



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 2011– 2012

Erisman Woodlands

by Anne Nalwalk

This December, Adele Erisman made two extremely generous gifts to conservation in North Stonington: she gave 62.1 acres of her home land on Reutemann Road in North Stonington to Avalonia Land Conservancy to be preserved as open space as the Erisman Woodlands and she conveyed her house and the remaining two acres surrounding it to The Nature Conservancy (TNC). She will retain life use of her charming home.



Adele Erisman, life-long environmental advocate and original member of Avalonia Land Conservancy when it was founded in 1968, celebrates her 100th birthday with friends from Avalonia and TNC at her home in North Stonington on November 11, 2009. Photo by Abigail Pheiffer used by permission of *The Day*.

Erisman Woodlands is wooded uplands with rock outcrops and some steep slopes leading to wetlands in the southern portion. A small stream runs across the western part of the house lot and then drains south toward the Shunock River south of Babcock Road. Erisman Woodlands includes nearly 1200 feet of frontage along the south side of Reutemann Road, 160 feet west of the house lot and 1027 feet to the east of it. Avalonia hopes to be able to connect it to the Henne Memorial Preserve on Babcock Road eventually.

Adele Erisman and her husband Robert acquired this property in 1956 and built the small, efficient house where Adele still lives. She first contacted Avalonia about preserving her property in 2009, intending to leave it to us in her will. Last year she decided to make her gift now, which permits us to thank her in person for her generosity. Visitors to her rear porch, which looks down on her woodlands and the wildlife that live there – squirrels chipmunks, a barred owl and all sorts of songbirds in the spring – will readily appreciate that this is a special place.

Adele was an ardent conservationist before it was popular, and before she and her husband moved to this area in the 1940s. In the *New London Day* (November 15, 2009) following the occasion of Adele’s one hundredth birthday, *Day* reporter Judy Benson noted that a program Adele gave to the Mystic Garden Club in 1943 led to the creation of the Denison-Pequotsepos Nature Center (DPNC) in 1946, on land that the Denison Society made available for that purpose (the full article is available at www.theday.com/article/20091115/NWS01/311159892). It is our good fortune that this endeavor continues to thrive under Executive Director Maggie Jones, educating future generations to continue to respect, love and care for our natural areas and wildlife. Adele continued to volunteer and write for the DPNC and various other publications for many years. She was also present at early meetings with Drs. William Niering and Robert Goodwin that led to the formation of TNC, now a major world-wide conservation organization. Adele’s contribution to TNC was amongst those that enabled them to purchase the 123-acre Cossaduck Hill Preserve, also in North Stonington. Adele’s other achievements as a conservationist include helping to establish North Stonington’s first Conservation Commission before many people were aware of the need to protect some of our open spaces for their conservation value. Last, but not least, she was instrumental in the founding of Avalonia Land Conservancy in 1968 as The Mashantucket Land Trust.

Adele, we all thank you, not only for this recent very generous gift, but also for the example that you have provided by your lifelong dedication to conservation. Never doubt that you have made a difference. Thank you, thank you, from the bottom of our hearts!

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Membership renewal changes

In order to realize savings on postage by using our bulk mail permit instead of first class postage, in future we will be sending out membership renewal reminders in one mailing, one time each year. This means all members will receive renewal reminders at the same time, instead of around the anniversary of their joining Avalonia. This will not only save on postage, but will also increase efficiency in processing renewals. In order that members do not suffer financially by this change, everyone who renews between January 1 and May 31, 2012 will have their memberships extended through May 31, 2013. All members whose membership expires before May 31, 2013 will receive a reminder in April 2012 and when they renew, their new one-year membership will expire May 31, 2013.

If you wish to renew now, rather than waiting for a reminder, a form is provided on page 5. You can also renew online at

www.avalonialandconservancy.org/DONORS-MEMBERSINFO

Your current membership expiration date is indicated on the address label on this newsletter, if you receive the print version.

President's Corner

In our last newsletter, I told you about the goals that I had chosen to focus upon during my term as Avalonia's President:

1. To consolidate the organizational changes that we have made in order to establish an organization in which neighborhood activism at the town level supports and forwards the goals and the mission of Avalonia at the regional level.
2. To place the organization on a sound financial footing that will permit forward planning.
3. To move the organization toward full accreditation with the Land Trust Alliance (LTA).

As all environmentalists know, everything is connected, and each of these goals is interconnected with the others.

Our Town Committees are a new organizational element for Avalonia, but they are now functioning efficiently in parallel with the Standing Committees: Acquisition, Stewardship, Finance, Personnel, and Development & Public Relations.

At the January Board of Directors meeting, we begin the budget planning process for the next fiscal year, an opportunity to observe the interconnected relationship of these goals. Each town committee is being asked to review its property list and identify what stewardship or other costs they foresee in the next fiscal year. These projections will be based upon good stewardship practices, in keeping with our mission of preserving natural habitats and educating the public of the value of these habitats. Stewardship planning and practices should be based upon the best available technical knowledge, so we are fortunate to have expert help from scientists in the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) Department of Agriculture and Department of Energy & Environmental protection (DEEP). Our careful attention to the budgeting process will help with goal #2, sound financial footing, as each dollar donated should be treated with the care and respect the donors intend. The budgeting process is a major aspect of goal #3, accreditation. The Board recently completed the Assessing Your Organization (AYO) process with the aid of a facilitator from the LTA, a necessary prerequisite to pursuing accreditation. We will be working to implement the recommendations made arising from the AYO analysis. To this end, we have established a number of working groups to address specific issues and submit recommendations to the Board:

- A Strategic Planning group, which will set goals for the future
- A Strategic Conservation Planning group, which will address some of the whys and wheres of future acquisition
- A Fundraising group to explore options for generating revenue to support our activities
- A Personnel Policy group to develop policy for managing our paid and volunteer staff, consistent with our accreditation goals.

How can you help?

- Please give to our Annual Appeal, if you have not already done so.
- Apply for an Avalonia credit card, and use it; Avalonia receives a percentage of your charges at no cost to you
- Get involved with your town committee.
- If you live in Griswold/Voluntown/Sprague please consider forming a town committee. We can help if you are interested. Just give us a call.
- We desperately need volunteers for the Development & Public Relations committee, to plan and implement fundraising activities and community outreach programs. We also have vacancies on our Personnel and Finance committees.
- We also need volunteers to help in the office on an occasional basis.
- Volunteers to help with stewardship are always needed.
- If you are a book keeper, I would very much like to talk to you.

Our contact information is in the sidebar on the left of this page. Thank you for your continuing support.

Acquisition Update

by Janice Parker

Since the last issue of this newsletter, Avalonia has acquired a number of properties in addition to **Erismans Woodlands**, the generous donation of Adele Erismans, which is featured on the front page. Much of the property Avalonia holds is received by donation, and individual donors like Mrs. Erismans who freely give their property for conservation have a special place in our hearts, and deserve special recognition.



Pickerelweed, *Pontederia cordata*

In order to achieve Avalonia's strategic goals of assembling contiguous forest blocks and wildlife corridors of significant ecological and habitat value, we also acquire properties by means other than outright gift.

The **Greenwood Tract** of the Mitchell Preserve in Preston was featured in the September 19, 2011 issue of the Day in an article entitled "Avalonia adds another gem to necklace". www.theday.com/article/20110929/NWS01/309299501/1018



Meadow beauty (Handsome Harry), *Rhexia virginica*

Avalonia also accepts properties set aside as part of the open space requirements of a subdivision, provided that these parcels meet our criteria with respect to conservation values. The **Birdland Tract**, which constitutes a 15-acre addition of ecologically valuable wetland to our existing Anguilla Brook Preserve in Stonington, is such an acquisition.

Another is **Burton's Island**, 25 impressive wooded island acres with marshy inlets at the southerly end of Pachaug Pond in Griswold. Acquisition committee members who visited the site were awed by the beauty and variety of the native wildflowers there, some of which are shown in these photographs, provided by Sue Sutherland.

We have also benefited recently from a generous donation by Mystic Seaport of approximately 2 acres on the southeasterly side of Hewitt Road in Stonington that comprises an important coastal shrubland habitat and is contiguous with existing open space around the Bishops Cove subdivision.



Steeplebush (hardhack), *Spirea tomentosa*

This 30-acre property located on the north side of Lake of Isles road was purchased for the cost of back taxes owed by the previous owner, a development company. The Greenwood Tract abuts Avalonia's Green Falls Five Tract, which in turn is contiguous with the Gibson/McKain Songbird Preserve and hence connects with the Mains Brook Preserve and onward to the Mitchell Preserve and the Eleanor and Flood Reed Memorial Woodlands, creating a total preserve of over 250 acres. We hope that it may prove possible to develop hiking trails that will connect some of these preserves, although a trail connecting all may be precluded by the extent of wetlands.

Poquetanuck Cove Conservation Action Plan

by Jean Pillo

The Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD) was awarded funds by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to facilitate the completion of a Conservation Action Plan for Poquetanuck Cove. Poquetanuck Cove is bordered by the Towns of Ledyard and Preston, CT. Town representatives and other local stakeholders are being encouraged to participate in the process, along with conservation professionals from many disciplines. In a series of three working group meetings, together they will define the most important resources of the cove area and then identify the threats to those resources. Finally, by group consensus, a plan of action strategies will be developed and prioritized to address those resource threats. The Conservation Action Plan model that will be used for this process was developed by The Nature Conservancy.

Poquetanuck Cove is a two mile long brackish water tidal cove of the Thames River. The cove was distinguished as a bird sanctuary in 1969 and waterfowl hunting was prohibited in 1982. A committee interested in the long-term protection of Poquetanuck Cove previously worked with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to draft an *Action Plan of Protecting the Natural Resources of Poquetanuck Cove, Ledyard and Preston, Connecticut* in 1997 but that draft plan was never finalized due to a change of political leadership. In 2008, Avalonia, in partnership with ECCD and the Thames River Basin Partnership, was awarded a NFWF grant to begin a multiyear Phragmites control project in Poquetanuck Cove. Prior to the application of herbicide on this aggressive invasive species, a multi-seasonal rare plant review was done, resulting in the verification of six rare plant species in the marshes of the cove.

In addition to developing the Poquetanuck Cove Conservation Action Plan (CAP), ECCD is preparing for the groundbreaking on a fish ladder on the Hallville Dam upstream of Poquetanuck Cove. With the installation of this fish ladder, 9 miles of upstream breeding habitat will become available for alewife and other fish that live in the ocean but return to freshwater streams to lay their eggs. Planning for this project began in 2004.

There will be many volunteer opportunities associated with the CAP process, and several workshops on related topics are being scheduled in 2012. If you are interested in more information on this project, please contact Jean Pillo at Jean.Pillo@ConserveCT.org.

Jean Pillo is Watershed Conservation Coordinator for the ECCD.

Water, Water Everywhere

After the air we breathe, water is the next most important resource for life on our planet. We are most fortunate to live in Southeastern Connecticut where almost everywhere we look we can see or be near water. Probably being near water is why most of us live in this area.

As you know, we all live in a watershed and the water in our individual watersheds is interconnected and eventually flows into Long Island Sound. What role does Avalonia have in protecting the water in our local watersheds? If one reads through each of Avalonia's property descriptions or explores each property on foot, one comes to realize that almost all Avalonia properties contain or border wetlands, ponds, swamps, vernal ponds, brooks and streams either inland or along Long Island Sound. As we follow the drops downstream through our various Avalonia properties, it becomes apparent that Avalonia has a most important role in water protection by protecting the land that abuts the water throughout all our land trust properties in Southeastern Connecticut.

Avalonia Land Conservancy and the Groton Public Library have arranged a miniseries about water at the Groton Public Library beginning in February. Do plan to join us for this engaging series about water that is often referred to as "blue gold".

On **February 28, 2012, 7:00 p.m.**, Judy Preston will begin our co sponsored miniseries about water with a program titled **RIVER CONTINUUM** that explains "the important relationships between one stream and another in a continuum that links every stream to a river from source to sea." Judy Preston is the Connecticut Outreach Program Coordinator for the Long Island Sound Study and works out of the UCONN Seat Grant program in Groton. She brings an academic background in ecology and a longtime involvement in community-based conservation to her educational programs.

On **March 13, 2012, 7:00 p.m.** at the Groton Public Library, the film, **BLUE GOLD** about World Water Wars will be shown. This "must see film for every person on the planet" won the Best Environmental Film award at a Vancouver International Film Festival.

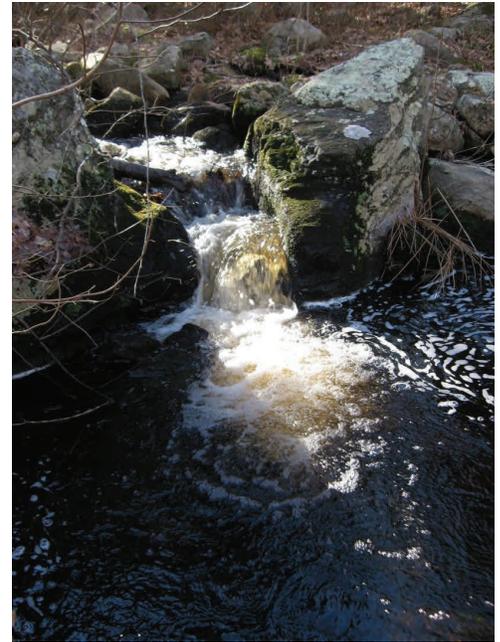
On **March 27, 2012, 7:00 p.m.**, the film **CHEMICAL REACTION** will be shown. "This award-winning documentary – while being a heart-warming, inspirational, human interest story about the origin of the natural lawn care movement in the U.S., it is also a powerful tool for individuals and organizations interested in reducing and/or eliminating pesticides from the environment, especially around our homes and our schools."

Juliana Barrett's presentation on **April 10, 2012, 7 p.m.** is: **CONNECTICUT'S WETLANDS: DEFINED, THEIR IMPORTANCE, HOW THEY ARE PROTECTED AND THE VALUE OF RIPARIAN CORRIDORS.**

Dr. Barrett will give a presentation on Connecticut's wetlands, how they are defined, the different types, why they are important, and the history of their protection in Connecticut. Juliana will also provide information and photos of riparian corridors, those segments of land along our rivers, streams and wetlands. Riparian corridors help protect the quality of our wetlands by filtering pollutants in runoff, and provide other benefits such as flood control, wildlife corridors, scenic value and privacy for waterfront properties.

Juliana Barrett is a member of the CT Non-profit Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO) team and an Assistant Educator in Residence with the CT Sea Grant College Program at the UCONN Avery Point campus in Groton, CT. As an ecologist, Juliana's focus is the coastal habitats of Connecticut and she is developing programs to assist coastal community leaders with technical matters related to the impact of land use on coastal habitats, riparian buffers, habitat management and restoration of coastal habitats.

Mark your calendars and join us at our upcoming miniseries about water at the Groton Public Library in February, March and April to learn more about the important relationships between one stream and another, how they all link together from source to sea and what we can do to protect our WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE.



Waterfall at Avalonia's Avery Preserve West Tract.

Photo by Joellen Anderson

Reptiles of Connecticut

INSIDE - Saturday, April 28 at 2p.m. at the Groton Public Library.

Meet live turtles and snakes as we learn more about the reptiles that call Connecticut home. Snapping turtles, box turtles, black rat snakes and milk snakes, are just a few of the fascinating reptiles you'll discover more about.

OUTSIDE - Saturday, May 5, from 10-11:30 a.m. Pond Dipping at Avalonia's Pine Swamp Wildlife Corridor (PSWC) property in Ledyard, CT. Meet at the Whalehead Road trailhead.

What actually lives below the surface of the pond? Grab a net and find out! Join us OUTSIDE at PSWC as we hike to a group of ponds and use nets to scoop out frogs, fish, bugs and more! Dress to get a little muddy, we'll provide the nets and buckets.

This OUTSIDE program will be held rain or shine (after all, we will be pretty wet anyway after our pond dipping fun)

These programs are sponsored by Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. in conjunction with Kim Hargrave from the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center presenting the programs with the Groton Public Library as our host.

A walk with RB Jones through White Cedar Swamp and Deans Mill Preserve

by Beth Sullivan and Binti Ackley

We have walked the White Cedar Swamp Trail and up to the Deans Mill Farm Preserve many times. This time we walked with RB Jones who knows this land from childhood and continues to be its devoted steward. We usually walk with an eye to plants and animals. This day he challenged us to see it through the eyes of history. The parcels are very diverse in their habitats and each area had a specific use and history. The signature piece is the White Cedar Swamp. Historically a wet seep area, it was enhanced by farmers decades ago to be a watering hole for livestock. Today it supports a rare stand of Atlantic White Cedar and boasts a snapping turtle of historic fame and proportions. We have each witnessed this legend on different occasions.

All along the walk he questioned the land use, the granite ledges and boulders and wondered about the quarrying methods. We passed stone walls and stone cairns, each stone had to have been handled and placed by someone.

The trail rises high and overlooks the reservoir and the site of the original Dean's Mill. Areas are dotted by huge erratics, boulders the size of small out buildings, deposited by the glaciers as they retreated north with the melt. Some of these boulders clustered into groups that were perfect for caves and forts. Places for fantasy and imagination of what Native American may have used them for the same. RB reminisced about the days when kids on horseback traversed the area, when it was far more open and less wooded. Campouts in the rocks, adventures on the ridges, cool springs for watering the horses.

RB has wonderful stories, lore that will be forgotten unless we record it now. He has graciously put several of his stories into words for us. Enjoy them as we did, and think of them when you next walk the preserve.

Deans Mill Farm, Part I: The Spring

by RB Jones

My memory of the spring goes back to the late 1930s or early 1940s (when I was 8 or 10 years old). There were 3 or 4 farms that abutted each other back then and I believe they had originally been Stanton brother farms. Our farm, "Dean's Mill," was located north and east abutted to the west by the Robinsons and to the south-west by Perkins and south by Olds. As all these properties came together in the corner at the south, it wasn't a long walk through the woods and fields to get to a neighbor's house! We did this frequently, as it was at the other farms where the action was! The Perkins had 7 sons; Willy was about my age and was full of life experiences and interests. The Olds family had 3 daughters my age and younger. The Robinson Farm only had "old folks", but fun to listen in on when the 3-way party line that connected us to the Robinsons and Emma Baker on Pequot Trail was in use!

My story of the spring takes place in my early wanderings about Dean's Mill Farm: witnessing old Mr. Perkins drive his grey 1938 Ford pick-up truck down through the bar-way (opening in the stone wall) to the spring that was located at the corner of Dean's Mill property to get his drinking water. The spring was not readily accessible to Dean's Mill Farm,

But fairly close to the Perkin's Farm house and they had permission to use this resource. He preferred the spring water as he said it was much purer to drink than his well water pumped to their kitchen. Mr. Perkins may have been of German extraction as I remember him having a very strong accent

The spring was located about 75 ft. from the Perkins' boundary line and down the hill to a marsh area. It was approximately 8ft square and made with stones so that there was a wall holding the surrounding land out of it. It was in the shade and always had a frog or 2 resting in it! What a special place.

Sadly, when I-95 was built, the spring was bulldozed away to make a drainage ditch for run-off from the highway. When you walk the trail, you can see the ditch in the north-west corner near the Perkins' Farm property line. I have looked for signs of the spring: stones or seeping water, but can find no clues. Only the old stone gateway, which connects the swampy area between the Perkins Farm and Dean's Mill Preserve, remains visible.

Parts II and III of this historical reminiscence will be published in subsequent issues. RB has offered to lead a guided walk through the preserve later in the year, details to follow. In the meantime, visit the White Cedar Swamp/Dean's Mill Preserve for a pleasant 45-minute amble (Jerry Browne Road, Stonington on the right just west of the water company heading towards Olde Mistick Village. There is a two car pull-off).

Avalonia welcomes new and renewing members!



Renew online using your credit card: www.avalonialandconservancy.org
Click "Donors & Members info"

Or mail this completed form and check to:
P.O.Box 49
Old Mystic CT 06372

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Choose membership level: Individual \$25 Family \$45
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I am enclosing \$.....as a contribution in addition to my membership dues.

I want to help: outdoor work fundraising/PR solicit new members
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Note: Dues, gifts of land, securities and other contributions are tax-deductible within the limits of the law.



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Avalonia now has a Facebook page:



Upcoming Events

Saturday February 4, 9.30 a.m. Perry Preserve hike. Part of DPNC's Pequotsepos Hikers series, led by their naturalists. Moderate difficulty and pace. Call DPNC at (860) 536-1216 for details.

Saturday February 18, 9.30 a.m. Hoffman Evergreen Preserve hike. Part of DPNC's Pequotsepos Hikers series, led by their naturalists. Moderate difficulty, slow pace. Call DPNC at (860) 536-1216 for details.

Saturday February 18, 1 p.m. Moore Woodlands Hike. Ongoing wildlife habitat enhancement at this popular Groton preserve highlights a large meadow and other points of interest. From Rte. 1, turn onto Judson Avenue, through a subdivision, right onto Capstan Avenue, to the end of the cul-de-sac near small cemetery. Tailgate refreshments provided after the hike courtesy of the Friends of Ledyard Libraries.

Tuesday, February 28, 7 p.m. River Continuum A visual program presented by Judy Preston at the Groton Public Library. Details page 4.

Tuesday March 13, 7 p.m. Blue Gold, a film about World Water Wars, Groton Public Library. Details page 4.

Tuesday March 27, 7 p.m. Chemical Reaction, a documentary about the natural lawn care movement, Groton Public Library. Details page 4.

Saturday, March 31, 1 p.m. Invasive Species Hike. Learn about invasive plant species and how to control them while walking the historic Sheep Farm, recently acquired by the Groton Open Space Association (GOSA). Park at the trail head half a mile up Hazelnut Hill (behind Pequot Medical Center) in Groton. Additional parking on the street and at the nearby UMC church. Tailgate refreshments provided after the hike courtesy of the Friends of Ledyard Libraries.

Tuesday, April 10, 7 p.m. Connecticut's Wetlands by Dr. Juliana Barrett at the Groton Public Library. Details page 4.

Saturday, April 28, 2 p.m. Reptiles of Connecticut: INSIDE at the Groton Public Library. Details page 4.

Saturday, May 5, 10 a.m. Reptiles of Connecticut: OUTSIDE at Pine Swamp Wildlife Corridor, Ledyard. Details page 3.

Saturday, June 2, 9.30 a.m. CT Trails Day. Hike Across Groton, plus other events. Save the date and check the next issue of "Avalonia Trails" or our website www.avalonialandconservancy.com for details.