



SOUTH HERO LAND TRUST

Newsletter

Winter 2017

A Campaign to Protect the Tracy Woods Conserving Forest, Farmland, and Trails in South Hero



South Hero Land Trust and Lake Champlain Land Trust Working to Conserve Local Woodland

Surrounded by Lake Champlain, with open fields, rich wetlands, and stunning cedar bluffs, South Hero is a very special place to call home. At the very heart of our town are 49 acres of beautiful woodlands, fields, and historic trails known as the Tracy Woods. South Hero Land Trust and the Lake Champlain Land Trust are thrilled to be working with the Tracy/King family to conserve this important natural and agricultural resource. With 35 acres of rich woodlands sheltering spring wildflowers, songbirds, and amphibians; 10 acres of open farm fields grazed by sheep and cows; and a network of walking trails, this property is a showcase for stewardship and community access to the land in Vermont.

The History of Our Working Landscape and Stewardship of our Natural Resources

The Tracy family has carefully stewarded the natural resources of their home in South Hero since 1841. They have created a unique balance of well-managed forest, active farm fields, and marshy shoreline habitat that exemplify the special history and culture of South Hero.

Charles Tracy, father of current steward Hobart Tracy, was a forester who managed the woods with care and compassion. His hand-drawn maps of the woods guided the placement of the mile of community trails that will open to the public through the successful completion of the Tracy Woods Conservation Project.

Hobart Tracy, his wife Naomi King, and his daughter Anne Tracy hope to honor and continue Charles' legacy of stewardship and community connections through this conservation project, which will permanently protect these unique woods and fields.

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Charles Tracy, forester, built the octagonal barn along Tracy Road with trees harvested from the property

SOUTH HERO



LAND TRUST

a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the farmland, woodland, natural and recreational areas, and open spaces which give South Hero its distinctive quality of life

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Protecting Special Places for 20 Years

A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I first discovered the Tracy Woods about eight years ago, on a wildflower walk with landowner Naomi King. I was awed and quickly felt a connection to this special piece of land, a connection that felt deep and instinctual. I knew immediately that this land was worth protecting, so that our community could always visit this unique place.

Entering the woods, I am always taken by the majestic shagbark hickory trees, with their characteristic peeling bark and angular branches. Nut husks litter the floor, remnants of busy squirrels. If I turn left and head uphill, the forest opens into a grassy wooded savannah, with dappled sunlight shining through graceful oak trees. Along the way in springtime, are trillium and mayflowers. Far in the back of the woods the ground gets spongy. Hemlocks tower above, and the dry upland woods transitions into a wetland, home to frogs and salamanders. The pathway skirts the edge of the wetland and curves right, the woods become dark and scented with cedar. Pine needles create a thick and soft carpet beneath my feet.

The Tracy Woods are the only place I've discovered where so many habitats can be explored in such close proximity. When Naomi King, her husband Hobart Tracy, and Hobart's daughter Anne contacted South Hero Land Trust about conserving their beautiful woods and fields, my heart sang. To be able to work with this family, who is dedicated to stewarding their land so well, and to opening their trails to our whole community, is truly an honor. Early on, Naomi shared how much she loves these woods, and what gladness it brings her to be able to share them with her friends and neighbors—and to know that those friends and neighbors also love these woods. Anne spoke of the legacy of this project—her family has cared for this land for many years, and seeing it protected is something in which they deeply believe.

I'm so pleased to be sharing the news of this project with you today, and hope that you will fall in love with the Tracy Woods just like I have. South Hero Land Trust is celebrating 20 years of land conservation and community building this year, and it seems fitting that the our current project will protect a property that exemplifies so much of what is special about South Hero—open farm fields, beautiful views, marshy shoreline habitat, diverse forest, a history of stewardship, and community trails.

We'll be hosting a walk there in April, looking for wildflowers and other signs of spring (see the details on page 7), and invite you to join us! In the meantime, we'll be sharing more details of the project throughout the spring and hope you will call or stop by to learn more. We will need your help to make it happen!

Many thanks to the Tracy/King family for their generosity to our community- conserving their land for the future, and opening trails for all of us to use. And thanks also to our partners at the Lake Champlain Land Trust, for helping us make this project happen.

With gratitude and warm wishes,

Emily Alger



Unique Nature Trails to be Opened for the Community

Here at South Hero Land Trust, we love getting outside and enjoying the natural world, and we've worked hard to make sure that great places for walking and exploring are protected in our community. We are very excited that the highlight of this project will be a mile of public access walking trails. The Tracy Woods are filled with spring wildflowers and diverse tree communities, and the wooded wetland is habitat for frogs, salamanders, and other animals. The trails will provide walkers a special opportunity to connect with nature in South Hero, a place for local families to get outside and active, and an outdoor classroom for learning and community service for local students.

Diverse Natural Communities to Be Conserved

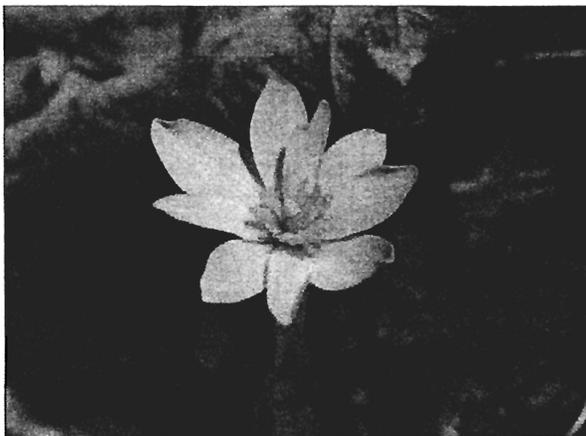
The 35 acre forest is a unique and valuable resource. There are five distinct natural communities, including Lakeside Floodplain Forest and Dry Oak-Hickory-Hophornbeam Forest. These natural communities are habitat for an array of animals, such as great blue heron, mink, and four-toed salamander, as well as myriad pollinators. Shagbark hickory, black cherry, hemlock, American elm, and many other tree species grow in the woods. Rich soils are perfect for spring wildflowers, like bloodroot, jack-in-the-pulpit, and trillium.

Farmland Protection to Support Flower Business

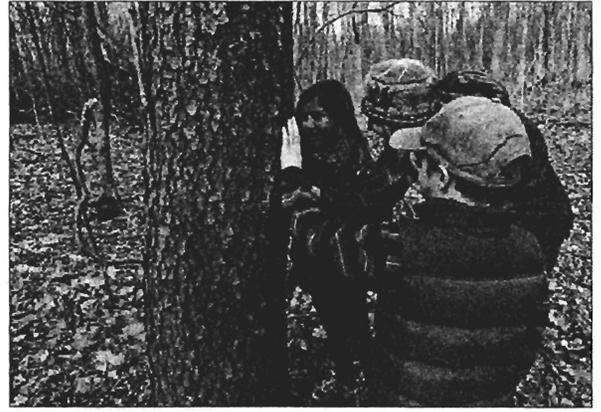
In addition to the woodlands, the Tracy property has over 10 acres of fertile agricultural soils that are currently in pasture and hay land for the family's small flock of sheep. This land was also once home to Lemon Lily Farm, a small perennial flower business specializing in day lilies and other perennials, owned by Naomi King. Once the land is conserved, Naomi plans to re-open Lemon Lily Farm, which will share a small parking area with the trailhead. Customers will be able to visit the gardens and walk the trails at the same time. We are excited to be supporting a family owned agricultural business through this project.

Protecting the Heart of South Hero

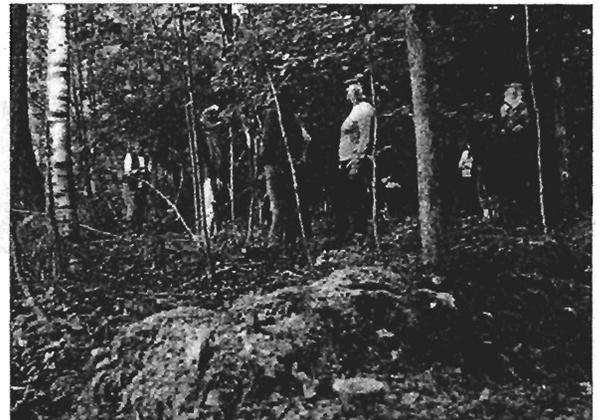
We all have special places in our life. Whether a rambling stream, a city lot overgrown with flowers, or a fort in the woods, we hold these places deep in our hearts. For many in the Islands, the woods, fields, and shore are where we first became explorers, builders, artists, and conservationists.



Hepatica (mayflower) and other spring wildflowers abound



Students learn to identify a black cherry tree by the distinctive bark during a SHLT Naturalist Walk



Walkers learn about the plants and animals found in wooded wetlands in the Tracy Woods

The Tracy Woods are a piece of our heart—a celebration of the history of our home and of our hope for a future filled with children playing in the woods, birds building nests, and spring wildflowers in abundance. By conserving the woods, fields, views, and shoreline of the Tracy Woods, the land will remain a place of exploration, discovery, and magic for generations to come.

If our fundraising goal is met, the conservation and public access easements on the property will forever protect the land's natural resources and scenic beauty, and ensure that we will always be able to spend time in the woods. We will need your help to make this happen, and will be in touch soon with campaign details!

Railroad to Rail Trail: A Historic Lens on the South Hero Landscape



One walker examines remnants of an old tractor engine that may have been used to run a saw at the lumber yard.

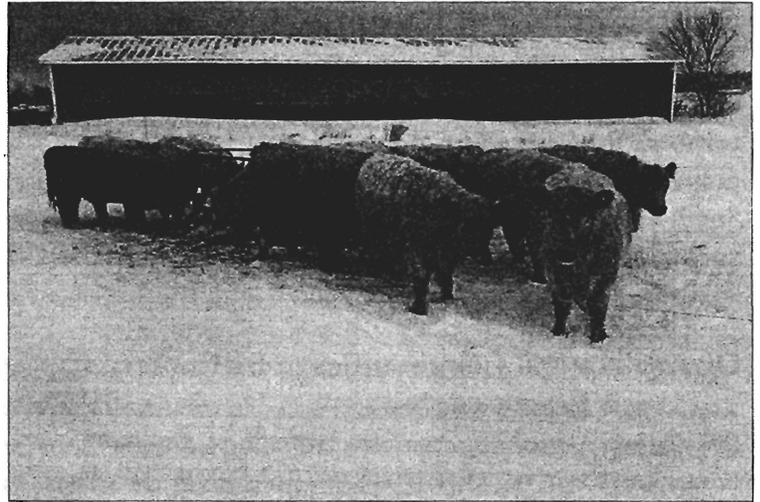
Twenty-two walkers showed up to explore the history of the Rutland Railroad in South Hero and look for signs of that history along the South Hero Recreation Path on February 11th. The first of South Hero Land Trust's Naturalist Series for 2017, we learned to use the lens of history to explore today's landscape.

Historian Samantha Ford joined us, to teach us what to look for to unravel the stories of our past. We looked at the shape of nails, use of concrete, and the smoothness of boards to age the remaining signs of the old bean and corn canning factories and lumber yard that stood beside the Rutland Railroad in the early 20th century.

Many thanks to Samantha for guiding us on this walk, and to Dr. Terry Robinson for helping us piece together the timeline with the help of historic photos and anecdotes from local community members.

We're looking forward to our spring Naturalist Walk in April- an exploration of the Tracy Woods with naturalist Alissa Daniel. We'll be looking for wildflowers along the trails and sharing more about our campaign to protect this special place! See our Calendar of Events on page 7 for details.

An Update from Health Hero Farm



The new Galloway cattle at Health Hero Farm are hardy and well adapted for Vermont's snowy winters

You may have heard that changes are afoot at Health Hero Farm. We checked in with owners Joan Falcao and Bob Fireovid for an update and the latest news from the farm.

Co-owners Eric and Hannah Noel, who've been farming with Bob and Joan since they bought the farm in 2013, have decided to leave the operation. They are selling their shares in the business to Bob and Joan, who will take over management of the whole farm. Over the last year, Bob and Joan they have transitioned into managing daily operations for grazing their herd of 50-70 cattle.

They have discovered a passion for raising cattle that goes beyond the business of producing beef. They are pursuing certification as "animal welfare approved" and have received a grant to build a mobile scratching station for the cattle. Joan attended a class on bedded packs for animal comfort, and is applying what she learned this winter. They are working on a nutrient management plan and preparing for compliance with new required agricultural practices. To that end, you may see them out in the field this spring jumping on the soil sample tool. Being so close to the lake, it is important to manage manure and other soil amendments correctly.

Bob and Joan are working with another local beef farmer, Mitchel Richardson, to improve their herds. As a joint project, they bought 14 registered Galloway cattle this winter, a hardy breed but gentle that will do well on Vermont pasture.

(continued on page 7)

Apples, Cider Donuts, and Local Agriculture: Celebrating 50 Years with Hackett's Orchard

The Places that Make South Hero Home

South Hero's apple orchards hold a special place in the hearts of many Islanders, young and old. As children growing up in the Islands, fall trips to Hackett's Orchard and Allenholm Farm to pick apples were sacred- the orchards seemed to sit outside of time, trees heavily loaded with crisp sweet-tart apples and the smell of cider donuts. From picking apples in the fall and seeing young calves in the fields in spring, to swimming lessons at White's Beach and skating at the Sandbar, there are special places that make South Hero home for us.

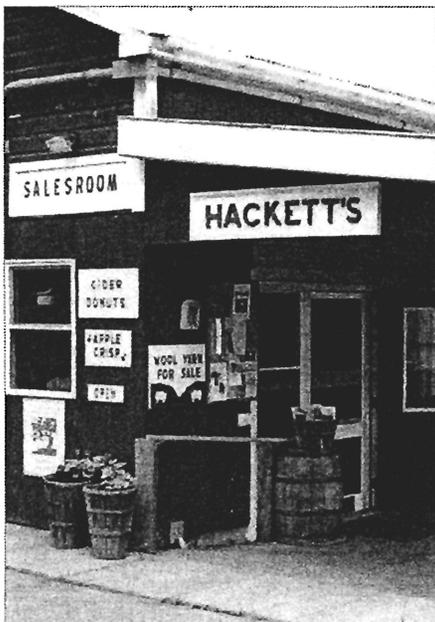
Ron and Celia Hackett, who've owned Hackett's Orchard since 1967, have introduced generations of children to apple picking. Hearing their stories over the years, from when they first arrived at the orchard, and "didn't know one apple from another," to the day they sold their first pie, was very special for us, and we hope you will enjoy reading some of their story here.

Vermont Beginnings

Ron and Celia both grew up in the Northeast Kingdom. Ron's father owned a dairy farm, a small sugar bush, and a potato farm in Albany, VT. At one time Ron anticipated taking over the potato farm, but life took him in a different direction. He married Celia and began a career with Bell Telephone Company, where he worked on the dial conversion of Vermont towns (allowing phone users to dial a number directly, rather than through an operator). They lived on a "postage stamp" lot with their two young daughters, Deb and Jill, in Essex Junction. As the girls grew, the home felt smaller and smaller; they wanted to get out of the suburbs. When they learned that the Larrow orchard in South Hero was for sale, they decided to make a change. They bought the property in March of 1967 and got to work.



Springtime bloom at Hackett's Orchard fills the air with the sweet smell of apple blossoms and the hum of bees



The Hacketts now sell all of their apples and cider at their on-farm store on South Street

The first year was hard. Ron had helped in the orchard a few days the previous fall, but they were otherwise untrained. They had a heavy bloom in the spring, which would usually be thinned with a chemical spray so that the trees produce big red apples. But as Ron says, their first spray salesman didn't have faith in Ron's ability to do anything properly. So he recommended not spraying and Ron didn't know any better. As a result, they had a tremendous crop of small green apples, not a one as big as three inches, and few turned red.

Learning As They Went

They kept working and learning. A new spray salesman came along and took Ron under his wing. He helped with the spray schedule and taught them to monitor for scab and insects. He and the UVM Extension's tree fruit specialists were important mentors. Ron worked for the phone company for the first 19 years, spending weekends and evenings in the orchard. He took all of his vacation time during picking season. They picked the apples into bushel boxes scattered throughout the orchard. Ron would come home and take the tractor to collect the boxes, often working until dark. They hand graded one bushel at a time on a table in the shop. Ron gives Celia credit for keeping things together; driving tractors, caring for the pickers, grading the apples, raising their kids, looking after the house- she did it all.

Wholesale to Retail

In the 1960s, most apples at that time were sold by route; orchardists like Ray Allen and Alan Kinney would go door-to-door selling apples all day. Ron and Celia sold most of their apples wholesale at general stores. They also sold apples to Carpenter's Apple Cider in Colchester, at 25 cents a bushel, and would buy cider back. They later bought cider from Ray Allen, and then in the early seventies Ron bought a press and began making cider at the orchard. When they did sell apples by retail, it was all by the bushel- folks buying storage apples or fruit for making pies and applesauce. Ron and Celia would set up a long line of pallets, separated into fancy and utility apples of each variety. Customers would go down the line asking for what they wanted, and Ron and Celia would load up bushel baskets.

In 1990 they built the kitchen and began making pies. Ron and Celia built their farm store up and worked to start Applefest, and many people discovered the South Street orchards. They were still only picking a couple thousand bushels a year, so in 1984 they planted 4 more acres. They bought some land from Ray Allen to expand the orchard, and suddenly their sales were all retail. When they sold their first pie, Celia couldn't believe it. "No-one buys pies! I don't buy pies, my mother never bought a pie," she thought. But they had the pie out on the table and a man came in and said, "I'll buy it." She was floored, she said, that "someone bought a pie!" They went on to sell 60,000 pies by 2008. It still bothers some people that they gave up making pies. But Celia says that the apple crisps they sell now have gone over very well.



Students pick their own apples during a field trip sponsored by SHLT

They began doing Pick-Your-Own in the 1980s. It's a lot of work to manage, but an important part of their customers' experience. Ron says that when he goes down to the orchard on a weekend afternoon in the fall, all he hears is talking and laughing. Celia remembers a customer who pick apples at the orchard, wrote a song about it, and came back to play it for them. And now they have second, third, even fourth generation pickers coming to the orchard.

Looking to the Future

They do have concerns for the future. They think about what the changing environment will mean for the orchard. New diseases and pests keep them on their feet. Climate change, and increasing variability of temperature and rainfall are hard on the trees, which need steady warming and sun for good bloom and pollination. Violent summer storms, which often bring hail, damage the trees and fruit. They can't irrigate easily, which will be a challenge for the dwarf trees they are planting.

To Ron and Celia, it never seemed like they were making major changes, but over 50 years the small changes added up. National pressures such as changes in food safety regulations have led to many small shifts. They've shifted from mostly selling wholesale to all retail. The farm store has brought visitors from across the country, as well as generations of school children to the farm- where they learn about farming, and leave with a special connection to the orchard and South Hero.

Celebrating 50 Years of Growing Apples and Feeding a Community

Ron and Celia's stories of their years at Hackett's Orchard made me realize that even the places and things that I think of as constant, are changing and adapting all the time. Ron and Celia have embraced change, while remaining true to a few core values at the heart of their business. They believe in working hard, providing the community with the very highest quality product, safety for their workers and customers, in generosity, kindness, family, educating the next generation. Because of their hard work and that of farmers like them throughout the community- the orchards of South Street have come to feel like part of the very bedrock of South Hero.

Many thanks to Ron and Celia Hackett for sharing these stories with us, and for their hard work over the last 50 years. And many thanks to all of the hard-working farmers that feed us, teach us, and make South Hero home.

Springtime in South Hero

South Hero Land Trust Calendar of Events

March 22nd Wally's Place Bagel & Deli Celebrates 9 Year Anniversary with South Hero Land Trust Benefit

Celebrate 9 years of awesome bagels in South Hero, and a brand new expanded location (with an expanded menu including delicious breads, salads, and more) for Wally's Place: Bagel & Deli! On Tuesday, March 22nd, Wally's Place will donate 25% of their proceeds to South Hero Land Trust. Stop in for a delicious breakfast, lunch or a sweet treat to support our work in conservation and community.

Wally's Place is now located at 260 Rte 2, and will be open from 6:00 AM- 2:00 PM on March 22nd.

April 22nd Spring Wildflower Walk at Tracy Woods

Explore the trails at Tracy Woods, South Hero Land Trust's current conservation project. Guest naturalist Alissa Daniel, a member of the faculty at UVM's Field Naturalist Master's Program, will guide us through springtime in the Vermont Forest, and we'll be on the lookout for the many spring wildflowers that grow in the rich soils of the Tracy Woods.

10:00-11:30 AM. Please email emily@sblt.org to RSVP and get parking directions. Part of the SHLT 2017 Naturalist Walk Series.

May 6th Save the Date for Green Up Day!

Join your friends and neighbors to clean up South Hero's roads, trails, and shoreline. This year's volunteer activities will include roadside litter pickup, White's Beach Clean-Up, and a trail crew at the South Hero Recreation Path through the Roy Marsh Wildlife Area. We'll follow up the morning's work with our annual "Thank You" BBQ at the Folsom playground. Call the South Hero Land Trust office to learn more and sign up.

More details coming soon!

May 20th Champlain Islands Farmers' Market

The Farmers' Market opens for the season with a Saturday market in Grand Isle (St. Joseph's Church, Rte 2) from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. The Wednesday market starts up on May 24th in South Hero (St. Rose of Lime Church, Rte 2) from 3:00 to 6:00 PM. Pick up early season vegetables, seedlings for the garden, fresh bread, sweet maple syrup, and much more!



Walkers at SHLT's February naturalist walk braved the snow and explored the history of the Rail Trail in South Hero with historian Samantha Ford.

Update from Health Hero Farm

(continued from page 4)

Joan and Bob will continue selling beef and vegetables at several farmers' markets, including the Champlain Islands Farmers' Market. Their beef is also for sale at the farmstand, on-line, and to wholesale customers.

Health Hero Farm is interested in finding a new farmer to lease a small portion of their land for a diversified vegetable operation. With good infrastructure in place, an existing farm stand, and 1-5 acres of land available, this is a great opportunity for a new and/or young farmer to come on board and build their own operation. Meanwhile, a local gardener will maintain the garden beds and produce enough vegetables to lend excitement to their farm stand.

Joan and Bob are excited about these new directions and enjoy talking about them. They are happy to answer questions and can be reached at (802) 378-5246 or healthheroislandfarm@gmail.com.



Campaign to Conserve
Tracy Woods and Open
New Trails Announced

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