



THE BARRINGTON LAND CONSERVATION TRUST

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AT ONE WITH THE LAND

Blakely Szosz interviews Robert Johannis about a Lifetime on the Palmer River

Certainly in Barrington the insight a person gains from having lived and worked a piece of land for a lifetime is a thing of the past. The changes in the landscape don't go unnoticed but usually go unrecorded. Robert Edward Johannis has lived on his family's farm on Sowams Rd. since 1942 where he moved at the age of ten. He grew up, married his wife Celeste and raised his family of eight children on the farm.

Originally Bob's father purchased the farm of 28 acres with an unlivable house and barn at \$194/acre or \$5,432. Another 16 acres were purchased ten years later from Narragansett Electric for about \$10,000 bringing the total property to 44 acres located on both sides of Sowams Rd. In 1989, through funding from the Barrington Land Conservation Trust, State and Town Open Space Bonds, and with the cooperation of the Johannis family, the Land Trust acquired 28 acres along the Palmer River establishing the Johannis Farm Wildlife Preserve.

The Preserve is a diverse habitat composed of woodland, salt marsh, and open pasture which supports equally diverse plant and wildlife communities. The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management strictly regulates public access. Active maintenance practices are minimal

leaving the landscape to appear very much like it did when Bob's family moved there. Property values have certainly changed but so has the land in ways that only he has experienced.

He recalls that the Palmer River had a channel for boats and the estuaries were deep enough so they had a diving board set up for swimming in the summers. Most have filled with sediment so that it may be six feet deep at most. Bob told me "the moon tides are bigger and every storm if there is a South / Southeast wind the water comes up almost to the greenhouse". Each spring the perigee moon (largest full moon of the year) combined with a high tide now closes the "Bungtown" (Old Providence Rd) Bridge in Swansea.

The farm is largely composed of clay once you dig down about three feet. Bob guesses it must run a few hundred feet deep as nearby wells had to go to four hundred feet so that the water wasn't "loaded with iron." The clay runs to the other side of the river and the estuaries are loaded with bricks left over from the brickyards and kilns that used to be there. When the public sewers were installed in Barrington they had to break through the clay to bury pipe and hit an artesian well in front of the house. It took three massive pumps to remove enough water to finish the job and then the well was covered but Bob felt that it permanently affected the water table.

The wildlife population has changed in a number of ways. Invasive species including swans and Canada geese have made themselves at home here. Native species that have disappeared or declined include American Black Ducks and "Mud Hens" also called the American Coot. The latter being a "smelly bird when they are scared they spray a stinky #@&%\$ all over". Mink and muskrats were trapped for their fur in the area in the late 1940s and are still around in lesser numbers. In the early 1950s otters were spotted. Deer showed up in the early 1990s with coyotes following a few years later. Bob has seen as many as eight deer at a time and last September saw a twelve point buck. He saw his first fisher cat in 2000 and last year saw one at least three times.

The river fed his family more than once and was filled with crabs, clams, oysters, mussels and eels and white perch in the spring. In the roots of pine trees was a good place to find quahogs. Bob blames the swans for the disappearance of the clams since they "bit the necks off the clams and killed them all." In the winter Bob used to chop holes in the ice and spear the two inch thick, three foot long black eels in the mud banks. "My mother and father loved eels!" After seeing my facial expression Bob explained "yeah, you cook 'em. Well, you don't eat them raw. It's not sushi."

(Con't on p.2)



Bob Johannis

(Con't from p.1)

To catch a glimpse of this relationship with a beautiful and forever preserved piece of our town has been a privilege that we are thrilled to pass on to our membership. The BLCT sincerely thanks Bob for sharing some of his experiences growing up and working the land along the Palmer River. For upcoming walks and events or more information on any of our properties visit www.BLCT.org

STUDENTS STUDY ANNAWAMSCUTT CREEK

The Land Trust has partnered with St. Luke's eighth grade science class on two projects led by teacher, Doreen Schiff to study the effects of urbanization on Annawamscutt Creek that runs from East Providence to Allin's Cove in Barrington.

In October, fifteen students met at the creek with Ms. Schiff and Land Trust Board member, Sandra Wyatt, where they learned about the impact of urbanization on streams and creeks, and conducted several water quality tests as a baseline to a final study of macroinvertebrates in the spring. The Land Trust congratulates Ms. Schiff on her receipt of an Environmental Council of RI Lorraine Tisdale Grant of \$500 to complete the study.

On a chilly December afternoon, Sandra met with students Molly Leary and Maddie Fairbanks to walk, photograph and see urban impacts on the creek first hand. Molly and Maddie will present their findings at the St. Luke's Science Fair in March.

OUR INDISPENSABLE STEWARDS

The BLCT Board of Directors will hold a Steward Recognition Day on Saturday morning, March 5, in appreciation for their time and commitment as stewards for Land Trust properties. The program will also review steward responsibilities, provide information about invasive species, and receive feedback on how the Land Trust can most effectively assist the stewards. The session will be followed by an informal breakfast and social gathering.

MANY THANKS!!

• FOR GIFTS IN MEMORY OF DOUG RAYNER

Nick and Julia Califano
Jane Blount
Richard Holt
Lisa Lipscomb
Michael Rayner and family
Wenley Ferguson

• TO CVS CAREMARK CHARITY CLASSIC

For their donation to help support maintenance and development projects at several Land Trust properties

• TO AMICA MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY

For a donation in memory of Joel Tobey who worked at AMICA for 40 years. Joel was a lifelong resident of Barrington and a devoted supporter of the Land Trust and its mission. His wife, Elaine, chose the Land Trust and the Barrington Preservation Society for his memorial gifts.

Brownie Troop at Sowams Woods

TERRAPIN STUDY AT RAYNER REFUGE

This year the Land Trust sponsored population study of Diamondback Terrapins in Hundred Acre Cove completed its 21st season. The conscientious work of students Evan Bulman and Brian Williamson, as well as Bob Caron and Pete McCalmont, enabled us to identify 121 individual turtles and protect many nests from predators. Accumulated data supports the finding that this population may be sustainable or only slightly declining.

The Trust again sponsored Audubon Society field classes for eighth grade Barrington students that included a section on the terrapins. In addition, a Providence art class from the inner city, studied the terrapin, enjoyed a field trip – for many, their first real out-door experience – and fashioned colorful clay models of the turtles, now placed in a garden near their school.

Plans for the coming summer, in addition to the usual fieldwork, include the encouragement of “terrapin gardens” in the yards of residents who live on the Barrington and Palmer Rivers where access for the turtles is unencumbered by retaining walls. Residents on Acre and Cove Avenues, Bowden Avenue, Henry Drive, New Meadow and Sowams Road have reported seeing the turtles in their yards attempting to nest but often not being successful due to lack of suitable terrain.

Facing a similar problem in Wellfleet, MA, researchers produced an educational brochure that is being adapted to our locale by science teacher and graphic artist, Lori Vastano. Jackie Senich and son Nick have volunteered to kayak around the rivers to locate potential nesting places.

Another idea being investigated is placing chicken wire along a stretch of guardrail on Wampanoag Trail, where some terrapin attempt to cross the road to nest at the Vitullo Farm. Before the days of two-lane highways, this was an historical nesting site. But it is no longer an option for the turtles as several are run over every year as they attempt to cross the road to their habituated nesting area.

The complete summary of the 2010 study may be found on the www.blct.org website. Anyone interested in joining our research team can contact Charlotte Sornborger at 245-8467 or c_sornborger@hotmail.com.



COME WALK WITH US!

Guided walks are scheduled through the winter, spring and summer. We urge you to join us in exploration of four of Barrington's beautiful natural environments.



*Photo of Screech Owl
by Jessica Weinberg*

Helen Tjader will lead an Owl Walk in Sowams Woods

Saturday, February 12, at 4:30 p.m.

(‘Bad’ weather date, Sunday, Feb. 13th, at 4:30 p.m.)

Park on Lighthouse Lane and meet at the Land Trust sign on Washington Road. Dress warmly; bring a flashlight. We can’t guarantee you’ll see owls, but you will learn how to look for them on your own. Male and female Great Horned owls have very different calls.

Here are some links to their calls:

http://www.owling.com/Great_Horned.htm#recordings

<http://www.owlpages.com/owls.php?genus=Bubo&species=virginianus>

THE FOLLOWING WALKS ARE SCHEDULED FOR THE SPRING AND SUMMER

The Barrington Three Forest Hike

Capture the feeling of “getting lost in the forests of Barrington!” Saundy Patrick will take you on this early spring hike along the greenway of Haines Park, Tall Cedars, and St.

Andrews meadow and forest. A hardy hike of about 2 ½ hours.

Amazing Ecological Tour of Mussachuck Beach

Join this late spring amble along the shores of Narragansett Bay and discover with Will Fairbrother treasures you never knew were there!

Dazzling Damsel and Dragonflies

Ginger Brown will lead her popular walk again this summer to discover, and briefly capture and examine these beautiful insects that inhabit the shores of Barrington's ponds and lakes.

STAY TUNED FOR MORE INFO, DATES AND TIMES !

THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!

SOWAMS WOODS

On **Beyond Our Walls Great Day of Service**, Helen Tjader led volunteers, including a local Brownie Troop, in removing invasive plants : **Ali Rubin, Alison Kostas, Barbara Coppola, Ben Rubin, Beth Rondeau, Conner Provolo, Diana Turgeon, Emma Sullivan, Erin Davis, Lindsay Turgeon, Maile Chopin, Matthew Goniprow, Melissa Menke, Nathan Lapides, Nia Milman, Nick Rondeau, Nicole Fitzpatrick, Nicole Smith, Olivia August, Sally Hanchett, Samantha Menke, Sophia Milman and Susan Kostas.**

PIC-WIL NATURE PRESERVE

Heavy duty trail maintenance was the mission of **Beyond Our Walls Great Day of Service** at Pic-Wil. Property Manager, **Lyn Cleary**, led volunteers: **John and Greg Fain, Erika, Ben, Jamie and Emily Schwartz, Patrick Fogarty and Kelly Kraunelis.**

DEEP MEADOW EXTENSION

Peter Gnocchi led an Eagle Scout project to build an osprey nest and perch at this Hundred Acre Cove marsh. **Greg Niguidula** has been working throughout the fall and winter to remove old dumped materials from the slope.

LOMBARDI PARK

Nate Lapides, studying invasive plants for his Senior project with mentor, **Helen Tjader** was joined by **Peter Burke, Helen** and volunteers from **St. Lukes Parish: Lynne Dolan, Martha Dolan, Kristiana Paterno and Conner Provolo** in cutting and pulling encroaching invasive plants.

BROOMHEAD MARSH

Norm Dudziak and **Helen Tjader** spent a bitterly cold winter afternoon clearing invasives from around native marsh restoration plants which, after five years, are forming a strong stand to hold in the coastal soils and hold back the phragmites.

ORCHARD AVENUE

Neighbor and volunteer, **Carrie Ruggieri**, assisted in removing dumped materials from this coastal land.

HERITAGE WOODS EXTENSION

Helen Tjader ‘rescued’ the property edge from mounds of dumped landscaping materials and invasive plants.

LAFRANCOIS WOODS AND DANTE TRIANGLE, HUNDRED ACRE COVE EAST, ANDREOZZI NATURE PRESERVE, AND LOMBARDI PARK

all received new signage thanks to Stewardship Committee Chair, **Ed Schottland.**



THE BARRINGTON LAND CONSERVATION TRUST
Box 324, BARRINGTON RI 02806

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Membership Categories (circle one)

Life Member \$1000

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Conservator \$250

Patron \$100

Sponsor \$50

Family/Friend \$35

Other \$ _____

____ **I'd like to volunteer,**
please contact me.

____ **I'd like information**
on donating stock.

We're on the web at
WWW.BLCT.ORG

JOIN OUR EMAIL LIST
FOR NEWS OF
SPECIAL EVENTS -
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*We solicit funds to help
maintain our properties via an
Annual Appeal in December.
Membership dues are solicited
in May and are for that current
calendar year.*

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