

Sakonnet Preservation

Newsletter of the Sakonnet Preservation Association

Speaking with Ralph Guild

It was a delight to interview the charming raconteur Ralph Guild. He and his wife Calla, with the support of their children, donated more than 11 acres to Sakonnet Preservation, including most of Gray's Mill Pond in Adamsville. We were very pleased that the couple also attended our Annual Meeting in July. When we expressed our gratitude and admiration for Mr. Guild's accomplishments in preserving this historic part of our town, he modestly sidestepped the compliments. "It was one of the more selfish things I've done," he told us. "It makes me happy to see the village looking today as it did when Calla and I first began visiting the area in the 1960s. I'm doing what I love to do."

"I think the love of preserving natural and historic properties is born in your blood. My grandparents lived in a Victorian house in which I spent time as a child, and they passed their love of it on to me," he said. He went on to tell us about getting to know John Hart, the previous owner of Gray's Mill.



Ralph and Calla Guild at our Annual Meeting. Photo: Kris Donovan

When Mr. Hart was ready to sell, he approached Mr. Guild first. The meticulous restoration of Gray's Mill is Ralph's proudest accomplishment, its foundation of dry-laid stones a construction wonder. He credits Pete (Ann) Baker for ensuring that restoration was historically accurate.

"John Hart asked me for my word that I would leave Adamsville the same as when I bought it. I was happy to give and keep my word. Now I've decided that the best thing to do is to give the pond property to someone who wants to care for it the way I do. I'm 89 years old and my great-grandson Liam is five. I want him to see the same things I do when he is my age."

While Mr. Guild may think that his accomplishments are 'selfish', we beg to differ. We are most grateful, and we promise to take care of Gray's Mill Pond for Liam and his great-grandchildren.

– Abigail Brooks and Kathy Klees Clarendon



Gray's Mill Pond in late spring.

Sakonnet Preservation

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7 South of Commons

Little Compton, Rhode Island



sound finances
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President's letter

Sakonnet Preservation thanks Heather Steers

Heather Steers' retirement after 27 years of service to the Sakonnet Preservation Board offers an opportunity to reflect on her remarkable influence on me and this organization. I didn't know Heather when I joined the Board under her Presidency. It didn't take long to recognize her devotion to the work of conservation in our town and to be taken in by her warmth and spirited personality. With her affection for this beautiful place, her intelligence and humor, Heather was a dynamic leader.

Her meetings were informative and fun, attracting a great group of dedicated volunteers to the work of land conservation and stewardship. Nearly 275 acres were permanently protected on her watch. When I became President, I managed to persuade her to take on our Stewardship Program.

Heather picked up the reins and created a program worthy of high regard by landowners and national accreditation.



Heather Steers and Abigail Brooks at our 2018 Annual Meeting. Photo: Kris Donovan

Two characteristics about Heather stand out to me — her dedication to doing the best possible job at whatever she offers to do, and the generosity of her appreciation for the work of others.

All of us lucky enough to work with her benefited from her deep knowledge of the community plus her profound and contagious wish to preserve this town's special character. Yet Heather didn't limit her sights to this community. She recognized the value of collaborating at the state as well as the local level and devoted some of her considerable energy to working with the RI Land Trust Council.

Simply put, it has been an honor to have worked so compatibly with Heather. Her dedication and exemplary leadership not only strengthened this organization but left its legacy on the landscape of Little Compton.

– Abigail Brooks

Learning with Sakonnet Preservation

Movies, walks, talks, awards — education is a key part of our mission, and the Public Information, Education and Outreach committee is planning thought-provoking programs for all ages.

This summer we presented the first ever Young Naturalist Award to 8th grader Sylvia Rapoza at Wilbur McMahan School. We've been working with the 5th and 6th grades to offer nature programs at Simmons Mill Pond for several years, so when we discussed presenting a student award, the teachers knew immediately who the recipient should be. Committee Co-Chair Nan Haffenreffer presented Sylvia with the award and a copy of David Attenborough's inspiring book *Adventures of a Young Naturalist*.

Our Annual Meeting speaker for 2018 was University of Rhode Island natural history writer Todd McLeish. His engaging talk, *Examining New England's Most Endangered Wildlife*, was well received, and the committee would like to have Mr. McLeish return to Little Compton for a program aimed at families.

Last winter we showed four fascinating environmental films which were well attended and



Board member Nan Haffenreffer presents Sylvia Rapoza with the Young Naturalist Award. Photo: East Bay Newspapers

sparked great conversations. We are using that feedback to choose the 2018-2019 films. Specifics coming soon!

On the Autumnal Equinox (after this edition went to press) naturalist Rachel Playe led a wild medicinal herb walk on the P.T. Marvell Preserve. Advance interest was very high for this event which was scheduled as part of Rhode Island Land Trust Days.

Sign up for email alerts or follow us on Facebook and Instagram to keep up with the fun programs coming soon!

– Kathy Klees Clarendon

Our New Look

Readers may notice that this newsletter has an updated look. The new design is part of the “rebranding” of our Association that began about two years ago. Efforts started with our identity, when we decided to refer to our organization simply as “Sakonnet Preservation.” Legally we are still the Sakonnet Preservation Association, but now when we communicate about the organization we will shorten our name. We are also avoiding too frequent use of “SPA” since this acronym may be confusing to some who are unfamiliar with our work.

Coupled with our simpler name is the tagline “Conserving Land, Preserving Little Compton,” a phrase which we hope summarizes our mission statement:

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.

We welcome your feedback!

– Warren Jagger

Pigscaping

When local landscape designer and fellow Sakonnet Preservation member Daune Peckham heard how pigs are improving my property, she said, “When word gets out, people are going to want to rent them.”

Last fall, my wife and I acquired our place in Adamsville, where the previous owner and SPA easement donor, Amelia Forbes Thomas, had once raised sheep and poultry. Fallow for years before we moved in, the pastures had become breeding grounds for knapweed, brambles, lonicera and poison ivy. The wooded acreage was worse: an impenetrable tangle of invasive species, bittersweet choking every hardwood tree, with lots of dead cedar and undesirable Norway maple trees in between. The multiflora rose had grown so thick, SPA volunteers found it challenging to inspect the land. Not wanting to attack the invasive growth with the indiscriminate use of herbicides or heavy equipment, I called in organic reinforcements: the original bush hog.

Having raised old English breeds of pigs on woodlands and pastures in Massachusetts, I brought in my four-legged laborers and set them to work. Their first assignment was to chew down the



The original bush hogs. Photo: Carter Wilkie

jungle that had grown in an old cow path that is lined by dry laid stone walls 300’ long and 6’ high on either side. In four weeks, five young Berkshires and two Tamworth-Gloucestershire Old Spots crosses had cleaned out the back half of the lane, giving me access to remove dead trees and brush and reseed with grass.

Next, the pigs moved on to the pasture, ravenous when it came to uprooting poison ivy and knapweed. They are also fond of the tender leaves of young raspberry and multiflora rose. But they avoid Queen Anne’s lace and milkweed, which suits local pollinators just fine. By the time cooler weather arrives for reseeding, the pigs will have helped to rejuvenate tilth and soil fertility, creating better growing conditions for dormant clover and native grasses in the soil.

Raising pigs in a sustainable way means rotating them frequently, moving them to fresh land and avoiding damage to the landscape that results from concentrating them in one spot for too long. Tended carefully, pigs on pasture will generate less odor than a single horse or cow. So, my abutting neighbors are delighted with the land reclamation progress and tell me they are enjoying the show.

– Carter Wilkie

Carter doesn’t rent out his pigs (yet), but you can find pork chops and pancetta, coppa and culatello made from his livestock at Farm & Coast Market in Padanaram.



Stewardship Perspectives

The Stewardship Report

For months before her retirement in July, Heather Steers had been passing the torch to me and to Stewardship Committee Chair Ann Beardsley. We help to organize the more than 30 volunteer monitors who each year trudge through mud, travel along stonewalls, crawl under stately holly trees and dodge prickly briars in order to view property boundaries and document changes to the land on each of Sakonnet Preservation's 62 holdings. Volunteers report that these monitoring visits sometimes feel like an adventurous scavenger hunt!

In addition to managing the annual monitoring, this past year I have developed a management plan for the recently acquired Gray's Mill Pond Property, identifying the goals, objectives, and responsibilities required to preserve the integrity of the property. With the recent conservation of the nearby St. Vincent de Paul parcel in Westport, we are exploring exciting opportunities to collaborate with the Westport Land Conservation Trust. I have also created a Baseline Documentation Report for the Mosher "Quaking Bog" parcel to outline the current conditions and inventory of that unique property.

Thinking back over my first year with Sakonnet Preservation, I'm in awe of the commitment to conservation by so many landowners in Little Compton. It is obvious that the community cares deeply about preserving this special place in the midst of a rapidly changing world.

– Mary-Kate Kane, Stewardship Director

Monitoring the Unexpected

Monitoring protected properties to make sure their conservation agreements are being observed might sound dry and perfunctory. Do you imagine the land police, replete with clipboards and checklists of do's and don'ts? Hardly. It's really about surprises and serendipity. The unexpected aspects of land stewardship unfold every year on "my" two properties in miraculous ways.

The properties themselves always have something new to show me. On Sarah and Jack Robinson's beautiful field, I've been greeted over the years by bluebird boxes, a maturing garden of native species, and new white pine trees. At Sidney Tynan's magical property, I've seen a new wild orchid, an unexpected carpet of moss, and animal homes that only Sidney can spy.



Mary-Kate Kane on Mosher property.

The most unexpected gift of monitoring, for me, is the development of relationships with the landowners that deepen over time. Sidney calls me when a new plant appears on her land. She brings her great-grandchildren to enjoy my tree house. Sarah and I have lunch and meet occasionally on our yoga mats. Jack arrives at the Art Café and asks if we can visit a bit.

Like their land, I know these relationships will endure over time. They are founded on shared

values and, more specifically, on a particular piece of land that the owners have protected, and that I get the joy of sharing with them when I visit. If you would like to be a volunteer monitor for Sakonnet Preservation, anticipate the unexpected.

– Jana P. Porter, Volunteer Monitor

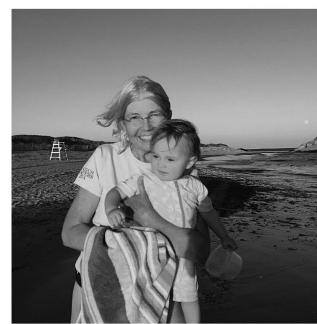
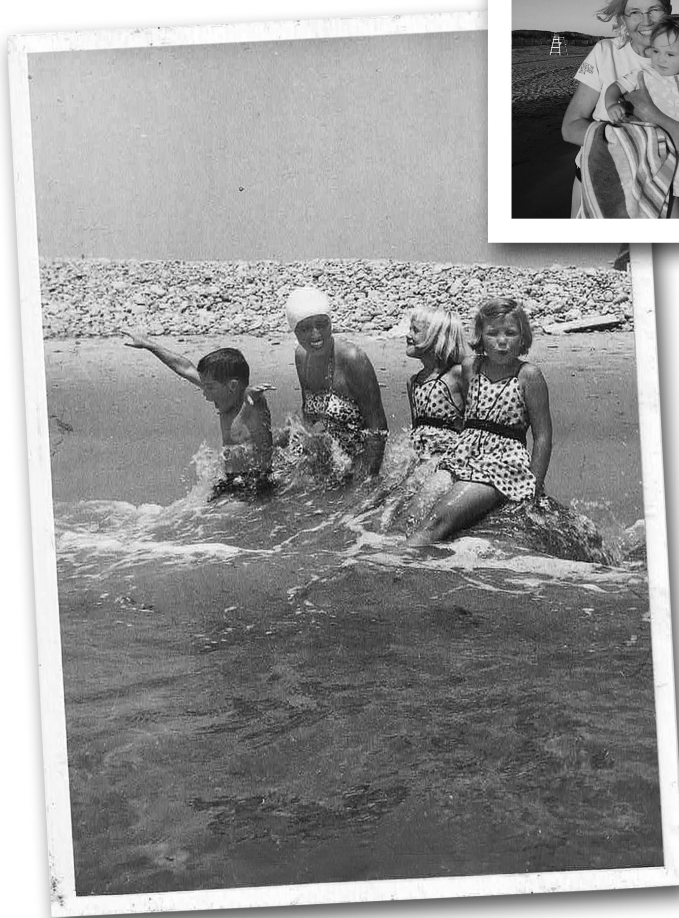
Note: contact Mary-Kate Kane at mkane@sakonnetpreservation.org to find out more about the joys of monitoring.

Five generations is a long time, but that's how long Susan Hall Mygatt's family has been enjoying their small, but spectacular, home in Little Compton. As the newest member of *Forever Little Compton*, our group of supporters who have included Sakonnet Preservation in their estate plans, Susan has taken steps to ensure that many more generations of her family — and yours — can enjoy the rural peace of Little Compton.

Susan told us "I never thought about leaving a final gift to Sakonnet Preservation until I received the letter, and I thought 'Why not?' This is an organization I care about. I will continue to support Sakonnet Preservation during my lifetime, and I have let my children know that I plan to honor the organization with a bequest in my will. My grandparents built this house in the 1950s, and now my sister and I own it jointly. Between us we have seven children and eight grandchildren, who visit whenever they can. One of my daughters was even married here on the property!

"I love Little Compton in general, but I especially love our neighborhood. Almost all of the houses around us are still owned by the same families who lived here in the '50s. That is so special in this fast-changing world. In 2004, a group of our neighbors granted a conservation easement to Sakonnet Preservation on an open 20-acre parcel, 'to ensure that it will be retained forever in its open, natural, scenic and undeveloped condition'. I know that my steady support makes a difference, however modest, in preserving this beautiful place. And when we lose a friend or family member from Little Compton, I make a gift in their memory to SPA."

below: Susan Mygatt with her mother and cousins. right: Susan today with the fifth generation!



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– Susan Hall Mygatt

We are so grateful to Susan for her generosity of spirit and thoughtfulness in sharing her family's story with us.

– Kathy Klees Clarendon

Welcome new Board Members

Paul Bazzoni moved to Little Compton and cofounded Sakonnet Dental group in Tiverton where he practiced dentistry from 1980 to 2014. He has retired from medicine and has found a niche working at the Young Family Farm on West Main Rd. As someone who enjoys fly fishing, gardening and painting, he brings these sensibilities, as well as his business experience, to protecting this town's natural resources, scenic character and open space. "The future is now, and here I am," he points out.

Lawre Richmond Goodnow has always considered Little Compton "home" no matter where else she has lived. With her Richmond sisters she participated in conserving much of Treaty Rock Farm, heightening her sensitivity to "those who share my love for Little Compton and want to preserve its open space." She comes to us with ten years of easement monitoring experience for a central New Hampshire land trust, as well as years working as an early childhood educator. "My roots run deep in Little Compton, and by joining the Board I hope to impact its conservation efforts and connect people of all ages to Little Compton's landscape through SPA activities and programs."

Maureen Hayes Harrington was born and raised in Little Compton and is a graduate of our local school as well as Salve Regina University and New England School of Law. She is currently employed with the Bristol County District Attorney's Office as well as volunteering with New Bedford Star Kids and St. Catherine of Siena Church here in town. She states: "As a lifelong Little Compton resident, I have witnessed firsthand the growth of our town and the necessity of preserving open space for the betterment of our community."



Paul, Lawre, and Maureen.

Sakonnet Preservation

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

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