



PECONIC LAND TRUST NEWSLETTER

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Photo by Pingree Louchheim

Conservation Efforts in Sagaponack

For 300 years, Sagaponack was an inconspicuous farming hamlet tucked between Bridgehampton and East Hampton. Relatively flat and unforested, it consisted of farms, tended without fanfare by generations of families. Today, its potato fields continue to be an integral part of the East End's economy and character.

Sagaponack's anonymity vanished over the last couple of decades. The charm of this hamlet has been discovered and threatened by inalterable changes wrought by

careless development. Much of its farmland has been subdivided, some by developers and some by the farm families who sought financial protection from the prospect of burdensome inheritance taxes. Today, a number of farms remain, but there is concern that they, and the families who continue to tend them, may vanish as well.

Along with a number of other areas of the East End, the Peconic Land Trust has selected Sagaponack as a target area for its conservation work. Sagaponack represents a vital

part of the South Fork's agricultural legacy that must be preserved.

"It is certainly not too late to preserve the integrity of Sagaponack," says Trust President John Halsey. "There are a number of farm families actively working the land. They are as important to its future as the land itself."

Preserving land and a way of life requires a considerable amount of skill, creativity, and financial resources. Over the last six years, the Trust has brought all to bear in pursuing a variety of projects. In

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A Silver Lining

For most people on the East End, the recession has been the worst of times. But for land conservation efforts, the present economic climate provides for many opportunities.

The reason? Real estate prices have not risen over the last year or so, and in many instances have declined. While this is not good news for those seeking to sell properties, the market provides a golden opportunity to either acquire land or to explore a variety of conservation options.

"Land was moving very slowly for a while, but is now starting to pick up," states Harold Shepherd, who owns a real estate company in East Hampton. "To buy raw land and divide it is becoming too costly and is a lengthy process."

The combination of low prices for open land and stringent environmental and planning requirements means development activity has come to a virtual standstill. And those who purchased land in recent years with the idea of development are now very open to overtures from others to either buy properties or to consider other avenues that would ward off a financial debacle. Even banks in the area have become more flexible in the disposal of land because their inventories have become uncomfortably high due to foreclosures.

"Nobody's giving anything away, but this is the time to buy or

come up with some alternative," he says. "If your goal is to preserve land, I don't know that there will ever be an opportunity like this again."

The Peconic Land Trust is taking full advantage of the opportunities. A number of property owners who thought that they had sold their land are now working with the Trust. After a review of their financial needs and conservation interests, the Trust divides their land into three basic categories: 1) those areas that should be preserved at all costs such as prime farmland, significant natural areas, habitats, 2) those areas that should be preserved if affordable such as buffer areas and woodland, and 3) those areas that would be suitable for limited and controlled development.

A concept plan is prepared which locates future development in appropriate locations within the context of a larger preserve. Typically, such plans drastically reduce the number of lots allowed under zoning. However, the reduced density translates into fewer improvement costs, less time in the subdivision process, and building lots that are unique enough to sell at premium values in a sluggish real estate economy.

With this type of creative planning, the Trust is hopeful that the worst of times can be the best of times for its conservation efforts.

The President's Column

The focus of this newsletter is on the farming hamlet of Sagaponack in Southampton Town. Having lived there for the past six years with my wife Janis, son Joshua, and, most recently, daughter Jenna, Sagaponack is near and dear to our hearts. Living next to the Foster farm as we do, reminds me of my childhood on Wickapogue Road in Southampton Village. As youngsters, my friends and I spent a great deal of time at the Downs and Fowler farms, which were full of life and activities. We played in the rye fields and barns, chased tractors and potato diggers. When I was 15 years old, I began to spend my summers working on Charlton Halsey's farm on Cobb Road in Water Mill. I used to move irrigation pipes across the fields and learned a wide variety of skills from shingling to plumbing.

The remaining farms in Sagaponack are like those of my childhood... full of life and activity. They are family businesses in the truest sense. As such, they are vulnerable to changing conditions and their survival depends on their ability to adapt accordingly. If farms are productive and profitable, they have a chance to survive. But there are other hurdles to be jumped as well... inheritance taxes, nearby residential development, regulations of all sorts, and labor to name a few.

The point is that farmland preservation begins with the farm families themselves. Thus, the Peconic Land Trust initiates its work with a clear understanding of the needs and goals of farm families. We identify alternatives to the outright development of farmland and open space. We provide farm families with ways to reduce inheritance tax liabilities and to preserve farmland at the same time. Beyond the work of the Trust, however, each and every one of us can support farmland preservation by buying local produce. We can be tolerant of the noise and the dust as well as the farm vehicle slowing traffic. For if we truly desire farmland preservation, we must improve the odds for survival of our local farm families.

John v.H. Halsey, President

Sagaponack

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1984, the eastern shore of Fairfield Pond was donated to the Trust. Efforts continue to preserve farmland immediately to the east of the pond, on both sides of Peters Pond Lane. In 1986, steps were taken by Ngaere Zohn to assure the preservation of a key parcel of farmland to the northwest of the Sagg School. Also in 1986, Pingree Louchheim and her husband Donald, who is a publisher of The Southampton Press, donated a conservation easement on a two-acre parcel that helps preserve the historic character of Sagg Main Street.

"We've known about the work of the Peconic Land Trust since it began, and we asked them what we could do," Pingree says. "This parcel is such a pretty corner, and it's pleasing to know it will stay that way forever."

In 1989, the Trust purchased 20 acres of farmland and wetlands to the southeast of Sagg Bridge from Janet Lester and Ruth Fleming. A number of neighbors in the vicinity of the parcel contributed \$1.2 million to underwrite the purchase. The land, farmed by Clifford Foster, is a key element of the scenic vista from Sagg Bridge. The Trust has a right-of-first refusal on a contiguous parcel of farmland. In addition to its own projects, the Trust has facilitated the sale of development rights to Southampton Town's Farmland Preservation Program.

Over the years, the Trust has earned the confidence of several Sagaponack farm families, such as the Whites and the Fosters, who have tilled the land for generations. "There's no question the Trust is doing good work here, especially with providing practical information," says Jeff White. "To its credit, it offers objective advice and is

Charitable Giving Ideas *By: T. P. Luss, CLU, ChFC*

In the April issue of the Peconic Land Trust Newsletter, I indicated that the purchase of life insurance is not only an excellent way to fund a charitable contribution, but also a superior planning technique. No sooner had the newsletter come out when we received word that Private Letter Ruling 9110016 cast a dark cloud over this technique.

Although Private Letter Rulings are not "Law," they are often used to guide Tax and Estate Planners. Since the tax consequences depend on the interpretation of New York Insurance Law, we would all be well advised to postpone the use of this technique until the dust settles.

This letter ruling has had a serious and significant effect on all public charities and I am confident that the law will be clarified in favor of the charities. In other states, such as Georgia, insurance laws have been amended to avoid adverse interpretations. An amendment is currently pending in the New York State Legislature to enable charities to use life insurance.

In the meantime, we will continue to explore other techniques in this column. In the next issue, we will discuss the use of life insurance as an "asset replacer." For more information, please contact the Trust office.

Tom Luss, CLU, ChFC, has worked closely with the Peconic Land Trust for a number of years. We want to thank him for his time and expertise.

available as a sounding board for discussing different options."

According to White, as much as 70 percent of the open land in Sagaponack has been subdivided, so preserving the rest is of vital importance if the area is to retain any semblance of an agricultural community.

"The projects we've completed up to this point have helped, but they have really set the stage for doing much more," Halsey says. "As with Wainscott to the east, if we don't act quickly, the area will lose the character that for hundreds of years made it a very special part of the locale."

Given the current downturn in the real estate market, the Trust is actively engaged in efforts to preserve land that has been subdivided. A number of parcels that have subdivision approval are being foreclosed upon by banks. Due to the fact that many of the lots in

the approved plans are not readily marketable at present, the Trust has an opportunity to prepare alternatives that preserve far more farmland.

"Many banks have an overabundance of foreclosed property," says Frank Filippo, Vice President of the Bank of the Hamptons. "Because banks are not in the real estate business, they are more open than ever to options for the disposal of these properties. It is a good time for land preservation organizations such as the Trust to work with the banks."

There is a critical mass of farmland that must be retained in order for agriculture to continue in Sagaponack or anywhere on Eastern Long Island. Not only is the Peconic Land Trust working hard to preserve the best remaining farmland, but it is also striving to enable farm families to pass their legacy on to the next generation.

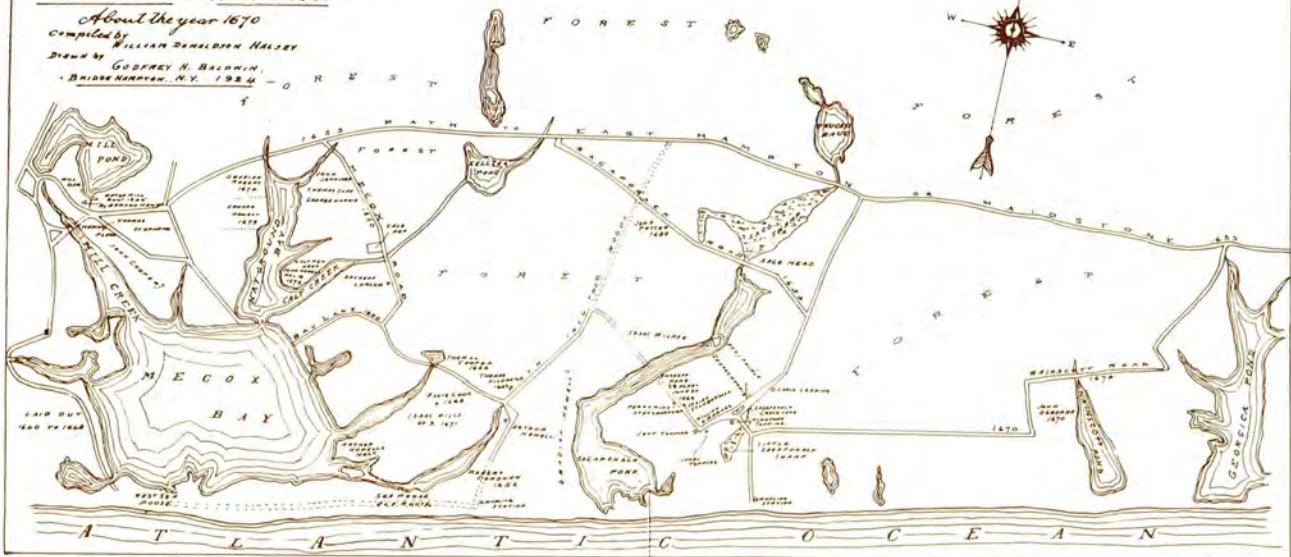
*Map extending from
Water Mill to Hainscott*

About the year 1670

Compiled by *WILLIAM DENALDSON HALSEY*

Drawn by *GODFREY H. BALDWIN*

BRIDGE HAMPDEN, N.Y. 1924



As is often the case with the history of the East End, accounts differ about the origins and importance of Sagaponack. This is no surprise, considering there are very few areas in the U.S. that have more than three centuries of history to sort out.

A bit of murkiness surrounds the origin of the name "Sagaponack." The translation from an Indian language (which one is not certain) is "The Place Where the Ground Nuts Lie" or "Nut That Lies in the Ground." Either way, the reference is to nut grass, a legume in the peanut family. It was quite plentiful on the peninsula that extends into the Atlantic Ocean and was a favorite food of the area's Native Americans. As the peninsula was inhabited by English settlers and residents moving east from Southampton, the Indians showed them how to create farmland by burning away the nut grass. Eventually, the eradication of one form of sustenance paved the way for sustenance for a new group.

The Sagg Bridge that exists now is a descendant of a bridge first built in the 1600's. The early settlers of Mecox and Sagaponack realized a bridge over Sagg Creek would be beneficial for travel, and Ezekiel

Sandford built the bridge. The settlement to the west afterward became known as Bridge Hampton.

Sagaponack also gave a name to another settlement. The first landing place for vessels in the Town of Southampton was North Sea, but as the 17th century progressed the eastern portion of the town saw a steady population growth and a more convenient port was needed. The new harbor chosen was called "Harbor of Sagg," and some years later, in 1707, there is a reference in Town Trustee record books of "Sag Harbor."

Sagaponack itself was first settled in the 1650's. The first settlers included Thomas Topping, Josiah Stanborough, Benjamin Palmer, and then John White. With the exception of Stanborough, these names are still present on the South Fork.

While Sagaponack has been known through the centuries for its farming heritage, there is also a legacy of independent thinking among its residents. For example, for a short period during the Civil War the Confederate flag was flown in Sagaponack. This was not due to an anti-abolitionist position but because some Sagaponack residents considered themselves "Copperheads," referring to a coin the Confederacy minted. Another legend that has

come down is that at one point some Sagaponack residents refused to acknowledge Daylight Savings Time, so that travelers going through the area were one hour off the rest of the South Fork.

Sagaponack does not have its own museum, but there are examples there of living history. The one-room schoolhouse continues to operate on Sagg Main Street. It is the third school building on that site, and at present it houses fourteen students. A little to the south is the Post Office, and visitors to it can see a display of all the Postmasters who have supervised the facility since it was established.

Though it is rich in history and has been of vital importance to the South Fork's agriculture, Sagaponack remains relatively obscure. According to Kelsey Marachal, who writes the "Sagaponack Scene" column in *The Southampton Press*, in the late '60's a barn caught fire and someone called an up-Island dispatcher to send a fire truck. The dispatcher hadn't heard of Sagaponack and didn't know how to direct the trucks to the fire. Finally, in frustration, the caller said, "Just go to the schoolhouse and look for the flames!"



Historic Lore

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: JOHN C. WHITE, SR. DIGGING POTATOES IN SAGAPONACK WITH A ONE-ROW SHAKER-TYPE DIGGER IN THE 1920'S; AERIAL VIEW OF SAGAPONACK IN 1953; SAGG BRIDGE IN 1923; THE SECOND SAGAPONACK SCHOOL HOUSE, WHICH WAS IN USE FROM 1830 TO 1885; THE MOSES ROSE HOUSE, BUILT IN 1705; CAPT. WILLIAM PIERSON HOUSE; BUILT 1740. OPPOSITE PAGE: A MAP SHOWING WATER MILL TO WAINSCOTT, CIRCA 1670.

THANK YOU TO THE FOSTERS AND THE WHITES FOR THE USE OF THEIR FAMILY PICTURES.





1991 Peconic at Quail Hill

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DESSERT AT THE PECONIC—A 3×5 FOOT CAKE; DAY'S ENTERTAINMENT—NANCY LEE BAXTER, RANDY PARSONS AND HUGH PRESTWOOD; DEBORAH ANN LIGHT, DONOR OF QUAIL HILL PRESERVE WITH TRUST PRESIDENT JOHN HALSEY; SCOTT AND LEVIN CHASKEY AND FRIENDS TOURING PROMISED LAND FARM; YOUNG PRESERVATIONISTS ENJOYING THE PECONIC; OVER 400 TRUST SUPPORTERS CELEBRATED THE TRUST'S ACHIEVEMENTS AND THE GLORIOUS WEATHER. *PHOTOS BY ROGER A. SMITH*



Peconinic at Quail Hill

Once more, the gods of land preservation intervened to provide beautiful weather for this year's "Peconinic," held on June 9 at the Trust's Quail Hill Preserve in Amagansett. Promised Land Farm, the organic farming cooperative operated by the Trust, is located at the preserve.

Approximately 400 people, including a good-sized contingent of children, gathered for the Peconinic. As participants feasted on a wide array of foodstuffs, musical entertainment was provided by Nancy Lee Baxter and Hugh Prestwood with Trust consultant Randy Parsons on bass guitar. Bob Willett and friend Bill Nell also provided music to the gathering. Deborah Ann Light, who donated the Quail Hill Preserve to the Trust in 1989, read a selection of poems related to land and its stewardship.

The Peconinic is not a fundraiser but an event organized by the Trust to thank its supporters. "We live in an area that is inundated with fund-raising events during the summer months," says Trust President John Halsey. "We have always felt that those who have supported our efforts should be brought together to experience the fruits of our labor." And that is exactly what happened at the Peconinic. As one looked through the crowd, the diversity of the Trust's support was apparent... local people, summer folks, farmers, weekenders, business owners, and more.

Of course, the Peconinic is not a spontaneous event... months of planning and days of volunteer labor are the keys to its success. "The volunteers work extremely

1991 Challenge Grant

The annual effort to match the Challenge Grant is underway. As in years past, the Trust must match a specified amount of funds by September 30, 1991. This year the William and Mary Greve Foundation, Ronald Lauder and family, Joseph F. Cullman 3rd, and an anonymous donor have offered a total of \$125,000, an amount the Trust must raise by the September deadline.

"We realize these are tough times economically," points out John Halsey, "but the downturn in the economy has provided the Trust with a window of opportunity to preserve farmland and open space heretofore beyond our grasp. We have to make the most of this opportunity and that requires financial support from the public at large."

The funds raised by the Challenge Grant underwrite the conservation activities of the Trust. Through planning, acquisition, and land stewardship, the Trust is able to leverage its financial support towards the preservation of land worth millions of dollars. Such funds enable the Trust to hire environmental planners and other land use consultants, procure the best legal and estate tax advice, prepare conservation alternatives to outright development, and so on.

"It is true that \$125,000 is a lot of money," Halsey says. "However, when you consider how much that amount can buy on the real estate market, and then realize what the Trust can do with that same amount, it is truly amazing. The funds we raise preserve land with a much higher value from both the financial and esthetic perspectives."

Contributions of all sizes are welcome to the Challenge Grant. Please use the enclosed envelope to send in your tax-deductible donation. The staff and board of the Trust thank you for your support!

hard with a great deal of enthusiasm," Halsey says. "We couldn't handle such a large event without them." Volunteers assist with everything from getting the invitations out to stacking tables and chairs at the conclusion of the event. The volunteers this year included Karina Bertucci, Marianne Boulton, George Bradley, Dorothy Dalsimer, Jane Iselin, Pingree Louchheim, Olivia Motch, Peter Robinson, Jane Thors, Dolores Zebrowski, and Ngaere Zohn among others.

The Quail Hill Preserve is located in North Amagansett which has been designated as a target area


by the Trust. Over two hundred acres of farmland is currently managed by the Trust and will ultimately be donated to our conservation organization. In 1990, the Trust acquired 20 acres of land from the Bistran family. In addition, the Trust currently holds a conservation easement on 38 acres in Stony Hill Woods and is actively working on easements covering an additional 220 acres of woodland. With upwards of 500 acres to be preserved by the Trust in North Amagansett, the Quail Hill was the perfect site for this year's Peconinic.

A copy of the last financial report filed with the Department of State may be obtained by writing to: 1) New York State, Department of State, Office of Charities Registration, Albany, N.Y. 12231, or 2) Peconic Land Trust, P.O. Box 2088, Southampton, N.Y. 11968.

 **PECONIC LAND TRUST**
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To the Land Trust
From Levin and Rowenna Chaskey



Mission Statement

The Peconic Land Trust is a nonprofit, tax-exempt conservation organization dedicated to the preservation of farmland and open space on Long Island. To this end, the Trust acquires and manages land as well as easements for conservation purposes. In addition, the Trust assists farmers and other landowners in the identification and implementation of alternatives to outright development.

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