



# Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

Spring 2012

## Preserving The Night Sky, Keeping Town's Rural Character

What is rural character? Included in the mission statement for the Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA) is the phrase "rural character" used to express defining features of the landscape of Little Compton to be conserved. Stone walls gracing open fields, woodland along our roadways, agriculture mixed in with a relatively low level of residential development, exquisite vistas across open land, and few lights to diminish our view of the night sky all contribute to the rural quality of this town.

These features are not only visually appealing but they also help protect the natural resources and habitat upon which we and wildlife depend. It is the goal of SPA to conserve these fragile elements of our surroundings for future generations to enjoy.

When a group of hockey players who use the Ponderosa asked that this organization consider an upgrade to the



*Western sky at dusk, February 26, 2012*

### Limiting outdoor lighting preserves night sky for Little Compton residents.

lighting for night skating, the question of balancing human use with the protection of habitat was raised. Stewardship of SPA-owned public properties obligates weighing such a balance.

The website [www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org) is devoted to educating the public about the challenges to people and animals of lighting up the night. The site suggests options that minimize negative impacts on humans, and on wildlife in ecologically sensitive areas such as wetlands, woods and coastal areas.

A type of lighting the website recommends — an amber, high pressure sodium light — is what the hockey players had proposed and what SPA has approved for the benefit of night skating on the Ponderosa. [www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org)

is a valuable resource for anyone making decisions about outdoor lighting in Little Compton who values preserving its sensitive environment and rural character and treasures viewing the night sky.



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## ***President's Letter***

Two years in a row, we have had cause for celebration. 2011 was the year of our accreditation by the national Land Trust Accreditation Commission. 2012 is our fortieth anniversary. We have come a long way in 40 years.

In January of 1972, the Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA) was established as the first community land trust in the state. This marked the beginning of a local land protection movement in Rhode Island, a state that now boasts over 40 community land trusts statewide. We can be proud of what has transpired since the efforts of a few Little Compton residents created SPA.

In its first newsletter, President Philip B. Simonds, stated the Board's objectives: "**...the preservation of natural resources of the Town of Little Compton, including water resources, marshland, swamps, woodland and open spaces, and the plant and animal life which have always been so important a part of Little Compton's charm, as well as the preservation of open land areas of historical significance.**" Further, he expressed the Board's wisdom recognizing "**...that land set aside as permanent open space has a restraining influence on future tax rates...that an abundance of new residential development tends to be an added tax expense, needing more in municipal services than is returned in tax revenue by these new residents.**"

Since 1972, SPA has protected 65 properties, including over 400 acres of land. The success of this accredited organization reflects the generosity of its community supporters and the labor of hundreds of volunteers over the past 40 years.

Please join with us as we celebrate the legacy of our founders with the events we have planned for the year. They are listed on page 4 of this issue. You are part of the community that has made SPA's successes possible. We hope you can be present as we celebrate them.

– Abigail Brooks, *President*

## Heather Steers Honored with Peter Merritt Award

Sakonnet Preservation Association Board member Heather Steers has been honored by the Rhode Island Land Trust Council with the Peter Merritt Award for "outstanding achievement in the land trust community." This award recognizes her dedication to land conservation in our community and state.

Heather has served on the SPA board in a variety of capacities since 1991 — nearly 21 years. Heather and her husband Michael had been summer residents since childhood. Shortly after becoming year round residents over 20 years ago, Heather was asked if she would serve on the SPA board and immediately she said "yes."

Describing her purpose in joining SPA, Heather says, "I felt then, as I do now, that living in this beautiful town, I would do anything to preserve the fields, the woods, scenic vistas, and open space that so characterize our special community."

As a board member, Heather has served as the organization's secretary, as its president for six years, and as a member of its accreditation team. She is currently serving as Chair of the Stewardship Committee and as a member of the Land Protection Committee. While serving as board president, Heather was responsible for the development of SPA's first comprehensive strategic plan and the Board commitment to practice land conservation in accordance with the national Land

Trust Alliance Standards and Practices. She has also served on the Board of the Rhode Island Land Trust Council, working at a statewide level promoting land conservation.

Since 2007, Heather's leadership of SPA's Stewardship Committee has ensured that each of

the organization's holdings is carefully monitored on an annual basis and each inspection is documented and archived. Currently her work involves supervising 32 volunteer monitors who visit a total of 65 Little Compton properties at least once each year and organizing all the details entailed in the stewardship of these properties as well. Single handedly, she has created a model of quality stewardship of which this organization is justifiably proud.

Heather's gift to both the conservation community and her home town is a legacy of land protection and stewardship practices of the highest

quality. This standard is recognized at a statewide level, and at a national level by the official accreditation of the Sakonnet Preservation Association.

SPA is indebted to Heather for all the work she has done and continues to do for the organization. Her contribution helps to assure that SPA fulfills its mission with the utmost integrity, quality and diligence.



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that living in this beautiful town,  
I would do anything to preserve  
the fields, the woods, scenic vistas,  
and open space that so characterize  
our special community."

Heather Steers

## Jackson and Sarah Robinson Donate Conservation Easement

In October 2011, Jackson and Sarah Robinson generously donated a conservation easement to SPA along the south side of Taylor's Lane. The Robinsons are passionate about land protection, growing native plants, and in Sarah's words, 'contributing to the preservation of our outstanding Little Compton landscape and character.'

The Robinson conservation easement permanently protects historic stone walls, the scenic view across their open meadow from Taylor's Lane, and its habitat and groundwater in this residential neighborhood. In addition, the protected property lies within the Little Compton Agricultural Lands Scenic Area and the Taylor's Lane Historic District Candidate Site, as designated by the State of Rhode Island.

This newest preserved parcel abuts a property with a 99 year restriction on development. Within one mile, there are 700 acres of conserved land including 155 additional acres protected by SPA, 254 acres protected by the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust (LCACT), 159 acres protected by The Nature Conservancy of Rhode Island, 85 acres protected by the Town of Little Compton, and 47 acres protected by the LCACT and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management.

SPA's Stewardship Committee Chair, Heather Steers, will meet with the Robinsons to review their SPA donor binder and to clarify the clearly drawn, rigorous process for monitoring the parcel. *Thank you Sarah and Jack.*

– Sheila Mackintosh, *Chair of Land Protection Committee*



### Please join the Sakonnet Preservation Association for our 2012 events

**Monday – April 16th ■ 7PM ■ LC Community Center**

*"Trees in Trouble: Identifying Threats from Invasives and Climate Change"*  
*Speaker John Campanini, Head of the RI Tree Council*

**Saturday – May 19th ■ 4 – 6PM ■ Art Café and Gallery Gardens**

*40th Anniversary of SPA – party and art opening with Commons Cottage Gallery.*

**Tuesday – July 10th ■ 6 – 8PM ■ Sakonnet Golf Club Playhouse**

*SPA Annual Meeting with Miyoko Chu from the Cornell Ornithology Lab,  
author of **Songbird Journeys**.*

**Friday – August 31st ■ 11AM ■ Dunderly Brook Trail**

*RI Land Trust Days event – Dunderly Brook Trail walk with  
The Nature Conservancy of RI guide, naturalist and ornithologist, Scott Comings.*

*All are Welcome!*

## A Place in the Family of Things

Terry Tempest Williams' prefaces her memoir, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (2001), with Mary Oliver's poem, "Wild Geese," the closing line of which points to nature's insistence — if we listen to the message — on our place in the universe. A native of Utah and a Mormon, Williams is a conservationist and a political activist. Belonging to the pantheon of American nature writers like Wendell Berry, Edward Abbey, Peter Matthiessen and Henry David Thoreau, she shares with them not only a belief in the essential human need for a sense of place, of a connection to nature, but in the transcendental character of "the spirit world," the idea that the natural world has spiritual value," that days "spent in the wilderness are sacred."

Thus Williams conceives of personal experience in the context in which she lives, particularly the rising of the Great Salt Lake and the resulting desecration of the pristine environment of the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. This history is the backdrop of the account of her mother's dying of cancer.

Williams' rich descriptions of birdlife and the natural world are interwoven with the story of her experience of her mother's journey. "Her womb," she writes of a mother, "is the first landscape we inhabit." Coming across a wounded barn swallow she knows is past helping, she is unable to leave the bird. She places it on the grass and watches it die. "Suffering," she says, "shows us what we are attached to..." Yet, she concludes, "dying doesn't cause suffering. Resistance to dying does."

What Williams ultimately experiences during her grieving and the restoration of the bird refuge is how "the healing grace of earth solaces and renews those who give themselves to it." Her book speaks vividly to all who rely on a familiar landscape for their sense of self and connection to the universe, be it the shores of the Great Salt Lake or the edge of the Atlantic Ocean.

– Rosemary Colt



## Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the praries and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air  
are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

– Mary Oliver

"Wild Geese" from *Dream Work* by Mary Oliver. Copyright ©1986 by Mary Oliver. Used by permission of Grove/Atlantic, Inc.



## Sakonnet Preservation Association

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*Consider The Gift of an SPA Membership!*

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401.635.8800  
For Information:

*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.*

**Our Mission**



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