 years ago. The first evidence of human life on the Niantic River dates back 12,000 years. It is generally believed that the ancestors of the Nehantics followed the mammoth, mastodon, bison, elk and other large and small game north to this region as the glaciers retreated. The “Western Nehantics,” so named because they settled on the west side of the Pawcatuck River, lived in villages that dotted the landscape from there to the Connecticut River. There is evidence of substantial settlements along both sides of the Niantic River at such places as Saunders Point, Pine Grove and Mago Point. They subsisted on scallops, oysters and both hard and soft shelled clams that the women and children gathered from the Niantic River and Bay. Men caught striped bass, bluefish, tautog, sheepshead, tomcod, sturgeon and estuarine fishes. It is known that they traveled as far as Fishers and Long Islands in their dugout canoes and they caught porpoises, pilot whales, seals, black sea bass, lobsters, sandbar sharks and skates. There is also evidence that they grew corn, beans and squash and hunted wild fowl.

Shellfish and Other Sea Creatures

The Niantic River is probably best known for its Bay Scallops. After record harvests in the years between 1930 and 1950, a marked decrease prompted the Shellfish Commission to stop its scallop harvest licensing program. The exact cause of this decline is unknown. Different theories look to poor water quality, lack of eelgrass or other submerged surfaces for scallop larvae to attach to and over-harvesting of first-year scallops prior to their ability to spawn.

Other shellfish are found here also. The soft-shell clams in the sandy beaches, scarce razor clams in the bare flats, hard-shell clams in deeper water and the mussels attached to rocks and pilings join the occasional oyster to round out the shellfish crowd. Also found are: Spider and green crabs (a major predator of scallops), drills (the snails that drill holes through the shells of scallops, clams and oysters to eat them), and two species of jellyfish (red in the early Spring and a colorless species in the summer).

In addition to the fish mentioned in the Nehantic section above, winter flounder travel into the river each year to spawn. Summer flounder (fluke), sea robins, toadfish, puffers, American eels, silversides, anchovies and the occasional sea horse also call the Niantic home.

Birds

From mid-fall to early spring, Bald Eagles, which winter in the lower Connecticut River valley, periodically fly over to visit the Niantic River and give the hardy kayaker a wonderful surprise. In the Spring and Summer months, the beautiful Osprey, or Fish Hawk, can be heard singing their soft calls as they soar over the river, looking for their prey. Many other coastal fishing birds, including the majestic Great Blue Heron, White Egrets, Cormorants and the small, but spunky Kingfishers, can be found along the shores. Swans, geese, and many species of ducks also call the Niantic River home. Many staying through the winter. SAFETY NOTE: Please do not feed the birds of the Niantic River. Feeding wild birds encourages dependent behavior, changes their diet and otherwise interferes with their part in the natural food chain. Also, swans and geese can be very aggressive if approached, especially if they have young nearby. Please keep a respectful distance.

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Coastal wetlands, a fragile transitional zone between marine and terrestrial environments, have significant economic and ecological value. They are the most productive ecosystems known, providing nutrients and habitats that support the entire coastal ecosystem. Most of the Nation’s coastal commercial and recreational fisheries depend upon wetlands for spawning, hatching, and nursery activities. Coastal wetlands also play vital roles as habitats for wildlife, waterfowl, and migratory birds.

The Niantic River forms the political boundary between the towns of East Lyme and Waterford. Several small local streams empty into the Niantic River, the largest of which is Latimer Brook. The river has historically supported healthy populations of marine animals, like shellfish, crustaceans, and finfish. In past years, the Niantic River supported extensive eelgrass beds. Eelgrass serves as a nursery for many marine species and an important sanctuary for marine animals, particularly as a refuge for the juveniles of many species.