

# Stately turn-of-century 'cottage' needs caretaker

**■ Clock ticking on finding lessee for Creek Farm estate**

By Emily Aronson  
aronson@seacoastonline.com

**P**ORTSMOUTH — When Chet and Lillian "Billie" Noel bought Creek Farm in the 1950s, they planned to one day subdivide and sell the 35-acre property. But the couple fell in love with the land and left the tree-filled landscape along Sagamore Creek untouched.

Now that the couple has passed away, the sale of the property to the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, as well as a conservation easement held by the state, has ensured the land will stay just as the Noels had wanted.

The only catch is that the Forest Society must find someone to run the property's historic Creek Farm Cottage before May 2006.

"Now that Billie's gone, we're really hoping that some organization could take over the building and make it compatible with the land," said Jane Difley, SPNHF president/forester.

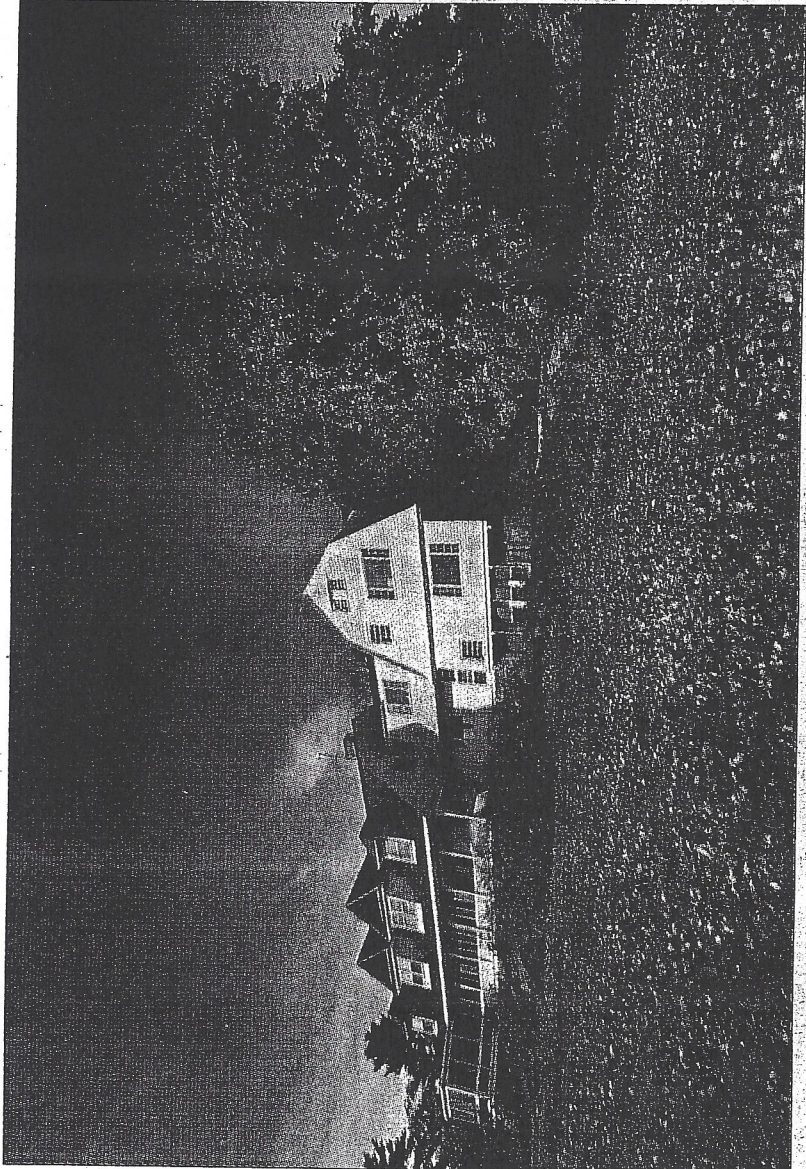
When the Forest Society purchased the property in 2000, its goal was to preserve open space, Difley said.

"We bought it because of the land and the access to the water," she said. "It wasn't about the house. It was about the land."

Billie had even included a clause in the deed stating the cottage must be destroyed within two years of her death.

But when state and local historians discovered the 1888 home could be razed, they implored the Forest Society to find a way to save it.

After negotiations between Billie, the Forest Society and historians, an agreement to save the home was reached. The deed was



Rich Beauchesne/rbeauchesne@seacoastonline.com

**The main house at Creek Farm sits on some 35.2 acres on Sagamore Creek in Portsmouth.**

changed so that the Forest Society would partner with an organization whose use of the home was compatible with Billie's preservationist intent. If the society could not find a partner within two years of Billie's death, the home would be destroyed.

Now with Billie's death in May, the clock has begun ticking away at the Forest Society's deadline. According to James Garvin, state architectural historian for the state Division of Historical Resources, Creek Farm Cottage is a perfect representation of the summer homes built by wealthy Boston families at the turn of the

20th century. "This house is the most magnificent and least changed example," Garvin said in an interview this past week.

The cottage, which is a mansion for the sprawling, wooden land architect Alexander Wadsworth Longfellow, relative of

poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The stately residence served as the summer home for Boston Brahmin Arthur Carey until his death in 1953.

Garvin said details like the fine woodwork inside the house and the turret clock above the entrance make Creek Farm Cottage one of the best preserved exam-

1905. Garvin joked the property's serene landscapes encouraged peace between the bitter enemies.

Today, the Forest Society rents out the cottage, which has been split into apartments, as it looks to find another use for the building. Difley said the society has had conversations with a few interested parties but has yet to find the right partner.

Part of the difficulty in finding a partner stems from the restrictions on the home placed in Billie's deed. The deed states the cottage must be used for environment-related purposes, whether they be for education or recreation. It could also be used by a nonprofit or public natural resource agency as a meeting or office space. An apartment building, hotel, private residence, or anything for profit or commercial use is not allowed.

Difley also noted a lessee would have to take over the house's maintenance costs, as well as foot the bill for much-needed capital improvements.

Difley said she hopes the Forest Society can find a renter who will match its vision of making Creek Farm a place for public education and recreation.

"We thought it would be a jewel among our reservations on the Seacoast," Difley said. "The idea of ensuring that anyone could have access to the water no matter what their financial status is."

If you or your organization is interested in leasing Cottage Creek Cottage, please contact Jane Difley at the Society for Protection of New Hampshire Forests at 224-9945.