

LYME LAND TRUST BULLETIN

July 1991

The Lyme Land Conservation Trust

Vol. V No. 1

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Neighbors,

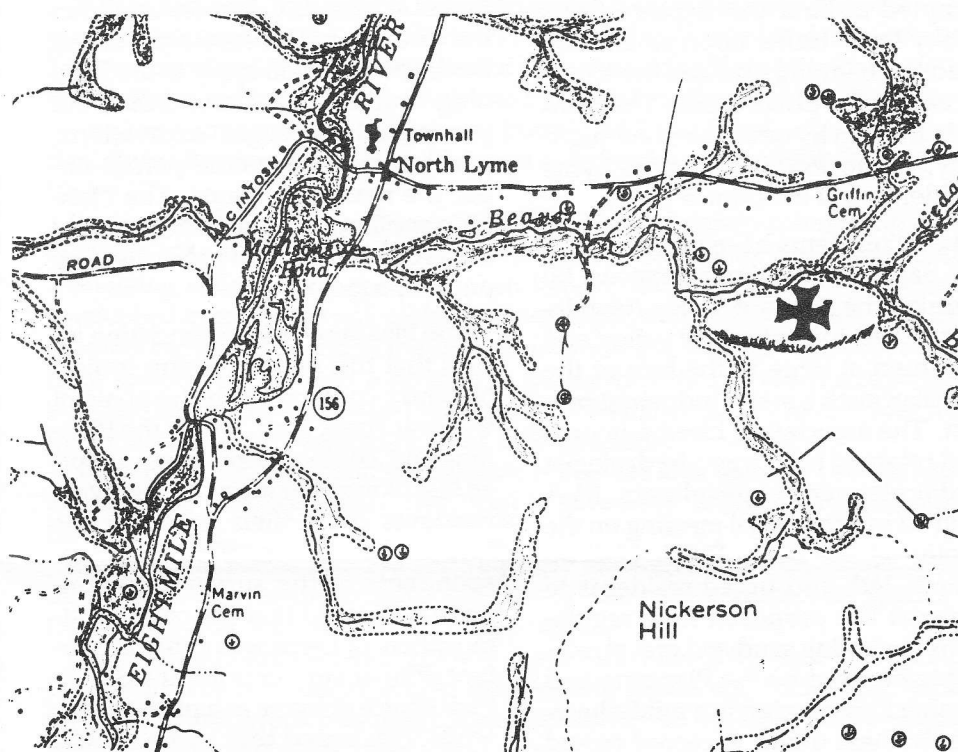
I'm going to repeat most of the information I reported at our Annual Meeting, which took place on June 12th and for which we had an excellent turnout, for the benefit of those of you who weren't there.

During the past year the Land Trust has received two gifts of land in fee. The first, a gift from our perennial benefactor Bill Beebe, consists of nine acres at the northeast corner of the intersection of Beaver Brook and Gungy Roads with the exception of Bill's house lot. It complements the first gift he made to us of 61 acres south of Beaver Brook Road and preserves the rural character of that corner of Lyme. The second gift was from William L. Oberg and comprises 13.1 acres to the east of Joshua-town Road in Hadlyme. The parcel, which is an open space dedication as part of a subdivision plan, is an interesting combination of ledge and woodland surrounding a wetland. It is a birdwatcher's paradise.

We also received two additional conservation easements. One, on Sterling City Road, granted by Andre Newburg, is the fourth such gift from Mr. Newburg, which now total 29.5 acres of contiguous land. We are indeed grateful. The other easement, on Mitchell Hill Road, was received from Mr. and Mrs. Bruno Klimek.

In reading this report one might get the impression that gifts of land to the Land Trust "just happen." Such

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This map shows the area of Lyme known as Pleasant Valley. The site of the proposed gravel mining operation is indicated by the large Maltese cross. The shaded areas are wetlands.

AN UNPLEASANT FUTURE FOR LYME'S PLEASANT VALLEY?

As the exhibit of "Three Artists of Pleasant Valley" opened at the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme, residents of Lyme faced the unpleasant prospect of a major mining operation in the middle of Pleasant Valley, where those artists lived and painted. Salem Earth Products, which already operates gravel pits in adjoining communities, proposes to remove an entire hill overlooking Beaver Brook, which flows through the valley to the Eight Mile River. The hill rises seventy feet from the brook and measures about 34 acres at its base. Imagine a 34-acre building five stories high and you'll have a

more vivid image of the scale of the proposal.

Roger Phillips, of Salem Earth Products, has leased the right to remove the gravel from Robert Congdon, who owns the hill and who runs a saw mill on the opposite side of Beaver Brook Road. Phillips originally expected the hill to yield two and a half million cubic yards of gravel. His most recent proposal reduced that to one million cubic yards. At that rate, he estimates that it will take about ten years to level the hill.

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AN UNPLEASANT FUTURE FOR LYME'S PLEASANT VALLEY?

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He hopes to sell about 25 truck loads of gravel per day, though the rate would vary with the pace of construction in the region. Counting inbound trips, his operation would add 50 dump truck trips a day to the truck traffic generated by the existing gravel pits on Beaver Brook Road. The Lyme Board of Selectmen has attempted to limit the impact of this heavy truck traffic upon small local roads by banning through-truck traffic east of the existing pits. That funnels the trucks onto the state highway, Route 156, where most Lyme residents will encounter them.

Local residents have responded to the Salem Earth Works proposal by forming the Pleasant Valley Association (PVA) to protect the valley and the town at large in the face of the threat of such a major industrial project. The association hired a lawyer and retained both a geo-hydrologist and a planner as consultants. PVA held an informational meeting on the project at the Lyme Public Hall on March 24th and urged residents to support the proposed new regulations governing sand and gravel mining to be aired by the Planning and Zoning Commission at a public hearing the next night. A record crowd turned out for that hearing, which resulted in passage of the new regulations. This gave the town much more control over sand and gravel excavation, although the new regulations are still far more permissive than Old Lyme's. The PVA has requested some further technical changes to make the intent of the new regulations more explicit.

Meanwhile, Salem Earth Products has withdrawn the proposal it had submitted to the Lyme Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commission pending the results of a study by a state Environmental Review Team which that commission had requested. The Environmental Review Team visited the site during April and submitted its report on June 10th. In the course of the environmental review, State Archaeologist Nicholas Bellantoni discovered records of a prehis-

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toric Indian encampment in the project area and has recommended an archaeological survey of the site.

Salem Earth Products will submit a new proposal in response to recommendations by the Environmental Review Team and the Inland Wetlands Commission. Once that Commission receives the new proposal, it will hold a public hearing on the impact of the project on the wetlands that surround it on three sides. If the Inland Wetlands Commission allows the project to go forward, Salem Earth Products will apply to the Planning and Zoning Commission for permission to begin excavations, which requires a special permit under the new regulations. The Planning and Zoning Commission would then schedule its own public hearing on the proposal.

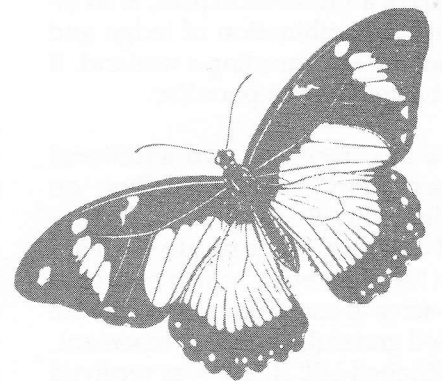
The Pleasant Valley Association insists that this gravel mining project blatantly conflicts with the goals of the new Town Plan, which the Planning and Zoning Commission adopted last November after polling Lyme residents about their hopes for the future of the town. 97% of the respondents to the survey questionnaire answered that the country atmosphere of Lyme was either important (9%) or very important (88%) to their choice of Lyme as a place to live, while 99% urged that Lyme should try to retain its predominantly rural character. Although small saw mills and gravel pits are certainly a traditional feature of the rural landscape, Salem Earth Products projects an operation on an industrial scale that dwarfs anything ever attempted in Lyme. Noting that many towns only allow operations of this sort within areas zoned for industry, the PVA insists that a mining operation of this size is completely out of character with the rural, residential setting of Pleasant Valley. "The valley is full of sand and gravel from one end to the other," according the Association President Melvin Woody. "But that doesn't mean it should be turned into a vast open pit mine. Lyme should not be gutted to supply fill for roads and cellars in other towns—not at the cost of destroying the values that make most of us want to live here."

LARGE-SCALE MAP OF LAND TRUST HOLDINGS NOW AVAILABLE TO BOARD

Until about a month ago the Board of the Land Trust had never had a useable, accurate, large-scale map of the properties owned by the Trust and on which it has conservation easements. Now at last, thanks to trustee Hiram P. Maxim II, who owns an engineering supply business in New London, just such a map has been prepared and reproduced for each member of the Board.

The basic map is a composite of the two topographic grids that cover Lyme enlarged to a scale of 1" = 900', on top of which is a clear plastic overlay which is a composite of the 44 Assessor's maps of the town. Over that is another overlay on which the Land Trust's properties and principal easements have been plotted. The original has been mounted on foam board and is kept in the Lyme Public Hall, where the Land Trust Board meets, and each trustee has a reproduction of it.

We are grateful for the time and effort Hi Maxim put into the map's preparation. It should be of great assistance to us in showing graphically where we are and enabling us to try to plan where we would like to acquire additional conservation holdings.



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a view hardly does justice to the dedicated individuals who put in countless hours following up leads, walking boundaries, preparing maps, et cetera. The Trust runs on volunteer power, and we welcome any and all who might like to give us a hand. Please don't be shy.

Our Stewardship Committee, under the able direction of Beverly Crowther, has been hard at work inventorying and marking the boundaries of our various landholdings. As you drive or walk around Lyme, look for our green and yellow signs with the heron.

We again participated in the Lyme Consolidated School's science fair, helping to judge the wonderful exhibits and awarding prizes to the winners. For those of you who have not attended this annual event, we recommend it highly.

All in all, your Trust is in good shape. Membership stands at 303, of which 210 are family or household memberships, and our finances are on solid footing. We thank you for your continuing support.

Sincerely,

Rufus Barringer
Rufus Barringer
President
June 1991

Quiet waterway teems with life if you look

The following article, which originally appeared in the April 13, 1991 edition of The Pictorial Gazette and is reprinted herein with permission of that newspaper, was written by reporter Liz Michalski following her attendance at the Land Trust's winter meeting held a month earlier. We thought it caught the lively spirit of Martha McLaud's presentation so well that those of our readers who missed the article when it first ran would enjoy it.

Lady-slippers, orchids, screech owls and peeping frogs visited the Lyme Public Hall recently as spring—for an hour, at least—came to town.

Martha McLaud, president of the Connecticut Botanical Society and active conservationist, spoke at the annual winter meeting of the Lyme Land Conservation Trust on plant and animal ecosystems of the valley of the Eight Mile River, which flows southward from East Haddam into Lyme and empties into Hamburg Cove.

"So I'm supposed to cheer you up, hmm?" McLaud joked, after trust president Rufus Barringer introduced her as a cure for the winter doldrums. "Well, I'll try."

For the next hour, McLaud took her audience on a brightly colored trip down the Eight Mile River, where deer, hummingbirds, and jack-in-the-pulpits reside.

Showing slides which she had taken herself, McLaud spoke of sometimes overlooked treasures. Skunk cabbage, for example, makes its own heat, and after snowfall can be seen melting the snow surrounding it. And spring peepers, tiny frogs scarcely thicker than a pencil, can inflate their throats to the size of giant bubbles. Several slides showed McLaud's two daughters, now much older than the pictures portray, examining their mother's finds.

"One of the things I think unfortunate is that as I look around, I see no really young faces," McLaud said. "We need to get across, to teach an appreciation for wild things."

Many of the plants McLaud showed were endangered or rare, sometimes a direct result of over-appreciative individuals who tried to transplant species to their own yards, a habit McLaud discouraged.

McLaud's audience listened intently as she told them of the jack-in-the-pulpit plant, which can change its gender from male to female and back again, and of the screech owl which frequently accompanies her on her early morning runs, always staying just a few trees ahead of her.

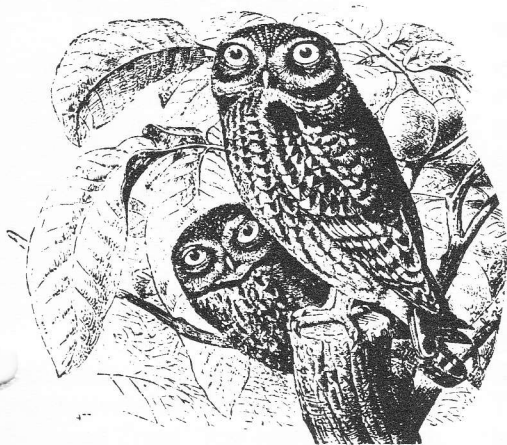
The audience also learned that birds of prey do not entirely devour their victims, but instead regurgitate the bones and other matter in a "pellet." By pulling it apart and examining the carcass, it is possible to determine what the bird's last meal was.

"Look very carefully at the little things," McLaud reminded her audience, citing the dragonfly's "monster of an exoskeleton" and the carnivorous tendencies of bladderwort, a waterplant which pulls in tiny organisms and devours them. Another sinister-sounding plant is the water hemlock, which McLaud called "the most poisonous United States plant." Cousin to the hemlock which killed Socrates, water hemlock results in a painful, violent death if ingested.

A more friendly slide was that of a raccoon McLaud had raised from infancy, and which she had to teach to be nocturnal. "I tell you, I'd rather raise two more of my own children than another raccoon," McLaud said.

"Please stop to smell the flowers, will you? Because there are a lot of them," McLaud concluded. "Some foggy morning, when you wake up on Hamburg Cove, remember the trip we took tonight down the Eight Mile River." And, she warned, "Enjoy it tonight, for tomorrow it may be snowing." (Her prediction was accurate.)

The Trust has been actively seeking to preserve the valley of the Eight Mile River by obtaining parcels of land along the river, through gifts, sales or easements. So far, according to Barringer, there have been no such gifts, nor are any expected in the immediate future, but the group remains optimistic. "We're just trying to get people to recognize what they've got," he said. "The Land Trust is trying to preserve it."



**TIMOTHY KEENEY,
NEW STATE D.E.P. COM-
MISSIONER, SPEAKER
AT LAND TRUST
ANNUAL MEETING**

Timothy Keeney, recently appointed Commissioner of Environmental Protection for Connecticut, outlined his department's priorities at the annual meeting of the Land Trust on June 12. His priorities focused on departmental funding and educational efforts as well as attacking the state's salient conservation and pollution issues.

His first priority, Keeney said, is getting the resources to fulfill the legal mandate of his department. Potential sources of revenue include forcing companies to give the state money for unredeemed bottles and cans, and registrations. The former would require legal action.

On the environment, Keeney stressed the importance of setting

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aside through legislation portions of the Connecticut River as wildlife conservation areas. Though there currently is no money in the 1991 budget for land acquisition, he says he may be able to draw on some available bond funds.

To combat pollution, he set as a priority cleaning up Long Island Sound. Underscoring his commitment, he recently created the position of commissioner for the Sound. Keeney also cited implementation of the Clean Air Act as a priority. Connecticut, he said, has the worst ozone air quality in the nation due largely to auto emissions. He also mentioned aquifer protection and medical waste tracking as priorities.

State educational efforts will increase understanding of environmental issues, Keeney says. Through these efforts, his department also is trying to raise money to upgrade state parks and help keep them open in 1991.

Also at the annual meeting, two new trustees, Antonia Honiss and Ruth Perry, were elected to the Land Trust Board to succeed retiring trustees Parker Handy and Joan Meyers. Cynthia Davison was elected Secretary.

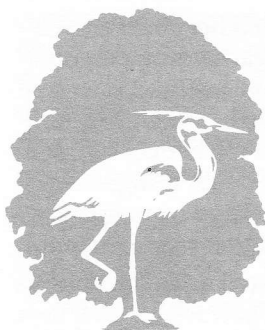


The Lyme Land Trust Bulletin

is published several times a year by the Lyme Land Conservation Trust, Inc. as a matter of interest to its membership and to the general public in Lyme. Its editorial board, to whom readers are invited to direct questions and suggestions, consists of John Friday and Cynthia Davison.

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