



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

SPRING 2012

Recent Acquisitions: Focus on Griswold

Two of Avalonia's most recent acquisitions are located in Griswold. As mentioned briefly in our last issue, late in 2011 we were given a very lovely wooded island property located in Pachaug Pond. This property, identified on maps as Barton's Island, was the generous donation of Jill Marquardt-Scola and her family (Nick, Nicole and Bobby Scola) and will be called the Scola Preserve in memory of Lee Curtis Marquardt and Grace Scola, Jill's father and Nick's mother, respectively. Both of these individuals were generous in the donation of their time and efforts to



Lee Curtis
Marquardt



Grace Scola

charitable organizations and had a love of nature and the outdoors, and now a portion of that natural outdoors will be preserved in perpetuity in their memory. Lee Curtis Marquardt was an avid fisherman as well as a volunteer for Habitat for Humanity who believed

deeply that that you always needed to give back

to your community. Grace Scola was likewise a keen volunteer, giving of her time for various causes from literacy programs to soup kitchens. She enjoyed gardening at her home, and spending time at the beach. She opened her beach to neighborhood families so that everyone could enjoy the Rhode Island beach that she so loved.

Avalonia's most recent acquisition also reflects the collective generosity of a family, in this case the Dutka family, Mary F. Dutka of Griswold, Andrew J. Dutka of Glastonbury, Anne Cuyler of Hamden and Andrew J. Dutka Jr. of Rockville, Maryland. Together they have donated 17 acres of diversified woodlands on Bethel Road in Griswold. The property will be known as the Dutka Family Preserve.

We all express our whole-hearted thanks and appreciation to these generous families, who have enabled these family properties to be conserved for the benefit of future generations.

We also encourage anyone who would like to memorialize the volunteer spirit of these individuals by volunteering to help steward preserves to contact us.



The Scola family: Jill, Nick, Nicole and Bobby.

Preserve Dedications in North Stonington

Dedication events for two preserves in North Stonington are planned for May. On May 5, at 10 a.m. we will celebrate the acquisition of Erisman Woodlands, the generous donation of Adele Erisman, which was featured in the last issue of "Avalonia Trails". On May 19, at 10 a.m. we will formally dedicate Parke Memorial Preserve, generously donated by the descendants of Ruby Parke Anderson and her husband Eugene Atwood Anderson, Sr., and named in honor of Ruby's parents Burrows Ripley and Aurelia Eunice Parke. This latter donation was made in 2009, and much volunteer labor has been invested since then to make this historically significant former mill site an attractive and educational nature preserve. Erisman Woodlands is located at 118 Reutemann Road, Parke Memorial at 16 Babcock Road.

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President's Corner

As we welcome spring and another new year of growth, I want to thank all of you for the contributions you have brought to the organization over the past year. Together we have overcome extraordinary challenges to make outstanding achievements.

In an economic climate where few people have energy left from the challenges of making a living to volunteer, we have expanded our organization with Town Committees who undertake our grassroots efforts, and Standing Committees who undertake the challenges of acquiring and stewarding properties, and of raising and managing the funds to support them.

In this same depressed economic climate, our member-donors have maintained our Annual Appeal income at levels comparable to previous years, while still contributing sufficient funding to underwrite strategic acquisitions.

You are the volunteers and you are the donors who have made that possible, and on behalf of the entire Avalonia organization, I thank you.

Here are your achievements for the 2011-12 Avalonia fiscal year. We have acquired 6 additional preserves:

- Erisman Woodlands, a 62-acre woodland preserve in North Stonington named in honor of its donor, Adele Erisman
- The Greenwood Tract, 30 wooded acres contiguous with the Gibson/McKain Songbird Preserve and hence with the Mains Brook and Mitchell Preserves
- Scola Preserve, (see article on page 1)
- Dutka Family Preserve, 17 acres of diversified wooded uplands in Griswold
- The Birdland Tract a 15-acre riparian buffer to Anguilla Brook
- A donation from Mystic Seaport of 2 acres in Stonington comprising a coastal shrub land habitat contiguous with existing open space around the Bishops Cove subdivision.

In addition, we are finally approaching completion of the survey that will make it possible to finalize our purchase of Bell Cedar Swamp. This acquisition is particularly dear to my heart, not only because of the unique attributes of the property itself, but because my own grant-writing efforts have raised the bulk of the funds necessary to effect the purchase.

These additions (exclusive of Bell Cedar Swamp) bring our total conservation holdings to over 3000 acres, a significant milestone.

However, it is not all about the numbers. I must emphasize that none of these properties has been acquired without rigorous review, first by the relevant Town Committee, then by our Acquisition Committee, and finally after due consideration by the Board of Directors. Each one has significant conservation value, and each is a component in our ongoing plan of strategic conservation. Each represents a valuable step toward our goal of developing forest blocks and wildlife corridors of ecological significance, habitat value and public benefit. Our Strategic Conservation Planning Group is working to develop a comprehensive master plan that will help to guide our future acquisitions.

Given the burden that we as an organization assume in acquiring property with a commitment to preserve it in perpetuity, we cannot, and do not, undertake acquisition lightly. Avalonia incurs significant immediate and ongoing costs and obligations in accepting even donated property. As our mission statement specifies, our goal is to preserve natural habitats; acquiring and subsequently stewarding them is only the means to that end. Our obligation, first and foremost, to our members, to our donors and to the environment, is habitat preservation. Sometimes that means making some difficult choices.

Of course, once a property is acquired, stewardship is absolutely critical to ongoing preservation. So, we need your volunteer support. Give us your phone number and email, so we can let you know of upcoming stewardship events. Check the trail party listings we put on our website and post *via* Facebook. When you come as a volunteer, bring your friends, bring your family, bring your scout troop, bring your garden club, bring your seniors group; Avalonia is an equal opportunity employer.

Thank you all, once again, for your volunteer efforts, your financial contributions and your ongoing support. Avalonia is your land trust, we couldn't do it without you.



Electronic newsletter delivery

Thank you to all of you who have opted to receive future newsletters *via* email. If you are not getting your newsletter by email as requested please let us know. There are a number of reasons why this could be the case; some members specified email delivery on their renewal forms, but did not provide an address, some addresses provided were not legible and some emails were returned as undeliverable from the addresses to which they were sent. So, if you received the print copy of this newsletter instead of (or in addition to) the e-version you would prefer, please let us know: avalonialc@yahoo.com. Thanks!

Thank You, Thank You, Thank You!

Our sincere appreciation to all who gave in response to our 2011 Annual Appeal.

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44th Annual Meeting
Wednesday, May 16th, 2011 at 7 p.m.
Denison-Pequotsepos Nature Center

There will be a business meeting at which Board members and Officers will be elected. The business meeting will be followed by a program:

Hidden in Plain Sight: Know the Land, Know the Man

A program on Venture Smith, the legendary 18th century freed black slave, who defied existing law to become a respected landowner in Stonington and Haddam Neck, and who represents an important historical figure in colonial times with a relevant message for the present.

The speaker will be **Marta Daniels**, a writer and independent historian from Chester.

Light refreshments will be served.

Hike across Groton

by Joellen Anderson

Lace up your hiking boots and join Avalonia Land Conservancy, Groton Open Space Association and the Town of Groton Parks & Recreation Department for a jointly sponsored, 2nd annual CT Forest & Parks Trails Day event on June 2, 2012 beginning at 9:30 a.m. at the Bluff Point State Park parking lot in Groton, CT. We will hike from Bluff Point State Park to Beebe Cove linking public hiking trails on state park, town and privately owned open space properties in Groton, CT. This walk is approximately 5-6 miles in length, and will be moderately paced and of medium difficulty. Participants are responsible for their own beverage and snacks. (Bathroom facilities are available at Bluff Point State Park and at Haley Farm State Park.) The hike includes about half a mile of walking on sidewalks. The Groton Parks & Recreation Department will provide return transportation from Beebe Cove to Bluff Point State Park parking lot. Heavy rain cancels, no rain date. Individual property trail maps can be found at: www.avalonialandconservancy.org, www.gosaonline.org, www.grotonrec.com/docs (Groton TrailsMap.pdf) and on the state DEEP website.

Registration requested: contact Sidney Van Zandt 860-572-5715 or email: SVanzandt3@aol.com.

Joellen Anderson is Chair of the Groton Town Committee

White Cedar Swamp and Deans Mill Preserve: Part II, The Hitching Post Tree

by RB Jones

This is the second part of a three-part series, the first part of which was published in our Winter 2011-2 newsletter. Part II comprises a letter from Grace D. Wheeler, Genealogist, Stonington, CT to Rand B. Jones. Envelope post marked February 10, 1943. "Dear Mr. Jones,

I have finally found this article about the tree, "The Hitching Post Tree". The history of one of the trees that helped furnish the frame to the ship ALTURA, launched last Saturday from the Stonington Shipyard is worthy of notice.

The tree stood on the farm now owned by Mrs. Marcia P. Stanton and occupied by her and Mr. and Mrs. Horace Frink. This tree had been a family landmark for about one hundred years and only for this patriotic purpose would Mrs. Stanton allow it to be sold, and when cut by Frederick Barnes it required his four horse team to haul the stick to Stonington. It was three and a half feet in diameter at the butt twenty feet long and contained about fifteen hundred feet besides three cords of four feet wood in the top.

About one hundred years ago Benjamin F. Stanton made use of a strong oak stick to break the ice in the winter time for his cattle to drink at the spring in the south-west part of his farm, which is the ancestral home of the late Stanton brothers. Each day that Mr. Stanton used the stick, he would leave it standing in the mud and water where he could easily find it the next time he needed it. At the close of the season the stick was left in its accustomed place and when he later observed it, it had taken root and the leaves had begun to appear. Gradually the sapling got larger and stronger as the years went by and when Mr. Stanton, in his declining year, rode horseback to this same spring in the winter, he would fasten his horse to this same little tree while he broke the ice for his stock to drink. Years passed on and the small oak became a large and handsome tree which adored the path and shaded the spring. Now its usefulness is turned into new channels and leaving the little spring it rides upon the ocean blue. Grace D. Wheeler"

The tree was cut during the First World War, about 1917.

An observation about the 'stick': white oak trees on the Dean's Mill Preserve were and are fairly rare. Most of the oak trees are red or pitch. It is interesting to note that there are over ten ancient white oak trees on the White Cedar Swamp. All appear to be over 100 years old! As you look at them, you can see that they are barely surviving from the last gypsy moth infestation. It's a good probability that these white oaks are progeny of the ALTURA oak tree as they all are south of the hitching post tree location!

White Cedar Swamp/Dean's Mill Preserve is located on Jerry Browne Road, Stonington just east of the water company on the right going towards Olde Mistick Village. Come and take a walk.

RB Jones is a member of the Stonington Town Committee.

Did you know that most of our stone walls are here because of Napoleon Bonaparte?

Have you ever wondered why the Colonists built stone walls through the woods? Or, knowing that the land was once cleared for farming and ranching have you assumed, as I did, that the stone walls were gradually built from early colonial times up until the decline of Connecticut farming in the mid-1800s? That isn't what happened.

I always assumed that the early farmers cleared the stones from their planted fields and stacked them neatly in stone walls to mark their plots of land. When you think about it though, why would a subsistence farmer take the time to put the rocks in a stone wall when it was easier to just pile them up in the field? Wood was very plentiful and it is much easier to build a rail fence than a stone one so that is what the early settlers did. You can still find early stone piles on Avalonia properties such as the Perry Natural Area in Stonington showing that these fields held crops. Some farmers did put the cleared stones into stone walls. You can tell these walls from others because they contain small and large stones rather than large stones only.

Before 1800 stone walls were rather rare in Connecticut and most of New England. Then came the "sheep craze" or "sheep mania". There were sheep in Connecticut in the 17th and 18th century, but England tried to discourage the wool industry. The sheep raised by the Colonists were English breeds that were small and produced little wool. Only about 6 % of their body weight was wool. The Colonies began exporting wool in the late 1600s and England cracked down, imposing a penalty of loss of a hand on anyone who engaged in the wool trade. This was one of the sore points that led to the Revolution.

Napoleon Bonaparte came to power in France in 1799 and went to war with Spain in 1807. Spain and Portugal had the finest wool sheep in the world, the Merino breed, and they guarded them carefully. A Merino sheep can produce 15 to 20 lbs of wool at a sheering, up to 21 % of their body weight. The wool is extremely good quality with fibers up to 6 inches long. Very few got out of the area before Napoleon threatened Spain and Portugal. Several U.S. envoys to Spain were able to arrange export of some Merino sheep to the states for a high price. These were enough to start a remarkable change in New England farming. One such envoy was Colonel David Humphreys of Oxford, CT. Col. Humphreys was appointed Minister to Spain in 1796 with the directive to look for trading opportunities. He was able to procure 25 Merino rams and 75 ewes for about \$100 each from Spain in 1802 and drive them across Portugal to take ship to the U.S. When they arrived in Derby, CT, farmers immediately took interest. Speculation drove the price for a Merino up to \$400 and later to \$2,000 for a Merino ram. Nevertheless, the Merino breed began to expand at an exponential rate.

Sheep need good fences, both to keep the valuable critters in and also to keep them from eating neighboring crops. Trees were becoming scarce due to early farming, house building, charcoal and potash production and the up to 30 cords/year needed to heat the uninsulated homes; therefore, fencing had to be made from something else. There was lots of stone. Some 125,000 miles of stone walls were built in New England between about 1810 and 1850. The stone walls were usually topped by a single rail supported by pairs of crossed fence posts straddling the stone wall. These wood pieces have long since decayed. Towns typically had a fence warden who checked fences and could impose a substantial fine if a farmer failed to maintain his fences. This was true in Vermont and New Hampshire and I am assuming Connecticut had wardens also but I could find no reference. Sheep farming and wool production flourished until the Erie Canal made access to the West easier and farmers left New England in droves. Before the Civil War about 95% of Connecticut was cleared of trees. With the decline of farming the forests have reclaimed much of the land and we have stone walls in the woods.

You can thank Napoleon Bonaparte for the stone walls you see today. If he hadn't attacked Spain, Spain would not have been willing to export Merino sheep to Connecticut and the stone walls would not have been built.

Mike Goodwin Chairs the Ledyard Town and Stewardship Committees.

Avalonia welcomes new and renewing members!



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www.avalonialandconservancy.org
 Click "Donors & Members info"

Or mail this completed form and check to:
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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.



AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY, INC.

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

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Avalonia now has a Facebook page:



Upcoming Events

Saturday, April 28, 2 p.m. Reptiles of Connecticut: an Avalonia-sponsored Super Saturday program with Kim Hargrave of the Denison-Pequotsepos Nature Center at the Groton Public Library. Meet black rat snakes, milk snakes, snapping turtles, box turtles and more. Registration is required; call 860-441-6750 beginning April 21st.

Saturday, May 5, 10 -11:30 a.m. Pond-Dipping at Pine Swamp Wildlife Corridor, Ledyard, an Avalonia-sponsored program with Kim Hargrave of the Denison-Pequotsepos Nature Center. Meet at the Whalehead Road entrance to Pine Swamp. Program will be held rain or shine. No registration required.

Wednesday May 16, 7 p.m. Annual Meeting at the Denison-Pequotsepos Nature Center. The usual business meeting and election will be followed by a program. Light refreshments will be served. See page 4 for details.

Saturday, June 2, CT Trails Day.

Hike Across Groton, 9:30 a.m., see page 4 for details.

Hike Avalonia's newest trail, through the Greenwood Tract in Preston, 1-3 p.m. Meet at the trailhead just off 31 Lake of Isles road. Park on Lake of Isles Road, if we have not completed our off-road parking area by then. The trail runs 2-3 miles over easy to moderate rolling wooded terrain into Avalonia's adjoining Songbird, Mains Brook and Green Falls Five Preserves. Get out your hiking shoes and our binoculars and bring the family. Leashed dogs welcome.

Poquetanuck Cove Paddle, 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. An easy flat water paddle at high tide through narrow, 2-mile tidal embayment of the Thames River. Discover a significant coastal habitat and designated state bird sanctuary. Learn about ongoing efforts to develop an intermunicipal Conservation Action Plan. Bring your own canoe/kayak, personal flotation device, beverage and snack. Meet Anne Roberts-Pierson and David Bainbridge at the public access car-top boat launch at end of Royal Oaks Drive (off Arrowhead Drive, Ledyard). Heavy rain cancels. Pre-registration is required. Questions and to register: contact Anne Roberts-Pierson, 860-464-8101.