



Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

Fall 2000

Letter from the President

Little Compton's Landscape Can't Be Taken for Granted

*by Larry Anderson
President, Sakonnet Preservation Association*

The New York Times and the Providence Journal-Bulletin have recently carried extensive articles extolling the beauty of Little Compton and the surrounding region. People flock from far and wide to enjoy the pleasures of Little Compton's landscape and natural resources. Some town residents may grumble about increased traffic on our attractive roadways, but the message is clear: the landscape itself is Little Compton's most precious asset, serving as the foundation for both the community's economic wellbeing and its overall quality of life. The owners and employees of many local businesses—farms, vineyards, nurseries, greenhouses, tree farms, fisheries, restaurants, bed-and-breakfasts, art galleries, and gift shops—benefit directly from the conservation of the town's natural and scenic resources. We all depend upon the town's groundwater. And we all enjoy Little Compton's seascapes, beaches, waterfront, open spaces, woodlands, and working farmscapes.

But these assets can't be taken for granted. Members, supporters, and directors of the Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA) have been active during 2000 to promote the cause of thoughtful land conservation in our community:

- Dr. Peter August, a professor in the URI Natural Resources Science Department, gave a lively, well-attended April 27 presentation at the Little Compton

Community Center on the use of Geographic Information System (GIS) computer mapping techniques to identify critical lands for conservation. The SPA, which sponsored Dr. August's talk, hopes to encourage adoption of local GIS capability to support not only our own activities but also those of important boards and offices, such as the Assessors, Building Official, Planning Board, Agricultural Conservancy Trust, and Conservation Commission.

- We initiated a successful spring fund-raising campaign to guarantee repayment of a substantial loan and to establish a new Land Fund. (See article on page 3 for further details.)

- The SPA recently protected a small parcel of land at the corner of John Sisson Road and Pleasant View Drive. A donation from Hi-Temp Specialty Metals, Inc., the lot is bisected by Sisson Brook, which is a source of Tunipus Pond. We are also working with several other property owners who have offered significant donations of land or conservation easements/development rights on parcels throughout Little Compton.

- In May the SPA adopted a two-year "Action Plan," emphasizing three parallel objectives:

- 1) land acquisition
- 2) community outreach and education
- 3) administration and management (Article on pg. 8)

- At SPA's July 11 Annual Meeting at the Stone House Club, many members and friends heard Doug Parker, Director of the Rhode Island Field Office of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), speak about "Land Conservation in Rhode Island." Using examples and maps from other Rhode Island communities, such as Block Island and South Kingstown, Parker described the urgency of the land con-

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servation challenge facing the state. He also discussed some of the successes achieved by Rhode Island's land trusts; and he urged voter support for the \$34-million open space bond issue that appeared on the November 7 ballot.

● In October, the SPA board approved a resolution to adopt the Statement of Land Trust Standards and Practices developed by the national Land Trust Alliance.

● SPA members and directors have participated in workshops conducted by TNC and the Rhode Island Land Trust Council, a recently organized coalition of the state's 42 private and municipal land trusts. These workshops have covered such subjects as negotiations and appraisals, stewardship, and board development. The SPA is also represented on the executive committee of the R. I. Land Trust Council.

● The SPA has recently applied for a matching grant from the Land Trust Alliance to conduct a series of informational workshops on the legal and stewardship aspects of conservation easements.

● Vice-President Luke Wallin has represented the SPA on the Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space Committee, a town board which was reconstituted this fall.

In pursuing these and other activities, the SPA's volunteer directors and members have been working diligently for the benefit of the community. Our "Action Plan" involves a review of the organization's policies, procedures, and operations. We want to ensure that the SPA has the capabilities to adequately manage the property interests it now holds. And we want to pursue future acquisitions in a businesslike and professional manner. In a strong real estate market, some acquisition projects prove to be complex, expensive, and time-consuming. Alternatives we've discussed for meeting these increasing demands include securing office space, retaining paid support staff, and cooperating with other land trusts and nonprofit groups. Any or all of these measures may require a higher level of funding than has been customary for the SPA.

The enthusiasm of Sakonnet Preservation Association members and supporters provides one encouraging indication of the community's appreciation for Little Compton's landscape. But the protection of the town's natural and scenic resources requires the continuing efforts of all concerned citizens.

Our Mission

The Sakonnet Preservation Association, a non-profit trust, is dedicated to preserving the natural heritage of Little Compton for the benefit of the community.

Membership News

We Met our Fundraising Goal!

Thank You!

The Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA) is pleased to announce the success of our recent Land Fund Campaign. Generous supporters have donated more than \$25,000 since May, when the SPA's Board of Directors initiated a fund drive with two goals.

The first goal was to guarantee the prompt and complete repayment of a 5-year, no-interest loan from the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Preservation Commission. Payment of this loan will complete the purchase of 10-acres of the Simone Blanchard farmstead, on the corner of John Dyer and Colebrook roads. This property is located in an area of town that has recently experienced considerable development. The public benefits of this strategically located open-space parcel, including passive recreation and scenic enjoyment, will only grow in significance. Thanks to our committed members and friends, the SPA was able to achieve this first fundraising goal. The SPA added more than \$16,000 to an existing dedicated account to ensure repayment of this loan when due in 2003.

The second goal of our fund drive was to establish the Sakonnet Preservation Association Land Fund. The Land Fund will help the SPA meet acquisition costs for pending and potential donations of land, conservation easements, and development rights. The Land Fund, as it grows, will enable the SPA to compete seriously for matching funds from state, federal, and private sources. Thanks to donors' generosity and their commitment to conservation, approximately \$9,000 has so far been dedicated to the Sakonnet Preservation Association Land Fund.

THANK YOU!!!!!!

Little Compton Voters Support Open Space Bond

By a 3-to-1 margin, Little Compton voters joined other Rhode Islanders in strong support of the \$34-million open space bond on the November 7 statewide ballot. In Little Compton, 76.4% of voters approved the ballot question—an even higher percentage than the 73.4% who supported the measure throughout Rhode Island.

As approved by voters, the five-year land protection program will provide \$10.8 million for the state acquisition program; \$11.4 million for 50-percent matching grants for local parks and conservation land; and \$10.5 million for community recreational development, including a \$1.5 million matching grant for Roger Williams Park and \$3 million for state recreation development projects.

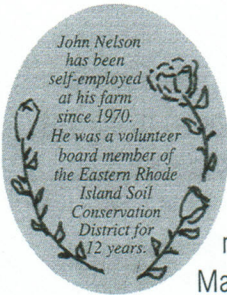
Proponents of the bond issue predicted that the \$34 million will leverage funds from federal, local, and private funding sources to provide \$100 million or more for open space protection over 5 years. The availability of such funding should offer new opportunities to Little Compton land conservation organizations, such as the SPA and the Agricultural Conservancy Trust.

Conservation Booklets Available

Conservation Options: A Landowner's Guide is a useful, readable 55-page booklet published by the Land Trust Alliance. The publication includes basic information about the tools and tax benefits of land conservation, including dollar-and-cents examples. The SPA has a limited number of copies available for interested members and landowners.

If you'd like to receive a copy of Conservation Options, please call 401-635-4615 or write:
Sakonnet Preservation Association, P.O. Box 945
Little Compton, RI 02837

Local Conservationists



One Acre

By John Nelson

At the northeast corner of my farm, where it fronts the Main Road, there is a one-acre lot orphaned by the sale of an adjacent road frontage lot taken from the seven-acre field of which both were once a part. Of the four soil types present on the farm, the Newport silt loam in this parcel is the best; but the lot's small area has cut it out of annual productive use. From about 1930 to 1960 it became an elegant commercial display garden for roses. We still call this lot the Rose Garden but its condition today belies the name. I have used this spot for pasture and for pigs, and I have stored there hay, lumber, telephone poles, gravel, old tires and farm equipment. It is presently a mess of vines, brush and briars, in the midst of which are unusual trees and shrubs and some handsome ordinary ones as well.

In considering a job of restoration on this little field which I have admired, used and abused, I have realized that it is a testing ground, a turning place for the cohesiveness with which I attempt to view my land and to husband it. How we treat things reveals how we treat ourselves. Possibly, by fixing this small enclave at the rim of my ragged empire, I might, flushed with victory, march onto more expansive fields of contest, knowing more than just what to do, but how to get it done and keep it done. My friends in soil conservation would call this a management plan; it is their business. Perhaps they understand best that without management of oneself, there is no hope of order in any other thing. I like to think I understand nature too well: I am unruly and she will always be. I may scratch her surface but she is life itself and doctors her own wounds. My plan for her is particular: hers for herself is infinite.

I like less the location of this one-acre lot

than its prospect, tilted as it is southwest towards the sea, a half-mile distant. Its trees and shrubs are both dense and tall and nearly surround its central meadow. The trees reach out over the grass like bathers at a pond who contemplate immersion. In the night I like to walk along the verge: as are deer, I am a creature of the prospect refuge.* I choose the muscular arching shadow under trees where my sight may play across illuminated grass. Confident of the near at hand I can look off over the fenceline between this wasteland and that crop land. There, dark terra firma begins to dip away to the distant silver sea. By day, I am a roamer of open spaces.

Along the east, a straight stone wall and a colonnade of decrepit sycamore maples fences out what Edward Abbey

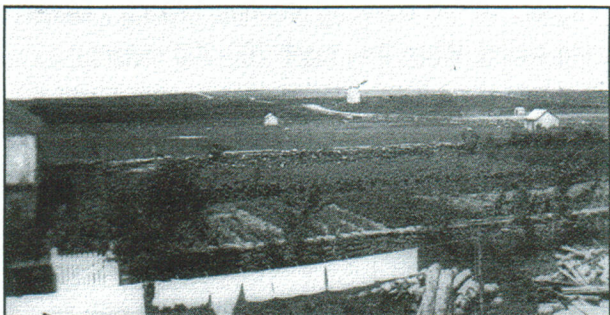
calls "a torrent of gas-guzzling Detroit machinery," which roars to and from Sakonnet Point. This plot may be its own preserve but it is also anonymously on the way to someplace else. In sunlight, birds of many kinds fly about, but their calls are overridden by the harsh white noise of cars whose operators may think they see where they are going but do not see where they are.

In Spring and Summer this place is resplendent with flowering crabapple and ornamental cherry, lilac and hydrangea, daffodil, Solomon's seal, lily of the valley and rambler rose. In thickest green Summer it is most private and contained. After Fall has washed the color from the trees a sere and sodden stillness settles in. No longer unto itself, it seems abandoned and surveyed through its naked interstices by passing light.

I want this square of land to be a stable,



**Prospect refuge. This is a theory that humans evolved in African landscapes where their ancestors lived in trees (refuge) and looked out over the open grasslands (prospect or view) for prey or predator. True or not, it's an interesting perspective from which to consider the landscapes we favor.*



c.1880 View from the back of the house

beautiful place where I can walk in the wooded part as well as in the field. I expect it to be productive. Its maintenance needs to be simple and even partly accomplished through other normal routines, or it may not get done. It is too close to houses and a busy road to be a wild preserve. Because I keep ruminants, a small, close-by grazing lot would be handy. There are few prettier sights than a meadow of trees, shrubs and grass all neatly pruned by resident animals. Modern pasturage is designed to be all steak and potatoes but I favor diversity because it is a smorgasbord from which grazing animals select widely to maintain their health.

So what would cattle do in this lot? They would reach eight feet high and nip away all the foliage and small branches. In hot weather they would stand under this verge, trample everything and fertilize the ground heavily. "Choker" vines and multiflora rose sprouting in the shade would be constantly clipped close to the ground. In the open, cows would crop the grass and woody sprouts to lawn length.

What will it cost in labor and material to set this up? Two days of junk removal and brush chopping will open up the lot. About five days' labor and \$1,300 in fencing will enclose the place securely. Two or three days of plowing, harrowing, seeding with a pasture mix, and cultipacking will smooth and replant the field with perennial forage. Seed will run about \$30. One or two days' labor will remove several competing trees, sever at the ground all vines presently trying to smother trees and remove brush from the seeding operation.

I admire the diversity and distribution of the

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New Members

Yes! I would like to become a member of



Sakonnet Preservation Association

Enclosed is my tax deductible membership contribution.

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$20
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining	\$35
<input type="checkbox"/> Special Gift	\$_____

Please make checks payable to:
Sakonnet Preservation Association

P. O. Box 945
Little Compton, Rhode Island 02837

Name _____

Address _____

Town _____

State _____

Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

The Sakonnet Preservation Association depends on volunteers. Would you like to help? _____yes



Your support helps to insure that future generations will enjoy the beauty and benefits of Little Compton's natural landscape.

Ethics and Aesthetics

Bioregional Perspectives on Little Compton Landscapes

Our Role in Woodcock Conservation

By Luke Wallin

It is an interesting challenge to investigate the significance of Little Compton landscapes for various species. Conservation work requires us to think regionally, in terms of watersheds and larger areas, but how do we get scientifically valid information about the role of local places in the fate of a population or a whole species? For this article I sought to learn about our habitat for birds in general, and for the American Woodcock in particular.

The website of Partners in Flight presents a rich overview of the birds' situation. That organization highlights the urgency of our bird conservation responsibilities. Between 1600 and 1900, 75 species of U.S. birds and mammals became extinct; 75 more disappeared between 1900 and 1980. Current rates are roughly two per year, and some ornithologists estimate many songbird species are vanishing at 1% annually. Surveys of Woodcock breeding areas or 'singing grounds' indicate 2% annual losses recently (1985-95), and 2.4% annual losses longer term (1968-94).

The Woodcock, a plump quail-sized creature with mottled black, brown, buff and gray feathers, round eyes and a long spear of a bill, is one of my favorite birds. It's famous for its late winter and early spring flight displays. The males fly higher and

higher over the breeding grounds, making a twittering sound. When they reach 200-300 meters they become silent for a moment, then plummet with a melodic cry in a zig-zag to land suddenly and give a call which most people describe as a 'peent,' but which sounds to me like a burst from a kazoo.

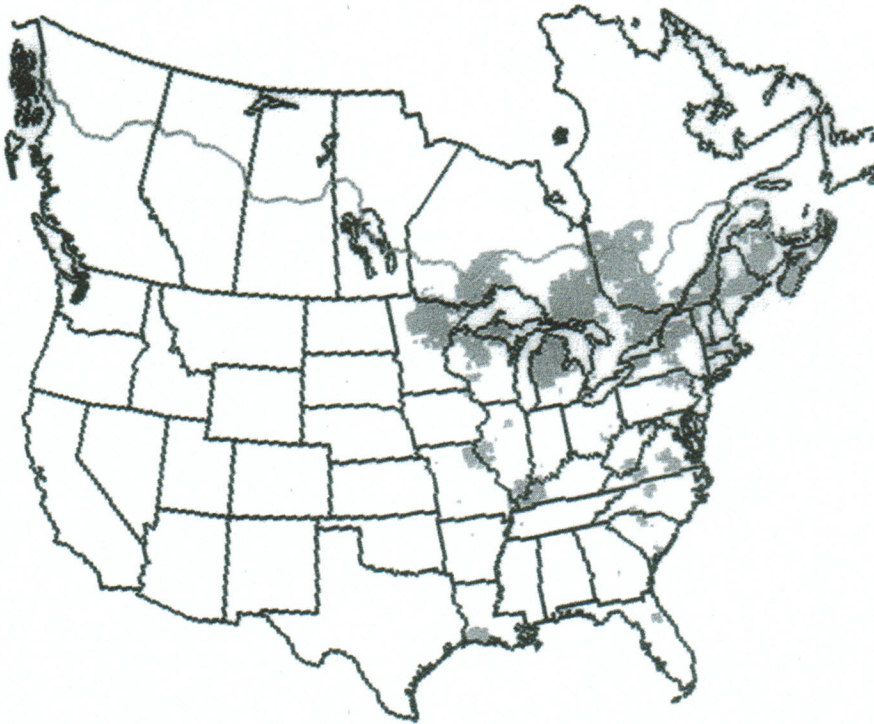
Because it probes for earthworms with its long bill, it needs dense, second-growth wet woods, which Little Compton provides in abundance. This past spring our air was lively with Woodcocks, flying at dusk and dawn, and sometimes late into the night with a full moon. The map accompanying this



article displays results of a recent count by the annual Breeding Bird Survey. It reveals that Woodcocks are shorebirds. Little Compton appears in the thin black line, indicating relatively high numbers, down the Atlantic coast.

Woodcocks are disappearing. Hunters kill 1.1 million annually, but the main threat appears to be habitat loss. In one West Virginia study, 127 Woodcock sites were observed in the mid-70s and again in the mid-90s. Only 15% of the sites were still good habitat. 41% had become mature forest, 24% open fields or pastures, and 9% human developments. Multiply this pattern over the entire range of the Woodcock, and you see why every acre counts.

Living in pictorial landscapes as we do in Little Compton, we may not grasp the speed of land



This map is courtesy of the North American Breeding Bird Survey. The heavy dark line along the coastlines shows the main habitat area of the woodcock. The Breeding Bird Survey indicates 101 birds or above found in these areas. The lightly shaded areas on the map indicate 1 bird and below found in these areas for this survey. The thin line through Canada shows the survey's limit.

■ 101 and above
 ■ One and below

For more information visit the North American Breeding Bird Survey on the web at <http://www.mp2-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/>

clearances across our region, and their effect on songbirds. When we consider bulldozing another lot for a project, it may seem a small loss. And this may be true for many species, such as deer, coyotes, crows, woodchucks and foxes. These creatures thrive in human-style landscapes, with fields and edges. But birds are another matter. Every patch of dense wet second-growth woods is precious to Woodcocks. And an acre saved for them matters a great deal in the big picture. Every missing acre means less area the predators, such as foxes, skunks, raccoons, opossums, and roaming house-cats, have to patrol in their searches.

In this case the biological region, or bioregion, includes the East Coast and Mississippi River Flyways, and to a lesser degree much of the Northeast and the Southeast. Woodcocks are a mostly invisible treasure living among us, shyly displaying their strange ways. Everyone who seeks to understand their ecology shares a great intellectual task. Everyone who protects a green patch for them joins an aesthetic and ethical movement as well. Such a person is entitled to refer to that patch as 'my Woodcock singing ground.'

For further reading:
<http://biology.usgs.gov/s+t/SNT/noframe/ne122.htm>

One Acre *continued from page 5*

trees and shrubs growing in the lot at this time, and do not plan to introduce anything further. The balance of typical and unusual specimens is uncommon and the varying density pleasing. With some thinning, all remaining trees should be able to grow well and, over time, contribute to a park-like setting. There are other parts of the farm where wildness or monoculture prevail. This acre called Rose Garden can become what I would call a pasture garden. Old names adhere despite new uses. We may always call it the Rose Garden. The past is always present.

SPA Adopts Two-Year Action Plan

At their May meeting, the Board of Directors of the Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA) approved an action plan to guide the organization's activities for the immediate future. During the next two years, the SPA will explore the organizational capabilities and changes required to enhance our Land Protection Program. As briefly summarized below, the two-year plan provides a financial framework for our activities, including projected expenditures, income, and fundraising targets. Many of these objectives are currently under way.

Our Objectives and Two-Year Plan Summary

Land Preservation:

- Develop land acquisition process
- Complete land use project
- Retire debt
- Develop Land Fund

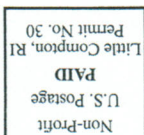
Community Outreach/Education:

- Produce newsletter bi-annually
- Schedule 2 lectures/workshops annually
- Distribute public informational materials

Administration and Management:

- Review financial procedures and controls
- Produce operations/administration handbook
- Develop 3-year strategic/fundraising plan

Postal Customer



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