



The Steep Rock *VISTA*

The Newsletter of the Steep Rock Association • Summer 2000

75th Birthday Party for Former Trustees



*Steep Rock's 75th Anniversary
Reception for Trustees.*

Descendents of eight of the nine original Trustees attended a reception honoring all former Trustees of Steep Rock. The occasion was one of a series of events celebrating Steep Rock's 75th anniversary – it's diamond jubilee.

- **Thomas Rossiter**, grandson of Founder **Ehrick K. Rossiter**, traveled from Needham, Massachusetts to attend.
- **Adrian van Sinderen's** daughter, **Jean Henry** of Middlebury was there. Her uncle **H.B. van Sinderen**, also served as a Trustee.
- **Joanna Settle**, great niece of **George W. Valliant** attended.
- **Hamilton Gibson** was represented by his son, **Dana Gibson** and his granddaughter **Paula Gibson Krimsky**.
- **Arthur L. Shipman's** granddaughter **Annie Shipman MacFarland** attended. Arthur wrote the original trust indenture. His son (Annie's father) was Steep Rock's secretary for many years.
- **Arthur C. Titus's** grandson **Curtis V. Titus** came from Middlebury.



Dana Gibson



Curtis Titus

75th Party, cont.

- **Victor H. McCutcheon**, who served as Steep Rock's President from 1925 to 1941, was represented by his niece, **Hollis Logan Clark** of Washington. Hollis's husband **Ted** was a Trustee for six years and a Vice President for three.
- **H.Siddons Mowbray's** daughter in law **Margaret T. Jones** was there. Her late husband, **Henry B. Mowbray** was a Trustee as well.



*Steep Rock President
John Millington*



*Former President
Bob deCourcy*

Steep Rock 75th Anniversary Picnic Saturday, September 2, 2000

11 a.m.-3 p.m.
At the Riding Ring

On Saturday, September 2, 2000 (Note the change: the picnic is on the Saturday of Labor Day weekend – it's usually the weekend after Labor Day.) the Annual Picnic sponsored by the Steep Rock Association will be a celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Association. The Trustees hope that all the residents of the Town will join us at our grand old fashioned picnic. Citizens dressed in period clothing will be in the crowd to give a flavor of what a picnic was like 75 years ago.

Join us under the tent at the riding ring on Tunnel Road for a marvelous traditional feast of hot dogs, hamburgers, and cheeseburgers. Jane Conn and Mark Averill promise more of their extraordinary onion soup. For dessert we'll have a variety of delicious sweet treats, and, of course, watermelon.

Judea Nursery School will keep the youngsters busy with a variety of games and activities; the Boy Scouts plan educational presentations on nature and survival.

Roger Cannavero and his musicians will entertain us, so come along and have some fun!

Don't Forget! Saturday Sept. 2, 11a.m. to 3 p.m.

Rain or Shine

5 New Trustees Elected

Sheila Anson, Town Clerk of Washington, has been reelected to the Board of Trustees. A Washington native, she's enjoyed a lifetime of running and hiking in Steep Rock and cherishes the sense of peace it's given her. Sheila currently serves as Co-Chair of Steep Rock's Stewardship Committee. Sheila says: "It is an honor to serve again as a Trustee. I look forward to continuing my work on the Stewardship Committee."

Kirsten Peckerman came to Washington with her husband, Edward, in 1971. Kirsten is on the Board of Directors of the Gunn Library and Museum and has been a member of the Washington Garden Club, a trustee of the Washington Art Association and a volunteer for the Red Cross Blood Donor Program. "I've ridden my horse, hiked, and cross country skied in Steep Rock, enjoying its beauty for many wonderful years," says Kirsten. "I look forward to serving as a Trustee, since my late husband and I always considered Steep Rock to be one of Washington's most valuable assets."

Polly Roberts moved here from New York with her husband Rex Swain 14 years ago, and walks Steep Rock and Hidden Valley trails every day with their wonder dog, Ada.

According to Polly: "When we first moved here, a realtor told us about this big land trust with lots of trails, and we thought, 'That's nice.' I had no idea how important Steep Rock would become to me. It serves as my gym, church and therapist. I'm honored to be on this board and have the chance to help further Steep Rock's wonderful mission."

Polly is a free-lance writer, marketing consultant and web site developer. She has served on the Zoning Board of Appeals since 1995 and is a former trustee of the Gunn Memorial Library and Museum, with which she continues to be involved.

Lee J. Seidler and his wife Lynn, lived on Lake Waramaug in New Preston for twenty years before moving to Roxbury in 1991.

Dr. Seidler was a General Partner and a Senior

Steep Rock Association Board of Trustees

FOUNDER

Ehrick K. Rossiter

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/VISTA EDITOR

Susan Branson

New Trustees, cont.

Managing Director of Bear Stearns and Co. for many years. He has taught at New York University's Graduate School of Business Administration and also at Columbia University and Robert College of Istanbul.

Dr. Seidler has been a member of Steep Rock for many years. As a landowner in Washington, he has, through generous Conservation Easements, preserved and protected, in perpetuity, significant land along the Shepaug River corridor.

Charles Treadway, III. Chick has been a homeowner in Washington since the early 1980's and a permanent resident since 1991, when he retired from the Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company. He has served on the Historic District Commission for a number of years, and represented the Commission on Washington's Open Space Steering Committee. A dedicated fisherman and hiker, he has been a volunteer on Steep Rock's Easement Monitoring Committee.

This Year's Membership Drive Ends August 31, 2000

There's still time to become a member or renew your membership. A contribution of any size entitles you to membership for one year. The funds raised help us to maintain the reservations. Please use this form to send in your donation.

Name _____

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State, Zip _____

Send To:

Steep Rock Association

PO Box 279, Washington Depot, CT 06794

Year 3 for Ten Year Stewardship Program

Work Continues in Clam Shell

Last year we began the project of restoring the Middle Field in the Clam Shell to the open field it once was. Many of the trees that had grown up in what was once a pasture were cut, and we began to get a sense of the open space that we want to reclaim. Old photographs of Middle Field show a lovely open grassy area, and we're well on our way to bringing that image back to life.

The next step in the process is to reclaim the trail through the field and to encourage grass to grow again. This will require removing a significant portion of the chips that were left after the trees were cut. Some chips will be taken from the site, but most will be spread throughout the understory of the surrounding trees.

Finally, we'll establish an area to stockpile some chips for future use in other land management projects.

Hidden Valley White Pines Next Stewardship Project

The Forest Stewardship plan adopted by Steep Rock recommended that the white pine stand in Hidden Valley be thinned. Many of the trees are crowded; their canopies are cramped; they can't grow any more and will eventually - sooner rather than later - die.

The trees were planted as seedlings in 1955. In the early 1970's, they were lightly thinned. Nothing has been done since then - thirty years! If Steep Rock doesn't act soon, most of the trees will be lost.

The Stewardship Committee, working closely with our forester Star Childs, has spent many hours planning this project. (see photo below)

Presidents' Trail

Peter Jensen's Open Space Management crew began work on restoration of the Presidents' Trail in late July. This popular trail begins at the entrance to Hidden Valley just south of the Shepaug River - an area commonly known as the "Chatfield" entrance. With the River clearly visible for much of its length (1 1/2 miles) the trail eventually winds through a stand of white pines and rejoins the main trail to the bridge over the Shepaug. The trail, part of which is the old railroad bed along the east side of the Shepaug, was opened several years ago and since then has seen ever increasing use.

There were several spots along the trail that were difficult to negotiate, and others where people had created bootleg trails down to the river, causing serious erosion problems. In one particular spot, a culvert made of very large sections of cut stone was completely destroyed during the 1955 flood, and the resulting disarray of large stones over the trail itself made passage along the trail difficult during good weather, and almost impossible during the icy winter months.

Among other improvements, the Open Space Management crew will build a side trail - actually a set of stone steps - down to the river on the site of the old bootleg trail. The stone culvert will be restored and the walking surface over it leveled and widened.

Just to the north of the culvert area, we will create a memorial to Steep Rock's former president George Ward. This quiet, unobtrusive stopping place along the path, has a view of the river to the north and south. It will be a fitting tribute to George, who so loved Steep Rock and who played such an important role in our fight to save the Shepaug River.



What's Up Doc?

Members of the Steep Rock's Stewardship Committee recently visited Great Mountain Forest in Norfolk, CT. Forester Star Childs showed the group examples of forestry management areas similar to what Steep Rock plans in the white pine stand in Hidden Valley. Back row, from the left: Susan Branson, Sheila Anson, Tara Cherniske, Ed White, Bill Alex (Mike Alex's brother, who used to work at Great Mountain Forest), and Ian Branson. Front row: Mike Alex, Vinnie Forese, Star Childs. (John Millington, President of Steep Rock, photographer.)



FAQ (Frequently Asked Question): Why Does Meeker Swamp Matter?



The tract of land known as "Meeker Swamp," above Route 202, opposite and northeast of the junction of Route 47, is an unspoiled parcel of land that offers a natural gateway to the town. It is one of the largest singly-owned open space parcels in Litchfield County. The 238 acres also include the former Wells Farm. The current owner has signed a contract agreeing to sell the property (appraised at \$3.5 million) for a bargain price of \$1.5 million.

The State of Connecticut has determined the Meeker Swamp parcel to be vital to the Town's interest in preserving open space, and has contributed \$450,000 toward its purchase.

- **Bee Brook Headwaters**

The site contains 97 acres of wetland with a major portion of the Meeker Swamp complex which forms the headwaters of Bee Brook, a major tributary of the Shepaug River. Just as the *volume* of water in the Shepaug is crucial to its health, so too is the *quality* of the waters that flow into it.

- **Major Aquifer**

In 1993 the Town undertook a project to identify the aquifers in town. The study established that one of the largest is in the Meeker Swamp area. Preservation of this property will ensure the protection of this irreplaceable resource in perpetuity.

- **Unique Wetlands**

These wetlands overlie a bedrock area of marble. A study by the Nature Conservancy notes that, "Its geological placement and comparatively large size make the wetland of particular interest, because marble-based wetlands are rare in Connecticut, and frequently may contain rare plant and animal species that specialize on calcareous substrates." In fact, subsequent studies have found rare freshwater mollusks.

- **Forest & Wildlife Habitat**

Approximately 90 acres of woodland on this parcel make for excellent wildlife habitat, particularly in conjunction with cultivated pasture, overgrown pasture and wetlands. The parcel's adjacency to other open land makes it particularly hospitable to certain owls, raptors, and forest-dwelling birds that require large, undisturbed ranges. And rock outcroppings at the northern edge provide cover and habitat for larger mammals.

- **Prime Agricultural Land**

About 60 acres of the site have been devoted to agriculture, mainly in corn silage. The U. S. Department of Agriculture has designated approximately 50 acres of this as "prime farm-land." The USDA argues that the preservation of this land is vital: "Developments that result in

irreversible land use changes represent a loss of valuable natural resources." If preserved, this precious agricultural land will continue to be farmed.

- **Archeological Interest**

A 1987 study by the [then] American Indian Archeological Institute revealed significant evidence of Native American use dating back 7,000 years. Because the land is undisturbed, its archeological sites are relatively intact and are all the more valuable. The Institute recommended the preservation of this area for further long-term studies.

- **Unusual Geology**

The site represents the eastern limit of carbonate (marble) bedrock in this region of the state, and is where three bedrock units (Stockbridge Marble, Manhattan Schist and Ratlum Mountain Schist) come together. This unusual geologic environment has the potential to support rare plant species.

- **Prime Location**

In addition to its highly visible location, this tract is adjacent or contiguous to several other preserved parcels. The Meeker Swamp parcel ties these together into a large expanse of natural terrain and creates a significant wildlife corridor.

Steep Rock Association
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