

# Canton Land Conservation Trust, Inc. NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 1993

## Land Trust Acquires Onion Mountain Preserve

**O**n June 29, 1993, the Connecticut Chapter of The Nature Conservancy deeded the Joe D. Pratt Onion Mountain Preserve to the Canton Land Conservation Trust. The 100 acre preserve contains a magnificent trap rock ridge, visible from Sexton Hollow Road in the northwest section of town. The preserve was originally donated to The Nature Conservancy by the Stocking family and is home to several rare plant species including the state-endangered long-leafed bluet (*Houstonia longifolia*), a close relative of the more familiar bluets or "Quaker Ladies" seen on lawns and roadsides in spring.

The Trap rock ridge reaches an elevation of almost 900 feet and provides a more northerly habitat reminiscent of forests to our north. The preserve is home to such diverse creatures as porcupine, coyote and numerous nesting bird species including Barred Owl and Pileated Woodpecker. The wetlands adjacent to the ridge form the headwaters of Simsbury's Nod Brook and serve as a breeding ground for the marbled salamander. Most significantly, Onion Mountain is the only trap rock ridge in the state that does not have a hiking trail running along the ridgetop.

Trap rock ridges, which include such well-known formations as Talcott Mountain, are a product of ancient volcanic activity. Although Connecticut did not possess active volcanoes, it did have lava flows, which hardened into an igneous rock that was later uplifted to form the long ridges we now enjoy viewing during the fall season. These ridges are usually steep to the west, more gradual to the east. In some portions of the state, the tumbled western slopes of the ridges have been quarried for gravel.

### ■ TRAILS & BOUNDARIES

The Land Trust Board of Directors is formulating a long range plan of establishing a system of trails throughout Land Trust holdings and marking the boundaries of all parcels.

Trails will be created through the various parcels on Ratum Mountain, and on other parcels where appropriate, to provide for extensive hiking. These trails, as well as the borders of our parcels, will be marked with mylar tags. Thus, hikers can become familiar with Land Trust holdings and trespassing on neighbors' property will be avoided. Eventually the trail system, along with descriptions of each parcel, will be published in a handbook. Following the philosophy of passive land use and natural management practices, the Land Trust will consult with an array of experts to plan and complete this extensive project.

### ■ BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## Volunteers blaze new scenic trail

**L**and Trust members and other nature lovers and hikers will enjoy the new Ted Wright Trail which runs from Breezy Hill Road to the Smith Farm on Doyle Road.

This fall a number of volunteers worked over several weekends to blaze this scenic route. Beginning at the intersection of Breezy Hill Road and Mulcundry Road, the trail runs northwest for approximately one and one half miles. To enter the trail, take Mulcundry Road north for about 100 yards and turn left (west) onto the trail. The first section of the trail goes through gently rolling land of mixed hardwoods, and includes a beautiful stand of ferns. The trail then gradually descends into a valley which includes a mature grove of hemlocks and an interesting outcropping of rock. It continues along an old logging road and then rises through hardwoods (large white oak, maple, ash and beech) to the mountain ridge. This latter section is the right of way over the Perry land. The ridge is treed with a number of beautiful hemlocks.

Finally, you begin to descend through laurel and hardwood to come upon the lookout platform of Dr. and Mrs. Smith - a very rewarding destination. This spot provides wonderful views to the west; undoubtedly great sunsets. Continuing down a fairly steep grade brings you to the Smith Farm on Doyle Road.

We are very pleased with the progress made this fall. The hard working volunteers were enthusiastic and task oriented. If weather permits, we will soon complete the permanent markings and put up signposts. In the spring we will finish whatever we can't complete as well as create a few new trail loops for those who want a shorter walk.

## Smith Farm *history and update*

**T**he Smith Christmas tree farm has seen several changes over the last couple of years. A new growing area was opened behind the house, the barn saw some improvements, including a beautiful stone entry ramp built by Mike Hoffnagle, and current fields were reorganized so trees are now planted on 8 foot centers, AND in straight rows. A most important recent development is that we now have a fulltime tenant living in the farmhouse. Tom Noonan took up residence in late September, and after lots of hard work he has made the place habitable. He is planning many improvements inside and out. As a result of this occupancy the CLCT contracted to have the roof of the house completely replaced from the rafters to the shingles. The attic was insulated during this process. A new cellar hatchway has also been installed in an effort to keep moisture from entering the basement. Future plans include the painting of the exterior and the replacing of some of the older windows. The Canton Land Conservation Trust is happy to have Mr. Noonan in residence, for his presence has stirred interest in the much needed repairs. Tom is also quite knowledgeable in the field of horticulture and has made some valuable suggestions as to future ornamental plantings at the farm.

The Smith Farm is perhaps the crown jewel in the aggregate of parcels held by the CLCT, and it is our intention to restore and preserve the farmhouse and the barn to an appearance which is aesthetically pleasing. We are hoping this process will be completed by this time next year.

Another interesting bit of news about the Smith Farm developed this past summer. A call was received from an heir of the original owners of the farm, and a meeting was arranged on a Sunday afternoon in August. Arthur Sweeton and Peter Lamb had the pleasure of meeting the family, including Wilbur Morris Messenger, who was born in the farmhouse in 1908. It was most interesting to hear Mr. Messenger recall some of his early childhood memories of the farm and especially of the house.



## Annual Christmas Tree Sale Dec. 11

Its interior has changed markedly since his boyhood. Kathy Melody, Wilbur's daughter, was able to tell us a little more about the family. In all likelihood, her great grandfather, Sherman Messenger, built the farm in the mid 1860's. Wilbur Warren Messenger, a son, continued to live on the farm and had three children, Wilbur Morris, Mabel, and Harold. Recollections of Wilbur and Harry are scanty, but they do remember having horses, pigs and cows.

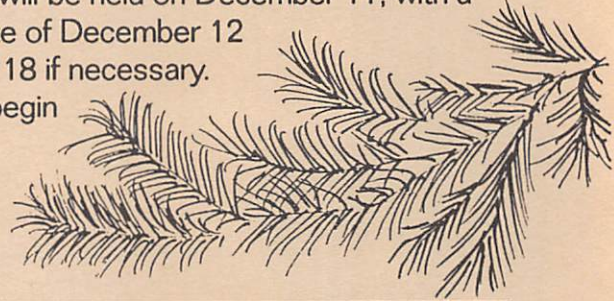
In 1914 or 1915 the family moved to Bloomfield, where Wilbur worked in the tobacco industry. Wilbur and Harry remember there was an auction of some sort at the farm when the family moved. It is probable that these were the last Messengers to inhabit

the farm. One last recollection which is documented in the family geneology is that one John E. Messenger (b.10/13/1878 d. 10/25/1882) was buried on the Sherman Messenger farm. To this day no one knows where the grave is located! Many thanks to Kathy Melody and her family for the sharing of their history.

The tree sale will be held on December 11, with a rain/snow date of December 12 or December 18 if necessary.

The sale will begin at 9 A.M.

Greens will be available at no charge.



## A letter from the President *1993 has been a good year for the Land Trust*

**T**he Sweetheart Mountain hiking trails were well used throughout the year and we are working to improve the area with the removal of structures and equipment left over from the hill's earlier days as a ski area. We expect that by the end of the year the old barn at the bottom of the hill will be taken down and removed from the premises and the cellar hole filled in.

In June of this year the Trust acquired 2.8 acres from James Gillespie along Breezy Hill Road and approximately 100 acres from The Nature Conservancy in the Onion Mountain area. This property, known as the Joe D. Pratt Onion Mountain Preserve adjoins a 30 acre parcel deeded to the Trust by the town of Canton in 1992.

Peter Lamb has overseen the

development of a new area of young trees at the Christmas Tree Farm and his supervision of the farm has assured us of another nice crop of trees for the coming season. We are putting a new roof on the farm house and doing necessary repairs on the basement and hatchway masonry. Tom Noonan has agreed to reside in the house and we welcome him. Tom plans to install a furnace and we are adding insulation to make things as comfortable as possible for him for the winter.

This Fall, Bob Allen supervised the blazing of a new hiking trail from Breezy Hill Road across to the tree farm on Doyle Road. We are looking forward to the trail's official opening next Spring. Work has started on a new handbook of trails and properties which we plan to have available by next summer. If any Land

Trust members would like to be a steward for a particular property please let any Board member know of your interest. We will be reviewing the stewardship of all properties next year, and may be able to use your help.

Expenditures this year for tree farm improvements and purchases of mowing equipment will amount to several thousand dollars. We are keenly aware of minimizing our operating expenses, and we appreciate your generosity in supporting our efforts with your donations of time and money. We are ever mindful of the importance of your assistance and are thankful for it.

We look forward to seeing you at the Tree Farm on Saturday, December 11th and wish you a very happy holiday!



# Hiking encouraged at Onion Mountain

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The Onion Mountain property was acquired by The Nature Conservancy in 1982. The late Joe D. Pratt, former naturalist for the Town of West Hartford, was instrumental in spurring the Conservancy to acquire the property and did much of the early field work that demonstrated the unique ecological value of Onion Mountain. Pratt was one of the finest field naturalists in Connecticut and also served as a president of the Connecticut Botanical Society and the Hartford Audubon Society.

The Canton Land Conservation Trust was delighted to receive this preserve. An adjacent 29 acre parcel was earlier transferred by the Town of Canton to the Land Trust, thereby expanding the preserve to the Simsbury Town Line. Simsbury's Onion Mountain Park, located off West Mountain Road, makes this protected area an excellent corridor for wildlife and hikers. Hiking enthusiasts and land trust members are invited to explore the area to the base of the Onion Mountain ridge. To protect the integrity of the ridge top, the Land Trust will not blaze a trail along the ridge and users are asked to refrain from damaging the sensitive areas along the ridge top, where most of the rare plants grown under very harsh conditions.

Additional property information is available by contacting Jay Kaplan at Roaring Brook Nature Center (693-0263).

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**CANTON LAND  
CONSERVATION TRUST, Inc.**  
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