

Views *from* Mount Grace



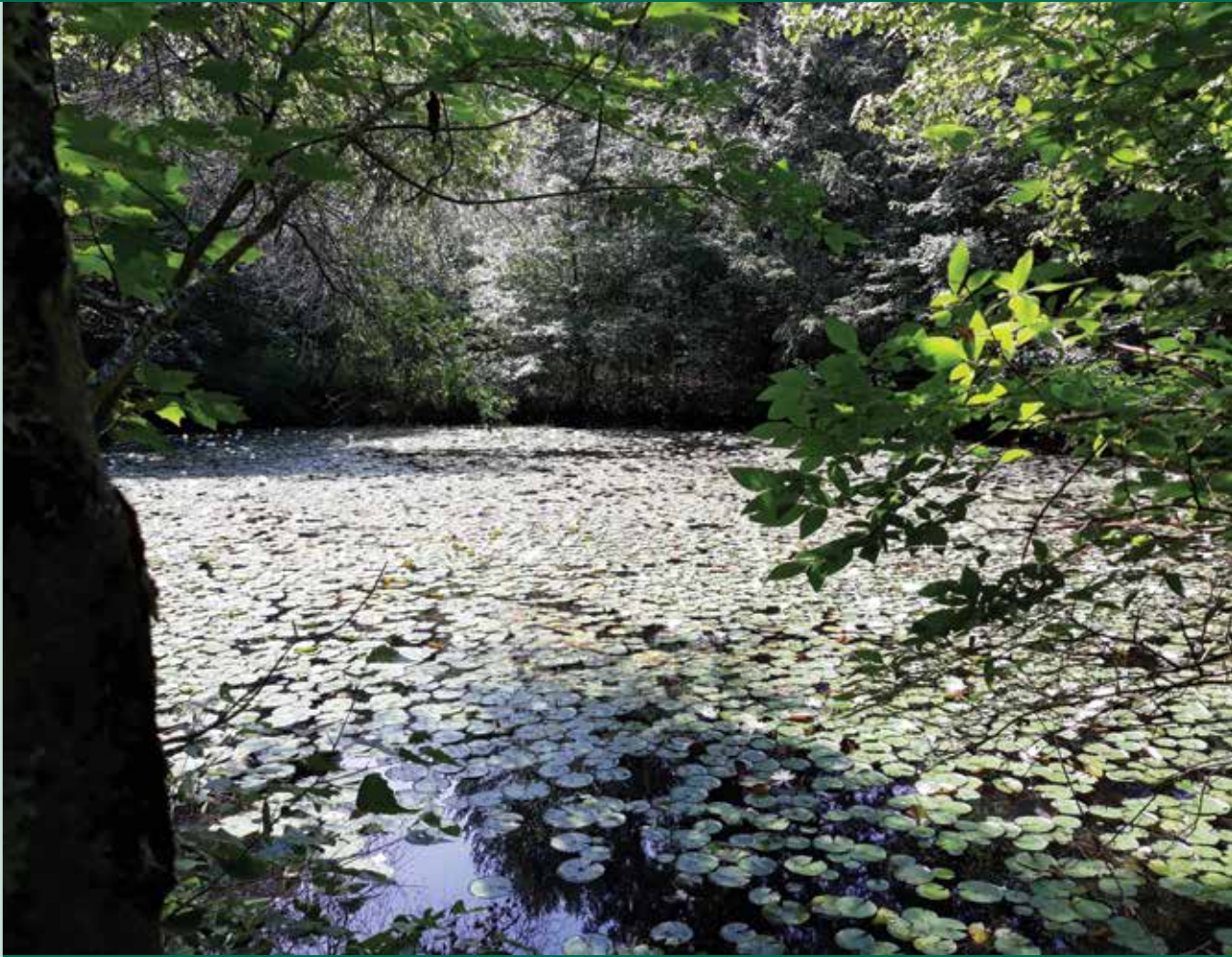
FALL 2020
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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- **A Nature-Lover But Not a Naturalist**
- **Connecting Conserved Land Through the Ages**
- **Margaret Power Biggs Society: Jeff Cole**
- **Native Plants for Pollinators: Restoration One Native at a Time**
- **Growing Partnerships and Good Food**
- **Coping with COVID-19**

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Blooming water lilies soaking up the sun in a small pond on Willis Road.

A Nature-Lover But Not A Naturalist

BY ALLEN YOUNG

Walking on a country road or hiking on a forested trail are my favorite things to do these days, a good activity given the threat of COVID-19. I enjoy saying that I am a nature-lover but not a naturalist. I am satisfied with my casual non-scientific way of observing and appreciating what my senses reveal to me during my time outdoors — and at home, too, just gazing out the windows of my house or lounging on the deck watching the oak, maple and pine trees sway in the wind (or remain amazingly still), taking in the blueness of the sky and the shapes of the clouds, and at night checking out the moon and the stars.

I'd been wanting to get to know Marielena Lima, Mount Grace's Communications and Engagement Coordinator. We decided to take a hike together, so we met at Mount Grace headquarters, ambled through the Skyfields Arboretum and crossed the property line onto trails within Lawton State Forest. As we chatted, real examples of my attitude toward nature surfaced. We heard birdsong, and were quiet for a few minutes as we listened. I did not say, "It's a wood thrush," because I simply don't know birdsong (except maybe a crow). I do know some amazing birders I've met through my involvement in the Athol Bird & Nature Club, and being with them on a hike enriches the experience. But I don't "need" the experts to enjoy birdsong.

> *continued on page 3*



Dear Friends,

Earlier this summer, Leigh and I decided to reach out, whether by Zoom, socially distanced walks, or over iced tea sipped in lawn chairs, to members of the Mount Grace community about the organization they love, and the future they want to see.

I have learned about Mount Grace’s history, about Leigh’s pragmatic approach to conservation, and about the passion and commitment of the Mount Grace membership. Landowners shared the many hiccups and wrenches that had to be creatively navigated and overcome in order to protect their land. I have learned about the reverence and love that we feel for Leigh and her extraordinary accomplishments.

In my first month at Mount Grace I was asked by Bill Labich, Senior Conservationist at the Highstead Foundation, “What makes Mount Grace so special?” I couldn’t answer the question yet. After the last two months of meeting so many of you, I feel like I can begin to answer Bill’s question.

Leigh and all of you have built an authentic organization that is not just about land, it is about people’s connection to that land. It is about protecting the biodiversity and scenic values, but it is also about all of us and how we treasure our open spaces. When Leigh sits with a landowner in their backyard, looking over their “piece of heaven” she shows genuine curiosity about what brings them to this specific acreage. She learns as much about them as she does about their treasured stream, stone wall, or funky out-of-place erratic. And she makes a commitment to them to help them protect what they love and to share that love. I believe that this is a key component to what makes Mount Grace unique.

So, I am so honored to be meeting this incredible network of people and to be entrusted with this extraordinary responsibility. My job at Mount Grace will be to love and protect what you have loved and protected for the next generation.

Warmly,

Emma Ellsworth
Deputy 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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- Aaron Nelson, *Regional Collaborative Coordinator (Greater Quabbin Food Alliance)*
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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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A Nature-Lover

> continued from page 1

The late Elizabeth Farnsworth conducted a fern workshop sponsored by Mount Grace in Royalston about a decade ago. I attended the session, fully attentive as she exhibited more than a dozen kinds of ferns and described their traits, and I had a good time, but as I told Marielena when we saw many of these lush, beautiful plants on our walk, they are just unnamed ferns to me now.

I have my list of go-to people for questions about nature. For example, on our walk, I pointed to some mushrooms and mentioned that my neighbor Rob Jalbert knows a lot about mushrooms and when I'm in the woods with him, he names them and declares which ones are edible.

Marielena and I saw some flowers as our walk drew to a close on Willis and Old Keene roads. First was a small wetland filled with water lilies. For fun, I later looked up the Latin name Nymphaeaceae, which I certainly won't remember! And then we stopped and smelled some white and pink flowers on a shrub that I could not identify, but I sent a photo to Rob, who with his great collection of field guides and apps identified it as *Spiraea alba* (common name, meadowsweet).



***Spiraea alba*, more commonly known as meadowsweet, is one of the beautiful flowers that can be observed during a summer walk on Old Keene Road.**

Finally, right across from Skyfields, I noticed a very large deciduous tree that I could not identify, though I enjoyed staring up it curiously for a few minutes. I confidently can identify oak, maple, beech, and birch, but what was this stately tree? It's an ash, according to KimLynn Nguyen, Mount Grace Stewardship Manager.



Allen Young at the Jacob's Hill vista in Royalston. Photo Credit: Bobby Curley

Allen Young has been a member of Mount Grace since its beginnings and served several terms on its board. He is the author of "North of Quabbin Revisited" and 14 other books. His autobiography, "Left, Gay & Green: A Writer's Life," was published in 2018. He is also a member of the North Quabbin Trails Association, the Millers River Watershed Council, and the Athol Bird and Nature Club.

Connecting Conserved Land Through the Ages

BY SARAH WELLS

Early in the pandemic, I took a bike ride with my husband at the Birch Hill dam managed by the Army Corps of Engineers. The dam is surrounded by more than 7,000 acres of connected and protected land, with significant acreage managed by both MassWildlife (Birch Hill Wildlife Management Area) and the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (Otter River State Forest). Mount Grace has a presence here, too, with our abutting Guiney Memorial Forest and a mix of privately-owned land with Conservation Restrictions (CRs). Connectivity is central to our work. When we look at new projects, we consider whether they abut existing protected land; the bigger the area of protected land, the better it is for a wide spectrum of plants, animals, and habitats otherwise sensitive to people and all of our infrastructure. Over time, as landowners choose to conserve their

pieces of our highly parcelized landscape, the corridors grow, as they have here. In 1998, Father John Guiney, a retired parish priest, left nearly 30 acres of land to Mount Grace in his will, in keeping with his intention to create a nature sanctuary in honor of his beloved Saint Francis, the patron saint of animals and the environment. Twenty-two years later, we've now accepted a generous CR donation from Richard Perkins on 88 acres right next door, and just north of the beaver dam visible from Birch Hill's bike path on Swamp Road. Together, these Mount Grace projects tie into an impressive and hydrologically significant conservation corridor that runs from Route 2 in Templeton all the way to the state line in both Royalston and Winchendon. And, thankfully, most of this corridor is open to the public to enjoy.

MARGARET POWER BIGGS SOCIETY

Member Profile: Jeff Cole

BY DAVID KOTKER



Jeff Cole with the piece de resistance of his tractor collection.

Most people know Jeff Cole best as the owner of Witty's Funeral Home and as a champion of the many causes he volunteers for, but his first love has always been farms.

Jeff still remembers his first tractor, a model of a John Deere, given to him by his father Roger at the Big-E when he was five years old. Today, he still collects model

tractors and the occasional full-size one. "It's a connection to my father," says Jeff. "He always wished he could have a farm of his own, and I felt the same."

But buying a farm was out of reach, so instead Jeff started a landscaping business. After a decade, he sold that company to begin a career as a funeral director, first studying and working in Texas, then returning to Orange to work at Witty's, which he now owns.

Jeff fondly recalls helping out on the farm of a friend as a young man, haying and milking at Bartlett Dairy Farm in Royalston.

That's what inspired him to join Mount Grace's Margaret Power Biggs Society, often sponsoring newsletters and events through his business. "I saw what uncontrolled development had done to towns that aren't that far from here," he explains, "and I was so impressed by the work Mount Grace does to make sure that doesn't happen in our region."

A hugely energetic advocate for his community, Jeff is, or has been, either President or Treasurer of the Tully City Council Club, the Camp Cheneo Association, the Orange Kiwanis Club, the Orange Historical Society, and the Orange Scholarship Foundation. He's served on the Boards of perhaps a dozen more local groups.

Why is he so often the first to pitch in? "Because I want to see our area do well for the people that live here," he replies. "And if we don't volunteer to do the work, who will? We can't allow these things to go by the wayside or we'll lose our community's sense of connection."

If you would like information about joining the Margaret Power Biggs Society, please contact David Kotker at 978-541-1767 or kotker@mountgrace.org

Native Plants for Pollinators: Restoration One Native at a Time

BY KIMLYNN NGUYEN

Every spring and summer, the sounds of the bumblebees buzzing around the blooming summersweet and the fluttering wings of hummingbirds around the coral honeysuckles are always music to my ears. It means that spring is here, the ground will start to green, the buds will bloom into flowers, and the wildlife will start to roam around in earnest for food.

Native plants are a vital part of our forest, garden, and land. They not only provide habitat and a healthier food source for a variety of wildlife, but they also attract birds, butterflies, moths, bees, and many other types of insects called pollinators. These pollinators have evolved with the native plants in their various forms to be able to feed on specific plant types.

While these pollinators are feeding away plant by plant, there is the added benefit of these little critters pollinating the flowers they visit to become fruits for the bears, birds, and humans to enjoy. Pollinators face many threats today, one of the greatest being habitat loss. Mount Grace is committed to restoring native habitat at our conservation areas.

Growing Partnerships and Good Food

BY CATHY STANTON

If you were at Quabbin Harvest Food Co-op on a Tuesday afternoon this summer, you may have seen an amazing amount of fresh produce being packed into bags and boxes. Our CSA-style weekly produce shares have been a mainstay of the co-op's operation since its very beginning, but over the past three years the program has grown exponentially. On one recent Tuesday, volunteers packed 130 fruit and vegetable shares for distribution to households throughout the area!



Volunteers Pat Larson, MaryEllen Kennedy, and Deb Habib pack dozens of vegetable shares for low-income seniors in the first distribution of summer 2020.

The growth in our share program reflects the strengthening of collaborations with service organizations, state agencies, farmers, and others across the local food system. We continue to be a vendor in the state-funded Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) and have once again partnered with Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) on a summer program for low-income Athol seniors. Starting

last year, we joined with Heywood Healthcare, the Orange Council on Aging, and others to add Orange seniors too.

And this year's total also includes the new Recipe for Wellness program with Seeds of Solidarity Farm and Education Center, funded by the Orange Community Development Block Grant. Recipe for Wellness and HIP participants enjoyed the first of several planned skills workshops earlier in the summer, learning to plant container gardens for home-grown tomatoes.



Participants in a Recipe for Wellness skills workshop learned to grow tomatoes in container gardens. Photo: Deb Habib, Seeds of Solidarity

Add that all up and it amounts to a lot of beautiful fresh food, much of it grown locally at The Farm School, Seeds of Solidarity, Coolidge Hill Farm, and other area farms. As we continue to develop this part of the co-op's mission, we're working to broaden our volunteer and funding bases as well as our partner relationships. There's even a new non-profit organization in the works that will help facilitate these kinds of collaborations. Stay tuned for details about that in a future newsletter!

As part of our Spring Appeal, donors that made a contribution of \$100 will have a native perennial planted in celebration of their gift. Donors who contributed \$250 will have a native flowering bush planted in celebration of their gift, and those who made a generous donation of \$1,000 will have a native tree planted in celebration of their gift.

Thank you so much to those who donated in support of protecting our pollinators and wildlife habitat! This fall, in appreciation and in honor of our supporters, we will begin planting native trees and flowering bushes throughout our conservation areas and start a pollinator garden at our headquarters, Skyfields Arboretum, to attract a more diverse range of pollinators to the area.



Bee pollinating the sweet-smelling flowers of native *Clethra alnifolia*, more commonly known as summersweet.

Coping with COVID-19

BY M A R I E L E N A L I M A

Peeking through the window of Chuck and Livvy Tarleton's farmhouse, Conservation Director Sarah Wells notarizes the final paperwork needed to complete the Sunset View Farm project. This atypical procedure was just one of the many ways that Mount Grace staff and volunteers have adapted and adjusted to continue our work of protecting and stewarding the land during the COVID-19 crisis.

After having to postpone most of her spring volunteer days, Stewardship Manager KimLynn Nguyen was still able to complete essential projects, such as blazing the new Sunset View Farm hiking trail and improving signage at Mount Grace Conservation Areas, with the help of a small group of socially-distanced volunteers from the Stewardship Committee.

Our TerraCorps members also stepped up to the challenge of creating virtual programming for our members and the general public to enjoy. Our first webinar Citizen Science Workshop Series began in April to encourage our members and neighbors to pitch in and help with a natural resource inventory on Mount Grace properties. Since then, Mount Grace has hosted an educational identification webinar every month on a range of topics from butterflies to edible plants.



A snapshot of the Nature Yoga & Meditation video available for viewing on the Mount Grace website.

More than 1,800 observations have been logged in iNaturalist, the nature app that Mount Grace is encouraging community members to use to observe and identify plants and animals on our conserved lands. In addition to the workshop series, former TerraCorps member Valerie Cedrone filmed and edited a Nature Yoga & Meditation video that features Eagle Reserve Conservation Area in Royalston and is a welcome respite during these stressful times.

As we carry on during the COVID-19 crisis, Mount Grace will continue to offer educational webinars every month and will offer small-group socially distanced events for everyone starting in August.

Fall 2020 Upcoming Events

CANOE/KAYAK PADDLE OF LONG POND

Friday, September 18th

(Rain date: September 19th)

RSVP required

**THINKING LIKE A WATERSHED:
COMMUNITY-SCALE CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND
RESILIENCE IN THE NORTH QUABBIN WEBINAR**
Wednesday, September 30th

Led by Connor Stedman

Online Registration Required

THE QUABBIN TO WACHUSETT STORY

Saturday, October 17th

Presented by Leigh Youngblood

Sponsored by: The Lexington Field and Garden Club

Online Registration Required

Visit our website at mountgrace.org/events for up-to-date event information.

Thank You To Our Supporters

Grants Received:

\$65,000	Tortuga Foundation
\$10,000	Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts
\$10,000	John M. Boynton Fund
\$600	Athol Cultural Council
\$500	Constellation, an Exelon Company

Gifts were Received *In Memory of*

Audrey Stevens
Edith Potter
Emily Jones
Fred Hellen
Ken Girouard
Mick Huppert
Nathan Rudolph
Nina Barszcz
Ron Cloutier

Gifts were Received *In Honor of*

Claire Elizabeth Wright
Heart Centered Kirtan - Libby Volckening
Kathleen Litchfield
Marielena Lima
Rosie

Special Thanks from Mount Grace to ~

Allen Ross for donating an Apple iPad for monitoring;

Lis McLoughlin for hosting the Authors and Artists Writing the Land Poetry event;

Michael Humphries for donating clipboards;

Star Cummings and Derek Estler for constructing and painting the Earleacres sign;

Corey Wrinn for creating the trail signs for our Conservation Areas;

Mike Mauri and the Spaulding crew for the Song Memorial Forest habitat management cut;

Kyle Simmington and Crew for landscaping at Skyfields Arboretum;

David Babik, Russ Cohen, Charley Eiseman, Karro Frost, Dan Jaffe Wilder, and David Small for presenting for the Citizen Science Nature Identification series;

Jassy Bratko, Julianne Busa, Lorraine DeSouza, Mike Downey, Lincoln Fish, Sarah Fortune, Rick Gardner, Mackenzie Greer, Sandra Grund, Kurt Habel, Lisa Hayden, Rebecca Longvall, Sally Loomis, Erik Mas, James McCarthy, Joanne McGee, Keith Ross, Priscilla Ryder, Andrew Smith, Cassie Tragert, and Anna Wilkins for presenting at the Open Space Conference;

Ted Cady and David Ray for the use of a log landing for the Song Memorial Forest habitat management cut;

Micha Archer for the use of her story book pages;

Kelsey Cass for starring in the Nature Yoga & Meditation video;



This fall, we are excited to welcome James Holcomb as our new Membership and Administration Coordinator.

Rich Holschuh for conducting a cultural resource inventory;

Jack Cadwell, John Hagar, Brian Hall, and Dan Leahy for assisting with monitoring properties;

Kris Gunderman for mowing the trails and lawn at Skyfields Arboretum;

Jami MacCartney, Alex Olson and Family, David McKinley and Crew, Eric Peterson, the North Quabbin Trails Association, and the Friends of Alderbrook Meadows for maintaining the trails;

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

We could not have done any of this without you!



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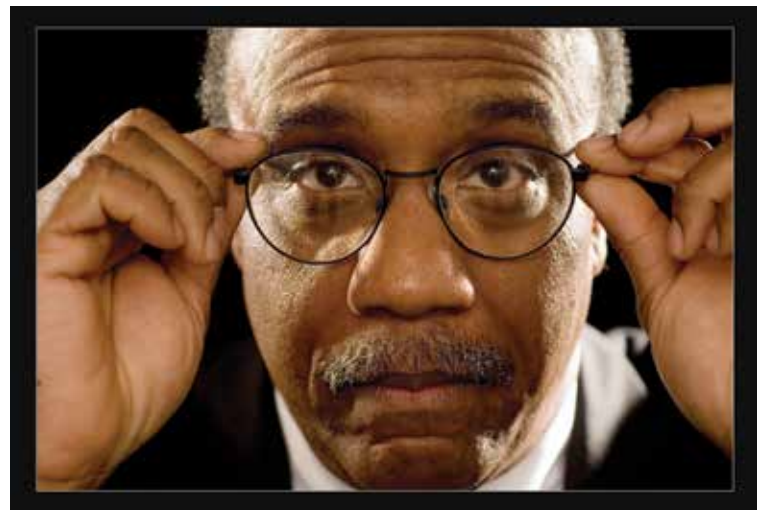
2020 Annual Meeting

October 22nd at 7pm

For the safety of our community and to comply with rules against large, in-person gatherings, Mount Grace will host its 2020 Annual Meeting in a virtual format. We will miss seeing you in person, but invite you to participate online.

- **Vote by proxy** using the mail-in ballot and envelope that is enclosed, just add a stamp.
- **Attend the meeting virtually** by clicking on the link provided at mountgrace.org

Featuring Greg Watson as our Keynote Speaker



Greg Watson is Director of Policy and Systems Design at the Schumacher Center for a New Economics. He served as Massachusetts Commissioner of Agriculture from 1990-93 and again from 2012-14. A former Executive Director of the New Alchemy Institute, Watson has spent nearly 40 years learning to apply systems thinking as inspired by Buckminster Fuller to achieve a just and sustainable world. **Photo Credit Tanit Sakakini**