



# Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

Fall 2001

## *SPA Opens Office at Commons*

For the first time since the organization's founding in January 1972, the Sakonnet Preservation Association now has an office, located in the middle of town. In August, the SPA moved into its new headquarters and workspace at 7 South of Commons Road, just off the Commons. Josie Richmond Arkins and Tom Arkins recently purchased the attractive building from Miriam Scott, who had long maintained her real estate office there.

In a two-year Action Plan adopted in 2000, the SPA board of directors budgeted for the cost of office space, beginning in calendar year 2002. However, when the new space was offered, the SPA board decided to move into the office as soon as it became available. The directors determined that a permanent office location was essential for the SPA to operate in a more businesslike and efficient manner.



The new office provides a central and secure location for the SPA's files and records, which had previously been distributed among the homes of the organization's volunteer officers and directors. The space also provides a workplace for the SPA's essential operational needs, from preparing mail-

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## Membership News

### *SPA Board Holds Workshop on Conservation Easements*

On Oct. 9th, the SPA hosted a board workshop on easements and other legal and tax aspects of conservation. Speakers were James V. Aukerman and Robert I. Victor.

Mr. Aukerman, attorney with Kenyon and Aukerman of Wakefield, RI, is a trustee of the South Kingstown Land Trust. He has served as counsel for the Nature Conservancy and other non-profits, in facilitating complex real estate transactions. Mr Victor, a CPA with Casten, Victor & Company of Middletown, RI, is treasurer of the Aquidneck Island Land Trust. He has worked as a volunteer with various non-profits in Newport County.

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### NEW OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS ELECTED AT SPA ANNUAL MEETING

At its 2001 Annual Meeting, held at the Stone House Club on July 10, the members of the Sakonnet Preservation Association elected a new slate of officers and welcomed two new directors to its board. Heather Steers was elected SPA president. Joining her as new officers are Terry Tierney, vice-president; Sheila Mackintosh, secretary; and Phoebe Cook, treasurer.

The approximately 100 SPA members in attendance also elected a 19-member board, including two new members with extensive land conservation experience. Jean Turcotte served on the Little Compton Planning Board and as a member and chair of the Agricultural Conservancy Trust. David

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## **Sakonnet Preservation Association**

### **Officers**

Heather Steers, *President*  
Terence Tierney, *Vice President*  
Sheila Mackintosh, *Secretary*  
Phoebe Cook, *Treasurer*

### **Directors**

Larry Anderson  
Helen Bridge  
Letitia Carter  
Phoebe Cook  
Stetson Eddy  
Roger Greene  
Elinor Hough  
Nicholas Long  
Agnes Langdon  
Sheila Mackintosh  
Lucy O'Connor  
Karen Richmond  
Jean Turcotte  
Andrew Sargent  
Heather Steers  
Erik Thomas  
Terence Tierney  
Luke Wallin  
David Wilson

### **Advisors Council**

David Borden  
Michael Forte

### **Newsletter Editors**

Larry Anderson  
Karen Richmond  
Luke Wallin

### **SPA**

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Little Compton, RI  
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## ***Little Compton Growth Projections and Trends: What Will the Future Bring?***

The growth of Little Compton's population is inevitable. The geographical size and limits of the town will remain fixed, however. The relationship between these two facts obviously has important consequences for the community. How can town residents and town officials plan and act effectively for Little Compton's future? Two good starting points are recent federal census figures and the "build-out analysis" included in the current version of the town's Comprehensive Plan.

Little Compton's population grew by 7.6%, or 254 people, between 1990 and 2000, from 3,339 residents to 3,593. While the town's growth rate for the decade was substantially above the state's overall growth rate of 4.5%, it represented a decline from the previous two decades. In 1970, for example, the town's population was 2,385. A decade later, in 1980, that number was 3,085, representing a growth rate of 29.35% and a population increase of 700. Between 1980 and 1990, the town grew by another 254 residents, or 8.23%, from 3,085 to 3,339.

According to recent federal and state statistics, Little Compton also experienced a substantial increase in houses built during the 1990s. During that decade, the number of houses increased from 1,850 to 2,100, or 13.5%. In the 1980s, by contrast, the number of houses grew from 1,694 to 1,850, or 9.2%.

Although the data and the projections included in the Comprehensive Plan are now almost a decade old, they provide the most comprehensive and current information available concerning Little Compton's growth prospects. (The current draft of the Plan was produced in 1993, and has been revised in response to the comments of various state agencies; but it still has not been approved by the Rhode Island Department of Administration.)

As described in Chapter 2 ("Land Use") of the Comprehensive Plan, a "buildout (land capability) analysis is a theoretical study which determines the amount of development possible in a given area based on different zoning scenarios and combinations of environmental constraints. . . . Theoretically that capacity is reached when every buildable parcel of land is subdivided so that it satisfies the minimum zoning requirements and is built."

The planners who assisted Little Compton in developing the Comprehensive Plan produced two buildout "scenarios." These were based on different assumptions about the percentage of "high constraint" land—land containing soils with a seasonally high water table—that will be developed in the future. "Buildout scenario 1 is based on historical evidence which shows that approximately eight percent of the land considered having high constraints for development has been developed," according to the Plan. "Scenario number 2 considers potential greater development pressure which would force 15 percent of high constraint land into development." (All the supporting assumptions, definitions, and data for the two scenarios are thoroughly documented in Chapter 2 of the Comprehensive Plan.)

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## Letter from the President

### BUILDING A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR EVERYDAY LANDSCAPE

As the new president of the Sakonnet Preservation Association, I was given the opportunity to attend the Land Trust Rally 2001 in Baltimore, Maryland, from September 30th to October 2nd. The Rally is sponsored by the Land Trust Alliance, an organization headquartered in Washington, DC that supports more than 1,200 land trusts across the continent. The Land Trust Alliance provides land trust volunteers and staff members with unparalleled training, essential information, a library of publications on conservation tools and techniques, ever-increasing public recognition, and representation on Capitol Hill. Over 1,600 people from 48 states, Washington, DC, and eighteen countries attended the Rally to participate in 25 off-site field trips, 14 pre-conference seminars, and 68 workshops and roundtable discussions.

The workshops I chose to attend—"Negotiating a Conservation Easement from Start to Finish," "Building a Successful Small Land Trust, Parts I and II," "Real Estate 101," and "Critical Fundraising Tools for Land Trusts, Parts I and II"—were well presented and very informative. I returned from Baltimore with useful course materials and a clearer understanding of the business principles and practices required to run a small land trust.

Throughout the Rally, at the opening address, plenary sessions, meals, and receptions, people spoke of the urgency of land preservation. Development and sprawl are consuming open land at an alarming rate. "Time is of the essence," we were told.

In fact, increased development can be seen throughout Little Compton. We live in a very beautiful, desirable town. The need to protect groundwater, farmland, forests, and wildlife habitat is essential. The SPA is currently working with several generous property owners who are planning to make conservation donations to the organization. We are grateful to them—and to all who have made donations in the past. But it is clear that we will need to raise money to buy additional property, as land is more expensive than ever. Moreover, the events of September 11th appear to have had a significant negative impact on the economy, which in turn has reduced tax revenues and charitable giving. The difficult challenge ahead is to make public and private funding for land conservation a priority.

The Land Trust Alliance is working hard to develop a "conservation ethic," an awareness of the benefits and importance of open space. Brian Donahue, the Massachusetts activist and scholar who spoke in Little Compton this spring at a program sponsored by the SPA, has written convincingly about how such a conservation ethic must originate in communities like ours. "The idea of going to the wilderness to get back in touch with nature was all wrong," Donahue writes in his 1999 book, *Reclaiming the Commons: Community Farms and Forests in a New England Town*, describing the development of his own thinking about conservation. "The places where we needed to form close connections with nature were not in the wilderness but where we grew our food, heated our houses, took our daily pleasures.... The cities and suburbs, and the farms and forests that supported them, were the heart of the matter.... I began to suspect that truly protected wilderness will follow from a society that has at last worked out a healthy relation with its everyday landscape, with its productive forests and farmlands."

An important aspect of the SPA's mission to preserve open space in Little Compton is to nurture such a healthy relation with our everyday landscape. We need everyone's support now.

by Heather Steers

President, Sakonnet Preservation Association



## Local Conservationists

### Jewell's Woods

By Barbara Jewell Pond

**A** small piece of Little Compton lore goes with the 19 acres of woodland on which we deeded development rights to the SPA last year. The land, to the west of Maple Avenue, came into my family in 1833 through my great-great grandfather, Captain Thomas Brownell. The next owner was his granddaughter, Henrietta Brownell. With her husband, John H. Jewell, they bought the entire farm for \$600 in 1900. It included a late eighteenth century chimney Cape, a barn (both dilapidated), and 32 acres of land. The woodland has never been developed and was only used for cutting firewood, a necessity in those days.

John Jewell became chairman of the Little Compton School Committee in the early 1900s. He then offered free firewood for all the one-room schoolhouses scattered through the town. Wagon roads were cut to haul the chopped wood. A horse-drawn wooden wagon called a "democrat" was used, pulled by Tom, Jewell's white horse.

Some of the neighborhood children discovered the pleasure of walking to the Commons through "Jewell's Woods." The route was sheltered, shorter, and carpeted in spring with wildflowers. In

summer there were wild berries along the way, and in autumn, the brilliant colors of swamp maples and oaks. In winter they were protected

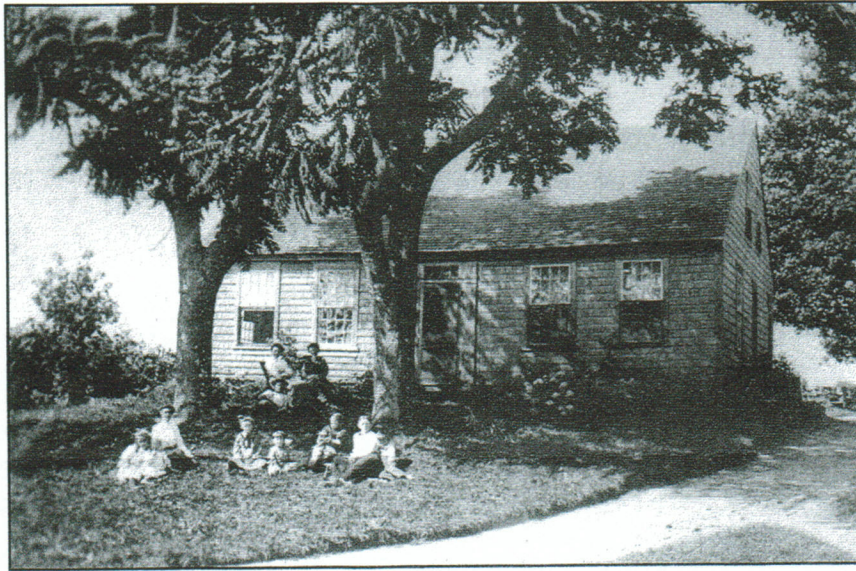
from biting winds by the holly trees and towering pines.

These children included Bill Cotta, Ernest Wilber, Edith (Pierce) Wordell, and Ida (Bixby) Elwell, who remembered the woodland walk in Lucy O'Connor's Jonnycakes and Cream. Joining

them were my father, Willard Brownell Jewell, and his sisters, Florence and Ethel.

After several generations of youngsters used this pathway to the Commons (with Grandpa Jewell's permission), it fell into disuse with the advent of a modern center school and yellow buses.

The wagon roads are now overgrown as nature has reclaimed her domain. While children's laughter is but an echo, the tranquil forest now rings with birdsong. The habitat of migratory birds is dwindling, but Jewell's Woods still provide a haven for warblers, thrushes, and orioles. There is a spring-fed pond which is home to turtles and salamanders.



Thomas Brownell's house, Little Compton, RI built c. 1790-1810. Later owned by John Jewell and then F. H. Pond, photo c. 1902.

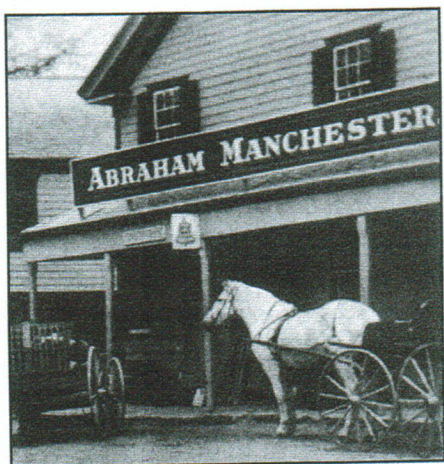




*The number 9 schoolhouse on Long Highway (south) c. 1907. The school later became a residence.*

Recently, the Nature Conservancy made a quick avian count in the woods and came away with a list of 22 species they had seen or heard on their brief tour. Included were a veery and a blue-winged warbler. If they had more time, I know their list would have been longer.

The woodland is also a sanctuary for other forms of wildlife, and the land is off-limits to



*The Jewell's horse, Tom, in front of Abe Manchester's store.*

hunters. There are many trees and shrubs providing food for all the wild creatures—pines, hollies, bayberries, wild grapes, and cherries.

Our family is most grateful that the SPA has

agreed to assume perpetual stewardship of Jewell's Woods so that it will always remain a refuge for wild creatures in the center of Little Compton.

## Conservation Easement Workshop

*Continued from page 1*

Among the interesting topics was an overview of tax advantages, under 2001 tax law, to landowners who employ transfers of conservation easements and development rights of property. Landowners can now preserve open space in perpetuity, retain ownership, receive significant tax deductions, and establish a large estate tax credit as well.

Flexibility of the management plans contained in conservation easements was another lively topic. It is possible for the donor and the land trust to agree on goals, such as open space conservation, and to organize strategies used in their attainment as conditions vary. For example, the landowner and the holder of the easement, such as the SPA or the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust (LCACT), could agree to fight an invasive species, such as Russian Olive, if it becomes an obstacle to the goal. In another example, the use of herbicides in a garden might be discussed and negotiated. At present it is also common that a donor may endow the parcel with a stewardship fund that would enable the land trust or owner to implement these management practices.

The participants, who included several LCACT members, asked how the general public can be engaged with conservation before it is too late—as it is already in so many RI towns. The speakers emphasized studies which show that development always costs towns more money (in services) than the development generates in new taxes.\* They also stressed the importance of town planning and co-operation and communication between various boards. They believe that effort should be concentrated on willing land owners, creative land deals and immediate action.

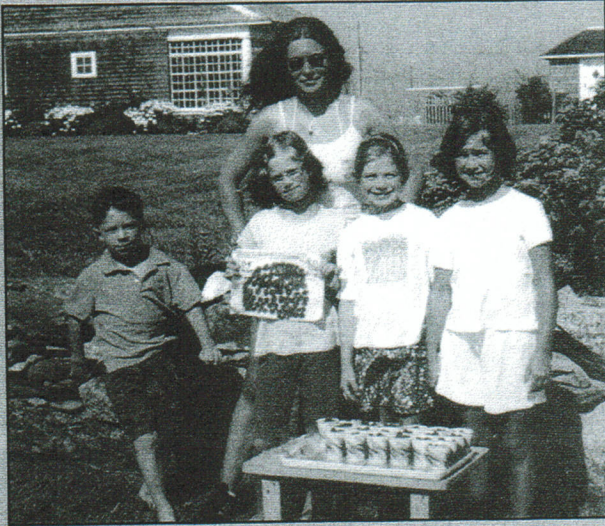
As a result of the workshop, both the SPA and the LCACT will be better prepared to work with landowners in exploring the legal and tax aspects of conservation transactions.

*Luke Wallin, Professor of English  
Umass Dartmouth  
email: lukewallin.com*

*\*For a copy of The Southern New England Forest Consortium's Report on this topic, call SPA @ 635-8800.*



## Kids for Conservation



Summer residents (from left to right) Alec Cover, Margaret Taylor, McKenzie Binger, Julia Taylor and their sitter, Anais, from Paris pose in front of their raspberry stand. (Missing from photo, another avid conservationist, Elsa Binger.)

*The children sold raspberries on Warren's Point this summer and after purchasing a kite, they donated the remainder of their cash to the Sakonnet Preservation Association's Land Fund. The children enjoy their summers here so much they wanted to do something to keep Little Compton green. The raspberries, picked from the Binger's yard on Quoquonsett Lane, were so popular that they increased in price from 25 cents per cup to 50 cents per cup. According to the pickers, it was hard to keep up with the demand! The SPA responded with, "Keep up the good work! And a big thank you for the donation!"*

*Their generosity inspired another donation from a local lemonade stand. Thanks kids!*

## LITTLE COMPTON RESIDENTS VALUE RURAL CHARACTER

On September 24, the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities (RICH) held a "dialogues" session in the Little Compton Community Center. The purpose was to gather ideas from community members as to what was most important to them about their town. A variety of topics was discussed. The consensus of the Little Compton participants was that they value the beauty and rural character of their community foremost.

RICH has been conducting these dialogues in every town in RI with the purpose of disbursing a \$1,000 grant to each town for a specific community project. Discussions with RICH representatives are ongoing to determine how the grant funds may be used.

## SPA ELECTS NEW BOARD Continued from page 1

Wilson, who moved to Little Compton from Westport five years ago, was the founding chairman of the Town of Dartmouth Agricultural Commission, a founding director of the Coastal Growers Association, and a director and past president of the Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust.

SPA President Larry Anderson, concluding his three-year term in that office, thanked several outgoing directors for their contributions to the SPA. Betty Cleaver, Beth Golembeske, Win Hall, Chris Oliveira, and Ted Merriman stepped down from the board in 2001. Anderson also announced that the directors had approved the creation of an Advisors Council, to recognize those former directors "who have provided exceptional leadership for the Sakonnet Preservation

Association." The first two members named to the Advisors Council were long-time directors and past-presidents Michael Forte and David Borden.

In other business at the meeting, the members amended the SPA's bylaws to change the start of the association's fiscal year to January 1 instead of September 1. Finally, the members enjoyed a slide presentation and talk by Trudy Cox, currently chief executive officer of the Preservation Society of Newport County. Cox, a well-regarded conservationist, described the challenges of maintaining and restoring the many buildings and gardens owned by Preservation Society. During a lively question-and-answer session after her prepared remarks, she also discussed some of the opportunities for—and obstacles to—cooperation between land-conservation and historic-preservation organizations.



## SPA Launches Annual Giving Campaign

*The SPA has recently sent letters to all our current members regarding our annual campaign. Now more than ever we need your help in sustaining our efforts to conserve land in Little Compton.*

*Time is of the essence as much of the area's critical, open, private land remains unprotected. Land conservation has become increasingly expensive with rising property values, legal fees and other professional expenses. The acquisition and maintenance of these protected lands can't be accomplished without your financial assistance.*

*If you would like to make a donation to our annual campaign or become a new member please fill out the form at right and return it to the SPA. Your tax deductible contribution is greatly appreciated by our volunteer organization.*

## SPA Opens New Office

*Continued from page 1*

ings and meeting agendas to making phone calls and maintaining land stewardship records. Finally, along with an adjoining conference room shared with the building's other business tenants, the office provides a comfortable place for the SPA board to hold its regular monthly meetings and to meet with landowners interested in discussing conservation options.

Through the generosity of Miriam Scott and several SPA directors and members, desks, carpets, filing cabinets, chairs, a computer, and other furnishings were provided to equip the office. SPA officers and board members have been at work filing and organizing materials that have been accumulating throughout the years. SPA director Karen Richmond designed the attractive sign for the SPA and the building's other tenants. Plans have also been discussed to open the office for certain regular weekly hours, staffed by SPA volunteers.

The SPA has new telephone service. Our telephone/fax number is 635-8800. Messages may also be left at this number.



## 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
_____ Sustaining Member	\$35
_____ Special Gift	\$_____

**YES, I WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT THE  
ANNUAL GIVING CAMPAIGN**

\_\_\_\_\_ Annual Gift (Tax Deductible) \$\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ My company will match my gift.  
(Please call for matching gift forms.)

I am already a current member. \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to be a new member. \_\_\_\_\_

***Please make checks payable to:***

**Sakonnet Preservation Association**

P. O. Box 945, Little Compton, RI 02837

Phone: 401. 635. 8800

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent Address \_\_\_\_\_

Town \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

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Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Summer phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Summer Address \_\_\_\_\_



## ***Growth Projections and Trends: What Will the Future Bring?***

*Continued from page 2*

Under Scenario 1 (eight percent of high-constraint land developed), "it is estimated that Little Compton could accommodate 2,500+/- additional dwelling units," according to the Plan. "At buildout there would be between 4,360 and 4,570 units, and population may range from 7,400 to 7,850 people. By the year 2020 approximately 21 percent of the new dwelling units may be built."

Under Scenario 2 (15 percent of high-constraint land developed), "it is estimated that the Town of Little Compton could accommodate 2,600 additional dwelling units, 90 +/- more units than in Scenario 1. At buildout there would be 4,450 to 4,660 units and between 7,550 and 8,010 people, a 2.0 percent increase over Scenario 1."

Under either scenario, the Plan concludes, the "Town of Little Compton may anticipate providing services and facilities for more than double its existing population. . . . A total ultimate population of under 10,000 will not transpose Little Compton into an urban community, but it will have def-

inite impact upon the current way of life."

The Plan is careful to note that predicting future development rates, even 20 years into the future, "is difficult, and the actual rate may vary considerably from that which is forecasted." Nonetheless, the planners based their two scenarios on the rate of development taking place in the 1980, when an average of 32.6 new dwellings were constructed in Little Compton each year. At that rate, under Scenario 1, the Plan predicted that the town would be "built out" to its maximum population "in approximately 76 years."

Little Compton's Comprehensive Plan is only a tool and a guide. As noted, its provisions and predictions, as well as the data supporting them, are now almost a decade old. But the Plan does represent the town's official policy for the future growth and development of the community. A careful review of the Comprehensive Plan's predictions, policies, and implications would be timely for all Little Compton residents and officials who are genuinely concerned about the town's fate.

*Larry Anderson*

Postal Customer

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.  
For info call  
401. 635. 8800



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