



Old Lyme Land Trust

Our annual newsletter: ***Tributaries***

Incorporated 1966

www.OldLymeLandTrust.org

August 2016

Your Land Trust at 50

What a story we have to tell! It is one of vision, generosity, passion, patience, and hard work. It started like this: back in 1966, a small group of residents, concerned with rapid development in Old Lyme, banded together to form a new type of organization, something called a “land trust” – private, non-profit, and dedicated to preserving Old Lyme’s remaining open space. They called it the Old Lyme Conservation Trust.

Fifty years later, and thanks to the volunteer efforts of many, too numerous to list here, the Old Lyme Land Trust holds almost 1,000 acres of forest, field, wetland, and salt marsh that will never be developed. These holdings provide permanent benefits to you, the Town’s residents, in the form of preserves that are open for hiking and bird watching, habitat for wildlife, and the preservation of the beautiful – some of them breathtaking – open and scenic as of Old Lyme.

A few names figure prominently in the formation and early days of the Trust. Well-known conservationist and lawyer Belton Copp made the first donation of land, in 1967. That four acres, along the Smith Neck marshes, is today the Belton Copp Preserve, but, just as important, the donation was ground-breaking in setting an example that would be repeated many times over in the following decades. It was, in fact, was the first piece of land in Old Lyme ever permanently set aside for public open space.



Sunset from Watch Rock Preserve, land saved from development by OLLT. Photo by Stanley Kolber.

The Trust was founded by John Lohmann, and early members, in addition to Belton Copp, included Kinsley Twining, Jeanne Clark, Matt Griswold, and Jennifer Hillhouse. These far-seeing citizens set the foundation and enduring legacy of land preservation that is the Trust’s primary mission.

John Lohmann was a towering figure in local conservation efforts. He, with his friend “Bud” Twining
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Aerial photo of the mouth of the Connecticut River. Portions of Old Lyme, at the right, are within the designated Important Bird Area.

For the Birds

It’s official. The mouth of the Connecticut River has been designated an Important Bird Area (IBA) by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and Audubon CT. While the designation comes as no surprise to scientists, nature-lovers – and birds – the designation will help bring attention to the value of these habitats to a wider audience.

Large portions of the IBA, including Great Island, are owned by the State of Connecticut (outlined in green in the map at left), but private lands and lands owned by Old Lyme Land Trust, most notably Watch Rock Preserve, are also included.

Audubon CT, the state arm of the National Audubon Society, has already designated 27 IBA’s in our state. In addition to the CT River mouth, there are four other new areas, one of them the Lyme Forest Block, which includes Nehantic State Forest and the Eightmile River Wildlife Management Area.

Audubon’s IBA Program is a global effort to identify and protect habitat that will protect sustainable populations of birds. The IBA program is overseen by Bird Life International, with National Audubon as the partner designate in the United States, and has become a key component of many bird conservation efforts.

Your Land Trust at 50

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and Bud's sister Edith Buck, donated to the Trust their jointly-owned 46-acre parcel, perched high above the Lieutenant River (now the Lohmann-Buck-Twining Preserve). It was John who spearheaded the Trust's first campaign to purchase land, saving 25-acre Watch Rock Preserve from becoming the headquarters of the Loctite Corporation. He had a lot of help on Watch Rock – over 1,000 donations from local residents and those with ties to Old Lyme. At the end of his life, John willed 40 acres of terraced fields and huge trees, leading down to Whaleback Point, on the Connecticut River (now the John Lohmann Connecticut River Preserve).

William and Connie Pike donated the first woodland parcel to the Trust and it became the Trust's first preserve. The Mile Creek Preserve shelters the headwaters of Swan Brook, and now boasts a self-guided tour easily accessed by the children at the nearby Mile Creek School (go to www.OldLymeLandTrust.org → Preserves → Mile Creek for a copy of the tour guide).

Mary Steube is another giant in our history. After the hurricane of 1938, she built a fieldstone-clad house beside Bucky Brook, just before it flows under Whippoorwill Road, and lived there until her death in 1998. Mary loved the land and its inhabitants. In her will she bequeathed to the Trust not only her beautiful home, but also the 50 acres surrounding it (now the Jericho Preserve), another 51 acres between the Mill River and Route 1 (now the George & Woodward Griswold Preserve, named for her father and uncle), and a very large endowment, which has made possible at least some portion of every OLLT land purchase since 1998. Though few in town have ever heard her name, Mary Steube, through her extraordinary bequests, has helped to preserve more land in Old Lyme than any other single individual.

In recent years, donations have been less frequent, but the Trust has continued to acquire land by buying it. In fact, almost 25% of our land was acquired in the last decade – much of it in “the Grand Canyon of Old Lyme” (now the Upper Three Mile River Preserve). We have created partnerships and pooled limited resources with The Nature Conservancy, the Town, and the State.

Additional property acquisitions are likely in the future, as the Trust works to acquire key parcels of open space that will increase the size of existing preserves, or link our preserves to other open space, especially along watercourses. State grant funds, in particular, have been vitally important in buying land, but are currently endangered by the state's fiscal crisis.

Looking forward, the Trust's goals include working on the town-wide trail system (see box at right), through donation or purchase of strategic pieces of land. We also want to complete surveys and management plans for all of our preserves. But perhaps our biggest task in coming years will be caring for the lands we hold.

Caring for this land is a big job. If the weeds in your yard have ever gotten ahead of you, you can probably begin to imagine what it takes to manage and care for the 620 acres of land open to the public, as well as other land held by OLLT. There are miles of trails to keep clear and

safe, fields that must be mowed at least annually, and the increasing problem of invasive plants.

Caring for the land is rewarding, and often fun, but it's also a challenge. The large quantity and complex level of stewardship involved will require professional assistance.

Included in this year's Tributaries, you will find an insert, a map of our preserves, with short descriptions and directions to each on the back. This land is yours to enjoy. Take a stroll along the half mile of shoreline at Watch Rock and watch the wind moving across the water. Or hike that ridge that Lohmann, Buck, and Twining donated to see the panoramic views of the Connecticut River to one side and the Lieutenant on the other. Wander quietly through dappled woodlands or sit on Whaleback Point in the fall and watch the swallows go to roost on Goose Island. These special places are more than just land set aside, they are the embodiment of the natural beauty that makes Old Lyme a unique and wonderful place to live.

Old Lyme Land Trust is an entirely volunteer organization, not affiliated with the town, and it is the support of our neighbors that gets the job done. For fifty years the people of Old Lyme have answered that call and led the way in conserving open spaces. Please join us in this worthy cause, if you have not done so already. Together we can continue to make a difference, and keep tomorrow green.

Town-wide Trail System

For many years now, towns along the shoreline and in other parts of the state have been diligently working to build town-wide systems of connected walking trails. The Old Lyme Land Trust has taken the lead on such an initiative in our town. Once in place, our town-wide system of trails will allow hikers to walk from one side of Old Lyme to the other, passing through several of our OLLT preserves and town-owned open space, with short stretches here and there along local roads.

Currently, just a few more links are needed to complete a multi-mile, east-west trail that will wend its way between Four Mile River Road and Lyme Street. Additional trails are envisioned for the southern and northern tiers of Old Lyme, with the latter connecting, ideally, with trail systems in Lyme, East Lyme and beyond.

Putting all of this in place, of course, has taken many years and will require many more before it is complete. It will take the efforts of many contributors.





More Opossums = Fewer Ticks

By Doug Nielson, reprinted with permission from the
Lyme Land Conservation Trust
Spring 2016 Newsletter

That furry white animal with beady eyes and a rat-like tail that you might see on a walk in the woods or in your backyard is the Virginia opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*), a species with a number of unique characteristics: it is the only marsupial in North America, it has a prehensile tail like New World monkeys, it is immune to venomous bites, both from insects and reptiles, is resistant to Lyme disease, botulism and rabies, and, when threatened, it plays dead.

Now we can add another item to that list: opossums are one of the chief natural enemies of ticks. In a study at the Cary Institute for Ecosystem Studies in Millbrook, New York, six animal species were captured and exposed to ticks. Of those six – white-footed mice, chipmunks, squirrels, opossums, veerys, and catbirds – opossums far out-performed all the others.

There are two major reasons for this. First, that beautiful thick coat attracts ticks. Second, opossums are fastidious, as clean as cats. When they aren't foraging, mating, or taking care of their young, they are grooming themselves. They catch more than 95% of the ticks that try to feed on them. The result is that a single animal can catch and eat over 5,000 ticks a week.

They are beneficial in many other ways. Although they might disturb your plants, they often eat plant-eating insects and slugs. They eat berries and other fruits, dispersing the seeds. They also eat rodents and snakes, particularly poisonous ones.

There are many misconceptions about 'possums. Because they often hiss and spit when approached, people think they may be rabid. Because they are prone to play dead when confronted with possible violence, people think that they are stupid. Neither is true. They are naturally resistant to rabies, and in clinical studies have shown that they are more capable of finding food and remembering its location than rats, rabbits, dogs, or cats.

Opossums have been around for nearly 65 million years, since the last dinosaurs became extinct. After all the native North American marsupials died out, about 20

million years ago, the 'possum crossed the Isthmus of Panama to come north.

Unlike many animals that need to survive a New England winter, 'possums can't add a lot of subcutaneous fat before cold weather, and are in danger of freezing at temperatures below 19°F. They often favor urban environments because human settlements tend to be warmer and provide more food sources.

Although intelligent, 'possums are slow and near-sighted, easy prey for large owls, bobcats, coyotes, dogs and cars. They are among the shortest-lived animals of their size. Most die before nine months and few live past three years.

So be kind to that four-footed bug-eater, he's helping you out, and his life is not easy. Keep your hedgerows dense, let large old tree trunks stand, make brush piles for shelter, and tolerate him if he rests in your woodpile or under your shed. And watch out for him in the road.

For more information, see:

Ostfeld, Richard, *Lyme Disease: the ecology of a complex system*, Oxford University Press, 2012.

Kessing, F., et al. "Hosts as ecological traps for the vector of Lyme disease," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, vol. 276, issue 1675, (November 2009).

Courageous Conservation



Legend has it that in 1962, John Lohmann, future founder of OLLT, heard machinery starting a road into the beautiful ridge across the Lieutenant River from his home. It's hard to be heard over a bulldozer, so John, a determined man, walked around, took up a position in front of the machine, and stayed there until it was turned away. He, along with his friend Kinsley "Bud" Twining and Bud's sister Edith Buck bought the land from the would-be developer, and later donated it to OLLT. That land is now known as the Lohmann-Buck-Twining Preserve.

Edie Twining, Bud's daughter, swears the legend is true, and drew this delightful cartoon to show us how it happened. She is also OLLT's steward for the preserve. Thanks, Edie, on both counts.

Rob Evans: Volunteer of the Year

Robert ("Rob") Evans was named Old Lyme Land Trust's Volunteer of the Year at our March 2016 annual meeting. Rob is the steward for our Hatchedts Hill Preserve, where he has done an incredible job caring for this 44-acre piece of lovely open woodlands, wetlands, and bedrock outcrops. When you visit, be sure to appreciate the wonderful boardwalk Rob built to make crossing Armstrong Brook easy and far less risky than hopping from rock to rock!

A native of Springdale, PA, birthplace and childhood home of Rachel Carson, Rob learned at an early age the importance of protecting our natural environment. During his youth, he spent the majority of his leisure time hunting, fishing, and camping with his family. He always enjoyed being outside in the woods and spent many weeks hiking and exploring the forests of Western Pennsylvania with his friends. Rob also learned to SCUBA dive at an early age, choosing to make it part of his life's work.



The boardwalk Rob built over Armstrong Brook, in the Hatchedts Hill Preserve, makes crossing much easier.

Tours of duty with the United States Navy took Rob around the world, in a very rewarding career as a U.S. Navy Deep Sea Diver. His major commands included the Aircraft Carrier, U.S.S. Kitty Hawk (CV-63); Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center, Panama City, FL; Consolidated Divers Unit, San Diego, CA; Naval Special Warfare Group One, Coronado, CA; and Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit One, Pearl Harbor, HI.

Deployed seven times, Rob participated in and led various diving and marine salvage missions throughout the Pacific and Middle East regions. In 2011 he was assigned to Naval Submarine School, in Groton, as the senior enlisted Navy Diver responsible for the operation of U.S. Navy's Northeast Region Hyperbaric Facility, as well as the training, qualification, and management of 40 submarine escape instructors.

In August of 2014, after 21 years of honorable service, Rob opted for an early retirement. He currently attends the University of Connecticut and will graduate this fall with an undergraduate degree in general studies and a post-baccalaureate certificate in Occupational Safety & Health.

Rob's love of the outdoors and commitment to service is what got him involved with the Old Lyme Land Trust. The Board of Trustees wishes to publicly thank Rob for all he does.



Cypress, a red-shouldered hawk, thrilled visitors to OLLT's booth at the Old Lyme Midsummer Festival.

Our Birthday Party

Two owls and three hawks came to our 50th birthday celebration at the Old Lyme Midsummer Festival and delighted the crowds. All of them are birds that could not survive in the wild because of injuries. They were with us thanks to Horizon Wings, a non-profit wildlife rehabilitation and education center in Ashford, specializing in birds of prey: www.horizonwings.org. Pictured are two of our guests, a female American Kestrel named Spirit and a male Red-Shouldered Hawk named Cypress. Both species can be seen in the wild in Old Lyme, although Cypress comes from Florida, and has a paler and grayer head than his local cousins.



Spirit, an American kestrel, perches on the hand of a volunteer presenter from Horizon Wings, a wildlife rehabilitation center that specializes in raptors.

Ed Sopneski, Steward Extraordinaire



Maybe you have seen him sitting on his stool at Watch Rock, the tools of his trade (bow saw, trowel, loppers) at his side, dog biscuits in his pockets, his signature U.S.M.C. cap atop his head. Lucky for you, perhaps you know him. This is Ed Sopneski, Old Lyme resident of 55 years, steward extraordinaire of Watch Rock, and, above all, a man with a very big heart.

Ed is dedicated to Watch Rock. He assisted John Lohmann, Connie Pike, Jen Hillhouse and many others in the purchase campaign. And he is passionate and knowledgeable about the outdoors generally, something he attributes to summers spent hiking in the White Mountains as a boy. Among many others who have recognized Ed's knowledge and work ethic was Virginia Peterson, wife of Roger Tory Peterson, who hired him to create and maintain a butterfly garden at the Peterson home on Neck Road.

It was Ed who launched the first attack in the Trust's war against the exotic invasive plants of Watch Rock. Five years ago, Oriental Bittersweet vines, thick and heavy after decades of unimpeded growth, threatened many of the preserve's large trees. One winter, Ed decided to cut the vines, and now the sections remaining in the trees are dead. Next, Ed cleared by hand the invasive understory. Moving along on his stool, one shrub at a time, Ed

cleared an incredible three acres of forest in the northeastern section of the preserve.

Ed called the solid mass of invasives, most of it 10'-12' high, "The Green Wall". He estimates that it took him 180-220 hours per acre to do the job, and he went through ten pair of gloves and nine bow saws in doing it! After seeing Ed's success, the Trust decided to bring in a paid, professional crew to expand his effort. With funding from a \$24,000 National Resources Conservation Service grant, the invasives were cut down in the worst 16 acres in 2012.

You might think that's the end of the invasives story, but Ed is still at it. Invasive plants are hard to kill and will come back when even small pieces of root are left, so Ed is still wearing out gloves and bow saws. The results of his efforts are amazing. Next time you're there, if you see Ed out working – and you *can* see him, now that the worst is gone – stop by and say hello. You won't be sorry.



Oriental bittersweet at Watch Rock, before the "Ed effect". Invasive plants threaten ecosystems in several ways, including removal of the base of the food chain, since most native insects won't eat them. Please visit the CT Invasive Plants Working Group site at <http://cipwg.uconn.edu/> to see how you can help.

Devin Byrne Wins Kinsley Twining Memorial Scholarship

Devin Byrne, a 2015 graduate of Lyme-Old Lyme High School, is the winner of the Old Lyme Land Trust's Kinsley Twining Memorial Scholarship. The \$1,000 scholarship is awarded to an LOLHS graduate who is pursuing a degree in environmental science or a related field.

Devin will start his sophomore year at the University of Maine in Orono this fall, where he is majoring in Wildlife Ecology. His career interests center on international conservation, and he has already worked with the non-profit Mongolian Bankhar Dog Project, which seeks to breed and train livestock protection dogs in an effort to curb herder-predator conflict in Mongolia.

Applications for the 2017 scholarship are due by March 15, 2017. Information and an application can be found at www.OldLymeLandTrust.org.

Old Lyme Winners of Annual Photo Contest

The land trusts of Old Lyme, Lyme, Salem, Essex and East Haddam jointly sponsor an annual amateur photo contest, to celebrate the scenic countryside, and diverse wildlife and plants in our towns. Photographers range from children to senior citizens. Many photos in the 2016 contest were taken in OLLT preserves, a few of which are shown here.



Hank Golet , steward of OLLT's Lohmann-Buck-Twining Preserve, won the top prize, the John G. Mitchell Environmental Conservation Award, with this beautiful photograph of a juvenile yellow-crowned night heron in the Black Hall River in Old Lyme.

Judah Waldo took second prize among young entrants, for this wintery picture taken at OLLT's Watch Rock Preserve. Judah's brother, Gabriel Waldo, received an honorable mention in the youth group.



Cynthia Kovak, steward at Mile Creek Preserve, earned honorable mention in the 'Landscapes & Waterscapes' category, with this wonderful shot of beech trees in the Mile Creek Preserve.



Other Old Lyme winners include Mary Waldron, who won 1st prize in the 'Plants' category with close-up of a milkweed pod, Harcourt Davis, who took 2nd prize in the 'Wildlife' category and 3rd prize in 'Landscapes/Waterscapes', and an honorable mention went to Elizabeth Gentile, in 'Wildlife'. Congratulations to all!

The deadline for the 11th annual photo contest is January 31st, 2017. Go to OldLymeLandTrust.org for details.

We gratefully acknowledge those who generously donated to OLLT

July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016

Milton Allen
George Anderson
Bob & Chris Angeli
Bill & Judy Archer
Diana Atwood-Johnson
Barb Avery
Dave Barclay
Charles & Barbara Beal
John and Suzanne Beatty
Jim & Janet Bechtel
Thomas & Judith Beers
Heather Bennett
Ann Lane &
Rudolf Bergmans
Chip & Nicki Berry
MJ Bertolini
Rudolph Besier
Anne Bing
Diana Blair
Ann Bliss
Bruce Boratz
Michael & Eloise Brady
Wendy Brainerd
Charles and Nicoll Brinley
Mary Boughton
Wayne Buchanan
Francis Buckley, Jr.
Brad & Cynthia Burgess
Peter & Jan Burr
Joe Cipparone & Ellen
Calkins
Matt & Shea Cantner
Catherine Mackay &
William Carley
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Libby Cathcart
Jane Chesnutt
Nancy Larson &
Robert Chester
Sam & Elsie Childs
Hyun Cho
Catherine &
John Christiano
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LeRoy Clark
Stanley Kolber &
Christina Clayton
Madeline & Keith Coakley
Kenneth & Eileen Coffee

Susanne Colton-Carey
Britt Sinay & Bob Cooper
Sharon Cundy
Robert & Ellen Davis
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Russell Fogg
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Lea & Patrick Harty
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Hautaniemi
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Joel Hawkins
John Heckman
Tom Sherer &
Deb Heminway
Joan Henderson
Theodore Hendrickson
Hans & Lilo Hess
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Suzanne & Brett
Thompson
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Barbara Traskos
Mark Werwilliger &
Edie Twining
Tom Unger
Ben Van Gool
Theodore Vanitallie
Christopher Voegeli
Mary Waldron
Elizabeth Whitley
Lucius & Adela Wilmerding
Renee Wilson
Lorraine Yurkewitz

Thank you all!

The Trust also thanks
and acknowledges
Mike Wells for his pro
bono work as attorney
to the OLLT.

Join the Fun: 3rd Annual Kayak Regatta

On **Sunday, September 18**, kayakers of all types will gather again to paddle the Black Hall River, guided by Barry Gorfain, a certified kayak instructor. Whether you're new to the sport, just thinking of trying it out, or an old pro, you're sure to enjoy the scenery, and probably some wildlife. This is an easy paddle and children are welcome when accompanied by an adult.

Bring your own kayak or rent from the Black Hall Marina, where we put in. Life vests are required, and can be rented. Donations to support the Old Lyme Land Trust are encouraged. Please arrive at the marina by 1:00 p.m.; it is located at 132 Shore Road, Old Lyme.

To register, please contact Fred Fenton at fentonland@sbcglobal.net, or 860-434-2468



Ever Seen Half a Million Swallows, All at Once?

Every evening in the autumn, hundreds of thousands of tree swallows gather over the Connecticut River as the sun is setting, sweeping in massive formations over the marshes of Old Lyme's Goose Island. Just after the sun sinks below the horizon, the flocks form into a tornado-like funnel and pour into the reeds within a matter of minutes, roosting there for the night. It is a truly awe-inspiring sight that you will never forget, guaranteed.

Join us to witness this spectacle close-up, as we cruise from East Haddam and back aboard the *Adventure*, with a naturalist on board. The date is **Saturday, September 24**, 4:30-8:30. Tickets are \$40 per person. Only 48 spaces are available. Wine, beer, soft drinks, and bottled water will be provided, courtesy of the Old Lyme Land Trust. Feel free to bring a picnic supper!

Contact Pam Hine for more information and to reserve your spot: info@OldLymeLandTrust.org, or 860-434-9933.