

# Sakonnet Preservation

newsletter of the Sakonnet Preservation Association

## Exploring Little Compton on foot

Many of us are familiar with the benefits of land conservation and the importance of maintaining natural habitats, providing space for native animals and plant life to survive and flourish. An additional benefit of these efforts is being able to walk through some of these properties, connecting with nature and open space.

**Sakonnet Preservation** owns several parcels under its stewardship that allow for public access, and three of these properties are highlighted below. Hopefully, you will be encouraged to visit them and spend time outdoors exploring and learning more about these unique habitats.

The **Camara Property** ("The Ponderosa"), located at about the halfway point of Meetinghouse Lane on the northern side of the road, is perhaps the most well-known SPA property providing public access. The parcel consists of a small pond, parking area and field, and is easily accessible from the road. Over the years, people have used this area for picnicking, fishing, pond hockey games, or just as a spot to pull in and take a break from the day. The Ponderosa continues to be enjoyed by many and is an early example of SPA's efforts to preserve the rural character of Little Compton by maintaining open space to be enjoyed by all.



The **Guild Property**, an 11-acre parcel open to the public, is in Adamsville and can be accessed via a parking area along the eastern shore of Gray's Mill Pond (Adamsville Pond), just over the border from Little Compton in Westport if heading east on Adamsville Road. This is a wonderfully diverse property featuring the pond, a sizable stream (Adamsville Brook) and a trail system which extends into and through the property. The interior trail can be muddy at times and a bit bumpy in places, so one can choose to stop at the bridge which crosses Adamsville Brook just before entering the woods. This is a great spot to pause and observe the wildlife around the pond and brook, or to just listen to the sounds of the water below. The Guild Property is well worth a visit.



The Guild Property trailhead

The **O'Connor Property** (East & West Islands) is unique among SPA properties offering public access. It is comprised of two rocky islands located off Sakonnet Point, requiring one to visit via kayak, rowboat, or similar small craft. West Island especially has a rich history as the former site of a private fishing club (The West Island Club) which existed from the time of the Civil War through the first decade of the twentieth century. All that remains of the cluster of buildings comprising the club are the remnants of cornerstone pillars visible from miles around, undoubtedly West Island's most prominent manmade feature today. If planning a visit to either East or West Islands, pay particular attention to the weather, tides, and marine conditions. Visits are allowed except between April 1st and August 15th, which is nesting and fledging season for native shorebirds.



Snowy Owl visiting West Island  
photo by Geoff Dennis

You can always find out more details on these properties as well as others, by contacting our office or by visiting [sakonnetpreservation.org](http://sakonnetpreservation.org) to see our list of conserved lands.

Geoff Manning

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# The mighty impact of small parcels

In the realm of conservation, size isn't everything. While vast national parks and sprawling wilderness areas often steal the limelight, it's the small, conserved properties that quietly contribute to the preservation of our natural world in significant ways. Here at **Sakonnet Preservation**, we understand the profound value these smaller parcels contribute to the local ecosystem and the vital role they play in tackling climate change.

These properties, despite their size, are important repositories of biodiversity. They provide crucial habitat for a myriad of plant and animal species, serving as vital corridors for wildlife movement and genetic exchange. Even the smallest patch of forest, meadow or wetland can support a surprising array of flora and fauna, enriching the local ecosystem and contributing to its resilience in the face of environmental challenges. These small parcels play a role in broader conservation efforts when combined with holdings from other conservation organizations in Little Compton, creating substantial open space.

Crucially, for Little Compton, these small conservation areas play an essential role in safeguarding water resources. Wetland areas, in particular, act as natural sponges, absorbing excess rainfall and filtering pollutants before they reach our groundwater. By preserving these small wetland habitats, we not only protect the quality of our drinking water but also mitigate the impacts of flooding and erosion, benefiting both humans and wildlife alike. A recent analysis of **Sakonnet Preservation's** properties shows that approximately 70% are classified as wetlands. As we look forward, we recognize the immense value of these small, conserved properties and remain committed to expanding our efforts to protect parcels of all sizes. By saving these precious natural areas, we ensure a healthier, more sustainable future for generations to come.

Land Trusts across America play a pivotal role in conservation efforts, collectively safeguarding millions of acres of land for the benefit of present and future generations. According to the Land Trust Alliance, over 1,281 land trusts in the United States have conserved more than 56 million acres of land—an area roughly equivalent to the size of Colorado. Land Trusts serve as key partners in conservation, working hand in hand with government agencies, private landowners, and local communities to ensure the permanent protection of our most cherished landscapes. By preserving these natural areas, we help protect ecosystems, support biodiversity, and strengthen community resilience, contributing to a more sustainable and climate-resilient future.

Joy Elvin



The Lanpher property, conserved by Sakonnet Preservation



# Boundaries of rock

Abigail Brooks reminds us: "As anyone who has been to Little Compton can attest, stone walls are a distinguishing feature of its scenic landscape—stone walls and meadows that run down to the sea. Stone walls tell stories. They are historically valuable markers of how land has been used. They define property boundaries or cart path enclosures, or were created when clearing fields for agricultural uses, even in currently forested parts of town. Many continue to serve similar purposes to this day— beautiful, useful and worthy of our attention and care."

Introduced to the "New World" by European settlers and built with the help of local Native Americans, Little Compton stone walls have been recognized as a unique feature of our landscape for a long time. You've probably all heard the story of Thomas Church, the town's representative to Massachusetts in the early 1700's when we were still part of that state. Thomas bragged to fellow legislators that Little Compton had enough stone walls to reach all the way to Boston, 70+ miles. When he was challenged, he returned to Little Compton to check his math, and found that he was in error: there were enough walls to reach from Little Compton to Boston—and *back again*.

With our off-the-beaten path location and relatively slower pace of development, many of these stone walls are still standing. And while stones may last forever, stone walls are subjected to our ever-changing weather, damage from trees and vehicles and dislocation over time by both two- and four-legged animals.

**Sakonnet Preservation** cherishes our stone walls and believes that their maintenance and mending is an integral part of the stewardship of our properties.

Recently, and with the financial help of the Little Compton Garden Club, we engaged stonemason Ben Cawley of Cawley Stoneworks to repair and reinforce a section of stone wall along John Dyer Road on our Blanchard Blazer property. As you will see when you next pass by, Ben and his team rebuilt the wall with an inviting and simple design. It is rock solid and will surely last another century or two.

Robert Frost, in his well-known poem *Mending Walls*, wrote that good fences make good neighbors. Local pastor, Virginia Army would add that the lines established by stone walls are a gentle reminder to all of us that boundaries are limitations we should set for ourselves and respect in others.

So, the next time you're driving down familiar roads, rushing to and fro, take a minute to appreciate this integral part of our town's character. Listen to their stories; remember those who initially built the walls and celebrate the talented stone masons, farmers and homeowners who continue to maintain these quintessential Little Compton features today.

Judy Melanson



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# Come to our Annual Meeting in July!

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**Sakonnet Preservation** will hold its Annual Meeting on Tuesday evening, July 23, 2024 from 6 to 8pm at the Little Compton Community Center.

From 6 to 7pm attendees will be welcomed with drinks and hors d'oeuvres. A short business meeting at 7pm upstairs will be followed by a panel of three speakers who have been intimately involved with our project at the Meehan Triangle—Stewardship Director, Adam Yorks; artist, Josie Richmond; and gardener, Jeremy Allen. Accompanied by images of the property's various habitats and seasonal changes, the speakers will share how this project is evolving as a model for habitat protection transferable to private landowners.

Additionally, Sidney Tynan has generously donated copies of her latest book, *Even More Country Letters*, which will be available at the meeting for voluntary contributions to benefit SPA. The public is invited to join us for this free event celebrating our 52nd year of conserving land in Little Compton.



Adam Yorks mowing the Meehan Triangle

## A wish to protect

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A landowner's choice to permanently protect a property as open space can spring from diverse motivations. It can be seen as a gift to the town, securing a piece of what makes this place exceptional for generations to come. It can be tied to a family's long history of enjoying the pleasures that have been experienced on a property. It can be seen as a means of protecting groundwater and habitat as the pressures of development bring up questions about how much longer we will be able to draw drinkable water from our groundwater. And what will be left of the native plants and the animals and insects that rely on them for nourishment that mark our seasons if we continue fragmenting the landscape? Individual landowners have their own motivation. Elizabeth 'Bunny' Millikin's is "to protect what is great about this place."

Over the last two years, **Sakonnet Preservation** has worked closely with Bunny to secure two conservation easements—one on a Warren's Point Road meadow that has been in her family for generations, and another on an adjacent property she recently purchased, ensuring both would remain open and undeveloped forever. She has succeeded in enlarging her current holdings of conserved land and "what is great about this place." Both easements provide watershed protections and scenic views from public roads. They create another link to 'greenways' being developed by contiguous protected properties that include critical and threatened habitat. Additionally, she is protecting properties in locations considered candidate sites for historic preservation.

It is hard to think of a greater legacy one can leave to this town than securing the permanent protection of a part of its landscape, an increasingly unique seaside landscape offering solace and sustenance to people and animals alike.

Thank you Bunny.



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 accept our apologies and notify Joy Elvin,  
[jelvin@sakonnetpreservation.org](mailto:jelvin@sakonnetpreservation.org)

Among the various conservation groups working in Little Compton, **Sakonnet Preservation** is distinguished by its willingness to accept properties for conservation that may not be a priority for other groups. We are open to accepting small parcels which make up a high percentage of the remaining undeveloped land in our community. Such parcels are vital for protecting groundwater, habitat corridors, historic stone walls and scenic vistas that define our landscape.

An accredited 501c3 non-profit organization, **Sakonnet Preservation** relies almost exclusively on donor contributions for its work preserving open space and providing conservation education to all ages in the community with activities, volunteer opportunities and web-based as well as mailed newsletters. Donations supporting our work can be paid by check; credit card payment online at [sakonnetpreservation.org](http://sakonnetpreservation.org); with contributions from donor-advised funds; with gifts of appreciated stock; or with Required Minimum Distribution funds from an IRA. Our correct mailing address is PO Box 945, Little Compton, RI 02837. For direct transfer of funds or financial instruments please contact us for instructions





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