

Trust preserves wildlands areas in Plymouth

By Anne Bartlett
The Patriot Ledger

KINGSTON — From a high piece of land next to Sylvia Place Pond, LeBaron Briggs looked out at the grove of pine and oak trees and remembered the late Gertrude Stewart.

The Stewart family owned the Kingston property on which Briggs stood, and lived nearby for 50 years. "They saw the gravel operations and building going on in the area, and realized the pressures all around us. They said, 'We don't want that to happen to our land,'" said Briggs.

In 1975, the Stewarts decided to donate the 13-acre property off Route 80 to the Plymouth County Wildlands Trust. Before Gertrude Stewart died last summer at the age of 92, she knew that the land she loved would never become a gravel pit or a housing development.

Thanks to gifts from people like the Stewarts who don't want their land to be developed, the Plymouth County Wildlands Trust now owns nearly 800 acres in eight towns throughout the county, including Plymouth, Kingston, Duxbury and Marshfield.

The 350-member organization protects those lands from the development that has overtaken much of Plymouth County, and makes them available to hikers, bird watchers, photographers and people who just like quiet walks in the woods.

The trust "was started in 1973 by a group of people who were concerned about and interested in preserving open space in Plymouth County," said Briggs, a Plymouth resident who serves as the organization's reservations committee chairman. "As the population grows, there will be places people can go that will be undeveloped."

Its first acquisition was the 112-acre Emery Preserve in Plymouth. It now owns 19 properties, and its



LeBaron Briggs and Linda Hewitt of the Plymouth County Wildlands Trust, on Kingston's Stewart Preserve.

Greg Derr/The Patriot Ledger

membership has grown in the last six years from 50 to 350.

The Plymouth-based trust is interested in relatively unremarkable land that might be turned down by large organizations such as the Nature Conservancy and the Trustees of Reservations.

"The national groups aren't as interested in keeping local lands," said trustee Linda Hewitt of Pembroke. Added Briggs, "They are lovely woods, but they are, perhaps, not unique. They nicely represent samples of Plymouth County habitat. They are of interest and value to people locally, but not on a larger

scale."

The trust has received all its land by donation so far, but would consider purchasing modestly priced property in the future if it were able to raise the money, Hewitt said. The organization is now largely dependent on membership dues, and had expenses of about \$6,000 last year.

The organization does not accept every piece of land that is offered. "When land is offered, we look at it carefully in terms of preserving its character, and the likelihood of our being able to take care of it," said Briggs. If the piece was a small lot already surrounded by houses, for

example, the trust probably couldn't protect it.

Donating land to the trust has advantages for property owners. They no longer have to pay real estate taxes, and can deduct the worth of the gift from their income taxes. But Briggs noted, "If you sold it to someone who was going to put up six houses, you'd get a lot more money."

The donors' primary motivation, said Briggs, is "love of the land and desire to see it stay the way it is."

In the past, most potential donors found out about the trust through word of mouth. "Now, we're making

The Plymouth County Wildlands Trust as of September 1985. The acreage, location and the

1. Emery Preserve: 112.5
2. Davis Grove: 1 acre, Plymouth
3. Caron Marshland: 1.25
4. Minot-Weld Conservation: 1981.
5. Stewart Preserve: 13.2
6. Mink Cove: 9 acres, West
7. Bruce Reservation: 10.4
8. Conant Hill: 23.4 acres,
9. Wynn Memorial Reser
10. Elkins Reservation: 16
11. Dodge Reservation: 5
12. Withington Preserve: 1
13. Great Harry Foot Island
14. West Shore Preser Plymouth, 1982.
15. LeBlanc Marsh Reser
16. Old Field Pond Pre 1983.
17. Charles L. Cherry Pre
18. Keith Properties: 19.7
19. Gallows' Pond Preser

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Once the trust acquires a property, its volunteers maintain the reservation, and in some cases build there. The Stewart Preserve in Kingston is unique in that it has a herring ladder, which was built in 1981.

The trust regularly sponsors programs on its reservations, and attempts to educate the public about the area's natural resources. "Excursion on the North River draws people, Hewitt said.

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as in Plymouth County



Derr/The Patriot Ledger
ton's Stewart Preserve.

The Plymouth County Wildlands Trust held nearly 800 acres as of September 1985. The list below includes each property's acreage, location and the year acquired.

1. Emery Preserve: 112.5 acres, Plymouth, 1973.
2. Davis Grove: 1 acre, Plymouth, 1974.
3. Caron Marshland: 1.25 acres, Wareham, 1975.
4. Minot-Weld Conservancy: 53 acres, Wareham, 1975 and 1981.
5. Stewart Preserve: 13.25 acres, Kingston, 1975.
6. Mink Cove: 9 acres, Wareham, 1976.
7. Bruce Reservation: 10.5 acres, Rochester, 1976.
8. Conant Hill: 23.4 acres, Wareham, 1976.
9. Wynn Memorial Reservation: 83.4 acres, Ellenville, 1978.
10. Elkins Reservation: 16.6 acres, Wareham, 1979 and 1980.
11. Dodge Reservation: 52 acres, Middleboro, 1980.
12. Withington Preserve: 0.31 acre, Plymouth, 1980.
13. Great Harry Foot Island: 10 acres, Duxbury, 1981.
14. West Shore Preserve at Halfway Pond: 232.5 acres, Plymouth, 1982.
15. LeBlanc Marsh Reservation: 15 acres, Marshfield, 1983.
16. Old Field Pond Preserve: 115 acres, Bourne/Plymouth, 1983.
17. Charles L. Cherry Preserve: 12 acres, Kingston, 1984.
18. Keith Properties: 19.7 acres, Kingston, 1984.
19. Gallows' Pond Preserve: 17.5 acres, Plymouth, 1984.

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Once the trust acquires a property, its volunteers maintain the reservation, and in some cases build trails there. The Stewart Preserve in Kingston is unique in that it has a herring ladder, which was restored in 1981.

The trust regularly sponsors outings on its reservations, and attempts to educate the public about the area's natural resources. An excursion on the North River drew 150 people, Hewitt said.

The organization discourages pic-

nicking on its land, and prohibits use of off-road vehicles.

"The reservations are for people who just like to walk in the woods in a peaceful surrounding. There are a lot of people who like to do that," said Briggs as he made his way through the Stewart Preserve in Kingston. "They are woodland trails, they're not city park type trails. You may run into a bramble. But that doesn't bother the people who are interested in this type of walk."

People who want more information about the trust can write to it at State Road, RFD 8, Plymouth, 02360.