

The Landmark

SPRING 1993

NEWS FROM THE FIVE TOWN LAND TRUST

OF LOCAL INTEREST

Contributed by Lois Osier

The town of Enfield was settled in 1680. The fertility of the land in the eastern section of the present town and the water power of the Scantic River drew settlers to that section at an early date. The year 1713 is usually regarded as the date of settlement, but a sawmill was in operation on the Scantic at least 20 years earlier. At Scitico the water power was put to grinding corn, sawing lumber and carding wool.

The smelting of iron from bog ore also went on for many years. The land was cleared and farms established gradually throughout the eastern section and the school districts of Scitico, Hubbard, Jabbok (Jawbuck), Wallop and East Wallop were organized. Large quantities of rye were grown and the distilling of gin was carried on at Scitico and East Wallop.

In 1835 a man named Loomis of West Suffield, who traded extensively for furs in Vermont and New York State, purchased the meadows since known as "Powder Hollow", and undertook the manufacture of gunpowder. Two years later Loomis met in New York, Col. Augustus G. Hazard, a native of Rhode Island, and together they formed the firm of Loomis, Hazard & Company. In 1854 Loomis sold out his interest and Col. Hazard and certain New York capitalists secured an Act from the Legislature, incorporating The Hazard Powder Company. The same year (1854) the district of Scitico was divided and the western part was called Hazardville. During the Civil War the demand for powder caused the village to grow rapidly. Powder making continued to be the principal industry for many years, but declined rapidly from the beginning of the present century, and ceased altogether in 1913.

"The above was written by Atty. Henry F. Fletcher and printed in the Souvenir Program for the Community Fourth of July Celebration, Hazardville, Conn. 1931."

OUR NEXT PUBLIC ACTIVITY

A walk on April 25, 1993 to Powder Hollow, Hazardville will be led by local Powder Mill historian Ed Allen. We will explore the 400-acre tract, the canals, dams, four existing buildings and the remnants of the 200 buildings, 118 of which were used as powder mills. Meet at 1:00 p.m. at the Powder Mill Barn at the foot of Maple Street by the Scantic River. Members, families and friends are invited to learn more about our local history and enjoy this open space parcel. Call Whit Davis @ 749-4753 for more info.

OUR NEXT MEMBERS' MEETING

At our next Meeting on Tuesday, April 27th @ 7:30 p.m. at the Melrose School, Rt. 140 we will have as our guest, Dave Salino, Forester for Chase Paper Co., who is involved with the Connecticut Forest Stewardship Program. Dave has had an opportunity to review some of our land holdings and will discuss some ideas for forest management. All members are invited to participate.

RECENT LAND TRUST ACTIVITIES

In September a group of 20 people explored a portion of the proposed Scantic River Park and Recreation Area in East Windsor, on a walk led by Albert Grant.

Our October canoe trip on the Scantic River in Somers saw paddlers in 6 canoes on a sunny brisk day enjoying the winding river scenery from the Somersville Mill Pond upstream to Four Bridges and back, including a lazy lunch stop on the river bank.

The hike on the 45-acre Skyline Scenic Area in Somers, one of our Land Trust properties, on February 20th was a successful and enjoyable winter activity. Twenty-three people proceeded up the white-blazed trail on a sunny winter's day. Many wild turkey tracks were seen along the trail; also some large catlike tracks, rabbit and deer tracks. The view was spectacular from the lookout and we returned via the wood road on the easterly portion of the land to the "big rock" and blazed a loop trail back to the parking lot. This has expanded an already extensive trail system and we invite you to use it.

These public events continue to demonstrate the benefit of preserving open space habitats in a region surrounded by residential development, increase the public's awareness of the Land Trust and broaden our membership base.

ENJOYING AND PRESERVING
Soapstone Mountain and the Shenipsit Forest Area
contributed by Gerry Stage

As a native Californian, cherishing the grandeur of the western mountains and the vastness of the deserts, I was apprehensive about moving into the megalopolis that reputedly stretched from the District of Columbia to Boston. Arriving in Connecticut, I was delighted to discover that this small, most-populated state of New England is predominantly covered with trees, even in some of the most densely inhabited areas. Numerous tracts of undeveloped land still exist. It has been my pleasure for the last 21 years to live on the edge of one, the Shenipsit Forest.

The Shenipsit Forest lies about 20 miles northeast of Hartford in the rolling hills that form the eastern margin of the Connecticut River valley. This hilly area trends generally north and south with an undeveloped section extending from near Rockville on the south about ten miles northward into Massachusetts. Many parcels within this area are owned by the State and have been designated Shenipsit State Forest, while the rest are in private hands, and, therefore, at risk to development.

Since the appearance of the colonial settlers, the area has been clear-cut repeatedly, and, as a result, most of the forest is relatively young. Occasional logging continues now on a selective cutting basis throughout. The altitude varies from about 300 feet on the western edge to about 1100 feet at the summit of two big hills, which has been flattered by being called mountains, Soapstone Mountain and Bald Mountain. The top of Soapstone bears a weather radar tower as well as a wooden lookout tower. Local lore has it that on a clear day one can see all the way to Mount Monadnock in southern New Hampshire. Scattered throughout the area are the ruins of old foundations and the remains of old stone walls that used to mark property lines and fields, though their locations now often have no relevance to current land use.

The area abounds with wildlife. Of course, the usual deer, squirrels, fox, porcupine and skunks are all present. In addition, I have personally seen fresh water otters, fishers, and once even a bobcat! Along with the usual song birds, hawks, owls, duck and geese, even a flock of wild turkeys can sometimes be seen.

The forest also holds an extensive matrix of foot trails as well as a wonderful variety of abandoned old carriage, logging, and even good quality dirt roads. The only formally designated hiking trail is the Shenipsit Trail, part of a network of trails in CT. known as the "blue trails" maintained by volunteers under the CT Forest & Park Assoc., more or less following an old Indian path that once extended from near Long Island Sound northward into Massachusetts. Though community growth encroached on such on it, the existing sections are generally pleasant traveling and well marked with blue blazes.

Many user groups enjoy this area. Organized groups include the Shenipsit Striders (runners), of which I was one of the founders, New England Trail Riders (trail motorcycles), the Reddington Rock Riding Club (horses), and the National Guard (Maneuvers). As individuals or in small groups, hikers, hunters, fishermen (& women & kids), woodcutters (per permit), and sightseers are all frequent users. Indeed, on prime Fall days hundreds of people may visit the Soapstone lookout tower, if nothing else. In the winter, most of these activities continue. If there is sufficient snow, cross-country skiers, snowshoers and skibobilers also appear and even an occasional dog sled. Most of these users are compatible; however, others (bandit motorcycles, 4-wheelers and ATV's --all illegal on state forest trails) cause damage and other problems when they get off the main dirt roads that are open for their use.

Soapstone Mountain/Shenipsit Forest (Continued)

The frustrating fact is that this fine area is now more threatened than ever by forces that would compromise its natural state. Pressure to develop private property is great. I believe a high priority for the Five Town Land Trust should be to preserve or protect as much of this forest area as possible by focusing on the inholdings and private parcels that separate the existing State Forest parcels. If you own any of these key parcels or know someone who does, spread the word of our endeavor and the importance of protecting the area. Also let us know so that we might follow up the lead. By working together we increase the chances of seeing real progress for this truly worthy cause.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Join a crusade in our own backyard! The need for preserving land is growing with the population. Even though the population is declining slightly in Connecticut, the rate of building new houses on lots which seem to increase in size will eventually fill up every possible usable space. Prime farmland has been given up to tract housing the length of the Connecticut River valley. Few farms remain as farms and vistas of cows and corn have been replaced by supermarkets, shopping centers and gas stations. We must try and preserve what little remains or even the marginal land will succumb to residential and commercial development.

We need each one of you to support your Land Trust. Tell your friends and neighbors about our work. The "press" has given us some exposure over the past year and our public activities have increased public awareness of our existence, but you, our members, still need to make your "voice" heard. We can do so much with a small donation of either land, or money for our Endowment Fund, and you can guarantee that this land will stay unchanged for your children and children's children. Even if the Five Town Land Trust becomes inactive (which is never our intention), our by-laws state the the land now in our stewardship will be turned over to a National Land Trust to be held forever in accordance with the terms under which it was donated.

MEMBERSHIP REMINDER

Notices were recently mailed to renew your membership. If you have not already done so, please mail your check to: Donna Grant, Membership Chairman, Five Town Land Trust, 128 Melrose Road, Melrose, CT 06049.

For potential new members, contact Donna for application and dues information.