

## **Land Trust Heroes: Seth and Lucy Holcombe Donate 152 Acres to Granby Land Trust**

By Trish Percival

When newlyweds Seth and Lucy Holcombe moved to Simsbury in 1959, Simsbury was a rural town, its geography dominated by horse properties, farmland and forest. Over the 15 years that they lived there, however, the population nearly doubled and the traffic on their road became significant. In addition, there was a dramatic increase in air traffic, with a flight path directly over their house. Seth and Lucy decided this rural town wasn't quite rural enough for them anymore, and went looking for a place in the country.

Both Holcombes knew something about Granby. Seth's ancestors lived in Granby for 5 generations before moving to New Hartford and then Hartford. [Many other descendents of Joshua Holcomb, including Tudor and Laura Holcomb (of Holcomb Farm) stayed in Granby; and many Holcombs still live here today.]

Lucy had visited Granby as a child, going to a friend's house "at her home on a dirt road that is now Route 20" (said Lucy in the Granby Senior Center publication, *From Acorn to Oak. Stories of the Town of Granby*). Lucy also had long been a member of the Hampstead Hill Club, a private swim club in West Granby (back when the Club membership consisted of urbanites looking for fresh air and a place to cool off.)

Seth and Lucy knew that Granby had the kind of open space and rural setting that they desired. However, when the realtor began showing them houses, nothing quite suited them. Then, one

afternoon, as they drove up Silver Street, they saw open fields. The land was not for sale, but it turned out the owner was willing to sell. For the Holcombes, for Granby, and for the Granby Land Trust, this was a fortuitous turn of events, indeed.

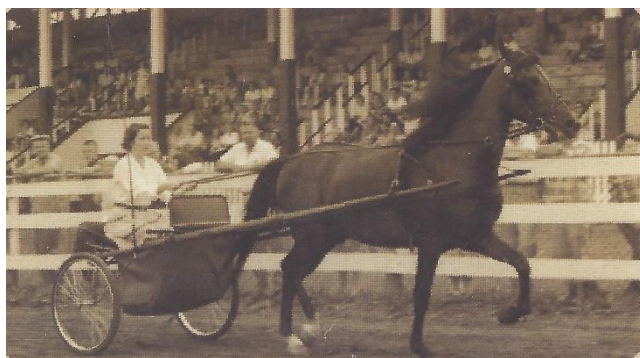
Seth and Lucy purchased the 89-acre property and in July of 1974 they moved into their new home. No one knew then what a truly indelible mark they would make upon this little town.

### Early Life

Both Seth and Lucy grew up in Hartford, not far from one another; both descended from old New England families; and both loved horses.

Seth, born in 1918, lived a block west of Union Station, and as a boy was a train aficionado. Seth's father was a skilled horseman, and Seth grew up riding. He boarded his horse, Hightop, at a stable in Bishops Corner. His family had a summer home in Marlborough and they spent time there with their horses. (Seth even told of riding their horses *from* Hartford *to* Marlborough, across the Bulkeley Bridge!) Seth attended Kingswood-Oxford School, The Loomis School, and The Gunnery, before graduating Trinity College, where he majored in the Classics.

Lucy, born in 1924, was a tomboy. Growing up near Elizabeth Park, Lucy would run home after school to change into her long pants so she could go play outside. She loved all animals, especially horses. Her favorite book was *Black Beauty*, and she was so sensitive to the plight of the horse that she burst into tears anytime the book was mentioned. Lucy was proud to tell of her father, William Spalding Eaton, who had ridden with the Calvary in the Mexican Border War. A family vacation to a dude ranch solidified Lucy's love of horses. Lucy attended the Oxford School, then Connecticut College. After graduation, she worked at Connecticut General, but she soon switched to teaching first grade so she could earn enough money to buy a horse.



Before long, Lucy bought Echo, a Morgan horse, and began working with him "in harness" (see photo). The following excerpt from the July 1958 issue of *The Morgan Horse* portrays the world in which Seth and Lucy lived during their courtship: "Miss Eaton bought Towne-Ayr Echo as a two year old from the Wolcotts. He was well along in harness by that time and though Miss Eaton was quite new to the horse world, Echo's gentle disposition was just the thing for

her and now the two of them make a pretty sight driving over the wooded trails of Bloomfield. They are just beginning to work under saddle and he is proving to be the same quiet boy he is in harness.

"Seth Holcombe purchased Viganita from Mrs. Ela as a three year old. She had been trained a little, but

Seth has put in many hours of work to make Vig the pleasure mare she is now. They have traveled together the trails of the reservoir, tobacco plantations, and the State Park for four years, and it is a happy day indeed when they take a ribbon in Morgan Pleasure Riding.”

Just a month after this article was published, Seth proposed to Lucy...in the horse barn! On January 17, 1959, they wed.

### **Thorne Bay Hill**

Morgan horses were central to life Seth and Lucy built together. Both competed in equestrian events at horse shows across New England. Seth served as secretary and registrar of the Morgan Horse Club and as president of the New England Morgan Horse Association. Lucy also served as secretary of the New England Morgan Horse Association for a time.

Soon after they moved to North Granby, Seth and Lucy stopped showing horses and began breeding them, instead. They named their farm Thorne Bay Hill, after one of their favorite horses, Baythorne.



“Seth and Lucy were true horseman,” says Harry Werner, VMD, who cared for the Holcombes’ horses and was a very close friend. “There are lots of horse owners out there, but few true horsemen. Seth and Lucy loved and respected their horses and knew how to care for them, so their horses lived long lives.”

### **Family Life**

Lucy’s obituary read, “Through 50 years of marriage, Seth and Lucy generously shared their home on Thorne Bay Hill with many Morgan horses, dogs, cats, family, and fortunate friends.” Indeed, they were never without animal companions, and they entertained family and friends frequently. Their nieces and nephews had open invitations to visit. Lucy’s sister’s daughter, Nancy Hinman, enjoyed Seth and Lucy’s company so much that she would bring high school friends to visit with her. Harry Werner and his wife Susan grew so close with the Holcombes that they considered Seth and Lucy surrogate grandparents to their children, and the two families spent many special occasions together.

Seth was extremely well-read and a wonderful conversationalist. “He was the best extemporaneous speaker you’ve ever heard,” said his nephew, Shepherd Holcombe Jr. “He also was very open and articulate, and truly engaged with whom he was talking.” Seth had many diverse interests. He was an academic who was passionate about the Classics and who studied the poetry of Emily Dickinson. He also enjoyed studying his family’s genealogy; was a true expert on the history of baseball (especially his beloved Red Sox); and took wonderful photographs of steam trains, which now are housed in the Railroad History Archive at the University of Connecticut. He even, for a time, was a square-dance caller. “When they made Seth, they broke the mold,” says Nancy.

Lucy was an outdoorswoman and a nature lover, with a special affinity for birds. She was gentle and kind, but she enjoyed intellectual discourse as much as Seth did, and many a dinner party went late into the night. Lucy also loved her dogs. When they moved to North Granby, the Holcombes built an extensive trail system through their property; and when Lucy wasn't riding her horses on those trails, she was walking her dogs, cross-country-skiing, or snow-shoeing on them. The trails served as a primary source of recreation for the Holcombes for 30+ years. Another source of recreation was their swimming pool. While Seth always said he wouldn't get in unless the water hit 90 degrees (which, of course, it never did!), Seth and Lucy hosted pool parties for all their nieces and nephews and for the Werners' children. Everyone loved visiting Aunt Lucy and Uncle Seth.

### **Contributions to Granby**

Upon moving to North Granby, the Holcombes quickly became involved in numerous town organizations. Lucy was a member of the Friends of Cossitt Library, a member and secretary of the Granby Library Board, and a member of both the Granby Historic Properties Study Committee and Salmon Brook Historical Society. She also was very active at First Congregational Church. Seth served on the board of The Salmon Brook Historical Society, served several terms on the Zoning Board of Appeals in Granby, was a member of the Republican Town Committee, and was a founder of the Granby Horse Council. Together, they were active members of The Granby Land Trust. Granby benefited immensely and in so many ways from their contributions over the four decades they spent here.



### **Conservationists**

The Holcombes shared a deep appreciation of the natural world and were dedicated to its preservation. They followed planning and zoning issues and favored open spaces and minimal environmental impact; and they were very early and active members of the Granby Land Trust. When 68 acres of property abutting theirs was put up for sale in 1984, the Holcombes bought it. Then, in 1993, they donated a conservation easement on all 152 acres to the Granby Land Trust, protecting it from development. In 2005, the GLT awarded its highest honor, the Mary Edwards Friend of the Land Trust Award, to Seth and Lucy. Lucy hung the award, a Carole Day watercolor triptych of the Mary Edwards Mountain Property, right by her bed.

### **A Remarkable Legacy**

Seth Holcombe passed away in 2009. Lucy passed in January of 2016. Remarkably, the Holcombes bequeathed their entire North Granby property – all 152 acres, including their house – to the GLT. In addition, they left a stewardship fund, so we can care for the land forever.

"Lucy and Seth's commitment to land preservation and the natural world is truly remarkable," says GLT president and the steward of the Holcombes' property, Rick Orluk. "Their gift of land and stewardship funds will have a lasting impact on the Land Trust and the community they treasured. It is the Land Trust's intention to create the Seth and Lucy Holcombe Preserve, which will be open for use by the public, so that others may enjoy and experience the land they so loved."

The Holcombes were modest, private people, who went about their lives with conviction and principle and completely without fanfare. "They wouldn't want to be celebrated," says Harry. "They wouldn't want a big plaque with their names on it. They'd want to be remembered for what was important to them."



Toward the end of her life, when Lucy was no longer able to get outside and enjoy her beautiful property, Nancy moved her birdfeeders to the window by her bed. To Lucy, those birds represented the natural world that she loved so dearly. Indeed, the animals, the trees, the flowers – the abundant natural world that existed on Thorne Bay Hill – *that* is what was what was most important to Lucy and Seth; that is what will live on, because of them; and that is what they will be remembered for, forever.

