

The Sakonnet Region: A Sense of Place

By Brian Janes

This time of year always seems to promote reflection. Maybe it is the advent of the holiday season, or the change from lush green to the grays and browns of winter, or just where we live in the Sakonnet region—from Tiverton to Little Compton.

Taking stock, reassessing, checking direction, pausing to consider, all of these things seem to happen more easily this time of year. Inevitably, these actions lead one to think about how incredibly lucky we are to live in a place that offers so much joy to even the casual observer.

Maybe it is the way the sun's long November rays turn the salt marsh the most brilliant gold, or the simple delight in seeing the hooded mergansers return to dive and pop to the surface in their feeding ritual. Perhaps it's turning a corner, only to slow for a flock of turkey rattling across the road. Or the way the holly trees simply sparkle throughout the bare woods under the crystal clear blue winter sky.

Why do these simple things give people such pleasure? Because they all lead to a "sense of place." *Wiki* notes "To some, (sense of place) is a characteristic that some geographic places have and some do not, while to others it is a feeling or perception held by people (not by the place itself). It is often used in relation to those characteristics that make a place special or unique, as well as to those that foster a sense of authentic human attachment and belonging." *Authentic human attachment and belonging*. . . hmm, powerful stuff, that.

Maybe it is the fact in the Sakonnet region, people can choose from any number of roadside stands to buy fresh produce grown by their neighbors and enjoy a friendly chat in the bargain. Is it in the stack of great eggs in front of someone's house available from the cooler on an honor system payment? Or the fact that within 10 minutes, you can be dangling a fishing line and perhaps (with luck) come home with dinner? Maybe it is just the sight of those naturalized crocus and bluebells every spring along the roadside.

Who can pass the cows at their watering hole across from Peckham Road in Little Compton without gazing past them over to the Sakonnet River and feeling a moment of peace? Can anyone not enjoy the bright red flash of the winterberry along Briggs Marsh on a cold November day? Or reach the dogleg in Neck Road and see that magnificent vista over Ferolbink Farm and not feel a bit refreshed?

Who could not want to ensure that these foundation stones of our sense of place in the Sakonnet region remain for our future years, for our children's and grandchildren's appreciation? A popular, unattributed quote reminds us "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children."

Thanks to the hard work of many individuals, and the foresight of the citizens of the Sakonnet region, much progress has been made to ensure that our sense of place remains

intact. Some people have helped with resources, some with their sweat. Others give their time or their expertise. Some of these most powerful totems already enjoy protection, now preserved for future generations. Others face much more uncertain futures. Still others, like Ferolbink Farm, hang in the balance.

So, as we express our thanks during the holidays, let's make certain we appreciate all the bountiful gifts our region offers. Let us all determine to proceed in ways that will help ensure that future generations may stop amidst the whirlwind of their lives and draw the same conclusion. Let us take the moment to realize just how very lucky we are. Local Sakonnet area conservation groups and The Nature Conservancy, which make up the Sakonnet Conservation Coalition, work towards preserving the Tiverton-Little Compton area's sense of place. And there is always a need for more assistance, and much more work to be done. Whatever your interest or ability, lend a hand. Because, there is only one chance to preserve these pieces of our life here in Sakonnet. Once "those characteristics that make a place special or unique" are gone, they're gone for good.

- Brian Janes is co-chair of the Tiverton Open Space and Land Preservation Commission, a member of the Sakonnet Conservation Coalition, which also includes the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust, Sakonnet Preservation Association, The Nature Conservancy, and the Tiverton Land Trust.