

Views from Mount Grace

MOUNT GRACE LAND CONSERVATION TRUST • CONSERVING THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE



FALL 2015
VOLUME 26, NO. 2
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MassLIFT-AmeriCorps volunteers prepare the Just Roots garden for winter in Greenfield. Mount Grace has worked with more than 30 local farms and gardens to support sustainable food production.

Investing in Local Agriculture

BY DIANE NASSIF

I just bought a small farm. "What is she up to now?" say my family and friends. I admit that I have been a wanderer in my life. I moved to the New England suburbs in 1971. After raising my son I moved to Boston in the 1990s. Five years ago I moved to the North Quabbin area. And now I bought a farm.

What, indeed, is this about? Having trained and been an urban sociologist, formally and informally, I might explain this as a first-hand investigation of land use patterns in Massachusetts. But this is a conscious decision of another sort: I am divesting my retirement portfolio of fossil fuels and investing in the local land.

When I moved to Orange I began a journey to learn how land can be used for a common purpose—not for profit or development. Although I had been a Trustees of Reservations member for years, I sort of thought of this as a way to get a reduced parking fee at Crane's Beach and also support other good things. Here in the North Quabbin, I learned that I should have taken land conservation more seriously.



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Dear Friends,

Conservation as an economic engine converged as a theme for this issue quite naturally. In Northfield, the local business association requested a presentation about the Alderbrook Meadows Sanctuary project at its monthly meeting. Because we provided a thorough assessment and illustration of the many values this one project offers to diverse community members, including snowmobile enthusiasts, bird-watchers, and those with limited mobility, it was easy to build support for a local amenity attractive to tourists and residents alike. Businesses recognize that quality of life is a primary motivator for employees, customers, and investors.



This summer I heard two stories in one week from Mount Grace members divesting their retirement portfolios and buying a farm with the funds, either to lease or to learn to farm. At a time when we are increasingly hearing calls for fossil fuel divestment, this is an intriguing example of think globally act locally. With her decision, Diane went from having remotely comprehensible investments to directly helping address a crucial problem facing farmers of high prices limiting their ability to buy land for growing food. Divestment – country style – is a promising variation of economically successful buy local food efforts.

Home-based and land-based businesses have always been the building blocks of community in New England. This is wonderfully evident at the upcoming North Quabbin Garlic & Arts Festival. You'll find New Salem Preserves there; just look for the beaming smile of Carol Hillman. At the Mount Grace table we'll have a preview of our project, Farm Values: Civic Agriculture at the Crossroads, powered by anthropologist Cathy Stanton.

Your financial investment in Mount Grace helps sustain the land we love, jobs and businesses we need, and opportunities for future generations.

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.

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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New Trail Coming Soon! Alderbrook Meadows is Protected

BY DAVID KOTKER

The Town of Northfield now owns a conservation restriction on Bill and Nancy Ames' 142-acre Alderbrook Meadows Sanctuary located just off Route 63 south of town. A new handicapped-accessible loop trail is now planned for the site, leading from a small parking area right on Route 63 to an observation deck overlooking a beaver pond on the property.

Mount Grace began working with Bill and Nancy Ames to protect the land in 2010. The Trust has submitted a grant request to fund the half-mile trail, which would be the area's first American Disabilities Act compliant nature trail. Additional plans include the installation of a bike rack and a parking area at the new trailhead.

The November 2014 Northfield Town Meeting voted unanimously to protect the land, a landscape of farmed fields, woods, beaver ponds, and brooks just south of the historic Beers Mountain. Support for the project came from state grants, Town CPA funds, and gifts from residents, the Fields Pond Foundation, the Snowmobile Association of Massachusetts, the Greater Northfield Watershed Association, the Northfield Area Tourism and Business Association, and the Greenfield Savings Bank.

"With the loss of Northfield's largest employer in 2004, we have been working to re-build a local economy based on heritage, outdoors, and agri-tourism," explained Joan Stoia of the Tourism and Business Association. "Alderbrook Meadows has the potential to draw significant numbers of visitors and multiply

the impact of other private and public investments such as the Northfield Golf Club, the New England Scenic Trail, and the Schell Bridge."

"We are so pleased to be able to protect this land, that we cherish, forever," added Nancy Ames, "especially since the new trail will make it possible for people to come out here and bear witness to the beauty of the land. Bill and I are truly thankful to the many neighbors and partners who helped make this possible. It took a real team effort to protect this remarkable place."



Hikers tried out the proposed route of the accessible trail in a series of walks before the Town Meeting vote.

Investing in the North Quabbin > *continued from page 1*

I was retired and had time to look into things more deeply than before. I got involved with Quabbin Harvest, the North Quabbin Community Food Co-op. I learned about techniques for growing food everywhere from Seeds of Solidarity Farm. I became a bee keeper and learned about the effects of agri-business on our food and pollinators. I hiked the woods and came to love the natural beauty here.

I decided that I needed to support local organic sustainable farming in a personal way, hence my purchase of 2.5 acres of land that has been farmed since 1800. It is too small to be protected by a land trust in the typical way. But I can conserve it in my own way.

I withdraw money from my retirement account each month to pay for this property. In my mind I am taking my money out of the pervasive system of stocks and bonds and putting it into the local land. This is a risk, of course, as is any investment. But I have more peace of mind knowing that I am taking care of land rather than investing in fossil fuels.

I am a bit too old to learn to farm this land myself, although I have some thriving gardens. I found a young woman and her friends to create a large garden on my field this summer. When she posted some pictures of the garden online, I loved seeing it. Even better, one of the comments was "Heaven on Earth." When I saw that I knew I was doing the right thing.

MARGARET POWER-BIGGS SOCIETY

MEMBER PROFILE: Carol Hillman

BY DAVID KOTKER

“It all began with an Indigo Bunting sitting atop a maple tree singing its heart out.”

That’s how Carol Hillman begins her book *A Sense of Place*—a reflection on the farm where she runs New Salem Preserves. The Indigo Bunting was singing on a fall day in 1968 when Carol first saw the property, then known locally as the Stowell Farm.

The colonial farmhouse and orchards had been abandoned for years, with some trees shooting up to 70 feet tall, but the Bunting’s song was an inspiration for Carol and her late husband Joel, who bought the farm, and began gradually to restore it.

“One year we got only one apple,” says Carol. “It took years to prune and tend the trees until they bore fruit.” By 1980, Carol was selling preserves to specialty retailers in New York City, as a framed letter from Balducci’s requesting preserves or “any other item you may have in stock” attests.

Carol has been a member of the Margaret Power-Biggs Society since 2006. She joined together with neighbors to support the conservation of nearby West Hill—where 133 acres slated for development were ultimately protected by Mount Grace in 2009.



PHOTO: © ADAM LAIPSON

Today, Carol and her long-time partner Bob Colnes sell heirloom apples, cider, donuts, sun-cooked preserves, and more. After 47 years of meticulous restoration, the colonial farmhouse and carefully-tended orchards offer a taste of rural Massachusetts today—where a working farm feeds neighbors and epicures alike while nestled amid protected lands.

“What I love is when young families come here with their children and have cider and donuts and sit and look at the Quabbin and the apple trees,” Carol adds. “The feeling that people can come here to relax and enjoy this place is really what’s important to me.”

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

Sparking Conservation Successes Across the Commonwealth

BY SARAH WELLS

A new program administered by the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership is sparking new conservation successes in our region and beyond.

Landowners wishing to conserve land may find the costs associated with land conservation insurmountable. Appraisals, legal fees, title exams, and surveys can add up to thousands of dollars.

But an innovative program funded through the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation’s Working Forest Initiative is helping to overcome this barrier to conservation. The Forest Conservation Due Diligence Grant Program now provides grants for transaction costs when landowners donate

land or conservation restriction value. This year, landowners in Hardwick, Ashburnham and as far away as Dudley, Massachusetts benefited from these small grants.

The program is administered by Mount Grace through the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership. This past year, the Forest Conservation Due Diligence Grant Program:

- Provided funding to help Henry and Judy Kohn protect 21 acres of woodlands and wetland habitat in Hardwick by donating a conservation restriction to the East Quabbin Land Trust.
- Enabled Steve and Claire Hjelm and Steve’s sister Phyllis Geiger

Families Create a New Town Forest for Athol

BY DAVID KOTKER

Ralph and Gloria Stoddard co-own just over 100 acres of woods and wetlands with Ralph's sister Gloria Meuse. Their land runs from White Pond down to South Athol Pond, and is knit together by logging trails and discontinued historical roads that wind up and down past cellar holes and wetlands teeming with wildlife. The Nature Conservancy's analysis of resilient landscapes considers about half this property to be crucial for survival of native species in a changing climate.

In 2014, the family joined with Mount Grace and a group of local landowners to protect their land together in the Quabbin Heritage Landscape Project. This summer, the Stoddard project became the first of the Quabbin Heritage properties to be permanently protected. The Town of Athol will own and manage this land—along with the LeBlanc property next door, also a Quabbin Heritage project—as a new conservation area. Abutting the protected 330 acres around the old Morgan Memorial Fresh Air Camp, the new conservation area offers the town a destination for hikers and hunters, as well as opportunities for forestry.



Ralph Stoddard and his sister Gloria Meuse touring the land with Mount Grace.

The family knows all these opportunities well. Ralph can show several stands where he has cut cordwood on the land, which has been enrolled in Massachusetts' Chapter 61 forestry program for decades. Gloria tells the story of the Stoddards' great-grandfather Zenas Stoddard, who would always hide his gun under a boulder near the train stop on the old Rabbit Line of the Athol & Enfield Railway before taking the train to school so that he could walk back across the land hunting on his way home.

Ralph Stoddard and Gloria Meuse summed up the family's thoughts in an email: "We are proud to have this land protected forever for all generations to enjoy the quiet solitude and beauty. Our land has been part of the Stoddard heritage for as long as we can remember. It has been handed down from our Great Grandfather

Zenas, to our Grandfather Harry S. Stoddard, to his sons Clyde and Earl in the 1950s. So it was very important for us to try and protect this land."



to transfer 95 acres of woodlands, wetlands and a branch of the Souhegan River in Ashburnham to the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game.

- Helped Francis and Thomas Wieloch in Dudley donate 70 acres of woods and ponds to the Dudley Conservation Land Trust and Mass Audubon.

"The Wieloch brothers and the Dudley Conservation Land Trust are most grateful to the Program for covering the costs of the title search, appraisal, survey, and legal fees," said Sandy Peterson of the Dudley Conservation Land Trust. "This grant has been instrumental in protecting this outright land donation of 70 acres of prime forest."

For more information about the Forest Conservation Due Diligence Grant program, visit <http://www.mountgrace.org/state-grants-now-available-landowners>



PHOTO: SANDY PETERSON

The Wieloch property in Dudley is now permanently protected thanks to the Due Diligence Grant Program.

STEWARDSHIP

Walk the Path Less Traveled— Mount Grace Trains New Volunteers

BY MARCELA MALDONADO

Today the Stewardship department, Marcela Maldonado and Mallory Durkee, is training a new Conservation Monitor volunteer. The property assigned to this volunteer is a beautiful piece of land in the North Quabbin, complete with a working farm. Our new volunteer is going to love it.

After the farmer gives us a tour of the fields we set off to see the rest of the property. The property converts into forest very quickly after the farm fields and soon we are deep within it. As we walk we explain the monitor's duty to our volunteer.

The volunteer must walk as much of the property as he can each year, making sure to always visit trails, boundaries, and other high use places. We ask him to make notes of everything he finds interesting, including the things that may raise questions he can refer back to us at the office. Soon our hike is over—the property is perfect condition!



New Stewardship Program Manager Marcela Maldonado on the trail at the Arthur Iversen Conservation Area.

Our new volunteer will write a report on what he saw today. Next year he will go out on his own. By doing so he will increase our capacity to manage all of our protected lands. If you would also like to be a Conservation Monitor volunteer, contact us today!

FALL 2015 UPCOMING EVENTS *Join Us!*

**North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival
Forster's Farm, Orange
Chestnut Hill Road
Saturday & Sunday, September 26-27
10am-5pm**

Experience the agricultural, artistic, and cultural bounty of our region in a landscape of protected farms and hills. Stop by the Mount Grace booth for updates on local land protection and to meet the staff, board, and MassLIFT-AmeriCorps members.

**Annual Meeting
Sugarbush Farm, Wendell
Davis Road
Saturday, October 3
11am-2pm
\$25 per ticket**

Mount Grace is currently working with Bill and Laurel Facey to help protect this 74-acre farm as a permanently affordable Massachusetts farm. This is Mount Grace's third affordable farm project, and the first in Wendell.

Join us on the land to see one of Franklin County's most beautiful farms. After the meeting, Bill will lead a tour of the farm, where he raises grass-fed beef cows and produces maple syrup.



Sugarbush Farm, site of the 2015 Annual Meeting.

**Volunteer Workday
Skyfields Arboretum, Athol
1461 Old Keene Road
Saturday, November 7
10am-3pm**

Come enjoy the outdoors at Skyfields and help us make it more enjoyable for others. We need active people to help with pruning and invasives removal as well as light maintenance of the grounds and trails. Please bring work gloves. Food will be provided.

**Connecting Communities Hike
Fern Glenn, Winchendon
Teel Road
Saturday, November 21
9am-noon**

Join our stewardship team for a walk on this 130-acre conservation area donated to Mount Grace in 1996 by Nathan Olson. The property teems with ferns of all varieties and the steep talus slopes rising on the southern edge of Fern Glenn provide habitat for porcupine and bobcat. This walk is co-sponsored by Freedom's Way and the Montachusett Regional Trails Coalition as one of the Connecting Communities Hikes: a series of hikes to increase awareness, accessibility, and appreciation for recreational trails and greenways.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Grants Received:

Fields Pond Foundation	\$20,000	Alderbrook Meadows
Tortuga Foundation	\$20,000	Wingate Farm Project
The Robert & Mary S. Cushman Fund and the Water & Land Stewardship Fund of the Greater Worcester Community Foundation	\$6,500	Unrestricted
The Leo S. Walsh Foundation	\$2,500	Unrestricted
Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts	\$1,000	Unrestricted

Gifts were received *In Memory of*: Fred Hellen and Reva Reck

Gifts were received *In Honor of*: Bobby Curley and Celtz

Special Thanks *from* Mount Grace to ~

The 2015 one-minute-movie video crew: Boyd Estus, Max Feldman, Rawn Fulton, and Phil Rabinowitz!

Mike Barry, Heather Bialecki-Canning, Richelle Brown, Patience Bundschuh, Andrea Buglione, Ted Cady, Fletcher Clark, Clear View Composting, Bill and Christine Copeland, Judy Cormier, Bob Curley, Lisa Damon, Norm Eggert, Aaron Ellison, Len and Amy Engman, Derek Estler, Elizabeth Farnsworth, Lula Field, Olivier Flagollet, Nancy Hazard, John Henshaw, Bonnie House, Gary Howland, Steve & Dede Johnson at Johnson's Farm Restaurant and Sugar House, Carl Kamp, David Koester, David Koonce, John & Carolyn Lepore, Nico Lustig, Jami MacCartney, Maple Grove Farmhouse Bakery, Dawn Marvin Ward, Janet Morrison, Tyson Neukirch, John O'Keefe, Orange Innovation Center, David Plummer, Chris Polatin, Matthew Raphael, Steve Rawson, Chris Anna Rogers, Linda Ruel Flynn, Paul Sievert, Pamela Snow, Rachel Stoler, Bill Stubblefield, Andrea Tehan Carnes, Ryan and Sarah Voiland at Red Fire Farm, Suzanne Webber, and Patricia Worth, for leading, planning, volunteering at, and hosting Mount Grace, North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership, and Greater Quabbin Food Alliance events



And thanks to the entire statewide 2014-15 MassLIFT AmeriCorps crew!

Carolyn Asbury, Warren Facey, Celt Grant, Clare Green, Pam Hanold, Bob Hardesty, Mimi Hellen Jones, MC Michael Humphries, David Koester, Rona Leventhal, Jen Paris, Cornelia Reid, Paul Richmond, Paula Sayword, Kenneth Spatcher, Peter Tusinski, the Town of Leyden, the Robertson Memorial Library, and Gary and Barbara

at Bart's Homemade Ice Cream for collaborating to support an evening of ice cream and stories in Leyden!

David Brule, Clare Green, Michael Humphries, Dan Leahy, Jean Shaughnessy, Dave Small, Robin Shtulman, Tom Wansleben, and Allen Young for making the Athol Library Storytelling event a great success

Alphonse Chenausky, Lucinda Childs & Eric Vollheim, Bob Clark, George Day, Jr., Ben Feldman, Mark Fellows, Clare Green, Christian Hains, Brian Hall, Ben Holmes, Mick Huppert, David Lockesmith, John

Moore, Jeff Perkins, David Petrovick, Warren Rice, Ginny & Don Rich, Ridge Shinn, Chad Wells, Kurt Wells, and Mary Williamson for assisting with our farmland inventory work

And thanks to the 2014-15 MassLIFT AmeriCorps cohort at Mount Grace: Mallory Durkee, Bradley Kennedy, Shannon McGowan, Margaret Owens, and Martine Wong. Your service is an inspiration to us all!



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Join us for the twenty-ninth annual meeting of Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust on Saturday, October 3 at Sugarbush Farm in Wendell. RSVP using the invitation inside to visit this beautiful example of a working New England farm.