



# Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

Winter 2010

## Preserving Cutts Family Meadow: Part of a Quilt of Land Conservation

There is a story behind every land protection transaction we do. One particular conservation easement we worked on this year involves a family parcel that exemplifies SPA's niche among the various groups conserving in Little Compton.

For several generations the Cutts family has owned a coastal meadow of just over 1/2 acre that is mown intermittently during the summer allowing the natural grasses and wildflowers to flourish and discouraging invasive plants. When David and Gordon Cutts and Holly Cutts Billings submitted an application to SPA, their property was evaluated to see if it meets SPA's and IRS criteria for conservation protection with public value. For *many* reasons, we decided that it does.

Their meadow is clearly visible to the public from the Town Lot, enhancing scenic vistas from both the parking area and from offshore. It abuts the Town Lot, acting to enlarge an existing conservation area. A stream flowing into Rhode Island Sound cuts through a shrubby swale between the Cutts' property and the parking area of the Town Lot. Protecting these waters, categorized as Type I, is a state-wide conservation priority and qualifies as having public value. Conserving the meadow conforms with recommendations within our Comprehensive Community Plan to protect scenic open

space, our rural seaside community character and our natural landscapes. This small lot also falls within a state-designated Greenway and the Little Compton Agricultural Lands Scenic Area.

Of personal value to the family, the conservation of this meadow increases the likelihood that the property can be passed to successive generations. Because the property is no longer developable (it was legally developable as a

grandfathered lot before it had permanent conservation protection), this generation of owners has dramatically reduced its value with an easement. Estate taxes at its developable value could have forced its sale in the future.

We would like to thank the Cutts siblings for gifting the easement on this beautiful meadow to SPA. Our

organization is pleased to be able to permanently protect and steward some small family parcels that may not fall into a priority category for preservation by other groups conserving land in Little Compton. Working collaboratively, the Sakonnet Preservation Association, the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust and The Nature Conservancy are stitching together a quilt of protected properties in Little Compton with conservation and scenic value for coming generations.

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

The Sakonnet Preservation Association has successfully navigated the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression thanks to the conservative investment practices of our Finance Committee, newly initiated belt tightening, and expanded donor outreach. Since the downturn coincided with the launching of our Carter Stewardship Campaign, there was an added financial challenge in our response to the recession.

Fortunately, our Finance Committee has utilized conservative investment practices over the years, securing our funds in Certificates of Deposit with a laddered approach, investing in each institution to the limit of FDIC protection. We did not lose a dime in the freefall of the stock market that flattened the funding of so many organizations and philanthropic foundations.

To address diminished returns from our 2009 spring membership drive, we knew we had to tighten our belt and expand our outreach. We started by axing thousands of dollars from our budget, first removing nearly all funding for conference attendance — a vital learning experience for many of us on the Board. We limited the hours of administrative assistance in our office and accelerated and broadened our search for grant funds. We focused on increasing our contact with potential member donors for our Annual Appeal while launching our website to create more visibility. And we asked our Board members and land donors to assist us by contributing funds for our land protection transactions and stewardship reserves.

The response has been impressive. The last quarter of 2009 showed a 35% increase in unrestricted giving from our membership over the fourth quarter of 2008. Additionally, our Carter Stewardship Reserve Fund increased over the full year by 65% as a result of grants, Board member donations, Board transfers from unrestricted funds, investment returns, and restricted contributions for stewardship from 2009 Conservation Easement donors and organization members.

We still have a way to go before we fulfill our goal of sufficient stewardship funding. But I am thrilled to be able to thank our generous supporters, hard working and generous Board members and our 2009 conservation easement donors for helping us immeasurably. With this combined charitable giving, we are able to continue conserving Little Compton's increasingly precious open space with the confidence that we are on our way toward attaining essential restricted stewardship funding for the long haul. And of equal importance, we have been given the necessary unrestricted funds to continue running our office. — *Abigail Brooks*

## New Board Member Profile: Sandra Mataronas

### Alaska Childhood Leads to Passion to Preserve Nature

Growing up in Alaska I began to appreciate nature at a very young age and was easily inspired to preserve it. It is difficult not to be inspired when you grow up surrounded by majestic mountains, crystal clear lakes, emerald green rivers and an abundance of woods and wildlife. Add to that a family that would pack up every summer and move into a tent on the side of a riverbank, only going home every few weekends to restock and freeze fresh-caught fish, and you have a kid hooked on nature. My days in the summer were spent fishing, hiking, playing in the woods and wandering freely. Now I cannot imagine a world without the freedom of that option.

Unsurprisingly, I was drawn to a biology career and I could not decide between land and sea so I majored in general biology for my undergraduate degree. The college I chose was a marine science school in the Hamptons. During that time I had many jobs but the two that stick out are working on boats as a deckhand and being a wildlife rehabilitator. I believe that, if I could ever make a living at it, being a wildlife rehabilitator would be my dream career. However, as much as I tried to stay on land I was always drawn back to the sea. I had the opportunity to sail on a schooner down the east coast through a SEAmester program during college and got the chance to see everything from Provincetown, MA to Cumberland Island, GA, to Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the BVI's. From then on I knew I could never live away from the ocean. This knowledge, along with meeting my future husband, drew me to Rhode Island.

*In addition to my affinity for the ocean, I have a great passion to preserve nature as a whole and this has led me to the SPA. — SANDRA MATARONAS*

My husband Greg grew up in Little Compton and is a lobsterman out of Sakonnet harbor. How amazing to have met my perfect person and to be brought to a perfect place. I have become resigned to the fact that I need the sea to be a large part of my life and am now working as a contractor for



*Sandra Mataronas on dock with hammerhead sharks.*

NOAA as a shark biologist. My master's research has been on the biology of a little known species living right off our coast, the Atlantic torpedo ray. It is a distant relative of the sting ray but instead of having a barb on its tail as a weapon the Atlantic torpedo have electric organs which they use to shock their prey. They are just another fascinating creature that could have a great effect on their aquatic ecosystem.

In addition to my affinity for the ocean, I have a great passion to preserve nature as a whole and this has led me to the SPA. Little Compton is a vision of a town, with rolling fields, historic stonewalls, plenty of woods and a never-ending ocean view, and it is a wonderful place to call home. I often think to myself on my drive home from work that the cows on the side of West Main Road have got to have the best views of any cows in the country (if not the world)! When the SPA asked me to be on their board of directors I was very excited to get to know some people in town as well as work with others to preserve what I love. Nature is ever so fragile and my hope is that with people supporting and working with organizations like this one we can preserve it so our children and generations to come can share these experiences with nature as we have been able to.

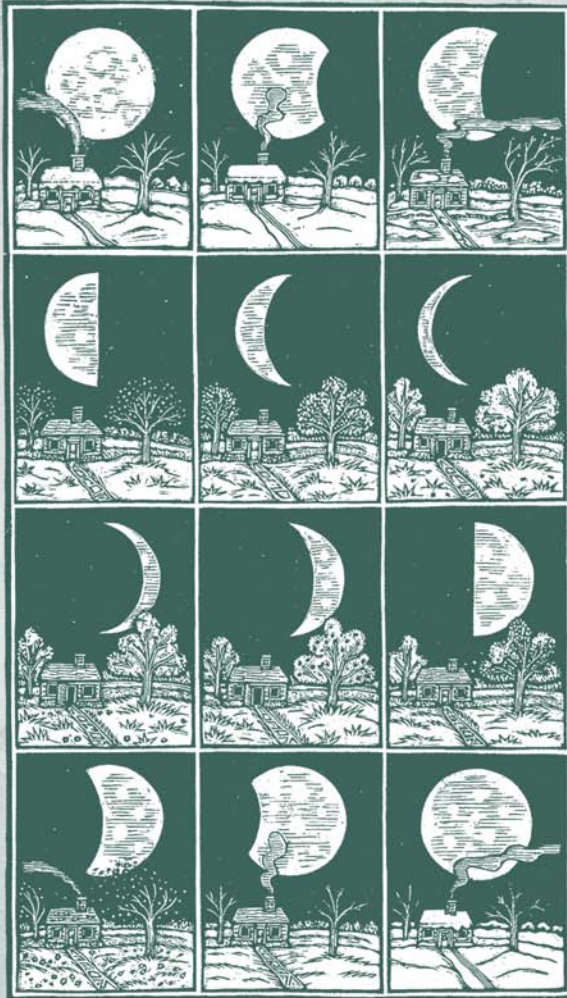


Illustration from the cover of *Twelve Moons of the Year* by Hal Borland.

# Twelve Moons of the Year

The names of moons, reflecting the nature of weather and the behavior of plants, animals and humans alike during that month, have been handed down through generations. Names of the moons are derived from those commonly in use among several related Indian tribes when the first English settlers arrived and varied, depending on the natural setting. Here are some that are still commonly used. Keep your eye to the sky and imagine what is happening around you that these names represent.

Wolf Moon	January
Snow Moon	February
Worm Moon	March
Pink Moon	April
Flower Moon	May
Hot Moon	June
Buck Moon	July
Sturgeon Moon	August
Harvest Moon	September
Hunter Moon	October
Beaver Moon	November
Cold Moon	December



## *An Expression of Gratitude to Our 2009 Land Donors*

In addition to the Cutts family donation, two additional conservation easements were donated to SPA in 2009. Deborah Wiley has conserved a two acre meadow on Bailey's Ledge Road, protecting open space that contains important agricultural soils, provides scenic vistas from and to the Sakonnet River and protects surface water on which our wells depend for potable water. A third donation comes from two siblings who wish to remain anonymous.

They have donated 5.5 acres of pond frontage that protect pristine Type 1 waters, historic farm walls and wetland habitat. We thank these generous donors whose contributions help protect the natural resources, habitat, scenic beauty and rural characteristics that set Little Compton apart from many coastal communities. These donations bring to nearly 409 acres the land protected by The Sakonnet Preservation Association.

## Spring Education Event, April 29 at 6:30 pm

### Conservation Easements – A Way of Preserving Family Lands

Come learn all the ins and outs about conservation easements in a talk given by Scott Comings of the Nature Conservancy at 6:30 p.m. on April 29 at the Little Compton Community Center. His presentation is being co-sponsored by the Sakonnet Preservation Association and The Nature Conservancy.

*For those who hope to prepare for future generations to inherit family property, the impact of estate taxes can influence whether or not it is possible.*

Comings will focus on conservation easements as a tool that can be used not only to preserve farms, scenic views, important habitat and natural resources, but can also help ensure that land remains in a family for future generations. Conservation easements have been used in Little Compton and on Block Island to achieve these goals since 1972.

For those who hope to prepare for future generations to inherit family property, the impact of estate taxes can influence whether or not it is possible. Conservation easements greatly reduce the valuation of land for estate purposes and can be a method of preventing an unwanted sale because of high inheritance taxes. The Sakonnet Preservation Association, the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust and The Nature Conservancy all use this important conservation tool on Little Compton properties.

*Conservation easements greatly reduce the valuation of land for estate purposes and can be a method of preventing an unwanted sale because of the high inheritance taxes.*

Scott Comings not only uses conservation easements to preserve land on Block Island and in South County but also to conserve his family land. Mr. Comings has worked for The Nature Conservancy for the last 13 years. He now serves as their Block Island Director, South County Real Estate Specialist, and Director of Stewardship. During his time at the Conservancy he has authored two books

about Block Island as well as countless articles in the Block Island paper. He has also developed an extensive conservation curriculum supplement for the Block Island School. In addition to his work at the Conservancy, Scott owns and operates an organic farm with his wife Suzanne. Block Island and Little Compton are his two favorite places in the state.



*Scott Comings with Cooper's Hawk.*

### Marvell Donation Honors SPA

The family of Elinor Truesdale Marvell has honored the Sakonnet Preservation Association by requesting that memorial donations be made to this organization in her memory following her death at 95 on November 18, 2009.

**SPA Wish List: Garmin, GPSMAP 60CSx GPS** This equipment would be used to assist stewardship monitors in locating property boundaries. Cost: \$350.



# Sakonnet Preservation Association

**Sakonnet Preservation Association**  
P. O. Box 945, Little Compton, RI 02837  
Phone/Fax: 401.635.8800

YES, I WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A NEW MEMBER.  
*Enclosed is my tax deductible membership contribution.*

- Student \$20
- Individual \$25
- Family \$35
- Sustaining \$100
- Patron \$250
- Sponsor \$500
- Benefactor \$1,000+
- Special Gift \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent Address \_\_\_\_\_

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State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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*Consider The Gift of an SPA Membership!*

sakonnetpreservation.org

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

**Sakonnet Preservation Association**  
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