

# Founders of the Lyme Land Conservation Trust

## Shirley Howard

By George Moore

Currently living in Essex, Shirley Howard is the only remaining board member from the first annual meeting of the Lyme Land Conservation Trust on May 26, 1967.

Who started the Lyme Land Conservation Trust and why was the Land Trust formed were among the questions I hoped to get answered when I went to visit her recently for an interview.

She is a very attractive, determined and intelligent lady with a fascinating recall of names and events. We weren't far into the interview when I began to understand the Lyme Land Trust didn't just happen.

When she lived in Lyme, she was Shirley Moore, and along with her then husband William G Moore and a few friends who shared a common vision for Lyme, she was one of the founders of the Lyme Land Trust.

Prior to moving to Lyme, she and her husband had lived in Greenwich CT and were dismayed to see the suburbanization which took place there, large parcels divided up into building lots.

They came to Lyme wanting to do what they could to prevent the same thing occurring here. Two things helped them – the rocky terrain which made development difficult and the passage of CT Public Act 490 which allowed a landowner to put acreage in excess of the zoning requirement into open space and receive considerably reduced property taxes.

While that served to slow things down, it did not prevent anyone from selling their land for development. They were aware of successful land conservation efforts in Massachusetts and wanted to set up a land trust to do the same in Lyme.

It is well known there is a "New York" community here – people who make Lyme their retirement or weekend home. Shirley related that the founders of our Land Trust



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not only shared a New York social and business relationship, but some were friends and neighbors in Greenwich before moving to Lyme. Margaret "Peggy" Clucas, a land donor and long time supporter of the Land Trust who recently passed away, was William Moore's sister and followed them to Lyme from Greenwich.

As a last illustration of the New York connection, Shirley sold her Joshua Lane house to the then New York Mayor John Lindsay and his wife, who she said matter-of-factly "were friends of ours."

As we went through the names of the successive presidents of the Land Trust from 1967 to 1992: Frank Stephenson, William Moore, Arthur Howe, Rufus Barringer, it was clear a group of like-minded friends guided the Trust and passed the torch for twenty-five years.

The driving force was Shirley, her husband at the time William G Moore, and their friends and neighbors Mr. & Mrs. Frank Stephenson. In 1968, both couples contributed parcels of land on either side of Rams Horn Creek – the first land ever

donated to the Trust. The Moores lived on Joshua Lane, the Stephensons on Brockway's Ferry. It was a start, almost eight acres protected.

The first Land Trust president was Frank Stephenson who was followed by William Moore.

Shirley served as Secretary until 1981. William Moore went on to serve as a State Senator and created and secured funding for the Gateway Commission, which has done so much to protect the first eleven miles of the Connecticut River.

Shirley said that local residents were at first resistant to the notion of affluent outsiders wanting to protect open space, but they finally came around when they realized preserving land did not adversely affect property values. Shirley bubbled with excitement when she said 60 enthusiastic people came to the first meeting brandishing letters of support and \$50 checks.

Shirley stressed the New York and Greenwich immigrants had deliberately taken a low profile non-confrontational approach. They knew it would take years to convey their message and earn trust. The last thing they wanted was for people to feel they were out to acquire land. Shirley's daughter married into the Eno family and lives in Lyme. Shirley's roots run deep here with a daughter, a granddaughter and three great grandchildren living in Lyme.

It wasn't until 1973 that the next land donation was made by Mrs. Orlean V Curtin who donated 20 acres on Moulson Pond. Mrs. Curtin lived in the house on Mt Archer usually referred to as the Red Mill. She was married to the world renowned architect, Edward Durell Stone.

When I told Shirley that today the Lyme Land Trust she helped create is the steward of 31 Fee and 64 Easement properties totaling well over 2500 acres, her response was "WOW! WOW!"