

The Steep Rock VISTA

The Newsletter of the Steep Rock Association

Volume 2, Number 1: SUMMER 1990

TO THE FOND MEMORY OF MICHAEL HARWOOD 1934 - 1989 ENVIRONMENTALIST, BIRDER, AUTHOR, SPEAKER, JOURNALIST, FRIEND, ADVISOR, TRUSTEE OF STEEP ROCK...

...this issue of the Steep Rock Vista is dedicated.

Michael, a long time trustee of Steep Rock, died in November 1989 at age 55 in San Diego from complications following arterial surgery. Born in Boston, Michael graduated from the Putney School and Harvard University in 1956 and moved to Washington in 1969 when he married Mary Durant.

A journalist, with countless articles in the *New York Times*, *Harper's*, *Audubon Magazine*, and the *Smithsonian*, he was also author of several major books—the best known being *On the Road with John James Audubon*, written jointly with his wife Mary Durant.

An indefatigable birder, Michael could be found walking his much loved Steep Rock trails almost daily, field glasses hanging from his neck. His annual bird count was a national event to support bird preservation, with Michael's supporters contributing so much per specie counted by Michael or his birding pals.

Without question Michael was the leader of the Washington community on environmental matters. It was through his diligence and foresight that the Environmental Council came into being. He pioneered solid waste management activity and, in 1971, started voluntary recycling in the town, years before it became the popular issue it is today. He



Mike and Mary

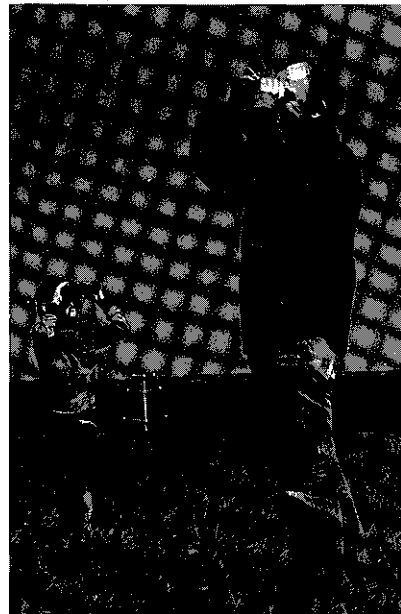
Photos by W. L. Chess



led the way on Washington's first Conservation Commission and wrote the town's first Inland Wetlands Regulations. It was also Michael who first sounded the trumpet on the Iroquois pipeline and was a key leader in the region's successful fight that removed that ominous threat which would have desecrated Steep Rock and other key areas of Washington. His devotion to improving the environment and his boundless energy on behalf of

environmental causes are irreplaceable.

On our Steep Rock board he was always our conscience, bringing us quickly to heel if we strayed even for a moment from the best path to preserve the heritage with which we're charged. We are left with a gaping hole to fill—Michael's vision, his enthusiasm, and his love for this land of ours.



MISS HELEN C. SCHWARZ DEEDS HER HOUSE AND PROPERTY TO STEEP ROCK

It is a pleasure to share with our friends the following letter, received from Miss Helen C. Schwarz relating to the gift of her home and the surrounding eight acres of land on East Street in Washington.

Trustees of Steep Rock Association
Washington, Connecticut

Dear Friends:

While living with my family in Greenwich, I had on many occasions enjoyed the beautiful Litchfield Hills in the fall of the year. To rekindle this pleasure, many years ago I came to Washington for a brief visit with friends. Almost by accident, I became associated with The Mayflower Inn and through its owner, Harry Van Sinderen, and his many friends, I learned more about the Town, its schools, and its various activities and more importantly, its people. The residents were very cordial and I shortly realized that the Town had an appealing civic personality. It became apparent to me that this distinctiveness did not happen by accident. It was developed by people who loved Washington and they expressed affection by devoting their time, effort and financial support, toward the objective of making Washington a more attractive place to live.

An example is Steep Rock. I have fond memories of countless enjoyable hours spent wandering over the trails of Hidden Valley and down and around the Pinnacle and the Clam Shell area. We, as residents of Washington, have the responsibility of protecting this most valuable heritage, to enhance it where possible and ensure that what we have inherited will be passed on to the next generation in an ever improving condition.

Having in mind my personal experiences and conscious of the living background that I have enjoyed these many years, I have this date signed a deed giving my home and adjoining acreage on East Street to the Steep Rock Association for its use and enjoyment in a manner appropriate to the Association's needs. This gift gives me great pleasure and comes with affection and cordial best wishes to my friends, the people of Washington.

December 4, 1989

Sincerely,

Helen C. Schwarz

Simultaneous with the granting of the Deed, an Agreement was signed by Miss Schwarz and George Ward, President of the Steep Rock Association, reserving to the donor the privilege of using the "house and grounds" during her lifetime.

This transfer to Steep Rock adds significantly to the original transfer of acreage by Mr. Ehrick Rossiter in 1925, gifts by the Van Sinderen Family and gifts made by many other loyal friends over the years. The Trustees believe that this gift may serve a distinctive purpose in future years as a home for the Steep Rock Executive Director.

The Trustees express publicly their heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Miss Schwarz for this magnificent addition to Steep Rock Association.

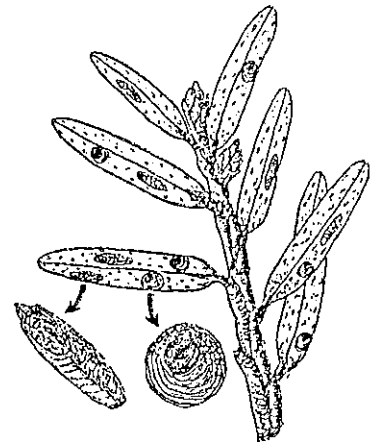


HEMLOCK SCALE IS MAJOR THREAT TO STEEP ROCK'S HEMLOCK FOREST

The magnificent hemlock stands in Steep Rock are severely threatened by an insect infestation known as hemlock scale. It appears we may lose a large number of our oldest hemlocks, especially on the west bank of the Shepaug River opposite the Clam Shell.

To evaluate reported browning of hemlock tree tops, in March, Ralph Scarpino, County Extension Forester, inspected the area and advised that we had a very heavy infestation of insects known as elongated hemlock scale, *Fiorinia Externa* and the circular hemlock scale, *Nuculapsis Tsuga*. These insects were accidentally introduced into the metropolitan area from Japan around the turn of the century. They have since become serious pests of forest and ornamental eastern hemlocks. For most of their lives hemlock scale reside on the underside of needles where they feed on the cell fluids through piercing and sucking mouthparts. Their attack causes foliage to discolor and drop, branches to die back, and eventually the tree dies.

Unfortunately there is nothing practical that can be done to control the infestation because of the inaccessibility of the terrain. Though we will lose many of these hemlocks, because of their ability to regenerate, hemlock should remain part of the forest.



FIVE NEW MEMBERS ELECTED TO THE STEEP ROCK BOARD

At the May meeting of the Steep Rock Board of Trustees, five new members were added to the board.

Robert Ficks moved to Washington with his wife and four children a year ago and is the rector at St. John's Church in Washington. Before attending the seminary and being ordained, Bob worked in the advertising field for many years, and lived in Weston, Connecticut. He is an avid gardener and fisherman and has joined the Washington Rod and Gun Club.

Mary Harwood, whose childhood vacations were spent at her parents' summer place in Kent Hollow, moved to Washington in 1947. She is presently the curator of the Gunn Historical Museum on the Green, a member of the Historic District Commission, and a director of the Washington Environmental Council. Under the pen name of Mary Durant, she is the author of several books on natural history, and her articles have appeared in such publications as *Audubon Magazine*, the *New York Times*, and *Natural History Magazine*. Her specialty is New England wildflowers. As co-author with her late husband, Michael, they wrote three books: **A Country Journal** on life in Washington, **On the Road with John James Audubon**, and **This Curious Country**, the history and natural history of the Badlands of South Dakota. Mary has been elected to continue serving Michael Harwood's term as trustee.

John A. Herrmann Jr. moved to Washington six years ago, and spends as much time as he can here with his wife Ann and their two sons. He is managing Director in the Merger Department of Lehman Brothers. Born and bred in New York, John has been involved in many volunteer activities including his children's schools, mental health, the New York Urban League, the Vocational Advisory Service, Yale University Development Board, and several environmental agencies. He walks, runs, and camps in Steep Rock and is looking forward to his service to the Steep Rock Board.

Susan F. Payne has lived in Washington since 1966. She has been Director of the American Indian Archaeological Institute for many years. In addition she has been involved as a parent and board member at the Washington Montessori School, and continues her involvement with the school. She also served as the first Chairperson of the Historic District Commission. About joining the Steep Rock Board, Susie says: "it is a privilege to become a trustee of the Steep Rock Association which contributes so extensively to the quality of life in Washington by preserving the beautiful and bountiful Shepaug Valley that has enriched people for over ten thousand years."

NEW FOOTBRIDGE UNDERWAY WITH HAUSER FUND GIFT.

The Hauser Fund in Community Funds Inc., established by Rita and Gus Hauser of New York and Washington, CT has made a major gift to Steep Rock which has allowed us to finally move ahead with our long planned new footbridge across the Shepaug. The new suspension bridge is being built to span the river just downstream from Saw Mill Hole and upstream of the river bend around the Clam Shell. O & G will be the contractor for construction of the bridge which will have a span of over 120 feet and cost about \$50,000. Completion is scheduled by September.

The new bridge will permit much easier year-round access to the beautiful Avenue of the Pines to the top of Steep Rock Cliff, and to the other lovely trails to the Double Ford and back to Mitchell's Hole. The opening up of this area should also reduce the pressure of overuse on the tunnel side of the river. The Hauser gift was made as a matching grant for other contributions to Steep Rock for the bridge.

The bridge will be named the Hauser Footbridge in honor of longtime Steep Rock supporters Rita and Gus Hauser.



New Steep Rock footbridge will be modeled after this bridge on the Appalachian Trail in Vermont.

Linda Potter lived in Washington as a young child, then moved to Litchfield, and returned to Washington 14 years ago when she and her husband Tim were married. She serves on the Board of Directors at Eliot Pratt Nature Center and the Washington Environmental Council. Linda has been involved with the natural world for years and has given talks for her children's classes and at the American Indian Archaeological Institute. She is presently giving plant lore walks and is developing a business which will hopefully expand into slide talks as well as plant walks.

SUSAN BRANSON APPOINTED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Susan Branson began working as Executive Director of Steep Rock Association and the Roxbury Land Trust this July. She brings valuable experience and enthusiasm to the job.

For the last 14 years, Susan has lived in Bethlehem where she and a group of others helped found the Bethlehem Land Trust. During a 10 year period she served as everything from secretary to president, learning much that will be useful in this job. For the last year, she was the Land Use Administrator for the Town of Bridgewater, which enabled her to become familiar with rules and regulations pertinent to land preservation and development.

Susan is a horseback rider and fox hunter and has served as secretary and president of the Litchfield County Hounds. She knows Steep Rock well from years of riding and hiking.

She has three children; two sons 18 and 14, and a nine year old daughter.

TWO SUMMER INTERNS HARD AT WORK

Nicolle Burnham and Robyn Lintner, both from Washington, have been busy attending to numerous chores this summer. When they aren't getting things organized in the office, cataloging pictures and getting papers filed, they are out in the field keeping trails cleared, blazes sharp, signs scraped and painted, and doing other important things. Nicolle will be attending Waterbury State Technical College, and Robyn will begin classes at Wesconn this fall. We are pleased to have them with us.

MATERNE LAND GIFT ADDS TO JONES BIRDWALK

Valerie Jones Materne has given Steep Rock an additional 2.9 acres along the Shepaug River. This most welcome gift extends the "Jones Birdwalk" an additional 390 feet along the river bank. The "Jones Birdwalk" extends along the west bank of the Shepaug from a point north of the Depot over half the distance to the road bridge at the junction with Bee Brook.

The Jones Bird Walk was originally established by a gift of land from Val Materne's brother Griff Jones in 1974, and was previously extended in 1984 by an earlier gift of 2.6 acres by Val Materne.

This gift is a most important addition which contributes to Steep Rock's goal of protecting the Shepaug River corridor.

TRUSTEES

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George A. Murphy, *Vice President*
Fourgie W. Smith, *Secretary*
Douglas H. Greene, *Treasurer*
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P. Lincoln Cornell	Bertram Read
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Robert Ficks	Hedda vonGoeben
T. Robert Frost	Harry R. Wright

Susan Branson, *Executive Director*
Vinnie Forese, *Forester*

SAVE SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 8 FOR THE STEEP ROCK PICNIC!

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