

122 Acres on Gouldsboro West Bay

Wildlife Refuge Created as Memorial To the Quintessential Father-in-law

By Mary Anne Clancy

GOULDSBORO—When Fletcher Taft Wood died in 1958, he left many reminders of the 93 years he'd lived in the Downeast area. Among them are the Hancock-Sullivan Bridge, Sumner Memorial High School, Maine Coast Memorial Hospital, and the coastal section of Route 1 that runs through Gouldsboro, Sullivan, and Steuben.

Now, Frances B. Wood of Prospect Harbor has created the ultimate memorial to her beloved father-in-law, a 122-acre wildlife refuge on West Bay.

The Fletcher Wood Natural Area—a gift from Frances to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service—became part of the Petit Manan National Wildlife Refuge in March.

"Fletcher would have done the same thing, but in his time, there weren't all these organizations and people weren't so interested in saving land," said Wood. "It's

my way of saying 'Thank you, Fletcher, you were pretty special'."

The 122-acre parcel—which includes two small islands and 6,333 feet of shore frontage—lies right behind Wood's home on Chicken Mill Road.

The wooded upland area slopes downward from Chicken Mill to West Bay. Bordering the bay is a salt marsh that was once controlled by a dike for harvesting salt hay to feed cattle, Wood said.

"When you see the salt marsh and the sheltered inlet, you can see why waterfowl would congregate there and why it is so attractive to shore birds," said Carolyn Pryor of Maine Coast Heritage Trust, the organization that worked with Wood and U.S. Fish & Wildlife over a two-year period to complete the transaction.

Petit Manan Wildlife Refuge manager Margaret Anderson

said that not only is Wood's gift "breathtaking in its scenic beauty," but that the West Bay in Gouldsboro has been identified as a Class A coastal wildlife concentration area by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. In addition to heavy use by migrating shore birds and water fowl, bald eagles also use the area year-round.

Wood inherited all of Fletcher's property when her husband Henry died in 1972. "Fletcher left everything to Henry and Henry left everything to me," Wood said.

Three years ago, when Wood returned to Gouldsboro from the Virgin Islands—where she and Henry lived for many years—she began contacting various organizations that preserve land for wildlife purposes.

Wood said she knew her future father-in-law and husband-to-be since her childhood summers when she visited her aunt's Gouldsboro home. They were always "Cousin Fletcher" and "Cousin Henry," she said.

Henry, a 1916 graduate of Bowdoin College who went on to Columbia University Law School, was very close to his parents, she said, and everyone loved and respected Fletcher.

Fletcher was the grandson of Ebenezer Wood who came to New England from London in 1638. Born in West Gouldsboro in December 1865, Fletcher began his first business at the age of 12. He and a 14-year-old friend harvested water lilies from Jones Pond and sailed down to Bar Harbor to sell them to tourists, Wood said.

At 15 years of age, he became a bellhop at the Rodick House in Bar Harbor and in subsequent years, worked at Albert Beal's store in Southwest Harbor, the Bar Harbor steam laundry, and the J.F. Hodgkins Fish Market.

In 1898, he was approached by creditors of the Clark Coal Co. who asked if he would run the company and pull it out of bankruptcy. He did just that before buying the creditors out and es-

tablishing his own company with his brother, and several other relatives, Wood said.

In 1906, Fletcher sold his share of Clark Coal and bought a Steuben store that had been run by an agent for Rockland Lime Co. in Rockport.

An agent for the company asked him to take on the job of buying wood and staves for the barrels that were used to pack the lime and, in 1910, Fletcher convinced the Rockport company to lease the mill at Chicken Mill to manufacture 2,000,000 barrel staves.

He expanded that business and ultimately employed 100 area men—buying the Dunbar Bros. Chicken Mill in Gouldsboro and managing a wood mill in West Gouldsboro. The barrel stave business died out in 1929 when Rockland switched to using waterproof bags to package the lime, Wood said.

Fletcher was also involved in numerous civil projects. He was instrumental in convincing the Highway Commission to bring Maine Highway No. 1 along the coast rather than sending it through the Black Woods Road (now Route 183), as was the original plan.

He raised funds for the Eastern Memorial Hospital—later to become Maine Coast Memorial in Ellsworth—donated five acres of land for the construction of the Gouldsboro Grammar School, and was involved in the construction of Sumner High School and the Hancock-Sullivan bridge (the "Singing Bridge"), she said.

While pursuing those interests and collecting Indian artifacts—a lifetime hobby—Fletcher was also quietly providing financial assistance to widows in the area, Wood said.

A quiet man who was devoted to his family, Fletcher was a thoughtful, considerate, and understanding person, Wood said.

The Petit Manan refuge's Anderson said that Frances Wood is carrying on Fletcher's stewardship. "There are many people such as Frances who both love their property and want to do something for other people—and for wildlife," said Anderson.