

TRIBUTARIES

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE OLD LYME CONSERVATION TRUST, INC.

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Remembering Mary (Griswold) Steube

by Sabine O'Donnell

Mary Steube is well known to the Old Lyme Conservation Trust. Upon her death in 1998, she donated her house, its surrounding land (now called the Jericho Preserve), the land that now comprises the Woodward H. & George Griswold Preserve, as well as almost \$1 million to maintain the house and acquire more land for the Trust.



This photograph of 20-year old Mary Griswold hangs at 44 Whippoorwill Road, her former home and the present-day office of the Old Lyme Conservation Trust.

The Whippoorwill house, located on Bucky Brook, is an important financial resource for the Trust. It generates rental income which is used for a variety of the Trust's activities, including preserve maintenance, land acquisitions, surveys, appraisals, and membership and administrative activities. The cash reserves allow the Trust to act swiftly when pursuing land purchases, avoiding the arduous and time-consuming process of applying for government grants.

This article paints a portrait of the very private woman behind these generous donations.

Mary Steube was born on November 27, 1910 in Old Lyme, and died here on February 15, 1998. Mary was the older of two daughters of Clara Champlain Griswold and Woodward Griswold. The family lived at 8 Lyme Street, now a yellow building to the right of the Cooley Gallery.

When Mary was 5 years old, the family moved across the street into what Mary called "Mother's House" next to a row of stores where her family ran a gourmet grocery store which carried the first selection of "Bird's Eye" frozen vegetables as well as the prestigious "S.S. Pierce" brand of goods. As a young woman, Mary worked at her father's store where she met and befriended many local artists whose artwork she collected.

Mary Steube built her house on Whippoorwill Road after the 1938 hurricane. The fieldstone-clad house served as a retreat from the hustle and bustle of town life. Mary loved wildlife, especially the birds, animals and plants around her house. She collected and transplanted a variety of mosses for landscaping. She walked her property with her dog, clippers in hand, to keep the trails open. Chipmunks fed from her hands.

When Mary was in her late 30's, she met John Steube, a widower originally from the mid-West. John Steube was a friend of Mary's father. John and Mary married, and settled

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Girl Scouts Renovate Whimsey Walk at Watch Rock Preserve

Girl Scouts Amy Lee and Allyson McCarthy of Troop 60359 have completed an ambitious project to bring the Whimsey Walk back to life. The Whimsey Walk is a short, fun, easy side trail for children at the Elizabeth B. Karter Watch Rock Preserve.

Their project earned them the Silver Award for cadets, which requires at least 40 hours of work. They started last September with trail clearing. Now, there are 12 colorful bird-houses, a scavenger hunt, a circle of painted stones – a fairy ring – as a gathering place, stools for sitting and relaxing, fairy gold, fairy houses with themes such as "The Beach House", handmade signs, and other whimsical touches. The Grand Opening was on May 16, and it was also featured on Connecticut Trails Day, June 6.

Amy and Ally describe why they chose to work on the Whimsey Walk: "The Whimsey Walk was a magical place to us when we were young. As we grew, the Whimsey Walk trail was forgotten and overgrown. We wanted to share our memories of all the magical fairies and their houses with younger kids. That is why we chose this for our silver project, we feel

kids would enjoy this trail to be rebuilt and to see the magical world of fairies."

We thank Ally and Amy for their hard work, and congratulate them on giving the community a special place to visit!



Amy Lee and Ally McCarthy at the renovated Whimsey Walk at the Watch Rock Preserve.

What Are Fish Ladders, and Why Do They Matter?



Steve Gephard of the CT DEP at the Mary Steube fishway on the Griswold Preserve. The structure on the left is an eel pass and on the right is a fish ladder.

Fish ladders play a special role in the lives of diadromous fish in Connecticut, and we are pleased to have one here in Old Lyme at the Griswold Preserve. Diadromous fish are species that live in saltwater and in freshwater for different periods of their lives, and engage in extended spawning migrations back and forth. Riverine corridors in Connecticut supported significant fish runs until the late 1700's. During the Industrial Revolution, construction of hundreds of dams on streams and rivers in Connecticut severely impacted Atlantic salmon, American shad, river herring, shortnose sturgeon, alewives, and other diadromous fish.

The dams created barriers that the fish could not get around and prevented these species from reaching their freshwater spawning sites. In addition to disrupting the migratory patterns of diadromous fish, the dams caused the degradation of downstream habitats by reducing water flow and increasing water temperature. The population declines in many fish species can be linked directly to the establishment of dams.

Now that we are aware of these consequences, agencies such as the Connecticut Department of Environmental

Protection (CT DEP) and organizations like the Old Lyme Conservation Trust are working to restore runs of diadromous fish to their native habitats. The most direct method is to remove dams, however, this is not possible in all cases. An alternative is to build a fish ladder which allows fish to swim up and around the dams. In 1998, the CT DEP and the Old Lyme Conservation Trust partnered to build the custom-made fish ladder on property donated by Mary and John Steube (now part of the Griswold Preserve). The ladder assists the fish — primarily alewives and blueback herring (also known as "buckies") — in navigating around the Lower Mill Pond dam in the Mill Brook River. Subsequently, in 2003, an eel ladder was added. The American eel matures in fresh water streams, then migrates to the Sargasso Sea (south of Bermuda) to spawn.

The fish ladder is constructed to allow the fish to jump from one step to the other, until they reach the top of the ladder, which empties into Mill Pond. There is a fish counter to keep track of the number of fish using the ladder.

In contrast, the eel ladder resembles a board with pegs, with a stream of water running over it. This arrangement suits the eel's physiology: eels can survive outside water for brief periods, and wrap around the pegs as they move upwards. The eel ladder does not span the full height of the dam. Instead, the eels drop into a large bucket after they successfully traverse the ladder. DEP workers visit each day to manually count the eels and deposit them in Mill Pond where they can continue their journey. To view weekly reports of the numbers of each species using our fish ladder as well as others in Connecticut, visit the Connecticut River Salmon Association website (www.ctriversalmon.org).

On April 25 at the Phoebe Griffin Noyes library, Steve Gephard of the CT DEP gave an informative talk and shared his enthusiasm about fishways. Over the last 25 years, the CT DEP has restored riverine migratory corridors at 33 sites in 22 towns which include the Leesville Dam on the Salmon River in East Haddam, Greeneville Dam on the Shetucket River in Norwich, Moulson Pond Dam on the Eightmile River in Lyme, and Chalker Millpond Dam in Old Saybrook, by providing technical assistance and/or funding for construction of fish ladders or dam removal. The well-attended talk concluded with a visit to the Mary Steube fishway on the Griswold Preserve.

What are "diadromous fish"?

Diadromous fish live in saltwater and in freshwater for different phases of their lives. They migrate back and forth for spawning. Diadromous fish can be further classified as "anadromous" or "catadromous".

Anadromous fish

Begin their lives in fresh water, migrate to sea as juveniles, mature at sea, and return to the stream of their origin to spawn.

Examples: Salmon Alewives Sea lamprey
Shad Sturgeon

Catadromous fish

Begin their lives in the ocean, migrate to freshwater as juveniles, mature in freshwater, and migrate back to the ocean to spawn.

Example: American eel

Wildlife Note: Rabies

Rabies is alive and prevalent in CT. A little bit of knowledge and precaution can go a long way in keeping us all safe.

Raccoons seen stumbling around, showing no fear, or approaching people and/or pets may be rabid and should be avoided. However, many female raccoons birth and raise young during the summer months and can be seen out in search of food during the day. They are not a danger and should be left to themselves.

For additional information or assistance with an animal that may need help or be rabid, call your local wildlife rehabilitator at 860-434-9999 or 203-389-4411.

Invasive Species



From left to right: Barberry at the Griswold Preserve; Oriental bittersweet at the Watch Rock Preserve; Euonymus at the Jericho Preserve; Multiflora rose at the Hoffman Preserve.

Invasive species can pose serious problems to the ecosystems they come to inhabit. Here we answer a few common questions about invasive species, focusing specifically on invasive plants.

What are invasive species? Most non-native species that are introduced, either accidentally or intentionally, have no deleterious effects on the new environment. But some display aggressive growth and can displace native species. These are referred to as "invasive".

Invasive plants are so successful because they often: 1) grow and mature rapidly; 2) spread quickly; 3) can flower and/or set seed over a long period of time; 4) have few known diseases or insects to provide control; 5) thrive in many habitats; and 6) are difficult to control.

Why are invasive species a problem? According to the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, invasive plants are a serious problem in the state, reducing agricultural production, impairing recreation, and causing the loss of biological diversity. They often shut out native plants and the ecosystem that depends on these native plants—insects, butterflies, birds, etc—in turn declines, too. Invasive animal species have similar deleterious effects on the ecosystem.

What invasive plants are found in Connecticut?

The Connecticut Invasive Plants Council lists 96 invasive plant species found in the state, including purple loosestrife, common reed (phragmites), ground ivy (run-away robin), kudzu, mile-a-minute vine, Norway maple, multiflora rose, oriental bittersweet, cottonweed, winged euonymus (burning bush), yellow iris, water chestnut, common barberry, glossy buckthorn, and Japanese honeysuckle. For a complete list, go to http://nbii-nin.ciesin.columbia.edu/ipane/ctcouncil/CT_Invasive_Plant_List.htm.

How does the OLCT manage invasive species on its preserves? The Trust has management plans for several of its preserves, and these plans include strategies to control invasive species. Invasive species inevitably make their way onto these properties, for example via seeds dispersed by birds or transported on the shoes of people using the preserves. While it is very difficult to completely eradicate the plants, with dedicated efforts it is possible to keep them in check. Work crews regularly visit the Watch Rock preserve to cut back the strangling vines of oriental bittersweet, and more recently volunteers have made headway towards eliminating the stand of winged euonymus ("burning bush") near the Jericho Preserve trailhead. But much more work needs to be done.

What can you do about invasive species?

1) Make sure that any plants you purchase for your yard or garden are not invasive. Replace invasive plants in your garden with non-invasive alternatives. While the sale of many invasive species is prohibited in Connecticut, some species, such as winged euonymus and common barberry, currently are not banned. 2) Remove invasive species on your property. The choice of control measure depends on the size and nature of the infestation, and should not include chemicals that are toxic to animals or birds. If dealt with early enough, invasive plant problems can often be eliminated by non-chemical methods. 3) Clean your boots before you hike in a new area to get rid of hitchhiking weed seeds and pathogens. 4) Volunteer with a local organization such as the Old Lyme Conservation Trust to help remove invasive species. 5) Help educate others about the threats posed by these intruders.

For more detailed information about managing invasive species, as well as complete descriptions and photos to aid in their identification, consult the following sources:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service
- The Nature Conservancy
- CT Invasive Plants Council
- CT Department of Environmental Protection
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Connecticut River Coordinator's Office

Old Lyme Conservation Trust MEMBERSHIP FORM

Join us in preserving Old Lyme's Open Space!

Complete form and return to: Old Lyme Conservation Trust,
Post Office Box 163, Old Lyme, CT 06371

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- ☐ **YES**, I would like to volunteer! Please call me.



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Upcoming Event: September 19 – Landsavers Walk at OLCT Preserves – All are welcome! Watch for details.



OLCT President Anna Silberberg presents the Volunteer of the Year Award to Ron Lee at the 2009 OLCT Annual Meeting. Mr. Lee was recognized for his stewardship of the Mile Creek Preserve.

Remembering Mary *(Continued from page 1)*

on Mason's Island. When John became ill, they returned to the Whippoorwill house in the late 1960's to be closer to family and to obtain better medical care.

Mary Steube had a life-long passion for nature. Passing her land to the Trust was Mary's way to preserve what she had come to cherish in her lifetime. The 50-acre Jericho Preserve was

donated "to be preserved in its natural state for study, education, and conservation purposes". The 51-acre Woodward H. and George Griswold Preserve is on Route 1. Mary Steube stipulated in her will that it be named after her father and uncle, and "be preserved in the wild and natural state for the protection and study of the natural resources, swamp, woodlands, fish, wildlife, and plants".

Today, we as town residents or visitors, are able to enjoy the beautiful natural settings of both preserves. My family and I enjoy hiking the Jericho Preserve with its steep climbs, tall ridges and scenic views. We love going to the Woodward H. and George Griswold Preserve at dusk to watch beavers swim in the Mill Pond slapping their tails or to try to get a glimpse of alewives migrating up the fish ladder in the spring.

Without visionaries like Mary Steube, Old Lyme would not be the town we have grown to love and appreciate.

Awards Presented at 2009 Annual OLCT Meeting

The Trust presented the second Landsaver Award of Appreciation to William M. (t) and Constance A. Pike in recognition of the central role they played in helping to build the Trust's system of preserves, specifically, their donation in 1973 of the 44-acre Mile Creek Preserve. The Mile Creek Preserve was the Trust's first upland forest preserve and was the largest donation of land to OLCT until that time. Also at the annual meeting Ronald Lee was awarded the Volunteer of the Year award for his wonderful work as a steward of the Mile Creek Preserve.