

## A Poem

### I Am Water

I am water.  
 You are clay.  
 I am what the world needs,  
 But you are what the world is made of.

When we meet:  
 Mud, and muddy water;  
 Thickening, loosening, even panic.  
 Waiting for each to settle,  
 Within each.

-Stephen Philbrick



### THE HILLTOWN LAND TRUST MISSION STATEMENT:

- To conserve active farmland and other 'working' properties;
- To save native plant and wildlife habitats;
- To protect watersheds;
- To preserve the scenic and rural character of the Hilltowns.

*The Hilltown Land Trust recognizes that our towns must balance their need to create new housing and jobs with their need to preserve critical natural resources and their rural character. We're committed to being an important participant in this endeavor.*

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## Walking the Bryant Woods

On Sunday, September 8, about 50 people joined "old growth expert" Bob Leverett on a guided tour of the Bryant Homestead's old growth forest and Great White Pine stand sponsored by the Hilltown Land Trust and Highland Communities Initiative.

Bob, a retired Major in the Air Force and resident of Holyoke, has rightly earned his reputation as an "old growth expert." Besides spending many years studying the forests of Massachusetts, he has written several articles on the subject

and co-authored *The Sierra Club Guide to Ancient Forests of the Northeast*. Often referring to the trees as "old friends" and "treasures," Bob explained that he gained his knowledge of trees from reading, experience, and "much collaboration with knowledgeable colleagues."

As the group walked the Rivulet Trail, Bob pointed out the different stages of forest growth. For example, while scattered and spindly white ash, sugar maples, and hemlock on either side of the trailhead indicated new forest, a bit farther

up the trail, bigger hardwoods, hemlocks, and pines and a less cluttered forest floor suggested a more mature forest.

Near the end of the Rivulet Trail, however, was the first signs of the old growth forest—the trees became even taller and wider, the canopy was denser, and large deadfall littered the forest floor. Many of the trees here are between 120 to 250 years old, with a few hemlocks possibly exceeding 300 years old.

Defining an old growth forest is difficult, or, as Bob put it, "there is no real definition so (*cont'd*)"



A group hikes the Bryant Homestead's Rivulet Trail, which encompasses several stages of forest growth.

## BRYANT HOMESTEAD CONTINUED

that the forest knows it's an old growth forest." The definition of an old growth forest often depends on who is defining it and where the forest is. But he did explain that about 2 to 5 acres of the Bryant Woods have the general characteristics of primary old growth in New England: very tall, wide and old trees, deep pits and huge mounds left by uprooted trees, and little if any human disturbance.

A turn onto the Pine Loop led to another highlight of the tour—the Bryant Woods' Great White Pines. "This is not just another woodlot," Bob explained. "It's an eye-popping stand of great white pines." Leaning against one towering pine tree, Bob explained why the Bryant's pine forest is unique. Although the pines are not the oldest in Massachusetts—most range in age between 120 and 130 years old—they do boast immense girths and have attained some staggering heights. Four, for example, are slightly over 150 feet tall, with the tallest one, the Bryant Pine, recently being measured at 156.3 feet tall. According to Bob, the soil, which is a mix of glacial sand and silt, is the perfect growing environment for these trees.

To honor the tallest pines, Bob has named them after several prominent New England poets—including Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost and, of course, William Cullen Bryant.

Currently, old growth forests on private lands are not protected, but Bob emphasized the need to preserve all old growth stands because they offer a rare opportunity to study forest growth and genetic diversity, past and present.

# T • O • W • N

## Frank Stevens' Generosity Continues

Frank Stevens has once again given the hilltowns and the Hilltown Land Trust an invaluable gift—another 112 acres of woods on Pisgah Road in Huntington. In December, 2003 Frank donated 267 abutting acres in the northwest corner of Westhampton to the HLT.

According to Ruth Pardoe, these two parcels, along with the 256 acres of land that Nancy Eric owns and recently placed in a conservation restriction with the HLT, have created a 635-acre tract of contiguous land that will be protected forever. Ruth, a HLT board member, has worked diligently to conserve much of the land along Pisgah Road in Westhampton and Huntington.

"This is an act of unparalleled generosity to the Land Trust, and the people of Huntington and Westhampton will be grateful, literally, forever," explained Ruth. "Steve has made a testament to his love of this land by saving it from eventual development."

Such large corridors of undeveloped land are important not only as essential wildlife habitat but also as protection for watersheds and other natural resources. These woods will also be part of the HLT's new eco-forestry project.

With this newest acquisition, the HLT now owns 597 acres in Westhampton, Huntington, Williamsburg, and Worthington. It also holds 18 conservation restrictions on another 1,789 acres in six hilltowns and is working toward obtaining five more.

Once again, thank you Frank Stevens for your generosity and dedication to conservation!

—Excerpted in part from *The Country Journal*



◀ "Old growth expert" Bob Leverett, who has spent years studying Massachusetts forests, shares his knowledge at the Bryant Homestead.

# U • P • D • A • T • E • S

## Carmel's Meadow Conservation: Sweat, Grit, but No Tears

Once upon a time there was a parcel of land on the banks of the Westfield River in Huntington which could have sprouted either grass or houses. It was a small parcel, only 6.5 acres, but it had 1,400 feet of riverfront and stunning views across its fields to the river from Montgomery Road at its junction with Route 112. Most important, architect Jeff Penn, who would later become a Hilltown Land Trust director, lived on the opposite shore of the river facing those same fields. The parcel came on the market in 2000 when its owner's lending bank threatened foreclosure on it and its adjacent parcels.

A group of neighbors, led by Jeff, formed an ad hoc committee to save the meadow, which was identified in the town's Open Space Survey. They received financial help from friends and neighbors, the Valley Land Fund, and the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund. But not enough to buy the land. When no conservation buyer emerged, Jeff stepped up and borrowed the rest of the needed money from a bank—at his personal risk. The HLT designed and accepted a contingent conservation restriction for the land, one that had not received the required statutory approvals and thus could be removed or modified if necessary. This provided a temporary form of protection.

Jeff held on for more than two years, paying real estate taxes and some of the mortgage interest out of his own pocket. Finally, in 2003, Natalie and Kirk Birrell, one of the lead contributors in the 2000 fund-raising campaign, agreed to buy the property from Jeff, reserving the building lot furthest from the river for a new house. Excluding the house lot where they now live, the Birrells contributed to the HLT a permanent statutory conservation restriction on the riverside meadow.

To make the deal work, Jeff incurred considerable expenses and donated his architectural services. As the project progressed, he continued to have input into the final appearance and quality of the site. Jeff calls his efforts an example of "not-in-my-backyard" conservation.

We call it an example of extraordinary personal commitment to conservation.

## Nature Sightings

The Hilltown Land Trust is sponsoring the Nature Sightings Board at the Old Creamery In Cummington. Patrons are encouraged to post area wildlife sightings on the large chalkboard near the door. Recent posts include a moose spotted in Worthington, a large buck at Snow Farm in Williamsburg, and a coyote in Cummington. Stop by the Old Creamery and check it out—it's informative and just plain fun to read, thanks to the interesting commentary some folks add to their entries.

## Please join the Hilltown Land Trust!

Get newsletters about Hilltown conservation and notices of special events.

*Help support the work!*

Along with your name, address, and contact information, please send your check or money order payable to:

**Hilltown Land Trust  
PO Box 251  
Chesterfield, MA 01012**

\$35 per year (our basic "Land Lover")

or with more passion:

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THANK YOU!