



Newsletter, Fall, 2020

Friends of Canonchet Farm Covidyear Update

By Tom Hoagland, President, Friends of Canonchet Farm

To all of our wonderful supporters and dedicated volunteers.

Hello to everyone in this our one and only newsletter of this terrible, yet historic Covidyear.

In what is now the new normal, our association's work has continued, despite the virus, clearing Invasive plants from the lakeside, the trail, the auxiliary beach parking lot and now the South County Museum grounds. Our small core of dedicated volunteers, masked and socially distanced, has most recently cleared the long-neglected native plant garden at the museum in preparation for replanting at the beginning of October with newly purchased plants and shrubs made possible by a generous grant from the South County Garden Club.

An additional and extremely vital part of this project will be the removal of more than 20 highly invasive burning bush and Japanese barberry shrubs on the museum grounds. They will be replaced in part by native North American shrubs. Unfortunately, due to the virus, all of our scheduled walks, talks and other events for the Fall have been cancelled, including our participation in 'Gansett Days.

As of today, our well-attended On Pettasquamscutt lecture series that we sponsor along with the Narrow River Preservation Association and the South County Museum, held on the last Sunday afternoons in January, February and March, are still scheduled and we hope they will occur as in the past, subject to

the course and outcome of the pandemic. With luck and good science, perhaps we will be able to schedule some walks and talks in the Spring.

Our annual meeting was another casualty of the pandemic. Because we could not conduct a meeting this year in the museum as we have in past years, our board of trustees met via Zoom on September 3. We then accepted the resignation of Kathie Kelleher as president after three years in that role, following her ten years as

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secretary and vice president. Thankfully, Kathie has agreed to stay on the board for an additional three-year term so that she can continue to provide guidance and wisdom to the organization. Carol Prest has stepped up to be our new vice president and Jim Kowalski and Richard Vangermeersch have agreed to continue in their roles as secretary and treasurer accordingly.



Finally, I want to formally welcome Melissa Crawford as our latest member to the Board. Returning board members are Alan Woodmansee, Mike Lapiskey, Beth Laliberte, Dennis Webster, and Bob Stepanian. In addition to Kathie, both Jim Kowalski and myself have re-upped for new three year terms.

Trail work clearing Invasives Saturday mornings from 9 to

The Boss

12 will begin October 3 and will continue throughout the Fall, Winter and Spring, weather permitting. We are a jolly group and always in need of new blood, so if you're going a little stir-crazy and want some exercise, come join us at our equipment trailer on the grounds of the South County Museum. We provide gloves and tools but we strongly suggest you bring your own water and mask. I hope to see some of you there!

Stay safe and healthy.

Tom Hoagland, on behalf of the Board of Trustees.

Friends and museum produce history trail brochure for Canonchet Farm



Friends of Canonchet Farm in association with the South County Museum recently produced a history trail brochure for Canonchet Farm highlighting 11 historically interesting features.

The 1.3-mile trail starts near the Narragansett Community Center and ends at the Robinson Family Cemetery. There is also an entrance at the midpoint of the trail at South County Museum. Features marked on the trail include evidence of the Seaview Railroad, a stone bridge over Crooked Brook, historic stone walls, a 19th-century quarry, the ruins of Governor Sprague's stable and the Robinson family cemetery. They are marked with wooden posts along the trail,

and descriptions of these locations are included in the brochure. The Robinson family was the 18th-century owners of Canonchet Farm. The rich historical past of Canonchet Farm is also described.

Since its first printing in April, more than 500 copies of the brochure have been distributed to interested trail walkers. You can find the History Trail brochure and other Canonchet Farm trail maps (the Geology Trail brochure and an overview of the entire Canonchet Farm trail) at the trailhead kiosks at the Narragansett Community Center and Narragansett Town Beach and on the Friends of Canonchet Farm website, www.canonchet.org.



Volunteers clearing the native plant garden at South County Museum

The battle against invasive plants

Every winter on suitable Saturday mornings a hardy group of Friends of Canonchet Farm volunteers load up at the tool trailer on the grounds of the South County Museum and go to work clearing invasive knotweed, privet, bittersweet, porcelain berry, Jananese barberry and burning bush on the 1.3-mile nature trail that connects the Narragansett elementary school and the museum, sometimes only a few yards from the museum grounds. Paradoxically, the landscaping that currently exists along the lanes and next to some of the museum's most-visited buildings includes more than 20 burning bush (*euonymus alatus*) and five Jananese barberry (*berberis thunbergii*). These plants are native to Asia and are highly invasive in southern Rhode Island, and the trail-volunteer work crews have removed many from the nature trail over the past four winters.



Overgrown native-plant garden

In early September all of the invasive shrubs were removed and then during the week of October 5-7, planting crews from Friends of Canonchet Farm, URI Master Gardeners and South County Museum will selectively replant North American native plants. Additionally, the long-neglected Native Plant and Moon Gardens to the east of the museum will be rehabilitated and replanted with colorful, pollinator-friendly, Rhode Island-grown native plants and flowers. When this process is completed, the new plants will be signed and will serve as an adjunct educational exhibit for the visitors to the museum and as a showpiece for the invasive removal

and native plant replacement work performed by volunteers on the grounds of Canonchet Farm.

What's happening

The Friends of Canonchet Farm volunteers are engaged in a multiyear effort to remove invasive plants from the trail. When completed, an extensive and intricate system of colonial stone walls, farm roads, stone bridges, stiles and quarries will be revealed after many years of dense vegetative cover. Trail usage



Jake Brown wielding pruners for the cleanup

has been rising steadily as trail conditions improve. We want to provide interpretive education to our trail users about the landscape they are walking through, and brochures are available that describe the history and geology of Canonchet Farm.

All the invasive-removal work in the property is done by Friends of Canonchet Farm volunteers, many of whom are also certified Rhode Island Master Gardeners and Rhode Island Certified Coastal Invasive Managers.

Our Partners:

Town of Narragansett: contact Steve Wright, director of Parks and Recreation

South County Museum: contact Jim Crothers, director of the South County Museum.

URI Master Gardeners: contact Kate Venturini, executive program administrator

South County Garden Club sponsor: Camilla Lee

Still to Come ...

While the pandemic has curtailed our trail walks and talks this Fall, there are still some other initiatives that our organization will be undertaking:

- The “On Pettasquamscutt” Lecture Series held at the Narragansett Library on the last Sunday of January, February and March has not yet been cancelled. We will send out reminders to members as we get closer to the date unless it is cancelled.
- A group of Jamestown Volunteers who are also engaged in clearing invasive plants from woodlands, prepared a beautiful four color, 8.5 by 11 booklet detailing 11 common southern Rhode Island invasive woodland plants. This booklet was made available to Jamestown residents at the town hall and library. They have graciously shared this book with us in proof form so that we may adapt it for Narragansett and Canonchet Farm. After editing is complete, we hope to seek a grant that would enable us to print sufficient copies to be made available at public locations around town
- The Winter Trail Volunteers who meet at 9 a.m. Saturdays by the equipment trailer in the South County Museum parking lot have been clearing a large area to a beautiful stone wall west of the trail. This area was infested with large privet bushes and many oriental bittersweet vines and now native tree seedlings, ferns and understory shrubs are returning. There is one 80-foot-long section yet to be cleared and we intend to work on this section in October. Before we do so, we have arranged to film the section before, during and after the invasive clearing work is completed. We hope that the resulting video will be posted on the website and available for viewing when we present it to the town council.