

Historical Timeline

Officially opened in 2016, the Park was actually more than fifty years in the making. A Park Plan was prepared by the Yale Urban Design Workshop, a community design center based at the Yale School of Architecture, providing urban design and planning assistance to communities in the region. The principal authors of the Park Plan were Andrei Harwell and Alan J. Plattus and the entire project was initially funded by a grant to the Avery-Copp House Museum from the Panoram Foundation.

Timeline:

- 1966** The Southern Connecticut Regional Planning Agency first proposed the “Marine Heritage Area”; a heritage park centered on the Thames River
- 1987** Statewide Heritage Park System Act approved by the State of Connecticut; Heritage State Park Planning and Selection Study Commissioned by DEEP
- 1988** Final Heritage Park Plan presented; Thames Estuary selected as model study area and more detailed planning commissioned
- 1990** Closure of Naval Underwater Sound Laboratory at Fort Trumbull
- 1990** \$2.6 million in bonding funds approved to fund the Thames River Maritime Heritage Park; first advisory committee formed for Park
- 1991** Second advisory committee formed for Park
- 1994** Thames Maritime Heritage Park Implementation Plan issued by QL Consulting
- 2000** Opening of Fort Trumbull State Park
- 2002** Groton and New London each received \$750,000 of the initial bond funds to establish “gateways” to the Park.
- 2004** Fort Street Landing in Groton Bank completed using Heritage Park funds
- 2009** Five years of negotiations between Navy and State of Connecticut over Nautilus floating dock ownership end without resolution.

2010 Parade Plaza, New London completed using Heritage Park funds; effort for Park began to fade away

2013 Yale Urban Design Workshop retained by Avery-Copp House to gauge interest to reviving and reconceptualizing Thames River Heritage Park

2016 Thames River Heritage Park officially opened as the first heritage park in Connecticut following the City of Groton's acquisition of 2 surplus Navy utility boats, which were refurbished and are maintained and operated by Thames River Heritage Park Foundation. This effort launched the first water taxi service in the area since the 1930s.

2017 Park's first executive director, Amy Perry, was named.

Park introduced history-themed boat tours with Submarines, Battlefields and Betrayers – Military on the Thames.

Park was voted "Best Historical Experience" By *Yankee Magazine*

2018 Thames River Heritage Park signed 17 historic and cultural sites as collaborative partners

2018 Park was awarded "Best Historical Attraction" in the state by *Connecticut Magazine*

2020 The City of Groton acquired a third retired Navy utility boat for the Park's fleet

2021 Park premiered [*Partners in History*](#), a video introduction to heritage sites along the Groton and New London shores of the Thames River and its virtual lectures.

The U.S. Navy accepted the gift of the Nautilus Dock at Submarine Force Library and Museum / Nautilus Museum from the Town of Groton for use by the Park's water taxi.







Park's second executive director, Catherine Foley of MeetingWorks, was contracted in Q3.

2022 The U.S. Navy and the Town of Groton finalized plans and ordered components for the Nautilus Dock.

Park graduated its first cohort of the Thames River Heritage Park Docent Academy, a collaborative, 10-week intensive program designed to promote volunteerism at the heritage sites in the Park

Park presented a 6-part lecture series, “Past and Present Visions of the Thames” featuring CT State Historian Walt Woodward.

Park expanded to 21 heritage sites with the addition of the following:

-  New London Custom House / NL Maritime Society
-  Cedar Grove Cemetery
-  Antientist Burial Ground
-  Hygienic Art
-  Old Town Mill (aka Winthrop Mill)
-  New London Black Heritage Trail

Park implemented a collaborative marketing campaign, *Discover the Thames*, to promote heritage sites and events on the Thames with funding secured from Partner sites and a grant from the Eastern Regional Tourism District. The campaign included digital billboards on I-95, social media, local and state-wide print media ads, radio ads, feature articles, weekly newsletter of events in the Park and the Park’s annual map and guide and tour brochure..

2023 Park graduated its second cohort of the Thames River Heritage Park Docent Academy.

Park hosted its second annual lecture/reception series, *Stories from the Park*, in partnership with the Lyman Allyn Art Museum. This series, which focused on authors who had written books related to stories on the Thames, met with great enthusiasm as indicated by the sold-out crowds and the program evaluations.