

# Parsons family, of Skowhegan, donates land to preservation group

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By Doug Harlow

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SKOWHEGAN — Somerset Woods Trustees added to its sanctuary of woods, trails, fields and riverfront properties Sunday with a 27-acre donation of land from the Parsons family.

The land on Malbons Mills Road in Skowhegan, where the current generation of Parsons liked to play ball, fly kites and pick wild strawberries as children, will now be part of a large land trust attached to the 55-acre Malbons Woods, also owned by Somerset Woods.



Standing beside a monument marking the Parsons Family Preserve on Sunday, John Parsons speaks about the long history of family-owned land along Malbons Mills Road in Skowhegan. The dedication of the preserve was attended by family members and the Somerset Woods Trustees. The will remain undeveloped and open to the public. Staff photo by David Leaming

John Parsons told the crowd assembled Sunday for the unveiling of a granite monument marking the Parsons Family Preserve that it was an honor for him and his family to be able to contribute to the trustees' land.

"Friends and neighbors of the Parsons family and particularly you, from the woods trustees, understand this legacy that we live is deeply human, but more than human. It's the land. It's the sky," he said. "We feel such joy that this living transition is going to be enjoyed by so many human beings and wildlife and bugs or whatever there might be." Parsons topped of his words with a poem penned by James Russell Lowell that his grandfather liked to quote: "There's nothing so rare as a day in June," he said marveling at the lovely weather on Sunday.

The nonprofit Somerset Woods Trustees was formed in 1927 and is believed to be the oldest land trust in Maine, according to the [organization's website](#).

Louise Helen Coburn (1856-1949), of Skowhegan, botanist, historian, poet, author, philanthropist and visionary, initiated the Somerset Woods Trustees and was its first president. The mission is to protect land that has have significant natural or cultural resources and manage it in a sustainable way for public benefit.

Where possible, the trustees open those lands to the public under suitable regulations. The Somerset Woods Trustees owns 27 holdings comprising about 929 acres in Somerset County. They are in Canaan, Cornville, Madison, Embden, Skowhegan, Solon, Norridgewock and Starks; and they range in size from 1.4 acres to 336 acres. Fifteen of these properties have frontage on the Kennebec River or a major tributary. The largest holding is Coburn Woods, which overlooks downtown Skowhegan. The smallest is a parcel on the east side of Lake George in Canaan. The organization also holds conservation easements on eight properties totaling about 643 acres, according to the website.

Marcus Parsons III gave a brief history of the Parsons family in Maine, noting that the first of the family members arrived from Amesbury, Massachusetts, after the American Revolution and settled in Cornville. The first Marcus Parson prospered in the timber business and built his home, which still stands on Malbons Mills Road.

Jack Gibson, president of Somerset Woods, said there already are trails on parts of the acquired lands, which will be open to the public for recreation.

"This is a wonderful donation," Gibson said. "Now we have 82 continuous acres."

Somerset Woods Executive director Nancy Williams said there are plans to use the Parsons Preserve as a sanctuary for butterflies and grassland birds.

“I love it and I know the neighbors are going to love it, too, because they remember this field, they use this field and there are strawberries that are right now ripe. They’re all over the place,” she said. “I don’t know what would have become of this area had they not protected it.”

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