

# LYME LAND TRUST BULLETIN

The Lyme Land Conservation Trust

April 1997

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Two recent land transactions in town demonstrate a dilemma that faces Lyme and many other rural New England towns. The first was a gift to the Land Trust by Sally Bill of a 296 acre conservation easement. The second was the sale of a 300 acre parcel on top of Mount Archer. In the first case the goal is to preserve the conservation values of the property, and in the second to utilize the land for its development potential. In each case the rights of the landowner are being exercised but with markedly different results.

While Mrs. Bill's contribution preserves part of our rural town character the Mount Archer sale worries many as to the potential loss of this quality. Land dedicated to open space in town totals about 6500 acres or about 30% of the 22,000 acres that make up Lyme. That is a lot of open space when compared to other Connecticut towns, but it leaves many thousands of acres that could one day be developed. And when the impact of just twenty-five homes on this one - 300 acre sale is considered it causes one to wonder what Lyme will be like in 25 years.

The point is that Lyme will likely change. The reasons that make our town so unique today such as its beauty, its world class natural resources and especially its rural character are exactly the qualities that attract people to come and live here. But unlike many towns in the region that have already seen their rural attributes stripped away, we have an advantage. Lyme is still a town of open spaces and we do have some control over our future. But what can the Land Trust do? We can't save all the land. There is neither the money to buy it nor the financial ability or inclination of all landowners to preserve their property in open space. But we can help people to get involved.

*continued on page 5*



*Looking northeast from high point of Bill property.*

## EASEMENT CONSERVES LARGE ACRES

Mrs. Sally Bill has donated to the Lyme Land Conservation Trust a conservation easement on 296 acres of woodland. The plot runs along the east side of Route 156 behind Raymond Farms, and comprises a rocky hill rising to 400 feet above sea level. The many ledges of the hill afford incomparable views west to the Pleasant Valley Preserve, south overlooking Beaver Brook valley, east to Cedar Pond and beyond, and north to Devil's Hopyard.

The slopes of the hill are part of the watershed of both Beaver Brook and the East Branch of the Eight Mile River. With extensive road frontage, the donation also helps preserve the rural character of the town as experienced by drivers.

The land is part of Raymond Farms which has been in Mrs. Bill's family for some two centuries. Her grandmother, a Raymond, married a Bill from Bill Hill, another long term Lyme family. The donation thus also preserves part of Lyme's history. Mrs. Bill remembers spending summers at her grandmother's farm. There was berry picking in sections of the hill, which is now overgrown with trees. Large percherons pulled wagons up the hill for lumbering.

Anthony Irving, president of the Lyme Land Conservation Trust, called the gift a remarkable acquisition, the largest easement in the Land Trust's history and increasing the holdings of the Land Trust by a third. "In fact, this is probably the largest conservation easement given to a land trust in Connecticut in a number of years. It is a pleasure to be the recipient of such generosity."

*See Calendar on Page 3*

## A SPECIAL WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

There is a window of opportunity now to save open land that will not come again, according to attorney Frederick B. Gahagan, speaking at the well attended November workshop on conservation easements held by the Lyme Land Conservation Trust. In Connecticut, between sixty and seventy percent of the land in parcels larger than fifty acres is held by owners over fifty five years of age. A century ago parcels of a thousand acres were not unusual.

The factors that allowed ownership of large acreage no longer exist. Development pressures have created such high land prices that, in future, few people will be able to afford more than a house lot. In addition, estate taxes have increased as the value of the land has risen, so that heirs, who do not have the necessary capital, may be forced to sell land to pay these taxes.

Together these forces will lead to increasing fragmentation of holdings. Habitats and viewsheds will be disrupted and the whole landscape will change as houses and other types of development spread across the open space.

Landowners can take advantage of this window of opportunity to save the land they have cherished and minimize the tax impact of inheritance by

donating or selling conservation easements (called restrictions in Connecticut) to an eligible non-profit organization or government agency.

Such easements are unique to each piece of land, depending on the wishes of the owner and the conservation values to be protected. The Lyme Land Conservation Trust is available to discuss the various options with owners.

### Why Landowners Conserve

Leslie Olsen, of The Nature Conservancy, spoke eloquently of the value of open land and the reasons beyond tax considerations which lead landowners to offer easements. There may be a desire that children be able to enjoy the land, a sense of commitment to a community or a belief that we hold land in stewardship for future generations.

She also pointed out that easements have become a far more flexible tool than was previously the case. They can be constructed to allow compatible uses, or to reserve sections for limited development as the needs of the family determine.

### Natural Resources of Lyme

Anthony Irving, Land Trust president, pointed out the unique situation in Lyme, where almost all land holds conservation values. It is part of a large block of woodland based, surprisingly, at the base of the Connecticut River, amidst areas of denser development; it is part of the lower Connecticut tidelands, designated by The Nature Conservancy as one of forty Last Great Places in the Western Hemisphere, an area also designated by a United Nations group as one of the world's important tidelands.

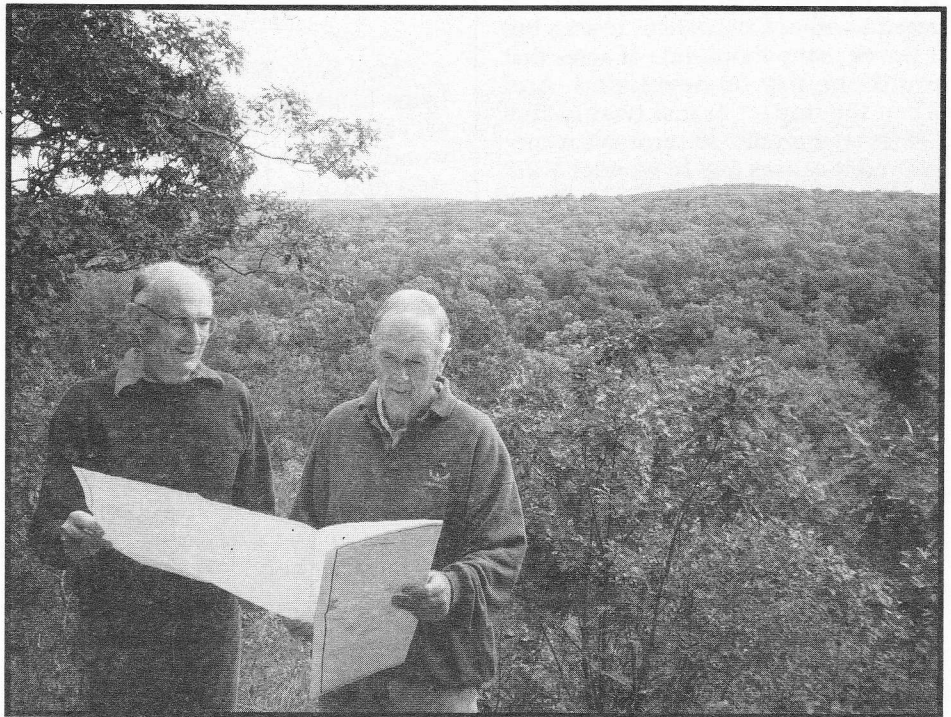
It plays a significant role in the Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge program which covers the Connecticut River watershed from the Canadian border to Long Island Sound. This federal project, unlike previous wildlife refuges, does not rely on purchase of land but rather working with owners to protect habitat. Easements are one tool in the strategies devised for this project.

Mr. Irving also noted that Lyme already has about thirty percent of its area in open space that is protected through various private and governmental programs so that any donation of land, however small, can be part of this larger picture.

### MITCHELL HILL ROAD EASEMENT

James and Elaine Lowry gave the Land Trust an approximately three acre easement on their property on Mitchell Hill Road. The land includes granite cliffs sloping down to a vernal pool. New England hardwoods, including ash, red and white oak, sugar and red maple typify the overstory which has grown over old pastureland, as evidenced by the remnant red cedar.

This easement is contiguous with one donated previously by Bruno and Regina Klimek, creating a five acre parcel. Mr. Lowry said the reason he moved to Lyme was because of the town's rural surrounding, and as nature lovers he and his wife wished to conserve the character.



James Lowry, and Robert Barney, Land Trust Treasurer.

## ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW TO SEE

The Education Committee, with Carolyn Bacdayan as chair, has been very busy with plans for future programs.

They plan annual spring and fall walks to introduce townspeople not only to the wonderful natural resources of outdoor recreation in Lyme, but each walk will have a specific and different focus. One can attend a walk in the same setting for several years, yet see it with new eyes. Each walk will introduce a new topic, such as the geology, the variety of habitat, map reading, historic uses etc.

### ARCHAEOLOGY TOUR

This spring's walk, on Earth Day, April 19, at 10 a.m. will look at the archaeology of Hartman Park, which boasts not only the usual Lyme stone walls, but foundations of homesteads and a mill and the mysterious "Three Chimneys," and other sites. Mary Ann Pfeiffer will bring us up to date on her research on these relics. Mrs. Pfeiffer and a crew of loyal helpers have made the trails and checked on the "little people" in the park.

The tour will be moderately difficult and take approximately three hours. Participants should wear sturdy shoes and bring snacks and fluids. A short lunch break will be made at one of the stops.

Space on the tour is limited. For reservations call Ralph Lewis at 526-

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sat. April 19. **Earth Day**. 9:30 a.m. Hartman Park.

Learn about the archaeology of the Park with Marianne Pfeiffer.

For Reservations: Ralph Lewis, 526-8886

Rain date April 26. 10 a.m.

Sat. May 17. 2 p.m. **Open House Sally Bill Property.**

Hamburg Road (Route 156) Half mile north of Town Hall.

Site will be marked.

Rain Date, Sun. May 18.

Tues. June 3. 7.30 p.m. Lyme Public Hall, **Annual Meeting.**

Speaker: Ralph Lewis, geologist with Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection.

"Avalonia, Subduction, and 'Other Intrigues' about Lyme's geologic past."

8886. If there is strong interest a later tour will be scheduled.

The fall program will be announced later.

The Education Committee also inaugurated a series of winter workshops, with "Managing Your Home Landscape - Naturally", held March 15. (See story page 4)

And not satisfied with that, the Committee put the Board to work with training sessions to upgrade their skill as stewards of the more than thousand acres held either in fee or as easements.

### STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE ALSO BUSY

The Stewardship Committee and wonderful volunteers have spent two sessions marking a new trail in the western section of The Pleasant Valley Preserve, and making two bridges to

ease crossing streams, which in flood are all but impassible except to those in highboots.

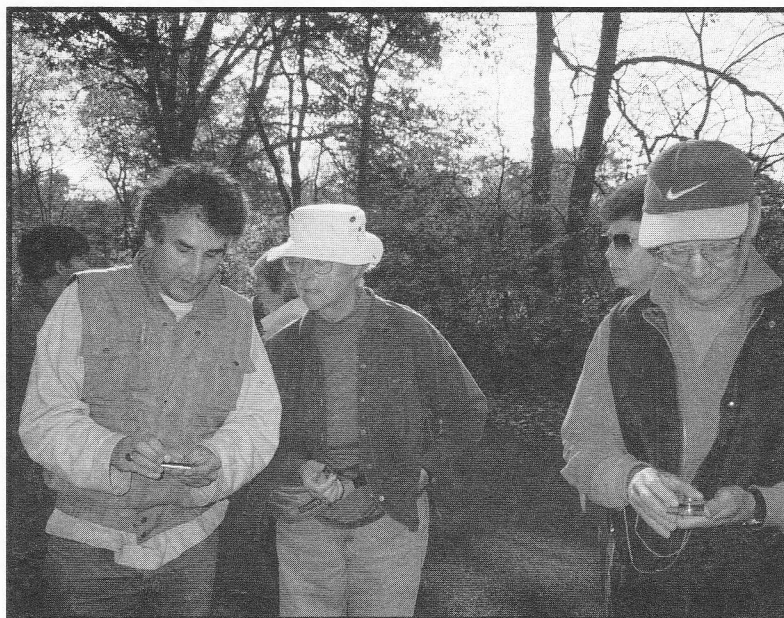
### ANNUAL MEETING

This year's Annual Meeting will be held Tuesday evening June 3, at 7:30 p.m. at the Lyme Public Hall in Hamburg. Ralph Lewis, an Associate Geologist with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, will explain how the underlying geology of Lyme determines the types of soil and the vegetation of the town. The talk is entitled "Avalonia, Subductions and 'Other Intrigues,' about Lyme's geologic past."

It will be an occasion also to elect new board members and make awards, as well as a chance for members and their friends to learn more about the Land Trust from board members.

### Compass Reading Exercise

The Education Committee, chaired by Carolyn Bacdayan, has initiated a training program for Land Trust board members. One of the major, legal, functions of the Trust is acting as stewards of the property it owns or on which it holds easements. A board member visits each property on a regular basis to ensure that provisions of the easement are upheld. On large properties, it is sometimes necessary to walk the boundaries with the aid of a compass and careful pacing. Anthony Irving, an ecologist, and Ralph Lewis a geologist, supervised the exercise. Here Anthony gives some pointers to Mary Catherwood.





### OPEN HOUSE

Sally Bill has graciously agreed to show the property to the public at an open house on Saturday, May 17 (Sunday rain date). See Calendar for details.

A conservation easement does not usually convey public access to property, so this is a special opportunity to see a magnificent stretch of land in the heart of Lyme.

Non-point pollution is the main cause of water pollution, Heather Crawford explained to a standing room only crowd at the Land Trust workshop on "Managing Your Home Landscape - Naturally." Non-point pollution is created by rain that runs off all land and into the groundwater or drains into streams, rivers and eventually into Long Island Sound. Land use determines the kind and extent of pollution.

Heather Crawford is Coastal Resource Educator from the UConn Sergeant/NEMO programs.

Pollutants are of several kinds. Nutrients such as phosphorous and nitrogen from fertilizers also fertilize aquatic plants which absorb oxygen from the water, killing off water based organisms. Pathogens - disease causing organisms - derive from animal wastes and failing septic systems and can lead to closing shellfish beds or swimming areas.

With some 10,000 chemicals available, keeping toxins out of the water is

not easy, yet a minute amount can kill fish.

All the debris we throw away is not only unsightly but can clog streams and destroy habitat. Thermal stress is another source of pollution. Many species live within a narrow temperature range. Rain water running off a hot parking lot can raise temperatures in water several degrees. Sun baking on shallow ponds has the same effect.

### What to do

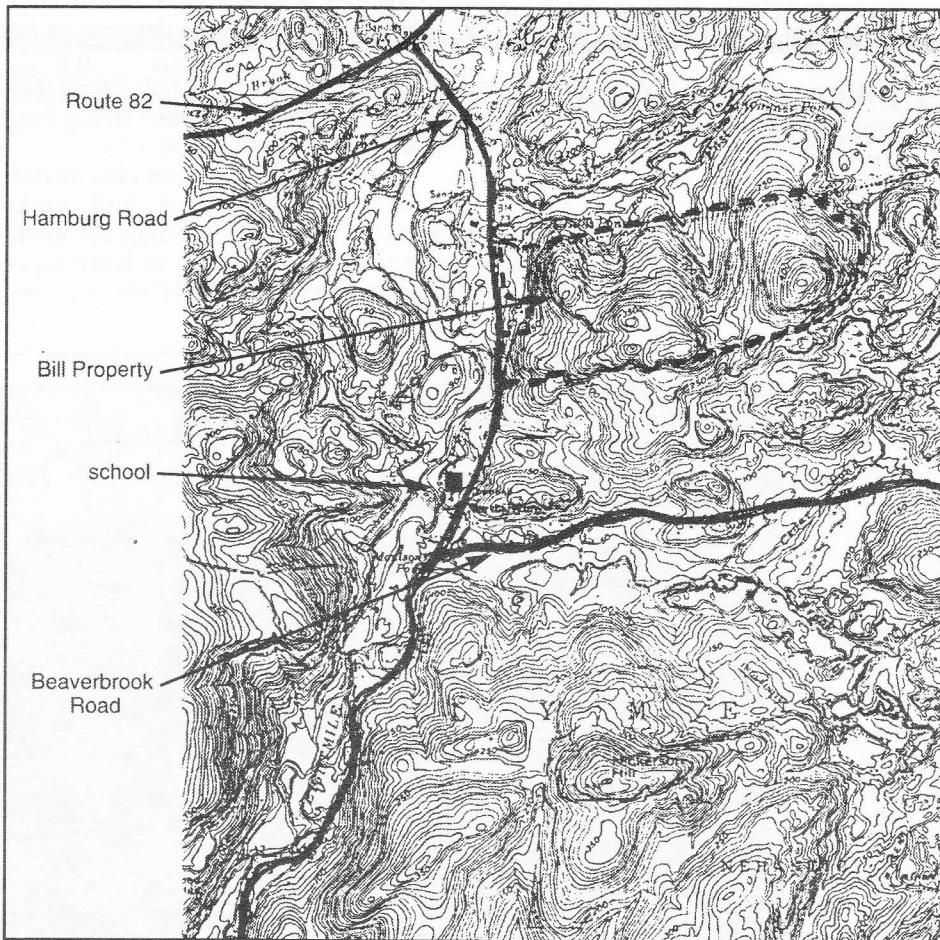
What can we do in our own yard? Turning paved areas - driveways, patios, play areas - into porous ones allows run off to sink into the ground where natural processes help to purify it. Down spouts can be directed into vegetation areas, away from driveways.

Reducing the the size of lawns reduces the water and energy needs of mowing. The use of native plants, adapted to local conditions, also reduces water use and fertilizer. New England species require only an inch of rain a week. Watering should be done as a long drenching which encourages deep roots that better withstand drought. Mulch helps prevent water loss.

Home gardeners tend to overdo fertilizers, using three times as much as commercial users. Test soil to find out what you really need, and use compost. Fertilizing in early fall with a slow-release product allows nutrients to sink into the soil, also fostering deeper roots.

Before using chemical pesticides, identify the bug, and explore methods of integrated pest control. Seek disease resistant species. For the health of streams, maintain the buffer zone of trees, shrubs or high grasses which filter pollutants, slow run off and catch sediments. Buffers also discourage Canada Geese which love grassy banks and easy water access. Their droppings are a major source of pathogens.

Septic tanks need care. Cover the leaching field only with grass as shrubs or tree roots can clog the discharge pipes. Household chemicals in the tank can interfere with the micro organisms which breakdown the sewage. Pump tanks out every 3 to 5 years, more often if you use a garbage disposal.



Location of Sally Bill property.

*Continued on back page*

## CONSERVATION BY ANOTHER ROUTE

### *Presidents Letter continued*

Education is the key and the Land Trust is working on programs that involve all ages in town. As the saying goes, knowledge is power and the more information we make available, the better we all are to make informed decisions concerning the future of our town and its natural resources. Our winter workshop focused on conservation gardening and our annual meeting this June features a talk on the local geology and how it impacts the way we use the land today. This spring the Land Trust will have a field walk in Hartman Park to visit Lyme's recent archeological past. And we're working with the Lyme Consolidated School on an education program that uses the outdoors as the ultimate text book.

The other main area of concentration for the Land Trust is land preservation. With the Sally Bill easement the Trust protects nearly 1200 acres in town. As I said before we can not save it all, but we can help. Our long range plan commits us to conserve environmentally sensitive land, farmlands and historic and scenic landscapes. This past fall we ran a workshop that offered landowners financial strategies for preserving their land in open space. The workshop was so well attended that we will repeat it next year. And although the Trust's funds are limited there are opportunities where our financial involvement can save critical property. We are at present working on such a project and I hope to have news by the annual meeting.

While much land in Lyme has been conserved through easements given to the Lyme Land Conservation Trust, The Nature Conservancy or other groups, Frederick Sturges has gone another route by deeding land to the State Forest's Land Acquisitions Department. Owner of some 400 acres straddling the Lyme-East Lyme border on Beaver Brook Road, Mr. Sturges will turn over at his death 183 acres adjacent to the Nehantic State Forest section on the Old Grassy Hill Road.

This land fills a wedge between the State Forest and the Hartman Park. About a quarter of the land lies in Lyme. When it becomes part of the State Forest, it will be open to hunting and to limited cutting of firewood, as permitted by the State Forest. Mr. Sturges, a hunter himself as well as a conservationist, believes hunting is necessary to cull the herds.

Under the program, the land is evaluated for local tax purposes at the time of the donation, and this rate remains in affect for fifty years, or until the land passes to the state. There are also federal tax benefits, as in the case of easements. Mr. Sturges donated the land many years ago, when Bill Beebe was town first selectman. He remembers with a chuckle, that at the time there was a town bounty on foxes. Mr. Sturges recalls paying his land tax on the donated land with a fox.

Some years ago Mr. Sturges also donated a conservation easement on land along Beaver Brook, south of the road, to the East Lyme Land Trust. This land abuts land in Lyme on which the the Lyme Land Trust holds an easement, contributing to the conservation of the Beaver Brook watershed, which, like all natural systems, does not recognize town boundaries.

Which brings us back to the beginning and a question: Can the Land Trust affect how the community allocates its land resources? I believe it has and it will in the future. The Land Trust is a voice in town. It's as loud as its membership and the more we have and the better informed we all are, the more capable we are to speak to what we want the town to be. Sally Bill says a lot with her contribution and the town is so much better off because of it.

Anthony Irving, President

### THOUGHTS ON PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

There is "a simple but sometimes overlooked characteristic of open space. It does most of its work along the edges. This is the part that people use most often for recreation. This is the part people see the most and it is often the best part."

"It is good, of course, if there is much more open land beyond. Edges should not be mere facades. ... And edge is most entrancing when you sense a depth beyond and that it will be well worth exploring."

"The promise is more important than the fulfillment. The fact is that most people do not get around to the exploration."

"In providing edge, small spaces can be more efficient than big spaces. As the size of space increases, it has proportionately less edge. If our aim is solely to provide people with a maximum amount of contact with open space, we would do best to enlarge the perimeter of space, rather than increase the bulk of it."

"The spaces are certainly important, but saving them is not enough. They ought to be seen, and this calls for a kind of landscape-development approach we have never really attempted."

William H. Whyte, *The Last Landscape*, pp. 171-72, 274.



View over Pleasant Valley from Bill property.

KEEPING OUR WATER CLEAN *continued from page 4*

## Panel Discussion

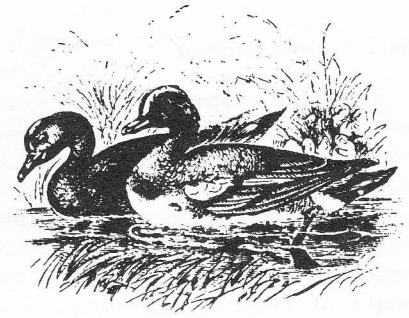
In the second half of the program, some local garden experts joined Heather to answer questions on local issues. High on the list were problems of deer and voles, with no easy answers. With deer, short of very high fences, no preventive measure seems to last long, but Ruth Perry found that periodic changes of tactics helped - different smells, balloons, streamers. A dog is also a good deterrent.

While moles are benign, aerating the soil and eating grubs, the voles use

their tunnels and can eat a lot of choice roots. Stan Peterson found a six inch deep metal barrier around a raised bed was effective.

Other panelists were Nancy Patenaude, John Falstrom, Daya Soudan and Heather Nelson.

On a question about diseased hemlock removal, Anthony Irving, Land Trust President and member of the Lyme Inland Wetlands Commission, pointed out that the removal required a commission permit, but they could help with the best methods of removal, and replacements, without creating erosion.



## JOIN NOW

If you are not already a member of the Lyme Land Conservation Trust, won't you consider joining. Send tax deductible contributions to Box 1002, Lyme CT. 06371. Be sure to include name and address.

Senior .....\$5.00

Individual ..10.00

Family .....20.00

Subscribing ..\$25.00

Contributing ..50.00

Sustaining .....100.00

Contributions to the Stewardship / Acquisition Fund also welcome.

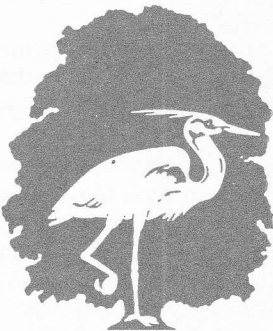
## *The Lyme Land Trust Bulletin*

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. Readers are invited to direct questions and suggestions to Joan Rich, Editor, at 434-7091.

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