



Pizza Party!!! Sunday, September 4

Please join the members and friends of the Colebrook Land Conservancy as we celebrate our 30th Anniversary!

WHERE: The Hale Barn on Stillman Hill Road

TIME: Noon to 3 p.m. on Sunday, September 4

Come sit under the tent and enjoy delicious pizza baked in a wood-fired oven in a pizza fire truck. The menu includes fresh salad, cold drinks, Italian ice and homemade desserts.

There will be guided walks on the Hale Trail, live music, a scavenger hunt, two goats to pet, exhibits inside the barn, and a poetry reading.

Free for members; \$10 for guests.

In the event of rain, our celebration will be moved to the Colebrook Town Hall. We look forward to sharing this special event with each of you.

We lack email addresses for many of you, and if there is an alert we wish to send out, information about upcoming events or other announcements, we have no way of contacting you but snail mail. Please send us your email address:

info@colebrooklandconservancy.org

The Colebrook Land Conservancy
P.O. Box 90 Colebrook, CT 06021

The Colebrook Land Conservancy Newsletter is produced in the public's interest. Comments and suggestions for articles are welcome.



Printed on recycled paper

If you'd like to Join Us or Contribute...

Yes, I support the purposes of the Colebrook Land Conservancy.

ANNUAL DUES: \$25 family, \$20 individual, \$10 senior.

To join or contribute, please send this coupon along with your tax deductible annual dues and/or other contribution to:

The Colebrook Land Conservancy
P.O. Box 90 Colebrook, CT 06021

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PayPal is also available on the Conservancy's web site,
www.colebrooklandconservancy.org

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THE The Colebrook Land Conservancy NEWSLETTER

"In Land We Trust"

Summer 2016

It Takes A Village

Colebrook Land Conservancy Celebrates 30 Years



Preserved forever: the Hale farm, at left, at the corner of Routes 182 and 183 and Rockwell Trail, at right, on Route 182A.



In celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Colebrook Land Conservancy, this article is the first of a two-part series offering a short history of how this organization began, what it has accomplished since its founding, and how it hopes to promote further conservation in Colebrook.

Greg Millard, a board member of the Colebrook Land Conservancy (CLC), was reminiscing recently about the pleasures of tramping with his father through the Kitchel Wilderness in the Algonquin State Forest off Sandy Brook Road, land that had belonged to Helen Binney Kitchel and was given to the State of Connecticut over several de-

acades, beginning in 1937. When Greg was growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, he said, many animals that had been all but wiped out in the 19th century because of over-hunting and loss of habitat—beaver, moose, wild turkey, and even deer—were returning to Connecticut. Because of reforestation and the work of conservationists, these animals had begun to flourish once again in our area.

Although various individuals and private groups have long possessed large private tracts of land in our area—such as Helen Binney Kitchel's Wilderness Preserve, Nancy Phelps Blum and John Blum's Phelps Research Area, and the Brookside Farm Association in Colebrook and the Childs', Lawrences' and

Walcotts' Great Mountain Forest, plant ecologist Dr. Frank Egler's Aton Forest, and the Doolittle Lake Company's hunting and fishing club in Norfolk, to name just a few—there was no organized plan to conserve them in perpetuity. This was not unusual in Connecticut at that time, when most of the private land had no protection against future development in a state that was then ranked the third most densely populated in the US. In response to this alarming state of affairs, a small number of land trusts such as the Weantinoge Heritage Trust in Kent and the Salisbury Land Trust began to form in Connecticut, starting in the 1960s and 1970s, and continued to grow steadily. By the 1980s the number proliferated, jump-



Robert Grigg: In Memoriam

Robert Laffin Grigg, Colebrook's official town historian and one of the most stalwart and longest-serving trustees of the Colebrook Land Conservancy, died at Hartford Hospital on July 25th following a heart attack. He was 83. Known to his friends as Bob, he was an affable and outgoing man with a photographic memory, a passion for history and a willingness to share his knowledge. Bob was a ubiquitous presence, often speaking at town events and educational gatherings, including the Colebrook Consolidated School's annual Rock School Day, when the students learned what it was like to study in a one-room schoolhouse. He also played an invaluable role as the town's official photographer, recording many events for posterity.

An alumnus of the Colebrook Center School, he later attended boarding school in Vermont, at the Lyndon Institute. After a stint in the US Navy during the Korean War, Bob enrolled at Clark University in Worcester. Following graduation, he took a job as a cartographer at the Hammond Map Company in Maplewood, New Jersey. Some years later, after his retirement, he moved back to Colebrook. Never one to sit still, he began to volunteer, variously, as a fireman, curator at the Colebrook Historical Society and as Colebrook Historian. He also took part in the archeological dig at the Richard Smith forge in Robertsville, which dates to the Revolutionary War and was important in making steel to bore cannons to fight the British. An inveterate researcher, he combed the town archives and other sources, and wrote a column, called "Historical Bytes" for the *Winsted Journal*.

He was an early and committed advocate for land conservation. Not only did he know the history of Colebrook, but he also knew its

topography. He knew where the springs and streams were, as well as the special plants and trees. He helped develop the "Colebrook's Notable Trees" brochure and map produced by the Colebrook Land Conservancy. Early on, he used his cartography skills to draw beautifully detailed maps of protected lands. He loved to walk on the land and led nature and history walks for the Conservancy, and greatly regretted when he grew too old to continue. He also helped locate boundaries on protected property and record its natural and man-made features, both pictorially and in writing. He wrote the *Trail Guide for the Rockwell Trail* and took nature photos for Land Conservancy notecards.

He also contributed numerous articles to the Colebrook Land Conservancy newsletter. He lent his expertise to the Conservancy in other ways, as well, often demonstrating that the historical significance of parcels of land can provide another compelling reason for their conservation.

Eager to impart his extensive and irreplaceable knowledge about the town's history and development, Bob was always ready to talk. He had a puckish sense of humor, and loved to unearth and share the human stories to be found among the fusty files of letters and documents in the Colebrook Historical Society archives. For him, the people who inhabited these records still lived and breathed; he conjured them up in his mind and created vivid portraits of his subjects.

Bob's obituary in *The Register Citizen* memorably quotes Mike Hurd, a fellow trustee and lifelong friend from their schooldays together at Colebrook Center School, who said, upon hearing of his death, "It is like seeing a library burn down." He will be greatly missed. ■

ing from 87 in 1985 to 120 in 1996, as many townships in Connecticut began to embrace conservation.

Inspired by this movement across the state, and driven by their long-standing interest in conservation, Nancy Phelps Blum and her husband John were the main catalysts for the founding of the CLC in 1986. The first meetings of their new Conservancy took place in Nancy Phelps Blum's kitchen sitting room in the former Phelps Tavern. She was a descendent of the original settlers of the town, and her house "looked like you were still in the 18th century," recalls Dan Strickler, a founding trustee and one of its longest-serving. The first Board had an enthusiastic group of people who wanted to preserve the character of their town while celebrating and exploring the natural world surrounding them. Nancy, the visionary first president, led by example: in 1975, more than a decade before the Conservancy was founded, she and John and Frank Egler had already made a joint gift of 394 acres to The Nature Conservancy. She and her family continued their generosity by granting the CLC easements on a total of 59 additional acres, plus a Greenbelt easement, which restricts development, along parts of Route 183, Phelps Flat Road and Sandy Brook Road. As Dan Strickler so aptly observed, she "laid the groundwork for the organization to build on in future years." Sharing the Phelps's infectious enthusiasm, many others donated their time and resources as well. Ron Spencer, a New York-based lawyer and weekend resident of Colebrook, and a founding trustee, was instrumental in doing the legal work for the group's incorporation as a 501(c)3.

Once the organization was up and running, like-minded town landholders began to contribute land and conservation easements. Although smaller parcels of land had been made to the CLC soon after its founding, (see box) the first significant donation of land, 41 acres along the west side of Smith Hill Road, came from Lucy Bradley in 1994. That year and the next, Moses and Jan Sternlieb granted easements on four parcels of land on Sugar Hill Farm, also along Smith Hill Road, totaling 85 acres, and Betsy Aaron and Richard Threlkeld gave a conservation easement on 66 acres of meadow, forest and wetlands along the east side of Phelps Road. This was the beginning of a new and more



At left, Conservancy members, including Nancy Phelps Blum and Bob Grigg, (center) celebrate the Eggers' gift. At right, the former Phelps Tavern, site of the first Conservancy

ambitious era in land conservation in the town, as people became more educated about the benefits of donating land or property easements to preserve Colebrook's animal habitats and pristine rural character.

Just as importantly, the CLC, true to its founding mission, sought to provide a real experience of the natural world for its members. Over the years, a random sampling of articles in the CLC's newsletters bears witness to its many conservation activities and reports on natural phenomena. Reading through them, one can find a description of a guided walk through the Phelps Research Area led by Nancy Phelps Blum, or many articles on local history by CLC board member and town historian Bob Grigg (see his obituary in this issue), such as the discovery of Robert Smith's Robertsville Forge Site or a feature on Colebrook's "Colonial Pine," an 18th century tree which had been named as the oldest tree in the state by the Connecticut Botanical Society. Botanist Joyce Hemingson gave an account of the Conservancy's Spring Wildflower Walk on the 100-acre property left to the Town of Colebrook by Charles Arnold in 1979, one of many she has conducted and written about over the years; and Roberta Lawton described a seminar she attended about the importance of a well-drafted conservation easement. Plant ecologist Harry White has contributed numerous articles, among them reports on the Hemlock

Original Board Members of the CLC

1986
Nancy Phelps Blum
John Blum
Ron Spencer
Norman Thompson III
Elizabeth Thompson
Moses Sternlieb
Daniel Strickler, Jr.
John Mascheroni
Colin Tait
Sidney Lazard

1987
Harriet Smith
Robert and Cindy Roberts
Diana Holcomb

Woolly Adelgid epidemic and descriptions of local habitats, such as the Phelps Research Area. Jean Millard described an Aton Forest talk on the ephemeral beauty of vernal pools, which fill with water in the Spring, bringing wood frogs and salamanders, and then dry up in the summer heat; and Sukey Wagner wrote about the scientifically proven benefits that nature affords to human beings. Included, too, were descriptions of nature books donated to the Colebrook Consolidated School and updates on what

was happening in conservation at the national or state level.

A significant threat to one of Colebrook's pristine habitats came in the early 1990s, less than a decade after the newly-organized Conservancy was founded. Local resident Fred Wildman Jr. submitted a request to the Planning and Zoning Commission for permission to build the Loon Brook Golf Club, which included at various times an 18-hole golf course, a clubhouse and zoning for 75 houses and a 48-room inn on property he owned along Route 182.

Dismayed by what effect such a huge project would have on the surrounding wetlands and watershed, CLC members went to work to educate the public about its consequences. Botanist and CLC trustee Joyce Hemingson pointed out during the hearings that the developers hadn't conducted the required scientifically accurate season-by-season study to determine the project's impact. This forced the developers to postpone the project in order to comply. Although Colebrook's Planning and Zoning Commission eventually voted to approve Fred Wildman's 1996 application, it attached certain conditions, including approval from Colebrook's Inlands and Wetlands Commission. In the end, the project was never built.

Around that time, the founders of the CLC, the Phelps Research Area and Aton Forest began to disappear—Frank Egler died in December, 1996, and John Blum



in February, 1998, followed by Nancy Phelps Blum in December 2001. Bob Grigg, who knew them all, and who remembered working on various ecological experiments devised by Frank Egler, wrote a sensitive tribute to Nancy. “Regardless of how much a pillar of society may have done for a community, perhaps over an extended period of time, their inevitable passing leaves the survivors with both a sense of loss and foreboding concerning future challenges... that must now be faced without their sage council.”

But Nancy had left behind a dynamic group of board members and volunteers who continued to make solid progress in conserving land and engaging the community in nature-related activities. The CLC’s successes continued, under the leadership of Linda Raciborski, Joyce Hemingson, Roberta Lawton and later, Barney Adams and Manuel Cords, and other stalwart board members such as Dan Strickler, Leelaine Picker, Harriet Smith, Sarah Hale, Hiram Ash, Sukey Wagner, Greg Millard, Ed Lord and so many other people mentioned here.

In 1998, the CLC received its first Connecticut Green Circle award from the Department of Environmental Protection for “outstanding volunteer environmental projects which contributed to or improved the quality of the environment.” It recognized two easements received that year: 24 acres between Route 8 and Robertsville Road, given by Doris Currier, which helped protect Sandy Brook and its watershed area, and another 22.4 acre parcel from John Garrels on Stillman Hill Road. Another Green Circle award to the CLC for its educational walks to raise awareness about conservation and habitat protection would follow soon after in 2000.

Only twelve years after its founding, the Conservancy had amassed more than 200 acres in conservation easements and owned 43 acres outright. But its biggest gains were yet to come. In 1999, a gift of 50 acres of land on the north side of Route 182A, adjacent to Loon Brook and its wetlands, which more than doubled the amount of land owned by the Conservancy, was donated to the CLC by Georganne Hinchliff Eggers and her family,

Land owned by the CLC: **656 Acres**

9.3 acres on Colebrook River Road (Rte. 8) given by Beverly Davis in 2013

7.4 acres on the north side of Sandy Brook Road given by the Faraway Hill Trust in 2010

394 acres Phelps Research Area in North Colebrook given in 2009 by The Nature Conservancy

5 acres on the west side of Colebrook River Road (Route 8) given in 2006

100 acres between Beech Hill Road and Sandy Brook purchased from Thomas and Chrystene Adams in 2005

1 acre given by Helen Reis on east side of Prock Hill Road in 2004

4.17 acres on the southeast corner of Rte. 183 and Stillman Hill Road purchased from Gerald and Michelle McMahan and Nancy Morgan in 2002

2 acres at the corner of Mill Street and Old Forge Road in Hartland, given by Kenneth Mahler of Boca Raton, Fla., in 2001

4 acres on the east side of Rte. 183 given in 2001

38 acres on the northwest corner of Rte. 183 and Stillman Hill Rd. purchased from Richard Hale in 2001

50 acres on north side of Rte. 182A given by Georganne Hinchliff Eggers & family in 1999

41 acres on the west side of Smith Hill Road given by Lucy Bradley in 1994

1 acre given by Beatrice Hale at corner of Wheeler Road and Rte. 183 in 1992

1 acre given by Robert Fumire on west side of Prock Hill Road in 1987

Easements Administered by the CLC: **571 acres**

157 acres on Smith Hill Road given by the Lewis family in 2012

94 acres south of Cobb City Road given by Eva Martinez in 2007

40 acres east of Pisgah Mountain Road given in 2006

23 acres on the north side of Stillman Hill Road given by John Garrels in 2003

22 acres on north side of Stillman Hill Road given by John Garrels in 1997

24 acres between Rte. 8 and Robertsville Road given by Doris Currier in 1997

66 acres on Phelps Road given by Richard Threlkeld and Betsy Aaron in 1996

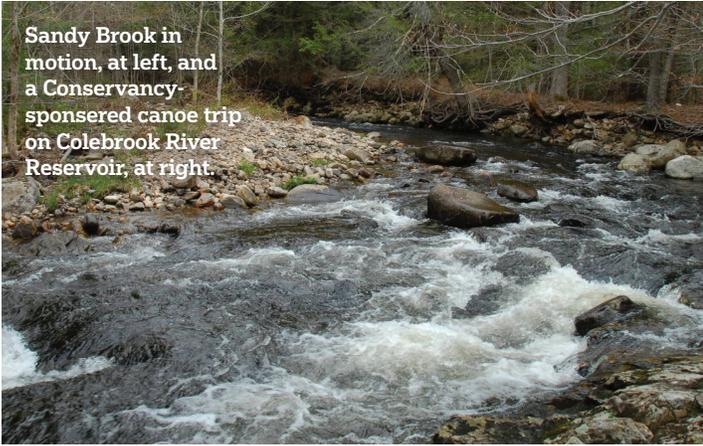
85 acres of “Sugar Hill Farm” on Smith Hill Road given by former owner Moses Sternlieb in four parcels, 1994-1995

26 acres on east side of Rte. 183 and north of Sandy Brook Road given by Nancy Phelps Blum in 1993

29 acres on east side of Rte. 183 and south of Phelps Flat Road given by John A. Blum and Timothy Blum in 1992

4 acres on east side of Prock Hill Road given by Nancy P. Blum in 1991 and now owned by the YMCA

Greenbelt easement along parts of Rte. 183, Phelps Flat Road and Sandy Brook Road given by John and Nancy Blum in 1987



Sandy Brook in motion, at left, and a Conservancy-sponsored canoe trip on Colebrook River Reservoir, at right.

direct descendants of the Rockwells, one of the original and largest landowners of Colebrook.

Then, in December 2000, recognizing the need to protect a pristine habit, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEEP) designated 43 acres of land lying within 100 feet of Sandy Brook as one of eight new Natural Area Preserves. "The uplands," the designation reads, "...protect the adjacent salmon and native brook trout fishery, create a scenic corridor and provide habitat and a migration corridor for upland wildlife." It continues, "Sandy Brook is considered the highest-ranking Atlantic salmon restoration stream in the Farmington River Basin." As part of the management plan that was done for the project, ecologist Harry White and Betsy Corrigan, a local botanist, compiled an animal and plant inventory. Harry's animal list included 28 species of mammals, 12 species of fishes, and 44 species of birds as well as 3 amphibians. The report noted the richness and vigor of the animal, bird and fish populations." In the plant category, Betsy recorded 72 native plants in the Sandy Brook river basin, as well as 14 types of invasive non-native plants. In addition, historian Bob Grigg listed several historical sites within the preserve.

Soon afterwards, in 2001, the CLC decided to undertake an important new project: preserving the Hale Farm, a property at the intersection of Routes 182 and 183, and one of the last working dairy farms in Colebrook. When Mason Hale Sr. died, he had left the farm to his two sons, Richard and Mason Jr., a noted lichenologist at the Smithsonian.

Volunteer Stewards

Here is a list of people who look after the various properties under the Conservancy's care.

Barney Adams

Dave Bishop

Joyce Hemingson

Kerry Jassen

Fred Jones

Scott Kenny

Robbie Lawton

Steve Lehman

Kathy Loomis

Greg Millard

Linda Raciborski

Jerry Rathbun

Dan Strickler Jr.

Jake Thompson

Sukey Wagner

Eric Wanner

Dan Ward

When Mason Jr. passed away, he left his share of the farm to his wife Beatrice. She in turn gave a 1-acre parcel to the CLC and sold the rest to Gerald and Michelle McMahon and Nancy Morgan.

CLC trustees approached Richard, who had moved to Arizona, but still fondly remembered his years milking cows there as a teenager, and discussed with him the idea of selling the farm to the Conservancy. Recognizing the

value of preserving such an historic and scenic property, he agreed to sell. With generous local support—and with the help of an open space grant from the Connecticut's DEEP—the Conservancy bought the barn and surrounding 38 acres as well as the 4.17 acres owned by the McMahons and Morgan. Local real estate agent and former board member Betsy Little handled the transactions. Mike Hurd, a trustee at the time, remembers this as the highlight of his tenure on the CLC: "... there definitely is one standout event...and that is the acquisition of the historic Hale barn and surrounding property—the beautiful gateway to Colebrook...I gladly took a lead role in CLC's fund raising efforts, which turned out to be a rather easy task given the townspeople's enthusiastic desire to protect this important property." The Conservancy won another Green Circle Award that year for the purchase and conservation of the Hale Farm. That same year, a family gave an anonymous gift of a four-acre parcel to the Conservancy along the edge of Route 183, as well.

In 2003, John Garrels granted a conservation easement on 23 acres of land abutting his earlier conservation easement of 22 acres which in turn abutted the Hale property. As a result, a total of six-tenths of a mile of frontage along one side of Route 182 became permanently protected, helping the town retain its increasingly prized rural character. ■

The second part of the Colebrook Land Conservancy's history will continue in the next issue