

# The Way We Were

## Reminiscing with Kathleen Anderson

by Lisa Capone



*A self-taught ornithologist, Betty Anderson in 1995 became the first non-Ph.D. to receive the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Arthur A. Allen Award for outstanding contributions to the science.*

Jerry & Marcy Monkleman

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**Like it was yesterday**, Kathleen Anderson recalls telling a fellow birder in 1966 that she had made stealthy forays to a place along the South Shore that would be the perfect location for a bird observatory. Unfortunately, she told Rosalie Fiske, it was someone's private property. As Anderson described the place now known simply as "Manomet," she saw recognition register on Fiske's face. It turns out the property belonged to Fiske's cousin, Roger Ernst; soon after, Fiske, now deceased, asked her cousin's widow for permission to net and band birds there.

"She had it in mind all along and was surprised that I knew about it," remembers Anderson, Manomet's original executive director. "I felt guilty telling her, yes, I've trespassed a few times to look over the bluff!"

In the fall of 1966, not long after that conversation, a cadre of volunteer birders — most associated with the South Shore Bird Club — began banding birds at Manomet. For the first three years, until it opened as a permanent research station in 1969, Manomet served as a banding site for Operation Recovery (OR), a five-year project to study the nature of avian migration along the East Coast. By 1968 when OR ended, Anderson ("Betty" to her friends), Rosalie Fiske and her husband John had visited other bird observatories — the Fiskes in Great Britain and Anderson on the California coast. Eager to replicate what they saw, the Fiskes convinced Ruth Ernst to bequeath her house and land to found a non-profit bird observatory, and asked Anderson to be its first director. Thus, in August 1969, the Manomet Bird Observatory (MBO) was born.

For the next 15 years, Anderson nurtured both the organization and the careers of many students, interns and young scientists who passed through its doors. In the process, she oversaw its evolution from a simple banding station to a widely-respected scientific observatory, performing what she calls "cutting edge" research and hosting famous ornithologists from the U.S. and Europe.

### The Early Days

"It felt in ways pioneering, and it felt enthusiastic," recalls Trevor Lloyd-Evans, now Manomet's Landbird Program director, who left the British Trust for Ornithology in 1972 to become Manomet's first full-time employee. "We felt we were doing things here that other folks weren't doing, which was exciting."

Exciting as it was, Anderson admits that in the beginning "I was flying by the seat of my pants," and very often frustrated by a lack of funding. John Fiske,

a retired financier, raised Manomet's initial start-up money, Anderson said, but when an expected endowment failed to materialize "it was hand-to-mouth all the time, never knowing from one month to the next how I'd pay salaries."

"There was a constant hustle for raising funding, which occupies an incredible amount of your time when you're just starting out. Volunteers did all the payroll, the library, membership. If the house needed painting, we all stopped what we were doing and painted the house," Lloyd-Evans remembers.

Fortunately for Manomet, Anderson's talents went beyond discovering secret birding spots. Just as the opportunity to meet and work with a diverse array of enthusiastic people is what Anderson calls the most rewarding aspect of her Manomet career, her ability to attract talented people and foster in them a lifelong interest in natural science is the living legacy she has bestowed.

"The spirit that existed here was shared enjoyment of and commitment to understanding birds and bird conservation. Most people were already committed — she helped catalyze that commitment into an esprit de corps," said Senior Scientist Brian Harrington, who joined Manomet's staff shortly after Lloyd-Evans in 1972. "That's what attracted me here. She had the kind of enthusiasm that really let ideas bloom — or flop. But you had the opportunity to take them to their logical end or their logical point of growth."

Grace Tuckerman of Cohasset has been a volunteer bander since the year after Anderson's work at Manomet began. She remembers signing on after hearing Anderson lecture at the Hingham Public Library — during which Anderson "took a little owl right out of her pocket."

"She's a female Pied Piper. She was just so enthusiastic about everything that you just knew you wanted to do it with her," says Tuckerman,

who continues to volunteer at Manomet for the opportunity of "being outdoors and meeting people I'd never meet any other way."

### Always a Naturalist

To hear Anderson describe it, becoming a naturalist came, well, naturally. A native of Southeastern Massachusetts, she grew up alternating summers in Carver and at her grandparents' ranch in Montana. Her father left Massachusetts as a young man, traveling throughout the West, living the adventurous life of an outdoorsman, and then marrying her mother, "a ranch girl from Montana." As a child, Anderson remembers a large wall calendar in the family's kitchen with spaces for recording events such as the day the first robin was sighted, when the peas were planted, or dates of first and last frosts.

"By the time I was eight or nine I was keeping a notebook of what I'd seen. I don't remember not being interested (in nature), but certainly my parents were the reason," Anderson said during a recent interview in her East Middleboro home. "We were always racing in with dan-

delions and violets and that kind of stuff. Anything to do with the natural world was what we talked about, so how could I not be interested?"

Harrington says Anderson is "one of the better informed natural historians I know. She is an extremely knowledgeable person and she's done it all herself, which is really remarkable." In 1995, Anderson received the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Arthur A. Allen Award for her outstanding contributions to ornithology. She was the first person without a Ph.D. — in fact, the first without a college degree — to earn the prestigious prize awarded previously to renowned ornithologists such as Roger Tory Peterson and Chandler Robbins.

A self-taught ornithologist, Anderson worked for the U.S. Public Health Service field station in Southeastern Massachusetts (later taken over by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health [DPH]) just following a serious outbreak of equine encephalitis in the 1950s. As part of the agency's study of whether wild birds were transporting the virus to Massachusetts, Anderson directed the netting and blood sampling of



Landbird Program Director Trevor Lloyd-Evans teaches a class in 1973 — shortly after he became Manomet's first full-time employee.

birds at High Pines, an island of thickets on Duxbury Beach. There, during 1965 and 1966, she supervised banding volunteers such as the Fiskes and Paddy Wade, who now chairs Manomet's Board of Trustees. By the end of 1966, Anderson's research proved that the virus was not being carried from the north by birds. It was against this backdrop — having assembled a corps of some 40 volunteers over two autumns on Duxbury

*Attracting young people to Manomet and instilling in them a lifelong commitment to conservation science were hallmarks of Betty Anderson's 15 years at Manomet's helm.*

Beach — that Anderson and the Fiskes began to consider locations for a permanent bird research station on the South Shore. While they pursued their goal of a banding station at Manomet, Anderson's DPH research shifted to Raynham's Hockomock Swamp.

For three years, she alternated between operating mist nets at both Hockomock and Manomet — staying five nights a week at Manomet, and rushing home in between to fix meals for her husband (late Paul Anderson) and two teenage children. She gave up her job at the DPH field station when Manomet opened as a permanent research station in August 1969.

### Aspiring Scientists and Distinguished Leaders

"I envisioned Manomet as being a low-key, full-time research station, a place where students and volunteers could, with a minimum number of professionals, work together, increase knowledge about bird biology and give young people...the stimulation of being exposed to birds and people working with birds," Anderson said. "The interns came from a tremendous discrepancy of backgrounds. We had farm boys from Iowa and Kansas. We had heirs of some great fortunes. We had children of Irish immigrants. I mean, we had people from all kinds of backgrounds, but, there, they were all on an equal footing and it was a yeasty mix."

*Inspired by her parents, Betty Anderson began keeping a nature journal when she was eight or nine years old. During her time at Manomet, she kept two journals — one for Manomet observations (pictured), and another at home.*  
Photo: Jerry & Marcy Monkman

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One aspiring scientist that was part of Anderson's mix was Wayne Petersen, now a field ornithologist with the Massachusetts Audubon Society. He and others were beneficiaries of "the famous Betty Anderson dinner parties," says Betty Petersen, Wayne's wife and Manomet's Birders' Exchange coordinator.

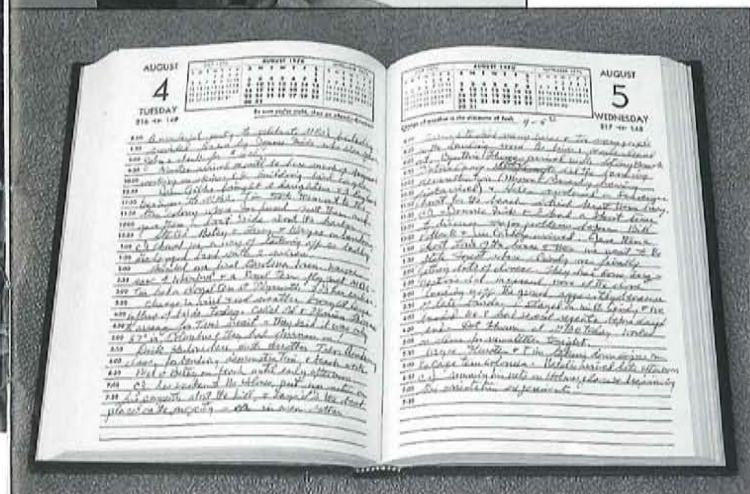
"She would invite somebody like a Wayne Petersen, whose career she wanted to foster and push along, to come to dinner. That's how Wayne was introduced to many, many famous people who he never ever would have had access to," she said. "Betty Anderson is the person who has catapulted Wayne into his present career. Absolutely."

The "famous people" often found either around Anderson's dinner table or conducting impromptu talks at lunch in Manomet's kitchen have names well known in serious birding circles.

"I tried to have an ongoing program of distinguished scientists," Anderson said, "people like Archie Hagar, Bill Drury, Jim Baird — and there would be visiting ornithologists



Manomet Photo Collection



who would come through every once in a while. Whenever I knew that some famous ornithologist was coming by, I would ask them to come and speak to the interns at lunchtime. It was a lively place.”

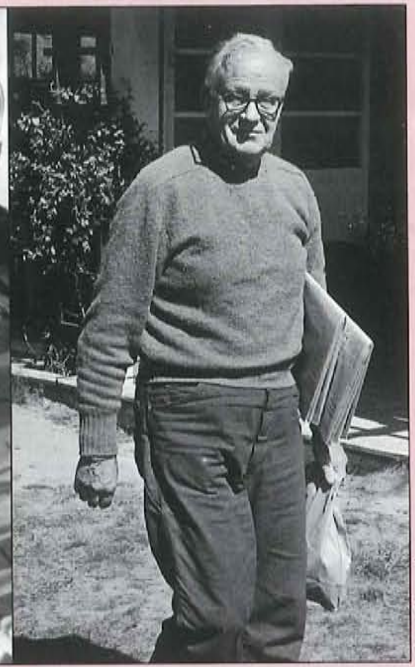
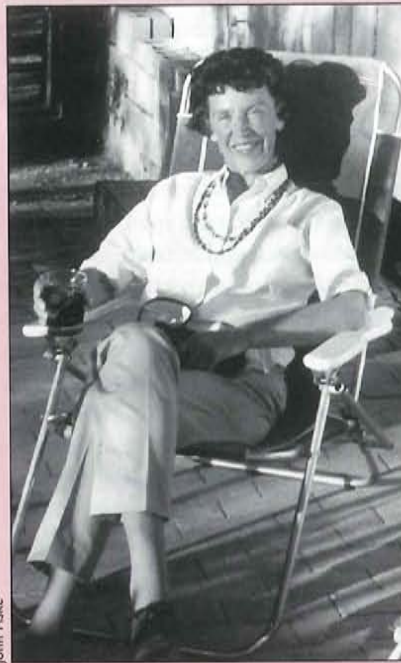
Hagar (a former state ornithologist), Drury (former director of research for Massachusetts Audubon), and Baird (former Massachusetts Audubon vice president) were members of an advisory committee Anderson assembled to ensure the scientific integrity of the fledgling organization’s work. Other members included Erma (Jonnie) Fisk, a bird bander who arranged Anderson’s first birding trip to Belize — a step that would eventually lead to Manomet’s avian and forestry research there; and Chandler Robbins, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist who encouraged Manomet to begin bird survey work in Belize in 1983.

Despite often feeling like she was “working in an eggbeater,” Anderson continued as executive director until 1984. During that time, her crowning achievement was the active involvement of young people — interns, students and volunteers — in Manomet’s research. “It’s more than just that they put a bit of energy in it while they were there,” she says. “They got something more out of it. And they tell me about it: Manomet was the pivotal point in their careers.”

With pride and joy, Anderson has watched those careers take flight. At the 100th anniversary meeting of the American Ornithologists Union, Anderson calculated that a quarter of the participants had a prior association with Manomet.

“Manomet was everywhere. Students were giving papers, becoming known for their research,” she says, rattling off a litany of names of former interns who’ve gone on to successful careers in conservation science. “I’d say that was one of the great rewards.”

*(Lisa Capone is the editor of Conservation Sciences.)*



## Manomet’s Founders: Rosalie and John Fiske

No recounting of Manomet’s history would be complete without a tribute to the unique contributions made by its founders, Rosalie and John Fiske. The Fiskes worked with Kathleen (Betty) Anderson on a national project to identify key migratory areas for landbirds in the mid-1960s — an endeavor that led to creation of the Manomet Bird Observatory (MBO). Rosalie had spent childhood summers at her cousin Roger Ernst’s Manomet summer home; through her efforts, Ernst’s widow, Ruth, agreed to deed the summer house and property to a new non-profit Manomet Trust in 1969. While Rosalie secured a home for MBO’s research, John used his connections at the New York Fiduciary Trust to raise start-up money.

Both John and Rosalie remained active supporters of Manomet’s mission until their deaths in 1986 and 1999, respectively. Rosalie’s considerable knowledge of and love for birds and bird habitats worldwide made for many a lively conversation with the staff, and contributed to the development of sound board policies. Her exceptional knowledge and ability as a gardener and her special concern for native plants helped guide the rebirth of Manomet’s garden — a place that had delighted her as a child.

Together and individually, Rosalie and John provided Manomet with never-failing wise guidance, generous appreciation and support and energetic enthusiasm. No organization has been luckier in its founders.

— Linda Leddy