

# YOUR SANCTUARY

## HOW IT STARTED AND HOW IT GREW

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** On Sunday, August 25, 1963, members of The Nature Conservancy, Inc. were invited to visit the Sanctuary as part of their annual national meeting in New London. At that time your president, at the request of Dr. Richard H. Goodwin, presented a brief history of the Sanctuary, most of which had been previously unknown to her. Thinking that the members as a whole might find it as interesting as she did, the following article has been prepared for your edification.)

In the spring of 1943, following a stimulating talk by Adele Erisman, being a member of the Sanctuary, and presently an honorary member, the Mystic Garden Club conceived the idea a wildlife sanctuary for southeastern Connecticut.

The Denison Society, a family organization which owned 125 acres of land across the road from the Denison Homestead, was approached and its trustees approved using this land for the purpose, provided a distinct and separate organization could be formed administer it.

During 1944, therefore, a Sanctuary committee was formed to consult with experts on the suitability and development of the Denison land, but it was decided not to proceed further until the war should be over. However, during 1944, the Denison Society most generously gave a series of talks to raise money for the preliminary expenses of creating a Sanctuary.

In 1945 the Denison Society at their annually meeting formally voted to approve the idea and to rent the land to sanctuary organization for 25 years \$1 a year with an option to renew for another 25 years.

On January 1, 1946, a campaign was started to secure 100 founders who could pledge \$10 each annually for three years. At the same time a corporation was formed and by-laws drawn in the name of the Pequot-sepos Wildlife Sanctuary, Inc.

Many people ask what our name cans. Pequot is the Indian tribe that lived hereabouts; "sepos" was their name for a brook. Therefore Pequot-sepos means "the brook of the Pequot."

The first formal organization meeting was held in April of 1946 with pledges already secured from 211 founders and from 111 charter members who agreed to pay \$3 each annually for three years.

With this financial backing the first curator, Thomas P. McElroy, Jr., was chosen in May of that year and the first

annual meeting was held on July 8, 1946.

For the next ten years the Sanctuary went along, functioning in various ways as an educational force in the community and improving its plant. Trails were laid out and cleared, a parking lot was built, and a Trailside Museum and Trading Post were set up in the old barn near the road which the Denison Society allowed the Sanctuary to use as part of the lease of the land.

Bird walks were instituted and the curator was asked to give many lectures on natural history subjects at clubs and schools. During this period, too. Pequot Trails, the Sanctuary publication, sent free to members, was started in leaflet form.

In 1956 the presently well-known and well-attended "Bird Ball" was given for the first time on December 31 as a money-raising project, and met with success.

In May of 1957, after more than ten years of service, the curator, Mr. McElroy, resigned to take a position elsewhere. He was succeeded by William Wylie whom most of you knew.

Because then (as now) it was difficult to make ends meet, an annual tea was instituted at the suggestion of Mrs. MacGregor as another means of raising funds additional to member-ship dues. And both the Tea and Bird Ball became annual events with the generous support of the community.

In September of 1957 Pequot Trails was published in its present bound format.

At the Annual Meeting in June 1958 Margaret MacGregor became president and it was during her term of office, in June of 1958, that plans for a new Trailside Museum were first discussed. This was sadly needed because, as the barn was not heated we could not keep the museum and trading post open during the cold months. It was decided to proceed and ground was broken that Fall. A major fund drive was started in January of 1960 and met with a good

response. So much so that by December of that year we were able to hold a combined house-warming in conjunction with our annual Tea and Sale in the new building, even though it was not fully completed. For this building the Sanctuary owes an unpayable debt of gratitude to one of our members, now a trustee — Agustas Peterle. For a year he devoted all his time to the construction of the Museum, assisted by Bill Wylie, with the result that we had to let contracts only for such things as the foundation, plumbing, heating and lighting. All the carpentry, inside and out, was done by these two men with the able help of Mr. Walter Moran, one of our most devoted members and gifted bird-watchers who fortunately is also a good carpenter. If any of you observed the framing while the building was under construction you must realize what a Herculean task these three men performed.

In June of 1960 Mrs. MacGregor was succeeded as president by Mr. Wilson D. I. Domer.

Once the Museum was finished all the trustees heaved a deep breath of relief — but too soon. The quarters for the curator and his family in the Denison Homestead had become inadequate. It was not that the rooms shrank but that the family grew — by this time numbering six. It became obvious that something would have to be done, not only from the curator's point of view but from that of the Denison Society which wished to install a single person as curator of the Homestead.

We were thus under the necessity of again raising funds in order to build a Curator's residence, with the approval of the Denison Society, on the land leased to us.

In January of 1961 plans for this residence were started. The gods help those who help themselves, it is said, and providentially an anonymous benefactor offered to lend the Sanctuary \$10,000 for the construction of this dwelling as a tribute to Mr. M. D. MacGregor, then Treasurer. The money was to be loaned at nominal interest with the promise that as the Sanctuary repaid the debt the donor would match these payments with gifts. This generous offer was accepted and in April, 1961, the building of the Curator's residence was officially approved and work was commenced, again with a more than generous offer on the omit of Mr

Peterle to do the carpentry with Bill Wylie's aid.

May 14, 1961 saw the formal opening of the Museum building.

In July, 1961, the Sanctuary again met with great good fortune. Mr. and Mrs. Harvey C. Perry of Westerly offered our organization a tract of over 93 acres on North Anguilla Road in Stonington as a gift, to be kept wild and unspoiled in perpetuity. This wonderful offer was accepted, so that ever since that time the Sanctuary has owned this lovely tract in fee simple The land is quite different from the Denison tract in its ecology, being more upland in nature. The construction of Route 95 has made it difficult of access during the past year but fortunately this route does not run through the property and in future years we hope to make greater use of it for bird walks and wildlife study.

In the fall of 1962, shortly after the completion of the new Curator's dwelling, Bill Wylie resigned as curator to take a position with the Federal Fish and Game Division in his native state of West Virginia. We were most fortunate at that time in securing a curator our present incumbent, Robert F. Kunz. You have only to visit the Museum and walk about the ground to see the many new exhibits he has installed and planted.

Because the Curator must of necessity be away from the Museum a large part of the time, we have been fortunate in securing the services of a former officer and trustee, Mrs. Barr Dench, to man our Trading Post. She began in the summer of 1961, when Bill Wylie was occupied with carpentry, and has continued with one winter interruption, until the present time.

Postscript: Some of the people who have helped during the past years are mentioned above by name. Many, many others have helped us both financial and by the work of their hands. It would be impossible to list them and nor would they wish it. But our heart felt thanks go to them all. Without them, we would not exist as a going and growing organization.

For your Sanctuary has been constantly growing -- increasing its services to the community and spreading we hope, the gospel of sensible conservation and love of nature among both young and old. It is our hope that it will continue to do so. We are the

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