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Long Island Women Preserving Nature and the Environment

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Abstract: Women have played an important role in beautification and preserving nature in garden clubs and village improvement societies. Edith Loring Fullerton was a floriculturist who wrote several books and many articles on gardening. Mary Fletcher and Grace Barstow Murphy were among those whose gardening interests expanded into conservation activism. Botanist Fanny Mulford preserved rare flora in her herbarium collections. Quite a number of women, including Olivia Cutting, Hathaway Scully, and Alexandra Moore, donated land to the government or conservation groups for parks and preserves. Giorgina Reid's work helped stabilize the Montauk Lighthouse and prevent its destruction. Marjorie Spock and Mary Richards initiated a lawsuit to halt aerial spraying of DDT on Long Island in 1957, resulting in much publicity. Spock shared information on the toxic effects of DDT and the trial testimony from experts with Rachel Carson who used it for her 1962 book *Silent Spring*, which was a major impetus to the modern environmental movement. These and other women have preserved natural Long Island.

Keywords: garden clubs, beautification, conservation, nature preserves, Edith Loring Fullerton, Grace Barstow Murphy, Giorgina Reid, Marjorie Spock

- 1 The modern environmental movement of the last half century has its roots in conservation activities beginning in the late nineteenth century. Long Islander Theodore Roosevelt was a national leader in these efforts, creating national forests, bird reserves, and national parks.^[1] Many of the early conservation efforts were in the West, but TR's cousins, W. Emlen and his wife Christina Roosevelt, created the Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary in Oyster Bay in 1923, the Audubon Society's first songbird sanctuary. The Long Island Chapter of the Nature Conservancy has been important since its founding in 1954.
- 2 Suburban Long Island was an important locale for the origins of the modern environmental movement, according to historian Christopher G. Sellers in his 2012 book, *Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature & the*

Rise of Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America.^[2] Long Island scientists and conservationists organized the Environmental Defense Fund in 1967, after beginning their lawsuit against the use of DDT, but their work built on decades of earlier activity, much of it by women. Indeed, ten years earlier two Long Island women initiated a widely publicized lawsuit against aerial spraying of DDT, and facilitated Rachel Carson's research for her seminal 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, that helped launch the modern environmental movement.

- 3 I did not include women naturalists and conservationists in my 2012 book, *Women in Long Island's Past*, but this article addresses that oversight. It focuses on a number of Long Island women and organizations active in the conservation of natural resources by preserving nature and the environment.^[3]

Beautification, Garden Clubs, and Love of Nature

- 4 Village Improvement Societies were fairly widespread on Long Island in the early decades of the twentieth century and some have survived into the twenty-first century. Women organized many of these societies. The oldest one and still active is the East Hampton Ladies Village Improvement Society (LVIS), organized in 1895. After the devastation in East Hampton created by the 1938 hurricane, the LVIS began a street tree program, replacing, watering, feeding, and pruning trees. In addition to countless hours of volunteer work by members, the LVIS tree budget by the mid-1990s had risen to \$50,000. Its other activities include seeding, feeding, watering, and mowing the five village greens and various beautification projects.^[4]
- 5 Sayville women were inspired by the East Hampton LVIS when they organized their Women's Village Improvement Society in 1914. Among the women's accomplishments over the years were initiating garbage disposal until the town began garbage collection, purchasing a shorefront public park in 1925, which they turned over to the town, tree plantings and maintenance, and other beautification activities, including barrels with flowers in the shopping area, which members watered and maintained.^[5]
- 6 Edith Loring (Mrs. Hal B.) Fullerton (1876-1931) wrote articles and books about home flower and vegetable gardens in the first two decades of the twentieth century. A native of Brooklyn, she and her husband lived in Hollis, Queens, for three years before moving in 1902 to a house in Huntington. The acre of property they purchased on Main Street, east of Huntington's downtown, was "overgrown with shrubbery and wild growth," but Edith soon made the grounds attractive with gardens, trellises, and a grape arbor. They called their home *Mira Flores* ("See the Flowers").^[6]



Fig. 1. “Taking notes.” Edith Loring Fullerton among the sweet peas in Huntington, c. 1906. Photograph by Hal B. Fullerton. *Courtesy Nauman Collection.*

- 7 Edith also began to write articles on gardening. “The Home Window Garden,” in 1902, would be the first of a half dozen articles on gardening she published in *Country Life in America*, each illustrated with her husband’s photographs. Her book, *How to Make a Vegetable Garden: A Practical and Suggestive Manual for the Home Garden*, was first published in 1905. She wrote a series of articles, “Half-Hour Gardening,” for the McClure Newspaper Syndicate, and the Burpee Seed Company asked her to write *Small Gardens for Small Folks* (1912). The articles that she originally wrote for children, which had appeared in *Country Gentleman*, were published in 1919 in *The Book of the Home Garden*. This book was designed for “children older grown” to aid in increasing food production during the war, but with attention to flowers, which she included because they “may help cheer us.” These are just some of her many writings on gardening and she also presented many talks on horticulture.[7]



Fig. 2. Edith Loring Fullerton, c. 1920. Photograph by Hal B. Fullerton. *Courtesy Nauman Collection.*

- 8 Edith's husband, Hal B. Fullerton, was a Special Agent for the Long Island Railroad (LIRR), working initially as a publicist and photographer. Hal became Director of Agriculture for the LIRR and operated two demonstration farms for the railroad, one in Wading River (from 1905 to 1914), and the other in Medford (from 1907 to 1928). Edith was Hal's partner in these enterprises and she wrote about farming in *The Lure of the Land* (1905-1909), as well as in their periodical *The Long Island Agronomist* (1907-1914), and *History of Long Island Agriculture* (1929), all illustrated by Hal's photographs. The LIRR officially recognized her partnership in the demonstration farms in 1915 when they made her Assistant Director of Agriculture. When Hal retired in 1927, she became Director of Agriculture for the railroad.[8]
- 9 Edith Fullerton's life has been well recounted in the biography written by her granddaughter Anne Nauman, *The Junior Partner: Edith Loring Fullerton, Long Island Pioneer*. In addition to being an "author, editor, lecturer, educator," Nauman wrote, she was a "lover of the natural world, beautifier of all that she touched," with a passion for floriculture and horticulture. Columbia University Professor Arthur D. Dean, in his Introduction to her *Book of the Home Garden* in 1919, wrote that in addition to being a gardener, writer, and mother, she was a pioneering farmer. He called her the "Lady of the Garden" and concluded that she "made a contribution to out-door life second to no woman in America." [9]
- 10 Garden clubs are numerous and widespread on Long Island, and their membership is overwhelmingly women. More than three dozen groups in Nassau and Suffolk counties are members of the Federated Garden Clubs of New York State, and eight are affiliated with the Garden Club of America (a few clubs are members of both national organizations). Probably the oldest is the North Country Garden Club of Long Island, founded in 1913 and centered in Oyster Bay. The next year saw the creation of the East Hampton Garden Club. The Westhampton Garden Club and the Three Village Garden Club (of Old Field, Setauket and Stony Brook), both began in 1928.[10]
- 11 The stated purpose of the North Country group is typical of most of the clubs: "to promote the knowledge and appreciation of gardening" through the "encouragement of conservation of natural resources; support of education in the fields of gardening, horticulture, conservation and natural sciences; stimulation of community interest to improve and beautify buildings and their surroundings, parks, roadsides, wildlife sanctuaries and other civic projects; and financial and other assistance for the furtherance of such projects." [11] Note the references to conservation and sanctuaries. Specific activities, of course, vary, among the clubs, but they include more than the flower shows and garden tours that are probably more familiar to the public. Garden club concerns encompass environmental activities as well as beautification projects. Additional evidence of the relationship between garden clubs and conservation is apparent in different ways in the lives and legacy of Jane and Ada Francke.
- 12 Ada Francke Whitaker, a member of the North Country Garden Club, founded the Jane B. Francke Sanctuary in Brookville in memory of her mother, Jane Bush Francke (1880-1953). Jane and her husband Luis lived on their estate, *Glenby*, of more than a hundred acres in Brookville after they married in 1911. An active member of the North Country Garden

Club and dedicated to gardening, Jane Francke was also committed to conservation and open space and served as a vice president of Friends of the Land. She was “extensively involved” with the Garden Club of America and organized “one of the first conservation exhibits” at the New York State Fair in 1926. In 1953, the Garden Club of America awarded her its highest conservation medal. The Whitakers donated 2.8 acres of the former estate of the Franckes, with its nature trails, to the Village of Brookville in 1955 for the Jane B. Francke Bird Sanctuary. Under an agreement with the village, the members of the North Country Garden Club feed the birds in the Sanctuary during the winter and conduct clean-ups of the property in the spring.[12]

Creating Parks and Preserves

- 13 Long Island’s counties and towns were slow to create preserves. As early as November 1945, the Riverhead News reported that a large number of the “most prominent women in Suffolk County,” jammed the County Supervisors’ board room, as the newspaper headline stated, “demanding county purchase Prosser Pines” near Yaphank.[13] Organizations sending letters in support included garden clubs in Riverhead and Stony Brook, as well as the Riverhead chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. At that time, it was proposed that the twenty-acre grove be a memorial to servicemen in the recent war. However, the county did not purchase Prosser Pines then; Suffolk did acquire the property in 1970 and it is now a county nature preserve.
- 14 Individuals, both women and men, often took the initiative in establishing parks and preserves by donating property. Olivia Murray Cutting (1855-1949) donated her 690-acre Westbrook estate in Great River on the South Shore to the Long Island State Park Commission in her will in memory of her husband, Bayard Cutting. The gift was to provide “an oasis of beauty and of quiet, and that it shall be a source of pleasure, rest and refreshment to those who delight in outdoor beauty.” Final arrangements for transfer to the state were made in 1951 by the Cuttings’ daughter, Olivia Cutting (Mrs. Bayard) James (1892-1963). The Bayard Cutting Arboretum State Park includes the Cutting manor house, nature walks, and extensive plantings, in addition to many trees, notably conifers.[14]



Fig. 3. Olivia Murray Cutting who donated today’s Bayard Cutting Arboretum to New York State. *Courtesy Bayard Cutting Archives.*

- 15 Elizabeth Alexandra Morton (1883-1964) donated 187 acres on Jessup Neck (in Noyack, west of Sag Harbor) to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1954. The Elizabeth A. Morton National Wildlife Refuge was the first of the federal government's refuges to be named for a woman (the second was the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in Maine). After her second divorce, Elizabeth Morton resumed her maiden name and lived in her parents' country home, in the Village of Southampton on South Main Street overlooking Lake Agawan, which she had inherited. In 1957, Morton also donated the twenty-acre Wolf Swamp Preserve in North Sea (adjoining Big Fresh Pond, also in the Town of Southampton) to the Long Island Chapter of the Nature Conservancy in 1957. [15]
- 16 A number of other Nature Conservancy properties were also donated by women, although most do not bear their names. The Vail Blydenburgh Sanctuary on the Nissequogue River in Smithtown, for example, was donated by Edith (Mrs. Vail) Blydenburgh (1885-1981) to the Nature Conservancy in 1966 in memory of her husband. The property was transferred to the Environmental Centers of Setauket-Smithtown in 1995, which also operates the Sweetbriar Nature Center that Edith donated to the Town to "use for environmental education and preservation." Offices of the 53-acre Preserve and Environmental Center are in the Edith and Vail Blydenburgh House at 62 Eckenkamp Drive in Smithtown. [16]

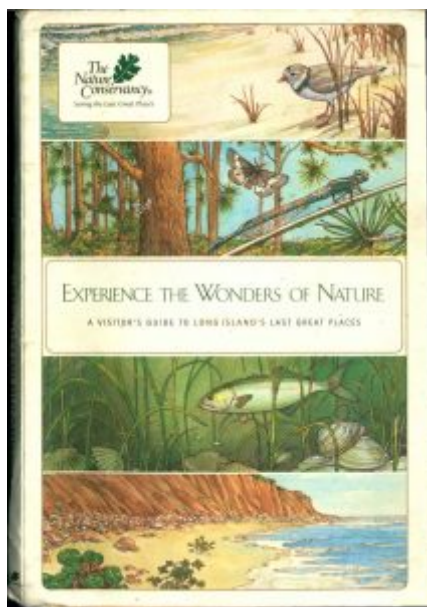


Fig. 4. Cover of the Nature Conservancy's book, *Experiencing the Wonders of Nature*, which describes their preserves (2002). *Courtesy Nature Conservancy.*

- 17 Several other women gave land for preserves to the Nature Conservancy. Frances Stokes (Mrs. Harold) Weekes donated six acres of freshwater marsh to the Nature Conservancy in 1965, in memory of her son Louis from her first marriage, killed in World War II. The Louis C. Clark Sanctuary on Valentines Lane in Old Brookville was transferred to the North Shore Land Alliance in 2012. Dorothy C. Kemp donated the 75 acres of Wading River Marsh to the Nature Conservancy between 1971 and 1980. A dozen other neighbors gave additional property, bringing the Edward J. and Dorothy C. Kemp Preserve to 125 acres. In 1972 Eleanor S. Brown donated the nearly six-acre wetland Archibald Manning Brown Preserve in Southampton in memory of her husband for whom it is named. Julia Loomis (Mrs. Landon K.) Thorne gave 104 acres

in Bay Shore on the Great South Bay in 1972 for the Thorne Preserve. Mrs. Augusta Robinson gifted the scenic Fulling Mill Farm in East Hampton beginning in 1973, which now is nearly eighteen acres and part of the Georgia Pond Basin.^[17]

- 18 Jane (Mrs. George) Nichols (1893-1981) donated three parcels from her *Uplands* estate on Lawrence Hill Road in Cold Spring Harbor to the Nature Conservancy in the early 1970s, and bequeathed the balance in her will. Her obituary identified her as “a primary supporter of the conservation movement on Long Island.” Today’s 93-acre Uplands Farm Sanctuary is dedicated to her memory, and the headquarters of the Long Island Chapter of the Nature Conservancy is in one of the farm buildings. ^[18] Nichols joined an important environmental lawsuit in 1957 involving spraying of DDT, discussed later in this article.
- 19 Mary Nichols Weld (1913-1986) and her husband David donated the David Weld Sanctuary in Nissequogue to the Nature Conservancy in 1969 and 1972. Mary Weld gave an additional 57 acres in 1975 and 1979. Two neighbors contributed a few additional acres; the Sanctuary now is 125 acres.^[19]
- 20 Giorgina Reid (1908-2001) has been called the “Savior of the Montauk Lighthouse” as a result of her successful efforts to halt erosion on its site. As a young girl (née Anzulata), she had immigrated to the United States from Italy with her mother. She studied art, and became a textile designer and photographer. In 1960 she moved with her husband Donald from Queens to Rocky Point. Their house was near a cliff and after a nor’easter took away some of their property, she built reed trench terraces, which successfully halted further erosion. She patented her method and wrote a book entitled, *How to Hold Up a Bank* (1969), describing the process.
- 21 When the Montauk Lighthouse was built in 1796, it was almost 300 feet from the ocean. Over the years, ocean waves and storms had taken their toll of two-thirds of the distance from the shoreline. By the late 1960s, the government was prepared to abandon and destroy the lighthouse and replace it with a simple tower further inland. Dan Rattiner, editor of *Dan’s Papers*, wrote in his newspaper about the plight of the lighthouse and organized protest demonstrations. One day, Giorgina Reid came to his office and told him how she had protected her home using “Reed Trench Terracing” on the cliff. Rattiner helped in obtaining permission from the Coast Guard for Reid to apply her technique around the Montauk lighthouse bluffs. For the next seventeen years, from 1970 to 1987, Giorgina, her husband Donald, and a few other volunteers worked weekends to construct a system of terraces, which stabilized the lighthouse. The government eventually provided sufficient funding to protect the lighthouse from further erosion. In 1979, the U.S. Coast Guard presented Reid with a Certificate of Achievement and Rattiner with a Certificate of Appreciation. In the Montauk Lighthouse Museum, the Montauk Historical Society has the Giorgina Reid Erosion Control Room, explaining Reid’s role and method of saving the Montauk Light. ^[20]
- 22 Hathaway (“Happy”) Weekes Scully (1915-1984) inherited the 70-acre *Wereholme* estate in Islip in 1952 from her mother, Louise Peters Weekes. Scully was married several times, but had no children. She decided to preserve the property as a wildlife center and nature sanctuary, and bequeathed it to the National Audubon Society. Suffolk County bought the property in 2004 and established the Suffolk County Environmental Center on the property. Meanwhile, Scully’s first cousin, Natalie Peters Webster, inherited her father’s adjoining 200-acre

property and donated it to the federal government to become the Seatuck National Wildlife Refuge. Her husband, Charles Webster, later founded the Seatuck Environmental Association, which now operates the Suffolk County Environmental Center at the Scully mansion. Thus Scully's donation ultimately resulted not only in a preserve, but an environmental center as well. These two women—Happy Scully and Natalie Webster—were responsible for preserving a total of 270 acres on the Great South Bay.[21]

- 23 *Chelsea*, the former Benjamin Moore estate, is now the northern part of Nassau County's Muttontown Preserve in East Norwich. Delano and Aldrich designed the manor house for Benjamin and Alexandra Moore in 1923-24. In 1964, Alexandra deeded 40 acres of her estate to Nassau County; later she gave the county the balance of the estate with a life tenancy (she died in 1983). The main house survives and there is also a Nature Center on the 100-acre *Chelsea* property.[22]
- 24 A few of the Nature Conservancy's Long Island preserves are named for women, for example the 31-acre Ruth Wales du Pont Preserve on Captain's Neck in Southampton Village, donated by Ruth (1889-1967) and her husband, Henry F. du Pont in 1961. The 15-acre Cordelia Hepburn Cushman Preserve in Oyster Bay Cove is named for Cordelia (Mrs. Paul) Cushman (1894-1960), who served on several social welfare boards in New York City. Roderick Cushman donated the Cushman property to the Nature Conservancy in 1973, which transferred it in 2012 to the North Shore Land Alliance. Mrs. Mary Dodderidge and Mrs. Ann Payne and their brother, Sidney A. Mitchell, Jr., donated the 42-acre Hope G. Iselin Preserve in Upper Brookville to the Nature Conservancy.[23]
- 25 The Town of North Hempstead's Fanny Dwight Clark Memorial Garden in Albertson originated in the twelve acres bequeathed by Grenville Clark in 1966 to honor his wife. She had been an avid gardener on their property, which is now a sanctuary for birds and plants.[24]
- 26 Other parks on Long Island named for women include Nassau County's five-acre Barbara Johnson Park and Preserve in Baxter Estates (Port Washington area), named for a former county legislator, and the nine-acre Betty Allen Nature Preserve (Twin Pond South) in Centerport, owned by the Town of Huntington. The latter was named for a local naturalist and environmental activist who co-founded the Huntington Audubon Society. Betty Beckwith Allen (1914-1986) was a birder and hiker who regularly walked in this park, which was near her home and later named in her memory. It is south of and adjacent to Route 25A west of Stony Hollow Road in Centerport. The Sarah H. Ruppert Walter Bird Park Preserve south of Hobart Beach on Eaton's Neck Road is named for Sallie Ruppert who was a nature lover, birder, and licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

From Botanists and Birders to Conservationists and Civic Activists

- 27 Fanny Mulford (1855-1939) was an amateur botanist who collected, preserved, and documented many rare plants, primarily in the Town of Hempstead. Born in California, she lived in the Village of Hempstead from 1866 to 1928. Fanny was an avid gardener and won awards in local garden shows. The noted landscape architect Ruth Bramley Dean designed the flower garden in 1917 on the large property where Fanny lived with her younger sister Harriet.[25]
- 28 Fanny Mulford collected orchids, ferns, violets, and other plants, mainly during the years 1895 to 1905. She was honored when a Smithsonian

botanist determined in 1902 that one of the unusual violets she collected was a new species and it was named for her, *Viola mulfordae*. Affiliated with the New York Botanical Garden, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, the Torrey Botanical Club, and the Wild Flower Preservation Society of America, Mulford donated her herbarium to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.



Fig. 5. Fanny Mulford's garden including the arbor seat, c. 1916. Photograph by Frances B. Johnston. *Courtesy Library of Congress.*

- 29 Eric Lamont, the president of the Long Island Botanical Society, recently summarized Mulford's legacy and contribution as a "local activist" in the early 1900s, "when the foundations were laid for environmental conservation." He concludes that her "greatest contribution to future generations was her passion for documenting with herbarium collections the last remnants of Long Island's rarest flora."[\[26\]](#)
- 30 Mary T. MacMurray Fletcher (1899-1989) enjoyed gardening, birding, and hiking and in the memoir she wrote in 1977, identified herself as an "amateur naturalist and conservationist." She grew up in Richmond Hill in Queens and taught biology at Richmond Hill High school for 35 years. After retiring in 1957, she and her husband Donald moved to Seaford, which she described as still quite rural. For the next two decades, Fletcher was an activist on Long Island and New York State in conservation and environmental activities.[\[27\]](#)



Fig. 6. Mary Fletcher and students at the Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary, Oyster Bay, c. 1925-1926. Mary Fletcher is on the far right. *Courtesy Mary T. MacMurray*

- 31 Fletcher became involved with ecology clubs in the Seaford schools and the Nassau County Museum of Natural History at Tackapausha. She helped survey the Tackapausha Preserve, which was just a few blocks from her new home. Among the organizations she joined were the Baldwin Bird Club (the oldest such club on Long Island), the Seaford Garden Club, the Nature Conservancy, ABATES (Ambassadors to Bring Action through Environmental Study), and the Long Island Environmental Council. As an active member of the Baldwin Bird Club, she wrote articles for its newsletter, *Long Island Naturalist*, and for a few years was the club's conservation chairman. She reported on issues of interest at meetings, wrote letters to public officials and newspapers supporting projects the club endorsed, including opposing offshore drilling, protecting the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Preserve, urging the reopening of Planting Fields Arboretum, and preserving a portion of Mitchel Field as a "nature laboratory."
- 32 Fletcher was more extensively involved with the Seaford Garden Club, whose activities, like others described earlier, included donating trees to school grounds, plantings at the railroad station plaza, landscaping the historical society grounds, and creating and maintaining a bird garden on the grounds of the Seaford Library. Fletcher focused her efforts on conservation and chaired the Seaford Garden Club's Conservation Committee from 1958 to 1976. For six years she was also the Conservation Chairman of the Long Island District of the New York State Federation of Garden Clubs, which in 1966 had 106 clubs and 4,500 members. Fletcher headed the Open Space Action Committee's inventory of large tracts of land on Long Island that were potentially available for recreation and conservation. She regularly reported on conservation at garden club meetings, wrote articles on conservation for the *Long Island Gardener*, and arranged exhibits on conservation topics at flower shows. Fletcher also attended and often spoke at meetings and workshops on the value of South Shore wetlands, and organized workshops on this and other issues. She was politically active, writing letters, sending telegrams, and lobbying on behalf of conservation issues. Fletcher received the Marion B. Darrow Conservation Medal for her work. She is an example of a woman naturalist involved in garden club activities who became an activist in conservation and environmentalism.
- 33 Grace E. Barstow Murphy (1888-1975) was also a devoted gardener, conservationist, and political activist. She was the wife of Robert Cushman Murphy (1887-1973), who had an eminent career as an ornithologist with the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. The Murphys had a vacation home for many years in the Mount Sinai area where Robert had grown up. Grace travelled with her husband and assisted him in his research. After he retired in 1952, the Murphys moved to Old Field (north of Stony Brook). Robert was a founder and the first president of the Long Island Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, which developed out of a successful effort to preserve the Sunken Forest on Fire Island. Long Island's Nature Conservancy was organized in 1954, only three years after the national group had been formed, and was the Conservancy's third chapter. Its stated purpose was "the preservation of natural areas on Long Island as living museums for the future." Murphy began acquiring preserves and sanctuaries for the Conservancy.[28] As detailed in the section above, "Creating Parks and Preserves," the Nature Conservancy received quite a few preserves from women.



Fig. 7. Grace and Robert Cushman Murphy (undated). *Courtesy Robert Cushman Murphy Collection, Box 24, Special Collections, Stony Brook University Libraries.*

- 34 Grace Murphy became active in the Three Village Garden Club after moving to Old Field. “Far from being proper gardeners,” she wrote, “we let milkweed and daisies grow anywhere they want.” They welcomed each native flower and the “wild things” in their own garden. In 1956, she convened a meeting under the auspices of the Conservation Committee of her Garden Club. Forty women attended from five garden clubs, two chapters of the League of Women Voters, and the Long Island Nature Conservancy. They organized Women United for Long Island. It soon changed its name to Conservationists, United, for Long Island, but the membership remained predominantly women. She felt that women had the time to “further the Cause of Conservation,” and to arouse greater “public opinion to conserve the natural resources and beauty of Long Island.”



Fig. 8. Grace Barstow Murphy, c. 1950. *Courtesy of Robert Cushman Murphy Collection, Box 24, Special Collections and University Archives, Stony Brook University Libraries.*

- 35 Grace Murphy served as president of the conservationist group for a number of years and worked tirelessly to “preserve the treasures of Long Island.” She was particularly interested in water pollution, trees, and the wetlands. The Brooklyn Botanic Garden published her 1961 pamphlet, “Conservation for Everyone,” which focused on water. She advocated “public ownership of more wild areas, reservations and more parks.” Grace Barstow Murphy telephoned, wrote, and in other ways worked to promote conservation and the “beauty of our environment.” The editor of the Nature Conservancy’s *Sanctuary* Bulletin called her “one of the first and perhaps the best advocate of putting aside natural land for

future generations.” She received an honorary doctorate from Brown University for her conservation work.[29]

The Modern Environmental Movement: Two Long Island Women Assist Rachel Carson

- 36 Rachel Carson (1907-1964), was a marine biologist and nature writer whose books, *The Sea Around Us* (1951) and *The Edge of the Sea* (1955), were best sellers. In the late 1950s she was investigating the hazardous effects of chemical pesticides on birds, people, and the environment. First serialized in the *New Yorker*, her 1962 book *Silent Spring* became a major impetus of the modern environmental movement.”[30] Carson was not a Long Islander, but two women on Long Island, Marjorie Spock and Mary Richards, aided her research on pesticides for *Silent Spring*.
- 37 Marjorie Spock (1904-2008) moved to Whitney Lane in Brookville, Long Island, with her partner, Mary Richards (1908-1991) in the early 1950s. Spock taught at Adelphi’s Waldorf School in Garden City, which espoused Rudolph Steiner’s principles of education. Each of the women had studied biodynamic agriculture, a form of organic farming with Steiner in Switzerland, and they raised fruits and vegetables on their two-acre property. Richards had digestive problems, which made it imperative that what she ate be free of impurities. In May and June 1957, the government planned to spray 600,000 acres on Long Island with DDT from airplanes to combat gypsy moths.[31]
- 38 Spock and Richards sought a temporary injunction in the U.S. District Court to prevent the spraying. Richards was wealthy and able to finance legal action. Spock contacted Robert Cushman Murphy who joined the suit and, since he was the best known of the group, became the lead plaintiff in *Murphy v. Benson*. (Ezra Taft Benson, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, was the lead defendant.) Three of the six original plaintiffs were women. (Gladys Weeks of Oyster Bay Cove, joined Spock and Richards; the two other men were John C. Homer of Brookville and David O’D. Kennedy from Cold Spring Harbor.) The judge denied the injunction and the spraying occurred in May and June. As a result, the women’s crops were “ruined” and their soil “totally compromised.”[32]
- 39 The plaintiffs decided to appeal the decision and seek a permanent injunction. Murphy started a legal defense fund and also began a committee of Citizens Against Mass Poisoning, which later was headed by his wife, Grace Barstow Murphy. This group included eminent scientists who recommended experts to testify. It also helped raise funds for the lawsuit (with several appeals, the legal expenses ultimately cost close to \$100,000).[33]
- 40 Additional plaintiffs who later joined the lawsuit included Ward Melville, a friend and neighbor of the Murphys in Old Field, Archibald Roosevelt, son of President and Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, and Jane Nichols who, as mentioned earlier, later donated land for the Nature Conservancy’s headquarters and Uplands Farm Sanctuary. Nichols had an eleven-acre dairy farm with 52 Guernsey cows on her property in Cold Spring Harbor, and the DDT spraying had contaminated her cows’ milk. The participation of Roosevelt, Melville, and Nichols brought additional high profile individuals to the suit and probably additional funds to finance the suit and appeals as well (Nichols was a daughter of J. P. Morgan, Jr.).
- 41 Even before the trial began, it was front page news in the *New York Times* and newspapers outside the New York metropolitan area reported on it as well. The trial in the U.S. District Court in Brooklyn began in

February 1958, lasted 22 days, with 50 witnesses and generated thousands of pages of testimony.

- 42 Marjorie Spock attended the trial in Brooklyn. Rachel Carson read about the lawsuit and was in contact with Robert Cushman Murphy whom she knew through the Audubon Society and soon with Marjorie Spock. Within days of the start of the trial, Spock was sending Carson (and others) newspaper clippings and copies of her daily reports on the proceedings. Spock and Richards, who were knowledgeable about pesticides, sent Carson additional articles and translated relevant Dutch and German articles for her. Carson herself wrote Spock that she was her “chief clipping service.” She became, as Carson’s biographer Linda Lear stated, the source of a “treasure trove of material.” Moreover, Richards and Spock secured and sent to Carson the 3,000-page transcript of testimony in the trial.[\[34\]](#)
- 43 The *Murphy v. Benson* lawsuit was not successful in achieving an injunction against future spraying, despite appeals up to and including the U.S. Supreme Court. The courts basically dismissed the case as moot since there were no plans for future spraying. But Spock and Richards brought attention to the toxic effects of DDT, which Carson would popularize in *Silent Spring*. It did set an important legal precedent for such lawsuits. Furthermore, though it was unusual for a justice to write a dissent when the Supreme Court declined to review a case, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas wrote an impassioned defense of environmentalism. Moreover, Rachel Carson utilized evidence from the case in *Silent Spring*.
- 44 John Paull, a British environmentalist, maintains that Spock and Richards were “the primary source for Carson’s book,” but this is an exaggeration. They were not Carson’s only sources of information for *Silent Spring*. She had her own “network of scientists” from her time as a writer and editor at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, from 1936 to 1951. Her work had also connected her with government scientists, librarians, and conservation organizations. Nonetheless, the two Long Island women were important. Lear states in her biography of Carson, “Marjorie Spock remained at the center of one group of scientists from whom Carson gathered most of her initial materials about the relationship between synthetic pesticides and human health.” Carson also contacted some of the witnesses and experts at the trial, including those from government agencies.[\[35\]](#)
- 45 After the Supreme Court declined to review their case, Marjorie Spock and Mary Richards moved from Long Island to a farm they purchased near Chester, in upstate Orange County, New York. Within a few years, other Long Islanders organized to fight pollution and DDT. After observing a fish kill in Yaphank Lake, Carol and Victor Yannacone began a lawsuit in 1966 against the Suffolk County Mosquito Commission. Carol was a science teacher who had grown up near the lake and was the plaintiff in the class action lawsuit filed by her husband, an attorney in Patchogue. The Brookhaven Town Natural Resources Committee, comprised mostly of scientists, joined the lawsuit. Although the judge ultimately dismissed the case after a year, they had “won while losing” by publicizing the problem. Suffolk County suspended, then banned spraying DDT. This lawsuit led to the formation of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) in 1967. Carol Yannacone was the only woman of the ten people who signed the EDF incorporation papers; most of the men were scientists from Stony Brook University or Brookhaven National Laboratory. Christopher Sellers observes that earlier the environmental leadership on Long Island had been “North Shore housewives,” but with the 1966 lawsuit, passed “to men from local high school and college

campuses.” New York State banned DDT in 1970, the same year the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was formed, and DDT was banned nationwide in 1972.[36]

Conclusion

- 46 Women in village improvement societies and garden clubs for decades have espoused beautification, love of nature, and conservation on Long Island. Botanists and birders such as Fanny Mulford, Mary Fletcher, and Grace Murphy loved nature and supported conservation. Fletcher and Murphy were also civic activists. Women mentioned in this article were responsible for creating more than 1,500 acres of parks and preserves by donating property to the government or the Nature Conservancy. Although few of those properties now bear their name, the women’s legacies include large parks covering hundreds of acres (e.g. the Bayard Cutting Arboretum) to the scattered “portfolio” preserves of the Nature Conservancy and North Shore Land Alliance. Regardless of size, most provide nature trails, sanctuaries for birds, and opportunities for everyone to appreciate the natural world. Nature Centers include Suffolk County’s at the Scully estate in Islip, and the Sweetbriar Nature Center at the Vail Blydenburgh Preserve in Smithtown. Marjorie Spock and Mary Richards made their mark on the modern environmental movement by their early lawsuit against DDT and influence on Rachel Carson. These women and many other naturalists, botanists, gardeners, conservationists, environmentalists, and lovers of nature all have helped preserve natural Long Island for us and future generations.

Notes

[1]For TR’s conservation and environmental activities, see Douglas Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and The Crusade for America, 1858-1919* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009); and Darrin Lunde, *The Naturalist: Theodore Roosevelt: A Lifetime of Exploration, and the Triumph of American Natural History* (New York: Random House, 2016).

[2]Christopher C. Sellers, *Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature and the Rise of Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 2-3.

[3]This article, like my *Women in Long Island’s Past*, excludes women who are still living and does not cover recent decades. Neltje Blanchan De Graff (Mrs. Frank) Doubleday (1865-1918) was in my book’s chapter on writers. At the turn of the last century, under the name Neltje Blanchan, she wrote books on wild flowers, flower gardens, and five books on birds. The Doubledays had their country home in Mill Neck from 1904. Natalie A. Naylor, *Women in Long Island’s Past: A History of Eminent Ladies and Everyday Lives* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2012), 66.

[4]Eunice Jackett Meeker, “The Ladies’ Village Improvement Society: A Century of Force in East Hampton,” in *Long Island Women: Activists and Innovators*, ed. Natalie A. Naylor and Maureen O. Murphy (Interlaken, NY: Empire State Books, 1998), 162-72.

[5]Norma White, “Civic-Minded Women: The Sayville Village Improvement Society,” in *ibid*, 173-79. When the Society was incorporated in 1925, it dropped “Women” from its name, but it has always been a women’s organization.

[6] Anne Nauman, *The Junior Partner: Edith Loring Fullerton, Long Island Pioneer* (Las Vegas, NV: Scrub Oak Press, 1997); and Natalie A. Naylor, "Edith Loring Fullerton's Partnership with Hal B. Fullerton," *Nassau County Historical Society Journal* 63 (2008): 28-42. Nauman is a granddaughter of the Fullertons, and a science writer, editor, and retired biologist. The Fullertons' house still stands at 158 Main Street/Rt. 25A, west of Spring Road in Huntington.

[7] Edith Loring Fullerton, "Preface," *Book of the Home Garden*, vii. Edith Fullerton's writings are described in Nauman, *Junior Partner*, 16-19, 25, 32-35; Naylor, "Edith Loring Fullerton's Partnership," 29, 37-38; and Charles L. Sachs, *The Blessed Isle: Hal B. Fullerton and His Image of Long Island, 1897-1927* (Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1991), 48-51, 57-59. *How to Make a Vegetable Garden* was reprinted five times, most recently in 2015 and has also been digitized and is available online. It was cited as recently as 1998 in a newspaper article: Cass Peterson, "For Dirt and Armchair Gardeners Alike," *New York Times*, November 29, 1998. The *Book of the Home Garden* also has been digitized and is available online.

[8] The fullest descriptions of the two demonstration farms are in Sachs, *The Blessed Isle*; Nauman, *The Junior Partner*; and in Gardner of Eden: *The Wit and Wisdom of Hal B. Fullerton*, which Anne Nauman compiled and edited from the Fullertons' Long Island Agronomist. *The Lure of the Land* has been digitized and is available online. The subtitle of the *Lure of the Land* varied in different editions; in the 2d and 3d editions it was: *The History of a Market-Garden and Dairy Plot Developed within Eight Months Upon Long Island's Idle Territory, Long Designated as "Scrub Oak Waste," and "Pine Barrens."* The Fullertons sold their Huntington home in 1910 and moved to Medford. In 1927, after closing the Medford farm for the railroad, the Fullertons moved to property they had purchased in East Setauket.

[9] Nauman, *Junior Partner*, xi; Arthur D. Dean, "Introduction," in *Book of the Home Garden*, xx. Dean was Professor of Vocational Education at Columbia and apparently a personal friend of the Fullertons.

[10] Federated Garden Clubs of New York State (website: www.fgcny.com), under District II, Garden Clubs.

[11] North Country Garden Club of Long Island, Inc. (website: ncgc.org).

[12] Laura K. V. Dougherty, "Have You Ever Wondered How the Jane B. Francke Bird Sanctuary Came to Be?" *Voice of the Village* (of Brookville), vol. 10 (Summer 2009): 8 (on the Village of Brookville website). This article by the village historian was written in conjunction with the Oyster Bay Historical Society's 2009 exhibition on the Francks. Additional information from the Francke Sanctuary website and Raymond E. and Judith A. Spinzia, *Long Island's Prominent North Shore Families: Their Estates and Their Country Homes*, 2 vols. (College Station, TX: VirtualBookworm, 2006), 1:276.

[13] *Riverhead News*, November 30, 1945, 1, clipping in the files of the Suffolk County Historical Society, Riverhead. Robert Moses had created more than a dozen state parks on Long Island in the decade beginning in 1924.

[14]George Roussos, *A History and Description of William Bayard Cutting and His Country House, Westbrook, Great River, L.I.* (Board of Trustees and Long Island State Park and Recreation Commission, 1984), 11, 28-29; quotation by Olivia James from deed of gift of Bayard Cutting Arboretum (From "A Plan for Westbrook," from the Bayard Cutting archivist, Maureen Burford, email June 23, 2016.)

[15]Elizabeth A. Morton National Wildlife Refuge website; Sally Spanburgh, *The Southampton Cottages of South Main Street The Original Hamptons Summer Colony* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2015), 105-7. Only the carriage house survives on the Southampton Village property; the main house was lost sometime in the 1960s.

[16]Information on this and other Nature Conservancy properties comes from its publication, *Experience the Wonders of Nature: A Visitor's Guide to Long Island's Last Great Places* (2002), 95; and Vail Blydenburgh Preserve and Sweetbriar Nature Center websites. The Nature Conservancy book describes its properties and includes a brief paragraph on the history, listing the donor for each.

[17]"Preserves Transferred to the Land Alliance," North Shore Land Alliance, *Conservation News*, Fall/Winter, 2012, 8-9l and Spinzias, *Long Island's Prominent North Shore Families*, 2:842 (re Clark Sanctuary); *Experience the Wonders of Nature*, 9, 13, 27, 82.

[18]"Jane Nichols, 88, Conservationist," *Newsday*, December 18, 1981; *Experience the Wonders of Nature*, 93. Nichols had attended the Columbia School of Social Work and was also a prime mover in the Huntington Family Service League, which developed into the Family Service League of Suffolk County.

[19]*Experience the Wonders of Nature*, 79-80. The Welds, together with Mary's mother, Cornelia Floyd Nichols, and brother, William Floyd Nichols, were also involved in the donation of the William Floyd Estate to the federal government. The property had been owned by Floyds since 1718 and is named for William Floyd, who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. When most of the property was given in 1966 it was to stop a nuclear power plant being built in Mastic; the balance of the 613 acres was given by the four donors in 1976.

[20]Bill Bleyer, "Her Light Still Shines," *Newsday*, August 18, 2001; Dan Rattiner, "Celebrating Giorgina Reid, Savior of the Montauk Lighthouse," *Dan's Papers*, November 27, 2014; and Dan Rattiner, "Saving the Montauk Lighthouse," in *In the Hamptons* (New York: Harmony Books, 2008), 130-42.

[21]Tammy La Groce, "Nature is All Around, but an Ornate House Is a Draw," *New York Times*, April 27, 2014, LI section, 10; and exhibits at the Scully mansion.

[22]Benjamin Moore died in 1938; Alexandra married Robert McKay in 1957, who died the following year, so the donations were by Alexandra McKay. Mildred Murphy DeRiggi, "Preserving Nassau County's Heritage in Museums and Parks," in *Nassau County: From Rural Hinterland to Suburban Metropolis*, ed. Joann P. Krieg and Natalie A. Naylor (Interlaken: Empire State Books and Hofstra University, 2000), 128-29, 136n23.

[23] *Experience the Wonders of Nature*, 21, 26, 82, 86, and the North Shore Land Alliance (NSLA), *Conservation News*, Fall/Winter 2012, 8-9. As the examples in the text indicate, the Nature Conservancy has transferred a number of its smaller “portfolio” sites in Nassau County to the NSLA, which was founded in 2002-2003.

[24] See Louisa Clark Spencer, “The Clarks of Clark Botanic Garden,” *Nassau County Historical Society Journal* 52 (2003): 14-22. The name is usually shortened to Clark Botanic Garden, obscuring the woman it was given and named to honor. The property was originally donated to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and was transferred to the Town of North Hempstead in 1989, with a conservation easement requiring it to be maintained as a botanic garden.

[25] The Mulford property was on the north side of Fulton Street, including today’s Cathedral Avenue and St. Paul’s Road (the family’s name is retained in Mulford Place, just north of Fulton). The map of Hempstead Village in F. W. Beers *Atlas of Long Island*, New York (New York: Beers, Comstock & Cline, 1873), shows the location of the Mulford house, opposite Bell Street, just east of today’s Cathedral Avenue; the Mulford property extended more than 700 feet west on Fulton Street, today’s Route 24). Hempstead assessment records indicate the Mulford property in 1899 was 48 acres and valued at \$12,000. (Assessment records are in the Long Island Studies Institute, Hofstra University.) Cynthia Zaitzevsky mentions Dean’s project for Mulford in *Long Island Landscapes and the Women Who Designed Them* (New York: Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities [SPLIA] in Association with W.W. Norton, 2009), 138 (Zaitzevsky spells Mulford’s first name as “Fannie,” which it may have been in Dean’s records).

[26] Eric Lamont, “The Botanical Work of Fanny Mulford on Western Long Island, New York,” *Long Island Botanical Society (LIBS) Newsletter* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 1, 2-10; quotation on 9-10. Lamont’s article includes a listing of 46 “state-listed rare plants” that Mulford collected. Lamont also wrote “Fanny Mulford’s Orchid Collections from the Late 1890’s,” *LIBS Newsletter* 5 (March-April 1995): 7-9. The *Newsletter* is available on the Long Island Botanical Society’s website. The two Mulford sisters were founders of the Hempstead Public Library in 1889 and Fanny was president of the library from 1913 to 1931.

[27] Fletcher donated her papers to Stony Brook University Library when she relocated to Williamstown, Massachusetts, in 1976. Information on Fletcher is derived from the 3.3 linear feet of the Mary T. MacMurray Fletcher Collection, no. 242, Special Collections and University Archives, Stony Brook University Libraries. See also Mary T. Fletcher, “Forest Park, 1902-1952, Memoirs of a Naturalist,” *Long Island Forum* 41, no. 9 (September 1979): 196-202, which focuses on Fletcher’s activities in Queens.

[28] Sellers, *Crabgrass Crucible*, 66-67, 97. See also Richard P. Harmond, “Robert Cushman Murphy and Environmental Issues on Long Island,” *Long Island Historical Journal* 8 (Fall 1995): 76-87.

[29] Sellers, *Crabgrass Crucible*, 93, 99, 132; Jean Beckwith, “The Unique Legacy of Grace E. Barstow Murphy,” in *Sanctuary*, Bulletin of the Long Island Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, vol. 17, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1975); and Ann Carl, “Editorial,” *ibid*, 1.

[30]The most thorough and the definitive biography of Carson is Linda Lear, *Rachel Carson: The Life of the Author of Silent Spring* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997). See also Robert K. Musil, *Rachel Carson and her Sisters: Extraordinary Women Who Have Shaped America's Environment* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), especially chapter 3.

[31]Lear, *Rachel Carson*, 306, 318-20; and John Paull, "The Rachel Carson Letters and the Making of *Silent Spring*," SAGE Open, July-September 2013: 4, doi:10.1177/2158244013494861. Paull, a social scientist and environmentalist affiliated with the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Oxford in England, has the most detailed account of the relationship between Carson and Spock. He focuses on the organic movement as a major and largely unacknowledged source for Carson. Spock was a younger sister of the well-known author and pediatrician, Dr. Benjamin Spock.

[32]The various accounts differ on the number of original plaintiffs. The May 24, 1957 ruling (*Murphy v. Benson*, 151 Sept. 786, available on-line) lists six. A New York Times article on May 9, 1957 named eight with the addition of Frances Barends of Centre Island and Mary Jacobs of Bethpage; five of the eight were women (Harold M. Schmeck, Jr., "Long Islanders Ask Court to Halt DDT War on Moth as Health Risk"). Paull, in the "Rachel Carson Letters," includes a time line and citations of the various law cases (3, 11). Lear, *Rachel Carson*, also includes citations of the cases, 547-48n29. When the case reached the U.S. Supreme Court, the name was *Murphy v. Butler* (Butler was the Area Supervisor in the Department of Agriculture), 362 U.S. 929 (US 1960). Quotation re crops is from Paull, "Rachel Carson Letters," 4.

[33]Biographer Linda Lear notes that Carson wrote Mrs. Robert Cushman Murphy in December 1959, who was the "official head of the Citizens Against Mass Poisoning," asking her to write Arthur S. Flemming, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, supporting his halt to sales of cranberries sprayed with pesticides. Lear, *Rachel Carson*, 313, 557n65.

[34]Lear, *Rachel Carson*, 306, 313-14, 318-20, 547n28, 548n31. Carson refers to the 1958 Long Island lawsuit in *Silent Spring* (158-59), but does not mention Spock as a source. For an explanation of why Spock and Richards were not acknowledged, see Paull, "The Rachel Carson Letters," 7-9.

[35]Paull, "Rachel Carson Letters," 1, 2, 6-7; Lear, *Rachel Carson*, 331-33, 552nn76-77; quotation at 332.

[36]Paull, "The Rachel Carson Letters," 9; Sellers, *Crabgrass Crucible*, 133-36, 267. The Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) soon developed into a large nationwide organization, but its history, including details on the Long Island lawsuit which spurred it, is beyond the scope of this article. See Charles Wurster, *DDT Wars: Rescuing our National Bird, Preventing Cancer, and Creating the Environmental Defense Fund* (New York: Oxford, 2015); and Marion Lane Rogers, *The Environmental Defense Fund and How It Grew* (New York: Environmental Defense Fund, 1990). Wurster, who was a founding trustee of the EDF, was a Professor of Biological Sciences at Stony Brook (later Professor of Environmental Sciences). Rogers was a secretary and administrative assistant with the EDF for nearly two decades beginning in 1970. Rogers' book includes contributions from a number of the scientists who were involved in the early years of the organization. She mentions a number of women, mostly volunteers, who aided the organization during its first decades.

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