

# Pioneers of the Lyme Land Conservation Trust

## Rufus Barringer

By George Moore

Rufus Barringer, born in New Jersey, graduate of Princeton, WW2 veteran and graduate of the University of Virginia Law School, came to Lyme with his wife Charlotte, affectionately known by all as Sharley, to retire in 1980.

Retirement meant land conservation, serving as a trustee of The Nature Conservancy and President of the Lyme Land Conservation Trust, while actively pursuing a passionate love of the outdoors, fishing and sailing.

He was president during a time of great change in Lyme. In the previous eighteen years, conservation easements did not play a significant role in open space preservation; the Land Trust had only accepted one, but during his presidency from 1984-1992, nineteen were accepted.

According to John Friday Jr., who served as vice president, there was a real estate boom followed by the inevitable bust. Prospective developers bought up as much land as they could and submitted their plans to the Town.

So as to preserve open space and protect Lyme's unique agricultural and rural ambience, the approval agencies required conservation restrictions; at the time the Lyme Land Trust was the only town entity that could accept and hold these easements. It required, according to John, "intelligent diplomacy".

Under Rufus Barringer, the Land Trust became far more proactive. The number of fee properties owned by the Land Trust doubled in the eight years he was president, adding a total of almost 168 acres.

Claire Sauer, a fellow director, said Rufus' dedication to Lyme and to land conservation was extraordinary and attributes much of our present day success to his efforts. She said he had the ability to motivate people to accomplish more than they thought possible.

Anthony Irving, our sixth president, credited Rufus with leaving a legacy that greatly facilitated the Trust's activities for years to come. Because of his stature in town, Anthony suggested Rufus brought greater credibility and standing to the Trust's public image. Anthony says he personally turned to Rufus on many occasions for advice while he was president.

Like many accomplished people, Anthony observed, Rufus had vision, in this case a vision of what the Land Trust should accomplish.



**Rufus Barringer (1923-2002)**  
**Fourth LLCT President**

He credits Rufus with a project articulated in 1989 to establish the Eightmile Preserve - "(it)...would comprise the watercourses of the Eightmile River ...and the banks to a distance of at least 100 feet from midstream on both sides."

Nearly 30 years later Rufus' vision came true, as the river gained national recognition as one of the nation's Wild and Scenic Rivers. Well ahead of the curve, Rufus, in Anthony's opinion, made a grand contribution to the success of the Lyme Land Trust.

On behalf of the Land Trust in 1987, Rufus accepted the largest gift of land it had ever received - over 64 acres from then Town Treasurer, William Beebe.

Toward the end of his term, Rufus negotiated the purchase of 23 acres bordering the

Eight Mile River, from the Hand/Smith estate.

It marked a major change in Land Trust philosophy. Up to this point, the Trust relied on land and easement gifts to expand the land under protection. Under Rufus, the Land Trust for the first time bought land for preservation and embarked on a fund raising effort, confident it had the support of people in town.

Evan Griswold, who knew Rufus as a fellow board member of the Connecticut Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, credited Rufus' "steadiness at the helm" with its ability to feel it could tackle anything.

Noting his nautical reference, I asked Evan about a sailing adventure he had enjoyed with the Barringers. Evan joined them on a trip along the southern coast of Newfoundland back to their home port in Baddeck, Cape Breton Nova Scotia. Rufus and Sharley preferred to sail in the "less crowded" waters off Newfoundland and Labrador.

Experienced sailors will readily concede Rufus had to have been an accomplished sailor. Actually, according to Fritz Gahagan who was on the same trip, Sharley had the steadier hand at the helm!

For decades, the Gahagans have been a constant and positive factor in land conservation in Lyme. The family has produced three directors: Sally Bill, her son Fritz Gahagan and his son Ben. The family has donated conservation easements on hundreds of acres of family land helping to preserve the Lyme we know today. Naturally, I turned to Fritz for his remembrances of Rufus.

There was deep affection that was clear. Fritz credited Rufus for positioning the Land Trust on the road to success, putting in place many of the practices we follow to this day.

According to Fritz, Rufus adopted a scientific analysis of the land in Lyme, prioritized tracts to be protected, set goals and worked hard to accomplish them. He reached out to landowners, conducted conservation education programs and was an effective fundraiser.

He had the courage to personally guarantee a bank loan to acquire a property in advance of fund raising, certain the people of Lyme would be supportive, which they were.

It was for Rufus a work of love. For those of us who live in the Lyme he left for following generations, it was a work for the ages.

### **The Rufus Barringer Fund**

**To honor her beloved Rufus, Sharley Barringer established a fund in his memory with the Lyme Land Conservation Trust. The Rufus Barringer Fund gratefully accepts donations to help with the stewardship of the land under the Land Trust's protection and to expand conservation education. Please consider acknowledging this extraordinary man with a donation to this fund.**