

Aerial view of the Knob, Quisset Harbor, Woods Hole & Elizabeth Islands. Photo courtesy of Falmouth Historical Society, photo taken by Ben Harrison.

The Land That Time Will Never Forget

How One Woman Pioneered Land Preservation for Falmouth

BY MIMI GOLUB

COURTESY OF FALMOUTH
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



ERMINE LOVELL RE

Top: The Knob at sunset, one of the crown jewels of Salt Pond Areas Bird Sanctuaries, Inc. **Above:** Ermine Lovell, founder of preserving the land for years to come.

TUCKED INTO THE SHORES OF QUISSETT HARBOR, through the Cornelia Carey Sanctuary, lies an oasis of scrub oaks, blueberry bushes and American beach grass that begins a natural sojourn to The Knob, one of the crown jewels of Salt Pond Areas Bird Sanctuaries, Inc. (SPABS). Two trails, meticulously maintained by the privately run, 62-year-old, nonprofit organization, lead to a natural rock formation that juts out into Buzzards Bay. On a clear day, The Knob offers unobstructed views of New Bedford to the west, the Cape Cod Canal entrance to the north, and the Elizabeth Islands to the south.

“It’s a magical feeling to step out of the woods and be surrounded by the clear, cool waters of Buzzards Bay,” says Barrie Murray, president of SPABS. “The Knob, with its rich history, is not only majestic but also a key player in protecting Quissett Harbor.” Today Murray, along with executive director Katey Taylor and an active Board of Directors, make it their business to continue one woman’s dream of ensuring that harbors, ponds, and Falmouth lands will be a natural resource for generations to enjoy.

If it weren’t for Falmouth resident Ermine Lovell and her passion for preserving land, The Knob may have been developed, eradicating wildlife, and preventing public enjoyment. In the 1960s, fueled by trips to Florida, where she

TOP: DEB FOLEY

observed wetlands being decimated by overdevelopment, Lovell knew that she had to save Falmouth’s untouched beautiful areas that she and her husband, Hollis, came to love dearly since moving to an East Falmouth farm in the 1930s.

“My aunt was a visionary who realized what the future held if ponds, marsh areas and farms turned into bricks and mortar,” Murray explains. “Ermine wanted to keep the plants intact, as well as animals and birds from leaving the coastal town she grew to adore.”

In the early 1960s, Lovell did just that by acquiring the land around Salt Pond and opening nature trails. After a failed attempt to secure the area through town meeting, she would not yield. She met with the Massachusetts Commissioner of Natural Resources who advised, “Mrs. Lovell, to accomplish what you want to do, you must own the land.” Her community-driven fundraising efforts, along with her stature as the first female real estate agent in Falmouth, facilitated the formation of a partnership with the

Massachusetts Audubon Society and ultimately the creation of Salt Pond Areas Bird Sanctuaries, Inc. Today, her organization oversees more than 250 acres of undeveloped land, including a working farm, undisturbed marshlands, and some of the most visited sites in Falmouth.

Sixty years later, Salt Pond is a haven for dozens of bird species and the birders who follow them. Flanked by the Shining Sea Bikeway and Salt Pond’s waters, the well-marked nature trails are open to the public year-round. “My boys call the



BETTY WILEY

Quissett Harbor, where the trail to The Knob starts

bird sanctuary Jurassic Park because they imagine themselves in a prehistoric forest, stretching their minds and their skills to explore the outdoors,” says Falmouth resident Alex Diaz-Matos. “They search for animals, fish in the pond, and ride their bikes along the water. We are lucky to have this beautiful public space in our backyard.”

Lovell continued her quest to conserve Falmouth land in the 1980s with the purchase of Bourne Farm in West Falmouth. Spread across 51 acres, complete with a 17th-century barn and farmhouse, a pond and walking trails that traverse former railroad tracks, the property has been visited regularly by residents and tourists since she raised \$400,000 to purchase it half a century ago. From walking dogs to celebrating weddings and annual Pumpkin Day festivities, the farm is alive with activity. The Outdoor Discoveries summer camp offers the younger generation an education in conservation. Campers partake in nature walks, hayrides, and pond fishing, while learning from environmental experts about the ecological system. Bourne Farm is a living, breathing testament to what land conservation can accomplish.


If there was ever an argument against saving land in Falmouth, it would

Flanked by the Shining Sea Bikeway and Salt Pond’s waters, the well-marked nature trails are open to the public year-around for walking, running or biking.



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LIVE ON THE FRINGE

be to build affordable housing for young families. Many people who grew up in town have been forced to move away due to rising costs. “Our goal is to protect Falmouth’s natural resources. Housing demands are real,” explains Katey Taylor, whose 27-year passion for conserving land is evident when she speaks. “People are drawn to Falmouth for its natural beauty. Undeveloped spaces can protect us all from an ever-changing climate. If we lose all the land, what do we have left?”

According to the Land Trust Alliance, the United States loses roughly 150 acres of natural land and 40 acres of farmland every hour. With every acre lost, a connection to nature is diminished, family farms are eradicated, valuable wildlife habitats are not

viable and future generations will lose the ability to play outside.

SPABS is blazing the trail for a green future. Every year since 2012, Falmouth High School and Falmouth Academy science departments are awarded grants to cover nature study expenses.

Natural world-based science fair projects at Falmouth schools vie for monetary prizes granted by the organization. “These students will be the ones attending town meetings someday. If we educate them now, they will help preserve the balance between development and undisturbed land,” says Murray. “We are investing in the next generation so they can carry on Ermine’s dream and hopefully create beautiful open spaces for the town of Falmouth to enjoy forever.” 🌿



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The Knob, where Quisset Harbor meets Buzzards Bay