AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY, INC. 19 68

# AVALONIA TRAILS

P. O. Box 49
Old Mystic, Connecticut 06372

*DEDICATED TO PRESERVING LAND AND WILDLIFE HABITATS*

**WINTER 2000**

## Marcia Woolworth Porter Preserve

In July 2000, Marcia Woolworth Porter gave Avalonia Land Conservancy the 40.3-acre open space from her Wamphassuc West subdivision on Wamphassuc Road in Stonington. Mrs. Porter and her late husband Richard W. Woolworth had owned the property since at least 1973.

The Marcia Woolworth Porter Preserve includes almost the entire saltwater marsh and inland wetlands between Wamphassuc Point on the east and Lords Point on the west. Two wooded "islands" run nearly the length of the marsh. Access to the preserve is provided at both the north end (adjacent to the railroad tracks) and at the south end (nearly 600 feet north of the stone posts denoting "private property." Six lots with approximately 300 feet of frontage each are located between the north and south access points.

While widespread walking across the marsh is not advised due to the sensitivity of the marsh and the presence of several channels, the area may be viewed from Lords Point, from the southern access on Wamphassuc Road, and from the waters of Fishers Island Sound. The marsh provides an undisturbed habitat for many species of birds, including swans, Canada Geese, ibis, egrets, ducks and various smaller species. The preserve also provides important nurseries and spawning areas for fish and other marine life.

The Marcia Woolworth Porter Preserve adds to Avalonia's significant presence along the Stonington shore of Fishers Island Sound and its coves — beginning in the East — Continental Marsh, Sandy Point, Dodge Paddock and the Beal Preserve, Simmons Preserve, Platt Marsh, Stillman Marsh, Lords View Marsh, Cottrell Marsh, Knox Preserve and the Dodges Island Conservation Easement on the Mystic River.

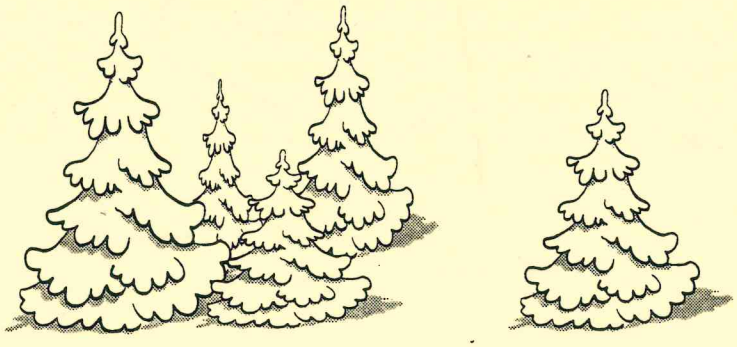
## Jean and Hobart Mitchell Preserve

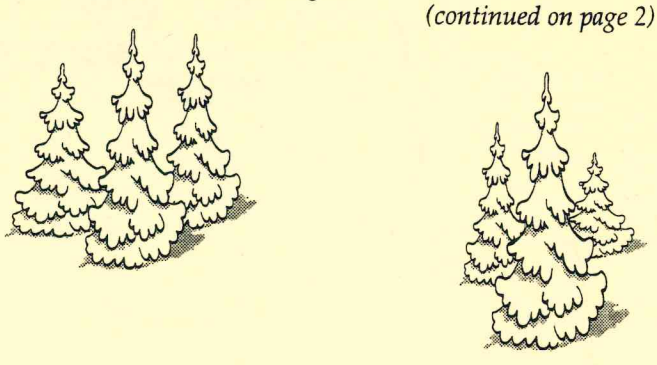
This past August, Jean and Hobart Mitchell donated the major portion of their land in Preston and North Stonington to the Avalonia Land Conservancy to be known as the Jean and Hobart Mitchell Preserve. The land includes two parcels in Preston (80.78 acres) on both sides of the Mitchell's driveway from Watson Road and surrounding their homestead on 6.22 acres and a continuation of the property into North Stonington (±21 acres). The Mitchell's property in both towns had been under the 10 Mill Forest Land Classification in both Preston and North Stonington for 33 years, since 1967. The transfer of a portion of this land activated the "recapture" tax provision of this 50-year agreement and so substantial adjustments by the Mitchells and Avalonia were made to honor the terms of this agreement.

The Jean and Hobart Mitchell Preserve is all wooded with second growth hardwoods and includes a hill rising to an elevation of 290 feet. It also includes more of the intermittent stream running south along the western edge of the Eleanor and Flood Reed Memorial Preserve. This stream runs into Main Brook, which flows year round.

While being a significant gift in its own right, an additional exciting feature of the Jean and Hobart Mitchell Preserve is that it abuts the west side of the 111.08-acre Eleanor and Flood Reed Memorial Preserve for approximately 1350 feet. From that point, the Jean and Hobart Mitchell Preserve runs approximately 2450 feet due west to Watson Road. Thus, the combined preserve area is 212.86 acres and creates the largest contiguous parcel of protected land held by Avalonia. Access to this preserve will continue to be through the Eleanor and Flood Reed Memorial Preserve on Northwest Corner Road in North Stonington.

*(continued on page 2)*





## *Mitchell Preserve* *(Continued from page 1)*

Several years ago, the "Preston Pipeline," a local Preston newsletter, published profiles of Hobart and Jean Mitchell. The following information has been derived from these articles. Hobart Mitchell, born in New York City in 1908, found music his first love, singing in church choirs from the age of 8 until he graduated from college in 1929. For the next two years, he made a "'backpack journey around the world,' singing on the radio, giving concerts here and there, hitchhiking and crewing on ships as he circled the globe." He returned to earn his MA at Columbia. From that time on he has been a dedicated Quaker and conscientious objector and has lived according to this code throughout his life, even writing a book entitled "We Would Not Kill," documenting his other kinds of service during the war years. For years, he and his first wife Claramary, whom he married in 1938, worked as volunteers for the Quakers. Hobe combined his faith and love of music into 11 Sermons in Song, which he presented from 1948 to 1961 to colleges in the eastern two-thirds of the country.

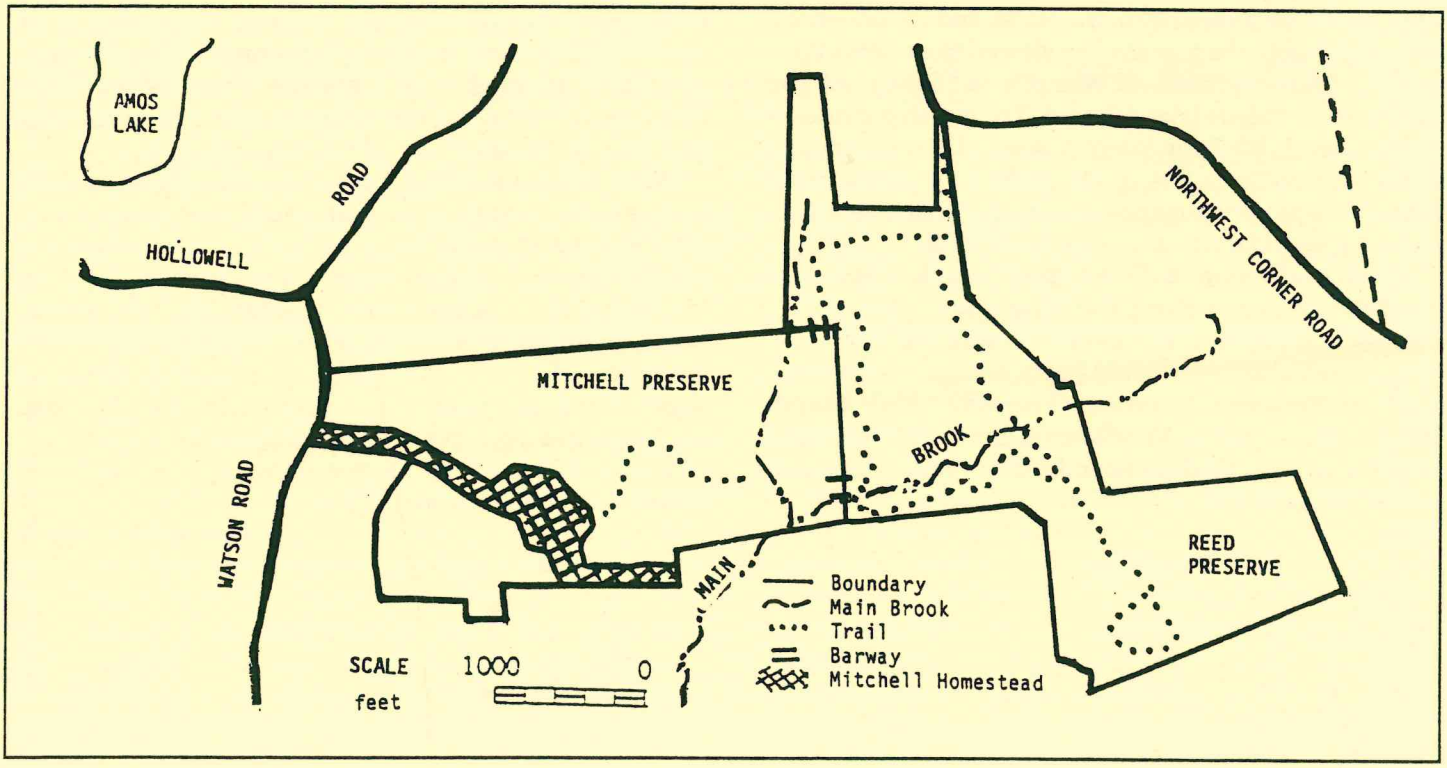
Continuing his love of music, Hobart and his close friend Jean North developed three LP records of music for churches that had no available music. These records were artistically, but not financially, successful so Hobart returned to his earlier occupation of teaching. He taught at Mitchell College from 1964 until his retirement in 1972 as Chairman of the English Department.

In 1957, Hobart and Claramary bought their property in Preston. The house is known as Woodmansee Red House and was probably built some time before 1765. It had no utilities and had been abandoned for 25 years. The Mitchells and their good friend Jean North worked diligently for many weekends to restore the house and yard.

Jean Mitchell's story is also interesting. She grew up on a farm in North Haven, Connecticut, and then attended Wellesley College. Realizing astronomy (her major) was not the best choice for her, she responded to recruiters from Curtiss Wright, who were "looking for bright young women with 2 years of math to replace the engineers who were being drafted." So Jean did vibration testing on propellers during the war. Ultimately she worked for the Society of Mechanical Engineers in New York City for 15 years, becoming production manager of its monthly publication. During this time, she met Claramary and Hobart Mitchell.

Jean then moved to the small town of Wallingford, Pennsylvania, to run the book store at Pendle Hill School, a Quaker school. For 10 years she travelled to Preston frequently to help the Mitchells restore their house and tame the landscape. "The tale of 'rolling the lawn' is a classic. After pulling out all the wild honeysuckle, the two women roughed up the soil and spread grass seed. The instructions said to 'roll the lawn'. They had no roller. What to do? Jean and Clerkie (Claramary) laid a large piece of plywood over the seeded area, and the two lay down and rolled back and forth over it, — moved it, — did it again and again until the lawn was properly rolled!"

The Mitchell's continuing love of life and of their Preston home were clearly evident to the Directors who celebrated their gift to Avalonia over tea and cookies at their home in September.




Jean and Hobart Mitchell Preserve and Eleanor and Flood Reed Memorial Woodlands

# Simone and Antonetta Norcia Nature Preserve

In September 2000, Michael Norcia of Pawcatuck gave Avalonia Land Conservancy 10.21 acres off of Johnson Street and Hickory Lane in Pawcatuck. The gift is to be known as the Simone and Antonetta Norcia Nature Preserve in honor of Mr. Norcia's parents, who began farming the land in 1931.

The preserve runs from just south of the water and sewer line south of Cronin Avenue to the railroad tracks where they parallel Pawcatuck Avenue. The preserve is separated from the Town of Stonington's park and picnic area behind the Stonington High School to the west by two vacant lots. The area is old farmland in transition to brush with some treed areas.

Mr. Norcia's family came to the area in 1931 during the Depression with the belief that having land was the way to survive. They leased the farm, known as Rock Ridge Farm, from Thomas Turner until they could begin to buy it in 1935, paying $40 a month on their loan from him. Like Hobart Mitchell, Mr. Norcia was also a conscientious objector during World War II. He was willing to help, but "just not to hurt anybody." As a result, he held various non-combatant positions in the U.S. Army.

Mr. Norcia, his wife Tommasina, and his brother Henry still live, garden and raise grapes on a portion of the family farm.

With this third gift of land in 2000, Avalonia Land Conservancy now protects 1,596.5435 acres in southeastern Connecticut (and New York and Rhode Island), owning a total of 1,571.9535 acres and holding Conservation Easements on 24.59 acres.

# The Wings Of Change — Report On South Dumpling

**by Brae Rafferty**

For many years Project Oceanology of Groton, Connecticut has been leading school groups out to South Dumpling Island in Fishers Island Sound during the spring gull nesting season. Armed with raincoats and inquisitive minds, students of all ages venture out to this island via *R/V Envirolab II* to observe and count the nesting birds. Historically, it has been prime Herring and Black Back gull nesting habitat. As you walk among the many nests, the birds always reacted with nervous squawking, occasional swoop attacks, and a white-wash coating aimed in your direction as they flew over head. If you have never walked through a gull breeding ground, it may be time you did.

For the past 10 years, South Dumpling has also shared its upper island with Great Egrets and Snowy Egrets, Black-Crown Night Herons, Glossy Ibis, and an occasional Little Blue Heron. These birds have taken advantage of the brushy open areas where the gulls cannot nest. Their populations appear to be stable.

During the past five years a new nester has come to the island, increasing in numbers each year — the cormorant. What began as a few ground nests has evolved into large numbers of both ground and tree nesting sites. Unlike any of the other mentioned birds, the cormorants have had a direct impact on their environment. Their guano immediately around their nests is killing the vegetation, including the trees. This is leaving large areas open to erosion especially along the tops of the banks. Last Spring, an attempt to stop the erosion and limit ground nesting sites had mixed results. Further efforts will be made this Spring. The tree-nesting cormorants continue to have negative impacts with no solutions to controlling their numbers at this time. Until recently, the cormorant population has been very small, only nesting in isolated locations. The recent cormorant population explosion in the Northeast has caught the State Biologist off guard and he cannot offer any controlling efforts at this time. Project Oceanology will continue to visit South Dumpling during future nesting seasons to watch these developments.

*Mr. Rafferty is an instructor at Project Oceanology and a Groton Director for the Avalonia Land Conservancy.*

# The Bedrock Fund for the Future

The Directors of the Avalonia Land Conservancy have been most gratified by the response to the fund-raising appeal for The Bedrock Fund for the Future, Avalonia's new land acquisition fund. To date, over $13,400 has been received in 112 donations and matching corporate grants. An additional $1,100 is anticipated in additional matching grants.

The Bedrock Fund for the Future will be used for any of the various expenses involved with acquiring land and can be expanded should funds be needed to actually purchase important parcels. So far, nearly all of Avalonia's preserves have been donated, but all acquisitions require expenditures of funds — some more than others.

Having the Bedrock Fund available means some acquisitions or commitments for acquisitions can be made without first engaging in a fund-raising drive. Avalonia is privileged to have such resources and will continue to use them prudently.


**SAVE ON YOUR TAXES!**

Use your state income tax refund to help save Connecticut's wildlife and plants. Their future is on the line - the "Endangered Species/Wildlife" Fund line on your tax return. Just check the box to make a donation and show your support. Your gift is deductible from next year's federal income tax.

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# Upcoming Events

**Sunday, February 4, 10:00 a.m.** — Walk on the new trail on the Moore Woodlands, Groton, with Director Quincy Robe. Inspect the enormous efforts to remove and control the invasion of bittersweet. Meet at the end of Capstan Avenue, Mystic. From Route 1 at the top of the hill west of Mystic, turn south on Ocean View Avenue. Turn right on Overlook Avenue, Island View Avenue, or Walter Fish Avenue to Capstan Avenue. Turn left on Capstan Avenue and proceed to the cul-de-sac at the end. Please call 446-0367 or 887-5878 for information or directions.

**Sunday, February 11, 10:00 a.m.** — Walk on Tefftweald at Birchenturn, 282 Grindstone Hill Road, North Stonington, with North Stonington Director David Davino. Well maintained, but sometimes uneven, trails through an upland forest with numerous stone walls and rock ledges and along Wyassup Brook. From Route 49, approximately 3.3 miles north of Route 184, turn left on Grindstone Hill Road. At the fork with Fowler Road, keep left on Grindstone Hill Road. Turn left into the driveway for #282. Follow the driveway to a small parking area. Please call 535-3634, 887-5878, or 535-3703 for information or directions.

**Sunday, February 18, 2:00 p.m.** — Explore the new Jean and Hobart Mitchell Preserve (101.78 acres) and the recently cleared trails on the Eleanor and Flood Reed Memorial Woodlands (111.08 acres) on Northwest Corner Road, North Stonington, with Director and President Anne Nalwalk. Meet at the entrance to the Reed Preserve at 371 Northwest Corner Road — 2.5 miles west of Route 201 and 1.5 miles east of Route 164. Please park on the grassy area on the road by the driveway or carefully on the road. Please call 887-5878 for information or directions.

**Events will be cancelled in case of heavy rain, crusty snow, or dangerous road conditions.**