

FALL 2018 VOLUME 26 NO. 3

# SPECIAL PLACES

FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE TRUSTEES

A scenic view of a rocky island with trees and a small boat in the water. The island is covered in green trees and has a rocky shoreline. A small boat with an outboard motor is in the water in the foreground. Another smaller boat is visible in the distance. The water is blue and the sky is clear.

**Hello  
Gerry!**

*Historic Marblehead  
island protected*



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trustees



# Hello Gerry!

Historic Marblehead landmark joins Trustees' family of protected islands

BY DINAH CARDIN

Visible from Marblehead's historic Fort Sewall and the town's Gas House Beach, Gerry Island is a beloved and iconic feature of the area's coastal and cultural landscape, and a popular destination for those seeking unique views of the historic shoreline.



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A rocky outcropping, accessible at low tide, Gerry (which is pronounced with a hard “g”) recently joined its neighbor Crowninshield Island as a Trustees reservation—becoming the organization’s 117th special place preserved as open space for the public’s use and enjoyment, forever. Gerry also becomes the newest culturally and naturally significant North Shore island to be protected by The Trustees, an assemblage that includes the Misery Islands in Salem Sound, as well as Choate and Long Islands in the Crane Wildlife Refuge in Essex.

Longtime Trustees board member Brian Kinney visited the island on a hot day in August to complete his visits to every one of the distinctive properties owned and managed by the organization. With its increased focus on the Massachusetts coast, Kinney says Gerry Island is the perfect addition to The Trustees portfolio. “I view the Trustees’ whole collection as a treasure map of the state of Massachusetts,” says Kinney. “Even the getting there is interesting—it’s a fun quest.”

Walking out on the naturally occurring land bridge in Little Harbor, off of Marblehead’s northeast shore, is really to step



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Marblehead residents relax on Gas House Beach with views, and easy access via kayak or paddleboard, to both Gerry Island (right) and Crowninshield Island (left) in Little Harbor.

back into history. The island was named for Elbridge Gerry—most remembered for the term “gerrymandering”—who was a significant contributor to American history as a signer of the Declaration of Independence,

governor of the Commonwealth from 1810-11, and Vice President of the United States under President James Madison from 1813 until his death in 1814.

“The opportunity to link this place with



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At 130 acres, Choate Island (formerly Hog Island, above) is the largest of the seven islands—Choate, Long, Dean, Dilly, Pine, Patterson, and Round—that make up the Crane Wildlife Refuge in Essex. Below, the views from Crowninshield Island stretch from Marblehead Harbor out to the Atlantic in the distance.

this rich history is really special,” says Alicia Leuba, Vice President of the Eastern Region. “He was an absolutely fascinating figure.” Gerry played a crucial role in the success of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, as he proposed the ultimate structure of the Legislative Branch, with a House whose members would be representative of each state’s population, and a Senate having an equal number of votes for each state regardless of size.

#### LITTLE HARBOR LANDMARKS

From Gerry Island, one has a unique perspective of the breathtaking coastline, Marblehead Light, and the green expanse of Fort Sewall, where Marbleheaders stood their ground during the War of 1812. “It’s an acre and a half,” but such an important acre and a half,” says Vanessa Parker-Geisman, Land Protection Specialist for The Trustees. “What matters is how unique and special that acreage is.” In between downpours on the morning of the official acquisition, Parker-Geisman, who lives in Marblehead, hiked the perimeter of the island. “I tell people that you have to experience it,” she says. “Get out here



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and see why everyone loves this little part of the world.”

Neighboring five-acre Crowninshield Island, formerly known as Brown’s Island and a popular spot for hikes and picnicking, is named in honor of heiress Louise E. du Pont Crowninshield, a philanthropist and founding trustee of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The family donated the rocky wooded island to The Trustees in 1955, and it thus became the third island protected by the organization—joining previously protected Great and Little Misery Islands in Salem Sound.

#### A REFUGE IN ESSEX

More than a half million visitors enjoy

the coastal properties of The Trustees each year. The tranquil islands the organization protects entertain the fewest among them yet offer unique, expansive views of the shoreline and ocean stretching as far as the eye can see. Sitting out in Essex Bay southeast of the Crane Estate, the largest of the islands is graceful Choate Island, another rare gem of cultural and natural significance. Formerly known as Hog Island, the 130-acre island is located in the Essex River Estuary and is the largest of seven islands that make up the Crane Wildlife Refuge. Choate boasts a rich cultural history that includes pre-European settlements and centuries of agricultural legacy. It’s an iconic remote agrarian landscape, virtually unchanged since the 1700s—a rocky ridge created by glacial ice that has been a landmark for mariners for centuries.

One of the state’s premier scenic resources, the island’s diversity of habitat makes Crane Wildlife Refuge also an area of great ecological wealth. Crown kinglets and sharp-shinned hawks are attracted by its spruce forest planted in the early 20th century, and its grasslands provide critical habitat for

bobolinks and Savannah sparrows. “Seen from the water, it can transport you back in time,” says Peter Pinciario, General Manager of the Crane Estate, who claims that serene and solitary Choate Island, surrounded by salt marsh, is the finest property owned by The Trustees. “The views from the summit are remarkable,” says Pinciario. “You can see all the way to Maine on a clear day.”

The best time to visit Choate is the fall. To access the island, boaters and paddlers coming from the Essex River and beyond can dock on Long Island, stroll along a pretty trail over a hilltop and past the ca. 1778 Proctor Barn, until the path delivers them to the island and the early-18th-century Choate House. A moderate hike to the windswept summit reveals the gravesite of Cornelius and Miné Crane, who made the island their home and donated the Refuge as well as what is now the Inn at Castle Hill—a total of 700 acres—to The Trustees in 1974.

#### THE ‘MISERYS’ OF SALEM

Further to the south, Great Misery Island offers stunning views of Salem Sound and hiking through the ruins of an early-20th-century resort. A century ago, this 83-acre island was a haven for leisure and recreation. Charming summer cottages and rustic, but elegant bungalows dotted the island, and golf tournaments and regattas attracted Boston and North Shore socialites. But the resort fell on hard times, and in 1926 a devastating brush fire ended all vestige of resort life. In 1935, however, North Shore residents came together to fight a proposed twelve-million-gallon oil storage facility and acquired a majority the land for the purpose of donating it to The Trustees so it would never be developed. Today, you can reach Great Misery’s four-acre sibling Little Misery Island by wading across a narrow, shallow channel at very low tide. The bones of various shipwrecks bring another aspect of a historical past just off shore—visible are the remains of the steamship *The City of Rockland* from Maine, scuttled here many years ago.

The Trustees’ North Shore islands are emblematic of the organization’s ongoing mission to protect and conserve much of the state’s coastline—more than 120 miles of which are now in The Trustees’ care. The acquisition of Marblehead’s Gerry Island



The ruins of an early-20th-century resort dot the landscape of Great Misery Island, which is accessible by boat or the Sea Shuttle ferry service out of Salem.

continues that tradition. Affected by recent storms, Gerry Island furthers the organization’s strategic mission to educate young people and adults about changing coastlines. Looking forward, The Trustees seeks to implement cutting-edge land management and greater protections and planning to prepare for the impacts of climate change.

#### MOVING AHEAD IN MARBLEHEAD

Marblehead residents Ted and Julie Moore had owned Gerry Island for 33 years, allowing the public to use and enjoy it, helping to make it a popular destination among locals. They have now made public access official and permanent through their decision to donate the island to The Trustees. After years of observing trash pickup and conscious stewardship at Crowninshield next door, the Moores are especially happy to know that their little piece of the world is in good hands. “We thought it was appropriate after 400 years of private ownership to donate it to an important land conservation organization so that they can take care of it for the next 400 years,” said Ted.

The waterfront and world class sailing drew Ted to Marblehead more than 40 years ago and then he helped Julie fall in love with the town too. The island was included in the purchase of a nearby boat yard; Ted remembers “very much” wanting the island. The couple obtained permits to put a stone cottage on the island, but they never got around

to building it. Instead, they held birthday parties and clambakes there. Julie kayaks to the island once a week at high tide to check on the property, enjoy the views, and read. The couple are happy that young people will have an authentic experience of the natural coastline at Gerry Island. “To be able to walk out to an island surrounded by water in the Greater Boston area is pretty rare,” said Ted, adding, “We’ve spent a lot of years with our kids on the seashore and in boats, looking at turtles and fish and seabirds and aquatic creatures.”

The recent acquisition of Gerry Island “really touched the heart of the community on the North Shore,” says Leuba. “I am blown away with the connection that people feel to this place.” More than 90 donors contributed to a \$250,000 endowment to maintain the land in perpetuity. Stewardship work begins this fall with plans for a ribbon-cutting in the spring. A ranger will welcome visitors to both Gerry and Crowninshield Islands on weekends during the peak season. In addition to a groomed trail, Gerry will also soon have signage to share its history. “We talk about the importance of connection to place,” says Parker-Geisman. “The salty smells, the sea breeze, the humidity, the rocks. This is where we cultivate that feeling.”

*Dinah Cardin is a freelance writer who lives in Salem.*