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## Westford Conservation Trust Newsletter - Spring 2017

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### President's Message

#### **Annual Town Meeting - Saturday, March 25, 10:00 AM Abbot School**

The Trust urges you to attend Town Meeting this Saturday. There are two articles regarding conservation issues of interest on the warrant.

- **Article 8** - Community Preservation Funds allocation. One of the fund allocations in this article is for the Trust's proposed Pageant Field stone wall restoration. The Trust urges you to support the wall restoration portion of Article 8. See the story in this newsletter regarding the historic significance of the wall.
- **Article 19** - To amend APR #3 on the Drew Gardens Parcel. The Trust Board members voted unanimously to oppose Article 19 to amend the APR (Agricultural Preservation Restriction).

#### **Drew Farm development Article 19: Do we want a restaurant built in a residential district on conserved property?**

The current owner of the 9 acre former "Drew Farms" in the Boston Rd residential neighborhood wants to build a large restaurant on their newly purchased, perpetually conserved farm property.

It looks simple enough on the surface, but I and others have found, from multiple conversations with residents, that many facts which prohibit the conversion of this farm, it's effect on the Town's financial balance sheet, and it's possible effect on the town's "livability," do not appear to be well known to many of them.

Here are some pertinent facts that will provide you with some background and will help you decide on your vote.... Click [here](#) to read the rest of the article.

**Hope to see you at Town Meeting! Thank you, Ron Gemma**

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## **Pageant Field Wall Restoration Proposal** **By Ron Gemma, Westford Conservation Trust President**



Part of the mission of the Westford Conservation Trust is to "preserve and protect historic sites". To help fulfill that mission, the Trust has requested \$35,000 from The Community Preservation Committee to restore parts of the wall on Hildreth St. that borders Pageant Field. Pageant Field is named for the location of the Westford "Historical Pageant" which was held on September 21, 1929, in celebration of the 200th year anniversary of the Town of Westford's incorporation (see picture above). The field is part of the Trust's [Prospect Hill Wildlife Sanctuary](#). The request for the funds will be part of Article 8 presented at the March 25th, 2017, Town Meeting. We urge you to support this article.

The Westford "Historical Pageant" was performed by 500 participants dressed in period costumes and reportedly viewed by over 3,000 people (Note: The Town of Westford's population at that time was approx. 3,500). The pageant included significant events in Westford's history beginning with its incorporation as part of the town of Chelmsford in 1655. It included such events as the first encounter with the indigenous people and their leader (sachem) Wannalancet sharing a peace pipe with the first minister, John Fiske; the call to arms for the Revolutionary and World Wars; the Town's farmers, the quarry men, and millworkers. The pageant was reported in the Lowell Sun and the Boston Globe which described thousands of spectators viewing the pageant from the then bare slopes of Prospect Hill on the same property.



The requested funds in Article 8 will restore the wall (a damaged section shown in photo) along Hildreth St. which is a very fine cut stone wall, approximately 4 to 8 feet high, 4 feet wide and 1,500 feet long. It has fallen into disrepair over the years due to the ravages of time, weather and road maintenance (storm drain clearing and snowplowing). Major

sections of the wall are partially or wholly collapsed and the rest of the wall has sections where large top stones have been disturbed (see picture). The proposed project will restore the wall to match the existing wall which is still in good condition using the existing material that is on site. The specifications will require that adequate foundations must be installed where the wall has collapsed.

The Westford Conservation Trust has upgraded Pageant Field and its surroundings since the 8 acre property was donated to it in 1999 by Priscilla Elliot, formerly of 24 Hildreth St. The field was originally utilized as a pasture and cornfield but was converted into a wildflower/pollinator field in 2012 by the Trust.

Extensive work has already been done by the Trust to the field including:

- Removal of invasive plant species such as multiflora rose, burning bush, bittersweet and Norway maple from the field and surrounding property.
- A plant survey was conducted and over 70 different plant species were identified.
- The wrought iron gate entrance to the field which had been extensively damaged was restored with funds from the Trust and other interested parties.
- Stones were removed from the field to make mowing easier and the path around the field was made more negotiable as a walking path.

Several Eagle Scout projects have also been completed to enhance the walking trails, which include access to the field from the existing Prospect Hill trails, the installation of stairs to the top of Prospect Hill and information kiosk and trail markers.

To see more pictures and some historical files regarding the Pageant, click [here](#).

### Westford Trails Are Everywhere By Rich Strazdas



The Trust has catalogued, mapped and maintained lots of trails in town. Many of you have enjoyed exploring the trails in your neighborhood and throughout Westford. Some of you have actively or passively helped maintain a favorite trail. Kudos!

Did you know that there are (at least) 64 miles of trails that have been mapped in town? The Trail Guide, available at Roudenbush and at the Town

### History of the Slifer Conservation Land By Ellen Harde



A survey dated April 18, 1925 and titled "Plan of Camp Lots in Westford Mass." shows 20 lots, each about 300 sq. ft, along the north shore of Keyes Pond, running from Keyes Brook on the west almost to Keyes Road on the east. The owner was Richard

Picking.

In 1927, Marie Jeanne Slifer bought one of these camp lots on Keyes Pond. By 1945, The Valuation of the Town of Westford lists Marie Jeanne Slifer as owning: Cottage \$1,500, Boathouse \$50, Lots 3-4-5 Keyes Pond 11,000 sq. ft. \$200, Cottage \$500, lots 1-2 Keyes Pond

Clerk's office, describes the trails, as does the [Trust website](#). But there has never been a one-stop online view of the extent of trails in town - until now! Take a look at this GoogleMaps-enabled view. How far are you from a walk in the woods? Where a line from a [Wendell Berry poem](#) comes to mind: " I rest in the grace of the world, and am free." Where the deer, turkey, fox, duck, and woodpecker live as nature intended. Where the marsh and the stream replenish our aquifer. Where the trees stand silent guardians of our carbon sequestration. Do you have a personal nature preserve on your property? Mentally add it to the map and share it with your neighbors. Get out there and enjoy what your fellow townspeople have preserved for you and your children! The photo, taken by the author - "Across Burgess Pond".

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## Spring 2017 Hike Schedule

Join the Westford Conservation Trust on its monthly hikes. All hikes are free and no sign up is required. Bring your binoculars for the May Bird Walk. For more details on each hike, please visit our [website](#). Words of hiking wisdom - You don't stop hiking when you get old; you get old when you stop hiking.

### **Saturday, April 1 - Burns Hill**

**Time: 9:00 am – 10:30 am**

Take an early spring hike on the Burn's Hill Loop Trail, led by Westford Conservation Trust President Ron Gemma. We will walk on varied terrain from hilltops with excellent lookouts to lowlands with ponds and aquatic plants. The trail is a bit rugged and hilly in places.

- Wear sturdy footwear appropriate to the weather.
- **Park** along Rome Drive near the trail marker.
- Sociable dogs on leash are welcome.
- For further information, call Ron at 978-692-5668.

\$200

Marie DeSautels was born in 1899, and married Ernest Slifer, born in 1904 in Charles Town, West Virginia and who was a graduate of Yale University and Yale Law School (1926). The 1940 census shows Marie and Ernest living in Medford MA. By 1952 their address was "off Keyes Road" in Westford.

In 1986, the Slifers' 36.6 acre property became available to the Town of Westford when Mrs. Slifer placed the property on the market and the Town had the right of first refusal under Chapter 61B. The 1987 Annual Town Meeting appropriated \$1.163 million dollars and the Selectmen appointed a six-member committee to design a "limited development" for the land.

At the committee's recommendation in October 1987, the Slifers' house and 3.2 acres were sold at public auction for \$220,000. Five building lots with frontage on Gould Road were created and sold in 1989, and a Self-Help Grant from the State of \$268,750 helped offset the cost of the Town's acquisition.

In 1990 a conservation restriction was placed on the remaining 27 acres. At the end of the project, the net cost to the Town for 27 acres of conservation land was \$270,000. Click [here](#) for a map and details of the Slifer Conservation Land hiking trail.

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### **Saturday, May 13 - Spring Bird Walk**

**Time: 7:30 am - 9:00 am**

Join Westford Conservation Trust birder Lenny Palmer for an early morning ramble at Westford's birding "hot spot", Emmet Conservation Land. We will search Nashoba Pond and wetland areas on Town and Audubon conservation lands for returning migrants and nesting resident birds.

- Bring binoculars and wear sturdy shoes as land can be rocky and hilly in places.
- **Park** in the Town parking lot at the end of Trailside Way off Powers Road.
- No dogs please.
- For further information, call Lenny at 978-392-9876.

### **Sunday, May 21 - Wildflower Walk**

**Time: 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm**

Join Westford's knowledgeable and enthusiastic Elana Schreiber for our annual wildflower walk. She will take us on a walk on the beautiful Acker-Dean-DeSilva Conservation Land along Stony Brook where we will search out spring wildflowers. We will move slowly as we search for plants.

- **Park** in the lot off Depot St at the train tracks near Stony Conservation Land/EBC.
- Bring binoculars.
- Dogs and children are welcome, but will find the pace slow.
- For further information, call Elana on 978-692-7906.

### **Saturday, June 3 - Greystone**

**Time: 9:00 am - 10:30 am**

Join Westford Conservation Trust Director Lenny Palmer for a hike through this lovely conservation land adjacent to Greystone Pond. Area is mostly flat but uneven. This walk is appropriate for all ages, but not suitable for strollers.

- Wear sturdy footwear appropriate to the weather.
- **Park** at the Greystone recreation area off Russell's Way. Turn off Groton Road onto Russell's Way and then right just after the second bridge.
- Sociable dogs on leash welcome.
- For more info, call Lenny at 978-392-9876

### Beau Walsh Trail Signs

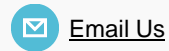
**By Bill Harman**



For a number of years Beau Walsh (pictured on left) has been making hand-routed trail signs.

Many of these are now installed at trailheads around Westford. White with grey letters, they are easy to see although they are relatively small and fit in appropriately with the trees and vegetation alongside the trails. They look like wood, but Beau makes them from a synthetic building material that will retain their handsome appearance for a very long time.

Now Beau has created a new format for showing a turn in the trail to the left or the right. It includes a recessed round area, which is the size of the small metal hiker medallions which we have available. Using two screws, the hiker medallion can be fixed in place, and the sign is ready to be installed. Now it's not necessary to have separate left-turn and separate right-turn signs on hand. I'm keeping several of these handy in the trunk of my car, so that I will be ready for the next time we need a nice appropriate sign somewhere when we realize that hikers are in need of better trail marking.



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