

ANNUAL MEETING

ELT's Annual Meeting took place this year on Saturday, September 8, in French Park. After reports on membership, finances, and land protection projects, the three board members whose term had expired: Walter Cliff, Chuck Ogden, and Susan Shapiro, were re-elected. A lively and informal discussion then provided land trust members with the opportunity to suggest new projects and opportunities for ELT. The discussion continued into the informal lunch provided by the land trust and the meeting concluded with a sale of the pumpkins grown by board members to replenish the ELT treasury.

PLEASE JOIN US!

If you're already a member, pass this envelope to a friend who's not yet a member. If you haven't yet joined ELT and love Egremont, use the envelope to become part of the good work.

Many thanks to the photographer/members who contributed photos to this issue:

*Martin Greene
Charles Ogden
David Shapiro*

ELT Welcomes LitNet

In keeping with ELT's policy of cooperating with other community non-profits, the land trust has made its South Egremont office available to Literacy Network for an hour each week so that a volunteer tutor can work with a student who works in South Egremont. Literacy Network's mission is to improve the language skills of anyone over eighteen who wants to speak, read, and write English better than they already do. The organization's regulations require that sessions be held in a spot with public access, and ELT was very glad to provide a suitable locale, especially since in this case the tutor is an ELT member.

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NEWSLETTER
FALL 2007

Many Volunteer Hands Get a Big Job Done

ELT members and friends turned out for the land trust's first Volunteer Day on August 11, and the fen property on Baldwin Hill Road was transformed. In the course of one year, a small cluster of rather attractive reeds on the edge of the little pond on the property had grown into a huge colony surrounding and obscuring the water. The reeds were actually the hated and feared phragmites, the bane of all conservationists' hearts because of its invasive qualities. While whole primitive civilizations in Eurasia and Africa have been based on it, here in New England it is a nuisance, crowding out native species at incredible speed. (Because, unlike native plants, it can tolerate salt, it is often found along roadsides.) In the push to restore Baldwin Hill Fen, it was targeted as Enemy Number One. And under the terms of a grant from the US Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, part of the grant has to be matched by ELT. One way to achieve this match is by hours of volunteer service by the Land Trust.

On that hot Saturday morning, a determined band of 31 volunteers of all ages, fueled by plenty of lemonade and ice water, not to speak of energy-renewing cookies, and supervised by arborist Tom Ingersoll, demolished the phragmites. Because the plant multiplies by sending out horizontal stems that then sink roots, it is not enough to cut down the towering stalks. Each stalk is hollow, and a drop of herbicide (in this case, glyphosate) must be carefully inserted into the stem at the point, usually breast-high, where it is cut. This is a job for experts, and a team of young interns from The Nature Conservancy, supervised by Jess Toro, took over this task. Wearing waders, the interns also cut the reeds actually growing in the water and added them to the growing pile that will be disposed of during the burn season.

The little pond is once more visible, and will, in the future, be the center of the nature trail ELT hopes to build. Meanwhile, there is plenty of other invasive vegetation on the premises, and plenty of work for future volunteer days.



Reading clockwise from above left: 1. Volunteers paused periodically for cool drinks on a hot summer day. 2. Some of the work took poace in the water at the edge of the pond. 3. Barbara Greene, ELT board member, was one of the land-based workers. 4. Work for experts: TNC interns carefully dripped the herbicide into the hollow stems of the phragmites.





Aunt Rose's Column

Aunt Rose hates to nag, but she can't stand to see good money going to waste just because folks won't stir their stumps a little. She's telling us that for another couple of months we can do good and do well.

I've had a number of "last chances" in my long life. My late husband Ezekiel was one of these. Some were not what they were cracked up to be, but some were really worthwhile. Ezekiel was somewhere in between. Now I believe I've found a last chance that is worth your consideration.

The government has changed the tax law once again, but this time it's in our favor. As you know, it has been the law for many years that a gift to a tax-exempt entity (like the Egremont Land Trust) of a conservation restriction on land produces a tax deduction equal to the amount by which the value of the land is reduced because of that conservation restriction. Typically this is sixty to seventy percent, but sometimes as much as ninety percent. Under the law before this latest change, that deduction could reduce your income by

a maximum of only thirty percent. Any excess over the thirty percent could be carried forward against your taxable income in the succeeding five years.

Now, however, under the new law, deductions created in 2006 and 2007 by conservation restrictions on land can reduce your adjusted gross income by up to fifty percent. And any excess can be carried forward for fifteen years.

For example, if you have an adjusted gross income of \$60,000 and donate a conservation restriction worth \$300,000 to the Egremont Land Trust (yippee!), before this you could deduct only \$18,000 in the year of the gift and could use only \$90,000 of tax deductions over the ensuing five years. Thus \$192,000 of deductions would go to waste. But now you can deduct \$30,000 in the year of the gift and use all the remaining \$270,000 of tax deduction over the following fifteen years, so that no part of the deduction should go to waste. And of course you need to have income to take advantage of any tax deduction.

The deduction limits are even more favorable for farmers, defined as people who earn more than fifty percent of their gross income from farming.

But this is really a last chance. Any deduction triggered in 2008 by the gift of a conservation easement will revert to the thirty percent and five year carryover rules of old.

So hurry up and get your conservation restriction in place by year end.

Remembering Linda

Linda Benson, the Egremont Land Trust's founder, died on the Fourth of July this summer. Organized and decisive all her life, she threw herself whole-heartedly into projects, even though none might seem to be a logical continuation of the preceding one. Her conservation interest started almost simultaneously with the Bensons' move to Egremont, just as plans to develop the Jug End valley were announced. Linda told her husband that they had not moved to the country to live next to a 600-unit development, and she quickly gathered a small group to form Egremont Environmental Action, later to be known as the Egremont Land Trust.

She was born in England, in Plymouth, in 1919, but as soon as she left school she headed for London, where she landed a job as secretary to T.S. Eliot and became a small part of the intellectual ferment of the thirties in England. Ezra Pound became a good friend and she kept up with him and his family for years afterward. She lived through the war in London, but afterward suddenly decided she'd had enough and that the next phase of her life would be in archeology. With no more ado, she set out for Greece to search out an interesting site, and chose Corinth, where a young American archeologist named Leonard Benson was digging. After they were married, Linda began the peripatetic life of academic couples, moving from the University of Pennsylvania (where she was the anthropologist Loren Easley's secretary), to the University of Mississippi, to Princeton, to Wellesley, to the Institute of Advanced Studies, to, finally, UMass. Always, Linda had a garden, and always she chafed at the feeling that she was simply "Leonard Benson's wife."

With the Jug End struggle she became, she felt, a person in her own right. She told Leonard, "You'll be Linda Benson's husband now." Working tirelessly, her study a war room, she besieged government offices with letters, telephone calls, and faxes. For tactical reasons, she represented herself as a rather naïve old lady who simply wanted to know. This was not true: although certainly a lady and beginning to be old, she was a sophisticated and wily opponent, adept at seizing allies wherever she could find them. On weekends, she and a few helpers set up a card table in front of the old post office in South Egremont and buttonholed passersby to sign on to join the struggle. From these lists, Egremont Environmental Action was born.

Linda, plus, among others, the Egremont Planning Board, The Nature Conservancy, the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and the Department of Environmental Protection, as it was then known, won that battle, of course; the developers retired in dismay and ultimate disgrace. Linda turned next to the effort to have the Commonwealth declare the Karner Brook Watershed an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. Once that happened, she turned to new fields of endeavor.

She had designed the house they built, at the corner of Jug End Road and Mt. Washington Road, according to the theories of Rudolf Steiner. Now, as they grew older, the couple began to feel isolated, and sold that house to move just over the New York border in Austerlitz, where they built a new house, and planted a new garden, among other members of a group called The Christian Community. Both Bensons had long been interested in a philosophic movement called Anthropostrophe, again an outgrowth of the thinking of Rudolf Steiner, and Linda, together with her friend Linda Norris, organized a very well-attended series of lectures on this subject. This was her last project: both Lindas died this year. Linda Benson was 88.

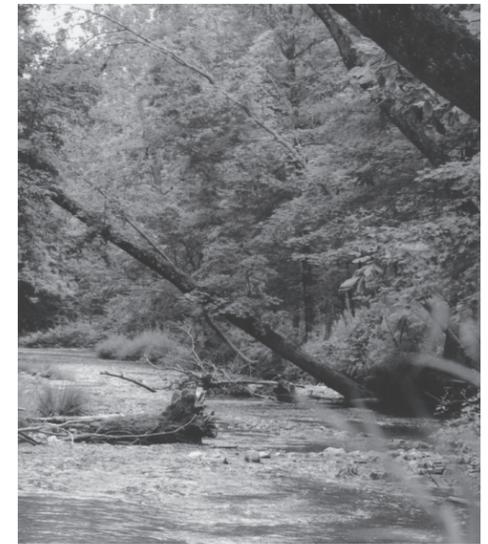


Linda Benson on her eightieth birthday.

Visiting the Green River Property

This was the first summer that ELT's new property on the Green River in North Egremont was open to fishermen, or indeed to anyone who wanted to enjoy the cool shade of the trees along the riverbank. The property is on Route 71, just one-fifth of a mile north of Rowe Road, on the right. There are two spots where cars may be pulled off the road to park. The field along the road is actively farmed (soybeans this year) so approaching the river without trampling on the crops presents a problem of strategy. Next year, ELT, in cooperation with the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, hopes to build a path, but for now the best plan is to make one's way south (turn right) between the cultivated land and the road, and then, at the end of the field, turn left toward the river. This is the best place to view the flowing water: upstream, the river forms several oxbows.

And while this Green River property is fully paid for, some of the money came out of ELT's capital funds. The matching grant still has \$18,000 to be awarded. Donations to the Green River Fund, doubled by the grant, will help replenish this capital and prepare the land trust for the next project.



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If we have inadvertently omitted your name, we apologize. Please let us know by leaving a message at 413-528-6626.

A Walk Through Egremont History

This year ELT's annual history walk was entitled "Personages from Egremont's Past" and was co-sponsored by The Friends of Egremont History. Fifteen fans of local history gathered at the Egremont Free Library on Saturday morning, August 18th, to hear Nic Cooper of the Egremont Historical Commission,



Lois Ginsberg introducing Nic Cooper in the Archive Room.

James Parrish of the Great Barrington Historical Society, and Ann-Elizabeth Barnes of the Friends of Egremont History. Lois Ginsberg, ELT's vice-president, welcomed everyone to the event and introduced the speakers. Nic Cooper led the group up the steep stairs of the library (formerly Egremont's Academy) to the Archive Room, which contains, in addition to documents, a mini-museum of Egremont's history. He pointed out such revered relics as Major Smiley's saddle, objects salvaged from the Dalzell Axle Factory and the Baldwin Chair Factory, and humble household odds and ends from two and a half centuries of daily life in Egremont. Nic urged attendees to come back to explore the archives at greater length. (The Archive Room is open on the first Saturday of the month from 9 to 12 AM or by appointment.)

James Parrish led the group around the Mount Everett cemetery, which is located behind and to one side of the library building. This is a private cemetery, maintained by members of the Mount Everett Cemetery Association, at an annual cost of a few hundred dollars. It contains the graves of many of Egremont's very early residents, including members of the Benjamin, Curtiss, Dalzell, Goodale and Karner families. James is himself a descendant of some of these families and is president of the cemetery association, but since the plots are all

taken he will not be able to join his ancestors.

Finally, Ann-Elizabeth Barnes led the band of amateur historians up to the Egremont Inn and along the old Sheffield Road, where the formidable Dorothy Durfee Brown once held sway. She owned the inn, bought and restored several of the historic houses along the road and encouraged her neighbors to do the same. That part of town, preserved through Mrs. Durfee Brown's efforts, came to be known to locals as Durfeeville. Ann-Elizabeth also recounted some of the very early history of Egremont, which, long before neighboring towns were settled at all, became a haven for fugitives from the law, escaped slaves, and other elements making for an unruly population, perhaps foreshadowing present-day town meetings.



Ann-Elizabeth Barnes in front of the Egremont Inn, once owned by Mrs. Durfee

In closing, Ann-Elizabeth described an on-going project of the Friends of Egremont History to make available, to the owners of historically significant houses in North and South Egremont, small signs with the date of the house, placed so as to be seen by passers-by. Increasingly, the history of Egremont is being made visible.



James Parrish in the Mount Everett Cemetery

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Early Birds

A record flock of birders turned out for ELT's sixth annual bird walk on May 5, a beautiful Saturday morning. Led once again by ornithologist Brian Kane, experts and novices alike formed a loose procession through the fields of Jug End State Reservation and up the trail that climbs through the woods to the ridge line. (And once again, the walk was open to everyone, without cost.) It was early enough in the

season to catch many of the migrants that pass through Massachusetts on their way north to their breeding grounds, and early enough in the day--the walk started at 7:30--to find the birds actively feeding. Although Brian himself, who started even earlier, saw 76 species in the general area, the ELT birders recorded a total of 40 species:

great blue heron
canada goose
mallard
turkey vulture
red-tailed hawk
kestrel
ring-necked pheasant
mourning dove
flicker
downy woodpecker
red-bellied woodpecker
eastern phoebe
least flycatcher
blue-headed vireo
tree swallow
blue jay
crow
black-capped chickadee
tufted titmouse
white-breasted nuthatch
eastern bluebird
robin
blue-winged warbler
yellow warbler
yellow-rumped warbler
palm warbler
louisiana waterthrush
common yellowthroat
cardinal

rose-breasted grosbeak
eastern towhee
chipping sparrow
field sparrow
song sparrow
red-winged blackbird
grackle
brown-headed cowbird
baltimore oriole
house finch
gold finch

For the record, the other species Brian saw were:

black duck
common merganser
cooper's hawk
red-shouldered hawk
ruffed grouse
turkey
rock pigeon
ruby-throated hummingbird
pileated woodpecker
hairy woodpecker
yellow-bellied sapsucker
eastern kingbird
barn swallow
brown creeper
house wren

ruby crowned kinglet
mockingbird
gray catbird
brown thrasher
hermit thrush
gray-cheeked thrush
wood thrush
starling
black and white warbler
black-throated blue warbler
black-throated green warbler

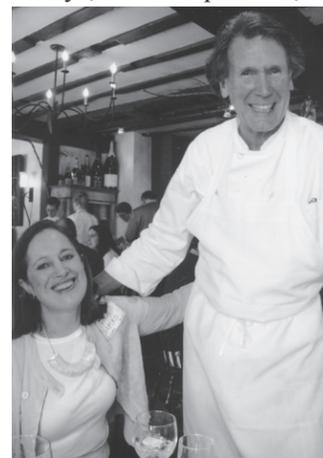
pine warbler
ovenbird
junco
white-throated sparrow
white-crowned sparrow
lincoln's sparrow
swamp sparrow
eastern meadowlark
purple finch
house sparrow



Bird walk leader Brian Kane

Seventh Spring Benefit

On Sunday, May 20th ELT held its seventh annual benefit lunch at the Old Mill in South Egremont. Chef (and ELT member) Terry Moore created a sumptuous menu featuring, as always, seasonal produce, often from nearby farms. After cocktails and hors d'oeuvres,



Chef Terry Moore with Susan Shapiro

guests sat down to risotto primavera, a choice of roast halibut with morel sauce or ragout of spring lamb with baby vegetables, and, finally, marscapone-filled crepes with strawberry-rhubarb nectar, all complemented by accompanying wines. Service was provided by members of the Old Mill's staff, Ginny Filkins, Barbara Chase, Kerry Willig, Nancy Begbie, Kasey Colfill, and Margaret Esposito, each of whom graciously contributed her services as her own donation to ELT.

The after-lunch speaker was Billie Best, the writer and born-again farmer from Alford, who spoke on the need to discard our old culture of consumption and concentrate instead on a new culture of conservation. Once, she said, the old paradigm that said the more food we consume the more we grow was sufficient. Now, however, we are running out of the earth's resources and we need a new paradigm. She described the fallacy of cheap foods, which, it turns out, are not so cheap after all: they use too much of the world's nonrenewable resources. Food from local farmers is often at first glance more expensive than mass-produced commodities shipped across the continent or across the world, but, she said, we should "buy less and pay more. We must close the relationship gap between the customer and the producer. Every time we spend a dime we're voting for the culture it came from."



Lunch finished, guests listen to Billie Best

ELT Goes to School

The chance to work with the children at the Egremont School is one of the pleasantest consequences of ELT's mission to educate. The land trusts sponsors special ecology courses, invites the children down to visit the ELT office and learn what a land trust does, and pays for many of the plants that make up the school garden. In these pictures the children are in the process of creating their garden and learning a few basic facts about the natural world around them.

