Pull and Be Damned Point
Goat Island

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Pull-And-Be-Damned Point on Goat Island.

by Jim Cerny

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Pull-And-Be-Damned Point (PABD) is at the easterly end of Goat Island where the ledge runs out toward the green no. 9 channel marker. Before ledge modifications were made, you could row (pull) with all your might and not go anywhere (be damned). While the point is not named on any current maps, it is retained as the name of a social club on the island (the red cottage). In 1900, in a display of false modesty, the *Portsmouth Herald* once referred to it as Profanity Point!

Coincident with plans for the now-famous removal of Henderson's Point that projected from the Shipyard shore at a sharp bend in the Piscataqua channel — a much-needed navigation improvement — there was also a study by the U.S. Army Engineers for the removal of Pull-And-Be-Damned Point, shown on maps at the time as Goat Island Ledge. But in 1899 the Army Engineers concluded the removal was not justified, that Henderson's Point was the real problem and it was blown up in a spectacular explosion in 1905, after much preliminary excavation with coffer dams. It was not until channel improvements were made in the 1990s that part of PABDP was removed.

Unfortunately some people think PABDP is another name for Henderson's Point and this misinformation is kept alive by the narration on the *M/V Thomas Laighton* cruises and by Dennis Robinson's website.

The symbol that looks like an exclamation mark on the 1882 map is the channel marker buoy, at the approximate location of the prominent no. 9 green lighted buoy today.

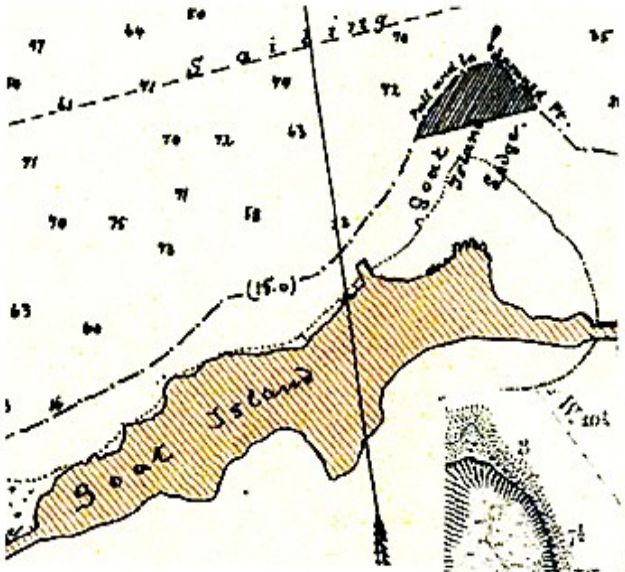
Left: U.S. Army Engineers map of 1882, with shaded area showing the proposed removal of PABDP. The exclamation mark is the channel marker. Depths are in feet. Henderson's Point is in the upper left, part of the Shipyard.

Above: Channel marker showing that the ebb tide still runs hard off PABDP. *(Jim Cerny photo)*

Edmund C. Tarbell (1862–1938)
Pull and Be Damned Point, ca 1904.
Oil on canvas
Private collection

There is some confusion as to the naming of the two points seen in the background at the left and right sides of this dark scene. According to an Army Corps of Engineers map of 1899. "Pull and Be Damned Point" is not the same as "Henderson's Point." Pull and Be Damned Point also can be seen in an 1866 map, noted near Goat Ledge as "No. 9."

In this painting, Pull and Be Damned Point can be seen on the left side of the image and the larger Henderson's Point on the right. Portsmouth's North Church is just visible on the horizon. Both points were considered dangerous to boats traveling through that part of the river, especially when it was at full ebb.

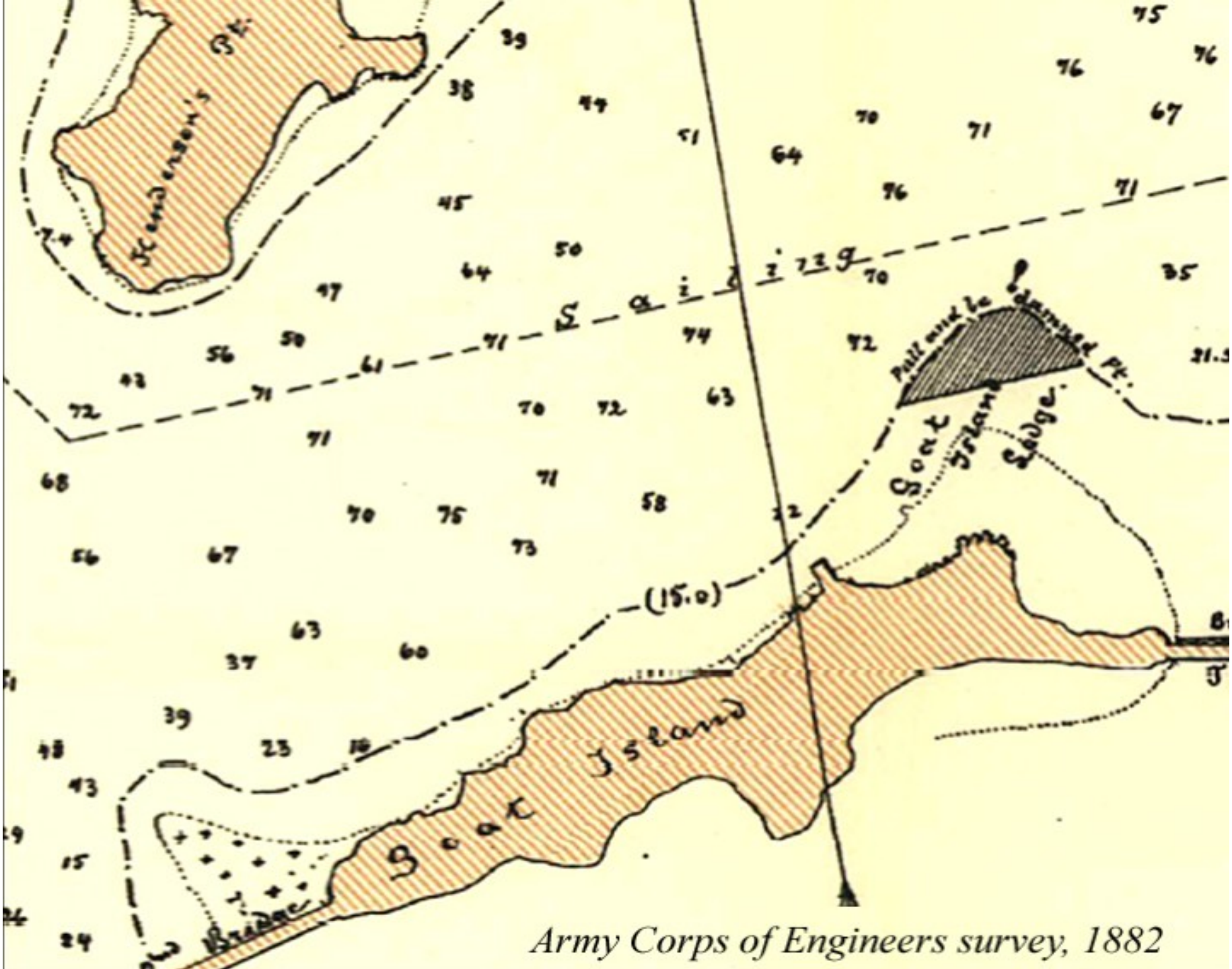


Left: Army Corps of Engineers map showing the Piscataqua River and Goat Island, 1899. Courtesy of Saltines, March 2009. www.ryefeflections.org

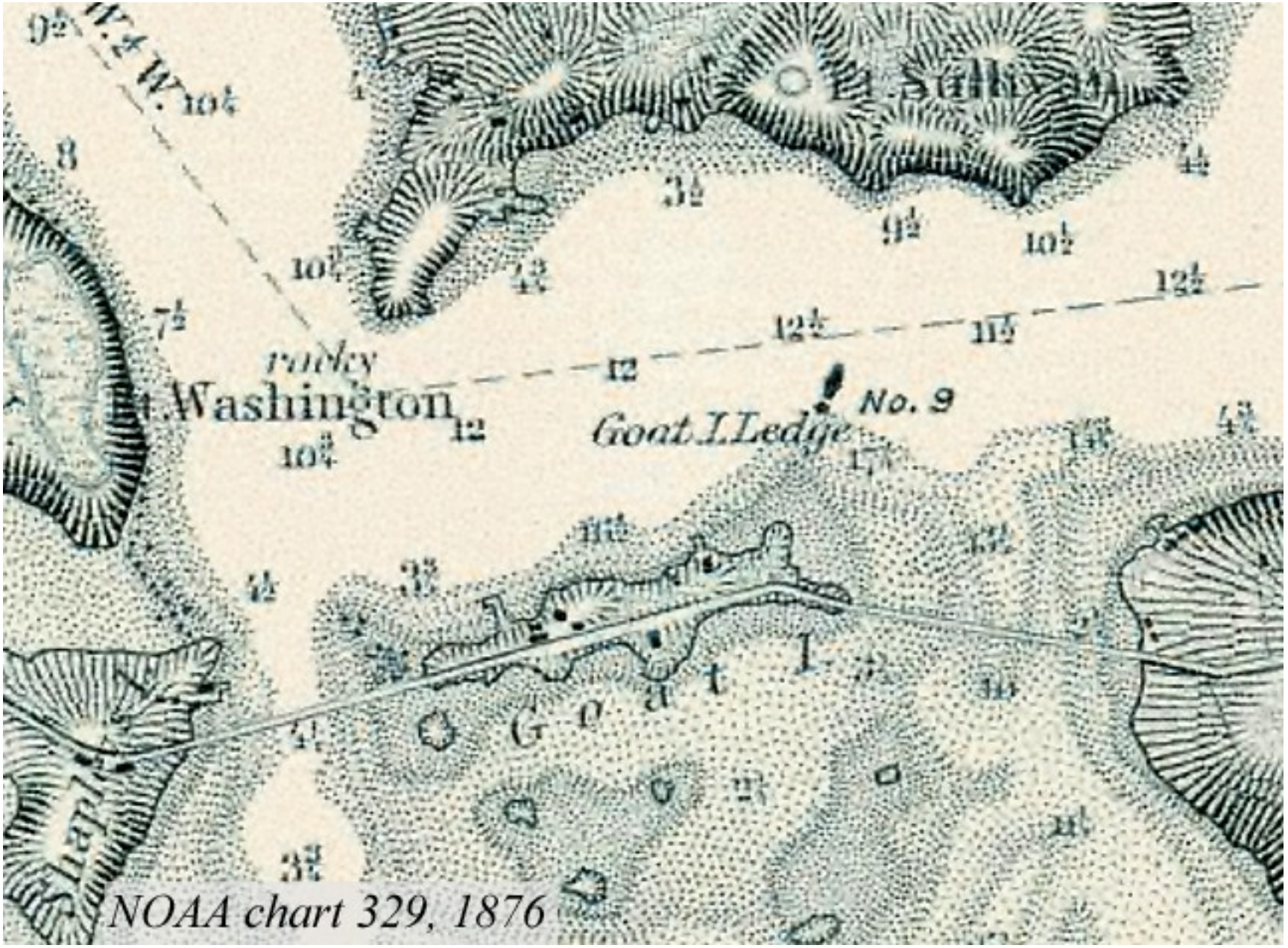
Below: Map of Goat Island showing the Piscataqua River and Kittery, 1866. Courtesy of Saltines, March 2009. www.ryefeflections.org

Detail of Edmund C. Tarbell (1862–1938), *Pull and Be Damned Point*, ca. 1904. Oil on canvas. Private collection.

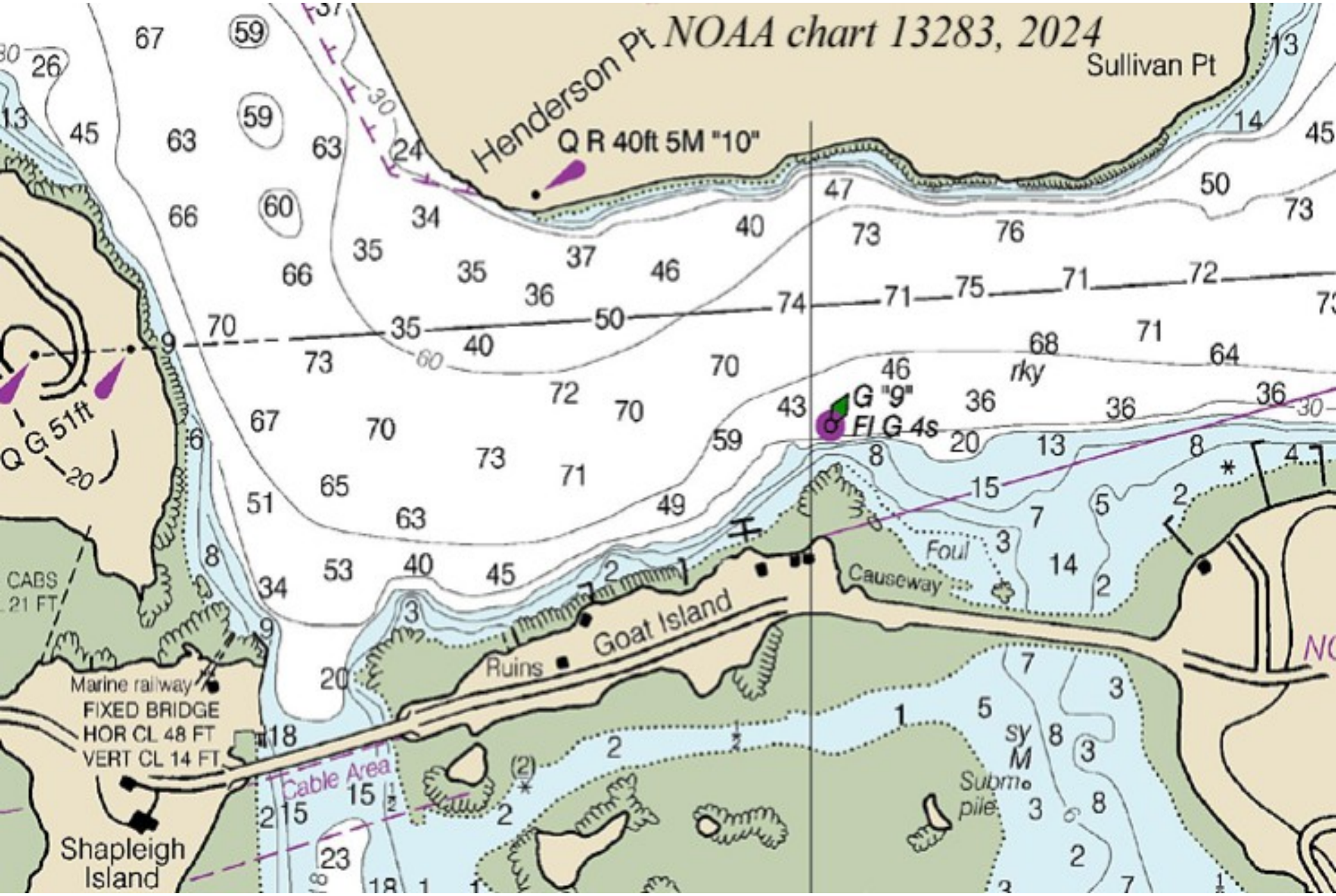
Green no. 9 buoy, tide running hard.



Army Corps of Engineers survey, 1882



NOAA chart 329, 1876


NOAA chart 13283, 2024
Henderson Pt
Sullivan Pt
Q R 40ft 5M "10"
G "9"
Fl G 4s
Q G 51ft
Goat Island
Ruins
Causeway
Foul
Cable Area
Marine railway
FIXED BRIDGE
HOR CL 48 FT
VERT CL 14 FT
Shapleigh Island
CABS
21 FT
Submo
pile

PROFANITY POINT.

Government Officers Want to Chance the Name But Not the Obstruction.

A special despatch from Washington to the Manchester Union says:

Representative Cyrus Sulloway of New Hampshire has just had his fondest hopes blasted For years he has had a hobby—the improvement of Pull-and-be-Damned point in Portsmouth harbor. During all this time he has pulled for the improvement and the final answer given him is much like the most emphatic word in the picturesque name of the obstruction. A report filed by the engineer officers, with an elaborate map attached, is to the effect that Pull-and-be-Damned point does not merit an outlay of government money for its removal.

In the course of the long crusade government officers have tried to call the obstruction Goat Island ledge, but Sulloway protested vociferously against the changes made in his bill and finally succeeded in securing the official sanction for the use of the hyphenated title. But that is about all he did succeed in doing. The point will remain where it is and vessels unfortunate enough to bump into it may pull and be blessed.

Lieut. Charles Keller, of the engineer corps, who made the examination, says in part:

Lieut. Charles Keller, of the engineer corps, who made the examination, says in part:

"The obstruction at this point is a submerged ledge which extends from Goat island into the Piscataqua river opposite Fort Sullivan on Seavey's island.

"The average distance from low water line at Goat island to the thirty foot contour on the ledge is about 300 feet, while the channel width between the thirty foot contours on the ledge and at Seavey's island is shown on the coast survey chart to be about 575 feet. The channel is, moreover, straight for a quarter of a mile above and over a mile below Pull-and-be-Damned point. Personal inquiry among persons interested in navigation fail to disclose any need or demand for a better channel than now exists.

"The removal of Pull-and-be-Damned point would not in itself improve existing conditions, since any real difficulty to navigation in this neighborhood is caused by the necessity of making a sharp change of direction above Pull-and-be-Damned point, in order to clear the projecting point of Seavey's island.

"The locality is therefore not deemed worthy of improvements by the United States, and no estimates are submitted."