



Take a Walk with Murwin Johnson

by Steve Knauth

[Editor's Note: As of this publication ELT has signed an agreement to acquire conservation restriction and development rights over 42 acres of the Johnson Farm. The Land Trust hopes to gain town approval for a grant and to begin fundraising for the property in October.]

Take a walk with Murwin Johnson over his land, and you begin to understand why he's so attached to it, and why he is more than just casually concerned for its future.

He's done more than just mow the lawn for the past 53 years.

Johnson acquired around 50 acres of wooded and open land in 1955 from his family, who had bought around 130 acres in 1948. It was formerly the highland field of the Bull family, prominent in Ivoryton, who lived kitty-corner across from what is now the Copper Beech. One of the first things Johnson, who worked for the state department of agriculture, did was build a barn and get some sheep. The rest of



*Murwin in the sheep barn.
Photo by Steve Knauth*

his farm grew up alongside. "I never dreamed of doing it full time, it was just a hobby," he says today.

What a hobby! Today, there's a line of fruit trees he planted years ago behind the house, past his wife, Polly's, flower garden. They are apple trees, bearing ripening fruit in mid-summer. Johnson approaches and appraises each



*Murwin Johnson's red barns on the farm.
Photo by Steve Knauth*

tree; some are doing well, some not so. Johnson's favorite, the Rhode Island Greening, is among the former. Then there's the pear tree whose limbs are positively weighed down with clusters of young fruit. "Last year, we got nothing," he says, reaching for the young pears. "This is a good set." Across the path are a couple of currant bushes – another Johnson favorite. "They make the best pancakes," he says. "Currants and maple syrup ... sour and sweet." The concord grapes next to them are maturing slowly this year.

Then, it's over to the low, slab-sided sheep barn – the one they built back in '55 - its color a faded Wyeth red. It's hot out, and the barn feels cool as we enter. The sheep don't agree, and remain lying down, except for one friendly animal who gets up to greet Johnson, and gets a pat on the head. "Thirteen ewes and 20 lambs this year," he says.

Beyond the barn, we walk down to a wire fence and an old-fashioned stone-weighted gate post, and look out over a huge, open hay field lying brown in the sun. A swath of cut hay marks where Johnson, 79 and an Ivoryton native ("grew up on Summit Street," he says), was just at work. From there, we can see all the way down the slope to the trees, and

continued on page 2

Essex Woods & Waters is published three times a year to keep members informed about properties, events and other activities. Call any board member for information or email us at essexlandtrust@comcast.net. Board members are Bill Grover (President), Bruce Glowac (1st Vice President), Bob Nussbaum (2nd Vice President), Gudrun LeLash (Secretary), Mike Carlucci (Treasurer), Paul Greenberg (Past President), Chet Arnold (Land Acquisition), Suzy Burke (Membership), Carol MacElwee (Communications), Al Macgregor (Chief Steward), Terry Smith (New Members), Peggy Tuttle (Programs and Events) and Brian Willis (Volunteers). Essex Woods & Waters is edited by Steve Knauth and Carol MacElwee with editorial assistance from Barbara Hughes and graphic design from AC Proctor, Essex Printing.

Platt Section of Bushy Hill Nature Preserve: Progress Report

by Steve Knauth

The first trail in the 30-acre Platt Property is ready for hikers.

Laid out by members of the ELT, the final trail was cut, cleared and marked in July. Hikers will find it at a junction with the Bushy Hill Nature Preserve “Red” trail west of Trout Brook in the park’s south central area.

Ron Nelson of Winthrop Hill Road in Ivoryton will be the new steward, according to Chief Steward Al Macgregor. He will work closely with Richard Helmecki, a member of the Essex Conservation Commission. The property, purchased by the Land Trust with the help of the town of Essex, the state of Connecticut and a host of contributors, abuts the approximately 110-acre preserve, which has been developed and managed by the Essex Conservation Commission. The land has extensive wetlands and a floodplain, along with granite outcroppings and ledges. The Falls River forms part of its border.

The Platt land shares much of the same kind of terrain, with wetlands at its southern fringes and higher ground where it joins the preserve. Much of the land is rocky and thick with laurel, and there are many rich, vernal pools. Stands of mature forest – oak, maple, beech and tulip trees – dominate the northern portion.

The new Platt property trail, named after the Buddy Platt family, who sold the land to the trust, is marked and blazed as “Green.” The winding path forms an easy-to-moderate loop with many highlights for hikers, according to Macgregor. “It passes a huge oak tree and many rocky outcroppings, several stands of laurel and large beech trees,” he says. “There are three small hills and the trail also follows a small creek for a short distance.”

More trails are planned, including one that will cross the stream and continue on into Westbrook (six acres of



The addition of 30 new acres of the Platt property will bring the Bushy Hill Nature Preserve to close to 140 acres with hiking trails and many beautiful rock outcroppings. In this photo Steve Knauth, left, and Bill Reichenbach, right, check out an ancient oak tree on the original property. Photo by Bill Grover

the parcel are in that town) to a proposed second entrance and parking lot. “A bridge over the Falls River is something we need to plan for, and hopefully we can build one this fall,” says Macgregor. “A path would then be cleared from East Pond Meadow road to connect to the present trail.”

Come visit the Land Trust’s newest park, and plan to join in an ELT walk, scheduled for October 5.

Take a Walk with Murwin Johnson continued from page 1

beyond, across the valley in which a hidden Main Street runs, and up the other hillside to the north. It’s the kind of wide expanse we’re not used to on the shoreline, where trees abound; the view is breathtaking.

We walk back up to the barn under the hot sun, turn past the chicken house, from which the sound of hens emanates, and enter a welcome ramble of shade trees, tall white oaks that overlook a well-worn dirt road. There’s a light breeze blowing under the canopy. One lone Wolf Oak stands out, a towering old tree, surrounded by mature trees that would be good for timber, says Johnson. The road opens to a further field, and a perfectly formed maple tree that stands by itself, green against the brown

hay. More Wyeth.

Beyond the field, a line of trees marks the path of a stream where the property ends. The sky is blue, the field is brown, the distant trees are green, and there are birds singing.

Johnson says one developer told him he could put in 20 houses here. The “part-time” farmer resisted the offer, and has worked instead with the Essex Land Trust to preserve it from development. An agreement whereby the trust would obtain development rights over some 40-plus acres of the Johnson holdings is pending. “It’s really a beautiful spot, and every day is different,” he says. “And I just have the feeling my Mother and Dad would love to have seen it kept open.”

Members Respond to Call for Volunteers

by Brian Willis
ELT Volunteer Chairman

In March 2008 ELT set up a more formalized volunteer corps with the help of the new database to draw on the pool of members willing to help with maintenance and other projects.

Nearly all members called seem pleased to respond. When they sent in their membership forms, fully half said they would help and half of those have participated already this year.

They are involved in a range of activities - from planting the new trailhead signs to setting up tables at Millrace, to taking care of mailings to members and even watering new plants at Cross Lots. Many photographers have been taking pictures at our various events. Our volunteers are helping us acquire more open spaces and make them as accessible and enjoyable as possible for our residents and visitors.

Please call me at 767-1736 or email me at brian.willis@snet.net if you are interested in a volunteer job with the Land Trust.

Mary Ellen Cozzolino Trims the Roses



Sometimes ELT volunteers take it upon themselves to pick up a job that needs doing.

Mary Ellen Cozzolino, longtime Land Trust volunteer, is shown above trimming the roses at Cross Lots in May. She has been trimming these roses for more than five years and as a result the Cross Lots roses are healthy and beautiful. Many thanks, Mary Ellen.

Photo by Charlotte Walters

Over Eighty Volunteers Make a Difference in 2008

Our thanks to the many volunteers who have worked hard in 2008. This list does not include members of the Board of Directors.

Barbara Anselmi
Tip Atkeson
Peggy Baer
Steve Bancroft
Leslie Barlow
Haynes Bayless
Augusta Benjamin
Ken Benjamin
Pam Bernardi
Sharon Bray
Adrienne Brochu
George Bullwinkel
Ed Burke
Mary Ellen Cozzolino
Ron Cozzolino
Jim Denham
Robert Donohue
David Dorrance
Barbara Edwards
Maureen Ekberg
Mimi Merton Elder

Said Esfahanian
Helen Fox
Doug Gingrave
Nancy Gould
Bob Graulich
Grayson Gregory
Dee Grover
Barbara Hall
Frank Hall
Elaine Haughton
Dana Hill
Barbara Hughes
Bob Hughes
Joan Hurworth
Paul Ireland
Debra Jackson
Kathy Katz
Sarah Keenan
Jonathan Kelley
Judy Kells
David Kelsey

Judy Kelsey
Scotland King
Steve Knauth
David LaBella
Mara Lavitt
Sarah Lively
Jeff Lovelace
Jack MacElwee
Richard Makuck
Ed Marcos
Paul Marden
Tom Marston
John Matthiessen
Mike Milano
Ron Nelson
David Newbegin
Chuck Nolin
Rose Nolin
Wini Olson
Augie Pampel
Penny Parker

Jane Piro
Mark Reeves
Bill Reichenbach
Alec Robertson
Keith Rustemeyer
Lucy Rutherford
Tom Rutherford
Tia Smith
Nancy Sneath
Jack Spangler
Fred Szufnarowski
Bob Taylor
Judy Taylor
Bill Tubbs
Howard Tuttle
Alice Vandeursen
Bob Walters
Charlotte Walters
Stuart Warner
Debbie Weinstein
Lew Weinstein
Rosemary Willis

New Stewards Appointed to Canfield Meadow Woods

Dana Hill of West Hills Road in Ivoryton was recently appointed steward of Canfield Meadow Woods, announced Al Macgregor, Chief Steward. Dana will be supported by Assistant Stewards Doug Gingrave of Essex Street in Deep River; Ed Marcos of Main Street in Centerbrook; and Frank Hall of Benson Lane in Essex. Dana replaces Charlie Roy whose vision it was for the preserve to be managed as one entity and who initiated the process by helping Deep River to improve its trailmarking system.

In the past year the stakeholders of the 300 acre preserve, Deep River Conservation Commission, Deep River Land Trust, Essex Conservation Commission and Essex Land Trust, have come together to develop a plan of improvements for the property.

The Rockfall Foundation has contributed to the initiative as have the stakeholder organizations.

Anticipated by the end of the year are additional trailmarkers, an improved entrance on Dennison Road, new directional signs pointing to key locations, and a plan of maintenance and improvements for 2009 that represents the interests of all stakeholder organizations. Janet Stone of the Deep River Land Trust has already completed a new trail map. Copies are available at all entrances. Hikers are asked to recycle these maps when possible since they are in color and expensive to reproduce. Hikers should have an easy time following the color coded trail map. Janet works for the US Geodetic Survey at Avery Point and generously donated her time and expertise in developing this new and improved map.

For more information on Canfield Meadow Woods contact Dana Hill at 767-8328.

Essex Garden Club Promotes Green

by Linda Levene, President, Essex Garden Club

The Essex Garden Club printed a bookmark for distribution to customers at this year's May Market in Essex.

The bookmark is both a way to reach out to the community as an organization as well as to encourage Essex and other Connecticut residents to think more about conserving our diminishing resources. It is available at the Essex Library and is enclosed. As Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

The Essex Land Trust works closely with the Garden Club and has received assistance in landscaping entrances to properties. With the improvement of the Cross Lots Barn two years ago, the Land Trust was able to provide space at Cross Lots for the Garden Club to conduct its "dig and divide" activities making Garden Club members' plants available for sale each spring.

On Sunday, October 19, at 4:00 pm, Bill Harris of Acer Gardens in Deep River will speak at the Essex Library as part of the Garden Club's ongoing outreach efforts. For this event the Garden Club is partnering with the Friends of the Essex Library to make programs on gardening and conservation issues available to the whole community. Since this is such a great time to work in the garden,

Harris will discuss several aspects of fall gardening such as planting shrubs and bulbs, dividing plants, deadheading, what and when to prune, compost, seeding lawns, repelling deer and controlling pests in the winter garden. He will be happy to answer questions from the audience. The Garden Club, the Land Trust and the Friends of the Essex Library all encourage your attendance.

Have You Seen These Posters Around Town?



The poster, shown above, features the most recent Land Trust event. Steve

Haines of Haines Design has created the distinctive designs of all posters throughout 2007 and 2008. They are distributed in Essex, Centerbrook and Ivoryton by Alec Robertson and Paul Marden.

Gala Celebration Honors Essex Land Trust's Conservators

by Joan Hurworth

The Essex Corinthian Yacht Club was the setting for a special evening of recognition on July 25th.

A cocktail reception, catered by the club's own chef, Abby Miner, with the addition of donated platters of large shrimp from Old Saybrook's Atlantic Seafood, provided a delicious setting for the festivities. ELT President, Bill Grover, welcomed all members, with particular recognition to attending past Presidents and the organization's Conservators, so important to the ongoing success of the organization. Bill brought members up-to-date on the latest projects of the Land Trust, notably, the future publication of a new pocket trail guide with maps, which will also be available online. In addition, the expected acquisition of conservation restriction and development rights over forty-two acres of the Johnson Farm was discussed with great anticipation.

The evening's highlight was the presentation and slide show by Andrew Griswold, noted naturalist and director of EcoTravel for the Connecticut Audubon Society. The subject was the annual polar bear migration along the Hudson Bay coast to Churchill, Manitoba, considered to be the "Polar Bear Capital of the World". Griswold has conducted tours to see this annual phenomenon, observing, close hand, these large, beautiful animals while they wait out the formation of the ice, enabling them to leave



Over 80 people attended the Conservators' reception in July at the Essex Corinthian Yacht Club. Photo by Frank Hall

and spend the winter hunting seals. Their livelihood is in jeopardy and the continuation of the species is at risk between its loss of habitat, oil exploration and the melting of the arctic ice due to global warming. Andy told us of their numbers decreasing at an alarming rate and forecasted the possible extinction of this vulnerable true marine mammal, dependent on the sea for its existence. A question and answer period followed the slide show presentation.

Redesigned Website Launched in August

Essexlandtrust.org or essexlandtrust.com.... both addresses will get you to the Land Trust's redesigned website where you can find the locations of open space properties in Essex, find out about an outdoor or indoor Land Trust sponsored event, or see a slideshow of a recent ELT activity.

The new site is designed by Steve Haines of Haines

Design who has volunteered many hours of his time and expertise to improve the organizational identity of the Land Trust. Around town you will see posters announcing events ... brochures promoting membership ... and new, more visible signs at the entrances to Land Trust properties.

All have been the result of the generosity and talent of Steve, an ardent supporter of the mission of the Essex Land Trust. He has been assisted by his wife, Barbara, who is both an artist and technical expert in the firm.

The first website was thanks to the work of Harry Bird who brought the Land Trust into the world of computers and databases. Harry is taking a well-deserved vacation with Goody Lelash aboard his 40+ foot yacht, *Bluebird*.

For further information, contact Carol MacElwee, communications director, at 767-2023 or carolmacelwee@comcast.net.

Shown left is a graphic of the website's new homepage.



Coming Events - Save the Date!

Thursday, August 21 at 5 pm

Canoe/Kayak/ Picnic

to North Cove, Falls River and Osage Trails. Launch your vessel at the Bushnell St. public access (note change from previously announced start point). Paddle through North Cove and the Falls River with Phil Miller leading the way. BYO picnic supper which you can keep in your canoe/kayak or have transported separately by car to Osage Trails Preserve. We'll paddle back to Bushnell St. by dusk.

Sunday, September 7 at 5 pm

ELT's 40th Anniversary Plaque Dedication Ceremony

Come join a toast to 40 years of ELT's vibrant history. A bronze placque with over 100 names including founders, land donors and other generous contributors will be unveiled at Cross Lots on West Avenue. Park at Town Hall.

Tuesday, September 23 at 7:30 pm

Great Hikes in Connecticut

Join Jim Little of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association at the Essex Library. He will talk about the best hikes in Connecticut over the state's 800 miles of blazed trails. He will also discuss how trails are an integral part of the Connecticut conservation movement. Copies of the popular "Walk Book" will be available as will other pamphlets and materials.

Sunday, October 5 at 1 pm

Platt/Bushy Hill Preserve Walk

There's much for young and old to learn about the newest ELT property. Phil Miller will lead the walk which will not be strenuous. Park at ELT parking area on East Pond Meadow Road in Westbrook.

Essex Land Trust's Major Donors to be Honored during ELT's 40th Year

Everyone is invited to the unveiling of a large bronze plaque mounted on a boulder at Cross Lots on Sunday, September 7th, at 5:00 PM. This plaque honors the Conservators who have contributed major financial support as well as those who have given significant amounts of time, or acres of land. These conservators are what make it possible for the land trust to acquire significant properties in the community for generations to enjoy. Raise your glass at this reception to honor our most generous contributors. Park at the Cross Lots parking area or in the Town Hall parking lot. A path from the Cross Lots parking area leads you to the boulder.



Shown above are Andrew and Amy from Computer Signs in Old Saybrook giving us a preview of the bronze placque. Don't miss the unveiling. Photo by Jack MacElwee

Carleton Barlow, Sr., Memorial Tops \$4,000

Our thanks to the Barlow Family for designating the Essex Land Trust as one of the recipients for memorial gifts in honor of Carleton M. Barlow, Sr. The memorial to date has raised \$4,250. Carl was active in the Land Trust for many years and he enjoyed participating in work parties. He loved to walk all over town and was known for his meticulous picking up of trash along his route. Carl died on February 26th of this year.

Thanks to Essex Savings Bank!



The Essex Land Trust would like to thank Essex Savings Bank for its generous ongoing support, including underwriting *Essex Woods and Waters!*