

Column #4

## **CELEBRATING PLACE: 30th Anniversary Notes from Blue Hill Heritage Trust**

### **Caterpillar Hill: A Protected Scenic Resource**

By Jim Dow, Executive Director, Blue Hill Heritage Trust



Are the scenic views that are so readily available to us here on the Blue Hill Peninsula of value to our residents and visitors? Would the quality of our Peninsula as a place to live or visit be diminished if access to the beauty provided by those views from our public roads and waters were lost? Does the conservation of scenic view spots provide public benefit?

Most people would answer “yes” to those questions. The founders of the Blue Hill Heritage Trust certainly did. Some of our Trust’s earliest projects centered on preserving the Peninsula’s scenic resources, and we are still continuing that work.

Views across the landscape from public roads or other public vantage points, including from the water, help define our sense of place. They inspire us and comfort us. The collection of visual images that we each collect over time becomes our picture of home. For those unable to or uninterested in walking a trail, the protection of publicly available scenic views is an especially important form of access to the landscape.

Scenic beauty is also a vital economic asset. It attracts people - for a visit, for a season, for a lifetime – who help fuel our local economy. The remarkable beauty of our landscape and seascape is in many ways the goose that lays our golden egg.

The view from Caterpillar Hill along Route 15 perhaps tops the list of our Peninsula's scenic resources. This spectacular view is easily accessible and well-known, both state-wide and nationally. Photos of the view have appeared in National Geographic and many other publications. The expansive view that opens up as you crest the hill is stunning to visitors, but it is no less valued by the year-round and seasonal residents who enjoy it daily.

For years our Trust worked to find a way to protect this view. In 2001, with the purchase of the Cooper Farm property, we did it. This 130 acre property includes all the land in front of the scenic turnout on Route 15. Its fields and forest help frame the distant southerly and westerly views of the islands of East Penobscot Bay and the Camden Hills. This view will remain a special Peninsula community asset in perpetuity, free of the danger of being lost to someone's private development scheme.

The conservation of this land has led to other public benefits. You can enjoy a quiet walk through the fields and woods on a two mile trail network that we maintain. You can enjoy a July or August day of blueberry picking. You can hunt there. All free and open to the public. (And now a town road through our property provides easy access to a nearby public property on Walker Pond owned and managed jointly by the towns of Sedgwick and Brooksville.)

Many people made the initial conservation of this Caterpillar Hill property possible: the former owners, Sarah Patten Gwynn and Emma Patten Casey, who sold it to us at a discounted price; Maine Coast Heritage Trust and Island Heritage Trust, our partner organizations who contributed to the fundraising effort; the many people who donated funds to make the purchase possible. It remains the responsibility of our organization, with the help of all who love this public place, to care for it, which we have done for the last 14 years and will continue to do.

Maintaining the blueberry fields is an important part of that stewardship obligation. Those fields form the foreground of the grand view and provide the berries that so many people (and animals) enjoy. With the help of the state fire ranger and the Sedgwick fire department, we have burned the upper fields near the highway on a periodic basis to aid the regeneration of the blueberry plants and help remove the competing vegetation. We are looking to the future by teaming with a local organic blueberry farmer to help us care for some of the other fields.

Was the conservation of the Caterpillar Hill view completed with our acquisition of the Cooper Farm property? Mostly, but not completely. There are two smaller adjacent properties to the north that also host smaller portions of the view to the west and to the northwest. Ideally the

scenic value of these two properties will eventually be protected from residential or commercial developments that block the public's visual access to these parts of the view. If the right opportunity presents itself, we will help.

Enjoy a visit to our Cooper Farm property this summer. Take a hike. Pick some berries. Soak in the sunset. Enjoy the benefits of our work to protect the spectacular view.