

**NHHS: THE NEW HAMPSHIRE SEACOAST AND OLYMPIC OIL REFINERY**  
**Comments of Nancy P. Sandberg April 10, 2014**

In late summer of 1973 many of my Durham Point neighbors and I became suspicious of the stories and the money being offered for our land by men in dark suits, driving dark cars. We formed the citizens group Save Our Shores. I was a 27 year old Durham housewife; my husband taught science at nearby Exeter high school; and our daughter Betsy was 4 years old. As president of SOS, I was suddenly thrust into a terrifying whirlwind. (#1 You can see in this slide how widespread were the land options — we knew they were up to no good.) Our fledgling organization, along with a start up community newspaper named Publick Occurrences, were determined to discover who and what was behind the mysterious land dealings. In early October Publick Occurrences broke the story with the discreet, yet startling headline, "Oil Refinery on Durham Point?" This forced Gov. Meldrim Thomson and Olympic Refineries to reveal their plan way ahead of their schedule.

And a most frightening and overwhelming plan it was! (#2) Olympic had secured options on over 3000 acres of land to build a 400,000 barrel per day refinery, the world's largest. Many storage tanks would connect to a pipeline across Great Bay, Pease Air Force Base and Portsmouth, through Rye and her beaches to a Supertanker transshipment facility at the Isles of Shoals--not to mention vast numbers of trucks and railcars to carry away the refined products. Driving Olympic's proposal, was the political will of the Governor backed by the power of the State, the Manchester Union Leader, the state's most powerful newspaper, and the Arab oil embargo. Such forces struck terror in the hearts of Durham citizens contemplating a defense of their town and way of life. (#3 This SOS poster with the Trojan horse symbolizes the plight of seacoast communities in the face of the many powerful forces against them)

Because the Durham Selectmen felt compelled to remain neutral regarding Olympic for fear of a lawsuit, it fell to SOS to defend the town's zoning ordinance and to mount the opposition to the plan for Durham and the seacoast.

Within the young organization, the Executive Board took a crash course on the oil industry, developed a position statement, met with the news media, wrestled with legal and zoning issues, networked with other seacoast citizen groups, and geared up for an Informational Meeting in early December.

Our plan was to mount the battle on three fronts; local, legislative, and federal. We had to convince people in Durham and the seacoast that the refinery was a bad idea. We had to prevent the state from stepping in and we had to head off federal approval of the project. Our strategy was to put all efforts toward winning the local battle first. Without victory in Durham Town Meeting the rest would be lost.

Save Our Shores believed the more people knew about the proposal, the more they would reject it. (#4 This is just one sample of getting the information out) The chair of our Technical Committee assembled a team of twenty experts from fifteen different fields who volunteered hundreds of hours of their own time to produce detailed technical reports on all impacts of refineries, supertanker ports, and downstream petrochemical industries on a community.

But the information wasn't going to do us any good unless it got to the people. And that's where the Chair of our Outreach Committee came in, organizing, literally, hundreds of volunteers to get the issues into the public's consciousness. (#5 Here I am with my daughter Betsy holding a petition that ran the length of Main St. with over 4000 signatures) They delivered information

flyers to residents, mobilized SOS speakers armed with petitions and pamphlets at every club meeting and every community event in Durham and the seacoast.

The press and TV crews loved the story because it was full of conflict. I'll never forget the day Aristotle Onassis flew over Durham in a helicopter. A group of enthusiastic local teenagers had put huge colored letters in the snow with the messages "SOS" and "NO REFINERY" and "ARI GO HOME". Boston Channel 5 was interviewing me in the back field when his helicopter flew a few hundred feet over us. It was quite dramatic! As I say, the news media were drawn to the story and this was to our benefit. Publick Occurrences, was invaluable to SOS covering not only the dramatic events but printing lengthy technical reports. This was long before computers and the internet. Spreading the word was slow with mimeo -graphs and dial phones. The news media helped us explain why Durham and the NH seacoast was no place for a refinery and a supertanker port.

Months of research and planning culminated in the December 8th, SOS information meeting. A local church was packed with citizens and press, with standing room only. Citizens were hungry for information. (#6) From the facts presented came the startling revelation that a refinery would not be taxable, as it is a machine. Contrary to Olympic's promises, it became clear that the projected tax revenues from the proposal and employment opportunities for New Hampshire workers were inflated. The specialized labor to build and operate the refinery would come from other parts of the country rather than from the local labor pool. Seacoast citizens came to realize that the fishing and tourism industries would suffer, not from massive oil spills, but from chronic oil spillage. More importantly in light of national security issues, the entire project would increase the nation's dependence on foreign, imported oil, controlled by the Shah of Iran!

Following the success of SOS's Information Meeting that shattered the myths about the so-called benefits of an oil refinery, (#7) Olympic rushed to have a meeting of their experts at UNH. The only problem was their experts didn't know NH—or about the insufficiency of fresh water for cooling or the public's resistance to the idea of over-riding the wishes of a town.

In the run up to the 1974 March town meeting, never had there been such a coalescing of community spirit toward a common goal. The citizens of Durham were ready to vote — ready to determine their future. No longer was this just a Durham Point problem. People came from every corner of Durham and the seacoast to help. Our membership swelled to over 7000 members. We all drew strength from the many voices opposed to this inappropriate proposal. In March the message rang clear across the state. (#8) The citizens of Durham voted 1254 to 144 NOT to amend their zoning to permit an oil refinery. All the seacoast communities, with the exception of three, spoke with one voice on town meeting day. NO REFINERY NO! The message was heard all the way to Concord where the legislature would decide whether or not to override the vote in Durham. The year following our victory, Save Our Shores went on to be a positive force in fifteen seacoast communities thru a grant from the U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, tackling the problems common to seacoast towns: solid waste management, recycling, water quality, alternative energy solutions, and protection of the Great Bay.

And here it is forty years later and the story of Save Our Shores and the refinery battle still resonates with people who care about protecting our sense of community, our precious natural resources, and the value of government by the people and for the people. Idealistic? Yes! Worth fighting for back in 1973-74. Worth fighting for today. Now Phyllis will tell the story from her unique perspective. (#9)