

A FIFTY YEAR HISTORY OF THE WYNDHAM LAND TRUST, INC.

“A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone”- Henry David Thoreau

Virginia “Jimmie” Wagoner was born in Bronxville, New York in 1922 and attended Syracuse University. During World War II she took time to work on engines at Pratt and Whitney and when the war ended in 1945 she went to work in the fashion industry in New York as a model and in management. She also was a violinist with the Hartford Symphony. She traveled extensively until 1956 when she married Henry Robert “Bob” Booth of Hillandale Farms in Brooklyn, Connecticut.

Bob’s great-grandfather William (1829-1912) had gained fame as the founder of the Salvation Army in 1865. Bob was born in New York City and was a former Navy pilot who joined the family textile business after his service.



In 1963 Bob and Jimmie Booth opened the Golden Lamb Buttery Restaurant at their hilltop farm where Jimmie was head chef until 2003. The setting and ambiance of this classic New England dining spot is fondly recalled by all who had the pleasure of visiting the beautiful, rustic setting.



Bob Booth (1922-2012)



Jimmie Booth (1922-2011)

In 1974 Jimmie was meeting with the family's attorney George H. Jackson and mentioned the idea of forming a Land Trust in order to preserve the vanishing woods, meadows and streams that were disappearing at an alarming rate and fortunately, for all of the residents of the northeast corner of Connecticut, George Jackson agreed to take on the task. Thus, on April 22, 1975, the Wyndham Land Trust, Incorporated was born.

George Jackson was born in 1939, lived in Pomfret and had an office on Main Street in Danielson. He had a thriving practice but found time to do the necessary bureaucratic application work to establish the non-profit group with the Secretary of State. He served as the first secretary and treasurer and was on the Board of Directors for forty-four years until 2019. George Jackson's unwavering commitment to his community should never be overlooked by all that have benefited from his wise guidance in the tremendous amount of volunteer work he has done.

One of the first hurdles was a name for the Trust and George learned there already existed a Windham Land Trust in the United States so the spelling became Wyndham.

Jimmie also recruited John Bigelow, Phillip G. James, Benjamin D. Williams III and local eccentric Lois Orswell as the founding Board of Directors. Otis Curtis from Danielson was also an early supporter. This formidable lineup served the Trust admirably and Lois Orswell provided a generous endowment in 1991.



The founders reunited at the Golden Lamb in 1987, left to right, seated Jimmie Booth, Lois Orswell, standing Ben Williams, Phil James, Dick Booth, George Jackson (Dick Booth was not one of the founders but served as President with great distinction for many years).

Phil James (1920-2001) was born in Dover, Massachusetts and raised in England. He returned to the States to pursue his Master's Degree in Literature and also served in the Army during World War II. When the war ended he joined the Army Reserve retiring in 1972 as a Lieutenant Colonel. He had a distinguished career in Education including being Chairman of the Trustees of Annhurst College in Woodstock.

John Bigelow (1910-2000) was the son of the founders of the Rectory School in Pomfret. He was one of its first students and served as headmaster as an adult.

Ben Williams (1936-2023) was a Princeton graduate from Long Island who became a Marine Corps Drill Instructor after his time in the Ivy League and this experience led him to a career in education. He came to Pomfret in 1961 to work at the Pomfret School. Ben served on the Board until 2019 and had a gift for public speaking, writing and the ability to lead anyone out of the foxhole and over the hill with his enthusiastic certainty.



Lois Orswell (1904-1998)

Lois Orswell was born in Pawtucket, Rhode Island in 1904. She inherited a fortune when her father passed away in 1944 and began assembling a world class art collection. In 1950 she purchased property in Pomfret which she named "Bafflin" and lived there until her passing in December 1998. She had divorced at a young age and lived alone maintaining a laser focus on the things that were important to her- art, her gardens, her animals and land preservation. She was described in the 1950s as looking "like something out of a portrait by John Singer Sargent...gracious, respectful, amusing, very smart, had a mind of her own and an iron will". She also had the resources to become a patron for many artists and fund the Harvard University Agnes Morgan Center for the Study of Prints, Drawings and Photographs. She also funded the endowment of the Land Trust so they could go about the business of acquiring property.

The mission of WLT was established to conserve and steward the natural resources of the area. It was decided early on not to limit the vision to a singular town so there were ten- Brooklyn, Canterbury, Eastford, Killingly, Plainfield, Pomfret, Putnam, Sterling, Thompson and Woodstock became the area that

would be focused on. Bylaws, Policies and Committees were organized and a legacy of conservation was begun.

It important to remember the environmental concerns of the 1970s. The sweeping and necessary federal regulations in regard to clean air and water had been enacted but had not yet had a positive effect on the landscape. There were long lines and riots at gas stations due to fuel shortages. Rivers ran red or green depending on what dye color the local mill was using that day. There were no bald eagles, turkeys, coyotes or bears to be found in Northeast Connecticut. A deer or hawk sighting was noteworthy. There was much cleanup work to be done.

WLT's first acquisition came in September 1977 with the donation of 29 acres by Joseph G. Chaffee in Putnam. The site is on the south side of Route 44 opposite Thurber Road. In 1980 37 acres were donated by Ann Averill Wright near the intersection of Routes 44, 101 and 169 in Pomfret. In 1981 Board member Irma Levonius and her husband Charles donated land near the Quinebaug River and the Sherman family did the same near Parker Road, both in Canterbury. In 1987 Bob and Jimmie Booth conveyed 7 acres on the east side of Wolf Den Road.

Across the road from the Booth donation resided Dr. Richard A. Booth, his wife, the former Nancy Harrington, and their two daughters, Margaret and Janet. They were not related to Bob and Jimmie but shared a strong interest in the work of the Land Trust and Dick soon joined the Board bringing an intense, unwavering dedication to acquiring, inventorying and enjoying the holdings of WLT.

Dick Booth was born in West Haven in 1927. He joined the Navy during World War II and after the war graduated with a bachelor's degree in zoology from Cornell University. He later got his master's degree at Yale. In 1959 the family moved to Brooklyn and Dick completed his PHD at the University of Connecticut. He was a professor at Central Connecticut State University.



Dick Booth (1927-2015)

He succeeded Phil James as President in 2000 and served until 2011. He remained as President Emeritus until his passing in 2015. His daughter Janet became a Director after this sad event. Dr. Booth's long time contributions as a community leader should not be forgotten.

In 1990 WLT had been in existence for fifteen years and owned less than 100 acres spread out in Putnam, Pomfret, Brooklyn and Canterbury. It also maintained a few Conservation Restriction Easements but these proved to be complicated and time consuming to monitor so it was decided as a policy to acquire and own land instead of pursuing legal restrictions on land owned by others.

1990 would see large donations by Lloyd and Hope Williams in Woodstock and the Tamler family in Thompson. In 1991 Lois Orswell would finance an endowment enabling WLT to become more aggressive and actually be able to purchase land.



Bob and Nettie Tamler

The Tamler donation of 60 acres was the first in a series continuing with an additional 20 acres in 1993. Their daughter Julie would continue with donations in 2014 and 2024 creating a large, remote forest block on the Thompson, Putnam and Rhode Island border.

Nettie Tamler was a third-grade teacher in Thompson who became regional director of Weight Watchers. The family liked nothing more than relaxing by the small pond in their secluded cabin on the state line.

The Board of Directors expanded by adding financial advisor James A. Weiss as Vice-President. Land acquisition activity increased.

Dr. Herbert K. Schneider donated 11 acres on Chestnut Hill Road in Killingly and the Laakso family donated 5 acres near Church Street in Sterling 1991.

An anonymous donor gifted 32 acres along the Quinebaug River near Cotton Bridge in Killingly and this was the beginning of the Dunn Preserve. Another anonymous gift came in 1993 when 70 acres were acquired near Wrights Crossing Road in Pomfret that eventually expanded to become the Three B's Preserve named after the Bosworth, Buttner and Butts families.

The summer of 1994 brought the first 30 acres in what would become a large swath of conserved land near Quaddick Lake in Thompson when Lower Pond, an isolated cedar ringed Beaver Pond along the Five Mile River, was acquired. It should be noted that the properties of WLT are like children- you love them all, but Lower Pond was one of Dick Booth's favorites. He would be very pleased to know how much this first parcel expanded in size in later years.

The remainder of the 90s saw Pomfret receive 8 acres from Arthur and Ada Gallup, then an anonymous 47 acres on the Quinebaug River that became the Lyon Preserve, 101 acres on Holmes Road, 93 acres near Cotton Bridge also on the Quinebaug as well as 30 acres that formed the beginning of the Aicher Preserve on Harrisville Road. The Aicher Preserve was augmented in 1998 when 20 acres from the Holzer family and 44 acres from the Aicher's established this mixed habitat gem of a Preserve.

It should never be forgotten how the residents of the area have benefitted and continue to benefit from the low-key, unpublicized land and financial donations from their neighbors who wish to stay unnamed and in the background. WLT could never have achieved its current status without these quiet dedicated benefactors.

As the 1900s came to an end the Wyndham Land Trust had acquired nearly 700 acres in its twenty-five year existence through the earnest efforts of its founders and the other like minded neighbors. Lois Orswell passed away in 1998, John Bigelow in 2000 and Phil James in 2001. The founders and other directors had set the stage for WLT to welcome the millennium looking forward to more projects and land acquisitions.

Other volunteers stepped up to assist. Jennifer Latici, James Dean, K. Bennet Howe, William Stehlik, III, Sarah Heminway, K. Bennet Howe, Marge Hoskin, Andy Tillinghast and Andrew Rzeznikiewicz would all take an active role.

Andy Rzeznikiewicz would lead the way with an extraordinary ability to connect with people and aggressively pursue funding through donations, grants and other avenues. He was a local kid born in 1972 and became manager of the Pomfret Connecticut Audubon property in 1994. The Audubon Society, directed by Board member Sarah Heminway, was and is a strong partner in conservation and public outreach efforts.



Andy Rzeznikiewicz leading a hike.

The first acquisition of the new century was 3 acres on the south side of Taft Pond Road in Pomfret donated by Raynham, Inc., which was the corporate name of the 1,200 acres owned by Harry Townshend. This first parcel began a long relationship with the Townshend family that would see WLT establish the Nightingale Preserve on most of what the Townshend family owned.

Henry H. "Harry" Townshend, Jr. was born into a prominent family of New Haven in 1920. He ran the JT Manufacturing Company plus was involved in many other business and civic affairs. In 1956 he purchased the estate of Ethel Goodridge Barber on Brayman Hollow Road. This large property ran north past remote Quarry Road into Woodstock and south to Taft Pond Road near the Windham County 4H Camp. Mr. Townshend liked nothing more than roaming the mixed woods and fields with his beloved dogs on the many trails he created. The Townshend children worked with WLT into the 2020s to establish the vast Nightingale Preserve.

The family of Jeff Cartier on Quarry Road and Joann Potrzeba nearby on Swedetown Road worked with the Trust and later added valuable habitat to Nightingale.

Also in 2000 the Gosnell family donated a large swampy tract on the east side of Route 169 in Woodstock near the Massachusetts border. This area was slated to become a reservoir around 1900 but those plans fell through. This large wetland is virtually inaccessible for hikers but is a wildlife haven.

In 2001 Cy Harvey and Bill Neumann coordinated the donation of 15 acres in Woodstock and the Little River Greenway was established. Later the Harvey family donated a large field across the street and in

2012 Bet Zimmerman Smith donated two small parcels upstream near Roseland Park and Stone Bridge Road.

In the fall of 2002 WLT began to publish its newsletter “Natural Surroundings” which highlighted recent projects and profiled Board members. Sporadic newsletters had been printed and mailed to members since 1992 but a more consistent schedule has been adhered to. Jim Tourtellotte from Global Design in Putnam donated considerable time to the design and logistics of organizing the letters. Dick Booth provided most of the content.



Jim Tourtellotte designed the WLT logo.

Board member Andy Tillinghast and his family donated 34 acres in 2002 along Sugar Bush Brook followed by property from the Fitze, Lathrop and Oates families in Plainfield.

WLT found a headquarters in 2003 when they moved into the restored 1841 former Pomfret Town House at 11 Town House Drive. Restoring this historic building was a cooperative effort between the Pomfret Historical Society, Tom Pahl from Heritage Building and Design in Pomfret and many others particularly Andy Tillinghast and Cy and Rebecca Harvey from Woodstock. The grounds were kept colorful due to the extensive gardens planted and maintained by George Jackson's wife Judy.



Cy Harvey (1925-2011)

Cyrus Isadore Harvey, Jr. was one of the many fascinating people who had a passion for preserving the open lands of the Quiet Corner. He was born in Cambridge in 1925 and served as a navigator in the Air Force during World War II. After the War he graduated from Harvard and in 1956 founded Janus Films with actor Bryant Haliday. He also co-owned the Brattle Theater which specialized in foreign art films.

In 1972 he started a business making and selling soaps which became a worldwide success by the name of Crabtree & Evelyn. He bought a house on Woodstock Hill and eventually built the company's headquarters on Peake Brook Road. Cy served on the WLT Board until his passing in 2011. His widow Rebecca continued to strongly support the mission of the Trust.

Occasionally properties are obtained by the Trust as part of the open space set aside requirements in a subdivision and that was how the Hauser lot in West Woodstock came to be in 2006.

In 2006 Michael Green joined the Board beginning a long tenure of dedicated volunteer work. Mike is a native of Somerset, England and came to the States in 1980 to attend the University of Florida. He moved to East Killingly in 1993 when his wife Carol Auer accepted a position as a professor in the Department of Plant Science at UCONN.

In 2009 Mike and Janet Booth built the website www.wyndhamlandrtrust.org and they have maintained, updated and constantly revised the page. WLT also established a presence on Facebook and Instagram.

Mike's many skills, whether they be indoors or out, have benefited WLT considerably through his many years of service.

2008 saw the acquisition of 20 acres in Killingly by the Kogut family and a parcel on Day Road in Pomfret by the Buttner family.

Ted Gellert and his wife Virginia lived in an old house on Ayers Road in Pomfret and they donated all of their land in 2007 but maintained life ownership. Ted passed away in 2017 and WLT carved off a small lot with the house on it and sold that as per the Gellert's wishes. The rest of the land was protected and soon after the Valentine family conveyed their neighboring tract. This Preserve joins up with the former railroad line that the State has restored as a walking and biking route known as the Airline Trail. This old railroad right of way crosses many of WLT's properties in Pomfret, Putnam and Thompson.

With the sad passing of Jimmie Booth and Cy Harvey in 2011 new Board members Jeff Stefanik and Ron Tillen joined and in 2012 Eastford native Jo-Ann MacFarlane was added to the Board.

Ron Tillen, like Mike Green, was an Englishman who lived on Thompson Hill. He spent nearly ten years on the Board and was instrumental in coordinating, writing and publishing management plans for nearly all of the Trust's properties, a colossal amount of work accomplished due to his tireless dedication.

Jeff Stefanik lived in North Woodstock and was a professional land surveyor that WLT had hired in the past. Andy Rzeznikiewicz approached him about joining the Board which he enthusiastically did. His skills and local knowledge has served the Board well for many years.



Jo-Ann MacFarlane (3rd from left) became involved with WLT when she donated 25 acres next to her house on Abington Road in Eastford. She later became a very valuable Director until her sad passing in 2020. Her neighbor Warren Bradway was inspired to donate his land shortly thereafter.

2011 also saw Dick Booth retire as President and he was succeeded by the capable Mary Adams Anthony. Mary had grown up in Bristol, Connecticut and came to the area to attend UCONN. She later went to Harvard and was an Executive Director at the 1772 Foundation so was very familiar with marketing, fund raising and grant applications.



The MacFarlane dedication.

Yosemite Valley Road is a remote section of Killingly. Reino and Josie Stenback built a house there in 1952 on 45 acres with the Five Mile River as their back boundary. Reino passed away in 1999 and Josie continued to live alone in this rugged, isolated spot. In 2012 she donated most of her land, keeping the house lot and her cherished gardens. She celebrated her 100th birthday there in 2024.

In the 1960s Joe Campert built Woodstock's only winter ski slope, O-Ho-Ho Ski Area and in the valley next door created Bungee Lake and Witches Woods lake with a chainsaw and a bulldozer. He also built Eastford Lake in that town. He dammed the low-lying mixed farmland and scrub woods and started selling small lots. Environmental permits or Planning Board approval was not as onerous then as now. Ironically Mr. Campert was a nature lover and he eventually put his leftover land in a Trust and after many years donated the lots to WLT. These pieces are scattered throughout the developments. The ski lodge closed in the 1980s.

Christian and Rachel Saranapoulos granted a Conservation Easement for a key parcel tying together large holdings of WLT and the Audubon Society in Pomfret in 2012. WLT prefers to own property outright but occasionally an Easement or Conservation Restriction is a pragmatic way to keep the land free of future development.



Professor Booth, in his element, addressing the crowd at the 2011 annual meeting. These meetings are in the fall and for many years were held at Hadi and Cheryl Bozorgmanesh's exquisite event barn in Brooklyn. When they moved away Bill Maclaren from Tyrone Farm in Pomfret graciously and seamlessly took over hosting this social event.

Dick Booth stayed on the Board as a director until his passing in 2015 and shortly thereafter his daughter Janet, who had long volunteered in various capacities, joined the Board.

Long time Board member Ben Williams succeeding Mary Anthony as President in 2013 and brought his steady, sensible and innate leadership to the group. Monthly meetings were held at the old Pomfret Hall with the occasional use of someone's home for social fun as well as Land Trust business.

The Robbins-O'Leary-Orr-Blain farming families of Thompson have been long-term friends of WLT and in 2013 the Robbins Preserve was established on the headwaters of the Five Mile River. Later other properties were acquired on Hill Road and Lower Pond. The O'Leary family has also preserved Fort Hill Farms, their picturesque dairy farm, through the Connecticut Department of Agriculture Purchase of Development Rights.

2013 also saw the Chiampa family donate 29 acres in Plainfield to honor the memory of Marion Preston, a righteous tribute.

Racetrack Hill in Woodstock was just that many years ago. Ken Rapoport and his wife Linda purchased the hilltop with the long view then moved a 1700s house from Rhode Island and reassembled it near the peak. Ken later fought against a proposed subdivision next door and when it was eventually denied he purchased that property as well. Sadly, Linda passed away from cancer and Ken established the Rapoport Preserve and began donating land in her memory. His neighbors to the north, Paul and Avis Spalding, also conveyed a large parcel and the Preserve was renamed Spalding/Rapoport in their memory. The discontinued portion of Calkins Road bisects the Preserve and it is a wonderful lane to hike.

Sarah Heminway left the Board in 2013 and her many contributions were missed. She continued as Director of the Pomfret Audubon Center and has remained a strong and loyal friend to WLT. Dawn Castiglia Adiletta from East Woodstock took Sarah's place and her background as a historian and member of the Connecticut Farmland Trust would prove to be very beneficial.

The Pomfret headquarters was deemed impractical, so WLT was a vagabond moving from Crabtree Lane in Woodstock to downtown Putnam and eventually to the office of The Last Green Valley on Main Street in Danielson. With the advent of Zoom during the Covid crisis in the spring of 2020 most meetings became remote from home although the Board occasionally still meet at various homes to enjoy each other's company. Another change at this time was the hiring of an assistant to keep the meeting minutes, deal with the finances and the many other time-consuming tasks that the organization requires. Alison Gray-Smith, Marcy Dawley, Jen Postemski, Anouk de Ruiters, Kathy Slininger and Joyce Fountain were some who filled that position. Marcy volunteered often and returned to fill the position after leaving for a few years.

Lisa Hayden grew up in East Putnam in an old colonial house with a big barn that her parents truly loved. Lisa and her siblings inherited that love and in her job as Outreach Director at the New England Forestry Foundation developed a working relationship with WLT which led the family to donating their parent's cherished property near Route 44 and the Five Mile River in 2014.

Later that same year Larry Rainville donated 29 acres of mixed fields and woods in Plainfield.



Mike Green

Anouk de Ruiter

Anouk de Ruiter, originally from Stamford, eventually became a Board member. She lived in Pomfret with her husband Rick Canavan and their children. Rick was a wetlands biologist and soil scientist, and his volunteer work delineating wetlands was a major benefit to WLT.

In April 2015 a 40th anniversary celebration was held at the Hillandale Golden Lamb Buttery, the very restaurant where Jimmie Booth and Lois Orswell first began to formulate their idea on forming a Land Trust. President Ben Williams gave his usual rousing speech noting that the Trust had an interest in approximately 2,000 acres and more interesting projects in the pipeline. Dick Booth did the honors of cutting the anniversary cake.

That same night it was announced that the Mitchell D. Phaiah Foundation had bequeathed a gift of 500,000 dollars. Mitch Phaiah was a Killingly businessman who passed away in 2014. Mike and Bev Cristina from the Foundation were instrumental in arranging the generous donation.



Attorney George Jackson

Attorney Steve Adams

2016 saw a major change in the Board when George Jackson decided to step down from his position as counsel and recruited his replacement Stephen J. Adams. WLT was extremely fortunate to make this segue relatively painlessly and Attorney Adams has continued the important, necessary and often thankless work with the same tireless dedication of Attorney Jackson. The volunteer work of these two has provided a half century of benefit to all in our corner of New England.

Steve was a native of the Connecticut coast and had a practice based in Putnam. He came to the area in the mid-1990s and lived in Woodstock after graduating from Quinnipiac University School of Law. He eventually moved to Mystic but continues to serve WLT. His importance cannot be overstated.



Mike and Dale St. Lawrence

Another new board member who would have a huge impact moving forward was Michael St. Lawrence who would succeed Ben Williams as President in 2017 and shepherded the organization through the onerous national accreditation process completed in 2019 and oversee the incredibly rapid land acquisition that took place between 2017 and 2024. Mike grew up in Northampton, Massachusetts and married his junior high school sweetheart Dale. She became a Doctor and he received a Master's Degree in Civil Engineering from MIT. He was Director of Business Development at Rogers Corporation in Killingly and well suited to manage the affairs of the Trust. They live on Buck Hill with a house in Thompson and a barn in Burrillville, Rhode Island.



Janet Booth and Mike St. Lawrence spread the word, Mary Anthony models the merch.



A formidable Conservation lineup makes the initial investigative ascent of Bull Hill on the Thompson-Woodstock line in October 2016. (L-R) Ron Tillen, Jeff Stefanik, Andy Rzeznikiewicz, Mike St. Lawrence, Steve Adams, Dawn Adiletta, Joe Adiletta, Dale St. Lawrence and President Ben Williams. Bull Hill Preserve would expand from the initial 284 acres to 1,200 in a remarkably quick amount of time. (photo by Mike Green)

In the fall of 2016 a possibility was broached to the Board about acquiring a 284 acre parcel located on the top of the steep wooded ridge that marks the Thompson-Woodstock town line. The area was known as Bull Hill and the ridge had an open hilltop area with long views looking over the majority of The Last Green Valley. Jeff Stefanik and Steve Adams took a walk around the site one Saturday morning and one week later led most of the Board on a hike to it. It was enthusiastically voted to pursue acquiring the property so WLT went into action securing grants for the funding and all of the due diligence that is required. In less than a year this major block was purchased. At the same time letters were sent to other owners along the forested ridge that WLT would be interested in accepting donations or even purchasing adjoining parcels and it was amazing how quickly large tracts of land were acquired.

The adjoining Harraden property was the next acquisition followed by Rogers, Mahoney, Cunningham and in 2022, Audette creating a large core in the center the existing forest block. In an amazing short

stretch, the original core expanded when the holdings of Waldron, Holly, Simonds, Czajkowski, Thomas, McWilliams, Ostrowski, Johnson and Young were purchased or donated by the end of 2018. The next year brought the Wettstein, Blade, Daniotti, Ravenelle and Guile tracts. In 2022 the Town of Thompson donated five landlocked parcels they had taken for non-payment of taxes years before. 2023 brought the Grochowski lot and at the end of 2024 the Callahan/Morse lot near Norman Hill Road in Woodstock was added.

The Waldron family also donated property on the French River in Thompson during this time.

Many of the Bull Hill lots had been in the same families for generations and were leftover wood lots for the farmers and homeowners in the valleys below. Due to the generosity and thoughtfulness of many of the owners the checkerboard boundaries quickly assembled to nearly the entire wooded ridge becoming the property of WLT. What started as 300 acres is now approximately 1200 acres protecting the forest block habitat and viewshed and providing hiking trails that have few local rivals. The outstanding view from the hilltop lookout takes in three states.



Marcy Dawley has served a couple of stints as secretary and has gone above and beyond expectations in her dedication and volunteering efforts.

Long Pond Preserve in Thompson is a multi-layered success story. The pond is near the south end of Webster Lake and though remote, had been a long active sand pit accustomed to teenage parties, dirt bikes, four-wheel drive trucks and empty beer cans strewn about. The first acquisition came from the family of Raymond S. Wieloch in 2003 and slowly other parcels were accumulated so it is now 143 acres

with the potential of more added in the future. The landscape has gradually reclaimed its natural look, the trespassing and litter has slowed (it never stops) and this former dusty wasteland now supports beaver, eagles and migrating ducks of all kinds.

2019 saw a major donation of 58 acres from the Campagna family in Canterbury.



The Preserve stewards work up a thirst in their duties. Here they are at the yearly meeting at the Pomfret Audubon barn.

Doug Zimmerman was an active athletic employee of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and most lunch hours he would run the streets of downtown Hartford. He tragically passed away doing that in June 2010 and his widow, Elizabeth, known by most as “Bet”, made it her mission to protect as much land as possible in Doug’s memory. She began by purchasing and then donating two lots on Roseland Lake. She also bought a large tract on Rocky Hill Road in Woodstock and donated that as well. Bet remarried Patrick Smith and after his unfortunate passing continues with unwavering dedication in her mandate to protect and preserve the land around us.

Not far from the Rocky Hill Preserve was a large old farm known as Cabbage Hill and in 2021 this stunning property was anonymously donated. It established a large block from Rocky Hill south to the Nightingale Preserve. This is rough, rocky habitat reminiscent of northern forests where the booming of owls or the howling of coyotes is the prominent nocturnal sound. Bear and the occasional moose are at home throughout.



Penny Foisey organizes the annual Ride for Open Space event.

Pomfret native Penny Foisey joined the Board in 2019. She was a finance professional with the Thames Valley Council for Community Action and immediately took over the business ledgers. She is a passionate equestrian who likes nothing better than bushwacking through the woods and fields on her favorite horse. Her easy-going enthusiasm is much appreciated.

The aforementioned Janet Booth joined the Board also as did Denise Baum and Robert Craig for a brief period during the strange times of the Covid outbreak. Janet continues the admirable legacy of her family with her web design skills.

Property continued to be acquired at a rapid pace. The Edward R. Laby Preserve was donated in the Kentuck area of Killingly by 2017. Anna May Scanlon named the Preserve after her late son. This remote

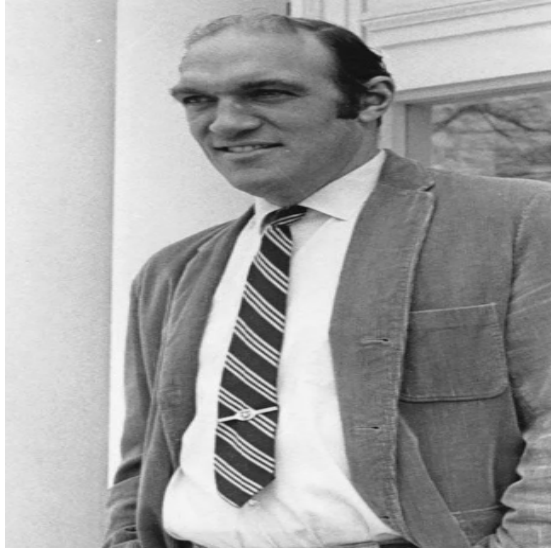
rocky area borders near the Rhode Island line. In Woodstock the Joyce Townsend Collins Memorial Woodland was created in 2019 on the East side of Prospect Street near the Rich family farm.



Board members Penny Foisey and Mary Anthony admire the unique stone structures preserved on WLT property in 2023.



The summit at Bull Hill.



Ben Williams, Mike Green, Jeff Stefanik and Andy Rzeznikiewicz.

Sadly Ben Williams passed away in March 2023 one day shy of his 87th birthday. He left behind a massive legacy of good deeds in many different areas. There is no Hall of Fame for Land Conservation but if there was Ben would be there next to the names Booth, Orswell, Jackson and Rzeznikiewicz.

Ben had stepped down as President in 2017 but remained on the Board. Mike St. Lawrence succeeded him and brought his well-rounded business leadership skills and shrewdly oversaw an incredible spurt of land acquisition that included the large expansion of the Bull Hill area, the Nightingale-Townshend forest and the Quaddick area Blackmore Brook-Tamler Preserve plus other parcels throughout WLT's neighborhood.

The other important work that began under Ben's term but was finished under Mike's was gaining national accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission in 2019. It had become apparent

that this was a necessary step to ensure that WLT was capable of gaining grant funding, insurance and other benefits. This heavy bureaucratic lift was accomplished through Mike's leadership and patience plus considerable help from Mike Green, Dawn Adiletta, Jo-Ann Macfarlane, Anouk de Ruiter and Marcy Dawley. The accreditation must be renewed and reviewed every five years.

The 2020s have continued the incredible land acquisition that erupted in the previous decade. 2024 saw 200 acres acquired from the Rhode Island Boy Scouts near Quaddick State Park and adjoining the Leclair property which had been acquired in 2011. It is not far from the Tamler Preserve. A large landowner neighbor between these various parcels, Mike Stanley, has been very generous and gracious in allowing WLT to lead public hikes connecting through his property.

Hadi and Cheryl Bozorgmanesh were longtime friends having hosted the annual fall meeting and potluck supper at their lovely grounds in Brooklyn and in 2022 donated one of their tracts as a parting gift when they moved out of the area. Other recent acquisitions due to the thoughtful generosity of the donors include the Joan Dash property in the center of Pomfret and the Berry family land near Mashentuck Mountain in Killingly as well as the previously mentioned Callahan/Morse parcel on the north end of Bull Hill. Bull Hill also had a trailhead parking area built on the Thompson side.

In early 2025 WLT came full circle when it purchased a large portion of what had been Hillandale Farm, the picturesque location of Bob and Jimmie Booth's home and location of their long-remembered restaurant, the birthplace of the Wyndham Land Trust, Incorporated. Their neighbor (but not their relation) Dick Booth would have been very pleased.

As the Wyndham Land Trust, Incorporated celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2025 it has an interest in approximately 6,400 acres spread out through ten towns. In the last ten years it has acquired over 4,000 acres and has become one of, if not, the largest non-governmental landowners in Northeast Connecticut. It is an incredible success story due to the many diverse dedicated low-profile volunteers who quietly and tenaciously go about the required work with a single-minded goal and mission of holding the ever-changing environmental pressures at bay.

If WLT is successful then the road views and landscape does not change so it is easy to not notice how much has been accomplished but there is always more to do. There are exciting projects in the pipeline and the dedication of the many faceted Board has not wavered or lost its intensity. Change is inevitable and a new generation will be required to take leadership in the future, much like the founders in 1975 have been succeeded by committed and talented volunteers.

The new membership and leadership will arrive to carry on the mission of those mentioned above because the mission is one so righteous and beneficial that it cannot fail. May the future of the Wyndham Land Trust be as fortunate in the next fifty years as it has in its first.



The sun sets on the annual summer solstice gathering in Pomfret.

