



# Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

January 2007

## NATIONAL LAND CONSERVATION CONFERENCE

## RALLY 2006

NASHVILLE • TN

As a new member of the SPA Board it was with great anticipation that I attended "Rally 2006," the National Land Trust Conservation Conference in Nashville, along with colleagues Sanne, Abby, Chris and John. The first challenge was to select the most helpful sessions from the more than 150 offered, many of which seemed especially alluring in view of our individual committee assignments. The late evenings in Nashville were taken

up with stimulating exchanges in which the 5 of us excitedly compared notes and shared dreams about SPA's future role in preserving Little Compton's special character.

The first exercise proved to be my "boot camp." "The Basics of a Successful Conservation Easement Program"—an indispensable, exhaustive (and exhausting!) all-day session (with a 180 page syllabus) that went at breath-taking speed. On Friday, I chose a field trip designed to showcase the benefits of land preservation: "Historic Franklin — Not Anywhere USA." This proved to be an inspiring journey to the rolling hills of verdant Middle Tennessee. Here we met Calvin LeHew, a local businessman and latter-day preservationist, who, in an entrepreneurial fashion, single-handedly rescued from oblivion Franklin's moribund redbrick Victorian downtown and decaying factory complex. Then a spellbinding tour of nearby Carnton by the best-selling author of the *Widow of the South* vividly recreated plantation life and, in lurid detail, the bloody battle of November 1864, when Carrie McGavock, a headstrong planter's wife, first nursed the wounded in her Federal

style house and dedicated the rest of her life to preserving the memory of 1,500 confederate soldiers buried in the family cemetery.

Saturday and Sunday's sessions focused on complex tax law changes, fiscal incentives, and the challenges of performing due diligence in conveying conservation easements. During a lunch session on "Partnering," one mid-westerner explained with disarming modesty how local land trusts staffed by volunteers collaborated to preserve 20,000 acres of bluff along the Upper Mississippi.

*The common theme that emerged from the workshops, talks and viewing the historic fabric of Nashville was the vital importance of preserving our unique heritage and sense of place.*

The message we took home with us was that with the support of the community and in close collaboration with conservation organizations, the precious legacy of the beauty of the land and the richness of the past can be preserved for the coming generations. — Steve Horowitz

## Public Information Event



We are very excited to have Attorney Stephen J. Small coming to give a talk on April 17 at the Stone House Club. Recognized as the national expert on conservation tax law, Small will discuss new conservation easement tax breaks for private landowners that may only be available for a limited time, as explained on the back of this newsletter. Small is

an energetic and engaging speaker whose career has touched on many aspects of land conservation. *Watch for more information.*



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## Letter from the Executive Director

To the hundreds of Little Compton residents and visitors who have supported Sakonnet Preservation Association's mission again this year, our warmest thanks. Your help has been critical in fulfilling SPA's mission of preserving the rural character and natural resources of Little Compton for the lasting benefit of the community.

**Here are some of the many accomplishments made possible by generous donors this year:**

- Thanks to generous landowners, a little over 251 acres have been preserved
- 17 Stewardship Monitors trained at P.T. Marvell Preserve
- Four board members and the Executive Director participated in the National Conservation Conference in Nashville, partially funded by grants from the Rhode Island Foundation and Land Trust Alliance
- Our first Executive Director was hired in April
- A New England Grassroots Environmental Fund grant helped us to defend wetlands
- Scott Millar of the DEM spoke on Conservation Zoning opportunities
- Geoff Dennis spoke on Little Compton's migrating birds
- 18 books on conservation donated to Wilbur School Library

Thanks again to those of you who helped us work towards our 2006 budget goal of \$75,000 in memberships and donations. If you haven't already made a contribution, please help us wrap up our Annual Appeal this winter by sending in your tax-deductible donation. Generous givers like you enable the SPA to preserve and steward Little Compton's precious open spaces.

Another important way you can help SPA is to share your interest in conservation with your friends and neighbors. Tell them about our accomplishments and the importance of land preservation in Little Compton. Together, we will continue our mission, tomorrow and in perpetuity. If you would like a membership package to share with a neighbor, please email me at [ExDir.SPA@verizon.net](mailto:ExDir.SPA@verizon.net) or call the office at 401-635-8800.

Thank you for helping us preserve the magical meadows, wonderful wetlands and rural viewsapes of Little Compton.

**Sanne Kure-Jensen**  
Executive Director

# The Importance of Land Stewardship

When a land trust takes control of a property for conservation purposes, it makes a promise to the property donor to protect and maintain the land according to the agreements between the donor and the trust. No matter how carefully crafted a conservation easement or agreement, it is only the beginning of the protection effort. The trust's ongoing commitment to monitor, defend and enforce the easement or agreement ensures the protection in perpetuity; this is land stewardship.

Sound stewardship includes a clear, legally defensible deed that addresses the concerns and wishes of both the donor and the trust. A specialist, such as a conservation biologist, studies the land and produces a document called the Baseline Document Report. This report documents the land's conservation values, including all ecological, scenic, geological, and other property features. It comprises detailed maps and surveys showing boundaries, road, trails, buildings, streams, etc. Photographs, both aerial and ground, showing the land's condition, allow the monitors to track future changes. Often a management plan for the property is also produced at this time.



*Stewardship Monitors training at the P.T. Marvell Preserve in October 2006.*

These reports provide the basis for land protection, which is carried out by monitoring the property. The Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA) trains its monitors who inspect each of the trust's properties at least once a year. They study the documentation, communicate with the landowners in the case of an easement, and then walk the property. This inspection determines if any changes have taken place inconsistent with the easement. The monitors record any violations and/or changes on the property in a report that is filed along with the other documentation for the property, all of which is copied and stored in safe, fireproof locations. Any violations are taken to the Executive Committee of

the SPA Board of Directors, which is responsible for addressing them. The SPA also maintains its property by mowing fields, controlling invasive species, picking up trash, etc.

Thus land stewardship comes with a cost, and so the SPA has set aside funds to cover the expense of documenting, monitoring, and maintaining the land. It also has set aside funds to address violations, which in extreme situations could include legal action. — *John Farr*



## Sakonnet Preservation Association

YES, I WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A NEW MEMBER.

*Enclosed is my tax deductible membership contribution.*

- Individual Member \$20
- Family Member \$25
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### Sakonnet Preservation Association

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# Sakonnet “Memory Holes:” Traveling in T

In July 1621, Edward Winslow and Stephen Hopkins, two leaders of the recently established Plymouth Colony, set out on the Pilgrims’ first diplomatic mission inland. Their destination was the village of Sowams, in what is today Warren, Rhode Island, to meet with Massasoit, sachem of the Pokanoket Indians. Guided by the English-speaking Indian Squanto, they traveled first to the Indian village of Nemasket, fifteen miles inland from Plymouth, then south along the Taunton River to Mount Hope Bay, home territory of the Pokanokets, a Wampanoag tribe.



Edward Winslow

Along the way “the Englishmen learned that to walk across the land in southern New England was to travel in time,” as author Nathaniel Philbrick writes in his deservedly best-selling recent book, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War*. On their trek from Plymouth to Sowams, Winslow

and Hopkins noticed the abundance of well-maintained circular holes, a foot deep, all along the well-traveled path. These small man-made pits were not just navigational waymarkers, they learned from their Indian companions, but mnemonic landmarks intended “to inform fellow travelers of what had once happened at that particular place so that ‘many things of great antiquity are fresh in memory,’” as Philbrick writes. “Winslow and Hopkins began to see that they were traversing a mythic land, where a sense of community extended far into the distant past.”

I read Philbrick’s passage about the Wampanoag’s “memory holes” with particular interest. In July 2005 I spent a stimulating day with the author, traversing Little Compton and Tiverton in search of sites related to some of the events and personalities he describes so vividly in *Mayflower*. Also accompanying us that day was Fred Bridge, a member of the board of directors of the Little Compton Historical Society

and a keen student of local history (and an active SPA volunteer). I felt a certain kinship with Edward Winslow and Stephen Hopkins. Philbrick’s fascinating observations challenged me to examine the historical dimensions of a familiar landscape through new eyes.

Philbrick had recently completed a draft of *Mayflower*, so he was traveling the region to test the geographical accuracy of his narrative. His book depicts the years between the Pilgrims’ 1620 arrival in Plymouth and the 1676 conclusion of King Philip’s War, the brief but bloody conflict when the English colonists effectively wrestled the region’s lands from the Native Americans of southeastern New England. The events of three-plus centuries ago, especially those of King Philip’s War, were fresh in his mind as we toured the local landscape.

Our explorations focused on two local figures who figure prominently in *Mayflower*, Benjamin Church and Awashonks. Church, the original English settler of Sakonnet, is the protagonist of Philbrick’s chronicle. An Indian-fighter with a conscience — at least by Philbrick’s sympathetic portrayal — he recognized the humanity of his Native

American adversaries, even as he captured and killed them. Awashonks, “squaw sachem” of the Sakonnets, the local Wampanoag tribe, struggled to balance her loyalties between neighboring tribes and Church, with whom the Sakonnets had developed friendly relations. Finally, Awashonks



Captain Benjamin Church

and the Sakonnets cast their lot with Church. That alliance, according to Philbrick, represented the turning point of King Philip’s War.

The three of us visited such places as Wilbour Woods, where Awashonks had maintained a settlement; Sakonnet Point; Treaty Rock Farm, site of the parley between Church and Awashonks; the monument on West Main Road marking the site of Church’s second Little Compton home; and the stretch

# Time across the Little Compton Landscape

of West Main Road further north, near the Friends Meetinghouse, where the aged, corpulent Church in 1718 was thrown from his horse, an accident that led to his death.



King Philip (Metacom)

We prowled Punkatees Neck in Tiverton, trying to imagine the course of the “Pease Field Fight” in July 1675, when Church’s small company of soldiers was drawn into a trap by local Indians. After a running skirmish, Church and his 20 men were pinned down by an estimated 300

Indians during a long, hot afternoon, taking cover behind a stone wall near the shore while they awaited evacuation by boat. As bullets flew, two men at a time ferried by canoe to a sloop anchored offshore. Church, the last man to depart, sprinted straight into the Indians’ gunfire to recover the hat and cutlass he had left near a well. Then, as he dove into the canoe, “a bullet grazed his hair while another splintered the wooden brace against which he’d nestled his chest, but he reached the sloop unscathed.” As Philbrick related this swashbuckling story to Fred and me on the shore of the Sakonnet River, I almost expected to hear the crack of musket fire.

The conclusion of King Philip’s War set the stage for development and settlement of the Sakonnet area by English colonists. Church was among the proprietors of the new town of Little Compton who began to divide the lands chartered by the Plymouth Colony and purchased from local Indians. The process of land division continued for almost three hundred years. Then, in the latter decades of the 20th century, a new set of concerns began to energize the community, altering and in some respects reversing the land-ownership trends set into motion in the 17th century.

By the 1960s and 1970s, “conservation,” “environment,” “ecology,” and “preservation” had become new watchwords of

public policy and private activism, nationally and locally. In Little Compton, private organizations like SPA, the Nature Conservancy, and the Audubon Society of Rhode Island became active in acquiring property for conservation purposes, as did public agencies such as the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust and the land-preservation departments of Rhode Island state government. Firmly established American traditions and principles of private property began adapting to new, hybrid legal forms of land ownership, such as development rights and conservation easements, in which property owners share rights and responsibilities with these private and public organizations. Locally, the cumulative result of this activity has been dramatic and swift, on the scale of historical events. Approximately 2,770 acres of Little Compton’s entire land area of more than 13,800 acres are dedicated to some form of legally permanent conservation.



Benjamin Church homestead site marker on West Main Road.

But these significant changes in land ownership and land management raise a new set of challenges for our own generation which will echo down the years. We can hope that the community will be a more peaceful place than

the one depicted in Philbrick’s intense and sometimes disturbing book. But will the efforts of today’s conservationists result in a future landscape that resembles a theme park, frozen in time, representing the romanticized image of a community as it never really existed? Or will that landscape provide a dynamic, evolving environment where people of all sorts can live, earn a livelihood, and play? And what “memory holes” will we leave for our successor stewards of this terrain to discover and puzzle over, generations and centuries hence?

Larry Anderson

Interim President of the Sakonnet Preservation Association

## 2006 SPA Annual Meeting: A Year of Accomplishment, to the Tune of Bird Song

Members and guests gathered at the Stone House on July 8th for the SPA's Annual Meeting. Outgoing President Heather Steers thanked Board members for their service and the 302 individuals and families who contributed to SPA this past year. She acknowledged the major gifts of 33 named donors and expressed appreciation for the work of the other Little Compton Land Trusts. She thanked Janet Espo, SPA's book-keeper, for her service, and presented SPA's new executive director, Sanne Kure-Jensen. Ms. Steers reviewed the year's highlights, including the protection of 17.8 additional acres of land in Little Compton, bringing the total number of acres SPA either owns or holds the development rights to or a conservation easement on to 332. Donors of conservation easements this past year include Ted Truscott, Anne and Peter Ransom, Trina and Jeff Sherer, Adelaide Sherer Vander Salm and Sidney Tynan.

Ms. Steers described the national Land Trust Alliance's creation of an accreditation and training program designed in response to IRS and Congressional scrutiny of the land trust sector. The SPA Board voted in January to "commit to adopt LTA's new training curriculum in preparation for accreditation and to apply for accreditation when it is deemed appropriate." She announced that SPA paid The Nature Conservancy \$100,000 for its share of the purchase of the P.T. Marvell Preserve conservation easement and described new internal SPA policies.

Retiring Board members Alli Brady, Gerry Billings, Tuck Buffum, Karen Richmond and Nick Long were thanked and a motion was approved to appoint the following Board members for the upcoming year: Larry Anderson, Heather Steers, Terry Tierney, Sheila Mackintosh, Chris Burns, Abigail Brooks, Rosemary Colt, John Farr, Steve Horowitz, Piper Hawes, Jana Porter, Richard Ross, Jack Selvaggio, Gail Thacher, Sarah Whitehead and Bob Wolter. Nick Long and Karen Richmond have joined the Advisory Council. Officers are Bob Wolter, Treasurer, Jana Porter, Secretary, Terry Tierney, Vice President, and Larry Anderson, Interim President. Chris Burns,

Sheila Mackintosh and Abigail Brooks will also serve on the Executive Committee. Sheila Mackintosh thanked Ms. Steers for her years of service to the Board and for her contributions as President. Ms. Steers will continue to serve on the Board as a member of the Land Protection Committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 P.M., when master avian photographer and Little Compton resident Geoff Dennis presented a slide show of more than 160 species, many of them in his own backyard. It seemed especially fitting to celebrate our local birds at a gathering devoted to the appreciation and preservation of their habitat, the open spaces of Little Compton. — *Rosemary Colt*

## Education Initiatives

SPA continues to pursue different ways to offer or sponsor conservation education for local school children. Renewing our efforts from last school year, SPA has purchased additional outstanding nature books for the Wilbur & McMahon School. Encouraging children to appreciate their natural surroundings is one effective means of ensuring the future of land conservation. We hope that the more than 38 titles purchased will inspire novice naturalists to enjoy and respect the world around them. For a full list of the newly acquired books from the last 2 years, please contact the SPA office.



*Cleaning up on Earth Day.*

Another continuing project is SPA's participation in the school's Earth Day celebration. We will again be using our Ponderosa Pond property as the focus of the day's program. This year, however, the activity was motivated by a workshop, *Discovering Community Treasures through Questing*, attended by board members Piper Hawes and Sarah Whitehead at the 40th Annual New England Environmental Education Association Conference in September. The mission of NEEEA is to promote quality environmental education across New England in partnership with local environmental organizations.

**Education Initiatives (continued)**



*Bringing history to life at the town cemetery quest.*

Questing was born out of a 150-year old English tradition called “letterboxing.” In the adaptation highlighted in the workshop, children and adults work together to follow clues that lead to a community “treasure” such as a natural site (farms, wetlands, woods) or a cultural site (historic building,

cemetery). Each quest is made up of 3 parts — clues, which teach participants how to “see” a community story, a map guiding them to the particular “treasure,” and a treasure box complete with a story about the site.

*The quests foster a sense of place and strengthen relationships between schools and the natural and cultural heritage of their communities, as well as building bridges across the generations by partnering children with community adults and civic groups.*

The workshop has already led to two school quests done by 6th graders at the town cemetery and the Wilbor House led by Marjory O’Toole of the Little Compton Historical Society. In April we will lead students on a quest to discover the distinct landscape and features of Ponderosa Pond.



*Questing at the Wilbor House.*

In addition to this initiative, all 2nd grade students at the school will be traveling in May to the Rhode Island Audubon’s Environmental Nature Center in Bristol for a program on *Life in the Wetland*. This hands-on outdoor field exploration in the Center’s 28-acre wildlife refuge will help the students to understand the importance of wetlands to both humans and wildlife. The students will use nets and scientific equipment to examine the creatures of the wetlands. — Piper Hawes

## A New Land Donation

It is always exciting when Sakonnet Preservation’s Land Protection Committee hears from a property owner who would like to keep his or her land just as it is, whether it is woodland, pasture, wetland, or seaside. Cindy Sheldon wanted to do just that: preserve the rural character of her property off West Main Road. The lot contains holly trees, shad bush, blue flag, asters, as well as wobbly stone walls that weave through the swamp maples. Red-tail hawks floated overhead when I walked the property with her.

This December, Ms. Sheldon donated her 3.6 acre lot to the Sakonnet Preservation Association. The lot abuts several other protected properties. Bumble Bee Farm, for instance, was protected in 2001 by The Nature Conservancy and the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust. Stetson Eddy donated a lot to SPA in 1985 and another abutting lot in 2002. Contiguous protected properties such as these provide better habitat and undisturbed corridors for the birds, reptiles and mammals.

The Sheldon parcel is also close to the headwaters of Dunderly Brook, the stream and watershed that flows to the Ponderosa, under Meeting House Lane, through Wilbor Woods and into Briggs Marsh. Protection of this watershed has always been a priority for SPA because Little Compton residents are totally dependent on water recharge areas and well water.

Ms. Sheldon’s donation is another contribution by a generous citizen, helping to ensure that the town’s character stays rural, its drinking water clean, and that plants, animals, and birds have sufficient living space.

We are so appreciative; thank you, Cindy.

— Sheila Mackintosh



## New Tax Incentives for Land Conservation

This past October several Board members and our Executive Director shared in celebrating landmark legislation when we were fortunate enough to attend the annual Land Trust Alliance Rally in Nashville. Many attendees have been working extensively to clarify and broaden federal legislation regarding tax incentives for conserving land. The fruit of their labors was the passage by Congress and signing by President Bush this past August of a law applying to conservation easements donated in the 2006 and 2007 calendar years.

H.R. 4 substantially increases the amount of deduction that can be claimed on taxes and extends the time over which the deduction can be taken. This legislation not only improves incentives for land conservation, but helps reach landowners of modest means who are "land rich" by allowing for added deductions. Formerly, a donor was allowed a deduction of up to 30% of income in any year for donating a conservation easement. This legislation increases the deduction percentage to

50%. Qualifying farmers and ranchers making a conservation easement donation within these two years may now deduct up to 100% of income. The legislation further extends the time over which the deduction can be taken from 5 to 15 years, allowing a higher percentage of income deduction against the value of the donation.

Ultimately, landowners must work with a tax attorney or accountant to calculate their eligibility for and the extent of their deductions. SPA staff and Board members are available to help potential donors explore how to begin this process, and whether our organization is the appropriate choice for holding an easement on their land. The window of opportunity closes December 31, 2007 unless the legislation is extended by Congress. If you or someone you know is interested in conserving land, the time is ripe. Please call our office or contact a Board member for further information. — *Abigail Brooks*

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**For Information:**  
401.635.8800

*The Sakonnet Preservation Association, a non-profit land trust, is dedicated to preserving the rural character and natural resources of Little Compton for the lasting benefit of the Community.*

**Our Mission**

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