

Sakonnet Preservation

newsletter of the Sakonnet Preservation Association

Leadership in Stewardship

Adam Yorks, our new Stewardship Director, shares a brief biography and reports on some recent projects.

A lifelong resident of Little Compton, I grew up exploring the fields, forests and coastline of our area, which instilled in me a curiosity about the natural world and motivated me to help protect it. After earning a Bachelor of Science degree and conducting conservation research in Washington State, Vermont, and Micronesia, I returned home. Regenerative agriculture caught my interest; it's a set of food production practices that improves soils, increases biodiversity on farmland and surrounding ecosystems and treats livestock and farmworkers humanely. Working at Sweet & Salty Farm for several years before starting my own pasture-raised lamb business, I have learned how nature and farming can coexist in the Sakonnet area, resulting in healthier food and a thriving landscape. From this perspective, I have helped others study and document Little Compton's unique conservation values and am excited to bring these experiences to the position of Stewardship Director with Sakonnet Preservation.

This spring, there are two particularly complex and exciting stewardship projects underway that have our attention.

Close observation on The Meehan Triangle, a property donated to SPA in 1982 by Phoebe and David Meehan, has revealed a uniquely intact population of native plant species. From clumps of bushy bluestem and switchpanic grass to thickets of highbush blueberry and small bayberry, this native flora community strongly resembles the shrubby meadows of the Sakonnet area before the arrival of the first colonists. As habitat, it supports many of our native pollinators, beneficial insects and migratory songbirds. Located between West Main and Old Main Roads near the intersection of Taylor's Lane, this publicly accessible and highly visible conservation property is intended to serve as a showcase for property owners to explore alternatives to exotic plantings and monocultural lawns. Through the efforts of SPA, the Little Compton Tree Committee, our local Boy Scout troops and community volunteers, and with the support of an Acebes Family Charitable Fund grant, visitors will be able to walk a meandering trail the length of the 2+ acre property with mapping that names and describes the habitat values these native species provide.

Passersby may have noticed extensive forestry activity near the corner of Colebrook and John Dyer roads. Our Blanchard-Blazer properties are a mix of forest and meadow on the hills west of Adamsville. The large-scale defoliation of forests by spongy moth (*Lymantria dispar*) larvae in 2016-17 hit the large stands of red oak on these properties especially hard, killing many majestic trees. SPA responded by working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and a professional forester to develop and implement a forest management plan, felling and removing many dead trees. We have plans to control invasive species on the property and plant trees to restore the forest.

As Sakonnet Preservation celebrates half a century of land protection in Little Compton, I appreciate the opportunity to join this team. Partnering with the community and like-minded organizations to foster inclusive stewardship of our lands is my goal as Stewardship Director. I will be working hard to ensure our fields, forests and open spaces continue to nurture future generations of Little Compton residents and the creatures that increasingly depend on our caretaking.

Adam Yorks

Adam Yorks and his daughter Noemi



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The wonders of cross pollination

From the President

Without intention, but by timing and luck alone, our links to other non-profit organizations in Little Compton are being nurtured by our new employees.

We invited Adam Yorks to apply for a position with us as our new Stewardship Director. In late February Adam joined our staff, having done contract work for the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust (the Trust) under the supervision of Carol Lynn Trocki for a number of years. He has also been engaged with the Conservation Commission's well water testing program. His training with Carol, a professional conservation biologist who has worked with us and the Trust, ensures he has had the best possible experience creating local baseline documentation reports and management plans, recording the underlying conservation values of a property and the plan for protecting them. He is intimately familiar with the landscape characteristics of our town and, having grown up here, knows personalities and place like the back of his hand. Adam is well equipped for this job, and we welcome his skills, genial personality, curiosity, creativity and attentiveness to the details of the natural world.

When Jenna Peterson-Magnuski applied to SPA, we were aware of her skillful work with the Little Compton Historical Society as Museum Educator, a position she still holds. We proposed and she accepted the position of part-time Executive Assistant with us, providing desperately needed support to our Operations Director, Joy Elvin. Jenna is a dynamo with valuable technical skills, a keen interest in conservation, and creative thinking about educational opportunities, including possibilities for expanding our work into the curriculum of the local school. She brings with her a deep affection for and engagement with this community. Already she is impressing us with her experience and abilities, and what she is learning from us may benefit the Historical Society.

We are blessed to have these young people offering so much to us and others in our town while we can offer them local employment. It simply doesn't get any better than this!

Abigail Brooks

Moving across town

Change is hard at first, messy in the middle, and gorgeous at the end.

Robin Sharma

I love this quote, as it sums up how we feel about our recent move. We had occupied our office next to the Art Café for 21 years, leased to us by Josie Richmond and Tom Arkins. We loved its honest idiosyncrasies, supportive landlords, proximity to the gallery, and easy access to a coffee. Since the building was filled with character and has a warm, homey feel, it took us nearly a year to accept the fact that the building could no longer accommodate our growing needs.

The search for new space was also fraught with problems, not least the fact that there is almost no commercial office space to be found in Little Compton, let alone in the Commons area. But as you may now know, we moved in February to 73C Simmons Road. In “Rhode Islandese,” it’s “where the video store used to be.”

At this time, we had offered a part-time position to Jenna Magnuski and, luckily for us, she was happy to jump in at the deep end and help us through the stages of our move. We decluttered, kept precious items extra safe, and packed as much as we could in advance. In the meantime, I quickly realized that our office furniture (also old and full of character) was not suitable for our new space. We have nearly tripled our square footage and the hunt was on for ‘free’ furniture. As a non-profit, we are constantly looking at ways to keep our overhead low, and after lots of evenings spent sleuthing through possible



SPA's new home

leads, we were offered as much office furniture as we needed from an office in Boston that was downsizing. It was a fortunate find, but how to get the furniture here and would it fit?

The latter part of that question was answered with the help of a volunteer architect who figured out the puzzle. As to the moving, Board members came to the rescue and a furniture collection crew was assembled. Vehicles, time, and lots of muscle answered the call, and our “new” furniture was collected and delivered in one day. A few days later, several other Board members volunteered to move over our office contents and help with cleaning our former space so that Josie could reclaim it for the gallery. We negotiated a few utility issues in the first few weeks but have eventually begun to feel settled. The new space has allowed us to spread out and even provide extra desks for volunteers and monitors to work at if needed. We still have more to do, but it now feels like home, and we are planning an open morning and invite you to visit.

Joy Elvin

Jenna joins the staff

As a “girl from away,” I never anticipated the ways I would become a woman increasingly involved in and in love with Little Compton.

I grew up in cities and near suburbs, so I had environmental zeal but little experience with open space. My first memory of Little Compton is the way the trees hugged the roads and filtered the sunlight. That first visit was also the first time I’d ever heard of “stewarding” the land. My husband Nate’s family

has held the deed for the family home in Adamsville since the early 1900s yet he has never felt like his family “owned” the 3.3 acres – his family is just the current steward of it, and that’s a serious and important responsibility.

Nate and I have worked hard to pass down to our children our love and care for Little Compton’s environment, history, and future. I’m delighted that my joy in this place has coincided so beautifully with another opportunity to support its preservation.



Jenna Peterson-Magnuski

Celebrating 50 years of conservation in Little Compton

January 13, 2022 marked the 50th anniversary of Sakonnet Preservation Association's founding in 1972. This creation of a privately funded community land trust, the first of its kind in the state, reflected the foresight of those who recognized that permanent land conservation would be required to protect Little Compton's rural character, land uses and natural resources.

The extraordinary success of the **50th Anniversary Campaign** is a tribute to this community and its generational attachment to this special place. The funds raised will help secure our future work and provide a solid footing as we begin our next half century.



Tickets for our planned 50th Anniversary Celebration sold out within days, with a growing waitlist we are attempting to address. Planning for this event is being done by an invaluable team of volunteer committee members. Production support comes from numerous businesses, public safety officials, and the neighbors and landowners of the property that is the site of the event, shown above.

We are indebted to our sponsors for their help underwriting this event, particularly Lead Sponsor **Brave Family Advisors**, Major Sponsors **BayCoast Bank** and **Welchman Real Estate Group**, and the other generous firms whose logos appear below.



We are also very grateful for the in-kind contributions of food, drink, products and services from local and nearby businesses, farm owners and purveyors listed below.



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