

Views *from* Mount Grace



SPRING 2020
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Since 1986 serving:

Ashburnham

Athol

Barre

Bernardston

Erving

Gardner

Gill

Greenfield

Hardwick

Hubbardston

Leyden

Montague

New Salem

Northfield

Orange

Petersham

Phillipston

Royalston

Templeton

Warwick

Wendell

Westminster

Winchendon



Robbins Brook is a great marshy area providing ideal habitat for a variety of ducks and wildlife on the newly conserved Hillis property.

Life on the Pond

BY SARAH WELLS

Last April, I packed my gear into my worn-out backpack, shoved some extra batteries for the GPS unit into my jacket pocket for good measure, and headed to the Hillis property. Nearly 170 acres of woods in Rindge and Winchendon, the Hillis land surrounds Robbins Brook and the human-made Robbins Pond, both of which are known to be home to a number of “species of greatest conservation need.” My job was to conduct a “physical site assessment”: to walk around, check boundaries, and take good notes. Our beloved plans and maps only tell part of the story. Nothing beats walking the land.

Sometimes I forget how many places there are around here where you can step off the road, walk for a few minutes, and then feel completely enveloped by the woods. The Hillis property is like that. No noise from roads or neighbors penetrated the quiet. I felt like a thunderous intruder crashing through the woods. A group of ducks floating in the brook instantly distracted me. Fumbling for my camera, I stumbled upon the bones of a wild turkey, the skeleton almost entirely intact. I slowed down. A little while later, I found a bone from a deer leg. Beyond that, deer scat and otter scat lying side by side. This is what “critical wildlife habitat” on my map looked like on the ground. I wondered how many creatures were watching me as I roamed “alone” through the quiet woods.

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Dear Friends,

I love that in Mount Grace’s 34th year the projects described in these pages clearly echo the mission we’ve been dedicated to all along. Challenges certainly change with the times, but the needs of the community for clean water, fresh air, healthy food, and refreshed spirits are constant.

Getting outside is important for everyone (even for those of us who work in conservation). But, if we’re not careful, it can wind up being like many things we know are good for us, easier said than done. I hope you will let the spring flowers, fattening tree buds, and chattering birds have your attention for a while. Just ten (or even one) minutes each day of focusing on the wind through the trees, the moon rising in the distance, or the feel of the air on your skin can make a positive difference to health and well-being.

Whether it’s the open trails at the Feldmans’; the wilds of Earleacres; or a visit to a farm like Sunset View or a farm market, like Quabbin Harvest, that calls to your senses, you can find your way to many places conserved by Mount Grace over the years via the interactive map at mountgrace.org.

Putting in the extra effort to ensure that farmland with farmer housing passes to another farmer’s hands and that local markets exist for farmers to sell produce and products at isn’t easy, but it is important to the local economy, a longstanding part of our mission. 35,000 acres conserved so far is rewarding. But in the context of there being more than one million priority acres left to be protected, we still have a long way to go - together.

Thank you,

Leigh Youngblood
Executive Director

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust protects significant natural, agricultural, and scenic areas and encourages land stewardship in North Central and Western Massachusetts for the benefit of the environment, the economy, and future generations.

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We welcome your articles, photographs, comments, and suggestions. For information about becoming a member or to request a change of address, please contact:

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Earleacres: A Missing Piece of the Puzzle Protected

BY FLETCHER HARRINGTON

Walking through the peaceful landscape of mature forest and meandering streams at the Arthur Iversen Conservation Area in Warwick, you would not know that a large tract of land at its center was not conserved. Most of the 500+ acres that make up the Arthur Iversen Conservation Area were protected in the early 1990's with the exception of a 50-acre parcel right in the middle of the conservation area.

That piece of land was most recently owned by Larry Fitzmaurice, who currently sits on our Board of Directors. The land was purchased in 1967 by Larry's aunt and grandfather, the Earle family. Larry recalls many hours spent in the woods with his siblings exploring the many natural treasures of the property, dubbed "Earleacres" by the family.

When much of the land was protected, the Earleacres parcel was not included due to a technical issue that predated the Earles. Recently, Larry reaffirmed his desire to see the parcel conserved, and with it, part of his family history. So, Mount Grace resumed diligence on the project and in December of 2019 we were able to accept Larry's generous donation of the land. The parcel is now designated "Earleacres" in honor of Larry's aunt and grandparents.

Earleacres is now protected in perpetuity, filling a missing piece of the puzzle for the Arthur Iversen Conservation Area. The nearly 600-acre puzzle forms an ecosystem supporting several threatened birds and plants as well as inspiring landscape features like the Devil's Washbowl waterfall. You can find directions and trail maps on our website to go explore this peaceful place.



Mount Grace member Brad Compton exploring Earleacres, a newly added property to the Arthur Iversen Conservation Area.

Life on the Pond *> continued from page 1*

When I popped out of the woods to walk along the shoreline of Robbins Pond, the beaver patrol announced my arrival, slapping its tail to remind the neighborhood I was still there. Once I reached the mounded berm of the dam, I again saw a sleek dark head penetrate the pond's surface. At first, I thought that this was a momma otter carrying her baby on her back. Then I remembered it was early April. The rambunctious, noisy, rolling water dance playing out before me was a decidedly pre-baby activity. This seemed like a good time to pick a comfy rock, eat my lunch, and—for the sake of a comprehensive assessment—record a few videos of the frisky otters. Danny Hillis and Taylor Milsal see this land as a wildlife sanctuary, and it's easy to see why. In December, Danny and Taylor donated conservation restrictions on their nearly 170 acres to Mount Grace, ensuring that countless generations of ducks, turkeys, deer, beavers, and otters will live in the woods and waters of this special place. Our entire region benefits from generous acts like these to protect and steward critical wildlife habitat.

Sunset View Farm: Officially a Whole Farm Forever

BY CAMILLE DUQUET

As farmers all over New England were gearing up for a new growing season last year, we embarked on a campaign with Chuck and Livvy Tarleton to protect their beautiful Sunset View Farm. Most recognized by its colorful farmstand filled with delicious organic produce grown a few hundred feet away, the 70-acre parcel is bordered by Route 140 on one side and by the North Central Pathway on the other. Chuck and Livvy knew that if nothing was done to help protect this land, it would quickly become house lots.



An aerial photo of Sunset View Farm.

As we began our partnership, it became obvious the importance of not only protecting the land, but ensuring it will be passed on to a farmer who will continue the 230-year old legacy of farming this land. So began the work of raising funds for an Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value. This tool ensures the land and its buildings are sold to farmers at an agricultural value. The goal is to keep the land affordable and in the hands of farmers—forever.



Livvy and Chuck Tarleton with visitors at their Open Farm Day event.

Livvy Tarleton reflects on the impact of this campaign, “We know our farm is an important asset to the community because we hear every day from shoppers. We take great delight in knowing that they will always have access to local produce because of this campaign.” The immense generosity of shoppers, community members, and farm conservation supporters throughout the state made this campaign a huge success for local farms and food. Friend of the farm and supporter, Marie Urquhart, explains, “Thanks to the hard work and generosity of many, Sunset View Farm will continue to provide fresh vegetables and fruits to our area. Locally grown produce means this food source is as fresh and nutrient rich as it could be. Can’t get better than that!”

This spring, Sunset View Farm officially became the 4th Whole Farm Forever protected by Mount Grace! With the Tarletons and all our supporters, we are thrilled to be able to continue to protect farmland and support local food.

Keeping Quabbin Harvest Going

BY CATHY STANTON

What would we lose if Quabbin Harvest wasn't there? That's the question that brought dozens of co-op members and supporters out to a board meeting on a cold February evening to discuss what it would take to keep the business alive.

Two years ago, the co-op board accepted that the store may never be sustainable on food sales alone. We've been pursuing other revenue sources since then—but the weight of a long-running deficit has resulted in several “can we make it?” moments. The latest felt like it might be the final one. We asked ourselves that sobering question: What would be lost if we closed? Here's what we realized:

We would lose programs providing fresh, high-quality food to low-income eaters through the Healthy Incentives Program, senior shares, and other initiatives.



Good food from Nalini's Kitchen is just one of the reasons we value Quabbin Harvest.
Photo: Oliver Scott Photography



Morey Phippen flipping the switch to celebrate the installation of solar panels at the Quabbin Harvest Food Co-op in February.

Area farms and food businesses, many of them very small businesses like ourselves, would lose an outlet for their products—more than \$150,000 worth in the past year.

We would lose the good foods from Nalini's Kitchen. There would be less business and life in Orange's struggling downtown.

There would be financial losses too, but board members and attendees at the February meeting agreed that the reasons to keep going are about far more than finances. People spoke passionately about the store as a vital community resource in uncertain times and an important link in our local food chain.

At the end of the night, the board voted to move forward with a fundraising goal to cover our projected losses over the rest of 2020 and get ahead of the next “can we make it?” moments. We've already raised enough toward that goal that we feel confident about taking the next steps. We're grateful to Mount Grace's leadership for their willingness to continue in this adventure with us, and look forward to building on the good things we've created together.

MARGARET POWER-BIGGS SOCIETY

Member Profile: Ben and Susie Feldman

BY DAVID KOTKER

When Ben and Susie Feldman hosted Mount Grace's 2016 Annual Meeting at their home on Briggs Hill in Athol, it was an opportunity to realize Susie's long-held dream of bringing people out into these woods, where she was raised.

"We don't want this land to be inaccessible," Susie says, "it needs to be something people can get pleasure out of. When people come back and tell me what they saw, it's one of the most rewarding things in my life."

"As a kid," she adds, "it was marvelous. Kids don't have the freedom to go beyond their fences. To me, the woods were a playground. It became very much a part of who I am." These kinds of rural experiences came to Ben later in life. "As a guy who grew up in Elizabeth, New Jersey, the idea of people walking through your land who you don't even know isn't exactly intuitive."

So how did these two people meet, you ask? They were backstage at the theater, working sound and lights for a production of the play "J. B." in 1968. They have been a team ever since. Ben worked as Athol's Town Treasurer for 30 years while Susie taught art in the Orange schools. Ben also served on Mount Grace's Finance Committee, which was part of what inspired Ben and Susie to join the Margaret Power-Biggs Society.

The couple mulled over conserving the Briggs Hill land, which includes miles of trails connecting woods in Athol, Phillipston, and Petersham, for years, as Ben recalls: "What ultimately made



Ben and Susie Feldman celebrating their 50th anniversary on the land.

us decide to go ahead was that one of Susie's former students, [Mount Grace Conservation Director] Sarah Wells, was going to be in charge of making sure the project worked."

Ultimately Susie's vision is to protect the local landscape by teaching new generations of children to love it. "The joy the kids get out of this is something so few children have," she explains. "It's a chance to get their feet wet and their hands dirty, to find frogs and bugs, and to learn about the forest."

"But," Ben adds, "it works with adults too."

If you would like information about joining the Margaret Power-Biggs Society, please contact David Kotker at 978-248-2055 x19 or kotker@mountgrace.org.

Spring 2020 Upcoming Events

April 8th – May 6th: 2020 MA Open Space Conference Webinars
Register for a webinar today at:
massopenspaceconference.wordpress.com

Monday, April 20th – Wednesday, April 22nd
Give Back to the Land Day
In partnership with Franklin Land Trust, Kestrel Land Trust, and Hilltown Land Trust, join us for this online fundraising event.

We have made the difficult decision to postpone our in-person events until further notice. We are in the midst of planning innovative, web-based events to keep our community active and together, so please visit our website at mountgrace.org/events for more up-to-date news.



THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Grants Received:

The Bafflin Foundation \$30,000

Gifts were Received *In Memory of*

Dr. Samuel Rosenfeld
Emily Jones
Nathan Rudolph
Dr. Edgar B. Moore
Thomas Peterson
Edith Potter

Gifts were Received *In Honor of*

Rob and Kath Moore

Special Thanks from Mount Grace to ~

Red Apple Farm, Dale Monette, and Ken Levine for supporting our Giving Tuesday Campaign with a great event;

Derek Estler for creating the Earleacres sign;

Eric Peterson, Jay and Iris Vicencio Rasku, Mimi Hellen Jones, Lee Thomas, Brian Hall, Cynthia Durham, Darlene and Johanna Lawlor-Moore, Gay Roberts, Christine Duerring, Daniel Ewald, Erika Schaper, and Lis McLoughlin for monitoring our conservation restrictions;

Eric Peterson, Jamie MacCartney, and Martin Bowers for clearing/maintaining our trails;

Laurel Facey for volunteering in our office;

Tom Ellsworth for providing maintenance services at Skyfields Arboretum;

Kris Gunderman for snowplowing the walkways at Skyfields Arboretum;

Christian Hains for constructing the official “flip” for the Flip the Switch Party at Quabbin Harvest;

Dan Monette & Karol Zub, Steve Rawson, Martin Bowers, Carl Kamp, and Dave Small for flagging the trail and future signage at Eagle Reserve Conservation Area;

Steve Rawson, Ray Jackson, Jean McCurdy, Julia Blyth, and Gary Brigham for marking boundaries on our properties;

Taylor Milsal & Danny Hillis, Alden Booth & Lissa Greenough, Paul Wanta, Paul Catanzaro, Diane Nassif, Cathy Stanton & Quabbin Harvest, and Ron Wolanin for planning and leading Mount Grace events;

Phyllis Damon-Kominz, the Lexington Field & Garden Club, and the Cary Memorial Library for inviting Mount Grace to speak in Lexington;

And all of our dedicated committee members for assisting our staff in moving our mission forward!



This spring, we are excited to announce two new hires: Marielena Lima, Communications and Engagement Coordinator, and Rocio Lalanda, Farm Conservation Manager!



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Let's Plant Native!!

Donate to Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust TODAY and help us plant native species! Native plantings attract bird species, butterflies and other pollinators, and provide habitat and food sources for a variety of wildlife. By donating as part of our Spring Appeal, you will help us plant native species as part of our restoration work at our conservation areas. Your generous donation of \$1,000, \$250, or \$100 will help us raise the funds we need to conserve more acres of forestland and farmland in our region. How best to celebrate your sustaining gifts than by planting a native tree, bush, or perennial on one of our conservation areas?

