

DAVIDSON NATURE PRESERVE

LAND DONOR: ELIZABETH DAVIDSON
OWNED BY: KLT, VASSALBORO



Davidson Nature Preserve (Brian Kent)

Regardless of the season, you can count on Elizabeth Davidson to have a freezer stocked with blueberries from the fields next door, part of the Davidson Nature Preserve, 97 acres that she donated to the Kennebec Land Trust in 2005. Since her donation, many Vassalboro neighbors have written to thank her, sharing fond memories of grandparents spending classic Maine summer days picking blueberries in these fields.

Elizabeth was raised near Boston and spent childhood summers in South China, Maine. Afterwards, she went west to teach in the Music Department at the University of California, Berkeley. Elizabeth says, “I missed New England dearly, especially the fall, the seasons, and family.” She retired in 1990, came back to the east coast, and made Vassalboro home with her purchase of land that is now the Davidson Nature Preserve.

With her new land came the question of whether to continue mowing the blueberry fields. “At first I thought — I can’t afford to have them mowed season after season — I’ll let them grow wild. But a neighboring farmer told me that when one thinks of the work that went into clearing these fields, and that farmers only used oxen, and then built these impressive stone walls... well that did it. I realized the open fields were cultural icons.” The fields are now mowed on a rotating basis, which ensures the preserve’s much-loved annual blueberry crop.

While the mowing question took some thought, Elizabeth knew from the start that she wanted to preserve the property. In a town that was rapidly losing open space and farmland, she understood that land conservation should be a priority. Before partnering with the KLT, Elizabeth contacted several organizations whose headquarters were out of the state, but decided that when protecting lands of local significance, “You may not want someone from away.” Working with the Kennebec Land Trust would ensure that her land would be cared for by “an organization that knew and cared about land and people in my community.”

Visitors to the Davidson Nature Preserve come for more than blueberries. They can also observe a variety of natural habitats. A white pine-mixed hardwood forest surrounds the expansive blueberry fields, providing diversity and edges for both forest and meadow species. At the western end of the field is a wetland — a long fen, like a bog,

but with nutrient input from a flowing stream. When beaver impounded the stream and flooded the surrounding upland, the fen became home to a great blue heron rookery, which currently supports nineteen impressive stick nests. Preserve visitors marvel at the view of the rookery, with nests high in the limbs of dead trees, and the activity of herons during the spring and summer breeding and foraging seasons.

The Preserve’s conservation land is enhanced by the neighbor’s abutting woodlot and orchard. Elizabeth notes, “Any contiguous land that provides habitat for wildlife is a great advantage.” She feels fortunate to have been able to protect and share a diverse, well-loved property. “I know it is something that a lot of people would like to do; finding a group who immediately understood my goals made this possible.”



Heron rookery (©Kennebec Journal/Joe Phelan)

The Davidson Nature Preserve is home to a portion of one of Maine’s largest inland great blue heron colonies. Protection from human development and habitat alteration undoubtedly facilitated its formation and growth, and will likely allow it to persist for several decades.

— Danielle E. D’Auria, Wildlife Biologist,
Bird Group Maine Department of Inland
Fisheries & Wildlife



Elizabeth Davidson
(Sarah Fuller)



Lowbush blueberry, *Vaccinium angustifolium*
(Maine Natural Areas Program)