



Celebrating 50 Years - The Early Years

By Steve Knauth

Editor's Note: In 2018, the Essex Land Trust will be celebrating 50 years of preserving and enhancing our community's open space and natural resources for the benefit of future generations. We are kicking off the celebration of this landmark moment with a first in a series of articles detailing some of the high points in our history.

In July of 1968, readers of the *Deep River New Era* and *Hartford Courant* newspapers found an announcement tucked into the pages.

In the face of growing concern over development in the area, a group of Essex residents had formed a land trust to acquire open space property for public use. It was called the Essex Conservation Trust (ECT) and its mission, said president Thomas S. Willetts, would be "to promote for the benefit of Essex residents ... the preservation of natural resources and the plant and animal life therein ... as well as scenic and historic sites." It would seek to "acquire by gift or purchase ... real or other property ... exclusively for educational, scientific and conservationist purposes."

Henry Tower was named vice president, Mrs. Frederick Dagget, secretary and R. William Bevan treasurer. The directors and the advisory board read like a "Who's Who" and included Merritt Comstock, Herbert Clark, Charles Doane and Walter Budney.

The *Middletown Press* covered the first meeting, held October 9. Already 258 members strong, the auditorium was "packed" according to the Press. Joseph Ward, Jr. of the state Council on Agriculture and Natural Resources gave a talk and showed a film, "Wingbeats on the Sand." But the highlight was an announcement by Land Acquisition chairman Merritt Comstock that the trust had purchased its first property - a 5-plus-acre section on the northeast section of Thatchbed Island.

Thatchbed Island was the early focus for land acquisition. In January of 1969, a group of property owners, led by Chester Bowles, donated acreage on the island's south end. This followed an earlier gift of land on Great Meadows by Mrs. Francis K. Buell in memory of her husband, Fishy Buell.

Membership expanded rapidly and included 47 in the Junior Land Trust, made up of 5th and 6th graders from Essex Elementary School under the guidance of 6th grade teacher Alouise Keenan. Yearly dues were \$1.

The ECT acquired six more acres on Thatchbed Island that winter, purchased from Mrs. Edna Pratt Ek and Capt. Walter Rowe.

Rowe, founder and first Commodore of the Essex Yacht Club, had bought land there in 1946 to protect it from development, making him one of the town's first conservationists; Ek's property had been in her family since the 19th century, when it was used to grow salt hay.

Thus, by the early 1970s, a new idea was taking hold, the idea of donating, and deeding or selling land to the ECT. William Mitchell of Ivoryton deeded 4-plus acres on the Falls River, including three acres of valuable wetlands. Mitchell said he hoped his act would "encourage other landowners to follow suit." ECT president E.P. Williams lauded the move, which would "help insure the quality of life in this community."

But the trust was about more than saving open spaces; education through talks and presentations was part of the

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plan, too. The first of the trust's Ecology Walks took place out on Great Meadows, hosted by Connecticut College student Rob Hernandez, who explained the flora and fauna of the pendant bar to a group of active members. The *Old Saybrook Pictorial* covered the event; the trust termed it a success and a second walk was planned.

Throughout the early 1970s, a variety of speakers were bringing current issues to the fore; Christopher Percy, executive director of the Connecticut Watershed Council discussed the pros and cons of the plan to build an oil refinery on Long Island Sound; Yale University forestry expert William Burch Jr. talked about the relationship between humans and the environment; Richard Buck, an expert on the Atlantic Salmon, highlighted efforts to bring the fish back to its Connecticut native river.

Membership was now more than 400; in the space of just five or six years, the Essex Conservation Trust, through acquisition and education, was becoming an integral part of the three-village community.



A view of Thatchbed Island looking south from Essex Village center. Courtesy of Essex Historical Society



A recent aerial view of the Land Trust's first property.

The Wangunks & Connecticut's Indigenous Communities


More than 13,000 years ago, people settled on lands that now lie within the boundaries of the state of Connecticut. Leaving no written records and scarce archaeological remains, these peoples and their communities have remained unknown to all but a few archaeologists and other scholars.

Dr. Lucianne Lavin, Director of Research and Collections at the Institute for American Indian Studies, recently presented a highly informative lecture on the Wangunks, one of Connecticut's indigenous communities that have long, rich histories that extend back to when they shared Mother Earth with mastodons and other extinct animals. Ignored or themselves falsely labeled extinct by local 19th century town histories, the story of their evolution into complex tribal societies with sophisticated social and political traditions had remained largely untold.

Dr. Lavin's presentation introduced the audience to these

CONNECTICUT'S TRIBAL PEOPLES

- Longevity
- Continuity
- Complexity
- Sophistication
- Adaptability



Coastal southern New England sachem, ca. 1680-1710



Pequot girl, early 20th cc.




Intertribal powwow at Mashantucket Pequot reservation 2007

vibrant American Indian cultures just before European contact, particularly the Wangunks, a populous, powerful tribe with extensive homelands on both sides of the Connecticut River Valley. She discussed indigenous relationships with white colonists, the great changes

in the physical and social landscapes engendered by colonialism, and how Native American communities adapted to their constantly changing world through a series of survival strategies. Their descendants continue to be a vibrant part of Connecticut life today.

Dr. Lavin is an anthropologist & archaeologist who has over 40 years of research and field experience in Northeastern archaeology and anthropology, including teaching, museum exhibits and curatorial work, cultural resource management, editorial work, and public relations. Those interested in learning more should look into Dr. Lavin's book, *Connecticut's Indigenous Peoples - What Archeology, History, and Oral Traditions Teach us about Communities and Cultures*.

WANGUNK COMMUNITIES KNOWN TO ENGLISH CA. 1635



Map of English & Indian Towns in CT Valley ca. 1635 (after Timothy H. Ives 2009).

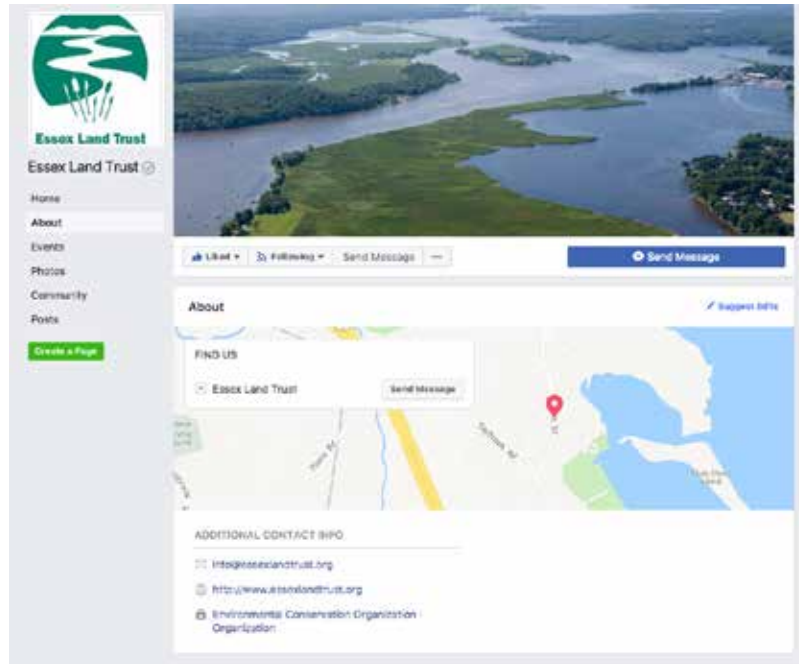
ELT Briefs

Essex Land Trust Now on Facebook

By Stephanie Gatto

Facebook is a social networking website that helps people connect and share experiences with family, friends and groups. The Essex Land Trust has created its own Facebook page to keep everyone updated on upcoming events, share relevant articles and links, as well as photos and videos. Using Facebook, a familiar and widely used social media platform, helps the Essex Land

Trust continue to reach out and engage with wider New England, Connecticut and CT shoreline communities,



while also strengthening its relationship with its current active members. It also enables the public to share their comments, add reviews, photos and videos of their ELT experiences.

Next time you are on Facebook, be sure to Like the Essex Land Trust page. Also, Follow us to guarantee that new content and updates added by the Land Trust will be added to your news feed. Have a photo of a recent hike? Did you enjoy one of the many

events sponsored by the Essex Land Trust? Share it on our Facebook page!

Investigating the Health of the Falls River Watershed

By Chet Arnold



Tabby Hargrove seining for fish with Bob Nussbaum

Tabitha Hargrove, recipient of ELT's David Hyde scholarship this year, is investigating the health of the Falls River watershed. Hyde scholars attend the summer Natural Resources Conservation Academy at the University of Connecticut, and then conduct a local conservation project in partnership with ELT. Tabby has undertaken an ambitious sampling effort, investigating four sites along the mainstream of the Falls River from near Messerschmidt Pond in the headwaters to below Tiley-Pratt Pond near the confluence with the Connecticut River. With the assistance of ELT Board members Bob Nussbaum, Chet Arnold and Jim Denham, she has been testing for water quality, seining for fish, and sampling the populations of stream-bottom insects (called "macro invertebrates"), which are a good indicator of water resource health. We are lucky to have such an enthusiastic and hard-working Valley HS scholar this year. Stay tuned for her results!



By Geoff Furtney

S ometime in the last century, the James Glen family built a bridge across the brook that ran down the valley of their property. It was a good-sized bridge on a beautiful stone abutment. And like all things, it got old. When the property came to the land trust only the abutments remained.

Today the bridge is fully restored thanks to the hard work of Michael Ryan, an Eagle Scout candidate from Troop 12. Michael comes from a short line of dedicated bridge builders—his brother built the 32-foot bridge at the trailhead of Land Trust’s Pond Meadow Preserve in 2015. Michael designed the bridge some months ago and with the help of the folks at Beard Lumber built a detailed material list. He solicited contributions from a variety of sources including the Community Foundation and his Grandpa.

When interviewed about the project, Chief Steward Tom Rutherford said this latest 14-foot bridge went up much faster and without nearly so many design questions. “Clearly Michael learned a few things watching his brother’s project two years ago. His dad, the guiding hand in the background for both endeavors, obviously honed his skills as well!”

The bridge is a short walk from the Hudson Lane entrance. Or park at the Doanes’ Woods Preserve, off of Navy Lane, find your way down the mountain to the valley floor and follow the flow of the brook. There you will find the original embankment and a wide, well-built bridge that will last for a long, long time. With no more boy scouts in the family, the Essex land Trust is proud to have the last Ryan Family original!



Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



Connecticut River Valley Native Americans

Thursday, November 2, 7 pm

Carriage House, Deep River Historical Society

Nicholas Bellantoni, former CT. State Archaeologist, will be our guide to Native Indian sites and cultures over the last 11,000 years in the Lower Connecticut River Valley. The evening will include Indian artifact identification and demonstrations of Native Indian lifeways. This second lecture on early Native Indian life in our area is co-sponsored by the Deep River Historical Society, the Essex Historical Society and the Deep River Land Trust.

Cross Lots Preserve Autumn Clean-up

Saturday, November 18, 9am

Cross Lots Preserve, 40 West Ave.

Cross Lots lovers come help us put this land trust preserve to bed for the winter, get a mild work out and connect with your neighbors in a beautiful setting. Refreshments will be served. Please bring rakes, blowers, etc. Families welcome. Dogs too. Rain date: Sunday, November 19.

Archaeology Hike in The Preserve

Saturday, December 2, 9am

West Parking Lot off Ingham Hill Rd., Essex

Explore The Preserve from the perspective of archeologists Nicholas Bellantoni and Lucianne Lavin. Learn the secrets of past lifeways and land use. Bad weather cancels.

Hike Doanes' Woods and James Glen Preserves

Saturday, December 9, 9am

End of Navy Lane, Essex

The Doanes' Woods Preserve is a large flat wooded area, which drops steeply to the east and adjoins the James Glen Preserve. These preserves include a wooded ravine with creek, rock outcroppings and spectacular tulip trees as well as other deciduous trees. A great winter hike to explore some local geological features with our stewards. Access is at the end of Navy Lane, off of Book Hill Road, Essex.



A late fall view of Doane's Woods

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