

Views from Mount Grace

MOUNT GRACE LAND CONSERVATION TRUST • CONSERVING THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE



FALL 2017
VOLUME 28, NO. 2
INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Red Fire Farm: A Whole Farm Forever
- Diemand Farm Protects Wendell Land for the Next Generation
- Margaret Power-Biggs Society Profile
- Enjoy the Woods!
- A New Neighbor at the Phillipston Town Forest
- On the Land with a Dedicated Steward
- Celebrating Whole Farms at Red Fire Farm for our 2017 Annual Meeting
- Mount Grace Updates

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



Ryan and Sarah Voiland on the farm with their sons Wally and Chester

Red Fire Farm: A Whole Farm Forever

BY DAVID KOTKER

This summer, Ryan and Sarah Voiland realized a long-awaited dream, by selling Red Fire Farm's 122 acres in Montague to Mount Grace. The couple has no plans to move. Instead, they have signed a lifetime lease on the farm in its entirety, and will continue to run the farm in a new partnership with the trust.

The Voilands worked with Mount Grace to protect their farmhouse, buildings, greenhouses, and land together as a "Whole Farm," a new model of shared farm ownership which offers significant benefits for local farmers. Access to land and housing is one of the biggest barriers for entry into farming. "Across the country, the next generation of farmers are struggling to find secure access to land and housing," explains Leigh Youngblood, Executive Director at Mount Grace. "Land trusts can help farmers secure more affordable access to land, housing, and farm buildings. This shared ownership model, developed by Equity Trust, is one tool that can help address these challenges."

Not much has changed day to day at the farm. "I don't actually look at it all that differently," says Ryan. "We farm land we own, land Mount Grace owns, and land we lease. I look at the Mount Grace land as being just as secure as the land we own." Adds Sarah, "Land isn't really 'owned.' This model focuses more on handing down the responsibilities of stewardship for the land from generation to generation so this farm will remain a resource for the whole community."

> continued on page 3



Views from Mount Grace

FALL 2017
VOLUME 28, No.2

Dear Friends,

One of the many markings of the Bicentenary of Henry Thoreau's birth this year was the intrepid masswalkingtour.org. This multi-day musical event was fashioned after Thoreau's own "A Walk to Wachusett" essay. Mt. Wachusett rests at the eastern edge of Mount Grace's region. The Feldman project described herein is part of our landmark Quabbin Reservoir to Wachusett Mountain Forest Legacy project.



Of Thoreau's twenty books, after *Walden*, he is best known for his published essay, *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*. How many of us conservation-minded folks remember that Thoreau spent his one night in jail for refusing to pay poll taxes for six years in opposition to slavery and the U.S. invasion into Mexico? In fact, *Civil Disobedience* was written in 1849, during Thoreau's *Walden* years.

Personally, I am not surprised that an attentive naturalist, really an early ecologist, had strong opinions on civil rights for all people. In nature, the plant communities most resilient to stressors typically have high biodiversity—places like the Thousand-acre Swamp in Athol and Phillipston. It makes sense that balanced social diversity is also more stable.

In farming and forestry, too much "sameness" leads to vulnerability to stressors like disease and pests. Ryan and Sarah at Red Fire, an organic farm, and Brian Szyndlar at his woodlot make proactive efforts to build and rebuild the diversity of their lands.

With the resurgence of appreciation for the benefits of local food, many of us, myself included, have experimented with new foods and maybe altered our cooking habits because we realize it will make us healthier, and happier. We can also experiment with new relationships. To be a healthier community and nation, let's make an effort to meet and talk to people not already in our social circles. For inspiration, check out Thoreaubicentennial.org for a list of events happening through December.

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:

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust

1461 Old Keene Road
Athol, MA 01331
978-248-2043 (tel)
978-248-2053 (fax)
landtrust@mountgrace.org
Visit our web site at mountgrace.org
Follow us on Facebook and Twitter

MOUNT GRACE STAFF

Leigh Youngblood, *Executive Director*
David Graham Wolf, *Deputy Director & TerraCorps Spin-off Director*
Jay Rasku, *Community Conservation Director & Land Stewardship Director*
Sarah Wells, *Director of Land Protection*
Jamie Pottern, *Land Conservation Specialist*
Sean Pollock, *TerraCorps Program Director*
Lisa Cormier, *Administrative Director*
Carol Mayer, *Administrative Assistant*
David Kotker, *Major Gifts and Grants Manager*
John Dooley, *Finance Director*
Ben Carver, *TerraCorps Impact Manager*
Hanna Mogensen, *TerraCorps Operations and Communication Manager*

MOUNT GRACE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Steve Rawson, President	Winchendon
Nancy Allen, Vice President	Petersham
Pam Hanold, Treasurer	Montague
Max Feldman, Clerk	Petersham
David Christianson	Ashburnham
Warren Facey	Leyden
Lenny Johnson	Carlisle
Mimi Hellen Jones	Petersham/Washington DC
Bryan Long	Orange
Lis McLoughlin	Northfield
Ann Meilus	Barre
Gail Oswald	Royalston
Joel Shaughnessy	Athol
Al Siano	Greenfield
Jerry Wagener	Northfield

MOUNT GRACE MASSLIFT TERRACORPS TEAM

Camille Duquet, *Regional Conservation Coordinator*
Tinsley Galyean, *Youth Education Coordinator*
Fletcher Harrington, *Community Engagement / Land Stewardship Coordinator*
Kat Kowalski, *Regional Conservation Coordinator*
Kim Lynn Nguyen, *Land Stewardship Coordinator*

mountgrace.org

@MountGraceLCT



Diemand Farm Protects Wendell Land for the Next Generation

BY DAVID KOTKER

Diemand Farm has protected 29 acres of their landmark third-generation farm with a conservation restriction co-held by Mount Grace and the Town of Wendell. This completes the Mormon Hollow Working Lands Corridor Project—which conserves 700 acres including farms in both Wendell and Montague.

The Diemands raise chickens, free range turkeys, sheep, and grass-fed beef cattle while selling eggs from 3,000 laying hens. Siblings Peter and Faith Diemand focus on the farm while their sister Anne runs the farm's store and catering business. "After 9/11, people really started coming to farms to get to know their local farmer and where food was coming from," says Faith. "That's been building and building."

That sense of community was what sparked the Mormon Hollow Project, which began in 2014 with a meal hosted at Diemand Farm at the request of Bill and Laurel Facey from Sugarbush Farm next door. "We had a gathering," Faith remembers. "We ate together with Jamie Pottern from Mount Grace and had such a good talk about protecting the land. It really made me feel closer to the neighbors, knowing we were all on the same page." After talking it over, the neighborhood, including Sugarbush Farm, Jerusalem Hill Farm, Stoney Hollow Farm, and Hunting Farm, decided to work together to conserve the land.

"These neighbors have always cared deeply about the land and each other," says Pottern, Farm Conservation Program Manager at Mount Grace. "Bill and Laurel had a vision not just of conserving their own farm, but of keeping the community intact. And it was

only fitting that the Diemands hosted both the first meeting, and the Party in the Hollow—a celebration of the project's completion. They are such a rock of this community—always giving to others and thinking big."

"It's such a good feeling to know that after we're gone some of the land will be safe and will still be in the hands of a farmer," adds Faith. "Farmers are a different type of person I think. I can't emphasize enough how much I feel that keeping the land safe is so vital. This is the future. It's a different way of life and a good life."

The project was supported by the Massachusetts Landscape Partnership Grant Program, the 1772 Foundation, the Conservation Fund, and the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts.



Faith Diemand haying on the farm

Red Fire Farm > *continued from page 1*

In 2012, Mount Grace began the Campaign for Affordable Farms to raise money to buy the farmland. Ultimately, the purchase resulted in the creation of "Mount Grace Farm LLC," a limited liability corporation with a purpose of owning and operating commercial farms. "We needed to innovate to create access to whole farms for the next generation," adds Youngblood. "By expanding our toolbox of models, we can better help farmers address issues of farmland affordability, access to land and housing, farm viability, and farm succession." Since beginning whole farm conservation with Red Fire Farm, Mount Grace has also partnered with Sugarbush Farm in Wendell and Wingate Farm in Hinsdale, New Hampshire to conserve their farms and farmhouses together.

There are more CSAs and more farms growing organic—meaning many more ways for consumers to get local organic produce. Former crew members at the farm have gone on to run their own CSA farms, including Stone Soup Farm in Hadley and Freedom Food Farm in Raynham. That may make the competition tougher, but for the Voilands, that's part of the evolution too. "I found a note I had written in high school saying that my ideal place to live would be a farm near some colleges where young people could come and learn to farm," says Sarah, "and now that's what we are."

MEMBER PROFILE: John Kramer and Elizabeth Lintz

BY DAVID KOTKER

Dorchester residents John Kramer and Elizabeth Lintz joined the Margaret Power-Biggs Society thanks to a love of local farms and a serendipitous connection. Elizabeth is a partner in real estate law at Goulston & Storrs. John, a pianist and composer who is on the faculty at the Berklee College of Music, was also a college roommate of Mount Grace's Jay Rasku.

The couple joined Mount Grace in 2012 during the Campaign for Affordable Farms. Members of the Red Fire Farm CSA, they see community supported agriculture as "a great way to de-industrialize food production and support the farmers directly." When Red Fire Farm partnered with Mount Grace to begin the campaign, they were among the first to get involved.

"I went to pick up our food and there were flyers asking for volunteers to help spread the word about the campaign," John recalls. "It really sounded fantastic, so I volunteered. Then we looked a bit more closely at the project and the next time we spoke with Jay we asked: 'Now what's the name of that land trust you're at?' Of course it was Mount Grace."

As the campaign neared its goal, the couple hosted a fundraiser helping to raise the money for Mount Grace's eventual purchase of the farmland. Today, Mount Grace is leasing the farm back

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



John Kramer and Elizabeth Lintz celebrate the completion of a 21-mile hike from Plymouth to Onset

to the Voilands—creating a community-owned whole farm that will always remain in agricultural production.

"Both Red Fire Farm and Mount Grace struck me as so innovative in how they were willing to debut a 'whole farm' model to conserve the farm with shared tenure," says Liz. "It is a really exciting way to address those issues that are pricing farmers out of the market for Massachusetts farms."

"We're really grateful to and impressed with both the farm and the trust," she adds. "Mount Grace is remarkable at leveraging resources to do a lot of leading edge work, and we're happy to be able to support."

Enjoy the Woods!

BY SARAH WELLS

The Partnership is gearing up to complete our first "Forest Learning Loop" on Susie and Ben Feldman's 297-acre conserved property. Visitors will be able to park off Briggs Road in Athol and take a roughly 1.5 mile walk through the woods, following signs decorated with forest gnomes.

Kid-friendly signage will describe fun facts about individual tree species and highlight specific areas where something especially interesting is happening in the woods. If you're curious about how nature responds after a microburst, or what it looks like and

sounds like after a patch of trees has been cut down to create a small opening for wildlife, you'll want to take this walk.

This project is being funded by a grant from the U.S. Forest Service that is catalyzing forest stewardship-related outreach to people of all ages in our region. In addition to funding our tried-and-true estate planning workshops for landowners, it has also given us the flexibility to experiment with new ways to connect with new audiences. Why are we working so hard to protect all of these woodlands, anyways? What does "stewardship" mean around here? In Northfield and Leverett, we've grappled with these questions over homemade gumbo and pulled pork

Family Adds Land to Phillipston Town Forest

BY DAVID KOTKER

Thousand Acre Brook meanders through Athol and Phillipston to reach the Millers River. Wildlife studies have logged hundreds of species in its watershed, including 108 different birds, and Mount Grace has been helping local families protect land there for years. Our newest partners are Cindy Coppolino and her brother Kevin Schlicke, who have added 58 acres of family land to Phillipston's Town Forest.

Their project honors the memory of their parents, Robert and Lenore Schlicke, who started a chicken farm on the land in the 1950s. Although their commercial farm didn't last, the couple kept a small dairy herd on the farm for 15 years while they raised five children on the land. "It really was great to grow up there," remembers Cindy. "You don't realize how lucky you are having so much room, and fresh vegetables, and great places to sled and to play."

The Town Forest, which includes land protected in 2012 when Reggie and Mel Houghton worked with Mount Grace to transfer their land to the Town, has now almost doubled in size. The property, which includes woods, wetlands in Thousand Acre Swamp, and part of the brook, was protected thanks to a unanimous vote at the 2016 Town Meeting—where Phillipston voted to use its Community Preservation Act funds for the project in anticipation of receiving a partial reimbursement from the Massachusetts LAND grant program.

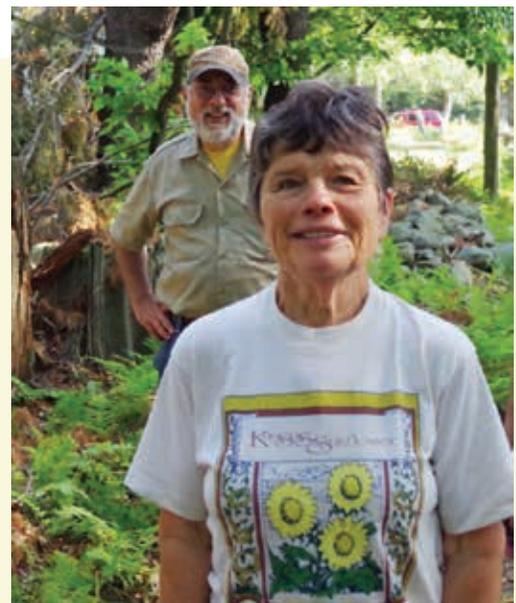
sandwiches (and non-government-funded beers) with small groups of neighbors who shared their stories of living in, working with, and enjoying the woods.

We all benefit from being surrounded by these large chunks of protected, intact forest, but the Partnership recognizes we will never protect "enough" without taking the time to understand and enhance the ways our community members relate to the woods we call home. In the words of Susie Feldman, let's "Enjoy the woods!"



Catching some rays in the swamp

Cindy, who grew up with the Houghton family, credits strong community ties with making that possible. "Protecting the land was dad's dream for a long time," she says, "and I think one of the reasons the Town was unanimous is people remembered him and wanted to vote for his wishes."



Ben & Susie Feldman

On the Land with a Dedicated Steward

BY FLETCHER HARRINGTON

Landowners don't often join us land stewards for monitoring visits. This makes sense since monitoring is generally done during regular business hours, but Brian Szyndlar is an especially active steward of his land—hundreds of acres of forest in Athol and Petersham.

We set off into a forest of conifers with an open understory. Large, partially buried stones lay along the lumpy ground suggesting the area had been pasture or fields in the not too distant past. Girdled hemlocks and dense young pines were evidence of Brian's work creating early successional habitat for wildlife while removing diseased trees and opening the canopy to bring sunlight to the forest floor.

We continued down logging roads to a black gum swamp where Brian pointed proudly to a tree that may be more than 500 years old. Up slope from the swamp we came to a vernal pool and finally an overlook with a view of rolling hills approaching the Quabbin Reservoir.

Walking and talking with Brian, it was clear he really takes stewardship to heart. He knows his land is an important part of both towns



Brian Szyndlar in his natural habitat

(it was conserved in 1996 by Ted and Beverly Hutchinson), and he welcomes respectful public use of the trails. He sees the hikes and naturalist walks that he's hosted on the property as a way to encourage more landowners to manage their land for both their own enjoyment and the benefit of their communities.

FALL 2017 UPCOMING EVENTS

Join Us!

North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival

Forster's Farm
Chestnut Hill Road, Orange
Saturday & Sunday, September 23-24
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-TerraCorps members.



Annual Meeting

Red Fire Farm
184 Meadow Road, Montague
Saturday, October 14
10:30am-3pm
\$10 per ticket or \$30 for ticket with lunch
Lunch tickets will be \$35 after October 6.

Join us to celebrate the successful completion of the Red Fire Farm project. Hosts Ryan and Sarah Voiland will offer tours of the CSA farm's 122 acres, now owned by Mount Grace and permanently protected as a whole farm.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Grants Received:

The Fields Pond Foundation	\$25,000	Quabbin Landscape Projects
Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts	\$20,000	Farm Conservation Program

Gifts were Received *In Honor of*: the wedding of Thai Ha-Ngoc and Sarah Kugel

Gifts were Received *In Memory of*: Nina Barzscz, Michael Brenneman, Mick Huppert and Dorothy Meilus

Special Thanks *from* Mount Grace to ~

Norm Eggert for the telescope

Judy Collette for saving our media files!

Ben and Susie Feldman their work on the interpretive trail

A special thank you to the Mount Grace members who supported our Mormon Hollow Landscape Partnership Project through the Local Landscape Collateral Fund at Greenfield Savings Bank

Thanks to our Community Campout volunteers: Chris Dodge, Lula Field, Clare Green, Brian Hall, Walker Korby, Tyler Martin, and Linda Wells

For assistance with the signage at the Gunnery Sergeant Jeffrey S. Ames Trail: David Brule, Doug Harris, Rich Holschuh, Lane Construction, Carol Lebo, Lynne Manring, Lis McLoughlin, Elizabeth Perry, and Sue Ross

Maureen Blasco, Kristin Bullet, Bren Carey, Brad Compton, Anne, Faith, Peter, and Tessa Diemand, Keith DiNardo, Laurel Facey, Norm Flye, Christian Hains, Mimi Hellen Jones, Rick Innes, Pat Larson, Al MacIntyre, Mary McClintock, Joanne McGee, Steve Rawson, Paul Somers, Cathy Stanton, Joelle Vautour, Bethany Webster, and Pat Worth, for helping to host, lead, and coordinate Mount Grace events

Thanks to our 2016-17 MassLIFT team: Lauren Bonatakis, Chelsea Farinacci, Fletcher Harrington, Margaret Hensel, and Katherine Ziemplak, for their service to land conservation and stewardship! And welcome to our 2017-18 TerraCorps Team: Camille Duquet, Tinsley Galyean, Fletcher Harrington (welcome back!), Kat Kowalski, and Kim Lynn Nguyen!

In Memoriam: Mick Huppert, Mount Grace Board of Directors 1999-2008, Mount Grace President 2007-2008



Thanks to the entire 2016-17 MassLIFT-AmeriCorps crew for supporting land trusts and partners around the Commonwealth



MOUNT GRACE LAND CONSERVATION TRUST
1461 Old Keene Road
Athol, MA 01331

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

**This issue of
Views from Mount Grace
is sponsored by:**

**David Singer
Attorney & Mediator**
377 Main Street
Greenfield, MA 01301
www.davidjsinger.com
djsinger@verizon.net
413-774-3100
413-774-5100 (fax)

Non Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 183
Greenfield, MA



Filming our new movie on location at Red Fire Farm...Join us at the Annual Meeting to see the world premiere!

Join us on October 14th to celebrate the successful completion of the Red Fire Farm Campaign and the establishment of a permanently protected whole farm on 122 acres in Montague!

Mount Grace's 31st Annual Meeting will be held at Red Fire Farm, where Ryan and Sarah Voiland have partnered with Mount Grace to combine protected land with farmer housing, buildings, and greenhouses as the prototype of whole farm conservation in the Pioneer Valley.

Invitation Inside!