

Town Report for 2015
Town of Rockport, Massachusetts
Millbrook Meadow Committee



Rockport Middle School students spend a day in Millbrook Meadow studying plants, eels and beavers with Eric Hutchins and Colleen Coogan of NOAA

Millbrook Meadow Committee, since 2012, has been devoted to a massive project for the Town—the restoration of the four-acre parcel in downtown Rockport, adjacent to King and Beach Streets and Mill Lane. This year plans for restoration neared completion, so construction may start in September, 2016.

The family of George Todd donated the Pond to the Town in 1936. Rockport's Garden Club gave the property now known as the Meadow to the Town in 1938.

During World War II (1941-1945) the Meadow was used to plant many Victory Gardens. Right after the war it was necessary to modify Mill Brook to accommodate heavy storm drains from newly developed areas around the Boston & Maine (now MBTA) Railroad Station. A channel was dug for the brook on the north western border of the Meadow, and it was lined with granite blocks.

In 1951 Lura Hall Phillips began efforts to save the Meadow from becoming a town parking lot, and over the next 40 years worked to protect and preserve this beautiful parkland. When she died in 1994 she left money in trust for the Meadow.

Over many decades Rockporters have enjoyed the Meadow for festivals, fairs, picnics, weddings, games and just fun. For over a century Rockporters have skated on the Mill Pond, and it was once a good place to catch small fish.

The dam between the Pond and Meadow, originally built in 1702, blew out in 2006, and was finally replaced in 2012, and it was then that the Committee, led by John Sparks, began a very comprehensive project to restore the area.

Construction of the new dam dramatized the poor condition of the Pond and the Meadow. The Pond was filled with silt, its original eight-foot depth now reduced to four feet or less and badly clogged with aquatic plants.

The Meadow was often soggy, the Brook was clogged with loose stones and debris, and several large trees were dead or dying.

Barbara and John Sparks led the Committee's drive to obtain funding from Town Meeting and from the Community Preservation fund. The Committee obtained \$182,245 from the Lura Hall Phillips Trust, and went to Town Meeting and townspeople voted \$60,000 in regular Town funds and \$100,000 in Community Preservation Funds (total of \$322,000) to begin the restoration.

Plans for Restoration. Since late in 2013 Milone & MacBroom has been at work on plans for restoration of Meadow and Pond, and now final construction plans are being completed, and the plans are in the process of submittal to State, Federal and local authorities for permits.

At year's end Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) had granted a certificate for the project, which is an important milestone.

Funding for Restoration. Department of Public Works and Millbrook Meadow Committee have presented a request for funding for the first phase of construction—dredging of Mill Pond—by the Community Preservation Act at Spring Town Meeting on April 2, 2016.

Membership: Members of Millbrook Meadow are Charmaine Blanchard, Shannon Mason, Barbara Sparks, Ted Tarr, Marcia Lombardo, Aileen Morrissey, Stephanie Woolf and Sam Coulbourn. Shannon continued as vice-chair, Sam chair, and Marcia treasurer. Selectmen approved the membership of Laura Hallowell on the committee on Dec. 1, 2015. Laura has served as an expert advisor on planting, and has led a project to eliminate invasive plant species, which has become a part of the restoration.

Liaison Group. The Committee formed a special liaison group to work with the Contractor and DPW. Barbara Sparks heads this effort, with Sam Coulbourn, Laura Hallowell, Eric Hutchins, Marine Biologist at NOAA, experienced local environmentalist and former chair of the Planning Board, Gunilla Caulfield, local author and long-time friend of Lura and Trustee of the Lura Hall Phillips Trust; Frank Hassler, a long-time head of the Finance Committee and expert on municipal finance; and John P. Campbell, AIA, experienced in recently completing the Community House project for the Town as Advisors.

Conservancy. Since Millbrook Meadow Committee, as a town government entity, could not serve as fund raiser, the Committee created a board for the Rockport Millbrook Meadow Conservancy. This Conservancy is an independent organization, qualified to solicit donations. The Conservancy Board works closely with Millbrook Meadow Committee to provide their individual experience and expertise in the Restoration project, associated fund raising, and stewardship of the park in the future.

Members of the Board are Dianne Anderson, formerly of the Finance Committee and many other local organizations, and long-time volunteer with Rockport Music; Tim

Corrigan, Owner of Earthworks Constructors and former member of the board of Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce; Chester Clark, retired business executive, former treasurer of the Educational Founding for Rockport and volunteer for Rockport Music; Martha Jane Coulbourn, former chair of Millbrook Meadow Committee and a long-time volunteer with Rockport Chamber Music Festival; Deborah Cowan, former business executive and active in Rockport Garden Club; Karl Norwood, Founder of the Norwood Group in New Hampshire and owner of property abutting the Pond; Maura Wadlinger, retired banker and member of the Rockport Cultural Committee, and long-time volunteer with Rockport Music; Barbara Sparks, Member, Millbrook Meadow Committee, former President of Rockport Chamber Music Festival, former chair of the Planning Board; and Sam Coulbourn, ex officio.

Fund-Raising and Outreach Committee. Shannon Mason has continued as chair of the Restoration Fund Raising and Outreach subcommittee, with Charmaine Blanchard and Sam Coulbourn as members, as well as Maura Wadlinger of the Conservancy Board. Advisors are Susan J. Gray, past president of Rockport Chamber Music Festival and veteran board member of Rockport Music; and Betsy Giannoccaro, formerly fund raiser and grants coordinator for Rockport Music. The subcommittee arranged for Essex County Community Foundation (ECCF), a tax-exempt organization qualified to accept tax deductible contributions to receive donations. Several mail campaigns, assisted by a matching donation of \$25,000 by an anonymous donor, had gathered nearly \$92,000 by year's end. A listing of all donors is located on the Conservancy web site at www.milbrookmeadow.org

In addition to mailings, the fund raising efforts have included manning booths at the annual Acoustic Festival, weekly Farmer's market events, Motif No. 1 Day and Harvest Fest.

Pamela Fox, a long-time Rockport Artist, donated a painting of the Pond for fund raising. Committee and Conservancy members sold raffle tickets which yielded \$3800 for the restoration.

In June Rockport Music held a gala dinner in a large tent in the Meadow, featuring world-renowned cellist YoYo Ma. Rockport Music gave the Meadow a full-page color advertisement in their seasonal program book, and donated \$2000 to the Meadow. Individuals in Rockport Music donated an additional \$10,000.

Master Plan. The plan for Restoration of Meadow and Pond will include these main items:



Rockport Artist Pamela Fox holds her painting, with help of Todd Norwood At Drawing for raffle winner.

1. Dredging of the Mill Pond, removing tons of sediment collected over the years, and also much of the invasive cattails and other aquatic plants on the part of the Pond near the dam.
2. Rebuilding of the watercourse that carries water in Mill Brook to the sea. It will be widened to reduce the chances of its flooding its banks. The course will be slightly sinuous, moved back to its historic path through the Meadow to make it more favorable for fish, eels and aquatic plants. The new design will make the Brook more accessible to children, as well.
3. Where the Mill Brook passes into the Beach Street culvert en route Front Beach a headwall will be built to support the sides of the channel.
4. The old, dying willow trees have been removed and will be replaced with new, vibrant willow trees and other species.
5. The Meadow will be restored, its drainage improved and graded to reduce incidents of flooding.
6. The Meadow path will be rebuilt using pervious paving stones, and low-intensity path lighting will be installed.
7. Planting throughout the Meadow will be restored, using primarily native species, with steps already underway to eliminate invasive, alien species, like Japanese Knotweed.
8. The playground will be rebuilt.
9. The Frog Pond will be dredged and made more accessible.
10. The new course of the Mill Brook will pass through the present dogwood cluster, and that will be removed. Dogwood plantings will be relocated.
11. As the dredging in the Pond is completed footings will be installed for a board walk that will allow people to walk along both sides of the Pond and then cross over in the area near the Union Cemetery and Holbrook Court, where they can view the ducks, frogs, turtles, birds and aquatic plant life.

12. For the first time since the park has existed, a water supply will be provided so that there will no longer be a need to borrow water from neighboring businesses. Likewise, an electrical connection will be provided for use during special events in the Meadow, and for low-level, night-sky friendly overhead lighting.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "S. Coulbourn", written in a cursive style.

Samuel W. Coulbourn,
Chairman