

## With Passion and Determination, Leona Brought Her Vision to Life

A one-woman force for conservation, Leona Asker saw the need for land protection in Plymouth and spearheaded the formation of Wildlands Trust.

A worn, faded snapshot marking a seminal moment in the history of Wildlands Trust is one of the only photographic records we have of our remarkable founder, Leona Asker. That's Leona sitting on the left as Arthur H. Emery, and his sister-in-law Mary Bradley Emery, sign the papers for their family's donation of land—the first property protected by the Trust.

Our huge network of supporters today grew from the efforts of this extraordinary woman back in late 1972. Leona Asker, a resident of Manomet, was concerned that mounting development pressures that came with the new Pilgrim power plant would threaten the character of Plymouth. She decided to do something about it. After reading an article about the activities of the Essex County Greenbelt Alliance, she was inspired to establish a similar land trust in Plymouth County.

Leona was not a conservationist by profession; however, as a clerk for the Board of Selectmen in Plymouth, she knew a lot of people she thought might be interested in her cause. She contacted

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In this 40th anniversary issue of Wildlands News, we take a look at the roots of Wildlands Trust and where we are today.



The Wildlands Trust is a non-profit organization dedicated to conserving land and preserving the natural heritage of Southeastern Massachusetts. We work to permanently protect and steward important habitats and landscapes, including woodlands and fields, ponds, coastal areas, agricultural lands, and river systems.

[www.wildlandstrust.org](http://www.wildlandstrust.org)

# Reaching for the Stars

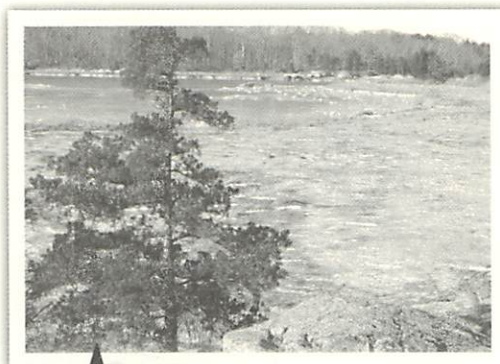
Our commitment is to do what it takes to make the entire constellation of our protected properties shine.

Many start-up organizations are launched by a single event that underscores the importance and relevance of their mission. For the Wildlands Trust it was the impending arrival of the nuclear power plant in Plymouth. Residents who cherished the open and rural character of their landscape feared a land grab by out-of-town developers lining up to take advantage of the promised lower taxes, compliments of the Boston Edison Company.

This public concern for the ecological and aesthetic integrity of Plymouth led to a call for action, which resulted in the creation of our land trust. Next, it was a single family that stepped forward to make the dream a reality. Offering to donate the family's 112 acres on Ship Pond Road, the Emery family of Plymouth and Boston was responsible for that very first star on our map.

Ever since then, it has been the practice at the Trust to represent our conserved lands with stars on a map, which today total 205. The "star map," as we call it in the office, may give insight to the impressive scope and expanse of the Trust's reach, yet it falls short in communicating the enormous responsibility that comes with each of those stars—the trails, the tree work, the wildlife, the neighbors, the public safety, the monitoring, and the mowing just to name some.

As we celebrate our 40th anniversary and plan for the next decade of the Wildlands Trust, we concern ourselves not only with the number of stars on our map, but just as important, the obligations that come with each of them. These obligations, which are expensive to fulfill and run in perpetuity, are the impetus behind the Davis-Douglas Farm, the new home of the Wildlands Trust. As we move forward toward 2023, the Farm will be the center of our strategic vision providing the Wildlands Trust with the opportunity to engage the public and grow our base of support because our goal is not simply to accumulate stars, but to make sure each of these stars shines brightly.



Emery Preserve was the first of 205 stars representing land protected by the Trust.

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Administrative offices are at  
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FOR INFORMATION about membership or the benefits of conveying land or conservation restrictions (agricultural included) to the Trust, call or write:

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Karen Grey  
Executive Director





# Wildlands Trust: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

The Trust was formed in an era characterized by a burgeoning environmental awareness at the grass roots level. Since Wildlands Trust's inception, the land trust movement both in Massachusetts and nationally has experienced explosive growth. In 1973, there were only a handful of land trusts in Massachusetts—today there are an astonishing 140. As the nature of land



## THE POWER OF VOLUNTEERS

Although much has changed in the four decades since our founders ushered the Trust into being, one essential reality has not: the work of preserving land requires a serious commitment of time and energy. Wildlands Trust has grown and thrived over the past 40 years due in large part to the contribution of volunteers. From the innumerable professional and legal hours donated by the experts in their fields, to the all-hands-on-deck response we depend on for mailings, the generous gift of themselves given by volunteers is priceless. We take this moment to acknowledge the good works of the original volunteers, and their modern counterparts who help keep the mission alive today.

## Old Colony Memorial

Thursday, January 17, 1974

### Plymouth County Trust To Acquire 1st Piece Of Land

**PLYMOUTH** — The Plymouth County Wildlands Trust, formed less than a year ago with the goal of acquiring land to be preserved in a natural state, is about to obtain its first parcel.

The land is 115 acres of woods off Ship Pond Road west of Route 3, south of the Clark Road exit, and is being donated to the county trust by its owner, Mrs. Mary Emery.

A Form A plan of the land was approved by the planning board Monday as not requiring subdivision control.

The plan was submitted to the planning board on behalf of the trust by Mrs. Leona Asker, who was active in the formation of the wildlands trust.

The trust is close to acquiring land in other towns, including Kingston and Wareham, according to Mrs. Asker.



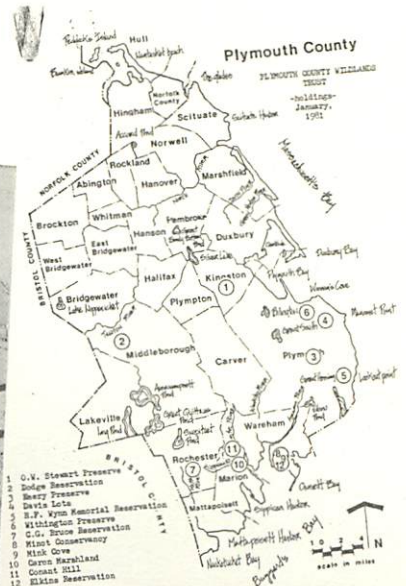
John W. Peirce

### John W. Peirce honored for conservation work

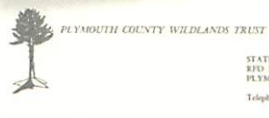
**WAREHAM** — John Wentworth Peirce of Wareham and Topsfield, director of the Plymouth County Wildlands Trust, recently received the annual Trustees of Reservations Conservation Award for outstanding conservation work.

Plymouth County and helped to form the Plymouth County Wildlands Trust, a newly created 200-acre of open land.

He has been a member of the Trustees of Reservations for many years and served on the Mass. Pla-



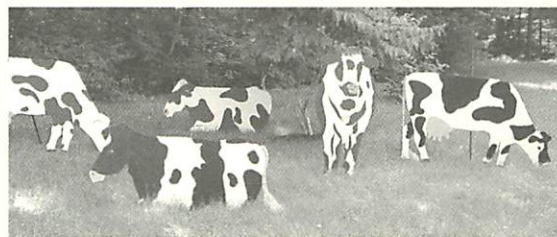
Once a piece of property has been turned over to the Trust, the group assumes the responsibility of maintaining it. "Ideally, the grantor includes an endowment along with the gift of land to be used for maintenance, but it's up to us to see that the work is done," explained Mrs. Asker.



- 1973** Plymouth County Wildlands Trust (PCWT) charter recorded at Plymouth County Registry of Deeds
- 1973** PCWT receives first donation of property: Emery Preserve, Plymouth
- 1978** PCWT holdings total 244 acres
- 1979** 400 acres saved
- 1982** PCWT membership reaches 112
- 1985** 1,000 acres saved
- 1992** PCWT acquires first conservation restriction (CR) in Wareham, from Trust cofounder Jack Peirce
- 1993** PCWT's first Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR): Grazing Fields Farm, Bourne
- 1995** Trust Hires First Full Time Executive Director
- 1995** PCWT receives donation of the Philbrick house and land in Duxbury for our current headquarters
- 1996** Name change to The Wildlands Trust of Southeastern Massachusetts (WTSM)
- 1997** Trust's first purchase of conservation land: Willow Brook Farm, Pembroke
- 1999** New amenities for public access added to Willow Brook Farm, including boardwalks and an observation tower

# and Tomorrow

As conservation protection expands and changes, Wildlands Trust continues to evolve. The next generation of conservation-minded individuals are stepping up to the challenges of the new millennium with the same fervor as their predecessors, bringing tools and skills unknown back then. Here is a sampling of people and highlights from the Trust's 40-year journey on the vanguard of conservation.



## MANAGING IS AS IMPORTANT AS GETTING

From the Trust's beginning, stewardship was a top priority. Leona Asker told the Old Colony Memorial in a 1974 interview, "Ideally the grant-or includes an endowment along with the gift of land to be used for maintenance, but it's up to us to see that the work is done." That work includes managing habitat for wildlife and biodiversity; improvements like new trails, boardwalks, parking areas, kiosks; mowing fields, removing invasive species, brush clearing—the list goes on. A 1982 Trust memo strongly emphasizes that "managing the land we have is as important as getting it in the first place." Carrying out the stewardship side of land conservation continues to be as vital a part of our work today.



### OUR PURPOSE

*... to assist in preserving in the natural condition and otherwise promoting the protection of open lands ..."*  
(from the Declaration of Trust)



**2000** Almost 3,000 acres saved

**2000** Mass. Legislature passes Community Preservation Act (CPA) into law

**2004** Trust holds 1st CPA CR, in Duxbury

**2004** Taunton River Watershed Campaign launched with support from the Sheehan Family Foundation

**2005** Trust-led effort preserves O'Neil Farm, the last dairy farm in Duxbury and one of the few remaining in the South Shore region

**2005** Trust joins North & South Rivers Watershed Initiative

**2007** 5,000 acres saved

**2009** Trust launches an updated internet presence with a redesigned content-rich, user-friendly web site

**2009** Name changed to Wildlands Trust

**2009** Trust collaborates with Mass. DFG to create the 230-acre Great River Preserve along the Taunton River in Bridgewater

**2012** Davis-Douglas Farm, Plymouth, purchased for new Wildlands Trust conservation center and headquarters

**2012** Trust establishes its first sizable urban preserve by accepting a transfer of 124 acres from the Brockton Audubon Society

**2013** Happy 40th! 6,700 acres saved

2013

## Joining Forces With Like-Minded Organizations Enhances the Effectiveness of the Trust

Over the years, protecting land has become a more complicated endeavor. Wildlands Trust is fortunate to call upon a wide array of public and private collaborators. The Trust works closely with state agencies that incorporate land protection into their mission, including the Massachusetts Division of Fish and Game and the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Through these alliances we have helped protect significant properties in recent years, including the Great River Preserve in Bridgewater and Sweets Knoll State Park in Dighton.

Collaborations with fellow non-profit organizations have also proven very beneficial to our land protection efforts. The Nature Conservancy is a valued and respected partner that has added considerably to our work, particularly in the Taunton River Watershed. Regional planning agencies, such as the Taunton-based SRPEDD, generously share their expertise and community-specific knowledge.

COLLABORATIONS  
ENABLE THE TRUST  
TO EXPAND OUR  
CAPABILITIES AND  
BROADEN THE SCOPE  
OF OUR LAND  
PROTECTION MISSION

## With Passion and Determination, Leona Brought Her Vision to Life

—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

John W. “Jack” Peirce, the founder of the Essex County Group, and he agreed to meet with Leona and a group of Plymouth residents to explain the benefits in warding off building construction by preserving land in its natural condition. Leona used her networking skills to assemble that first group of individuals: Kathleen Anderson, Executive Director of the Manomet Bird Observatory, Developer Joseph Davis, Attorney Robert L. Shea, Selectman Sumner A. Chapman, Jr., her sister Phyllis Buck, and about 25 others. Everyone agreed that such an organization was a great idea.

So began the Plymouth County Wildlands Trust (our name was later changed to Wildlands Trust) whose charter was recorded at the Plymouth County Registry of Deeds on February 28, 1973. Attorney Shea drew up the incorporation papers and did all of the necessary legal work pro bono. Kathleen “Betty” Anderson became the group’s first president.

From then on, Leona Asker did whatever it took to advance the Trust’s work. Folders in the Trust archives are filled with

hundreds of personal letters hand-typed by Leona on blue onionskin. Before the end of its first year the organization received a donation of land from the Emery family of Plymouth. In Leona’s words, “First excitement for us was that Mary Emery and her family of Long Pond, Plymouth, were interested in preserving some land.” Leona’s anticipation was so great, she rolled up her sleeves to help Mary get her house in shape for her daughter Charlotte’s wedding. Soon PCWT was the owner of 112 acres of land.

Insight into Leona’s style comes from an anecdote she related. At a public meeting in Wareham, a rather secretive acting woman showed up to ask questions about PCWT. The woman was interested in donating land but stated that she didn’t want to discuss it or to be bothered with visits and questions. So one afternoon, Leona and her sister Phyllis disguised themselves and drove by the woman’s property several times—checking out what is now the Bruce Reservation. Another time, the Trust received a letter from an elderly gentleman asking if there was a fund available for feeding wildlife in his area. He was living

on a fixed income and could no longer afford to feed the animals on his own. Leona wrote back that the Trust’s membership contributions for land could not be used for wildlife. But she enclosed five dollars of her own money as a gift, and then sent a copy of his letter to the Plymouth Old Colony Memorial with the hope it would be printed and others would offer support.

Leona’s final act of commitment to the Trust was the bequest that she left to the organization when she died in 2011.

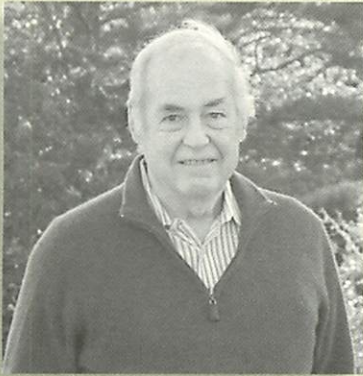
Our current network of members, volunteers, and supporters has grown exponentially because of Leona Asker and others like her—local concerned residents, professional conservationists, town officials, bankers, lawyers, accountants, and countless others who share a passion for land conservation and have offered up their enthusiastic assistance these past four decades. There is not enough space in this newsletter to name everyone, but on the occasion of our 40th anniversary, we offer our whole-hearted thanks to Leona and all of you who have made our work possible.

# Thank You For Your Contribution

The Trust relies on private philanthropy to fund the work we do to save land throughout the region. You, our members, *are* the Wildlands Trust. Thank you for your vision and for your dedication to preserving land for future generations.

## Welcome New Members

Wildlands Trust welcomes the 76 new members who joined the Trust between June 2013 and September 2013. We thank you for your support.



### MEET BILL ABBOT, ESQ.

Environmental activist, attorney, and founding member Bill Abbott has donated countless hours of counsel to the Trust. His significant efforts helped grow the Trust's portfolio of protected land from one preserve in 1973 to over 200 preserves in 34 towns across southeastern Massachusetts. We asked Bill to share his reflections on the Trust's early days.

*Member:* Bill Abbot, Esq.

*Hometown:* Plymouth, MA

*Founding Member:* 1973

"We [the Wildlands Trust founders] realized in 1973 that our South Shore towns were under the threat of rapid and rampant development, and time was running out to protect the extraor-

inary natural areas that make our region unique in the State. The Trust was born out of this shared feeling that without concerted and dedicated action countless diverse and pristine natural areas would be forever lost. That was the motivation of the Trust founders from the get-go, to seek out these special lands before they succumbed to the bulldozers of developers, and we had superb cooperation from landowners who shared our vision.

We met weekly, and every Saturday morning we visited potential land parcels that we could bring under the Trust's protection. Thinking back I can say that these were some of my own most enjoyable Saturdays ever spent, and also immensely satisfying as the number of Trust properties steadily grew. With no staff and no funds every land acquisition was the result of a volunteer effort.

It is so heartening to see that this same vision we had decades ago continues to motivate the Trust today—there is still so much land out there worthy of protection and landowners looking for a way to preserve what they feel so connected to. The next 40 years hold great promise for the Trust and its mission. The threat of development continues unabated, and the entire region will surely benefit as more and more lands are saved by the Trust to be enjoyed by us all."

## In Memory of

JENEBA STEWART ALLARD

-Ann Stewart, *Cambridge*

WESLEY ALLISON

-Kenneth Huhn, *Bethlehem, PA*

GAIL BRIGGS

-Evelyn Hannigan & Robert Jacobson,  
*Plympton*

-Pat and Karen Wheatley, *Cornish, NH*

AGNES & PERCY DOUGLAS

-Arthur & Jo-an Carbary, *Redmond, WA*

CHANDLER GREGG

-Kim McGinn & Phyllis Wilson,  
*Charlotte, NC*

-Lindsay Price, *Jamaica Plain*

RICHARD WARREN HOWE

-Roger & Rhoda Berkowitz, *Pittsboro, NC*

-Samuel & Dorothy Davis, *Duxbury*

-Frances Fisher, *Chapel Hill, NC*

-Anne & Karl Granath, *Pittsboro, NC*

-Lawrence Howe, *Evanston, IL*

-Linda Landberg, *Patterson, NY*

-Karen Siroky, *San Diego, CA*

NEIL JOHNSON

-Arthur Vautrain, *Duxbury*

JOHN F. LYNCH

-Anne Lynch, *Plymouth*

DENNIS MCKEON

-Mike and Cyndy Cotter, *Quincy*

## Donate Online

You can now renew your membership or donate online at the Trust's web site, [www.wildlandstrust.org](http://www.wildlandstrust.org).

Look for "Support Our Work" on the blue menu bar.

Of course, you can still use the envelope enclosed in this newsletter or call 781-934-9018.



## PLANNED GIVING

# A Gift As Enduring As Nature

Your legacy lives on when you make a bequest to Wildlands Trust.



Would you like to have your great, great, grand children walk the trails that you walked? Or ensure that natural spaces and habitats will remain untouched as the world develops and sprawls? Or maybe just feel good knowing that your legacy will live on in the landscapes you love? Consider including Wildlands Trust in your planned giving.

The Trust has almost 7,000 acres under its care and continues to grow as land is added to our inventory

of protected properties. The generosity of many individuals has enabled us to establish a basis to secure the financial capacity to steward these lands and preserve their conservation values for the long-haul.

Among those donors who share our passion to protect land and the natural heritage of southeastern Massachusetts, many have had the vision to bequeath generous gifts through their estate planning. Their planned giving has made a significant impact on the Trust's strength and ability to continue to further its mission. Not so long ago, we said good-bye to Leona Asker and Helen Philbrick. Through their wills, these visionary founders continue to be great supporters of the Trust even when they are no longer with us.

An estate plan ensures that your assets will be distributed in a way that meets your financial and personal goals. The sisters Helen and Marjorie Belcher bequeathed over \$600,000 to Wildlands Trust by naming the Trust a beneficiary of their estate. There are many different ways for you to set up your plan. A bequest in your will is one of the simplest ways to make a planned gift to Wildlands Trust. If you have already done your estate planning, a codicil to your will may be added to make your bequest. Whatever route you choose, it's always a good idea to seek professional advice.

To get started today, call Wildlands Trust to discuss your ideas and intentions. We look forward to partnering with you to protect the landscapes you love and to leave a lasting legacy.