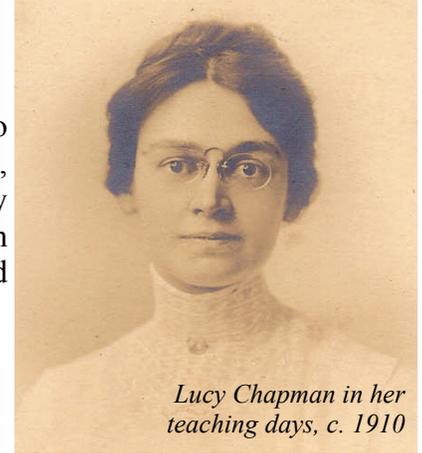


BREWSTER CLAIMS FIRST-EVER TOWN CONSERVATION LAND: Chapman-Harden Preserve on Main Street created 50 years ago

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Who was Lucy Chapman and why is she a Cape Cod open space hero?

She was a petite woman who never married, a Brewster native who returned from the big world of New York to care for her extended family, a Radcliffe-educated English teacher and lover of language. But history must record her as the first person to donate land to a Town Conservation Commission on Cape Cod, as documented by The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts recently.



*Lucy Chapman in her
teaching days, c. 1910*

Fifty years ago, on November 6, 1961, Lucy Harriet Chapman donated 3.57 acres to the fledgling Brewster Conservation Commission to be kept in a “semi-wild state” in the



“interest of conserving natural beauty.” She had bought the Main Street parcel from Freeman Atwood in 1938. She wished the Town to keep it as the Chapman-Harden Preserve, honoring the two old Brewster families of which she was a proud part.

In the 50 years since her conservation land gift, much has changed. Towns have come to rely upon expensive purchases of open space before the land can be consumed by rampant development. Local non-profit land trusts like the Brewster Conservation Trust have arisen in each town to serve as an alternative repository for gifts of land. Whole new legal techniques, such as the conservation restriction, have been created to preserve land. But the spirit engendered in Miss Chapman’s simple gift of land persists—Cape Codders who care about their environment and believe that land can be set free to let Nature have a little bit of what is left.

Lucy’s gift was not the first land set aside from development in Brewster. Mrs. Roland C. Nickerson donated 1,700 acres for the State Park in 1934. John Hay, founder of the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History, began cobbling together gifts of land for his facility, then known as the Cape Cod Junior Museum, throughout the late 1950s. And the Town had acquired land for a variety of purposes, beaches and recreational sites, in the 20th Century. (Wing Island was bought in 1962 for recreational purposes under the custody of the Selectmen). But Lucy Chapman established a new trend—showing that the Town itself could and should hold land strictly for conservation purposes.

The Brewster Conservation Commission was itself new in 1961, completing its first full year. It was the second ConsCom established on Cape Cod (Barnstable’s was first in 1957). “Massachusetts invented the municipal Conservation Commission [in 1957],” says the Mass. Assoc. of Conservation Commissions, “A specific municipal conservation agency and authorization of conservation as a valid municipal purpose were needed before communities could acquire areas for passive use, rather than active recreational development.”



View of the Chapman-Harden Preserve from across Main Street, Brewster



*Lucy Chapman,
retired in Brewster, c. 1965*

Before ConsComs were saddled with their busy duty to administer wetlands protection permits for the Town in 1972, ConsComs identified important natural areas in town and figured out ways to save them. Since then, much of that latter work has been handled by the Town Open Space Committee (founded in 1984) and the non-profit Brewster Conservation Trust (founded in 1983).

Despite the green sign marking its location on the south side of Route 6A, the Chapman-Harden Preserve is fairly ignored now, wedged between the entrance to Town Hall and the driveway to the Eddy School. A stonewall runs down the west side, dividing the Preserve from the Stonehenge subdivision. Along the east side of the Preserve, you can still see the old cartpath that connected the Crosby Farm to Main Street. The Preserve is now overgrown with a variety of rambling shrubs and trees, including red maple, black cherry, pitch pine, red cedar, willow, tupelo and one old apple tree. (A magnificent 18-inch diameter tupelo sits out in the swamp.) Fox grape, highbush blueberry, arrowwood, bullbriar, winterberry and tall brambles make a perfect “Briar Patch” for wildlife sheltering. The Considine Ditch flows east to west through the rear of the parcel. (See accompanying story.) Unfortunately, there are invasive species of plants as well, such as Oriental bittersweet, black locust and ailanthus or tree of heaven, a weedy tree.

The black locusts are perhaps remnants of the first use of the Preserve, that of town tree nursery. In 1964 Conservation Commissioner Ernie Gage, who also served as the town herring warden for many years, popularized the idea of the ConsCom buying seedlings, giving them a headstart on the Harden-Chapman Preserve and then transplanting them around town, mostly along Main Street. The ConsCom spent several hundred dollars each year with Allard Nursery and others, obtaining saplings of elm, linden, mountain ash, locust, maple and willow. One year the Brewster Garden Club donated 50 elm seedlings to the town nursery. By 1971 the County began distributing subsidized seedlings (it still does) and reference to Ernie’s nursery passes out of the Town Reports. Undoubtedly, some trees, such as locust and willow, persist.

Lucy Chapman lived across the street from the Preserve at “Hardenfield,”* which had served as the family farm through much of the 1800s. A classic half-Cape style home added onto successively over the years, it is now the home of Spyglass Antiques. Lucy did not live in Brewster all her life but she was born (1885) and died (1972) there. In between, she attended Radcliffe College and a teacher training school in New Bedford. She is said to have begun her teaching career in Springfield MA. But her brother-in-law led the Fieldston School in New York City and Lucy began teaching English grammar and literature there for 24 years in the early 1900s. Harcourt Brace & Co. published two of her language skills primers. By 1938, she had retired to “Hardenfield” in Brewster, to care for her ailing mother Lizzie Chapman



View of Hardenfield, 2257 Main Street, Brewster. Lucy Chapman’s family home

and her brother Joseph Chapman and his children. Her teacher training came to the fore in tending her nieces and nephews; when play in the yard reached a fever pitch, she would lean out the kitchen door and scold, “Modulate your tones!” Lucy kept a beach cottage on the Bay at the end of Chapman Lane. The Chapman-Harden family survives in Brewster via many relatives, some still on Chapman Lane.

The Town of Brewster has acquired almost 1,700 acres of town-owned conservation land. The Brewster Conservation Trust has protected another 530 acres. But it all began 50 years ago with a small, good act by a small, good woman, Lucy H. Chapman.

Brewster’s Considine Ditch

The Considine Ditch drains much of central Brewster, beginning in the swamps straddling Underpass Road and running west through pipes, ditches, retention ponds and culverts until emptying into Cape Cod Bay beside Breakwater Beach. The Ditch, perhaps named for the family of Donald Considine (former Selectmen and Town Clerk 50 years ago), collects most of the runoff along the south side of Route 6A. It runs through a long pipe beneath the softball field in front of Town Hall, under Main Street and emerges behind the Woodshed. The Ditch is kept clear by the Cape Cod Mosquito Control Project, a state/county agency.



The Considine Ditch, shown here, flows through the rear section of the Chapman-Harden Preserve.

For more information, contact the Brewster Conservation Trust at bct@brewsterconservationtrust.org

** Hardenfield, Lucy Chapman’s home, was built in the classic half-Cape style in 1780 in E. Harwich. In 1829, it was “flaked” (disassembled into movable sections) and transported by ox cart and team to its present location on Brewster’s Main Street. Lucy’s great-grandfather Capt. Joseph O. Baker was part of the move as a boy of ten. Capt. Baker’s daughter Susan married Theophilus Harden, a church deacon of Brewster and housepainter by trade. The Hardens’ daughter Elizabeth (“Lizzie”) married Reuben Chapman of Brewster and had four daughters (Lucy, May, Elizabeth and Alice) and two sons (Joseph and William). Lizzie died in 1952; Lucy died in 1972.*