

A HISTORY OF CHAPMAN'S POND AND ITS PRESERVATION

by
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PART I



The Cynthia B. Carlson Wildlife Preserve (Chapman's Pond). Photo by Susan Bourneque. Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy.

Land preservation fights are rarely won on a permanent basis. Individual development proposals for unique areas may be fought and defeated but as long as the land continues to exist in its natural state, it is always susceptible to being destroyed or degraded. When one proposal is turned down, there are usually others waiting to be considered.

Every year, scenic and ecologically significant land areas are sold with changing ownership and better or worse opportunities for preservation. In the past, the state of Connecticut has acquired many significant areas for inclusion into its system of state parks and state forests; however, the state cannot purchase every desirable tract of land. In the private sector, land trusts, watershed councils, and associated bodies have formed alternative means to preserve land which is increasingly important to the state.

One of the most important acts of land preservation in Connecticut in many years took place on April 1, 1982 when The Nature Conservancy purchased 300 acres of land in East Haddam from the heirs of the late Vivien Kellems. The Conservancy has named the new fish and wildlife refuge the Cynthia B. Carlson Nature Preserve, known to most as Chapman's Pond.

Following the acquisition there have been many news articles about the new preserve but more needs to be recorded, because the land is so unique and so many people worked very hard to save it; a more detailed account of both the land and the story of its preservation should be offered. The saga of Chapman's Pond is important for all land preservationists because it tells how land preservation sometimes evolves in a most tedious and complex manner.

THE LAND'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The name, 'Chapman's Pond,' does not adequately describe the region because there is more to the area than just a pond. The over 600 acres of land is located in the southwest-



ern corner of East Haddam, stretching south from the Goodspeed's landing to the northern boundary of Gillette Castle State Park and includes a series of similarly shaped hills known as The Seven Sisters. The land is bordered on the east by River Road and to the west by the Connecticut River and Lord and Rich islands. Between the river and the base of the sharply-rising hills is a broad, flat floodplain, an accumulation of silt and organic debris that fills a portion of the ancient riverbed. Chapman's Pond lies within that floodplain.

To the naturalist, the key to the value of the area is its diversity, for the tract not only includes river floodplain and a totally fresh-water tidal pond (which is unique in itself), but it also boasts two tidal creeks connecting the pond with the river, tidal marsh, mixed hardwood forest, a nearly pure stand of mature hemlock, hills and cliffs towering hundreds of feet upward, rushing woodland brooks, and reverting meadows. Although a few old foundations, stone walls, and logging roads can be found, the land is essentially in an unspoiled, natural state.

Within the area one can find just about any type of native tree common to the state; there are numerous noteworthy stands of hemlock, black birch, yellow birch, tulip, beech, maple, and oak with one particularly impressive white oak along the South Creek. There is also a massive hemlock hidden among a thick stand of pure hemlock on the top of a ridge. It is obviously a survivor from the days when the land was open fields.

Tim Hawley, a forester for the New Haven Water Company speculated that the northern hemlock stand was between 80 and 100 years old and owed its existence to the moist, humid environment of the pond. Hemlocks, he explained, cannot tolerate fire and even brush fires can kill standing trees. Railroads, such as the now-defunct New York, New Haven, and Hartford line across the river, were responsible for many fires in the region due to airborne

sparks. This stand's proximity to the pond and the manner in which it and The Seven Sisters hold pockets of fog may have helped keep the locale moist and resistant to fire.

The land between the pond and the river is half tidal marsh dominated by sedges, cattails, and rushes and half floodplain forest, hosting large cottonwood, ash and spice-bush. The marshes contain two uncommon species of plants. *Lophotocarpus spongiosus*, a member of the water plantain family found on the tidal mudflats, is listed in Dowhan and Craig's *Rare and Endangered Species of Connecticut and Their Habitats* as being rare and threatened by urbanization and pollution. Torrey's bulrush, *Scirpus torreyi*, is listed as rare in our state and was recently discovered in the tidal portion of the pond. In addition, a mint known as the Hedge-nettle, *Stachys tenuifolia*, likewise very rare in Connecticut, is thought to be growing in the floodplain area although its presence has yet to be confirmed by botanists.

The edges of the tidal marshes host a jungle of flowers. Most are not rare but they provide for very scenic canoeing especially in the fall when many species such as cardinal flower, loosestrife, and pickerelweed are in bloom. The major inflorescence of the terrestrial wildflower community occurs in the spring and botanists expect to find some additionally interesting, if not rare, species of flowers in the upland woodlands when more thorough surveys are done.

The area also has a diversified animal community. A moderate-sized deer herd roams the forest and the common species of fox, raccoon, opossum, rabbit, and squirrel are certainly well represented. DEP wildlife biologist Joe Risigo reports that otter and mink are known to reside there and it is probable that the seclusive bobcat is present also. Perhaps one of the most interesting residents is the coyote, which was found for one of the first times in Connecticut by a trapper in the Chapman's Pond area during the 1960s. Coyotes are now regularly reported. Risigo relates stories of being in the vicinity when the East Haddam Bridge sounded its siren and hearing numerous coyotes answer with a chorus of distinctive howls. The relatively large expanse of natural, undisturbed land with abundant food supply is the reason for the local success of this uncommon species.

The pond and marshes have a large population of muskrat as well as snapping turtles, snakes, and rodents but perhaps the most visible creatures are the birds. Waterfowl regularly visit and nest in the marsh as do one pair of mute swans, herons, bitterns, kingfishers, and a multitude of songbirds such as red-wing blackbirds, wrens, various sparrows and warblers — the list is endless.

The area has not been thoroughly 'birded' but experienced birders such as Ted Hendrickson of Old Lyme, and Professor Noble Proctor of Southern Connecticut State College are impressed with the apparent diversity of the area's bird life. Migrant ospreys regularly fish the pond and the late Tom Hoehns, DEP biologist, speculated that once the rebounding fish hawks begin to expand inland, Chapman's Pond may be one of the first sites used for nesting. The upland hills also host rich bird life and may provide breeding habitat for owls and hawks as well as pileated and red-headed woodpeckers, both of which have been sighted there. Cornell-based ornithologist Paul Spitzer has speculated that if bald eagles are ever able to resume nesting in southeastern Connecticut, Chapman's Pond will be the place it will occur. Presently,

eagles regularly over-winter in the area, fishing near the two tidal creeks, where ice rarely forms.

The pond is a very significant place for fish because it provides them with critical overwintering habitat. The Connecticut River Ecological Study — the environmental impact statement done for the Connecticut Yankee Atomic Power Plant — identified the pond as one of the most important wintering areas on the lower river and when Fish and Game biologists (now DEP) discovered high densities of fish in the pond even during the summer, all commercial fishing was outlawed in the pond. Numerous species use the pond's sheltered waters for spawning, including the popular game species of largemouth bass and northern pike. Sport-fishing in the pond ranges from fair to excellent for sunfish, yellow and white perch, largemouth, smallmouth, and calico bass, pickerel, northern pike, carp, white catfish, brown bullhead, and American eel.

Although the small, tumbling brooks on the hillsides are essentially devoid of fish because of their steep gradient, there is one very small pool that contains an apparently isolated population of native eastern brook trout. The few fish in the pool sexually mature at lengths of four inches; dwarfism probably maintained by the extreme physical confinement and allowed to persist by the pristine water quality and the lack of hatchery trout introductions.

THE HISTORY OF THE LAND

Early accounts of the lower river valley by settlers made no mention of a pond in the East Haddam stretch of the river even though descriptions were offered of other, often smaller, waterways such as Lords Cove, Selden Cove, Whalebone Creek, and the Salmon River Cove. The floodplain below The Seven Sisters was referred to by residents of the 1600s as Chapman's Meadow.

East Haddam, originally part of the Town of Haddam, was first settled by Europeans in 1670 but a man named Robert Chapman claimed a large tract of land in the southern part of the region as early as 1642. The land's Indian ownership was confusing at best; two tribes lay claim to the area but both were dominated first by the fierce Pequot invaders and then by the Pequot off-shoot, the Mohegans led by the legendary Uncas. There are conflicting stories as to how Chapman, a resident of Saybrook came into possession of the land. One account says he bought it from a Mohegan named Chapeto while local historian Francis Parker, in his comprehensive *History of East Haddam*, claimed the land from the Eight-mile River in Lyme to the Twenty-mile Island in East Haddam was given to Chapman by a Nehantic sagamore named Wekwash, or Wequash, an ally of Uncas and the English in the first Indian war of North America and one of the first Indian converts to Christianity.

Much of the described land was later given to other white men, including William Lord who bought the Twenty-mile Island from Chapeto in 1669 — according to DeForest in his classic *History of the Indians of Connecticut*. If this is true, it is unlikely that Chapeto would have been of an age in 1642 to sell land to Chapman and Parker's version is more plausible. In any case, Chapman was the first white man to acquire from an Indian, land along the river between the settlement at Hartford and the fort at Saybrook, making the Chapman's Pond area quite historic. This area was most likely shared by Chapman and Lord during the late 1600s with Chapman

owning the northern part and Lord owning the southern portion. Twenty-mile Island (a misnomer since the island is about 16 miles from the river mouth) was eventually acquired by the Chapman family but subsequently reverted to the Lords and has been referred to as Lords Island since the 1700s.

John Chapman never developed his land but his son, Captain John Chapman, became one of the first settlers in East Haddam when in 1673 he built his home on the knoll where the Gelston House restaurant now stands. He timbered the wooded hills and grazed animals on the floodplain meadows and the land stayed in the Chapman family for many generations. The floodplain meadows where the pond is now located was originally called Chapman's Meadows, but by the early 1700s they were referred to as the Town Commons or the Meadow Commons, implying that town residents were given free access to the grazing land.

How and when Chapman's Pond was formed, is open to speculation. The author's research and that of others indicate that it may have formed sometime in the early 1700s, perhaps by a large flood, since references to the pond begin around that time. It was only the southern half of the meadows that became a pond and that area was probably somewhat marshy originally because of the draining of three upland brooks among The Seven Sisters into the floodplain. The northern half of the meadows, now under an airstrip and parking lot, was probably much drier.

The river frontage along the meadow area was a popular stretch for commercial fishing of salmon and later shad and the fishermen used to moor their boats in the pond and row to the river via the outflowing creek, a long, winding, south-flowing stream. A dispute arose between the fisherman who owned the land around the creek and the other fishermen so the other men dug 'ditches' between the pond and the river so they could take their boats out to the river without passing down the disputed creek. Although traces of a second ditch remain, only one functional ditch survives today; The Great Ditch, which runs from the pond to the river directly east of Lord Island.

Down through the years, the use of the meadows shifted from grazing to haying. Town farmers, now spread out all over the large town, owned narrow strips of the meadow extending from the river inland to the pond, many only 100 feet wide. Every fall the farmers would cut the grass and take it to their farms for winter feed. The vegetation was called 'salt hay' but since the pond and the adjacent river are almost totally freshwater, the species of grass was almost certainly not the same as the salt hay harvested from downstream meadows at Essex and Saybrook.

The haying tradition continued until recent times and there are many town residents who remember it. Anita Gelston Ballek tells of not only the hard work involved but of the fun, food, and haying contests. The entire farming community would assemble on the meadows at the same time to help each other with the harvest and enjoy picnic lunches and games. Ballek recalls that the hay was hand-cut, gathered in huge bundles across workers' backs, and thrown onto the carts that were pulled by oxen across a stone culvert over the Great Ditch.

East Haddam farmer Mortimer Gelston — Anita Ballek's brother — believes that he was the last person to hay the land in the fall of 1935 when he was 15. In March of 1936 the

infamous Great Flood devastated the meadows, depositing tons of silt, debris, and vegetation that subsequently sprouted and pioneered the present-day floodplain forest. The culvert over the Great Ditch was washed out, cutting off access to what then became an unnamed island — surrounded by the pond, the river, the south creek, and the Great Ditch, which slowly became known as the north creek. For years, boaters encountered mild rapids and whirlpools at the site of the old culvert when the ebbing tide flowed over the remnant rocks but years of spring freshets and floods have swept away the obstacles and widened the passageway so that boaters now encounter only the strong surge of the tide emptying the pond into the river.

Near the turn of the century the second offshore island appeared between Lord Island and the hay meadows. Built from alluvial silt and sand like its neighbor, the island was soon homesteaded by Mr. and Mrs. Augustus Rich who built a home and lived there until November 1922 when the building burned. They moved to a house on the hillside overlooking Chapman's Pond (the foundation can still be found just south of the middle brook) and in 1925 they quit-claimed the island, now known as Rich Island, to a man named Mundorf.

Lord Island was also inhabited during this time. A man named Franken lived in a small hut. Lord Island was also a traditional fishing spot so it is hard to say whether it is a stone foundation of Franken's hut or the remnants of an old fishing pier that terrorize pleasure boaters today, but an unnatural pile of rocks — exposed only at low tide — stands upstream of Lord Island and adjacent to the upper end of Rich Island as a testimony to river dynamics. The upstream end of Lord Island has marched downstream hundreds of feet since it was first described in the 1600s.

Through the years, much of the Chapman land fell into the hands of the Gelston family, and at one point much of the hillside was planted with tobacco. Stone walls, fence posts, and a rotting chestnut timber foundation can still be found amidst the woods. During the late 1800s, Maltby Gelston — Anita and Mort Gelston's uncle — built a house at the base of a hill where the middle brook flows into Chapman's Pond. He grew tobacco and patented a new process for rolling cigars.

During the war years, the Gelstons relinquished much of the land and according to Mort it was probably the 1930s or '40s when the Leavenworth family moved into Maltby's house. Someone — perhaps the Leavenworths — made buttons from oyster shells and shell scraps and old buttons can still be found along the shore of the pond.

Between 1941 and 1956, a man named Lathrop acquired from the Gelstons most of the upland property around Chapman's Pond to develop it but he, in turn, sold it to Vivien Kellems in 1963.

THE KELLEMS YEARS

Vivien Kellems is a whole story by herself. She was a wealthy, single woman, who waged a life-long battle with the Internal Revenue Service, claiming income tax rates discriminated against single women. Although a frequent traveler, she lived in the Millington section of East Haddam and owned a considerable amount of land in town and elsewhere.

Town residents were amazed by the amount of money Ms. Kellems spent to acquire the Chapman's Pond land that

consisted of several undeveloped lots. She reportedly paid \$54,506 for one lot and \$32,500 for another, and many local residents feel that these purchases were the start of escalating real estate prices in the lower river valley where land had been dirt cheap right through the 1950s. When people saw how much money their land could bring, they started raising the asking prices — and got what they asked.

It is unclear why Ms. Kellems bought the land, but she took a special interest in it. It was not posted and people visited it regularly and used it for hunting, trapping, fishing, and hiking. During the sixties and seventies the area gained a reputation among the increasing number of river people and naturalists as a secluded, beautiful spot where one could go and escape into solitude without a gate fee or fear of prosecution. Other lands on Pond Hill and adjoining lots were timbered during these years but the Kellems land was untouched.

Included in the Kellems property was the old road connecting the Gelston-Leavenworth house with the southern terminus of Old Creamery Road, a paved town road. Ms. Kellems claimed that the dirt road was still a town road and waged a long battle to keep it open. During the sixties, the owners of a home at the end of Old Creamery Road sought to block access to the old road in order to stop people from cutting across their property. The homeowners blocked off the road and Ms. Kellems responded by re-opening it and photographing people using the road. It was her claim that if it was proven the road was used at least every seven years, the town could not abandon it. When an earthen barricade was finally erected to block the road, Ms. Kellems wanted Charlie Wolf, then First Selectman of East Haddam, to clear the barrier with his bulldozer. Wolf, however, chose to stay out of the dispute.

While things remained much the same on the Kellems land, changes occurred around it. In 1965, a small airstrip now known as the Goodspeed Airport relocated on the broad floodplain north of the pond after losing its Haddam Neck location to the Connecticut Yankee Atomic Power Plant. In 1969, the state of Connecticut acquired Rich Island and began maintaining it as a wildlife management area.

Although local residents have stated that the state took possession of it by invalidating the original homesteading deed, the records show that the state paid \$3,250 to Mundorf for the land. The state also bought Lord Island in 1971 as well as several meadow lots between the south creek and Gillette Castle State Park. Although there were negotiations to purchase more land down by the pond, including Charlie Wolf's meadow tract, no offers were ever made and the state apparently abandoned any plans of further acquisitions.

Chapman's Pond drew the attention of residents when the abandoned Gelston-Leavenworth house caught fire and burned to the ground. Fire department vehicles were able to get into the area along the old town road and contain the ensuing forest fire, which scorched about an acre of woods, but the house was totally destroyed. Killed in the fire was Thomas R. O'Hara, a 25 year-old Vietnam War veteran from Cranston, Rhode Island.

Roger Gandolf, now assigned to the Crime Investigation Unit of State Police Troop K in Colchester, was the resident state trooper in East Haddam at the time. He recalls that O'Hara, whose parents owned a summer cottage on the other side of town, had a history of mental problems and wanted to become a recluse. He established a hideout in the old building and allegedly burglarized several properties along the lower Salmon River, including the Frank Davis Resort. Many stolen items were discovered in the debris of the house and the State Police used small boats to enter Chapman's Pond to carry the evidence out. According to two sources, the boats encountered rough water upon reaching the Connecticut River and at least one boat tipped and sank, dumping all of the stolen contraband into the river from where it was never recovered.

Gandolf remembers that there was some debate over the cause of O'Hara's death since the body had been decapitated and nearby was a shotgun containing a spent shell. It was eventually determined, however, that the dismemberment was caused after death when the chimney collapsed and the shotgun was discharged due to the heat of the fire.

To be continued

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PART II



The Cynthia B. Carlson Wildlife Preserve (Chapman's Pond). Photo by Susan Bournique. Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy.



Canoeists on Chapman's Pond. Photo by Susan D. Cooley. Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy.

PRESERVATION EFFORTS

There is circumstantial evidence that indicates Ms. Kellems was considering developing the property as of 1971 but during the spring of 1973 she discussed with the then Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection, Douglas M. Costle, ways to preserve the land. The state made no firm offer to acquire the land but later that year when Costle requested from the Gateway Committee a list of lower Connecticut River properties worthy of preservation, Kellems' Chapman's Pond tract was high on the list. Again, there is no evidence that the DEP or the Gateway Committee (later renamed the Connecticut River Gateway Commission) moved to acquire it.

When Vivien Kellems unexpectedly died in January, 1975 while in Santa Monica, California, many people assumed that she would leave the Chapman's Pond land to the state as a nature preserve, or that the land would be protected in some other fashion. That was not done, and all of the Chapman's Pond land was left to her brother, David Kellems of Coupeville, Washington, who was a co-owner of some of the parcels.

Why the land was not permanently protected has been a cause of speculation among East Haddam residents ever since. Some question Ms. Kellems' sincerity as a true land conservationist while others who knew her well have commented that she was so preoccupied with her life that she never fully considered the eventuality of her death. Whatever motives she had, the beauty and ecological significance of her land, her management of it, and the unique circumstances of her estate prompted one of the most complex and interesting land conservation efforts in our region's history.

The IRS immediately put a lien against Vivien Kellems' estate in order to collect back taxes owed to it as a result of her refusal to pay. To complicate matters further, David Kellems,

the principal heir, died several months after his sister's death, prompting more complex probate proceedings. Nothing happened to Chapman's Pond for two years but in the meantime, other members of the family had engineering plans for a 60-unit subdivision drawn up.

I was out of the country during 1976 and when I returned in 1977, I heard rumors that the IRS had satisfied its claim against the Kellems estate and the heirs had begun to sell much of Vivien's land, including some in East Haddam. Having spent a great deal of my childhood on the Connecticut River and Chapman's Pond, specifically, I was horrified at the thought of this valuable tract of land succumbing to bulldozers. In an attempt to learn more, I wrote to the Kellems' long-time attorney, Francis McGuire of New London, and learned that the Chapman's Pond lots had not yet been touched and there were no plans for them at that time. The land was now owned by three members of the Kellems clan: Tillie (David's widow) and Van Kellems from Coupeville, Washington and David C. Kellems of New London, Connecticut. Van and David were Tillie's sons and Vivien's nephews.

Still a novice to the organized environmental community in Connecticut, I began what I envisioned as a one-man crusade to spearhead a preservation effort. Conservationists had casually talked of "saving" the land for years but to my knowledge there was no effort actively under way. I contacted every conservation group I could think of, including the DEP, the Connecticut River Watershed Council, and the Connecticut River Gateway Commission. Some stated they had no money, others explained that it "wasn't their thing," but most expressed the opinion that someone else was going to acquire it. Christopher Percy, now with the International Atlantic Salmon Foundation, was president of the watershed association and suggested that I talk to Evan Griswold who was then

director of the Connecticut Chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

The Connecticut Chapter, which is headquartered on the Wesleyan University campus in Middletown, had a long-standing interest in the Chapman's Pond area and according to TNC sources, Vivien Kellems offered to sell the land to the organization in 1974 after the state failed to bid on it — a little known fact. The appraisal set the land's value at \$800,000 whereas the appraisal done for TNC valued it at \$525,000. The two parties could not agree on a price and no purchase was made. Months later, Ms. Kellems died.

When I visited Evan in 1977, not much was happening in regards to the Chapman's Pond project and I agreed to help him collect information on the area in order to 'sell' the project to TNC's Eastern Regional Office in Boston. For the next year we conducted a review of the surrounding landowners, for there were other attractive lots in the Chapman's Pond area besides those belonging to the Kellems family; wrote summaries of the biological and physical features of the land, and solicited input from experts in various fields. Several expeditions were undertaken to gather additional information and during one canoe outing that I led during that time, Ken Metzler and Ron Rosen, biologists with the DEP, discovered the rare Torrey's bulrush growing on tidal mudflats.

Negotiations were soon begun with the Kellemses, and it soon became clear that the family would not donate the land. Purchase would be necessary. There was also some disagreement among the three Kellems heirs. Both the Kellemses and TNC had new appraisals done and there still was a wide discrepancy. The Kellemses were asking for \$900,000 for about 360 acres but TNC's appraisal set the value of the land much lower and TNC is prohibited from buying land at a price above appraised value.

The discussions soon reached an impasse as offers went back and forth. On March 10, 1978, TNC offered \$450,000 for the land, which was refused. Later that year, another plan was offered, proposing that the Conservancy buy a tract of land in Washington that was comparable to the Chapman's Pond land and the two parties would swap land. Since the Connecticut Chapter of TNC could not fund the entire purchase price, the plan called for the chapter's borrowing money from TNC's national office in Washington, D.C., buy the land in Washington, receive Chapman's Pond in trade, sell the Pond land to the DEP, and use the proceeds to pay back the national office of TNC. The DEP would then turn the Chapman's Pond area into a wildlife management area, possibly with certain conditions set by TNC. However, this proposal like all of its predecessors, fell through. Another TNC offer was rejected in 1979 and by the spring of 1980 the project had lost all momentum. Evan Griswold left TNC in April and the Kellems land went on the market, and the asking price was a million dollars.

At that time, the East Haddam Conservation Commission decided to try to organize a local land trust. Such an organization had long been a pet project of chairman Arthur Merrow, who is also very active in the state's Sierra Club organization. The town residents, alarmed over the recent building boom in the town, responded very favorably. The commission sponsored an organizational meeting in March of 1979 and a steering committee was formed to take over the project. On June 13, the East Haddam Land Trust, a non-profit land preservation group, was incorporated with Frank Wolcott III as the

president of the board of directors that included, among others, Merrow, Dr. Richard Goodwin, professor-emeritus of botany at Connecticut College, and me. Goodwin, the current president of the land trust, has been instrumental in The Nature Conservancy since the 1950s and is a veteran of countless land preservation campaigns.

The land trust soon became involved in the Chapman's Pond area when in 1980 it received two tracts of meadow floodplain along the river from Allegra Taylor Batchelor, widow of Pulitzer Prize cartoonist C. D. Batchelor of Deep River. The trust's efforts were aided with the addition to its Board of Anita Ballek, a lifelong resident of East Haddam and member of the local farming community. In 1982, Anita gave a parcel of Chapman's Pond land that she owned to the land trust and helped approach other farm families that still owned land in the area.

On July 1, 1980, W. Kent Olson was appointed as Executive Director of the Connecticut Chapter of TNC and within a month I visited him to attempt to renew TNC's interest in Chapman's Pond. Kent, a recent graduate of Yale University, had been briefed about the area by the Middletown staff. Again, I began to supply information, names, and ownership lists as Kent tried to get the project moving. Soon he was talking to landowners and reestablishing communications with the Kellemses, assisted by TNC trustee Alex Gardner of Greenwich, now chairman of the Connecticut Chapter of TNC and a man who was largely responsible for the resurrection of the Chapman's Pond project.

It was not long before TNC and the East Haddam Land Trust found themselves bumping into each other; negotiating with the same landowners to acquire the same land. Realizing that such an approach was counterproductive, the two organizations met and mapped out a strategy for land acquisition in the area. It was decided that the land trust would concentrate on obtaining gifts of the small meadow lots that were owned primarily by local residents as well as a few of the upland parcels. TNC would continue to work with the project of the Kellems tract as well as with other large upland landownerships. The organizations agreed to keep in close contact and orchestrate their moves with the common goal of a large nature preserve encompassing hundreds of acres around the pond and upland areas with eventual joint management.

THREATS OF DEVELOPMENT AND THE SHAH

Meanwhile, however, the Kellemses were starting to interest potential developers in their land. Even the Kellemses, themselves, had ideas for developing the land — including a campground/marina complex — but other people had grander designs. Jerry Whitson, now with the Beazley Real Estate Company's Fairfield Office, was the manager of Beazley's East Haddam branch and recalls that he had several developers interested and one had gone so far as to make a deposit on the land and draw up engineering plans for a 60-unit subdivision. The plan was to establish a private guardhouse, a sewage treatment plant near the pond, horses, hiking trails, and other "fascinating things," as Whitson put it. What happened? According to Jerry Whitson, the interest rates killed every plan put up and between the interest and the rapidly escalating gasoline prices, the real estate market in East Haddam dried up. Conservationists can be somewhat thankful, then, for the bad economic times. The U.S.D.A. Soil Conservation

Service calculated that if the land had been timbered and developed, as much as 7,000 tons of soil could have been expected to wash off the steep, rocky hills into the pond.

But Jerry Whitson had one more client interested in the Chapman's Pond area that would attach the land to international history. It is a story that has not, heretofore, been publicly told. In 1980, the attention of the world was drawn to the exile of the Shah of Iran, the ensuing turmoil of the Iranian revolution, and the capture of the American hostages. The outraged Iranians took the hostages when they learned that the Shah had been admitted into the United States for what the Carter Administration insisted was only medical treatment. In May of 1982, Whitson finally confirmed the rumors, telling me that he had, in effect, sold the Kellems' Chapman's Pond land to the former Shah of Iran.

Although still reluctant to go into detail, Whitson said that he was contacted by "his (the Shah's) people" who were interested in the land because it was close to New York where the Shah's doctors were located, it was isolated and easy to protect, and was close to his children who were enrolled in Connecticut schools. The plans included separate housing for his security people, a helicopter at the nearby Goodspeed airport, and his private jet at Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks. The Shah's people made "a generous offer" that was accepted and the deal was ready to be closed.

However, events on the other side of the globe came into play and delivered Chapman's Pond from a fate of development. Whitson won't specifically say what went wrong, but one can assume that after the hostages were seized, the Carter Administration quietly withdrew the welcome to the Shah and limited his stay in the U.S. to medical treatment. Before long, the Shah was in Egypt, and the land was back on the market for \$900,000, and TNC was again earnestly discussing acquisition with the Kellems family.

A CONCERTED EFFORT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTOR

Kent Olson spent a great deal of 1981 on the phone talking to Van Kellems in Washington and in June TNC made another offer for the land but the Kellemses rejected it. However, by the end of the year Olson sensed that TNC and the Kellemses might soon agree on a price. Accordingly, TNC began a fund-raising campaign, not only among TNC members but also among private corporations and government agencies. The first target was the U.S.D.A. Soil Conservation Service (SCS), which funds Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) grants to worthy projects. Back in 1980 Kent had prepared a proposal for a RC&D grant to help with the Chapman's Pond acquisition and submitted it to the SCS. The proposal was crammed with information and opinions from the numerous experts enlisted during the campaign.

The SCS officials chiefly involved with the project were State Conservationist Phil Christensen and District Soil Scientist Barry Cavanna — who used to live in the Chapman's Pond area and knew it well. The men were eager to obtain the grant not only for the merits of the project but also as an achievement for the state since Connecticut had never received an RC&D grant for this kind of project as large as the one they were requesting: \$500,000. The SCS helped fill out the application paperwork and refine the proposal through eight drafts. Before the proposal went to Washington, D.C., it needed to be approved by the local levels of the SCS.

Mortimer Gelston, the East Haddam farmer who once hayed the meadows and whose family once owned much of the Chapman's Pond land, was the chairman of the SCS's District Supervisors. Mort threw all of his support behind the proposal and with the help of others saw it through the district and regional levels so that it could be sent to Washington. Considering the existing attitudes in Washington concerning fiscal and environmental matters, everyone knew the grant was a long-shot but the effort was aided by Mort Gelston's connections and Phil Christensen's experience. Mort was serving on the President's agricultural advisory board and Phil was knowledgeable in the way of the Washington bureaucracy. According to accounts, Christensen practically carried the proposal by the hand through all of the federal red tape, spending a great deal of time in Washington, working for the project and discussing it with officials.

The proposal also needed home-state political support and Olson and the East Haddam Conservation Commission contacted 2nd District Congressman Sam Gejdenson and United States Senators Chris Dodd and Lowell Weicker, urging them to endorse the effort. All three responded favorably and diplomatically, appreciative of the sensitive climate in Washington, D.C. Representative Stewart McKinney, whose district is in western Connecticut, also threw his support to the project.

At one point in 1981 when TNC was discouraged about its ability to purchase the Kellems land, it suggested to the Gateway Commission that it buy development easements to some of the land — a much less costly venture. However, the SCS responded by stating that it could not participate in any plan involving easements only and the idea was dropped.

As Olson had predicted, the Kellemses and TNC did come to agreement on a price by the close of 1981. TNC did not have the necessary \$600,000 at that time but was fearful that any delay might allow the long awaited opportunity to slip away. Therefore, in December it purchased an option to buy the Chapman's Pond land. The option would expire on April 1, 1981 and TNC went to work to raise the \$700,000 — \$600,000 for the land purchase and \$100,000 for a perpetual management endowment. If the SCS grant would come through, much of the money would be available but there was still no word from Washington.

Soon TNC found itself in an uncomfortable and somewhat unique position. The Kellems family had submitted an application to the Town of East Haddam to receive permission to carry out a large-scale timber harvest of their Chapman's Pond property. Olson called Van Kellems in Washington for an explanation and was reassured that the family did not intend to actually log but was going through the procedure "just in case." In retrospect, it may have been a tactic to keep the pressure on TNC.

Meanwhile, some residents of East Haddam were preparing to stand up at the town meeting to oppose the plan and blast the Kellemses. TNC was worried that the ensuing controversy and publicity might rattle the delicate agreement it had with the Kellemses. In a high-stakes gamble, Olson arranged a "cease fire" among the opponents, which allowed the logging permit to sail through unopposed. If the risk paid off, the land might soon belong to TNC. If it failed, the conservation group would have assisted with a major disturbance of the very land it sought to preserve.

At this point, Cynthia B. Carlson of Haddam, the future eponym of the new nature preserve, became involved in the project. A group of conservationists along the lower Connecticut River — spearheaded by a group called CONVAC and its leader attorney Julian Rosenberg, long-time East Haddam resident — had been battling Northeast Utilities for years, first opposing the construction of the Connecticut Yankee Atomic Power Plant in the 1960s, then pressing for the comprehensive ecological study of the impacts of the plant, and finally arguing over placement of high voltage overhead transmission lines that cross the river at several points. Their claims were that the power lines spoiled the scenic quality of the lower river and that Northeast Utilities had failed to comply with a DEP order to remove the lines and put them under the river. Mrs. Carlson, a landowner and developer in the Higganum section of Haddam, joined the battle and filed suit against NU in an attempt to get the power lines at Scovill Rock removed. She claimed that the lines and towers diminished the value of her land.

In 1981, chances for removal of the power lines dimmed and Northeast Utilities proposed several alternatives to the multi-million dollar project of laying the lines under the river. Most parties seemed to be ready to accept a compromise that included a donation by NU of \$1.25 million to help preserve the valley's scenic quality through land acquisition. Early in 1982, the DEP ruled that the powerlines could stay and NU announced its intentions to donate \$250,000 to a Middletown trust and \$1,000,000 to the Connecticut River Gateway Commission, now chaired by none other than Evan Griswold, former Director of TNC's Connecticut Chapter.

The Gateway Commission, a quasi-state agency established by an act of the state's legislature in 1972, is dedicated to the protection of the scenic quality of the lower Connecticut River and is empowered to oversee member-towns' zoning changes along the river and to acquire river land and easements. With the million dollars from Northeast Utilities, the Gateway Commission finally had money.

On February 24, 1982, Kent Olson and Alex Gardner stood in front of the Gateway Commission asking that a chunk of the million dollars be contributed to the acquisition of Chapman's Pond, a project in keeping with the purpose of the NU gift and a long-term priority of Gateway.

Although it appeared likely that Gateway would agree to the contribution, actions totally unrelated to the Chapman's Pond project were imperiling the entire arrangement. On March 5, 1982, Cynthia Carlson and her attorney asked the DEP to reverse its decision to let the powerlines remain overhead at Scovill Rock. If the DEP honored her request, NU would not donate the money, the Gateway could not give it to TNC, and the entire project might collapse. Even if the DEP stayed by its original decision, Carlson would be able to appeal, delaying settlement possibly for years, which would likewise kill the pending land purchase.

At the time, Peter B. Cooper, a New Haven attorney and well-respected, veteran conservationist, who was the chairman of the Connecticut Chapter of TNC, and, coincidentally, the private legal counsel for the Gateway Commission, met with Mrs. Carlson and her attorney for most of the weekend discussing the matter. On Monday, March 8, Mrs. Carlson withdrew her appeal before the DEP and the next morning the DEP reaffirmed its decision to let the powerlines remain, clearing the road for the NU donation. That evening the Gate-

way Commission pledged \$300,000 to TNC toward the purchase of Chapman's Pond on the conditions that the commission actually did receive the million dollars and that TNC would raise the balance needed to purchase the land. A one-month grace period had to pass before the money would actually be transferred and all parties kept their fingers crossed, hoping that nothing would occur to derail the agreement. TNC resumed its search for the balance of the \$700,000.

In order to exercise its option to buy the land, TNC had to make a decision on March 10, 1982, and although it was then \$51,000 short of what it felt it needed to go ahead with the project, it legally bound itself to the April 1 purchase.

On March 22, the SCS announced that it was awarding a \$160,000 RC&D grant to the project and soon afterwards added another \$45,000 and suddenly TNC had \$578,000 in cash and pledges toward the \$700,000 goal. On April 1, 1982, The Nature Conservancy bought 300.84 acres of the Kellems land with the family retaining 60 acres near River Road. The pond had been saved!

The area was officially dedicated on June 13, 1982 as the Cynthia B. Carlson Nature Preserve in a splashy awards and dedication banquet at East Haddam's Gelston House Restaurant — site of Captain John Chapman's home and within sight of the new preserve.

MANAGEMENT OF THE PRESERVE AND ITS FUTURE

The acquisition efforts for the Chapman's Pond area are not yet finished. Although the critical, threatened land has been preserved, significant parcels of land around the pond need to be acquired if a comprehensive nature preserve is to be established. It is important to set aside as much land as possible if adequate habitat for healthy populations of coyote, bobcat, deer, and especially bald eagle is to be provided.

The Nature Conservancy and the East Haddam Land Trust will continue negotiations with other landowners in hopes that they, too, will join the efforts for preservation and add their lands to the ever-expanding nature preserve. The organizations will also continue to solicit additional cash gifts and increased membership in order to provide for adequate upkeep and expansion of the preserve.

Although in most cases the two conservation groups will retain individual ownership of the separate lots, the aggregate of the area around the pond will be managed jointly by the two organizations with help from the SCS and the DEP, assuring professional and local participation. To date, the specifics of the management plan have not been finalized but it appears that the management will not greatly differ from that of the past twenty years. People will be free to visit the preserve but the site will not be actively promoted to encourage heavy public use. The principal access will remain through the creek and pond via canoe. It is likely that motorized vehicles will be prohibited from the land.

The groups generally believe that Mother Nature is the best manager of this type of land. As the years turn into decades, trees will die and be allowed to fall and rot. The pond, creeks, and marsh will go through natural changes associated with scouring, deposition, and flooding; the hemlocks will grow old and majestic; the forest will mature; habitat for uncommon organisms will be enhanced; and special interrelationships between groups of animals and between organisms and their physical environment will be maintained. It is possible that in fifty years people will be able to observe at Chapman's Pond what they cannot observe anywhere else in the state.

Chapman's Pond *(Concluded)*

The Connecticut River is one of New England's most valuable natural resources and people are constantly amazed how the second largest river of the heavily-urbanized East Coast avoided the destructive plague that struck lesser rivers. Among other joys, the current health of the river has been responsible for maintaining swimmable water, pleasure boating, and some of the largest anadromous fish runs in eastern North America — including the famous Connecticut River American shad and the rebounding Atlantic salmon.

In full recognition of these blessings, residents have banded together to preserve them and the lower river is generously sprinkled with land set aside in perpetuity, including parks or preserves at Griswold Point, Great Island, Lords Cove, Turtle Creek, Seldens Island, Gillette Castle, Haddam Island, Hurd Park — the list goes on. Now, Chapman's Pond will take its rightful place in this distinguished company and outshine many as one of the river's crown jewels.

There are many indirect benefits to the Chapman's Pond preservation efforts. The project may inspire another, which in turn leads to a third. Yet the bottom line is that a part of nature, history, and our heritage will always be available to future generations. Chapman's Pond is one that did not get away.