

Column #6 Celebrating Place: 25th Anniversary Notes from BHHT

The Mountain

By Jim Dow, Executive Director, Blue Hill Heritage Trust

This Sunday, August 8th, Blue Hill Heritage Trust is hosting a free community celebration called Mountain Day. With a variety of activities for the whole family, and lots of music, Mountain Day was conceived by a group of energetic volunteers as an enjoyable, family-oriented event that will celebrate the Trust's 25th Anniversary as well as the importance of Blue Hill Mountain and other conservation lands to our community.

The Mountain, as it is known to all who have been here awhile, is of course more than a 934 foot 'monadnock' that appears blue when viewed distantly from the sea. It is a symbol, an icon, that easily and simply represents our place, and that helps bind us together as a community. It is also a piece of real estate that has served and continues to serve many purposes.

The Mountain has a well-documented history of human use since the time of settlement by Europeans. Trees for building and fuel were cut from its slopes and pastures created for livestock. Minerals were mined near its summit. Carriages of rusticators traveled up its shoulders to capture the view. Blueberries were harvested. An observation tower was built by the state as part of a forest fire detection system (and became an unofficial and unmaintained public viewing tower until it became unsafe and was removed). A communication tower was erected to serve the hospital, ambulance and fire department, and now serves cell-phone users and WERU listeners. Residents and visitors have also long used The Mountain as recreation land, to hike, to pick berries, to hunt. Since the land on The Mountain was always privately owned, these uses were all undertaken or permitted by the owners of the land.

The Mountain's continued availability for public recreational use was certainly never a given. Much of the land could have been developed for residential house lots – the views are spectacular and steep terrain is really no obstacle to development, as any one who has traveled to other parts of our country can attest. It could also have been posted with "No Trespassing" signs as has happened throughout our landscape as a result of increased land values and ownership changes. Fortunately neither has happened. Instead, much of the land on the south side of the Mountain and around its summit is now conservation land and thus part of our community commons.

Our Trust owns and cares for 127 acres, from the Mountain Road to the summit, and the citizens of Blue Hill own an abutting 175 acres, including the field where Mountain Day activities will be based. (The Trust also owns an additional 160 acres on the Mountain's eastern and western shoulders). These lands have over two miles of trails that are hiked tens of thousands time a year, by residents and visitors in all seasons. "I'm going to hike the Mountain" is often heard around here.

This centerpiece in our landscape of course not only provides us recreational opportunity, it also provides scenic beauty (whether you are looking at it or from it) and, for many people, spiritual benefit. With more than 40 species of mammals and reptiles and over 100 bird species having been observed there, The Mountain also affords us an easy and direct way to connect with the natural world.

The Mountain became conservation land because people who loved it took action to conserve it for the benefit of our community. Many people have been involved over the years, but there are two early heroines in this conservation story: Ruth Hayes, who left the 175 acre Morse Farm property to the Town of Blue on her death in 1977, and Louise Frederick, who in 1989 donated a conservation easement to the Trust on a 70 acre parcel of family land that runs from the Mountain Road to the summit and then bequeathed the land to the Trust when she died 9 years later.

Ruth and Louise's gifts were the beginning. We have continued their work by adding additional acreage and through faithful stewardship, including many trail improvements. (Just last week, with the assistance of the Maine Conservation Corps, we finished the latest restoration project on two sections of trail.) It is now up to all of us to carry the story forward not only by using the land but by contributing what we can to its care.

On Sunday, we will celebrate our "small misty mountain", the many people who have contributed to its conservation, and the Trust's 25th anniversary. It will be fun. Please join us.