# The Henry L. Ferguson Museum

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## From the President

In my first letter as president, I want to begin by remembering Penni Sharp and all that she did for our Museum. As our president since 2003, Penni provided quiet but confident leadership in all her initiatives. She educated many islanders through her nature walks, her nature notes, and her committed interventions on behalf of flora, fauna and habitat. She oversaw the development of children's programming at the Museum and brought many acclaimed scientists and naturalists to Fishers Island through the Museum's speaker series. She was instrumental in the development and maintenance of our vital Land Trust. Most recently, she set in motion our current project to renovate the second floor, which will allow us to further expand her education vision. She will be greatly missed by the Museum and our entire island community.

In addition to our regular Thursday nature walks, led this summer by new board member Terry McNamara, we are starting an ongoing series of nature walks in memory of Penni Sharp that will be hosted by guest naturalists and scientists. All of these walks will provide Fishers Islanders with an opportunity to get out in nature and learn firsthand about the island's incredible natural assets.

Museum Director Pierce Rafferty has been busy working on this year's annual exhibit, "The History of Farming on Fishers Island." The show chronicles the full sweep of island farming from Native American maize planting over 1,000 years ago right through to today's Fishers Island Oyster Farm. Our special exhibit this year is entitled "In their Presence." It showcases wonderful photographs of hawks and owls by island naturalist Justine Kibbe.

I would also like to mention some important functions of our extensive Land Trust. These natural areas, protected in perpetuity, offer not only aesthetic appeal and natural attractions for hikers on our trails, but also perform a diverse range of ecosystem services, including air and water purification, pollination, flood control, and wildlife habitat protection. The Land Trust is now entering a management phase and Bob Miller, our Land Trust vice president, is initiating the development of a comprehensive management plan with the cooperation of the full board.

Finally, I would like to update you on our exciting second floor renovation. Work is progressing nicely, albeit a bit slower than originally expected due to severe winter weather. We may be somewhat delayed in opening it, but we look forward to showing off a fantastic new public space. I am also pleased to report that fund-raising is going well with the Museum receiving generous donations from many individuals and foundations. More than $460,000 has been raised to date toward a total projected cost of $550,000. We are *very* grateful to all who have contributed to this important project. If you would like to help us reach our goal, please let Pierce or a board member know.

I hope that you take full advantage of all that the Museum has to offer during what promises to be an exciting season. We have a full schedule of children's programs and stimulating speakers lined up. I look forward to seeing you at our opening party on June 27th, and at other Museum events and activities throughout the summer.

*—Elizabeth McCance, President*

**Wilderness Dairy, circa 1890s, from exhibition "History of Farming on Fishers Island." Museum Collection.**

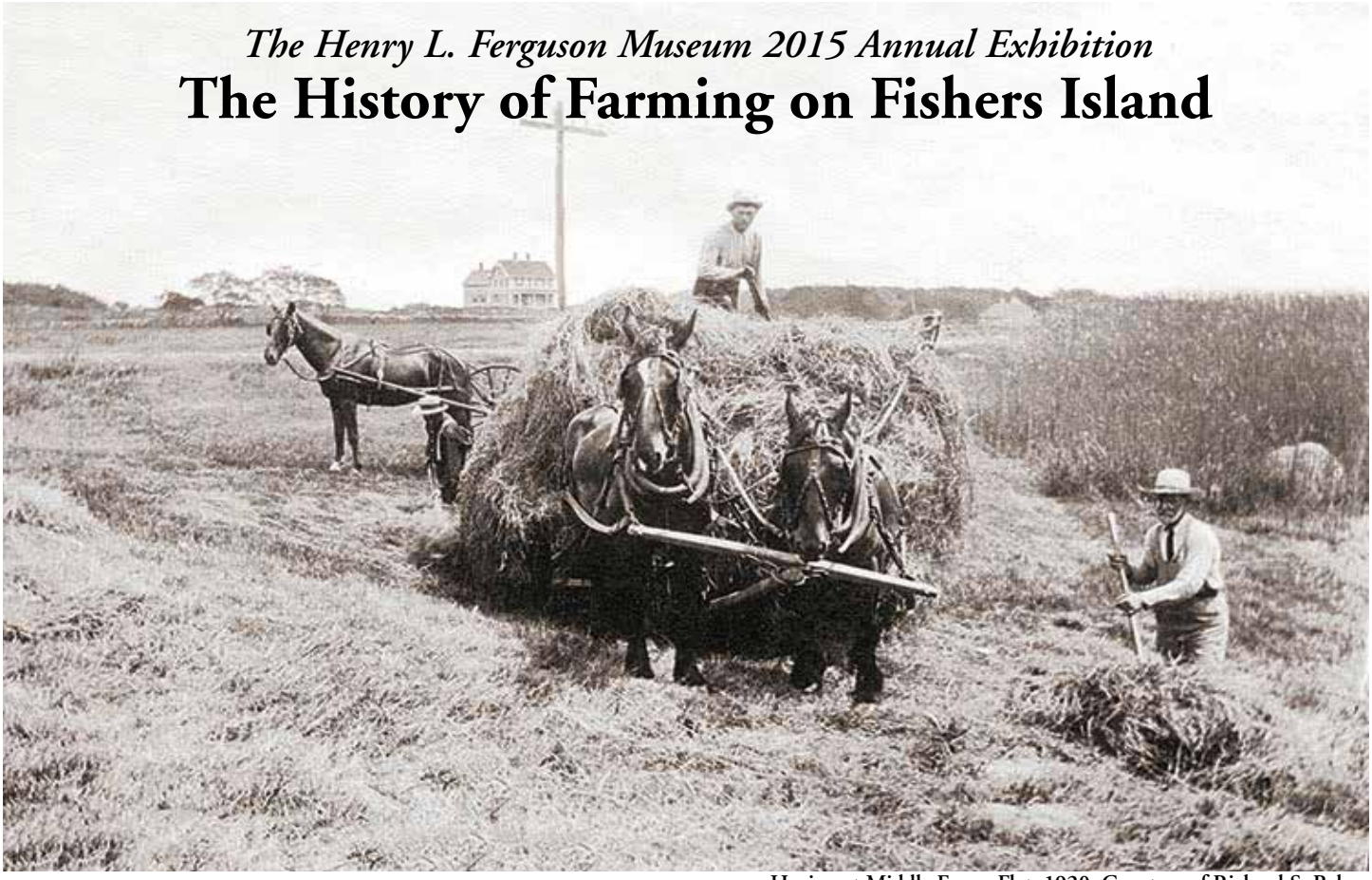
## "In their Presence"

Snowy owl near Elizabeth Field Airport, January 12, 2014. Courtesy of Justine Kibbe.

**Photographs of hawks and owls by Fishers Island naturalist Justine Kibbe.**

*The Henry L. Ferguson Museum 2015 Annual Exhibition*

# The History of Farming on Fishers Island



Haying at Middle Farms Flat, 1920. Courtesy of Richard S. Baker.

**Exhibition sponsored by:** AltusPartners CHUBB

**Join us for the opening reception on Saturday, June 27th, 5 to 7 p.m. All welcome!**

# A New President and Changes to the HLFM Board of Trustees

## Elizabeth McCance Elected President

The Museum's Board of Trustees announced on December 23, 2014, that Elizabeth McCance had been unanimously elected as the president of the Museum, effective immediately. She graciously accepted her new position.

Elizabeth joined the H.L.F. Museum board in 2006. She has served on various committees including heading the leadership gifts effort to finish the Museum's second floor space, which is currently under construction. In accepting her new role Elizabeth wrote, "I am very honored to be selected for this important position. It will be difficult to follow Penni's remarkable leadership, but I look forward to working with the board to help the Museum flourish in all its mission areas."

Dr. McCance's higher education began at Yale University, where she earned her BS in Biology in 1989. She continued her studies as a graduate student at the University of Maryland, College Park, where she received a MS in Conservation Biology and Sustainable Development in 1992. In 2004, Elizabeth completed her PhD at the School of Natural Resources and Environment at the University of Michigan.

Elizabeth joined Chicago Wilderness in 1996 as the Science and Land Management Teams coordinator. She led the teams through a process to develop a regional recovery plan for biodiversity. In 2002, she was named their director of conservation. Prior to joining Chicago Wilderness, Elizabeth worked for the Species Survival Commission of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, where she helped to administer an international network of 8,000 volunteers.

As a project manager for Criterion Ventures, a company that specializes in launching social ventures, Elizabeth worked to help prevent people from going into debt trying to pay the uncovered costs of healthcare. She also worked on a business incubator in Miami that focused on the development of non-profits in the area.

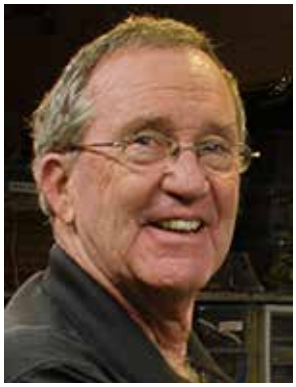
Elizabeth was formerly adjunct faculty at Sacred Heart University, where she taught both master's students and undergraduates in courses ranging from environmental management to field ecology. She is now a full-time assistant professor at Norwalk Community College teaching environmental science and general biology. She is also starting a degree program in environmental management at Norwalk Community College. A board member of The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut since 2013, Elizabeth is a resident of Westport, CT, and enjoys her summers at Fishers Island with her two young daughters.

## The HLFM Welcomes Three New Board Members and Says "Thank You!" to Another.

At their October 13, 2014 meeting, the Museum's Board of Trustees was informed that Elizabeth H. "Libbie" Cook had stepped down from the board after many years of dedicated service. The trustees expressed both regret at her decision and deep appreciation for all that she had done as a board member and as a vice president of the Museum. They voted wholeheartedly to make her an honorary trustee.

At their January 25, 2015 meeting, the Board of Trustees voted unanimously to invite three people to join the board: Terry McNamara, Megan Bohlen Raymond, and Barbie Riegel. The prospective board members were contacted after the meeting, and all three graciously accepted.

## Terry McNamara



Terry has spent a portion of every summer on Fishers Island since 1971. For the last several summers, he has enthusiastically stepped in to lead the Museum's nature walks during the month of August. He is an active volunteer at the Vanderbilt Museum in Centerport, NY, where he serves as a master gardener. He is also an active member of the Huntington-Oyster Bay Audubon Society.

Drawing from 33 years of experience teaching high school science on Long Island, Terry is helping the Museum expand exhibits and programming for children, including activities that promote first-hand experience of science and nature. Terry is an avid naturalist with interests in birds, herpetology, mushrooms and seaside fauna. He and his wife Harriet (Ahlgren) own a house on the Peninsula.

## Megan Bohlen Raymond

A life-long seasonal resident of Fishers Island, Megan has a BS in Geological Sciences and Environmental Science from Tufts. She received her MS from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science at the College of William & Mary. Her professional life has focused on ecological site assessments and environmental planning, most recently for William Kenny Associates. She has extensive experience identifying vernal pool habitats and conducting surveys of state-listed and endangered species. From 2004 to 2009, Megan served as the Inland Wetland Agency Commissioner for the Town of Branford, CT. A certified soil specialist, Megan has worked on wetland delineation and coastal restora-

tions projects in MA, CT and NY.

As a board member, Megan's range of expertise will be of considerable help in the science-based maintenance of our current Land Trust holdings, and the assessment of other island properties that may need protection in the future. Megan lives in Branford, CT, with her three children and her husband, who is a professor at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Science.

## Barbie Riegel

A well-known summer resident, Barbie has been involved with many island organizations over the years. Through her past board position with the Fishers Island Conservancy, Barbie was instrumental in developing the Nature Days environmental education programs. The gift of her late husband Jerry

Riegel's extensive nautical book collection for a new reference library was the catalyst the HLFM needed to move forward with the second floor renovation project.

Barbie is a longtime member of the board of directors of the Stroud Water Research Center in Avondale, PA, which conducts groundbreaking research on the ecology of fresh water streams, rivers and their watersheds around the world. She is currently assisting the HLFM with fund-raising for the second floor renovation and will bring great enthusiasm to the board. Barbie divides her time between Fishers and Hobe Sound, FL.

# Penelope Chester Sharp (1938-2014)

*The following remembrance was read at the Memorial Service for Penelope "Penni" Sharp, held at the First Congregational Church, Guilford, Connecticut, 11:00 a.m., April 18, 2015.*

My name is Pierce Rafferty. I am the director of the Henry L. Ferguson Museum, Fishers Island, NY, where Penni served on the board beginning in 1986, and as president from 2003 until her death. I am speaking as one of Penni's many friends, and as someone who worked closely with her during the last decades of her life.

In the wake of Penni's death last December, I felt bombarded by constant reminders of her absence and her presence, as I suspect many of you did.

Her *absence*—accentuated by the suddenness, the finality, the fundamental unfairness of her death. She had been so vital, in recent memory, seemingly with so much left to give to her family, to herself, to her friends, to her co-workers, to us all. Her *presence*—kept very much alive by the way that she had so seamlessly and generously blended into her many surrounding worlds, into our lives, through a wide variety of relationships and activities—both personal and professional—that characterized her very purposeful life.

There are countless contributions that she made that counter her absence, that help fill the gaps, that keep her present, in our presence, and it is a few of those contributions—representing many more—that I want to focus on today as we honor her memory and celebrate her life . . .

I first got to know Penni in the mid-1990s when I joined the board of the Museum. It wasn't until the early 2000s, however, that I witnessed her going all out on a major work project. Penni, along with a small group of island naturalists, was tasked with reorganizing and reinterpreting the Museum's entire natural history collection for display in a new building that was replacing an outmoded structure. During this period I had the pleasure of watching Penni, a consummate professional, repeatedly draw from her vast pool of knowledge with the purpose of sharing that knowledge with others.

With an impending opening fast approaching, she poured herself into the exhibits and text panels and did so with an ample supply of no muss, no fuss, grace under pressure that so few of us have. She was writing text panels on tidal pools and shoreline environments one minute while sorting rows of almost identical warbler specimens the next. You can't *see* her there, but she is so very present in the natural history galleries of our new Museum.

Penni never dwelled on how she came to acquire her impressive range of knowledge. She was a bit of a self-effacing magician that way, always keeping the focus off herself as she pulled accurate information out of her hat. Questions were answered with ease; rarified knowledge appeared, presto, but she never felt the need to reveal, much less brag about her past accomplishments: her time at the Yale School of Forestry, where she earned her graduate degree in 1979 at the age of 41, her life-long evolution into a first-class botanist, or her decades of committed work as an environmental consultant in Connecticut. Penni stayed in the present and drew from the past without any hint of tooting her own horn. For example, she often spoke about the growing threat of invasive plants on Fishers Island, especially the dreaded mile-a-minute vine, but she never felt the need to trumpet the fact that she had for many years been co-chair of the Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group.

Her tendency to not talk about her day job, or about her extensive volunteer work on the mainland, could conceivably be related to the fact that she was, *technically*, on vacation while on Fishers Island. You would have a hard time knowing that, given all the on-island work she did over the decades. Mirroring her environmental concerns on the mainland, she remained a stalwart defender and champion of the defenseless while on Fishers. She was the go-to person who looked after rare, endangered or threatened plants in our marshes and fields, vulnerable nesting birds on our rocky beaches, and criti-

**Penni Sharp. Courtesy of Genie Trevor.**

cal habitat of all types put at risk by human encroachment. One of her many responsibilities was overseeing the maintenance of the Museum's Land Trust, consisting of more than a tenth of our approximately 3000-acre island. She worked closely with other dedicated board members to ensure that the properties remained protected and undeveloped for the benefit of flora and fauna, and yet accessible for humans through an intricate network of trails, the guide for which she wrote.

Penni seemed most in her element out of doors, walking on paths, in fields, on trails, in woods, on beaches, often with Ruby, her beloved black lab, or with family, or close friends. For many years, she also took small groups from the Museum out on nature walks that were scheduled for each Thursday afternoon at 2 pm: "Sharp," she would remind me. The subject of these walks would vary week to week: seaweeds, rare plants, invasives, shore birds, or just "whatever we find."

I think all who spent time with Penni have their own special memories. She just didn't pass much time casually, or waste a lot of time. If you were with her, she was there. I don't think I ever saw her not paying attention, when attention was needed or expected. She was a listener and an observer, always keeping her eyes on the subject at hand, be it a person in conversation, a rare plant in the woods, or a passing bird in the sky.

She brought her characteristically sharing spirit to her many interests and activities. The A to Z list is a long one, but this short sample pulled from the Bs and the Cs reveals the depth and the range: beekeeping, birding, botany, chicken raising, choral singing, conservation of all types. She was dynamic in so many ways, a gift to us all.

With the loving support of Penni's family and those who gave to the Museum in her memory, the Board of the Museum is initiating an on-going series of educational programs entitled "Penni Sharp Nature Walks," each walk to be hosted by an invited guest naturalist, or scientist, including ornithologists, botanists, and entomologists. These walking "talks in the field" will help keep Penni's remarkable legacy alive in both the hearts and the minds of all participants.

My heart goes out to Greg and the family. Penni is and will continue to be much missed, but just as certainly will continue to be much remembered.

Thank you Penni for everything you were, everything you did, and for the caring, selfless legacy you left for all of us.

*We would like to thank all who gave to the Museum in memory of Penni Sharp. Your gifts will help establish an ongoing educational series at the Museum, "Penni Sharp Nature Walks" led by guest naturalists and scientists.*

Donors as of May 7, 2015, from Penni Sharp's family include Greg Sharp, Genie and John Trevor, Sandy McPherson, Colby (Mike) Chester, Geoffrey and Laurie Chester, Daniel and Tysh Tilt McGrail, Clare Stone, Jessie Stone, and Posy Stone and Sims Preston. Friends and co-workers who donated include: Anonymous, Diana and Jimmy Bostwick, Lauren Brown and John Herzan, Judi Bruckman, Peter and Jan Burr, Leslie and George Conant, Elizabeth H. Cook, Peter and Diana Cooper, Jane Crary, Janet Vail Day and Robert J. Wyman, Ken and Cookie Edwards, George and Sandy Esser, Harry and Susie Ferguson, Ann and Michael Flinn, Luke and Rhonda Fowler, Ed and Peggy Harding, Jane Harvey and Charlie Curtis, Adam Henry, Richard and Nancy Higgerson, Kenny and Nat Howe, Ann C. Letendre, Carol Levine, Loureiro Engineering Associates, Inc., Robert and Bobsie Macleod, John F. McGillian, Steve McPherson, Murtha Cullina LLP, Linda Patelli, Patricia Pierce and Marc Rubenstein, Noble and Carolyn Proctor, Pierce and Vicki Rafferty, Bagley Reid, Kate and Scott Reid, Barbie C. Riegel, Sandy and Jim Righter, Sarah and Andrew Rose, Kandi Sanger, John and Holly Schenck, Frances R. Spark, Nick and Martha Spofford, Karl P. Stofko, Roy T. and Emily Van Vleck, Jackie Williamson, Bonnie Wittner, Ilene Wittner, Mary Denny Wray, and David Yih.

**Penni birdwatching on Fishers Island, December 2013. Photo by JTAhrens.**

## Invasive Crabs on Fishers Island
*by Terry McNamara*

The crab species most of us are familiar with on Fishers Island is the green crab *(Carcinus maenas)*. On the docks on the Fishers Island Sound side of the island, countless crabs have been hauled from the water with drop lines by youngsters. On the south side of the island these crabs are also present but rarely seen by beachgoers. The evidence of their presence is in the detritus left behind by tidal movement. These crabs are easily identified.

**Green crab *(Carcinus maenas)*.**

Green crabs generally range up to 4 inches across a carapace that is broader than it is long, though larger individuals have been recorded. Their color is not their most distinctive feature. They range from reddish to dark mottled green or brown. A positive identification can be made by examining the shell. There are five "teeth" on each side of the shell and three rounded lobes between the eyes.

These crabs are an invasive species from Europe that first appeared on the U.S. Atlantic coast in 1817. Though they have been on Fishers Island for generations, they are continuing to spread world-wide. They have earned the dubious distinction of being named one of the 100 worst invasive species in the world. This is due to their voracious appetite for economically important species. They feed on bivalves and other crustaceans. They have a well-documented impact on young oysters, soft-shelled clams, mussels and scallop populations. In Maine a bounty was offered for them though the program was short-lived. Various programs and studies have been done nationally to find a use for them that would make their capture financially attractive, as in Europe where the molting soft-shelled crabs are a delicacy sold for $40 a pound. On Fishers their primary use is as bait for fishing. They are gathered in traps or collected by turning over rocks in the intertidal zone on South Beach. Presently, however, green crabs are no longer plentiful under the rocks at low tide and, in many areas, there are none present at all. A new invader has come to the island.

In the past few years, an observant beachcomber would have noticed that the shells and claws left by the tides were no longer those of green crabs. The remains of the smaller crabs that washed up were different. The carapaces were square-shaped with three lateral spines or "teeth." The legs when present had light and dark bands on them. The colors were mostly an orange-brown, but also maroon and green. A cursory search of the internet or a current seashore handbook would identify the remains as having come from the Asian shore crab *(Hemigrapsus sanguineus)*. These crabs have a maximum carapace width of 2 inches and red-spotted claws with a small bump at the junction.

This new invader was first recorded on the Atlantic coast

**Asian shore crab *(Hemigrapsus sanguineus)*.**

in 1988 in New Jersey. By 1994, it had reached Long Island Sound. Its first appearance on Fishers Island was not recorded, but since 2013 an examination of the sheltered space under the rocks at South Beach at low tide has revealed a teeming population of the Asian shore crabs. In previous years there were large numbers of green crabs under the rocks and in the attached seaweed, as well as observable populations of young Atlantic rock crabs *(Cancer irroratus),* lady crabs *(Ovalipes ocellatus)* and spider crabs *(Libinia emarginata)*. In the sand there were hermit crabs *(Pagurus longicarpus)* and an abundance of common periwinkles *(Littorina littorea)*. This is no longer the norm. The littoral area exposed at low tide has diminished populations of periwinkles and hermit crabs. Small specimens of the other crabs are generally absent.

Whether these new invaders will have a like effect on crab and shellfish populations on other parts of the island is unclear. There has been an extensive amount of research in the

**Crab habitat on South Beach, Fishers Island, NY. Photo by Terry McNamara.**

past decade on the interactions between green crabs and Asian shore crabs in Northeastern U.S. intertidal areas. The ability for the Asian invaders to outcompete the green crabs for both food and sheltering space beneath rocks is well established. The declining populations of the other species present have also been noted in every area studied, though no causation has been definitively demonstrated. It is interesting to note that similar effects have been reported by researchers studying the impact of the recent appearance of invasive green crabs on the U.S. Pacific coast and in Australia.

Both species spawn several times during the warmer months and hatch as free-swimming larvae that mature into juvenile crabs in about a month. This gives them ample time to spread to new areas through a variety of ways. The ballast water of ships is considered the most likely method by which the crabs are introduced into new areas. There is currently no effective way to control the Asian shore crab populations as the parasites that keep them under control in their native areas are not present. So it seems that the crab populations on Fishers Island will be in flux for the next few years at least. Hopefully, the effect of this new invader on our shellfish populations will be minimal.

## "Tagged" Osprey Update
*by Beth Jepsen*

### Charlie

Charlie spent his winter around lakes in the northwestern Bolivar region of Colombia. On March 18 he began his migration north by heading south to Cordoba, Colombia, before turning west and then northwest up the isthmus of Panama. Instead of returning by the more direct Caribbean route, he chose a migratory path that took him to Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico. After reaching the Yucatan peninsula, he returned to the U.S. via the Gulf of Mexico, crossing into northwestern Florida on March 27. He then followed waterways up the eastern coast and, after 16 days, was back on Fishers Island. Ornithologist Rob Bierregaard had been planning to switch Charlie's transmitter to another male osprey; however, because of Charlie's unusual flight pattern, he will continue to be tracked for another migration cycle.

**Charlie's trip south to Colombia last fall (right) and his looped return north (left).**

Since his return north, Charlie has resumed his role as a dutiful partner of his mate at their transfer station nest. Occasionally staying overnight on the mainland, he spent most nights in April sleeping in trees near the Fishers Island nest. Throughout the month he made frequent daytime trips to the mainland to hunt for food, usually near the Niantic River on the East Lyme-Waterford border. He also made one trip south to Orient Point and a couple of trips to North Stonington, CT, and Rhode Island.

To get updates on Charlie's travel routes visit this link:
fergusonmuseum.org/osprey-cam/tracking-charlie/

### Edwin

After wintering in Brazil in the Amazon rainforest, Edwin's tracking data was intermittently picked up further north along rivers in Colombia and Venezuela in mid-February. On March 11, he started his migration north following his usual Caribbean route through the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Cuba, reaching the Florida Keys on March 24. He then followed waterways along the east coast, and after 23 days reached the Connecticut River on April 2.

Since his return north, Edwin has resumed his role as a Connecticut-based wandering bachelor. He spent most of April traveling back and forth between the Connecticut River and the Niantic River, and between reservoirs, ponds and streams in the Montville-Salem area. He rarely spent more than one or two nights in a row in the same location. He has made a few trips south to Gardiners Island and Fishers Island, and east to the Groton Reservoir—once reaching further east to Hyde Pond in Mystic, and north to Avery Pond in Preston.

To get updates on Edwin's travels visit this link:
fergusonmuseum.org/osprey-cam/track-edwin/

**Edwin's travel routes in April 2015.**

# Island History: Paths Not Taken

*by Pierce Rafferty*

Of all the decades in Fishers Island's storied history, there are few whose outcome was as unpredictable as the 1870s. The sudden death in 1871 of Fishers Island's owner, Robert Ralston Fox, derailed his ambitious farm operation and exposed the island to wildly divergent development plans.

Robert R. Fox, a wealthy retired merchant of cotton duck, had purchased the island in 1863 for $55,000 from the last in a long line of Winthrop owners. Fiscal distress had forced the Winthrop family to sell after more than two centuries of successfully running and renting their undivided island as a profitable stock farm and dairy. However, at the time of Fox's purchase, the island's farms were all but abandoned and the property was heavily mortgaged. A writer for an agricultural magazine described an island stripped of wood, with fields gone to seed, dilapidated barns, over-grazed land, and "an air of neglect that hangs over everything."

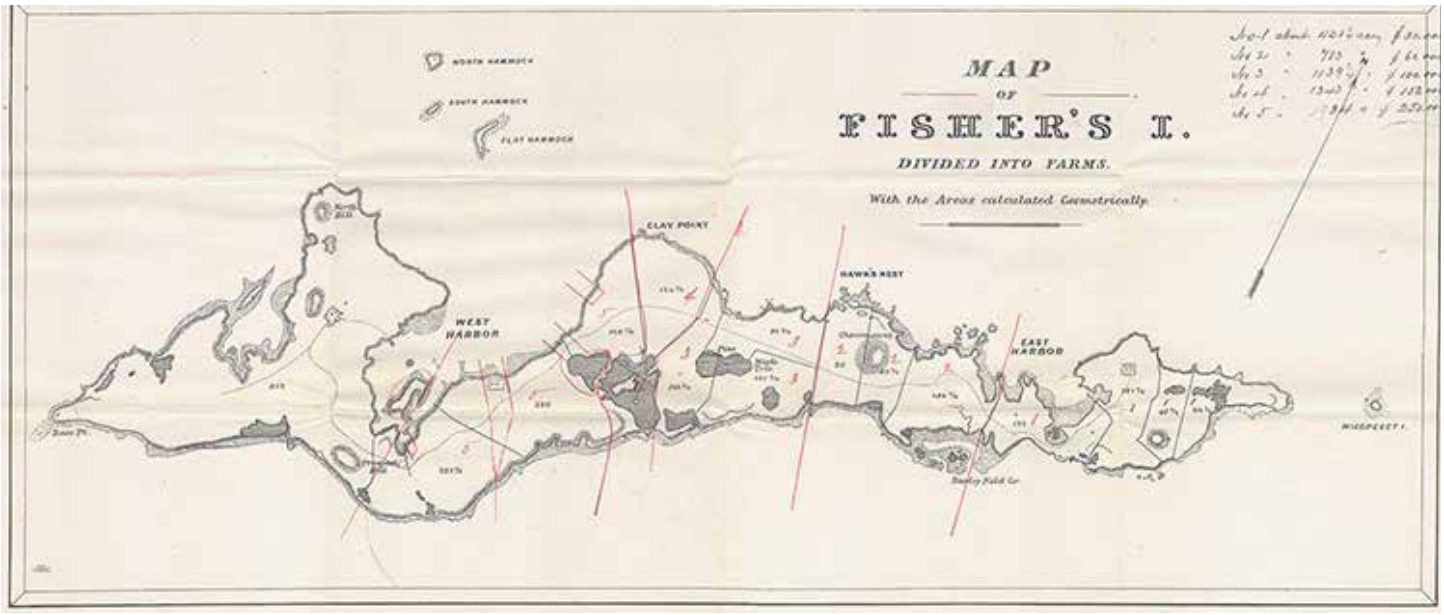
If the Winthrop family's sale came as no surprise to contemporary observers, what did raise an eyebrow or two was Fox's development plan. He wanted nothing more than to restore Fishers Island as a great stock farm. Instead of selling off land lots as many had expected, he kept the island as an undivided property, a rustic private estate. Fox turned a small brick caretaker house into an elegant residence known as the Fox Mansion House where he resided with his wife, two daughters and household servants.

Over the next eight years, Fox, as gentleman farmer, invested some $200,000, in 1860 dollars, into farm infrastructure, including barns, stone walls, wood fencing, and a grist mill. He brought in some fifty farm laborers to work the property. Soon hundreds of prize cattle and several thousand sheep were roaming the fields and hills of Fishers Island again. His untimely death in 1871 brought Fishers Island back to the attention of the outside world and potential purchasers.

When hints of a possible new sale of Fishers Island cropped up in the press in 1872, development plans quickly followed. Perhaps the most outlandish was a proposal floated in the New York State Assembly that had Sing Sing Prison moving to Fishers Island from "up the river" in Ossining, NY. The idea had first been proposed when the Winthrop family offered the island for sale in the early 1860s, but was quickly tabled when Mr. Fox bought the whole island outright in 1863. In the wake of Mr. Fox's death, the prison relocation plan was dusted off and seriously debated.

**Prisoners going to work at Sing Sing Prison. Courtesy of New York Public Library**

In May 1873, the Assembly passed a bill seeking the removal of the prison from Ossining that authorized Assembly commissioners to select a new site for the prison. Both politicians and the press considered Fishers Island an ideal choice. Boosters listed its numerous merits: chance of escape was minimal; it had fertile soil for raising convict fare ("grain and vegetables, pork, mutton, and perhaps beef"); there were extensive clay beds on site to fashion bricks for a fortress wall; there was no population near enough to be morally polluted; residents in Ossining confidently predicted rising real estate prices after the prison departed; and, perhaps most importantly, a reason-




**1875 auction map showing Fishers Island divided into 15 farms. Museum Collection.**

able purchase price was predicted. The interested legislators pointed out that all the provisioning farms on Fishers Island could be worked with convict labor. There was also talk of introducing table grapes as a crop, as had been done successfully in parts of Long Island. Thankfully, this proposal never came to fruition and we were spared the arrival of agricultural chain gangs to tend our fields. For reasons yet to be determined, no vote was ever taken in the Assembly that might have led to us becoming an island fortress, an impregnable "Alcatraz east."

The prison plan being a non-starter, Mr. Fox's widow, Eliza, worked with the executor of the Robert Fox estate to devise a new plan that divided the island into fifteen farms, "calculated geometrically," reserving the western one-third as a home farm and possible future resort. An auction was held in June 1875, but the land lots failed to sell after reserve prices were not realized. At the time of the auction, there were only seven houses on the entire island, almost all farm cottages.

For the remainder of 1875 and early 1876, the Fox estate hired Ira Hart Palmer, a prominent citizen of Stonington, Conn., involved with steamboat lines and summer hotels, to function as the real estate agent tasked with selling tracts of land on Fishers Island. Working for a 10% sales commission, he printed one thousand promotional envelopes for correspondence that included the following copy:

**"Fishers Island to be Summer Resort in 1876"**

**"Steam and Cable Communications with New London will be Permanently Established."**

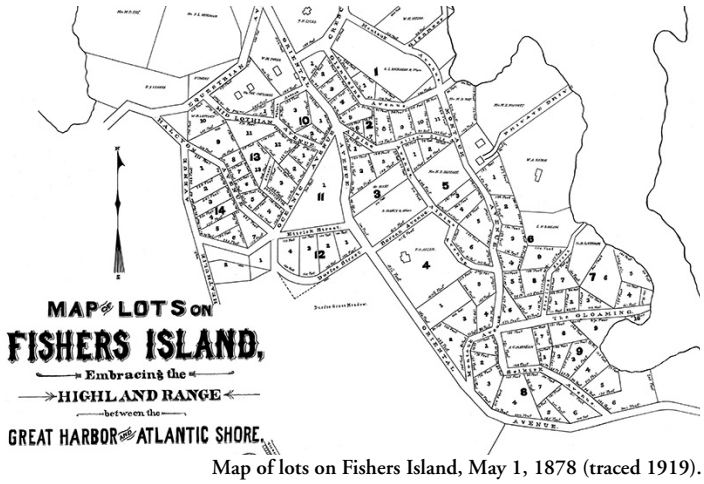
**"Hotel and Cottage Sites can be Engaged by addressing: I. H. Palmer, Stonington, Conn."**

Mr. Palmer summed up his mid-1870s development intentions for Fishers Island in a letter to the editor published in New London's *The Day* on October 26, 1898: "It was my aim, my ambition, my plan to have established colonies at different parts of the island, all desirable, and to have connected the system with a narrow gauge railroad. For instance, set off a large tract for the Springfield contingent, the Hartford, the Meriden, the New Haven, the Norwich and others. Each and all to be strictly a community by themselves—very much as the Norwich colony is at Eastern Point." As part of his promotional efforts, he brought a group of approximately 100 of New London's leading businessmen to the island on the Steamer *Port Royal.* They landed at West Harbor and viewed the surrounding landscape for an hour. Unfortunately for Mr. Palmer, the tour triggered no land sales or development plans.

During 1876, Mr. Palmer did come within days of finalizing the sale of 600 acres at the eastern end of Fishers Island to the Cheney family of Manchester, Connecticut, prominent manufacturers of silk. The sales price was $25,000 for a tract that included the East End (Winthrop) House and East Harbor. Their intention was to establish a Cheney colony on Fishers Island for a family group that then numbered about 70 people. However, the death in March 1876 of Ward Cheney, a founder of Cheney Brothers and a main proponent of the plan, halted the sale and terminated the plan. Were it not for his death, a private family colony would have been established on land that today holds the Big Club and its associated golf course, as well as many private residences. Although the Cheney family didn't create a unified colony, individual family members built houses within this same area fifty years later as part of the Olmsted Plan. Their residences included the J. Cheney Wells house (today owned by John and Pam Kean), the Charles Cheney house (today's "Sandsong" owned by Dedo Kidd and Michele Goss), and the W.C. Cheney, Jr., house (today owned by Harry and Nancy Gruner). With no land sales recorded, Palmer recalled that he dropped Fishers Island "like a hot potato, after spending several hundred dollars in pioneering it before the public as a summer resort."

The Fox Estate rebounded from these failed efforts by shifting their attention to the west end of Fishers Island. James Lyles, Mrs. Fox's son in law, took over as executor and drew up a new development plan that restricted land sales to the west end. The new streets and roads were given fancy names like Halcyon and Equestrian avenues while the east end was kept undivided and undeveloped. Land sales began in the spring of 1876—the first since the Winthrop settlement in the 1640s (excepting Fox family purchases). Allowed to grow, a small New England town, as part of New York, sprang up almost instantly. After centuries of being rebuffed by no trespassing signs and posted notices, people from the mainland were eager to have access. They bought half an acre, an acre, or in some cases larger parcels, and built for either year round or summer use. By the end of the decade, both a winter and a summer community had taken root on Fishers.

These abandoned development plans—including proposals to create an island of farms, a site for a relocated maximum security prison, a trolley-linked string of distinct resort communities, and a 600-acre residential colony for a single prominent family—have been all but forgotten over time. However, they are useful today as reminders of how close we came in the 1870s to becoming a very different island. In the mid-1880s, two Ferguson brothers arrived on Fishers with their own vision for the island's future. After their purchase in 1889 of approximately nine-tenths of Fishers Island, they built on what had been preserved by the Winthrop and Fox families and charted a new path that is still being followed today.




**Map of lots on Fishers Island, May 1, 1878 (traced 1919).**

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*Please excuse any inadvertent misspellings or omissions.*

** Deceased.*

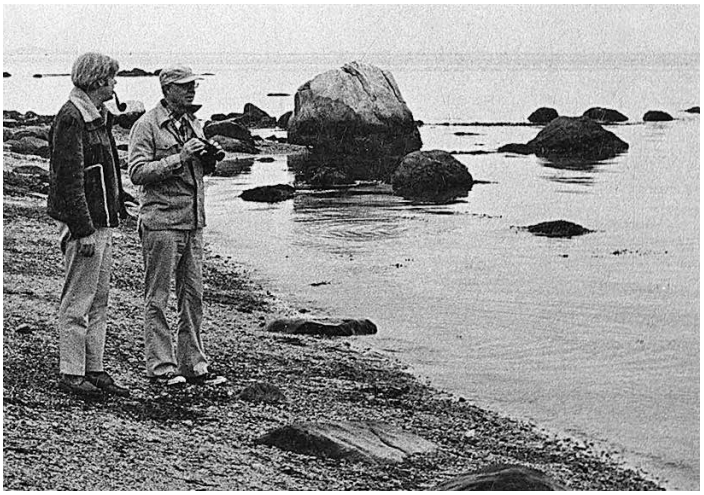
# Edwin Horning's Extensive Bird Data to be Uploaded to eBird

*by John Sepenoski*

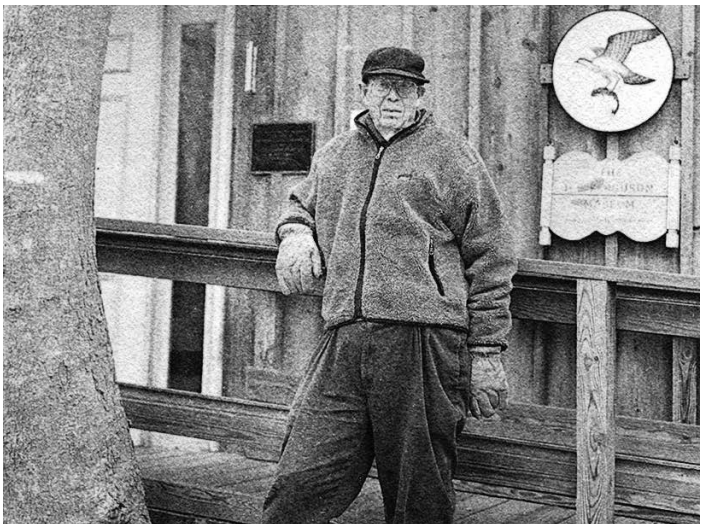
My involvement in the Ed Horning Journals Project can be traced back to the Town of Southold appointing me as the Town's representative to an Audubon New York (ANY) committee that was created to develop a management plan for the Orient Point and Plum Island Important Bird Area (IBA). While this committee was active, Fishers Island resident Jackie Williamson contacted ANY about the IBA program and inquired as to whether any parts of Fishers Island would qualify as an IBA. Jackie offered her personal journals as documentation of the birds of Fishers Island and also noted that Ed Horning, the late curator of the Henry L. Ferguson Museum, had kept journals covering 1966 through 2003 and that these journals were kept at the Museum courtesy of Ed Horning's family.

One of the tools that ANY had used to document IBAs was eBird, an online database that allows the submission of bird sightings, including historic sightings, from anywhere in the world. As per their website, eBird was launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society and provides data sources for information on bird abundance and distribution at a variety of spatial and temporal scales. eBird's goal is to maximize the utility and accessibility of the vast numbers of bird observations made each year by recreational and professional bird watchers. The observations of each participant join those of others in a database and eBird then shares these observations with a global community of educators, land managers, ornithologists, and conservation biologists with the data becoming the foundation for a better understanding of bird distribution around the world.

ANY and I recognized the significance of such an extensive series of journals and knew that it was important to get this information entered into eBird. We worked with Ferguson Museum Director Pierce Rafferty and Southold Town Clerk Elizabeth Neville to arrange for the Town to borrow the journals so that I could go through them and type up all of the bird sightings for submission to eBird. Pierce contacted the Horning family and they gave the project the green light.



**Ed Horning bird watching with Edwin, Jr., on South Beach, c.1982.**



**Ed Horning in front of the second Museum, c.1997. Photo by Ethan Kibbe.**

I then began entering the sightings into spreadsheets so that they can be imported into the eBird database. As of writing this, I am working on July 2000 with just over three years' worth of journals to finish and have typed up over 20,000 lists. Yes, that's twenty thousand separate lists! When these lists are submitted to eBird, Fishers Island will be one of the best documented areas in Suffolk County, as far as birds go, for the period the journals cover.

The importance of these sightings cannot be overstated. Although I never met Ed, I have certainly gotten to know the birder side of him through these journals. In fact, in journal entries where he did not note the location of his sightings I can often figure out the location based on the species he reported and the comments he made. The word that best describes Ed's birding on Fishers Island and his entries in his journals is "relentless." When there was a good run of shorebirds at South Beach in the summer, he would go there every day, sometimes more than once, and note what he saw. Throughout the journals Ed consistently documented the Osprey nests on the island, at times visiting the same nest several times a day and sketching where the Osprey were on each of his visits. This repeated effort of recording birds at the same locations on Fishers Island over and over again throughout the 1966-2003 period is what makes his observations so valuable for documenting trends in birds on Fishers Island.

Finally, as I have said to Pierce several times since we began this project, I am having a blast doing it. I am a bird watcher myself and submit all of my birding lists to eBird, but there is still something special to me about entering historic data so that it becomes accessible for study and analysis in eBird, rather than have it waste away on a shelf, or be forgotten in someone's attic. I am confident that Ed Horning would be pleased having his data as part of the eBird database.

*Mr. Sepenoski is chair of the Town of Southold's Land Preservation Committee.*

# A Sampling of Additions to the Museum's Collection in 2014

**Tripp Baker.** Original deed of sale dated August 11, 1820, for 187-acre farm with buildings, located at the end of Black Point in the town of Lyme, Connecticut. The seller was Robert Gorton (1778-1855) of Fishers Island, NY.

**Ken Edwards.** Fire-damaged military sword that originally belonged to Maj. A. G. Pendleton, The sword was found by the donor amidst the rubble of "Miramar," the Pendleton residence that burned to the ground on January 1, 1969. Boat life ring for *Minomar,* Fishers Island, NY, circa 1930s.

**Charles B. Ferguson.** One pair of antique binoculars manufactured by Bardou & Son, Paris, with owner's name engraved: "Walton Ferguson, Jr. New York."

**Betty Kannon.** FIFD metal badge (pinback), circa 1930. The badge belonged to John Francis Kannon, a member of the FIFD, who worked for the FI Corporation from 1929 to 1941. "War Department Theatre Programme" [Movie schedule], circa 1929. This schedule predates the 1932 Fort H.G. Wright motion picture theater and lists movies that were shown at the Serviceman's Club, once located adjacent to the 1932 theater.

Miss Evelyn Talbot and Miss Gwendolyn Talbot in matching beach attire, Fishers Island, NY, July 1926. Acme Newspictures.

Fire-damaged military sword found amidst the rubble of Pendleton residence "Miramar," after fire on January 1, 1969. Donated by Ken Edwards.

**Jonathan and Madora Kibbe.** Two vintage cowbells originally found on Cant property (today Kibbe), East End, Fishers Island, NY.

**Catherine Leslie.** Watercolor of former Band Barracks, Fort H.G. Wright, Fishers Island, NY, entitled "Taps" by Yvette Wilson, circa 1960s.

**Elizabeth Peishoff.** Fishers Island School Graduation Program, June 23, 1947.

**Barbie Riegel.** Approximately 500 books with nautical themes from her late husband Jerry's collection (2015 accession).

**Sandy Riegel.** Oversize blueprint with key to of Fort H.G. Wright buildings, mounted on board with surrounding wooden frame, circa 1942. Sixty five Lloyd's Yacht Registers, misc. years 1905-1979.

**John Spofford.** Collection of nautical magazines including *Sea Classics, Ship's Monthly, Steamboat Bill and Power Ships.*

**Tony Tremaine.** 73 books and periodicals, primarily on nautical themes.

**Debby Walters.** Collection of Fishers Island ephemera, photographs, magazines and news clippings.

**John Wilton.** Nine original photographs of Fishers Island landscapes, primarily Land Trust properties.

**Harry Yerkes IV.** G.E. light bulb in unused condition, circa late 1890s. Donor found bulb on foundation between floor joists of Mansion House Cottage D, Fishers Island, NY.

Mr. Stephen E. Budd on Kerry at the Fishers Island Horse Show, September 1, 1930. Acme Newspictures.

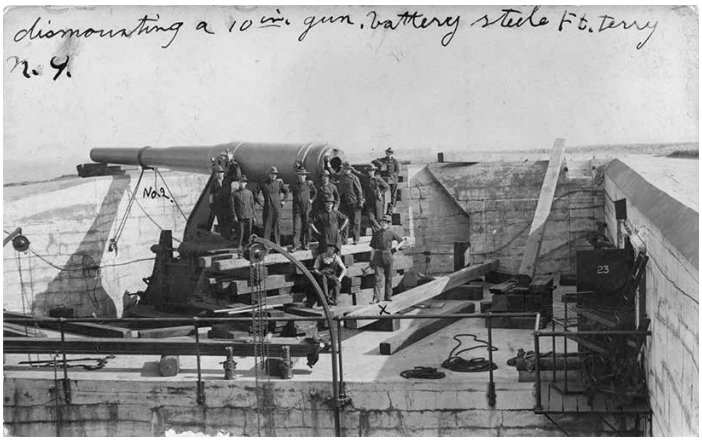
**"Fashionable Society at Fishers Island . . . Members of the younger set of society disporting themselves on the beach of the [HHC] club." 1926. Left to right: Stephen E. Wise of New York, Miss Carroll Ferguson of Greenwich, Conn., Laurenson Riggs of Baltimore, Md., and Jonathan Butler of New York (front). Acme Newspictures.**

## HLFM Acquisitions in 2014

**Objects include:** Two original leases for Fishers Island, one signed on March 25, 1734, and one signed on January 8, 1741/2. Ann Winthrop signed both while acting as agent and attorney for her husband John Winthrop F.R.S., the lessor and owner of all of Fishers Island. The lessees were, respectively, Mary and George Havens, of Fishers Island, and George Mumford, "late of South Kingston in the County of Kings County now of Fishers Island in the Province of New York." Tiny silver medal "Fishers Island Horse Race, 1st Place, 7/16/1906." Wooden souvenir "Fishers Island, N.Y." bank in shape of cut log with slot for money, circa 1910s. Season ticket for Steamer *Ella,* 1889. Copper trophy for Cat Boat Race, Hay Harbor Club, 1909. Fort H.G. Wright sweetheart pillowcase with poem.

**Photos include:** "Dismounting a 10-in. gun, Battery Steele Ft. Terry N.Y." [Fort Terry, Plum Island, NY] 1907 postmark. Mrs. Alfred L. Ferguson of New York City and Miss Gwendolyn Talbot of Greenwich, Conn., sitting on bench at the HHC wearing after-swimming attire, 1926. (Acme Newspictures). Evelyn Talbot and Miss Gwendolyn Talbot in matching beach attire, Fishers Island, NY, July 1926 (Acme Newspictures). "A sharply dressed pair, Mr. J. Lenox Porter and Miss Carolyn Buckner, attending horse show, Fishers Island, NY, on September 1, 1930" (Acme Newspictures). "Miss Ruth Aninger gracefully taking the barrier on Tampa at the Fishers Island Horse Show, Fishers Island, New York 9/1/1930" (Acme Newspictures).

**Books include:** "Long Island Sound: Prospects for the Urban Sea," edited by J.S. Latimer et al., and "Steamboats on Long Island Sound" by N. J. Brouwer.




**Dismounting a 10-in. gun, Ft. Terry, Plum Island, NY, c. 1907. Real photo postcard. Museum acquisition.**

**"Race Rock Wind." Photograph of fisherman at Race Point by Boots Parker, 1986. Donated by Debby Walters.**

## MISSION STATEMENT

**The mission of The Henry L. Ferguson Museum is the collection, preservation and exhibition of items of Pre-History, History and Natural History of Fishers Island and, through its Land Trust, the preservation in perpetuity of undeveloped property in its natural state. It is organized for the education and enjoyment of the Island's community and visitors and for the protection of habitat for the Island's flora and fauna.**

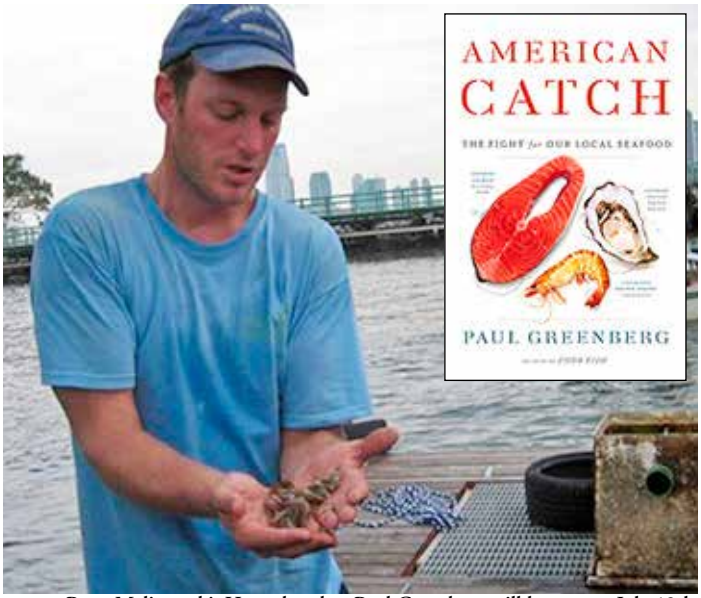
# Museum Speakers and Programs 2015

**Owl Prowl.** Get up close and personal with a live owl and learn about owls' unique adaptations for nocturnal life. A Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center (DPNC) family program for ages 5 and up. **Wednesday, July 8, 2015.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. Place: The Museum. Suggested donation: $5.00.

**"Homegrown Terror: Benedict Arnold and the Burning of New London."** Author Eric Lehman will speak about his new book that chronicles the life of Benedict Arnold and the events leading up to the treacherous Arnold-led attack on New London on September 6, 1781. **Sunday, July 12, 2015.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Union Chapel.

**Slither: Learn All About Snakes.** Live snakes are the stars of this popular DPNC family program. **Wednesday, July 15, 2015.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. Place: The Museum. Suggested donation: $5.00.

**American Seafood from Salmon to Oysters: Sustainability and Restoration.** An illustrated lecture by Fishers Island native Pete Malinowski and author Paul Greenberg. Pete Malinowski teaches marine science and aquaculture at New York Harbor School. Paul Greenberg's new book is titled, "American Catch: The Fight for Our Local Seafood." **Sunday July 19, 2015.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Union Chapel. A joint HLFM and FI Library Program. The 2015 Smith Vaughan Lecture.



Peter Malinowski. He and author Paul Greenberg will lecture on July 19th.

**Super Birds and their Super Abilities.** Ever wonder how birds are capable of doing all the fantastic things they do? Meet one of our bird ambassadors and learn about all the fascinating abilities of these super creatures! A DPNC program for ages 5 and up. **Wednesday, July 22, 2015.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. Place: The Museum. Suggested donation $5.

**"Venture Smith: Making Freedom."** Author Chandler B. Saint will share new discoveries relating to the remarkable life of Venture Smith, an African prince who was captured and taken to colonial New England as a slave. Smith labored for a quarter century in bondage, including more than a decade on Fishers. He later was able to purchase his freedom and became a successful businessman in Connecticut. **Sunday, July 26, 2015.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Union Chapel.

**Animals in Disguise.** Learn about the hidden world of animal camouflage. How do these super creatures avoid catching the eye of a predator and fool their prey? We will explore all that and more while we learn and play. A DPNC program for ages 5 and up. **Wednesday July 29, 2015.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. Place: The Museum. Suggested donation: $5.

**The History of Farming on Fishers Island.** An illustrated lecture by Museum Director Pierce Rafferty. For most of its history Fishers Island has been a working farm. This survey of island history puts farmers and animals back at the center of island life—a spot they steadfastly occupied for centuries following settlement in the 1640s. **Sunday, August 2, 2015.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Union Chapel.

**Peek into a Pond.** Come discover what creatures are living in our ponds. We'll have nets and buckets so you can take your best shot at catching frogs, tadpoles, fish, insects and more! A DPNC family program for ages 5 and up. **Wednesday, August 5, 2015.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. Location: The Museum. Suggested donation $5.

**Honeybees and other Pollinators: What causes their decline and how can we help them?** Dr. Marina Caillaud, Senior Lecturer in the Dept. of Entomology at Cornell Univ., will describe the extent and causes of bee decline, as well as solutions that can be implemented by each of us. Dr. Caillaud is a seasonal resident of Fishers Island. **Sunday, August 9, 2015.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: To be determined.

**Animal Superheroes.** Dive into the exciting world of animals and their beyond belief adaptations. Have a close encounter

with some of our region's very own super animals. A DPNC family program for ages 5 and up. **Wednesday, August 12, 2015.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. Place: The Museum. Suggested donation: $5.

Dr. Marina Caillaud will lecture on honeybee decline on August 9th.

**Battlefield Archaeology of the Pequot War, 1636-1637.** Archaeologist Dr. Kevin McBride's lecture features discoveries made on and near the site of the Pequot fortified village at Mystic, Conn., that was attacked and burned by a force of English soldiers and their and Native American allies on May 26, 1637. **Sunday, August 16, 2015.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: To be determined.

**Under the Sea.** An exciting program that allows children to explore ocean habitat while learning about seaweeds and sea creatures. A giant clam will be put together by the kids and individual art will be created. A Children's Museum of Southeastern Connecticut family program for ages 4 and up. **Wednesday, August 19, 2015.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. Place: The Museum. Suggested donation: $5.

**Ooze.** Learn all about how slugs, salamanders, worms and toads use slime to help them move and protect themselves. DPNC family program for ages 5 and up. **Wednesday, August 26, 2015.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. Location: The Museum. Suggested donation $5.

**Nature Walks:** During July and August, Nature Walks will start at the Museum on Thursdays at 2 p.m. unless changes have been posted.

**Museum Hours:** June 28th to Labor Day: Tuesday through Friday: 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; Sunday 11 a.m. to 12 noon. Closed Mondays.

**Off Season Hours:** To be posted. For special appointments: Please call Museum Director Pierce Rafferty at the Museum.

# The Henry L. Ferguson Museum

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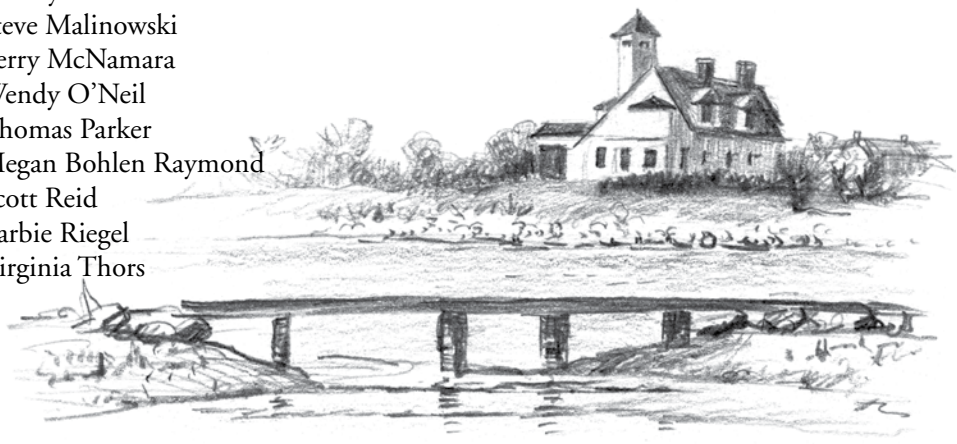

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