



Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

June 2005

ANNUAL MEETING

**The Sakonnet
Preservation Association
presents
Lawrence Taft, Director,
The Audubon Society
of Rhode Island
as its guest speaker**

**THURSDAY
JULY**

**7
at 6 pm**

**Join the SPA for
complimentary
hors d'oeuvres and
sandwiches
at the
Stone House Club
Sakonnet Point Rd.**

**Public welcome.
Cash bar available.**

See page 5 for more details.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

With the arrival of spring, nature's bounty surrounds us here in Little Compton. Abundant woodlands, fields and wetlands are teeming with wildlife. Freshly tilled farm fields await planting. Bright green, new plant growth fills scenic vistas. Watersheds are saturated. These are the benefits of land preservation that we'd like to send on to future generations. This is what inspires us to do the work we do.

In January, The Nature Conservancy closed on the 11.5 acre Marvel property we reported on in our last newsletter. The conveyance of the conservation easement to the Sakonnet Preservation Association, the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust, and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, which will provide public access to the property including the creation of trails and a small parking area for use by the public, has been made. Later in June, SPA's \$100,000 contribution to the project will be paid to the Nature Conservancy.

SPA's Land Protection Committee is presently working with several property owners who are interested in donating land or a conservation easement, which would limit development on their property forever. Often it takes several years to complete an acquisition because of the required title searches, surveys, appraisals and deed or conservation easement agreements. We would like to thank these people and the many others who have made land, easement, or financial donations over the years.

However, land and conservation easement deductions are under attack. **continued on page 2**



Sakonnet Preservation Association

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER CONTINUED

The Land Trust Alliance, the national organization for the more than 1500 land trusts in the U.S., has provided the following report:

In January, a report released by The Congressional Joint Committee on Taxation shocked the land trust community by proposing major decreases in the federal tax deductions for conservation easements and bargain sales. The proposal, if adopted, would end the work of land trusts as we know it.

The Joint Committee has proposed that deductions for conservation easements be limited to 33% of the appraised value. No deductions will be allowed for the donation of an easement on land used for a personal residence. The Committee also proposes changing the deductions associated with donations to the owner's 'basis' – that is, the cost of the land plus any capital improvements made over the years.

If enacted, these proposals would severely set back our conservation work. Saving land is often the primary motivation for donating a conservation easement, but we know that tax deductions enable many more people to donate.

The Land Trust Alliance

The LTA is engaged in a vigorous response, working with a coalition of national conservation leaders and allies. They need the help of all of us. Letters to our U.S. senators and representatives asking them to help in fighting these proposals are essential. Draft letters and more information, including how to email or write our elected officials, are on the LTA website at www.lta.org.

Congressional hearings are being held this spring on transactions by land trusts. The Senate Finance Committee staff is looking at a wide variety of issues related to donations and sales of land in fee, as well as donations of conservation easements. The Land Trust Alliance states that "...after an 18-month investigation and congressional hearings, it seems likely that the Committee will introduce reform legislation to increase the accountability of land trusts."

These are tough times for land trusts. The Joint Committee on Taxation's recommendations would seriously limit the donation of land and conservation easements to SPA and other organizations. Please help preserve open space in Little Compton by contacting Senators Chafee and Reed and Representatives Kennedy and Langevin. Thank you.

Heather Steers, President, SPA

Aquidneck Land Trust Director Presents a Plan for Strategic Land Conservation

by Jana Porter

On Wednesday, April 27, SPA sponsored a public presentation at the Community Center on "Strategic Land Conservation," offered by Ted Clement, the Executive Director of the Aquidneck Land Trust. About 50 people attended the event, including representatives from all Little Compton's land planning groups.

Mr. Clement emphasized the importance of involving all interested residents and planning groups in the strategic planning effort to ensure accuracy of information, the widest possible vision, and a group of willing and able volunteers. "We were seeking to avoid the 'bucks and acres' mentality," said Mr. Clement. "We wanted to develop a qualitative shared responsibility among planning participants."

The ALT began their effort with a mapping project that visually documented all the conserved acreage on Aquidneck Island by qualified holder as well as by conservation status. These maps were mailed to every resident of the island.

ALT also identified three levels of conserved land: (1) land conserved with a perpetual conservation restriction or easement, (2) land conserved with a deed restriction, and (3) land held with conservation intent alone, lacking permanent deed restrictions. "Recognizing that some important conserved lands were not very secure also helped ALT prioritize future

acquisitions," said Mr. Clement.

Recognizing a significant gap in data about conserved properties, the Aquidneck Land Trust became the designated centralized repository for key conservation documents and for an eventual database. Efforts were made to close information gaps through identifying land holders, contacting them for information, specifically locating parcels, conducting research for verifying land status, and checking research results with land owners.

Mr. Clement stressed the need for outreach with the public as well as with the holders of conserved land. Once the mapping results were shared with participants, conservation opportunities, particularly for adjoining parcels, became evident, and unprotected parcels could be evaluated and prioritized for possible future conservation. A land evaluation form was developed to score land parcels, facilitating the designation of 100 "hot" parcels. Strategies developed to pursue each of these parcels are now being implemented.

Of Aquidneck Island's 25,000 acres, 17% is conserved. About 54% of the island is developed, and 29% of the land is still available for development.

SPA Board Adopts Five-Year Strategic Plan

In January, the Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA) Board of Directors voted to adopt a Strategic Plan that will guide the organization's activities and operations for the next five years.

The Strategic Plan was the product of a year-long process, which was supported by a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation. All SPA board members participated in two daylong strategic planning sessions in November and December 2003, which were facilitated by Sylvia Bates, a New Hampshire-based consultant with extensive experience assisting land trusts and conservation groups throughout New England and the rest of the nation. During those sessions, the SPA board developed a draft Strategic Plan, including a mission statement, a set of long-term goals, and specific action steps to meet those goals. Under the leadership of a committee including board members Tuck Buffum, Sheila Mackintosh, Lucy O'Connor and Heather Steers, the board in the ensuing months revised the draft plan, resulting in the final version approved in January.

The Strategic Plan identifies the SPA's goals under four major categories: land and natural resource protection; stewardship; public information, education, outreach and advocacy; and organizational focus and capacity. Under each category, the Plan then identifies fifty-two prioritized action steps, with assigned responsibilities and time frames for implementing each action step.

The Strategic Plan's long-term goals are as follows:

Land and Natural Resource Protection:

Permanently protect land in Little Compton for the lasting benefit of the community.

Promote the protection of land and other natural resources in Little Compton by working with other groups and individuals.

Stewardship:

Responsibly steward SPA holdings through monitoring and land management.

Public Information, Education, Outreach and Advocacy:

Educate and reach out to the Little Compton community emphasizing land, water and natural resource protection. Serve as a legal and technical informational resource to promote land use practices consonant with SPA's mission. Advocate, within Little Compton and beyond, for policies, programs and laws that will enhance SPA's mission.

Organizational Focus and Capacity:

Ensure SPA's strategic focus and operational priorities by establishing consistent policies, systems and procedures.

Ensure adequate funding to carry out SPA's mission.

Maximize SPA's organizational effectiveness by attracting, retaining and developing qualified board members and staff. Build and maintain a supportive membership.

In developing the Strategic Plan, SPA board members were guided by a determination to strengthen the organization's capacity to ensure the long-term protection of Little Compton's landscape and natural resources. The planning effort also reinforces the SPA's ongoing commitment to adopt policies and procedures consistent with the Standards and Practices of the Land Trust Alliance, a national umbrella group that supports the activities of the nation's land trusts.

To receive a copy of the SPA's Strategic Plan, please contact the SPA office at 635-8800.

Little Compton: Then and Now

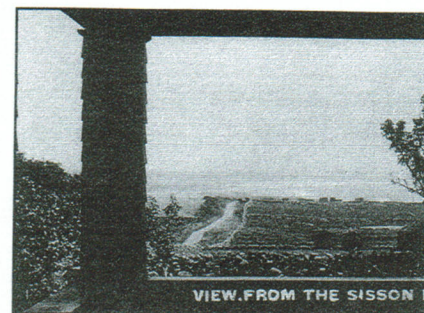
Photos courtesy of the Little Compton Historical Society



Brownell farm in 1930's.



1915 across West Main towards "Prairie"



View from Sisson house circa 1915.



Brownell farm in 2005, one of the first farms preserved by the LCACT in 1987.



Today looking from Meehan Triangle, SPA preserved in 1983, towards Harrison property preserved by the LCACT 2003.



2005 view. Newly preserved Marvel property is on the left side of South Shore road, group effort of TNC, LCACT, SPA & RIDEM.

SPA to Host Annual Meeting July 7

The Sakonnet Preservation Association's Annual Meeting will be held on Thursday, July 7, 2005 at the Stone House Club, 122 Sakonnet Point Road, from 6:00-8:30 p.m. The guest speaker will offer a unique Rhode Island perspective on land protection, environmental education and conservation advocacy. Lawrence Taft, the newly appointed director of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, will give a talk entitled "Over 100 Years of Education, Conservation and Advocacy: the Audubon Society Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow."

Mr. Taft is a life-long Rhode Islander who, prior to being named director, was the ASRI's Director of Properties and Acquisitions. He also served for 13 years as the Director of the Norman Bird Sanctuary in Middletown. Mr. Taft has a long history of involvement in Rhode Island environmental organizations and is very familiar with Rhode Island's particular environmental issues and opportunities. As Director of Properties and Acquisitions he was responsible for the ASRI's 9,200

acres of protected wildlife habitat, which include 14 refuges that are open to the public. He also handled land acquisition efforts and negotiated conservation easements and purchases. During this time, Taft was able to work with landowners, foundations and other conservation organizations to protect nearly 1,000 acres.

In addition to Mr. Taft's talk, the SPA Annual Meeting will include a reception with hors d'oeuvres, sandwiches and cash bar that begins at 6:00 p.m. The annual meeting will start at 6:45 p.m. and include a description of recent SPA activities and the election of SPA officers and directors. Mr. Taft's talk will start at 7:15 p.m. All SPA members, as well as the entire community, are welcome to attend. Please consider bringing a friend or neighbor. There is no charge for the event, but donations will be welcome at the door. Call 635-8800 for additional information.

Thanks to our contributors 2004-2005 !

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