



AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY, Inc.
P.O. Box 49,
Old Mystic, CT 06372

Simmons Preserve

Property Management Plan

Corner of Palmer and North Main Streets
Stonington, New London County, Connecticut

Stonington Town Committee is responsible
for the stewardship of this property

Plan Prepared by:
Richard Newton & Beth Sullivan
Spring 2014

Approved by Stonington Town Committee: _____

Date _____

Approved by Stewardship Committee: _____

Date _____



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SUMMARY

This plan is a triangle of property at the corner of Palmer and North Main Streets in Stonington, CT. This waterfront property on Quana Duck Cove is a small but important part of the gateway to Stonington borough. See the map that follows. Visitors are welcome.

Property is owned by Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc., P.O. Box 49, Old Mystic, CT 06372. Avalonia Land Conservancy (ALC) can be reached by email at avalonialc@yahoo.com, by phone at 860-884-3500, and has a website at <http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org>.

HISTORY

The Simmons Preserve is located in the Town of Stonington in the southern area of town. It is bounded by residential housing with the exception of the northwest boundary that is waterfront.

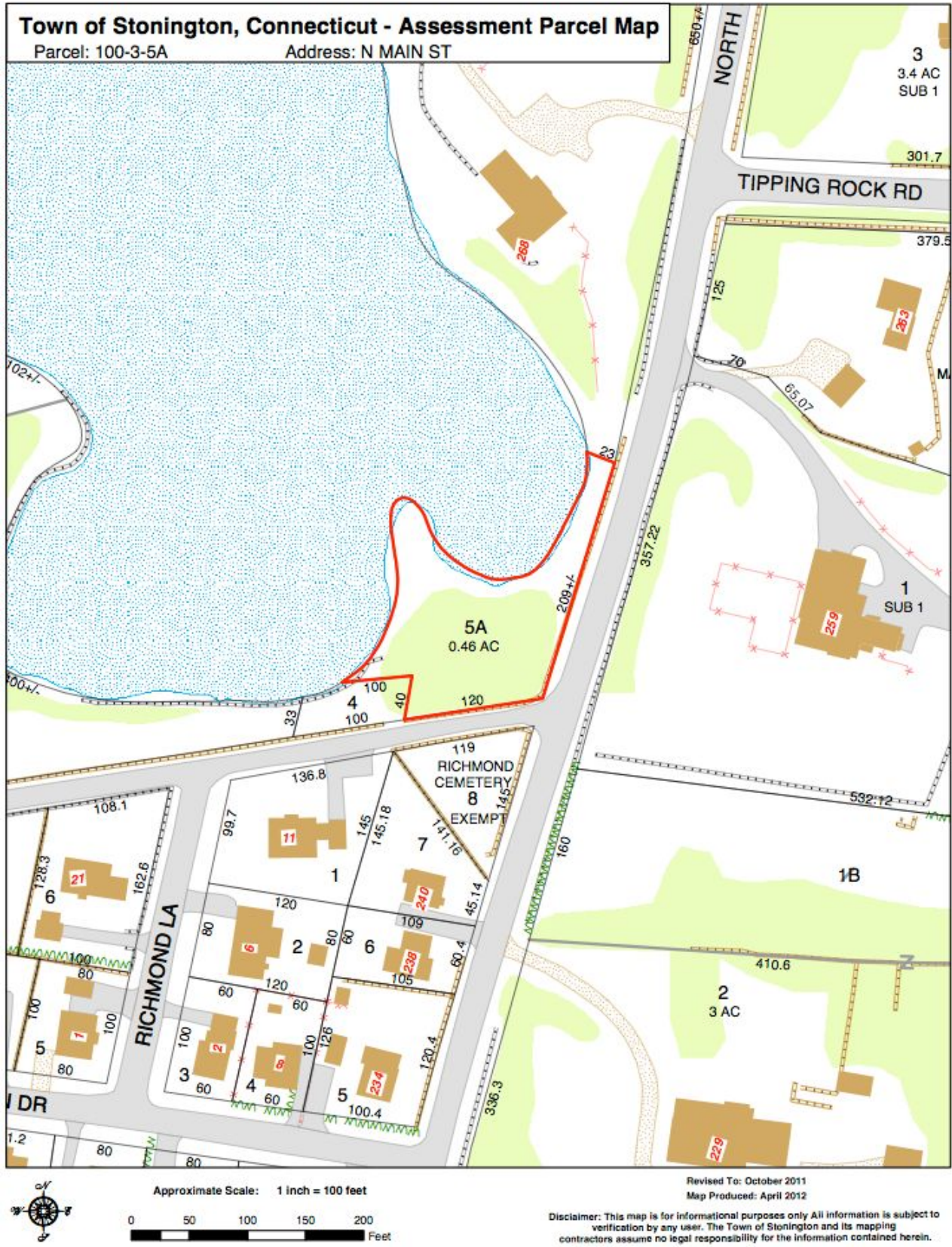


Charles H. Simmons donated the property to the Mashantucket Land Trust in December 1985. (Mashantucket Land Trust, Inc. is now Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc.). Additional historic information is in the appendix.

SITE INFORMATION

The property

A parcel map of the properties from the Town of Stonington GIS database is shown on the next page. The property is identified as Map/Book/Lot/Unit 100-3-5A. GIS acreage is 0.46 acres. Zoning is RC-120.



Acquisition history

Donated in 1985.

Land use history

Land was once a cemetery. See history in appendix. Most recent use is waterfront open space.

Public use resources

Access is through gates on North Main Street. There are no marked trails as the property is small. Passive recreation is allowed: photography, nature study etc. No recreational motorized vehicles are permitted. Dogs must be on leash at all times. Standard Avalonia boundary marking signs have been posted in accordance with management principals, but there are no maps of the property nor are there any immediate plans for signage at entrance. The property along the streets is bounded by stonewalls.

Public benefit of the protected property:

The property is a significant natural area that qualifies as being preserved for a “conservation purpose” under 26 US Code 170(h)(4):

(4) Conservation purpose defined

(A) In general

For purposes of this subsection, the term “conservation purpose” means—

- (i)** the preservation of land areas for outdoor recreation by, or the education of, the general public,
- (ii)** the protection of a relatively natural habitat of fish, wildlife, or plants, or similar ecosystem,
- (iii)** the preservation of open space (including farmland and forest land) where such preservation is—
 - (I)** for the scenic enjoyment of the general public, or
 - (II)** pursuant to a clearly delineated Federal, State, or local governmental conservation policy, and will yield a significant public benefit, or
- (iv)** the preservation of an historically important land area or a certified historic structure.

Natural resources

This property is approximately one half acre with the majority of the property being a meadow. Along western boundary there are several large non-native ornamental shrubs and trees that are historic and were part of original flora of cemetery. The ground is carpeted with Lily of the Valley making mid May the best time to visit. Also there are day lilies and sedum species, among others. Ornamental shrubs and trees include Rhododendron, Winged-Euonymous (Invasive), Norway Maple (invasive), fruit trees (Apple species) and several old horticultural

specimens.

Native Trees and shrubs include: Sugar Maple, Red Maple, Cherry, Sassafras, American Basswood, Red Cedar, Mountain Laurel, Sweet Pepperbush, Highbush Blueberry, Sumac, Bayberry and along the shoreline, Groundsel. *Rosa rugosa* is naturalized along the bank. Other *Rosa* species are present as well. There is Virginia Creeper vine along the walls. Poison Ivy is widespread around shrub edges.

There are numerous herbaceous perennials including native Goldenrods, White Wood Aster, Canada Mayflower, Spotted Wintergreen, Milkweeds, Blue False Indigo and grasses. Unfortunately in many places the Lily of the Valley and the seedling *Euonymus* are crowding out most native herbaceous plants.

There are also numerous non-native and seriously invasive plants present which need to be managed: *Phragmites* along shoreline and wall, Japanese Honeysuckle, Winged *Euonymus*, Oriental Bittersweet, Barberry, Black Swallowwort and Multiflora Rose.

ELEVATIONS



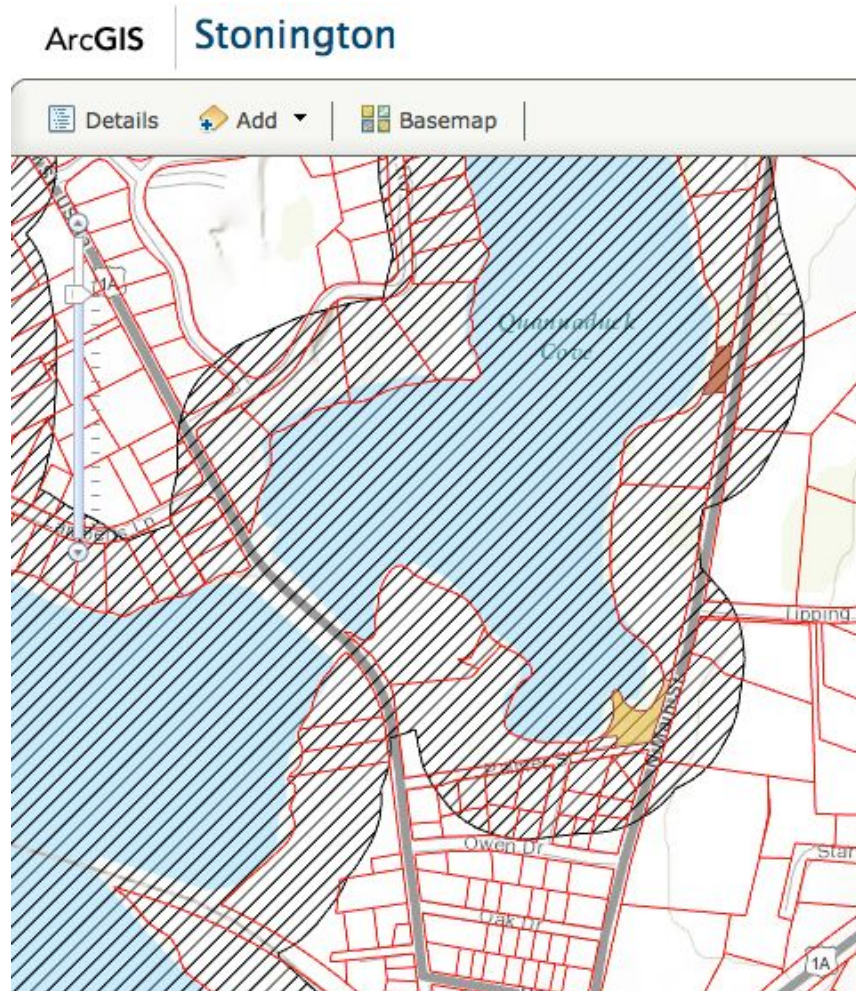
SOILS

Soil map is not relevant.

HYDROLOGIC FEATURES

There is a narrow strip of coastal wetlands along cove.

SPECIAL FEATURES AND CULTURAL RESOURCES



The cove area falls within a Connecticut DEEP Natural Diversity Database Area though no endangered species or species of concern are known on the immediate property.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Stewardship policies

Avalonia Land Conservancy Fee Land Stewardship Principles were approved on December 16, 2009 and the document is available at the Conservancy's office on Hatch Street in Mystic, CT. This document sets forth the general principles governing stewardship of all Avalonia properties. The document or any approved successor is hereby incorporated as part of this management

plan.

Protection

No entrance / roadside sign at present.

The management objective for this property is to leave it in its natural state as protected open space, with special attention paid to preserving the view.

The Connecticut Coastal Management Manual (CCMM), the Town of Stonington Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) and Connecticut General Statutes all speak to the need for the town to protect visual quality of the landscapes. North Main Street is the primary route to and from the Borough of Stonington. Looking out over the Simmons Preserve is one of the last views of the water as people leave Stonington. From Section 2 of the CCMM:

“The Connecticut Coastal Management Act (CCMA), the foundation upon which the coastal management program is based, contains a general statement in §22a-91(5) that the coast is rich in “aesthetic resources,” and §22a-93(15)(F) defines as an **“adverse impact on coastal resources” the “degrading [of] visual quality through significant alteration of the natural features of vistas and view points.”**”

The map on page 4-25 of the 2004 POCD shows this area as a “scenic area”. As stated in the POCD “Scenic resources contribute to Stonington’s character and quality of life”. Preservation of this property as a low open meadow preserves these views.

Maintaining properties appearance

Litter control, mowing and invasive plant control.

Public use

The preserve is open to the public for passive recreational use though there are no trails. Motor vehicles, bicycle riding, and horseback riding are not permitted. Hunting and the use of firearms on the property including bow hunting and target practice are not permitted. Camping is not allowed. Dogs must be kept on a leash no longer than 7 feet long. Visitors are not allowed to pick vegetation or disturb wildlife excessively. Water access is allowed for hand carried

watercraft. (kayaks)

Enhancing wildlife habitat(s)

The property will be maintained in accordance with donor's wishes as low meadow as well as a sanctuary for wildlife by encouraging native flora and eliminating the non-native invasive plants.

The goal is to see the bank re-grow with native shrubs that will enhance the area and appeal to wildlife.

Controlling invasive species

Removal of invasive species by manual means will be accomplished as resources permit.

In 2013 Avalonia entered an agreement with the CT DEEP to manage and treat the Phragmites along the eastern wall and water edge. This will continue until 2015.

Erosion control and flooding

No control planned.

Productive uses

Protection of views and enhancing wildlife appeal.

Scientific and educational activities

None planned.

Response to large natural disasters

Removal of any hazards will be undertaken as necessary.

Special management considerations

The Town of Stonington Zoning Enforcement Officer cited Avalonia (violation #12-111) for "clear-cutting" in the 100' coastal area non-disturbance area in December 2012 when volunteers were removing invasive plants. This citation was disputed by Avalonia, then withdrawn by ZEO, in the first quarter of 2013.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Recurring and occasional requirements

Stonington Town Committee members visit the site on a limited basis.

Annual obligations

Site visits and mowing at a minimum of one or two times a year to maintain meadow and access.

Short term plan (1 – 5 years)

Annual site visit.

Control invasive plants. Non-native and invasive or undesirable vines and shrubs, crowding and killing native growth and shading meadow areas, degraded the northern bank area. Invasive plants have been removed as well as a couple of smaller sassafras saplings leaving the best one to grow taller and healthier. A fruit tree was freed up and several Groundsel shrubs and many Bayberry bushes, both desirable native plants that will grow and enhance the bank, were uncovered. A nice stand of native sweet pepperbush and several blueberry shrubs was left standing. Monitor and support native growth.

Mow field.

Assist with the periodic North Main Street resident-organized cleanups.

Donor's family arranged for replacement of gates in 2013.

Long term plan (5+ years)

Monitor site. Control invasive plants.

Schedule for revising this plan

This plan shall be reviewed at least every five years and updated as necessary.

APPENDICES

I. Zoning map for property and surrounding area is available at the Stonington Town Hall or online at <http://gis.stonington-ct.gov/mapxpress/>.

Deeds are available in Avalonia files, Stonington Town Hall and online at <https://connecticut-townclerks-records.com/User/Login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fIndex.aspx>

II. Historical photos

1999 Aerial Photo from Town Of Stonington GIS:

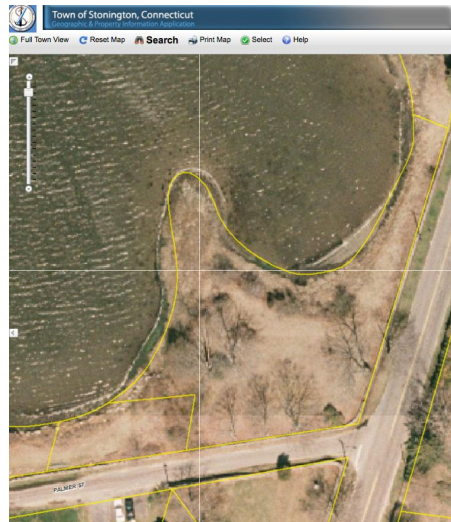


Photo looking across North Main Street (courtesy Rob Simmons):



The Simmons' Preserve

Bud's Point

The Mechanics Burial Ground

“A small but absolute jewel bit of ground”

Located at North Main & Palmer Streets, Stonington, CT

On January 29, 1986, The Day reported that Charles H. Simmons, Jr. had given a half-acre property bordering Quana Duck Cove in Stonington, CT to the Mashantucket Land Trust. The half-acre lot had been known at various times over the past 100 years as The Mechanics Burial Ground, Bud's Point and The Simmons' Preserve. Land Trust President Norman C. Smith was quoted saying that the lot was “a small but absolute jewel bit of ground which helps preserve the beauty of the area.”

Charles Herbert Simmons Jr. was encouraged in his donation of the property by his wife Roxane Ruhl and his four children – Charles III, Robert Ruhl, Jane Kennedy Fairbrother and Thomas Sanford. His desire was to keep the land open

and free of development so that the views of the cove could be enjoyed by future generations. The Mashantucket Land Trust and its successor organization, the Avalonia Land Conservancy, referred to the property as The Simmons Preserve.

Records held by the Town of Stonington show that on 26 March, 1844 a rectangular plot of land measuring 120 feet by 60 feet was conveyed by Samuel S. Denison to Benjamin S. States, both of Stonington, for the price of \$150. This property was located “at the South East corner of a lot of land north of a lane or street running westerly from the North Road or highway to Pine Point.” This deed apparently was the first record of a plot of land that would become “The Mechanics Burial Ground” to receive deceased railroad workers who died in Stonington. The date follows the completion of the first interstate railroad in the United States from Providence, RI, to Stonington, CT in 1836. It precedes acquisition of the larger Stonington ‘Evergreen’ Cemetery on North Main Street from the Phelps family who sold the ‘burial ground’ and adjoining acreage of Stone Acres Farm for that purpose in 1854.

Thereafter, Simmons family records show that on February 26, 1903, Miss Caroline Hyde of Upper Montclair, Essex County in New Jersey conveyed an approximately four acre property with dwelling to Elizabeth Eagle Simmons, wife of Charles H. Simmons of the City, County and State of New York. Although the document stated that the transaction was “for the consideration of one dollar and other valuable considerations” another family record dated February 14, 1903 shows the purchase price to be \$10,000. The deed was received and recorded in Stonington by Elias B. Hinckley, Town Clerk, at 11:00 am on March 4, 1903.

This property adjoined on its southern boundary property owned by Alexander Palmer and a lot referred to as the “Mechanics Burial Ground” or simply the “Burial Ground” according to a survey of May 20, 1899, by Don P. Stanton. On its northern boundary were lands owned by Theodore Palmer and a lot owned by Alexander Ross that included two structures. On March 18, 1911, Elizabeth Eagle

Simmons purchased the Ross property from his heirs. The two roads abutting the property were known at the time as the “North Road” to the east and “Loper Lane” to the south. The abutting body of water was called Lambert’s Cove at the time of these transactions. Since then all have been renamed.

According to Simmons Family lore, Elizabeth Eagle Simmons did not like the idea of owning a property adjacent to a cemetery. In 1905 she prevailed upon her husband, Charles Herbert Simmons, to purchase the deeds to the cemetery lots from the families of the deceased, all of who were railroad workers – thus the name ‘Mechanics’ Burial Ground.’ These purchases took place over a number of years, and Mr. Simmons took title to all the lots so his wife did not have to own a ‘cemetery.’

On September 12, 1906, Mr. Simmons also purchased a parcel of land from the Stonington Cemetery Association to receive the remains of those interred in the Mechanic’s Burial Ground, and he went about the process of locating living relatives of the deceased to obtain permission to relocate the remains. Local Ministers who had the burial records in their churches assisted him in the effort. The Simmons Family obtained the last plot from the claimant of the property in 1922.

From the time the family began to purchase the cemetery deeds, they called the small peninsula of land “Bud’s Point” after their son – Charles Herbert Simmons, Jr. – who enjoyed playing there as a child.

On February 16, 1932, all of the Simmons property west of North Main Street except Bud’s Point were conveyed by Elizabeth Eagle Simmons to her son Charles, Herbert Simmons, Jr. It appears that “Bud’s Point” remained in possession of Mr. Simmons, Sr. This resulted in a letter of inquiry from the Stonington Selectman’s office dated October 27, 1939, asking Charles H. Simmons Jr. if he was the “owner of record of all the property formerly owned by your father and mother in the Town of Stonington.”

In a letter back to the Selectman's Office dated November 8, 1939, Mr. Simmons, Jr. wrote that the quitclaim deed prepared by his father in prior years "leaves out a portion of my father's property which we refer to as the Old Mechanics Burial Ground." Thereafter, an additional deed conveyed the property to Charles Jr. from his father. Certain other transactions took place regarding the property between the death of Elizabeth in 1936 and Charles Sr. in 1947.

Simmons Family lore holds that Charles Simmons, Jr. an architect who practiced in New York, Connecticut and Vermont designed the two gates providing access to the property. The larger 'farm gate' was rebuilt by C. Mike Crowley of 15 Palmer Street in 1984 and again in the 1990s.

[NOTE: The preceding short history was prepared by Robert R. "Rob" Simmons, the second son of Charles and Roxane Simmons, and the third generation of his family to live on North Main Street adjacent to The Simmons Preserve in Stonington, CT. It is based on family records and official documents in possession of the family as well as 'family lore' meaning tales told around the dinner table.]

The newspaper article on the next page was published on February 12, 1986 in *The Compass* (a weekly paper from Groton, CT). Please note that the President of Avalonia, Norman Smith, subsequently disputed the "fair market value" and amount able to be deducted as a charitable gift. That information was not provided by the land trust.

Bud's Point, new 'jewel' in Mashantucket trust

By SUSAN KIETZMAN
Staff Writer

STONINGTON — Bud's Point, which was once a place to swim, wade and catch rabs for the neighborhood boys, is now part of the Mashantucket Land Trust and will be preserved as open space throughout history.

Charles Simmons Jr., or "Bud" as his father called him, use to play with his friends along the shore of Quanauck Cove at the intersection of North Main and Palmer Streets. The half-acre piece of land—connected to a larger piece which held the family house—was a favorite spot for the young boy in the summertime and soon acquired the name "Bud's Point."

At the very end of last year, that land transferred from the hands of Charles Simmons Jr. to the Mashantucket Land Trust, with the understanding that the land will remain open to the public and development-free. A shoreline nature walk would please Simmons, according to his son Rob, but "that would depend on the wishes of adjoining property owners," the younger Simmons said.

Charles Simmons (Sr.) purchased the land in 1903. Along with J. Culbert Palmer, his brother-in-law, Simmons split a section of land "from Palmer Street to where a fresh water brook, from the wetland east of North Main Street crossed the road and entered Lamberts Cove." Soon after, Palmer bought another house and sold his half to Simmons.

Charles Sr. learned of a burial ground on his land—where Bud later played—and worked with the "Reverend Spaulding" on transferring the coffins to the Stonington Cemetery. Spaulding contacted all the relatives of the deceased, asked permission to move the coffins, which was granted. Charles Jr. said his father paid for the new graves.

Charles Sr. died in 1945 and his son took over the property. He sold one of the houses (a gardener's cottage)—not the land—and continued to live in the Simmons home (Grey's Knoll). Grey's Knoll was razed in 1968 and the "Summer Palace" (one-story, redwood structure) was built in 1970.

The Mashantucket Land Trust came into being about the time Grey Knoll was being razed. According to its president, Norman Smith, the land trust was "started by a group of people concerned with environmental areas and concerned about development."

"The main idea," Smith continued, "is to properly manage the land,

so it serves as open space, naturally preserved." The Trust board of directors keeps the land exactly how its donor wishes—either completely open, with nature trails, or for some educational purpose, Smith said.

The Trust owns about 600 acres of land in Southeastern Connecticut, Rhode Island and New York and will continue to acquire land, but cannot take everything. "We turn down a lot of land," said Smith. "If it has no ecological, environmental or aesthetic value, we don't take it. Sometimes a developer has a piece of land leftover that he can't develop and we just wouldn't take that."

"The size of the piece has nothing to do with it," Smith continued. "The Simmons land is under half an acre but it's a jewel. It's a real keystone to that area."

George Campbell, a Stonington board member of the Trust, said the "Simmons preserve is a highly attractive and visible piece" of land. The community is extremely fortunate to have public-spirited citizens, such as Mr. Simmons, who are very much concerned with preserving the character and quality of our unique environment here in Stonington, which could so easily become badly eroded.

"In years to to come," continued Campbell, "the community should become increasingly grateful to Mr. Simmons for this most generous and thoughtful gift in the public interest."

Rob Simmons said he hopes more people will follow in his father's footsteps and donate land. "The gift doesn't have to be large to be beneficial and useful. There are two ways to think of your shoreline property," the younger Simmons said. "Either it's money in the bank, or it's a potential gift for the future of the community."

The gift, however, is beneficial to the donor, in the form of a tax deduction the year of donation. The Simmons land, according to Smith, is worth \$200,000 (fair market value), which the elder Simmons was able to deduct from his federal income taxes.

To donate land, Smith said, people should contact the Land Trust. A member of the Trust will survey the land. If the plot is good, a special acquisitions committee studies it further and makes a recommendation to the board of directors. If purchased, the land is then cared for by board members.

Campbell said this was the 25th piece of land donated in the 18 year history of the Trust. Fourteen of those 25 plots of land are in Stonington, which constitute about 350 acres, Campbell said.

New gates - 2013



Dan Banning and Steve Burdick install new gates.