

Views *from* Mount Grace



SPRING 2021
VOLUME 32, NO. 1

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Panorama view of Bear Mountain in Wendell from the outlook on Hermit Castle Trail in Erving.

Conserving Wendell Throughout the Decades

BY JONATHAN VON RANSON

Sixteen years ago, Ray DiDonato, then chair of the Wendell Open Space Committee, worked with Mount Grace on the Town's purchase of Fiske Pond. Two years ago, Ray, with his wife, Laurie, picked up the Mount Grace thread again and worked up a conservation restriction (CR) for their land, which they signed in January.

During the process, they made some difficult decisions about public access, solar generation, pond/dam maintenance, and more. Their CR, for 24 acres on Lockes Village Road, involves part of a pond and wetland that features beaver, otter, and great blue herons. It also covers forestland and a field.

Laurie, who sits on both the select board and the town's energy committee, and Ray, who has served on numerous town boards, decided the CR would allow hunting, fishing, canoeing, electric-powered boating, and an option for ecological restoration ("maybe someday allowing the return of the pond to a brook," Ray explained). They decided to prohibit solar installations – this despite Laurie's long work on energy issues and their shared belief in the conservation potential of alternative energy. In the field area, farming and even a roadside stand are allowed.

Across the road is the Fiske Pond Conservation Area. The property is also near protected tracts around Mt Mineral. "It builds," Ray said, "on a protected corridor leading all the way to the Quabbin."

First with Mount Grace's Sarah Wells, then helped in baseline documentation with KimLynn Nguyen, the DiDonatos worked out the final details with Fletcher Harrington, whom Ray described as "very helpful, and patient!"

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Views from Mount Grace

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Dear Friends,

I often think of the out of doors as a place for observation, quiet reflection, a place to be within oneself. This last year it also became our primary place for social connection and community. We are hiking together, sitting socially distanced in folding chairs, and struggling to keep glasses upright while resting on picnic blankets. More recently these visits are to the tune of the noisy clump of snowshoes or bundled to the max around a campfire. Nature is now more than ever a site for community, and not just for respite and escape.

Most recently, as the frost comes out of the ground, our ventures outside are damper and even a bit muddier. As we sense the onset of Spring, we also feel the subsiding of anxiety. I so look forward to being all together in person, to seeing the smiles of my friends and neighbors, to the return of bear hugs as greetings. That said, I hope we hold on to this expanded way we spend time together. That we keep our new walking, exploring, outdoorsy selves.

We have quite a year ahead of us. We will be celebrating the tremendous creativity and vision of Leigh Youngblood! We will be toasting our 35th anniversary and the milestones of Mount Grace's establishment and growth as a land trust known for packing a punch beyond her weight. We will also be defining our vision for the next 35 years. How will Mount Grace rise to the unique challenges of climate change and fighting for land justice and inclusion during a time of unprecedented transfer of land from one generation to the next? There remains tremendous urgency in protecting our working forests and farms, our woodlands and watersheds, our social spaces, and our spaces for rejuvenation. We have work to do. Let's do it together.

Warmly,

Emma Ellsworth
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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Expanding our Youth and Family-Friendly Programming

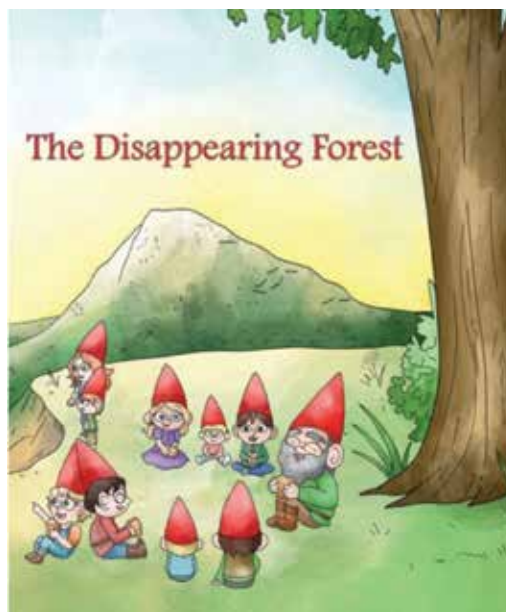
BY MARIELENA LIMA

As we kick off our 35th Anniversary, Mount Grace recognizes the importance of introducing youth and families to the wonders of the outdoors. For many of us, our early memories of being introduced to the outdoors make lasting impressions that form lifelong connections and a love of nature. With this in mind, we have been expanding the Youth Environmental Education program to include virtual and accessible programming for young people and their families no matter the season or the weather.

During the winter, Mount Grace hosted two interactive author read-aloud events for children on Zoom. Sara Videtto read from her read-and-find storybook, *Turtle's First Winter*, and showed participants her pet turtle, Shelby. Additionally, author Steve Shanley read from his choose-your-own-adventure book, *The Disappearing Forest*. Participants immersed themselves in the secret world of gnomes and worked together to help Gary Gnomelley in his quest to save the forest from development. You can watch a recording of Sara's reading on our YouTube Channel and keep your eyes peeled for another opportunity to participate in Steve's *The Disappearing Forest* read-aloud.

Mount Grace also hosted a family-friendly storytelling event featuring local storytellers Michael Humphries and Linda Tomasi via Zoom. This was a great alternative to an in-person storytelling night around a campfire in February.

These virtual events were in part inspired by the successful socially distanced StoryWalk® Mount Grace hosted back in August featuring Micha Archer's *Daniel Finds a Poem*. This spring, we're excited to offer another StoryWalk® on conserved land. In the next few months, we will offer programming that addresses climate change to help start more conversations around climate change for youth and families.



Gary Gnomelley with his gnomeling students. Illustration by Ali Barker.

Conserving Wendell > continued from page 1

Wendell has been a frequent focus of Mount Grace's land conservation work. The trust first helped save 465 wooded acres from housing development, land that's now part of Mass. Fish and Wildlife's holdings. It owns and protects the 66-acre Hidden Valley Memorial Forest. In the last 25 years, the Trust has assisted 21 projects here, many in 2015-17 during the Mormon Hollow Working Lands Corridor project.

A Wendell project done in 1995 might help bookend Leigh Youngblood's tenure as she winds up her time directing Mount

Grace. She phoned a landowner she'd met in the local Earth First! group inquiring about putting his land under conservation protection. After talking to his partner, he called back. During a walk of the property, as the two rested on an outcrop, the landowner recalls deciding that saving his land from development felt very right...implicitly suggesting that Leigh was in the right job. Because the land – yes, it was my land – got a CR...and Leigh went on to more than 25 years of great work!

Building Partnerships for Pollinators



BY KATHRYN SUTCLIFFE

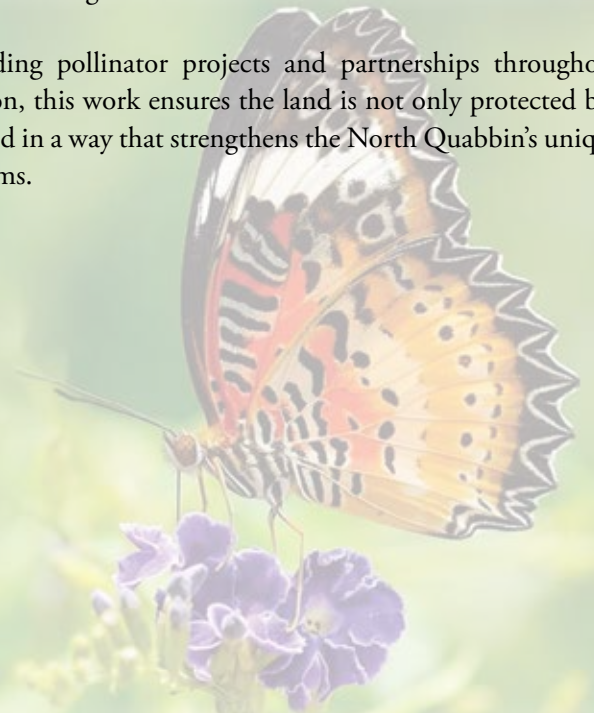
Native pollinators such as birds, bees, and other insects are crucial to healthy local ecosystems, but they're also increasingly threatened by habitat loss and invasive species. However, a growing regional interest in tackling this problem is leading to creative new partnerships and solutions.

At the January 2021 meeting of the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership – a regional conservation partnership sponsored by Mount Grace – three partnership members shared current and upcoming projects designed to strengthen native pollinator habitat. The North County Land Trust is creating a pollinator meadow. East Quabbin Land Trust is developing pollinator community outreach programs, distributing native plants paired with container vegetable gardens to grow at home to illustrate the connection between pollinators and vegetable yield. Finally, Dave Small of the Athol Bird and Nature Club (and a long-time Mount Grace member and volunteer) shared the work he's done to turn his backyard into healthy pollinator habitat.

These presentations sparked knowledge sharing and generated rich brainstorming among attendees, who exchanged resources for native seeds and plants and discussed potential collaborations such as regional seed banks. By creating a space for partnership members to learn from each other and build on one another's work, Mount Grace is stewarding the regional connections that help conservation and stewardship work continue to thrive.

Mount Grace will soon be starting pollinator work of its own. Thanks to a recent grant from the Hollis Declan Leverett Memorial Fund, Bank of America, N.A., Co-Trustee, two new pollinator plots will be created at the Mount Grace headquarters at Skyfields Arboretum. The plantings will be designed to attract a more diverse range of pollinators, such as bumblebees, flies, wasps, and birds. Additional native perennials and shrubs will be planted through Skyfields and serve as a seed source for further future pollinator projects. Keep an eye out for the new pollinator plots this coming summer!

By building pollinator projects and partnerships throughout the region, this work ensures the land is not only protected but stewarded in a way that strengthens the North Quabbin's unique ecosystems.



Stewardship Manager KimLynn Nguyen planting a native shrub at Skyfields Arboretum.



Communications and Engagement Coordinator Marielena Lima watering the recently planted native shrub at Skyfields Arboretum.

A Land Trust Downtown

BY CATHY STANTON

As Mount Grace looks back on its 35-year history, it's interesting to ponder where six years of partnership with Quabbin Harvest fits into the longer history of Orange and the North Quabbin region.

The co-op's building at 12 North Main was built in 1881 for the Orange National Bank, back when every little town had multiple local financial institutions. The solidity and security of the former bank remain—drilling into the foot-thick walls for any reason is an all-day project! But comparing the undated postcard with a 2019 view shows signs of long economic decline as well as earlier efforts to revive Orange's commercial center after the loss of the industries that once fueled its prosperity.



In this undated postcard, the building that now houses Quabbin Harvest is on the right, with white awnings.

The pitched roof was removed, likely following the common practice of removing unused floors to save on property taxes. The chimney now beautified by Susan Marshall's "Reaching for the Sky" mural was shortened. And in the 1960s, the façade was replaced—"altered beyond recognition," says the National Register of Historic Places nomination for downtown Orange—as part of an attempt to refresh and modernize a struggling downtown.

Mount Grace's land conservation work focuses mainly on the forested and farmed land surrounding the area's mill towns. But in 2014, a group from the co-op suggested the counter-intuitive idea of buying the former bank as a storefront for the fledgling food retail business. The land trust's leadership recognized how farmland protection, the local food economy, and the vitality of town centers like Orange's could all be interconnected and how this partnership could support the mission of encouraging land stewardship, benefiting the environment, the economy, and future generations. The rest, as they say, is history—or rather, it's part of the ongoing story of caring for the places we live—and eat!



Decades of economic change have left their mark, but the building communicates a sense of optimism about the future of Orange and the region. Photo: Cathy Stanton

MARGARET POWER BIGGS SOCIETY

Member Profile: Louise Dwyer Huppert

BY DAVID KOTKER

Louise Dwyer Huppert grew up in Arlington, Massachusetts when undeveloped land could still be found in town. She remembers scaling the steep ledges of the hill behind her home to reach a plateau of scrubland at the top that eventually led back to a farm set alongside a pond and wetlands. “That’s all built up now,” she explains, “but we were very lucky that this wildness was still there for us then.”

The need to be near the wild has stayed with Louise all her life and brought her and her husband Mick to the Mount Grace region. Both were working in central Massachusetts—Mick setting up health centers in Worcester and Louise establishing and directing a daycare in Palmer—when an ad for an old farmstead in Barre inspired them to move there as they started their family.

Mick soon met Keith Ross who helped them protect the land around their new Barre home. That relationship with Mount Grace grew. And Mick, who Louise describes as “just having an incredible appetite to serve and to help others,” continued working with Mount Grace, serving as Board President in 2008. Louise began supporting as a member of the Margaret Power Biggs Society with memorial gifts after Mick passed away in 2017.

Louise and Mick had also bought land on Petersham’s Narrow Lane—a 20-acre stand of mostly red oak and white pine that slopes gradually down to Lorinda Pond. “We walked the land there when our grown daughters were back in town from their various pursuits,” Louise says, “I loved the serenity and the



Louise Dwyer Huppert enjoying the outdoors during the winter.

feeling of just being. Over the years, our thinking evolved from ‘this would be a nice place to build a home’ to ‘oh yes, this has to be protected, this has to be allowed to be alive, to be wild.’”

In 2011, the Dwyer Hupperts donated that land to Mount Grace. It is now open to the public in perpetuity.

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

Spring 2021 Upcoming Events - Join Us!

GIVE BACK TO THE LAND DAY

Saturday, April 17th – Thursday, April 22nd

Join us for this online fundraising event at www.givebacktotheland.org!

NATURAL HISTORY FOREST WALK

Led by Dr. Chris Picone

Saturday, April 24th (Rain date: May 1st)

Paul Dunn Woodland Preserve, 2 Hewitt Rd, Ashburnham

RSVP Required

FLYFISHING WORKSHOP SERIES

Saturday, May 15th and Sunday, May 16th

Various locations

RVSP Required

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

Thank You To Our Supporters

Grants Received

Hollis Declan Leverett Memorial Fund, Bank of America, N.A., Co-Trustee \$12,500

Gifts were Received *In Memory of*

Dr. Allen Ross
Dr. Peter Tishler
Susan Foster
Karl Quackenbush
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Jim Wilbur
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Kim Noyes and Bill Lafley
Jason Hodgkins
Chris Camosse
Patricia and Steve Cutler
Grace LaPointe
Carol Hillman
Alice Linehan

Special Thanks from Mount Grace to ~

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Jeffrey Blanchard for presenting for Giving Tuesday;

Sandy Renna for donating handcrafted bowls;

Tom Brouillet for donating homemade candles for the Volunteer Appreciation gift;

George Northrop and Bebe Ames for plowing the parking lots at our trailheads;

Julia Blyth, Shelli Bischoff, and Mike Mauri for providing consultation;

Tom Ellsworth for providing maintenance services at Skyfields Arboretum;

Ben and Susie Feldman for helping organize programming on their land;

Charlotte Weltzin for leading the guided mindfulness walk;

Paul Wanta for leading the wildlife tracking workshop;

Sara Videtto and Steve Shanley for reading their stories at the author read-aloud events;

Julie Bouchard, Linda Tomasi, and Michael Humphries for presenting at the Storytelling night;

And all of our Mount Grace Board and Committee Members!

We could not have done any of this without you!



We were greatly saddened to hear about the passing of Peter Tishler and want to express our sincere thanks to him and his family for his support of our work for almost 35 years.



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Celebrate **EARTH DAY 2021** with Mount Grace!



Thursday, April 22nd, 9am-6pm
Volunteer Work Day
Skyfields Arboretum
1461 Old Keene Road, Athol, MA

Join us at Skyfields Arboretum to help with stewardship activities on the land! We will be pulling invasives, planting native species, creating two pollinator plots, and much more!

Saturday, April 24th, 10-11am
Natural History Forest Walk
Paul Dunn Woodland Preserve
2 Hewitt Road, Ashburnham, MA

Join Dr. Chris Picone for a natural history forest walk at Paul Dunn Woodland Preserve in Ashburnham, MA on Saturday, April 24th.



RSVP on our website or contact KimLynn Nguyen at nguyen@mountgrace.org or 978-541-1769 with questions about the volunteer work day.