

A New Preserve on Birch Island

By Christine N. Farrell

How lucky we are! How lucky we are to be in Maine. How lucky we are to live in a community that cares for the diverse and fragile habitats found here in Harpswell.

This fall, the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust (HHLT) will protect another piece of important coastal habitat on Birch Island — conserving forever the land and waterfront for wildlife and people. The new acquisition includes 43 acres on the northeast corner of Birch Island, 3,000 feet of shoreline

and 50 acres of associated coastal wetlands and mudflats. It will be open to the public for low-impact recreation.

“The people on the island are thrilled that the property will be protected,” said Dick Snow, local resident and historian. “They are happy to be able to walk the wonderful trails, visit the shoreline and know that the land will be kept pristine forever.”

Conservation of this land is made possible by a grant from the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program — the fifth such grant HHLT has received in the last five years.



PHOTOGRAPH © JIM ST. PIERRE

Collaborative efforts of HHLT, Maine Coast Heritage Trust and Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust have led to a series of successful conservation projects in Middle

Bay and eastern Casco Bay.

In honor of their contributions to conservation in Harpswell and beyond, HHLT will be naming the

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Bringing Nature Home

By Julia McLeod

At our Annual Meeting this July, we heard about how our yards and gardens are playing increasingly critical roles in supporting native food webs. Our own actions in our yards, big and small, can be both intimately

rewarding and broadly beneficial for birds and other wildlife.

Eric Topper, Education Director at Maine Audubon explained how we can help by “Bringing Nature Home.” He touched on three main topics: planting native species, managing our gardens for their full habitat

potential, and ensuring genetic diversity for sustainability and adaptability.

This work is based on the book of the same name by Dr. Doug Tallamy, who studies how populations of insects (and hence birds and other wildlife) are negatively impacted by the decline of native plants in the landscape and the loss of genetic diversity.

The good news is that some of the simplest choices we make in our own backyards can have profound effects on local wildlife.

Native plants and animals have evolved together over the millennia and many species are



PHOTO COURTESY OF MAINE AUDUBON

mutually dependent on each other. One of the most well-known relationships is that between Monarch Butterflies and Milkweed. When Monarchs are in their caterpillar stage, they can only feed on Milkweed. There are many resources on choosing native plants that are best for your own yard.

Topper emphasized the

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Our Mission:

To preserve and protect Harpswell's natural resources, cultural heritage, and access to the outdoors through targeted conservation, responsible stewardship and education.

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Bringing Nature Home

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importance of timing maintenance of your gardens so that wildlife have the chance to use those plants for their full potential. For example, the common practice of putting our gardens to bed in the fall removes a potential food source

for birds and other wildlife. Instead, we can leave those dry seeds and fruit until spring.

Finally, Topper emphasized the great importance of genetic diversity in plants. Many nurseries are selling cultivars that are cloned, and thus genetically identical. When plants reproduce naturally and produce seeds, they maintain the diversity that allows some

of a species to survive stressors. With a changing climate, adaptation and resilience are key.

Topper recommended two resources: The University of Maine Cooperative Extension and the Wild Seed Project. Both can be found online.

HHLT plans to continue to play a role as a community resource for information and inspiration.

Otter Brook Update

In our spring newsletter we included a long article about the Otter Brook Project. We're happy to report that the fundraising for the project is nearly complete. We have purchased the first property and expect to close on the second in 2017. After that, trail building will commence.

The new Otter Brook Preserve in north Harpswell will be a treasured asset to the animals and people of Harpswell. Protecting Otter Brook conserves habitat, a rare freshwater stream, marine water quality and public recreation opportunities. For more information about Otter Brook, visit our website: www.hhlmaine.org.

We would like to express a huge **THANK YOU** to everyone who contributed to the Otter Brook Campaign, including town residents who voted yes to contributing \$75,000 in town money.

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HHLT's Nature Day Camp explored Otter Brook this summer and found hundreds of baby toads!

CURT CHIPMAN PHOTO



CURT CHIPMAN PHOTO

Land Conservation

The Lands Committee and staff continue to work diligently to pursue new land conservation opportunities.

See the feature article about a new preserve on Birch Island on the front page and an update on Otter Brook on page two.

Stewardship

The Stewardship Committee, staff and volunteers continue their regular work of maintaining HHLT's preserves and trails and monitoring easements.

Controlling Invasive Plants

In collaboration with the Harpswell Invasive Plant Partnership, HHLT has begun controlling invasive plants, including Asiatic Bittersweet, Autumn Olive, Japanese Knotweed and more at Curtis Farm Preserve, Johnson Field Preserve, Houghton Graves Park and the McIntosh Lot Preserve.



JEFF STANN PHOTO

More Parking Spaces at the Widgeon Cove Trail

You may have noticed that we've expanded the parking area for Widgeon Cove Trail, to allow more visitors to enjoy its scenic beauty.

Community Outreach and Education

Nature Day Camp

We had another successful summer of Nature Day Camp, with four weeks of camp all fully enrolled. Happy parents said:

"This was a wonderful program! Very well organized and well executed. My daughter had a wonderful time. When I came to Mitchell Field for pick up and saw the kids frolicking in the field — I teared up. They looked so happy and joyful — a moment of pure bliss."

"THANK YOU!! What lucky kids to participate in this camp! My son came home the first day saying he wanted to be a marine biologist when he grows up. Wonderful exposure to science in the field for a kid."

Nature Day Camp is

supported by Holbrook Community Foundation, with scholarships provided by the Harpswell Garden Club.

Public Programs

It was another busy summer of public programs, including opportunities to learn about salt marshes, wildflowers and marine mammals; a family campout; and a hands-on art workshop. HHLT offers a variety of public programs all year, for all ages. Check the back of the newsletter for upcoming events.

Annual Meeting

Our annual meeting was well-attended and enjoyable. You can read about the speaker's comments in one of this newsletter's front page stories.

We organized our first silent auction as part of our annual meeting, and successfully raised \$2,300. Thank you to all the businesses and individuals who made the auction a success.

Collaborative Partnerships

Harpswell Invasive Plant Partnership



JULIA MCLEOD PHOTO

Family campout at Mitchell Field.

In 2016, the Harpswell Invasive Plant Partnership (HIPP) began removing invasive plants from selected sites and putting in place long range plans for other sites. The group also offers education and training programs for Harpswell citizens who want to learn how to identify and remove invasive plants.

HIPP received a grant to hire a Community Outreach and Engagement Consultant to develop a plan for educating the community about invasive plants, why they should care about them and what they can do.

HIPP is a cooperative effort of HHLT, the Harpswell Town Lands Committee, the Harpswell Conservation Commission, the Harpswell Recreation Committee, the Mitchell Field Committee, the Harpswell Garden Club, and local citizens.

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Walter and Helen Norton

By Doug Warren

For decades, the Norton name has been a very quiet, but very powerful force in the effort to preserve Maine's farmland and its coastal treasures.



Walter and Helen Norton, for example, bought the historic Dunning Farm on Harpswell Neck in 2006, donated an easement to the Maine Farmland Trust, and now the land is leased to Joe and Laura Grady, who run Two Coves Farm. The Nortons' generosity ensured that this beautiful piece of property will be forever farmland.

The list goes on: The Nortons own the historic building that houses the Schoolhouse Café, which also provides meals to Harpswell Coastal Academy, and lease it to the popular restaurant. The couple have been major supporters of the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens and Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences in Boothbay, and the Maine Coast Heritage Trust, among other organizations.

In fact, the Nortons are the primary reason the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust exists today. In 1983, they bought the Tarr-Eaton House, built in the 1780s, along with 42 acres of

land in Harpswell Center and donated the house and two acres to the Harpswell Historical Society. The historical society put easements on the house and land, sold them, and used the money to found what was then called the Harpswell Heritage Trust to manage the easement. That organization is now known as the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust (HHLT). The Nortons later donated the remaining 40 acres to the HHLT.

With these and other preservation efforts, the Nortons consistently maintained a very low profile while raising three daughters and living on Harpswell Neck farmland that has been in the family since the 1740s. Walter Norton, an insurance executive and Harpswell native, died in May at 91. Helen Norton, who grew up on a dairy farm in York, Pa., says she and her husband always shared a love for farmland and open space.

"We saw how people had taken the beautiful farms of Harpswell and divided them up, sometimes not very well. We both felt this was part of our heritage that needed to be preserved," she explained.

To acknowledge the Nortons' unequalled legacy of support for preservation efforts in coastal Maine, the HHLT is naming its latest acquisition – 43 acres on Birch Island – the Walter and Helen Norton Preserve. "We've always tried to stay in the background," Helen Norton acknowledged. "But it's a great honor."

Reed Coles, executive director of the HHLT, said recognizing the Nortons is a pleasure given their years of preservation effort. "Walter and Helen's continued generosity has resulted in the conservation of hundreds of acres of important wildlife habitat and one of the last active farms in Harpswell. We are extraordinarily grateful for their commitment to conserving the natural resources and history of our town." He noted that

one of the HHLT's newest trails, Widgeon Cove Trail, is on part of the Dunning Farm property purchased by the Nortons.

Helen Norton says she is very pleased with the current direction of the HHLT. "A number of people have become involved who have given it great impetus. It's now a force to be reckoned with." She also expressed her desire to see greater cooperation between land trusts in their preservation efforts.

Tim Glidden, president of the Maine Coast Heritage Trust, offered praise for Walter Norton's love of the environment.

"Walter was a champion of conservation at all levels: from his hometown of Harpswell to the waters of Casco Bay, to the oceans of the world. He took his responsibilities as a steward of the world very much to heart. I will miss him."

Helen Norton said she and her husband shared a love of the isolation, but also the sense of community, that can found in the world of nature. "Animals need corridors to migrate, continuous undeveloped areas, to survive. And, ultimately, I think the same thing can be said for people," she said.

New Historic and Cultural Resources Committee

By Deane Van Dusen, Committee Chair

HHLT has recently formed a Historic & Cultural Resources Committee dedicated to preserving the historic and cultural history of Harpswell from the eighteenth century to the present and using them to keep the town's history alive.

The goal of this new committee is to foster increased awareness and knowledge of our town's historic and cultural resources and to encourage their preservation. The new committee anticipates working with the Harpswell Historical Society and others on education and outreach.

HHLT, originally named the Harpswell Heritage Trust, was incorporated in 1983 with its initial purpose of holding

a preservation easement on the National Register listed Tarr-Eaton House in Harpswell Center. Currently, HHLT holds four preservation easements that protect historic structures along with their associated landscapes and one preservation easement dedicated only to the structure.

The Committee, with the help of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, has recently obtained an inventory of Harpswell's historic places compiled and developed by the Commission from 1986 – 1989. There are approximately 300 site assessments that were developed by architectural historians and provide detailed information on property type, architectural data, age, location and historical significance.

This inventory is available to the public and we encourage you to stop by our office to explore Harpswell history within this fascinating archive!



The historic Tarr-Eaton house

New Preserve on Birch Island

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new preserve after Walter and Helen Norton.

The new preserve not only has exceptional natural features, but it also has a fascinating history as the site of a boatyard and boys' camp.



PHOTOGRAPH © JYM ST. PIERRE

Located in the northern third of Middle Bay, Birch Island is one of the largest islands in Middle Bay, lying between Harpswell Neck on the eastern side and Mere Point on the west.

Shell middens show evidence that Native Americans used the island before Europeans began to settle there in the 1700s.

Families famous for establishing Harpswell used Birch Island for timber and farming, and it has been reported that

there were once 40 children in the island's grammar school.

In addition to a number of farms, there were at least two boatyards on the island, one of which was operated by the Durgins on the property HHLT will acquire. The Durgins were close friends with Reverend Elijah Kellogg, the Harpswell pastor and namesake of the church on Harpswell Neck Road, and two boats were built for Kellogg at the Durgin boatyard in the mid-1800s.

As time went on, fewer and fewer families stayed on the island year round, and it became known for "solace and serenity."* Maine and Massachusetts cottage owners and summer visitors from New England to Virginia came to enjoy the island's casino, baseball field, hotel, scenic views and hiking trails.

In the early 1900s, the Durgin homestead became the site for Camp Narragansett, which educated boys from Boston ages 6 to 16.

The camp offered "wholesome and profitable entertainment," as well as gains in physical condition and character-building. A boy was taught "how to take care of himself in the woods and on the water; how to make baskets, build boats and toys; how to play tennis, baseball, basketball, quoits and squash; how to fish, row a boat, and swim; and how to use a rifle, bow and arrow; how to cook, eat, sleep and live in the



PHOTOGRAPH © JYM ST. PIERRE

open."

The camp also offered field trips to "fish canning factories, paper mills, Longfellow's home, White Mountains and Old Orchard Beach."

The main lodge of the camp was the Durgin farmhouse. The camp advertised its full kitchen

for the public, preserving our clean marine waters and wildlife habitat in the eel grass and mudflats, protecting habitat for many shorebirds and preserving the wild shoreline that makes Middle Bay such a special place to visit and recreate.

HHLT will continue to update the community as plans for public access and opportunities for public programs on the island unfold.

To take advantage of the National Coastal

Wetlands Grant

PHOTOGRAPH © JYM ST. PIERRE

and "large airy dining room capable of seating 100 people." An icehouse stored ice cut in the winter for the campers and staff. The cost for each boy in 1932 was \$215 for eight weeks.

Today, little evidence of the camp exists. The lodge and chapel and former cabins have disappeared and the property has reverted to its natural state.

Today this corner of Birch Island is entering a new chapter in its history, as it is set aside for future generations to enjoy. Conserving this property has many benefits, including providing access

Program, HHLT has to pitch in \$47,000 towards the cost of the project. If you value this addition to Harpswell's conserved land, please consider donating to help cover the costs. Visit our website for more information: www.hhlmaine.org.

*Quotes in this article are from Dick Snow's 1992 book: A History of Birch Island, Casco Bay, Maine.



PHOTOGRAPH © JYM ST. PIERRE



PHOTOGRAPH © JYM ST. PIERRE

Students Zero in on Harpswell's Coastal Habitats

by Tom Hall

On a recent spring evening, nearly 20 students, some with graying hair, peered excitedly into tidal pools on Pott's Point, not quite knowing what to expect.

"They're pretty gung-ho, touching crabs, putting things in buckets – it's a chance to be kids again," said Janet Gannon, a self-described "ocean nerd" who led this expedition. It is one of seven sessions in the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust's inaugural Short Course on Harpswell's Coastal Habitats.

Gannon, a former Bowdoin College instructor, showed the students, all adults, the big picture by focusing on the littlest things, such as how organisms adapt differently to the pools left behind after a high or low tide.

"You have to investigate things closely to appreciate Maine," Gannon said.

Pott's Point, long known for its spectacular panoramic views, provides plenty of opportunity for exploration underfoot as well.

"This is one of the most amazing places in Maine," Gannon said. "It's an ancient salt marsh that shows how diverse Harpswell really is, for a town that is all peninsula, with more water than land."

Gannon is one of eight instructors for the Short Course, which wraps up with a Sept. 14 gathering for participants.

"All the instructors are really passionate about their areas of expertise – that really fueled our curiosity," said student Whitney Conway.

Students used microscopes indoors to see what the naked eye cannot, before venturing outdoors to see how nature unfolds.

"We really got to see the interconnectedness of all things,"

Conway said, like how mussels use their "feet" to create byssal threads of protein, to attach themselves to safe places on the rocky coast.

"It was just amazing to see this happen in real time, using the marine microscope," Conway said.

Unplanned "teachable moments" popped up occasionally, such as finding horseshoe crabs mating on a nearby beach.

"It was nice to just get caught up in the wonderment of the moment," Conway said.

HHLT has a number of programs for youth, such as its Nature Day Camp, but this is its first such course targeting adults.

Bruce Brandt, a retired physicist, jumped at the chance to see what his granddaughter found so fascinating at HHLT's Nature Day Camp.



JULIA MCLEOD PHOTO

"The expertise of the other [adult] students is amazing," Brandt said. Everyone seems really 'with it' and eager to learn."

Brandt had been to Pott's Point many times before, but never thought much about the tidal pools – or how old the algae might be.

Brandt also enjoyed a "Reading Nature" session taught by Matt Dubel, executive director of the Cathance River Education Alliance.

Dubel took students through the woods at Skolfield Shores, learning to "see" what was there all along – subtle clues to how this historic part of Harpswell has evolved over the last three centuries.

"We found old-growth trees in a line, so it was obvious they were intentionally left uncut," Dubel said. "But why?"

The class also tried to figure out how that stand of old-growth beech trees have somehow avoided the blight you see elsewhere from insects and fungus. "Maybe genetics?" Dubel said.

Dubel said there are four "lenses" useful in decoding any landscape: climate, topography, substrate (what's underfoot) and "disturbance – what has changed things here – beavers? lightning?"

It's that kind of "What's going on here?" approach that registers with adult students, Dubel said.

"Children bring fewer preconceptions to what nature has to offer," Dubel said. "It's harder for adults to put on 'fresh eyes' to look a little closer."

The Casco Bay Estuary Partnership supported this pilot project with a grant.

Dave Brown, HHLT's New President

This summer, Dave Brown became president of HHLT, taking over from Charlie Johnson, who stepped down after eight years leading the organization.

Dave writes:

I first became aware of Harpswell's special combination of forest and ocean as a teenager when my family came to visit the log cabin my grandparents built on the shore. Jane Covey and I spent our honeymoon in that cabin, visited it with our children as they grew up, and thirty years later began spending our summers in the property's old farmhouse on Cundy's Harbor Road. Eventually we converted the barn to be our current residence.



I worked for many years on the problems of international development, focusing particularly on the challenges facing nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations trying to catalyze sustainable political and economic change in developing countries. Jane and I founded and ran a nonprofit thinktank called the Institute for Development Research for twenty years. I also taught organization behavior and development for four decades at Case Western

Reserve, Boston University, and the Harvard Kennedy School.

My first contact with the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust came as our family explored how to put my grandfather's property under a conservation easement. Decision-making that involves nine people with diverse views is not easy, but over ten years of discussions we came to consensus about working with HHLT to protect the forest and shoreline that our grandparents loved.

I have now been on the HHLT board for six years, chairing the Accreditation Committee and the Strategic Planning Committee as well as serving on the Stewardship and Executive Committees. I am particularly interested in how HHLT can work with a wide range of partners to enable the community's human and natural systems to thrive together.

News and Updates

Continued from page 3

New Trustees

This summer, HHLT welcomed two new trustees and brought back a former trustee.

Monique Coombs is the Seafood Program Director for the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association. She sits on the Recreation Committee for the Town of Harpswell and is on the board for the Casco Bay Tuna Club and for Bailey Island

Library Hall. She is also active with the Merrymeeting Food Council as part of her role with the fishermen's association. Monique loves Harpswell, fishing, and being outside, and says she is very excited to be on the board for such a wonderful organization like HHLT.

The natural world has been a vital part of **Priscilla Seimer's** life since childhood. Her undergraduate degree was in Natural Resources Conservation and although her working life ended up being outside that field, most of her volunteer time, and

certainly her passion, never has been. In addition to completing the Maine Master Naturalist program a few years ago, she completed and passed Certified Interpretive Guide training last fall. She has been active in the Maine Appalachian Trail Club for years, and is currently the maintainer for the Hunt Trail in Baxter Park, is a Volcano Volunteer at Mt. St. Helens, a docent on Admiral Peary's Eagle Island, a long-time member of Maine Audubon and supporter of other organizations. She has been an active member of HHLT's

Programs Committee for two years.

Deirdre Strachan is returning to the HHLT Board after a year off. She is returning to her previous position as the Chair of the Development Committee. Deirdre worked for 35 years with international health programs. She is currently the Vice President of the Holbrook Community Foundation and the Harpswell Conservation Commission. She enjoys taking her grandchildren on the HHLT trails and to the HHLT's Nature Day Camp.



CURT CHIPMAN PHOTO

Bethany McNelly-Davis of the Schooner Alert led a knot-tying program at HHLT.

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Upcoming Events and Programs

All events are free unless otherwise noted. For details, visit www.hhlmaine.org.

Return of the Natives

Thurs., Sept. 15, 6:30 p.m. * Elijah Kellogg Church * Join the Harpswell Garden Club to learn about landscaping with native plants from Kookie McNerney of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

Autumn at Otter Brook

Sat., Oct. 15, 1-3 p.m. * Otter Brook Preserve * Check out Harpswell Heritage Land Trust's new Otter Brook Preserve with Maine Master Naturalist Priscilla Seimer and learn about how local plants and animals are preparing for winter. Free. Pre-registration required.

Harpowell Day: A Celebration of Traditional Handcrafts and Subsistence Skills

Join Harpswell Historical Society and Harpswell Heritage Land Trust for a celebration of traditional handcrafts and subsistence skills. **Saturday, Oct. 1 from 12-4 p.m.**, rain or shine, at the Harpswell Historical Society, 929 Harpswell Neck Road. For all ages, there will be much to see, do and learn about during this free event celebrating Harpswell's history.

- Observe demonstrations of skills and handcrafts, including weaving baskets, spinning wool, weaving cloth, hooking rugs, woodworking, churning butter and more. Many of the demonstrations encourage active participation.
- Deepen your understanding of Harpswell's rich history through a tour of the old graveyard and Meeting House. Browse the historic artifacts in the museum. Learn about the architecture of the historic buildings in Harpswell Center.
- Help press cider and sip it warmed with cookies in the Historical Society Museum



kitchen. Harpswell Coastal Academy will have other food for sale as well.

- Visit sheep from Two Coves Farm in the town's historic cattle pound.
- Enjoy live music provided by Harpswell Coastal Academy's House Band and others.
- Listen to readings in the Meeting House and a reenactor's stories in the graveyard.
- Bring your kids to learn from a period schoolmarm in the one-room schoolhouse, play with toys of long ago and listen to storybooks in a fishing schooner stern.
- Check out antique cars.

For more information: www.hhlmaine.org, 207-837-9613, outreach@hhlmaine.org or www.harpowellhistorical.org, 207-833-6322.