



Avalonia Trails

P.O. Box 49
Old Mystic, CT 06372

...preserving natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and by communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources

WINTER 2014-2015

The Art of Conservation Event: Generosity at its finest

by Beth Sullivan

On October 18th Avalonia launched our first-ever art event as a fundraising effort to support the Conservancy's Bedrock Fund. As any planner of a "first ever event" would tell you, it can be daunting, but this event came together in a wonderful way due to patience, stamina, volunteerism, and generosity.

The event was originally planned as a contest: as an idea to get people out onto our preserves, to paint, draw and photograph the beauty they found. It was an odd twist to realize that people really didn't seem inspired by competition. What was most wonderful was that artists in all media chose instead to donate their work to support the cause!



Bidding was spirited, and a good time was had by all. Photo by Bruce Fellman.

A selection of art, prints, photos, small original works, cards, and jewelry were set up in the lower gallery to be part of the silent auction. In the main gallery larger pieces, original art and photographs, were arranged on easels throughout the space.

Guests had plenty of time to peruse the art in both galleries and enjoy a musical duo and plenty of great appetizers. Wine, much of which was donated, served to lighten the mood and get folks ready to bid.

The bidding went well in both the silent and live auctions with several spirited competitions and prices rising, as they should.

All for a great cause. There were two special items: services of professional photographers and naturalists offering guided tours and lessons on Avalonia Preserves, for the purpose of photographing them. We hope the lucky bidders on those items will return next year with more of their photographic art to share.

As a first time event, it was a notable success. We are thankful for: our volunteers, event sponsors, especially Russ Burgess from Charles Schwab who was a gallery sponsor; and donations of food and wine, music and services. Most importantly, we thank all the artists who donated their work to support a cause we all believe in.

Annual Appeal

by Heather Milardo

Many of you should have received the most recent mailing in mid-December (Sorry for the delay, it was beyond our control). For those who have not, please keep your eyes on your mailboxes in January and February. Our mailing this year was segmented; we are trying hard to address the issues that you, our individual members, feel are the most important so we have sent multiple mailings.

While fund-raisers, such as the Art Event described above, are a component of our development strategy, and some limited grants funding is available (though fiercely competitive) for specific projects such as the Dodge Paddock/Beal Preserve restoration described on page 3, the donations that you make in response to our Annual Appeal are the largest single component of our operating budget and are critically important to maintaining our organization. We hope that you will find yourself able to make a contribution to Avalonia this year. We greatly appreciate and depend upon your generosity.

Nominating Committee

by Michele Fitzpatrick

The Nominating Committee is seeking candidates for the offices of President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and five members of the Board of Directors for one-year terms starting June 1, 2015. The members of the Committee are Dick Conant (Chair), Binti Ackley, Russ Burgess, Michele Fitzpatrick, Heather Milardo, Beth Moore, and Kassie White. You can provide suggestions to any of the Committee members or send them to the office; contact information is on page 6.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS
2014-2015**

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Michele Fitzpatrick.....President
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Groton.....Dick Conant
Ledyard.....Mike Goodwin
Preston.....Margaret Gibson
Stonington.....Beth Sullivan
North Stonington.....Pat Turner

A Note from the Editor

by Janice Parker

Thank you to everyone who contributed the articles and photographs that comprise this issue of "Avalonia Trails", as well as those of you who planned and executed the events, programs and initiatives that are reported here. The deadline for our next issue is **April 2, 2015**, but feel free to submit material at any time.

We also offer our newsletter in digital form; if you would prefer to receive your copy by email, please let us know. Avalonia's contact information is on page 6.

Thanks! We can't do it without you!

President's Message

Greetings everyone, and happy winter season!

Your Board of Directors (BOD) has been very active in expanding our partnerships and connections with other conservation organizations. In September at least six BOD members and other leaders attended the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) Rally in Providence. We participated in a wide variety of sessions and had a luncheon meeting with local LTA representatives. We learned that there is a lot of support available for us in meeting our goals to improve our processes and governance. We will share a lot more information about this as we go along.

We are also strengthening our interaction and participation with the Connecticut Land Conservation Coalition (CLCC). Four of us attended CLCC sponsored training in Hartford in November called "A Board for All Seasons: Managing Land Trusts for Perpetuity." We brought away many ideas for improvement that we shared with the rest of the Board at an all-day retreat the following day.

We are working diligently toward the development of a Strategic Plan, one of the primary means for ensuring the organization is structured for perpetual existence.

In December Avalonia co-sponsored a CLCC Regional Land Trust Board Summit with the North Stonington Citizens Land Alliance. About ten organizations represented by over 25 attendees, as well as one state legislator participated. A number of local leaders gathered at a reception before the summit to discuss shared issues and look for areas of cooperation. We also accepted an invitation from Amy Paterson, Executive Director of the CLCC, to participate in a project called "Connecticut Land Trust Advancement Initiative: Growing Conservation & Stewardship Capacity by Building Stronger Land Trusts." The project is being funded by the US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Technical Assistance Program. We will be meeting in January to identify and choose projects.

Many other exciting things are happening for Avalonia – please check out the rest of the newsletter!

Executive Director's Letter

Heading into the New Year, I am inspired by the idea of new beginnings. While I don't make New Year's resolutions, I do like the idea of re-evaluating the ways to make the coming year better. As Avalonia welcomes the New Year, we are also exploring ways to make the organization better. We continue to strive to run operations more smoothly and efficiently, create better programs, and improve our communication and outreach efforts. At the beginning of our fiscal year this past June, we started putting annual plans into place; and in the New Year; we will continue those efforts going forward. Some of those plans include doing more member events and fundraising events such the Art of Conservation event that we held in October. They are a great way for us to build our relationships, reach new people, and have fun at the same time. We will also be focusing on trying to create more educational programs that benefit our youth community. Please keep an eye on the newsletters, website, and our Facebook page for updates as these programs develop.

Avalonia's mission is to save land in southeastern CT and to protect our natural resources; that is the umbrella under which we operate, but there are so many moving pieces that are required to make that happen. Thank you for being a part of Avalonia and for all of the ways that you help us to reach our goals for the year.

In memoriam: Anna Coit 1908-2014

by Anne Nalwalk

Anna Coit, a long-time Director of Avalonia Land Conservancy, died on October 15, 2014 at the age of 106. She was remarkable in so many ways— for her clarity of wit and prose, her ability to make all who knew her feel special, and her love of her land, as well as her longevity. Anna was a leader in Avalonia as a director from North Stonington from 1988 to 2005. She served as director-at-large until 2010, when she was named an honorary director in recognition of her 22 years of active service, for which we are grateful.

Anna spoke on all issues in the land trust and in the community with a succinct and measured manner, which often clarified the matter at hand.

In the *New London Day* (Friday November 28, 2014), Ann Baldelli described her as “an editor, author, environmentalist, historian, poet, farmer and teacher, among a long list of other accomplishments...” She loved a good story and had a twinkle in her eyes. She was still active in her last year, publishing (with the help of devoted friends) a lovely hand-bound book of poems written while visiting Islesboro, Maine. She also served as Grand Marshall of Stonington’s parade celebrating the Bicentennial of the Battle of Stonington— she remembered attending the Centennial Parade when she was six years old— and read her poetry at the Mystic Art Association. She was proclaimed North Stonington’s first Poet Laureate.

Anna lived her conservation ethic in the management of her own lands— maintaining her Christmas tree farm with minimal trimming and use of pesticides. She maintained her Pachunganuc Farm on Route 49 as active farmland and recently restored the existing farm pond.

Anna demonstrated her conservation ethic in the disposition of the land in North Stonington that she and her husband bought in 1952. Anna’s donation to Avalonia of her house lot and Christmas tree farm (minus the house and buildings) comprises about 10 acres. An additional 16.48-acre parcel is to be sold with a deed restriction that it contain only one house.

We are all the better for having had Anna in our lives.

Sandy Point Nature Preserve Becomes Part of the National Wildlife Refuge System!

by Michele Fitzpatrick

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has accepted Avalonia’s Sandy Point Nature Preserve, Stonington (and Westerly, RI), into the boundary of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS). Avalonia is in the process of negotiating a 10-year lease with FWS Region 5 for FWS to “possess, occupy, develop, maintain, and enforce regulations governing” the NWRS on the property. The property will be attached to the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge, to be managed solely by the Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The preserve will be open to the public using a permit system and regulations similar to the past, except that FWS does not charge for permits and has the authority to enforce the regulations. The details of the permitting process for next summer are still under discussion with FWS and will be shared with the membership and the public as soon as they are decided.

LISFF Grant Award *by MaryEllen Mateleska*

The Dodge Paddock and Beal Preserve in Stonington serves as a model example of how collaboration and community engagement can fulfill the Avalonia mission to preserve and protect our invaluable natural resources. Avalonia blog entries and newsletter articles have highlighted the Stonington committee’s engagement with Connecticut College students and Trinity College professors, as well as the extensive mosquito control efforts of Roger Wolfe and others from Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. In 2015, the Preserve and Avalonia will embark on its next journey; working with both existing and new partners to create a restoration plan that will prepare the ecosystem for future climatic events.



Binti Ackley (Center) and MaryEllen Mateleska (front row, second from left) represent Avalonia and Mystic Aquarium at the Long Island Sound Futures Fund award ceremony November 19 in Port Jefferson, NY. Photo by Patrick Comins of Audubon Connecticut.

With over \$45,000 of funding secured through Long Island Sound Futures Fund, this year-long project will partner Avalonia, Mystic Aquarium and several other community partners, not just to restore and protect 2.6 acres of marsh and tidal habitat, but to offer extensive educational opportunities for area residents. Throughout the project period more than 400 people will dedicate 2,800 volunteer hours to educational outreach and restoration initiatives, thereby introducing them to Avalonia and recruiting new Conservancy members. Ultimately Dodge/Beal will have a rebalance of the freshwater wetlands, tidal wetlands, and invasive-ridden coastal grassland systems to enhance wildlife habitat, biologically control mosquito populations, and increase water quality, all while creating a task force of environmental stewards.

Stewardship Field Days *by Mike Goodwin*

Avalonia will host a series of field days in Ledyard starting **Thursday, January 8th, 2015** and continuing weekly on Thursdays through the winter months. Town Committee members will lead hikes on one or more preserves each week to discuss property maintenance, walk property boundaries and perform light maintenance. The general public is invited to participate in these field days. If you enjoy our properties and would like to give a little of your time to help maintain them, please join us. We are looking mainly for volunteers in Ledyard, but all are welcome. We will meet in Ledyard center at Holdridge Home and Garden Center on Colonel Ledyard Highway (Rte 117). Please park away from the store near the street. Meeting time is 10:00 a.m. sharp. We will try to keep all field days to 2 hours maximum. Very inclement weather cancels.

Good Relationship with Municipality Becomes Stronger Still

by Mike Goodwin and Anne Roberts-Pierson

The transfer of eight parcels of land totaling 12.46 acres on July 10, 2014, from the Town of Ledyard to Avalonia marked the second time since July 2004 that such a generous handoff has occurred. The first such transfer request and positive response by the Town of 14.5 acres a decade ago facilitated the creation of an interconnected trail system throughout the newly established Avalonia nature preserve known as Pine Swamp Wildlife Corridor (324 acres total).

The eight parcels transferred this year do not play the same role as in 2004. Instead, they enlarge four existing Avalonia nature preserves in Ledyard as these small open space town-owned parcels already abut Avalonia holdings. Ownership transfer in these cases actually provides more surveillance and stewardship of these parcels than the Town itself might have been able to provide them as stand-alone parcels.

These requests and deliberations take time, as shown by the following timeline: original request April 2013, approval by Town Council summer 2013, final vote by the citizenry at Town Meeting Sept. 25, 2013, with legal processing finishing up on July 10, 2014. We heartily thank Ledyard citizens for their show of support on Avalonia's behalf.

So where are the eight parcels and to which Avalonia preserves do they connect? Here is the list: 57R Avery Hill Road, 0.53 acres, adjoins Avery Preserve, West Tract; 13A Melanie Lane, 0.08 acres, 21R Friar Tuck Drive, 2.12 acres, and 20 Ramblewood Drive, 6.56 acres all adjoin Pine Swamp Wildlife Corridor; 25 Peachtree Hill Avenue, 1.18 acres, adjoins Haleys Brook Preserve, 24 Silas Deane Road, 0.72 acres, 19 Lynn Drive, 0.59 acres, and 45 Seabury Avenue, 0.68 acres all adjoin the Greenman Preserve.

It's Back! Pot-luck Get-Together by Anne Nalwalk

In response to numerous inquiries over the past five years, Avalonia has reinstated its late-winter pot-luck get-together. It will be held **Saturday, March 14, 2015** at 5:30 p.m. at St. James Episcopal Church in Preston, at the intersection of Routes 117 and 2A. This gathering is for members, friends, potential new members, and families to socialize in a relaxed setting with plenty of delicious food and a little music. All are welcome. We hope this date, which is later than in previous years, will reduce problems associated with the vagaries of our local weather and the early darkness of Standard Time.

After dinner, Bruce Fellman of North Stonington will present a slide program, "Through the Seasons on Erisman Woodlands, Babcock Ridge and Beyond." Bruce is an accomplished naturalist, photographer, and environmental and science writer and educator. Bruce started his career as an Environmental Educator at Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge in Rhode Island and has published a syndicated natural history column since 1978. His work has been published in *Smithsonian* and *National Wildlife* magazines, the *Boston Globe*, and Brown University publications. From 1992-2009 he was the Managing Editor of the *Yale Alumni Magazine*, reporting on science and medicine. He also teaches all ages in schools, colleges, and nature centers and conducts biological studies, concentrating mostly on vernal pools, amphibians, and dragonflies. We anticipate an exciting program that will open our eyes to the beauty around us.

A Perfect Picnic

by Bruce Fellman



Mac Turner, Janice Fitton and Sydney the dog share a mid-hike picnic.
Photo by Bruce Fellman

Planning an outdoor endeavor is always a risky business, but the weather couldn't have been more cooperative on the afternoon of Saturday, October 25, the day of what we hope was the first *annual* picnic for Avalonia members. The beeches were in their golden glory, as more than a dozen stalwarts and a couple of well-behaved dogs met at the small parking lot of the Babcock Ridge preserve then packed ourselves into a few cars to drive to the Erisman Preserve trail-head, the start of our journey. Earlier in the week, North Stonington committee member Mac Turner and I marked a trail that connected both refuges, and that Saturday morning, Town Committee chair Pat Turner and I hauled a cooler, filled with delicious picnic fare, and bags of supplies to the picnic spot atop the ridge.

The temperature was in the 60s when we started our walk, and along the way, I offered impromptu natural history information on the biology of fall color, glacier geology, the likelihood the preserve area had been visited by cougars recently, the identity of some bones and mushrooms we spotted en route, and numerous other topics. At the top of the ridge, we relaxed, talked, and, of course, sampled a fine assemblage of wine and cider, crackers and cheese, grapes, and other goodies.

Too soon, it was time to make the slow and, because of fallen oak and maple leaves on the trail, slippery descent off the ridge. We made one stop to look for Two-lined Salamanders hiding under logs at a still-dry vernal pool (the area was then in the grip of a persistent drought). A meadowhawk dragonfly greeted us from its perch on the roof of one of our cars when we finished up a picnic outing that everyone agreed was "awesome."

Erisman Memorial To Be Held by Mac Turner

The North Stonington Town Committee plans to hold a memorial event for Adele Erisman, who died on August 9, 2014. Adele was a life long conservationist and she donated 62 acres of beautiful wooded uplands that she owned to Avalonia. Adele was very much a "hands on" person, and the Town Committee feels it would please Adele to remember her by hosting a work party in Erisman Woodlands. We plan to install a small bridge across a seasonal stream and to do additional trail work. A date will be chosen sometime in the spring. The Erisman Preserve is part of the Shunuck River corridor that includes the Henne and Babcock Ridge properties and forms a contiguous block of more than 200 acres of watershed and wildlife habitat.

Are you a History Buff? *by Joellen Anderson*

Griswold, CT is celebrating its bicentennial year throughout 2015 with many events you may be interested in attending. Avalonia has a special historical property connection in Griswold with the ownership of the Mary & John Walton 23-acre Meadow Preserve that was donated to Avalonia by Mary Walton in 1996. This property is significant historically because the meadow was used by Revolutionary War militia for training purposes and it is listed on The National Register of Historic Places. Mary Walton was an active conservationist who loved the environment and dedicated a good part of her life to maintaining and improving it. If you would like to visit the Walton preserve or other Avalonia properties with historical significance, look through our current online property list and spend an afternoon outside exploring them.

Plan to follow Griswold's online bicentennial schedule of events throughout 2015 to learn more about southeastern Connecticut history. Avalonia Land Conservancy owns additional properties in Griswold for a total of 270 acres. Google "Griswold CT bicentennial" for ongoing event listings.



Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment (GNCE) Partnership *by Michele Fitzpatrick*

Avalonia is entering our third year of exciting academic partnership with Connecticut College's GNCE. The center has a Certificate Seminar program which requires sophomores to complete a course designed to provide students with an introduction to the activities, methods, and motivations behind land conservation. Starting in spring 2013, students have worked cooperatively with Avalonia to develop projects to aid our general efforts and improve conditions on Stonington preserves. Projects are designed to provide lasting benefits to the local community, models that can be replicated elsewhere, and opportunities for students. There are a number of blog posts by and about the students from last spring (February 17, March 31, April 14, May 5, June 2, June 9), check them out at the blog, <http://avaloniaetrails.blogspot.com>! We are looking forward to expanding the program this year. We also plan to make this program the presentation topic for the next Annual Meeting in May 2015.

Wall Restoration in Stonington *by Beth Sullivan*



Avalonia owns several properties along North Main Street. It is sometimes dubbed "The Gateway to Stonington" as most traffic leaving the interstate and coming into town, travels this lovely road.

Historic photos depict beautiful stone walls lining the roadway with ancient maples arching gracefully overhead. In the fall, it becomes a leaf-peepers photo-op. This fall we decided to tackle clearing the walls along the Fennerswood Preserve, from Pequot Trail, for nearly three-quarters of a mile along both sides. Shrubs and brush had grown up on both sides of the wall.

As we began clearing, a few things became painfully obvious: there was a massive amount of litter all along the road, hidden within and under the greenery, most of which was poison ivy. And, the walls underneath were disappearing! Over time, rocks have gone missing: good field stones are valuable. While working, we also uncovered many stones that had tumbled off the walls to the base and were covered by vines. The stature and integrity of the historic boundaries had been compromised. So our task took on another dimension. We began to think about replacing and restoring those rocks to rebuild those walls to a little of their former glory.

With a bit of brain storming with an Avalonia friend who helped rebuild the Paffard Woods walls last year, we got an estimate for repair of these walls, but in stages, so we could start with priority areas and see how far we could get depending on our funds, which were minimal.

We embarked on a small, local campaign to ask our neighbors, not necessarily just members, to help us with stewardship efforts here in their home town, with the walls as a first and very visible start. Once again, the generosity of our friends has proven amazing. In a short time we received donations enough to complete the wall restoration and even acquire more stones if needed. The work has begun on the west side down from Pequot Trail. It looks great! Thank you!!

Now if we could only solve the litter problem!

Changes Affecting "Avalonia" Capital One Credit Cards *by Heather Milardo*

Since our last issue, we have received notification from Capital One that they are making changes to their charitable giving program. For those of you who had/have Avalonia credit cards, you should have received notice, either by mail or by email, from Capital One that they are cancelling the Avalonia cards and issuing everyone new regular Capital One cards. No longer will a percentage of purchases be sent to Avalonia automatically. If you choose to continue using your Capital One card, you will have to go into their site and manually designate your rewards funds to come to Avalonia each time you want to donate them. If you have questions, please contact Capital One directly at 800-228-3001 and they will help talk you through the process.



AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY, INC.

P.O. Box 49, Old Mystic, CT 06372

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Avalonia has a Facebook page:



**Read our weekly blog for updates between newsletter issues:
<http://avaloniaetrails.blogspot.com>**



Upcoming Events

Thursday, January 15, 2015, 10:00-12:00 a.m. **Maintenance training hike** to discuss property maintenance, walk property boundaries and perform light maintenance. If you enjoy our properties and would like to give a little of your time to help maintain them, please join us., everyone is welcome. We will meet in Ledyard center at Holdridge' Home and Garden Center on Colonel Ledyard Highway (Rte 117). These hikes will be held every Thursday through the winter months. Very inclement weather cancels. Details on page 3.

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