



# Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

Winter 2009

## Sakonnet Preservation Association Reaches 400 Acre Mark

On December 31st, with a raging snowstorm underway to mark the end of the year, members of two families met President Abigail Brooks in the Town Hall to record their donations with Sakonnet Preservation Association. One landowner, who wishes to remain anonymous, contributed a conservation easement on just over two acres of coastal property that abuts another easement we hold. This beautiful acreage of open agricultural land overlooking Rhode Island Sound provides important habitat for migratory and resident birds and is now permanently protected.

On that same day, five Taylor siblings (Janet Taylor Lisle, Robert, Geoffrey, Hugh and Crane Taylor) donated outright a lot north of Taylor's Lane of over 3 acres. This lot, handed down through three generations of their family, abuts another parcel to the northwest donated to us by Betty Hough in 1998. Streams flow through the Taylor parcel, gathering steam as they approach the Sakonnet River, providing both habitat and well recharging capacity to neighboring residents. This area of coastal shrub is considered vital to migrating birds as they make their way along the Atlantic flyway in the spring and fall, feeding as they must on the seeds and berries these properties provide. The lot is surrounded on three sides by historic stone walls.

The conservation of contiguous properties is a priority for our organization as we seek to enlarge the benefits for animals and humans alike that comes with corridors of open space left permanently undisturbed. Water resources, as well as habitat protection, combined with the preservation of rural character are among the qualities we assess for conservation by our organization. We owe a debt of gratitude to both families for these extraordinary contributions to the quality of life in our town. And we are honored to be protecting over 400 acres in Little Compton for current and future generations.



*Janet Taylor Lisle at the west boundary of her family's donated property.*

### Our Gratitude

#### **Patricia "Patty" Goodrich**

We gratefully acknowledge a very generous bequest from Patricia "Patty" Goodrich. Patty, the late wife of David Goodrich of Bailey's Ledge, had a forty-seven year love affair with Little Compton and became a committed supporter of land conservation and the Sakonnet Preservation Association. She had a keen appreciation for the beauty of this place and a strong desire to help preserve its unique rural character.

#### **Pauline "Polly" Farrell**

The Sakonnet Preservation Association was recently named as a recipient for memorial gifts in Polly Farrell's name. She and her daughter Rachel had travelled to Little Compton over the years to observe grassland birds on our landscape. These memorial gifts represent an expression of affection for her and her family and acknowledge their recognition that habitat protection is essential in the life of birds.



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## SPA Volunteers Clean Up East and West Islands

As owner of East and West Islands, just south of Sakonnet Point, about 100 yards from shore and adjacent to "Seaconnet Light," the Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA) is the steward of the two islands and responsible for stewarding to ensure that their conservation values are protected. West Island, the bigger of the two at 6 acres, contains remnants of the stone pillars that supported the West Island Club in the 1800's and early 1900's. East Island, 3 acres in size, has a lower profile and served, in the Club's heyday, as the site of a vegetable garden and grazing area for cows. A stone wall encloses the area on this island likely used for the garden.

Jessie Lloyd O'Connor, whose family owned the islands, generously donated them to the SPA in 1983 hoping to keep them protected as open space for all to enjoy. Currently, they serve as an impressive rookery for waterfowl and as a recreational spot for day boaters.

Last May, Abigail Brooks, SPA's President, Sheila Mackintosh, Chair of SPA's Land Protection Committee, and Geoff Dennis, a local quohogger, expert birder and SPA volunteer, traveled to the islands in Geoff's boat to monitor the properties. They observed countless nesting Cormorants,

Gulls, and Canadian Geese as well as migrating and resident song birds. Over 100 damaged lobster pots and deep piles of trash along the shoreline of both islands called for action. In the fall, after the nesting birds had vacated the islands, the cleanup took place.

Geoff spearheaded the project and volunteered his boat and brawn. Sixteen volunteers spent approximately 12 hours cleaning up the Islands on two Saturdays in September that coincided with the Audubon Society's International Coastal Clean-up. Geoff, Peter Lozier and Mike Steers captained their power boats and towed row boats to the site, anchored, and helped get all ashore. One hundred twenty lobster pots were dragged to the shoreline, emptied of their brick weights and flattened with a sledgehammer to make transporting them easier. Twenty-one large garbage bags were filled with refuse. Hours later, these "fruits of their labor" got loaded into the boats for the trip to Sakonnet Harbor where they were transferred into trucks and cars for disposal at the Transfer Station.

The clean up was an unprecedented success. It was even some fun. All involved had the satisfaction of watching the boats, looking like overloaded garbage scows, leaving the islands on the ocean swells. Looking back as they departed, the hardworking volunteers could take pride in having restored the islands to the pristine habitat originally envisioned when they were donated to SPA. — *Heather Steers*



*Abigail Brooks, Jeanne Parente, Geoff Dennis, and Heather Steers cleaning East Island.*

## President's Letter

***“The lesson I read in the past is this: that the health of land and water — and of woods, which are the keepers of water — can be the only lasting basis for any civilization’s survival and success”*** — RICHARD WRIGHT FROM A SHORT HISTORY OF PROGRESS

With our conserving work comes the long term responsibility and commitment for our organization of PERMANENTLY protecting the open land we hold. These parcels help define some of the beauty and character as well as protect the natural resources of our Little Compton landscape.

Conservation values that make a property worthy of protection are often the natural assets that have attracted generations to rural settings such as ours. Quality drinking water, farmable land, the presence of a variety of plants, trees and animals, historic structures such as stone walls, and beautiful vistas across meadows to the sea are some of the defining characteristics of our landscape that draw us to it. In offering substantial tax deductions for the protection of such assets, Congress has confirmed with legislation the importance of conserving these life-sustaining elements.

As a conservation organization, we are obligated to ensure that the conservation values and development restrictions that apply to each conserved property we hold are monitored annually and protected FOREVER. We are determined as well to honor the original donor's intentions. These protected properties will be handed down through many generations in the best possible condition with our organization's oversight. The responsibility of our monitoring oversight is called “stewardship,” and it is a vital and expensive part of our work at the very core of our mission.

The IRS requires that land trusts report annually on the monitoring of each conserved property because of the generous tax deductions now available to donors and bargain sellers of these parcels. We must justify to the IRS that we are capable of protecting a property's natural resource value FOREVER.

*Securing reserve funding adequate to subsidize our organization's stewarding capacity well beyond our lifetimes is essential. With that in mind, we have launched the Carter Stewardship Fund initiative, honoring visionary gifts by Letitia Carter over the years. Her gifts have been specified for stewardship and have been used to create our Stewardship Reserve Fund. We are undertaking an ambitious five-year plan to build on her generosity and foresight. Our aim is to raise funds adequate to meet our perpetual responsibility to landowners, our community and the generations that will follow us.*

*In this way, we intend to address the PERMANENT protection of the conservation values of our holdings and confirm our commitment to the mission statement that serves as our guide: “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.” — Abigail Brooks*



## Highlights of 2008 Annual Meeting

On July 8th, 2008, despite the heat, humidity and wind, nearly 100 members and supporters turned out for our Annual Meeting. The Sakonnet Golf Club Playhouse turned into a delightful venue as we celebrated the accomplishments and conducted the business of our annual gathering.

Retiring Board members Rosemary Colt, Steve Horowitz, Suzie Shaw and Sarah Whitehead were honored for their service to our organization, and new members Margaret Tirpaeck and Scott Morrison were welcomed. 2007 conservation easement donors — Jim Marsh, Chris and Wendy Born, Amelia Thomas and Paul Bazzoni — were thanked for permanently protecting their properties for the benefit of the community. Treasurer Bob Wolter reported that SPA is in sound financial condition. Major donors were thanked, and a particular laud was given to the Millikin family for the generous memorial gifts received by SPA in honor of the life and conservation interests of Dudley Millikin II.

The second portion of the meeting was devoted to SPA's responsibility stewarding its properties that is such an important part of the work we do. The Carter Stewardship Fund Campaign was launched to build the organization's financial reserves for protecting the properties we hold. Heather Steers, Chair of our Stewardship Committee, honored those currently volunteering as property monitors. Carol Trocki, the wildlife biologist who prepares our baseline documents, shared photographs of properties in Little Compton she has visited. When asked what she found unique about Little Compton, she answered that the scale and quality of open space and wetlands that remain undisturbed sets our community apart from any other she has visited.

The meeting closed with the showing of a DVD, made by volunteer Piper Hawes, who brought Wilbur/McMahon elementary school youngsters to the Audubon Education Center in Bristol to learn about wetlands. The enthusiasm of these future stewards was palpable in this delightful presentation she created.

## SPA and LCACT Partner to Acquire Historic Adamsville Property

*At last we can report on the successful completion of our efforts to protect the remaining woodland lot on the Simone Blanchard property in Adamsville as of December 16, 2008.*

In the late 1980's, the Sakonnet Preservation Association acquired four lots, totaling nearly 10 acres, through a bequest from owner Simone Blanchard. With the financial assistance of the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust (the Trust), we have been able to purchase the remaining original two acre parcel of this farm that is located on John Dyer Road near its intersection with Colebrook Road. The lot, now owned in common by our two organizations, brings the total of permanently protected land surrounding this historic Adamsville farmhouse to nearly twelve contiguous acres. Its strategic position at the intersection of two well-traveled Adamsville roads, its location in the watershed of the West Branch of the Westport River, its abundance



*Bill Richmond of the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust and SPA President Abigail Brooks at the Blanchard property.*

of historic stone walls, wetland, forest and meadow habitat, its classification as Prime Farmland soil suitable for agriculture, and the pressure of increasing nearby development, all give it priority consideration for conservation.

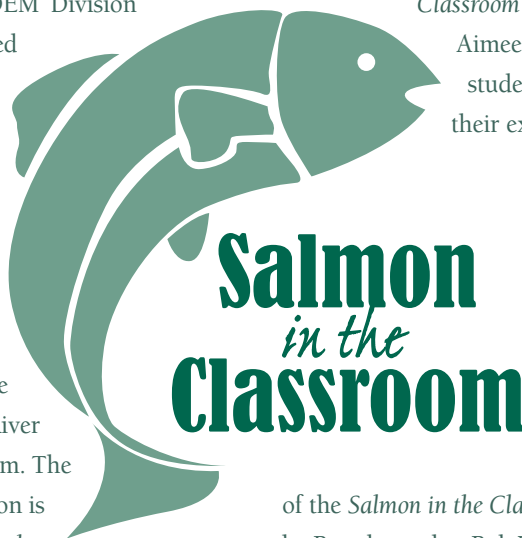
When current owner Stuart Blazer approached SPA in January of 2008, offering to sell this one remaining unprotected parcel abutting the lots we already owned, there was no reason to say "no" once we secured funding with the help of the Trust.

Working together, we have succeeded in adding the final piece to this beautiful network of field and forest that is woven together by a labyrinth of impressive stone walls.

## Spring Education Event: *Salmon in the Classroom* Program

Kim Sullivan, Senior Biologist with the RIDEM Division of Fish and Wildlife, will be the featured speaker at the annual Sakonnet Preservation spring education event to be held at the Little Compton Community Center on April 29 at 7 pm. The public is invited to attend this event.

Kim will discuss the life style of Atlantic salmon, the history of Atlantic salmon in Rhode Island, the RIDEM'S effort to restore Atlantic salmon to the Wood/Pawcatuck River system and the *Salmon in the Classroom* program. The Wilbur and McMahan School in Little Compton is starting its second year in the *Salmon in the*



*Classroom* program under the supervision of Ms. Aimee MacLean, Science Teacher. Eighth grade students will be joining Ms. Sullivan to share their experiences with the program.

Kim was instrumental in instituting the *Salmon in the Classroom* program in Rhode Island schools with help from the Connecticut River Salmon Restoration program. In 2009, there will be 32 middle and high schools participating throughout Rhode Island. The Sakonnet Preservation Association is a supporter

of the *Salmon in the Classroom* which was introduced to the school by Board member Bob Wolter. — *Bob Wolter*

## Bobolinks and Stewardship: What's the Link?

This past May, twenty of us had a privileged viewing of arriving bobolinks on five properties in Little Compton. These beautiful, exuberantly melodic birds are in steep decline all over the country as the loss of farms, farm fields and early mowing take their toll on grassland-nesting birds. With experienced birders John Gwynne, Fred Thurber and Garry Plunkett among us, we walked through meadows and skirted woodlands where the black, buff and white males were clamoring to claim their nesting territory in anticipation of the arrival of their female partners.

The purpose of our outing was to educate both participants and landowners about methods for protecting these vulnerable birds during their nesting season. By delaying mowing of fields until at least mid-August, landowners can keep nests and fledglings from being destroyed by mowing equipment. Where hay for animals is being harvested, fields can be mown in alternate strips or can be planted to a variety of cold and warm weather hay crops that mature sequentially as a way of protecting some portion of a field for the bobolinks and other ground nesters until their early parenting duties are over. Tom Sandham from the Eastern RI Conservation District Office, and Garry Plunkett from the Tiverton Open Space Commission have been experimenting with such planting schemes in Tiverton.

Bobolinks are drawn to habitat that includes wetlands where they can withdraw to molt in mid-August before they begin their long migration to South America for the winter. Bird behavior is not only fun to watch but has much to teach us about the value of our meadows and wetlands. Learning how to balance our needs with those of the wildlife that share our landscape is fundamental to SPA's stewardship and educational work in the community.



*Bobolink photo by Geoff Dennis.*



# Sakonnet Preservation Association

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## Our Mission

*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.*

**For Information:  
401.635.8800**

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