



# gosa news

Groton Open Space Association News, Fall 2015, Volume 4, No. 2



## The Land We Love



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## A Message from Joan Smith, GOSA President

2015 has been an extraordinarily active year for GOSA. In fulfillment of our mission to protect land, water and wildlife, we have focused on acquiring land that meets GOSA's high land-acquisition standards and on raising the funds needed to purchase it. We are also carefully developing land management and sustainability programs tailored to the needs and interests of all the parties involved, including the land sellers, the State of Connecticut, and GOSA. Because GOSA plans to hold its lands in trust for public benefit in perpetuity, we are working hard to raise our recordkeeping and fiscal oversight standards to meet standards recommended by the Land Trust Alliance.

GOSA was selected by the Land Trust Alliance to participate in a records update project to scan and digitize important documents. Barbara Tarbox, former Groton Town Clerk, led an effort to organize 50 years of records and dozens of boxes. Our next step will be to create an online platform to store important documents and make them readily available to the GOSA board, GOSA membership, and the public.

David Olivier, since his appointment as Chair of the Finance Committee last May, has enhanced GOSA's fiscal oversight and, in collaboration with our new Treasurer, Eugenia Villagra, is guiding us in upgrading our accounting system.

Our best estimate is that GOSA will close on the 307-acre Avery Farm property before Thanksgiving thanks to the matching funds GOSA has raised from hundreds of individuals like you, several local foundations, and the Town of Ledyard. The long-awaited release of funds from Connecticut's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program and the federal North Atlantic Wetlands Conservation Act grant program will take place soon. Once released, the aggregate funds will go toward the purchase of the 152-acre Ledyard portion of Avery Farm and the remaining 155 Groton acres will be generously donated to GOSA by Judy Weber, owner of Avery Farm. She and her family will continue to manage the fields and barns under a lease agreement and the state will hold a conservation easement over the entire parcel.

Avery Farm is not all! GOSA has been advocating for protection of 201 acres of land located between I-95 and Route 184 and owned by Tilcon Corporation. The state recently signed a purchase and sale agreement under the auspices of CT DEEP's Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program. As a "cooperator," GOSA has pledged to match 20% of the purchase price and will enter into a management agreement with the State. Protection of this site would create an almost complete greenbelt from Bluff Point to Ledyard.

And finally, GOSA was awarded a CT DEEP grant of \$614,250 toward the purchase of the Lamb Farm, which abuts Avery Farm in Ledyard. GOSA has a memorandum of understanding with the owners and will take the next step to negotiate a purchase and sale agreement.

GOSA volunteers have been active in two habitat restoration projects: a USDA Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) at the Sheep Farm, and a 31-acre New England cottontail (NEC) habitat restoration project at Avery Farm and Candlewood Ridge. Thanks to the success of state, federal, and local land conservancy and restoration efforts, the rabbit has been recently removed from the federal endangered species candidate list. As a "Friend" of Haley Farm, GOSA continues to mow the fields to preserve an increasingly rare meadow habitat preferred by local flora and fauna.

We keep nimble and feel energized by GOSA's ever-changing challenges. We enjoy engaging with dedicated and interesting people, and we especially appreciate the support shown to us by the community.

*Joan Smith, GOSA President*



Joan awarding GOSA's Salamander Award to Barbara Tarbox at our Annual Meeting  
Photo by Victor Villagra



**GOSA News** supports the mission and purpose of the Groton Open Space Association by publishing electronic newsletters that inform the public of past, present and future GOSA activities and threats to the health of open space. *GOSA News* also serves as a [link to the GOSA website](#) for additional information and as a link to other key sites. Our mission is to inform and inspire the public to become actively involved. We welcome letters to the editor. Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address and daytime phone number via e-mail to: [gosamail@gmail.com](mailto:gosamail@gmail.com).

**GOSA Mission and Purpose** To work to promote conservation, environmental preservation, open space and recreational areas in Southeastern Connecticut. To educate the public about the value of open space, conservation and environmental preservation. To enlist public support and funding to promote, acquire or maintain open space for public use, alone or in cooperation with local, state or federal agencies, or with other nonprofit organizations. GOSA is a nonprofit tax exempt organization under IRS Section 501(c)(3).

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### Membership

To join, send a check to:  
Groton Open Space Association, Inc.  
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Please include your name, address and e-mail. A minimum \$10 contribution is due annually to maintain membership.



## Life Growing Up on a Farm: A Conversation with Judy Weber, Owner of Avery Farm

By Liz Raisbeck



Artist David Bareford set up his easel at Avery Farm and painted the beautiful scene above as a participant in GOSA's 2014 plein air art event.

### How did your family happen to purchase the Avery Farm?

My father, Latham Avery, purchased the farm when he was 19 years old. His mother co-signed it with him, since he was so young. The price was \$4,000 for about 80 acres and this house and a barn. The barn had to be torn down eventually and he built a new barn later. He bought the farm in 1928 or '29 and married my mother Edna a few years later. My sister Katharine and I were born in 1934 and '35. My mother had no experience with farm life but learned to do everything. Shortly after they were married electricity came—there was one line to the house and one to the barn. So they bought milking machines, which helped make dairying doable for a small farm like ours.

My mother and father had a milk route—it was the only way to make a living in dairying back then. They had customers in Groton and Mystic, but they dropped Mystic because the Groton route was growing by leaps and bounds. They didn't have any help except one fellow who came and cleaned the barn. Their pickup truck was their only vehicle. My mother did most of the milking. They were very frugal and life was hard, but all the farmers around here were in the same boat and we didn't think much of it.

### Did your father come from a farming family?

Not really, but his grandfather was a dairy farmer. My father was named after him: Latham Avery. He spent a lot of time on his grandfather's farm and knew that he wanted to be a farmer from a very young age. I think he wanted to just be himself; he wanted to do what interested him, and that was farming and everything to do with nature.

My father had a dream and a vision and passion to see it through, limited only by his means and practicality. He was self-taught and read extensively about everything that interested him. He researched thoroughly farming methods and dairying. He talked to people of all walks of life and valued their opinions. I don't think being a farmer as such was his dream; it was a means to an end. The lifestyle gave him the freedom, the environment, and the wherewithal to make his dream happen, which was to live close to nature and the land.

Having an innate love of all that was natural, he was very aware of any changes or the unusual in his surroundings.

One day when he was sharpening the blades of his mowing machine on a whetstone under the sycamore tree, he noticed something fluttering down from a tree limb with a hole in it! He had no clue as to what it might be, and then another small object about the size of a golf ball dropped out of the tree, and then another. He went closer to get a better look, and there was a female wood duck and a brood of eight babies walking across the lawn on a march north toward the swamp, which had been drained. He wished them luck and mulled this over for a day or two. Then he called his neighbor and owner of half the dry swamp, asking him if he would be willing to help dam the culvert under



Judy Weber and her dog, Missy  
Photo by Liz Raisbeck



Click on the image above to see a video of ducklings "fluttering down from a tree... with a hole in it."





*A wintry view of the marsh built by Lathan Avery and Jim Lamb for the wood duck, her eight little ducklings, and migrating waterfowl. According to Judy, "This marsh has become an attraction for photographers, artists and naturalists. Bird watchers come to view the numerous species of waterfowl and shorebirds."*

the road, backing up water into the swamp again. His neighbor Jim Lamb offered to help and within a week they created a dam and spillway with boards to regulate the water height. The town helped by raising the roadbed and strengthening the bank, and the ducks had a home.



*Great blue heron and snowy egret at the Avery-Lamb marsh  
Photo by Sue Sutherland*

My father also raised wild turkeys from hatchlings. When all 50 were feathered out and could fly, he released the flock into the wilds of southeastern Connecticut. He didn't live long enough to see the fruits of his labor of love, but there are plenty of wild turkeys in Ledyard now.

### **How did he learn about farming?**



*Photo courtesy of Judy Weber*

Well, farming wasn't as involved as it is now. They milked their cows by hand and put up the hay by hand. He probably couldn't make a living in the beginning. He only had three or four cows. He read a lot and talked a lot to dairymen that were doing well. He always wanted to have Jerseys as they gave such rich milk and cream. They were beautiful and could produce well on small amounts of roughage. Over time he bought pure-bred Jerseys from Vermont and developed a herd of them. The herd grew to 30 or so milk cows, which my parents took care of by themselves.

### **How did the farm grow from 80 to 307 acres?**

My father felt that if you didn't own the land you had no control over it. He only owned to the west side of Haley Brook, and he didn't want to see a lot of houses built across the brook. Over time a number of properties around us were foreclosed by the banks during the Depression and after, and my father was able to pick up several acres that way. He was always interested in conservation and was trying to protect the brook. He wanted to make ponds for migrating waterfowl so he built a dam in the early '50s. He built it all by hand from stone and cement with instructions from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Then, right after he built it, a hurricane came through and completely blew it out. I felt so bad for him



*One horse open sleigh ride, 1967. Photo courtesy of Judy Weber*

because he worked so hard. He also stocked the brook with brook trout, but they were so wily he never could find them and catch them.

Eventually, my father needed more pasture so he bought the Cyrus Brown Farm, which had been the Erastes Lamb place. All these farms were originally from the Lamb property, which had been a royal grant from the king in colonial times. Our house was built in 1775 by one of the descendants of the original Lambs. The Lamb home-  
stead, which was built in 1714, is the farm to the north of us and is still owned by the Lambs today. Anyway, over time Avery farm grew to 300+ acres, most of which was forest and wetlands.

Tragically, when my father died in 1958 of pancreatic cancer—he was only 47—we had a dispersal of the herd and farm equipment; sold it all off. That was very hard. At the time, we had one of the highest producing Jersey herds in the country. There was a problem when we dispersed the farm animals and equipment, because the town divided the fields into house lots for tax purposes, but we were fortunate to get into the [490 program](#) for farms and woodlots and the taxes became manageable.

### How did you happen to get into raising horses?

After the dispersal of the farm, my mother got a job testing cows for health and productivity with the Dairy Herd Improvement Association. It was a program run by the state that helps farmers adjust the feed according to the cow's weight and productivity. She would weigh samples of milk once a month, testing it for butterfat content, and send it to Cornell Agricultural School, which would send back a report with recommendations for the farmer. It was a more scientific approach to farming, which was very helpful to the farmers and increased productivity a lot. My mother did that for four or five years. She was very good at it, and then she had a bad gall bladder attack, which forced her to retire. She got a job at the "New London Day" as a proof reader. She was also very good at English. In the meantime she bought a horse. The brush was growing up on the farm and she realized you needed grazers to keep the brush down. So she bought a Morgan weanling at an auction—I think she bid \$125 and

was surprised she got it. It turned out to be not such a good horse for her, however.

My sister Katharine and her husband restored the home on the Cy Brown place, which my father had bought. She was very interested in horses. We had a pinto that we had gotten for Christmas as kids. My father knew a farmer with a Morgan stallion—he was so beautiful! So we bred the pinto to the stallion Bennfield and we got a beautiful bay filly. We didn't know much about horses, and we called her Colty, and people kept correcting us that she was a filly, not a colt. Anyway, we lost her, but my sister had a dream to get a pure-bred Morgan mare, which she did and then started breeding her to Benfield, then 20 years old. Eventually we had maybe 12 or 15 Morgans, and several were champions. In fact, in 1970 we showed the first ever full brother-sister champions, Bennfield's Ace and Katy Bennfield, which won the top ribbons at the Eastern National Morgan Horse Show in Springfield, Mass. Bennfield's Ace went on to become World Champion stallion that year at the Grand National in Detroit. Katharine was an especially good judge of horses, and she knew quality when she bought that pure-bred mare.

### What was it like for you growing up on this farm?

You learn very early about being responsible on a farm. There's an unwritten rule—take care of the animals be-

fore you take care of yourself. My sister and I of course had chores on the farm. I fed the chickens and took care of the calves. The chores never seemed like work; they gave us a sense of pride if well done. Every couple of days there was a miracle or a disaster, it seemed. Everything is so magnified when you're young.



*Bennfield's Ace and Katy Bennfield took top honors at the 1970 Eastern National Morgan Horse Show in Springfield, MA. That same year Bennfield's Ace went on to become World Champion stallion at the Grand National in Detroit. The above image is a photograph taken of a painting by well-known animal artist, Walter L. Brown. Photo courtesy of Judy Weber.*

We were very active in the 4-H program. We took our heifers to the county fair for judging, and we won a lot of prizes. If we won locally then we were selected to go to the Eastern States Exposition fair in Springfield, Massachusetts. That was very exciting. We'd stay in dormitories there for a week during the fair and show our heifers in the Coliseum with other 4-Hers from all over New England. Our whole focus was on taking care of those Jersey cows.



I can't remember ever being bored. My sister always had a birdcage on the kitchen table. When the canary flew away, Katharine replaced it with a snake or a field mouse or a baby rabbit retrieved from the cat. We also had a pet crow. It had the run of the farm and could say "hello." It was remarkably entertaining.



Photo courtesy of Judy Weber

We swam in the dammed-up brook...building the dam was half the fun. We built huts in the woods and camped out, skated on the ice ponds and went sledding on the hillsides. When the brook was frozen we skated to school, which was exciting, exploring places we had never had access to before.

On the farm my mother did everything. Besides most of the milking and cooking, she made my sister's and my clothes, did all the cleaning, wallpapering, painting inside and out; she even made braided rugs, many of which are still in use. She was also the bookkeeper for the farm business.

We had a vegetable garden, and the hired man had a wonderful green thumb. He brought in vegetables every day, which he expected to have for lunch, sharing, of course, with us. My mother would come in from milking cows and the milk route and start cooking up the vegetables he brought us for a major meal.

We went to a one-room schoolhouse right up the road. We all walked to school. It only had a wood stove; we didn't have electricity or running water. There was a wood shed and two outhouses. It got really cold in the winter, as there was no insulation. School went from first to eighth grade, and then we went out of town to Fitch High School in Groton. There were about 15 to 18 children, all from the farms around here. The older children helped the younger ones learn the basics. We knew everybody, and I really loved school. Our teacher was wonderful. She was from the area also. Her name was Mrs. Whipple, and she specialized in geography and history. We didn't have any fancy playground equipment like today. There was a big stone ledge next to the school and parts of old cars. Our favorite thing was to get a fender and slide down that ledge as fast as we could. It was a wonderful childhood, growing up on this farm.

### How did you happen to transfer Avery Farm to GOSA?

In 2011, I think, my daughter Sue and a friend, Karen Lamb, were walking Missy, our dog, when they met Sue

Sutherland taking photos at the cranberry bog on Lambtown Road. Curious, they asked what the photos were for. She in turn told them about GOSA and their interest in acquiring the Candlewood Ridge property next door. My daughter Sue casually mentioned the conversation to me, and we discussed what a blessing it would be if GOSA were able to acquire and protect the land and wetlands which abut our property on the southern border. We were growing increasingly concerned about plans for major development of that property, which had already started but then halted when the recession occurred.

I called Sue Sutherland that night and shared my interest in preservation and protection of undeveloped land in general, and my own land in particular. The rest is history. Nothing means more to me than the land. It is the only thing that is forever. My premise has been, "If you can't leave it better than you found it, leave it alone." Nature is amazing! I feel very fortunate to have made the connection with GOSA and their willingness to take the helm on protecting this beautiful property. I have every confidence that they will respect and care for this land and its resilience and beauty. Through their dedicated board, members, supporters and volunteers, the dream held by my parents and my family will continue.



Judy and her family love the wildlife that flock to the farm. "Even beaver," she remarked in the interview, "have come to improve on man's version of a dam." The beavers dammed a stream running through the property and created this beautiful new pond. The water, however, backed up uncomfortably close to their colonial-era home and barns. Photo by Eugenia Villagra

**About the Interviewer:** Liz Raisbeck is retired from a 25-year career in Washington, D.C. as an environmental policy advocate for National Audubon Society, National Parks Conservation Assn., and other national environmental organizations.



## Poetry of the Wild

Introducing Lili Kane, student reporter

Lili is currently a 7th grader at Fishers Island School in NY. She enjoys playing bassoon, judo, writing and spending time with her friends. She plans on continuing her education at Fishers Island and possibly becoming a genetic engineer or journalist.

Two summers ago, my family and I, along with the whole Groton area, were given an amazing opportunity to showcase poetry in the Groton-Mystic area.

*Poetry of the Wild* was founded by Ana Flores in 2003. She created it while working as the first artist-in-residence at the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association. Her mission was to raise awareness for the association and the land and waterways it protected.

My family constructed our own box decorated as a sort of fairy house and inside was a poem that I had written. The making of our poetry box holds so many memories that I will always remember.

My father constructed the house in an octagonal shape with a plexiglass window on each side. Once done, my mother came in with glass pebbles, ceramic artifacts, spools of thread, and about 15 hot glue gun sticks, although as it turned out, hot glue was not made for the outdoors. The glass pebbles that had been glued onto the outside of the box quickly fell off. We then resorted to super glue and then epoxy, which held nicely at least for the time being. The inside of the box was beautifully decorated with "tables" and "chairs," tiny paintings and a bed made with cotton pads, fish vertebrae, and scallop shells.

After we finished making the box, we had to choose a spot for it, which turned out to be easier than we expected. We visit Haley Farm frequently, and we visited again and found a beautiful spot for the box just beside the pond, near the entrance, footbridge and inside a grove of small trees, just beside a pepperidge tree. Because I had deemed myself advisor, I watched my father and two brothers install the box. First they dug a small hole about two feet deep. Once they put the pole that was attached to the box into the hole, they covered the rest of the hole with excess dirt.

Inside the box, we placed a small notebook for people's comments and their own work. We received beautiful comments and some original work. About halfway through the summer, a family of earwigs decided to take shelter in our house and stayed for a couple of weeks. But after a month or so they left.

After many trips back and forth from our house to Haley Farm to reglue things, summer ended and thus ended our little box's life out in the wild. The box now resides in our back yard with common visits from ourselves, family and neighbors.

### Just Letting by Lili Kane

wispy	july air
crunchy	flitting between
sea-worn hair	content
raised above my	and
sweat-beaded	pure excitement
back.	dancing on the brink of
july air	what's next.
bringing memories from	july air
the frigid december	letting your
when it fogged my glass	muddy palms
and crystallized	frame tomorrow
the cold	letting your toes dance on
july air	the pavement
letting the watermelon juice	casting silhouettes of
drip down	animals
my chin	fierce
letting the cherry	letting us laugh
stain my shorts	and laugh again
letting us laugh	never making
and recounting stories	just letting
that never fade	
not wanting it to ever end	
but somehow	
letting it.	



Photos by Syma Ebbin



## Bringing to Mind Connecticut's Lands of Auld Lang Syne

By Syma A. Ebbin



A tree grew up through the rusted agricultural equipment on Avery Farm, most of whose acreage has succeeded to modern forest. Photo by E. Villagra

*"When the fiddle had stopped singing Laura called out softly, 'What are days of auld lang syne, Pa?' 'They are the days of a long time ago, Laura,' Pa said. 'Go to sleep, now.' But Laura lay awake a little while, listening to Pa's fiddle softly playing and to the lonely sound of the wind in the Big Woods.... She thought to herself, 'This is now.' She was glad that the cosy [sic] house, and Pa and Ma and the firelight and the music, were now. They could not be forgotten, she thought, because now is now. It can never be a long time ago."*

Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods* (1932: 237-238)

As a girl, I was a big fan of Laura Ingalls Wilder's books from *Little House in the Big Woods* to *Little Town on the Prairie* to *These Happy Golden Years* and all the others. Who could resist the combination of adventures, hardships, good times, and a touch of romance? Although these semi-autobiographical novels outline the arc of land use and settlement in the western United States starting around 1870 when Laura was three, the events bear similarities to the European colonization and development of New England roughly two hundred years earlier.

A few centuries before Laura's entry into the world, in the early 1500s, Verrazano sailed along the outer coast of Long Island, the first European since the Norse to explore the region. Estimates of the Native populations in North America at this time of first contact have been reassessed upwards in recent years, but it is thought that the population of southern New England numbered around 100,000, most densely settled along the coast and in the river

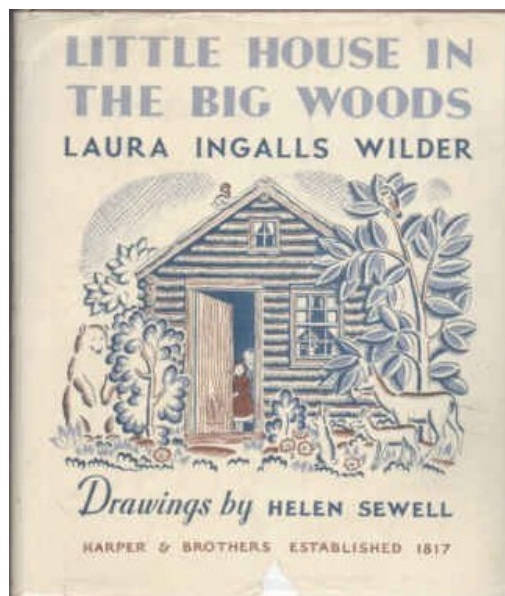
valleys. Roughly one hundred years after Verrazano, Adriaen Block sailed the length of Long Island Sound, exploring the coast of Connecticut, facilitating Dutch settlements on Manhattan Island at the mouth of the Connecticut River, and farther up the river at what is now Dutch Point in Hartford.

The landscape that these explorers encountered was the result of both human and natural forces: the prevailing climate and extreme weather events, topography, underlying geology and soils, land use history, successional processes, existing biota and human land use. The region was almost entirely forested, comprised of chestnut, several types of oaks, hickories, red maple, black cherry, elm, ash, black birch, white and red pine, spruce, fir, aspen, and northern hardwood species. Recent surveys identify 82 species of trees and shrubs in Connecticut.

Connecticut's European explorers and the settlers that followed came upon a forested land, park-like, and free of underbrush. Although seemingly pristine, it was not the wilderness Justice Marshall proclaimed in his famous Supreme Court decision *Johnson v. M'Intosh* of 1823 in which he wrote that, "*The tribes of Indians inhabiting this country were fierce savages, whose occupation was war, and whose subsistence was*

*drawn chiefly from the forest. To leave them in possession of their country, was to leave the country a wilderness...."*

In fact, the tribes of Indians along the Connecticut coast, the Pequots, Mohegans, Nehantics, Quinnipiaks, Hammonassetts and Paugussets, lived off the land, transforming it as well as its ecology in the process. They regularly







The seven images on pages 8 - 9 show the same landscape during different periods of land-use history in central New England. Left to right: pre-settlement forest, 1700; height of forest clearing and agriculture, 1830; farm abandonment, 1850; white pine forest on abandoned farmland, 1910.

burned the forests in spring and sometimes in fall to remove underbrush, make it easier to travel, improve hunting and preferentially promote valued food plants. Recent estimates by Manuel Lizarralde and Jason Mancini indicate that over 300 plants were used for a wide array of uses including food, medicine, tools and other applications. They used fire to clear lands for shifting small-scale agriculture, which supplemented their hunting, fishing and foraging. Tribes moved seasonally to follow resources, and settlements were occasionally relocated as successional processes reclaimed the cleared agricultural lands as forests.

The first Europeans settled in Connecticut in the 1630s. Land clearing proceeded slowly as they established small farms and pastures for grazing animals. Some animals, such as pigs, were allowed to forage along the coast and in the forest—just like Pa Ingall's which "*ran wild in the Big Woods, living on acorns and nuts and roots.*" Other animals required more protection, and grazing fields were eventually enclosed by fences.

Settlers felled old growth trees for timber and cordwood. Wood was the principal source of heat as well as the primary material used in building houses, barns, boats and other equipment. The tallest and straightest were used as masts in sailing ships. Sassafras, thought to be a cure for syphilis, was exported to Europe. Hemlock bark was used to produce tannins. Some wood was shipped to England where a "timber famine" existed. So intense was the harvest of trees surrounding the more populated areas that, according to historian Bill Cronin, by 1659, 13 years after New London was settled, cutting trees within four miles of the meeting house was prohibited.

By 1820, 75% of Connecticut was deforested according to a recent forest inventory produced by the USDA and USFS, leaving forests covering only a quarter of the state. Overall, this clearing of land for timber, agriculture, and pasture led to soil erosion, sedimentation of creeks, rivers, and harbors, the loss of wildlife species as habitats disappeared, and ultimately, local timber shortages.

Agricultural production dominated Connecticut's agrarian economy for much of its colonial history until the middle of the nineteenth century. Poor, rocky soils favored livestock production, which was shipped to Canada and the

Caribbean to feed slaves and workers on sugar plantations. Livestock required two to ten times more pasture land than tilled agriculture. In this pastoral economy, land was a valuable commodity, bought and sold for profit. Grazing lands, once held communally by towns and villages, shifted to fee-simple ownership and decision-making.

In 1830, the Erie Canal's completion opened up fertile lands in western New York state (where loyal Little House readers will remember Laura's future husband Almanzo Wilder was born and lived) and beyond, facilitating transport of agricultural products to eastern markets. Twenty years later, the expansion of railroads connected fertile lands even farther west (including some of the areas where Laura's family lived and Almanzo's family ultimately moved) to eastern population centers. The demand for Connecticut's marginal agricultural lands diminished, farms were abandoned, farmers migrated westward to find better soil or to cities to find employment in factories and emerging industries. The farmers who remained turned to specialty crops that couldn't be imported or brought in from great distances, such as fruit, dairy, and especially in the Connecticut River valley, tobacco. The value of the remaining agricultural production actually increased at the end of the nineteenth century as marginal lands returned to forest. Unfortunately, the move towards large-scale mechanized farming was the last straw for small New England farms, which were unable to compete.

Abandoned farms underwent successional processes, reforested with white pines, which flourished in the cleared fields. The chestnut blight emerged in the early 1900s and decimated the state's main forest species. Chestnuts were replaced with oak and hickory. Harvard University's Fisher Museum located at the [Harvard Forest](#) in Petersham, Massachusetts, displays an informative set of dioramas created in the 1930s which chronicle the history of land use in New England. These dioramas visually document this arc of settlement, agricultural production, farm abandonment and reforestation.

These new forests were harvested for charcoal production and box board containers. The Hurricane of 1938 had a significant impact on Connecticut forests. My great grandfather T.K. Raymond was a wood cutter who milled





Left to right: white pine succeeded by hardwoods, 1915; a vigorously growing forest of hardwoods, 1930; the modern forest landscape, with stone walls serving as a reminder of changing land-use history. Images provided courtesy of the Harvard Forest research program.

a stand of hurricane-blown white pine across from the current Pfizer waterfront in Groton, giving the center cut of each tree to his daughter, Mildred, and her husband, Alan (my grandparents) as a gift. Those extraordinarily wide planks line the walls of what is now my mother's house, burnished a lovely warm orange over the years.

And now we find ourselves in a somewhat paradoxical situation. Connecticut is roughly 60% forested. It boasts the largest percentage, 72%, of so-called "wildland-urban interface" or WUI of any state in the U.S. An amazing title for the fourth most densely populated state to boast. We apparently like our trees in the land of steady habits. This has various consequences, both positive (think aesthetic and recreational amenities associated with our wooded backyards and close access to forested areas) and negative (road closures and lengthy power outages after Irene, Sandy and Winter Storm Alfred). But WUI is all about interface – the boundaries between wildland and human land use. So this does not mean we have more large forests in Connecticut but rather [more fragmented forests](#), interwoven with houses and roads and other vestiges of urban living. And such fragmented habitats don't serve many wildlife species well, providing inadequate resources and introducing hazards to migration and breeding. Our agricultural lands are also at risk as farmers age, property taxes increase, and the economics of farming make farmland vulnerable to urban sprawl when demand and prices for easily developable land are high.

The Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality notes in its most recent report that both forest and farmland preservation are failing to meet state targets and that both types of land use or cover are actually declining in Connecticut over the past several decades. According to 2006 UConn [Center for Land Use Education and Research](#) data, farmland covers only 7.3% of the state at this point and has been decreasing in recent years, having lost 62 square miles since 1985—a trend which many in the state hope to slow or reverse. This means that some critical habitats like woodlands, shrub areas, and warm season grasslands are increasingly scarce and in poor condition in Connecticut. And as the old saying goes, more or less, "As habitat goes, so go those species...." And indeed, many wildlife species of concern live in these declining habitats including the New England cottontail, American woodcock, and over 50 other species. The 2015 draft of the Connecticut Wildlife

Action Plan explicitly connects the diversity of Connecticut wildlife—"84 species of mammals, 335 species of birds, 50 species of reptiles and amphibians, 169 species of fish, and an estimated 20,000 species of invertebrates"—to the diversity of landscapes, waterscapes, and habitats in the state. The report also lays out the primary threats to these areas as "habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation, changes in land use, and competition from non-native invasive species."

Groton Open Space Association has been involved with forest and farmland preservation since its beginnings in 1967 when they helped save Haley Farm, a coastal dairy farm, from residential development. No longer farmed, Haley Farm is fast becoming a coastal forest. Open fields remain because GOSA pays to have them mowed. GOSA members then worked with the state of Connecticut to create Bluff Point Coastal Reserve. Since then the Merritt Family Forest, Sheep Farm, Candlewood Ridge, and Avery Farm have or, in the case of Avery Farm, will soon be added to the acreage of Connecticut's preserved farms and forests.

Beyond outright acquisition, there are a number of other ways to preserve the functions of rural forest and farm lands. [Public Act 490](#) was passed by the Connecticut Legislature in 1963 with the goal of creating economic incentives to preserve forests, farms and other parcels of open space. The Act allows eligible property owners to have their land assessed at its lower use value rather than at fair market value for tax purposes. The Act isn't a mechanism to permanently preserve these lands, but it can improve the economic calculus involved in retaining the land in these low impact uses. [Transfer of Development Rights \(TDR\)](#) is another approach used in some communities, one familiar to Groton's new town planner, Jon Reiner, from his tenure in North Kingston, RI. TDRs allow rural landowners to sell their development rights to others so they might be used in areas where higher density development is more environmentally appropriate.

It is not enough to acquire and protect open space. We need to think about the habitat values of that land as well. Modern conservation efforts have expanded from the traditional, narrowly focused approach which has targeted the preservation of individual plants and animals to a broader landscape-wide strategy in which the conservation of





Haley Farm in 1967 and Haley Farm State Park today, 50 years later

specific habitats and entire ecosystems is the target. Such a strategy is able to preserve a wider diversity of species as well as critical ecosystem services provided by these lands. Whether it is land or living species that are the target of these efforts, it should be noted that it is almost always easier, less expensive and more effective to conserve rather than to restore. Unfortunately, conservation is not always an option when landscapes have been degraded, losing function and integrity, or species have been pushed beyond their biotic limits, threatened with extinction. In such cases, restoration may be the steeper, but only, hill to climb.

In *The First Four Years*, one of her last books of the Little House series, Laura writes, “*The incurable optimism of the farmer who throws his seed on the ground every spring, betting it and his time against the elements, seemed inextricably to blend with the creed of her pioneer forefathers that ‘it is better farther on’-- only instead of farther on in space, it was farther on in time, over the horizon of the years ahead instead of the far horizon of the west.*”

The human inclination to remain hopeful by looking farther down the road in space or time is, I think, universal. But this approach can also prevent us from bonding with our home and developing a *sense of place* to guide us. As frontiers close and limits become apparent, it is essential to reappraise what exists here in the now. We must work with what we have and what we know and devise ways to

co-exist with the natural world. And this brand of “eco-pragmatism” may be as much about preserving the quality of human life as it is about preserving nature. In a world where arguably no ecosystem is immune from the influence of humans, it is critical to retain or recommit lands for the sake of both humans and other species. We must navigate towards sustainable futures from within the confines of our local areas and present times. We must strive to acquire a sense of place and an ethic of stewardship.

Progress is not a linear path towards ever-increasing bounty and security. Looking back, the past was neither full of want nor perfect. The history of New England’s land use contains stories of both success and failure. It is up to us to unearth the lessons embedded in these chronicles of past times. Although Laura believes that “...now is now. It can never be a long time ago...”, we understand that as a young child she lacks temporal perspective. Time does move on, and “[t]he future becomes the present, the present the past, and the past turns into ever lasting regret if you don’t plan for it!” as Tennessee Williams famously wrote in *The Glass Menagerie*. Reacquainting ourselves with the past is an important task, providing our roadmap to a more sustainable, no-regrets future. By bringing to mind those lands and times of *auld lang syne*, we begin the work of planning for a livable world for ourselves in both the now and future.

**About the Author:** Syma A. Ebbin, Ph.D., is research coordinator for Connecticut Sea Grant, faculty member of the UConn Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, and a member of the GOSA Board of Directors.



GOSA volunteers work tirelessly to restore or create threatened habitats, thereby creating homes for an extensive list of vulnerable native species. Through coppicing activities, habitat for New England cottontail and many other shrub-dependent species have been created. The removal of invasive plant species has also helped maintain desired, especially native, plant and animal communities.

Left to right: Removing abandoned lumber and boulders; the same area after the clean-up; GOSA volunteers planting 1100 plants to restore the habitat. Photos by Joan Smith and Eugenia Villagra





## Sidney's Corner

By Sidney Van Zandt with  
Liz Raisbeck

### Cowslip Brook Gets a Foot Bridge

It was another summer of extraordinary volunteer efforts on GOSA's properties. As National Trails Day approached last June, my fellow GOSA volunteers realized that we absolutely had to complete a bridge across Cowslip Brook on the Merritt by June 7. What if 50 or so hikers came to the brook and found the water too high to get across?! Board member Jim Anderson swung into action and produced a handsome wood framework for the bridge. On May 22 he managed to get the framework to the edge of the property where 20 strong, enthusiastic Naval Submarine Base volunteers completed the bridge in record time--less than 30 minutes! Volunteers carried the



frame from the road to the brook and pushed or carried wheel barrows filled with pre-cut boards and equipment to the brook crossing site. With five drills working, we started at both ends and met in the middle. As the last board fell into place, the Cutler Cross-Country team crossed the bridge for its first official use. And it was ready to hold those National Trails Day hikers on June 7. Thank you, U.S. Navy volunteers! Photo by Marie Goe-Olsen.

### GOSA Annual Meeting October 15, 2015

GOSA's Annual Meeting and lecture on *The Battle of Mistick Fort* attracted over 80 members and friends. Joan Smith launched the business meeting with her 2015 President's Report, Dave Olivier reported on finance, elections were held, and a Salamander Award awarded to Barbara Tarbox, right, for her invaluable help with GOSA's records project. The evening concluded with Dr. Kevin McBride's lecture about how archeological evidence demonstrates that at least one Pequot War battle/skirmish was fought on GOSA's Sheep Farm back in the 1630s during the English retreat.

Photos by Eugenia and Victor Villagra



Kevin McBride, Keynote Speaker





## Sidney's Troubling Tick Trial

Unfortunately, I had to miss a number of wonderful GOSA activities this past summer because I was flat on my back with unrelenting fever, aches and pains, and extreme fatigue. Us outdoor volunteers are always on the alert for ticks, some of them very tiny, picked up during our work in the woods and grasses. But we do occasionally miss one or two. The initial diagnosis was Lyme disease, but after not responding as expected to antibiotics for Lyme, I was sent to an infectious disease specialist, who discovered that I was hosting far more nasty bugs than originally thought: babesiosis and anaplasmosis, two much rarer tick-borne diseases which have similar symptoms to Lyme disease. Fortunately, I am now well on my way to recovery, but this experience has been a sobering lesson that there is more to ticks than Lyme disease!

Working in the woods is an integral part of land management. GOSA volunteers take the following precautions when hiking or working outdoors:

- Stay in the center of the trail.
- Wear light-colored clothing so that you can see the ticks on your clothes.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Tuck your pants in your socks.
- Inspect and shower right away after you get home. Do not delay.
- Apply DEET to your clothes. (Not everyone does this.)

For more information on ticks, click on the Centers for Disease Control logo. For more detailed information on taking precautions, click [here](#).



*Sidney in early October at the Fall Festival, decked out in her GOSA shirt and visor. She is almost 100% again now.*

## GOSA Gala April 23, 2015 Mystic Marriott Hotel and Spa



Friends, dinner, drinks, a little oratory, and a lot of great auction items come together to support GOSA's mission to protect land, water, and wildlife in southeastern Connecticut. GOSA Secretary Pat Olivier has planned and organized this wonderful event every year since the first event was held in 2007 with only five volunteer organizers and 35 in attendance. Eight years and Galas later, the 2015 Gala counted 200+ in attendance and a total of 42 volunteers. Kudos to Pat and her crew!

*Photos by Anna Sullivan*







## Haley Farm Clean-up

GOSA's Annual Haley Farm State Park Clean-up was held on April 25 this year and attracted GOSA members and friends of all sizes, including UCONN Alumni, UCONN Eco-Huskies, Cache-in-Trash-Out-Geocachers and Canine Patrol Cadets, who were the true heroes! Five acres of invasive plants were lopped and trash bags filled. Large metal pieces, a buoy, a colorful kite, and much more were removed from fields, shoreline, roadside and woods. Many thanks to The Last Green Valley for their help in sponsoring tools, gloves, bags, water, cider and food. UCONN Alumni provided grinders and water and Eco-Huskies provided bags and water. Photos by Joan Smith.



## The Merritt Family Forest Clean-up

Three days later, on April 28, another group of volunteers helped with the The Merritt Family Forest Clean-up. After about 2.5 hours of work, eighteen large trash bags were filled with an amazing array of strange materials including car parts, pieces of metal, foam, and a traffic signal light. A plastic human skull won first prize for most unusual item. The property looks great now. We picked up on both sides of the road and all around the intersection at Flanders too. Photo by Marie Goe-Olsen.

## Planting for Wildlife at The Sheep Farm and Candlewood Ridge

On August 27, a large gaggle of volunteers, including eight (in yellow shirts) from the Sub Base, fanned out first at the Sheep Farm and later at the Merritt Family Forest to plant over 100 native shrubs and trees in the midst of the drought. A herculean effort was made to fulfill the final installment of the restoration plan for these properties that were damaged by heavy winds during Superstorm Sandy.

Two trucks, two vans and three station wagons hauled plants, soil, water, wheelbarrows, tools and people to get the job done. Trees and shrubs replaced the trees damaged or downed by Sandy, thanks to a USDA farmland grant and the efforts of our volunteers. Most of the trees and shrubs are fruit bearing and provide good habitat for wildlife and add to the diversity of our woods and landscapes. Dogwoods, ironwoods, high-bush cranberries, huckleberries, blueberries, viburnum, inkberries, bayberries, winterberries and a few oaks were among the 40+ trees and shrubs planted by these hard-working and enthusiastic volunteers. These plants provide food and shelter to a host of small mammals, many bird species, as well as bees and butterflies. So, a story that started with a terrible storm in 2012 ends fruitfully in the summer of 2015! Photo by Joan Smith.







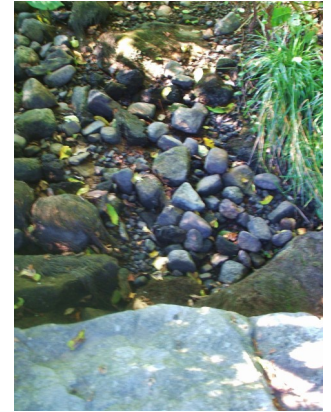
## Watering, Weeding, and Coppicing at the Candlewood Ridge Restoration Site

**Water** Under moderate drought conditions in July, GOSA's Stewardship Committee decided the 1100 plants, so laboriously and lovingly planted as part of the Candlewood Ridge habitat restoration project last fall, needed watering. Ninebark shrubs looked especially thirsty, but fortunately many other hardier species were thriving despite the drought and the hard, dry soil. Jim Anderson and Marie Goe-Olsen carried gallon jugs of water to *each and every plant* from a large plastic swimming pool filled by the Groton Fire Department. Thank You Groton Fire Department! Three jugs of water were required per plant, with 1000+ plants in need of water. This project resulted in more than a few aching backs, but was certainly worth the effort.

**Weeds** Whitney Adams dedicated many hours to removing mugwort, an invasive plant species that has cropped up in the restoration area. Jim Anderson and Jack Berlanda, a state forester, will work at eradicating Japanese stiltgrass, another invasive that may have been imported in the soils brought in by a former developer.

In mid-October, Marie and Jim returned to Candlewood Ridge this time to finish weeding the back portion of the planting area. Marie dove into a mugwort jungle and found at least six forlorn but healthy pussy willows hidden amidst the tall weeds. The weed-shaded pussy willows were in perfect condition despite not being watered under the drought conditions.

**Coppicing** The [coppicing](#) project to expand New England cottontail habitat began in mid-September with the cutting of overgrown mountain laurel shrubs. Tree cutting was delayed until the third week of October to accommodate the protected long-eared bat nesting at the site until then. Due to the presence of heavy logging equipment, and for safety reasons, the northern sections of Candlewood Ridge will be closed to the public until the project is complete in late November.



*Eccleston Brook at the Merritt Family Forest is dry, evidence of the moderate drought conditions that affected Groton last summer. Photo by Joan Smith.*

## GOSA at Groton Fall Festival

Groton's Fall Festival is a community-wide event held each year over Columbus Day Weekend in October. It attracts all kinds of artists, crafters, businesses and nonprofit organizations like GOSA who display their merchandise and information at Poquonnock Plains Park. Since its inception in 2006, the Fall Festival has grown dramatically: over 110 vendors participate and thousands of people attend from the local area and beyond.

This year lots of people joined us at our booth: Joan Smith, Eli Kane, Brooklyn Redo, and I provided information on GOSA, kids' nature activities, free milkweed seeds, and more! Tom Jannke and Bea and Paul Reynolds from Tri-Town Trails shared our booth too. Photo at left by Joan Smith and below by Bea Reynolds.

