

Views *from* Mount Grace

Volume 18, No. 3 • Fall 2007

C O N S E R V I N G T H E L O C A L L A N D S C A P E TM



BASCOM HOLLOW FARM

Rescuing Bascom Hollow

BY SUSAN LASCALA

The year I turned 40 I decided to get healthy. I called my friends, Doff Storrow and Emily Samuels for support. We started riding bikes on weekends, affectionately calling our rides "The Tours de Gill." One Sunday morning we turned east onto Hoeshop Road and then veered left where the pavement turned into a dirt road I hadn't been on before. Woo hoo! I shouted out as my bike zoomed around a gentle curve on a long, gradual hill. Normally I would be concerned about the uphill to follow, but I was taken in by the scene unfolding around me and didn't give a thought to the pain ahead. I flew past woods where sunlight filtered through the leaves, giving the sense of a moving stained-glass window. Then the right side of the road opened up turning into fields of tall grass, and the fields opened to become a valley. A farmhouse appeared ahead and then became the center of the scene. The land flattened and I squeezed my brakes for the sharp turn at the bottom of the hill. In front of the farm house the now-flat road ran between sunlit fields. It felt as if I were riding into a bit of heaven. We crossed a small bridge over what I eventually learned was the Fall River, and then we stopped. I turned to look at the place we'd just come from. I could see butterflies dipping into the grasses. I could hear birdsong, the burbling river, and my own breathing. Nothing else. If I ever make it to heaven, I thought, this is what it will look like.

(continued on page 3)



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

Inside This Issue

Giniusz Farm • Member Profile • Russell Hill • Red Apple Woods

Mount Grace Updates • Volunteer Stewards Program • Upcoming Events

Annual Meeting, September 29th





Dear Friends,

Sustainability is a word that means many things to many people and it can be applied to a variety of circumstances: forestry, energy, and organization, to name but a few. However, the general meaning is clear: in order for any system to continue to function in a healthy manner, a dynamic balance must be achieved between incoming and outgoing resources.

For most of its history, Mount Grace produced enormous results in land conservation with surprisingly few human and financial resources of its own. This record was noted in the report, *Western Massachusetts: Assessing the Conservation Opportunity* produced by the Open Space Institute of New York in March 2005. This study "identifies strategies that could direct Western Massachusetts toward a sustainable future that embraces its natural heritage."

Impressed by this study, and Mount Grace's track record, an anonymous supporter committed to funding a five year expansion plan in order to make Mount Grace's productivity sustainable. Additionally, a private foundation made it possible for Mount Grace to begin work with the national Land Trust Alliance to evaluate and strengthen all of our conservation, stewardship, fundraising, and administrative practices.

This action-packed issue of Views from Mount Grace illustrates how these investments are paying off in results, and how important the active involvement of individuals is to sustaining our work.

Thank you for your support.

Very truly,

Leigh Youngblood
Executive Director

Views from Mount Grace

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 our office at:

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 www.mountgrace.org.

Mount Grace Staff

Leigh Youngblood
Executive Director
David Graham Wolf
Conservation Director
Brenda Bhatti
Conservation Project Manager PIT
Paul Daniello
Conservation Project Manager
Tom Wansleben
Stewardship Biologist
Jay Rasku
North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership Coordinator
Pam Kimball-Smith
Development Director
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Mary Eliot Jackson	Royalston
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Mike Roche	Orange
Colleen Sculley	Montague

How right it is that more than a decade later my bike-riding friends and their spouses were among those answering the call echoing out of Bascom Hollow this spring. The owners of the farm, Paul Worthington and Anne Marie Dollarton, needed to put the property up for sale on the open market. They had applied for an agricultural preservation restriction (APR) but a series of complications kept the project from closing. Dick French, resident of Gill, Mount Grace member and former Board President, kicked into emergency land-preservation mode.

Dick knew time was short and, aware of how desirable those 169 acres would be to the real estate market, he went into action. Dick talked to the realtor handling the sale; Dick called

Mount Grace and brainstormed with Brenda Bhatti and lawyer David Singer, about options; he talked to his wife, Emily, about buying the land themselves. He talked to Greenfield Savings Bank, who agreed to loan the money.

Mount Grace's Board of Directors came to look at Bascom Hollow, and were collectively smitten, convinced this was a place worthy of their attention. Brenda Bhatti doggedly worked through the complicated process of pre-acquiring an APR on the property. Four Gill families answered the call and loaned a total of \$300,000 to Mount Grace towards the purchase of the property. In the meantime, John O'Keefe, another former Mount Grace president, called upon friends and convinced them to visit this farm.

On July 10, 2007, two couples – Tom Chalmers and Joan Meyer, with Brian Donahue and Faith Rand – purchased the farm, already protected by an APR. Four and one-half acres around the existing farmhouse had been excluded. The new owners will raise grass-fed lamb and beef, and may do some sugaring. Bascom Hollow was pulled back from the brink of division and development by committed local residents, the tenacious work of Dick French, and Mount Grace's ability to carry a complicated project through to fruition. The list of individuals who touched this project is long, and demonstrates the spirit of land protection as something that rises out of the community. Because of the efforts of committed citizens, community government and Mount Grace, a bit of heaven remains in Gill for all of us.

ERVING COMPLETES FIRST EVER CONSERVATION PROJECT

BY JAY RASKU

This summer, the Town of Erving became the proud owner of its first ever conservation land.

Back in the spring of 2007, town leaders jumped at the opportunity to protect the 125-acre Giniusz Farm, known to many residents who hunted or hiked the property.

Brenda Bhatti of Mount Grace and Jay Rasku of the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership worked alongside Tom Sharp, Erving Town Administrator, and Laura Hebert, member of the Erving Conservation Commission, to develop a conservation scenario that would work for the town.

After a number of meetings and discussions, the best funding strategy emerged: the town would buy 119 acres outright and purchase a conservation restriction on the remaining 6.8 acres. A town vote to fund the project would occur at the next Town Meeting. Following a successful vote, the town would apply for a Massachusetts Self-Help Grant to help cover the costs of the project.

Mount Grace worked with the Conservation Commission to

draw up a conservation restriction and warrant articles for the land project. The Partnership assisted in educational efforts before the town meeting vote, and awarded the town a Partnership Grant to cover the cost of the appraisal required for the Self-Help Grant.

At Town Meeting in June of 2007, residents packed the Erving Elementary School and voted overwhelmingly to protect the land. This July, Erving received the funds from the Self-Help Grant to complete the project.

Now residents will forever have the ability to explore and enjoy the land. Currently, old logging roads meander through the woods, and can be followed to property's rocky summit, known as Poplar Mountain. Hikers are rewarded with spectacular views of the surrounding forested hills and the Millers River Valley.

"It's a great thing for the town." said Conservation Commission member Laura Herbert "We're excited to start working on opening the land to the community and getting trails set up."

Member Profile

Dick French: *Many Ways to Give*

BY NATHAN RUDOLPH



Over the past ten years, Dick French has played a central role in the success of Mount Grace. He has served on the board of directors- including three terms as president, and has protected around 300 acres of land in Gill through agricultural preservation and conservation restrictions. He has also spearheaded numerous conservation efforts including the recent Bascom Hollow project, donated carpentry expertise at Skyfields, and provided Mount Grace with sig-

nificant financial support.

Dick's great grandfather, engraver and music publisher Elisha Clapp, left Dorchester in the 1850's and purchased the 20 acres in Gill Dick now calls home. As a fifth generation Gill resident, it is no surprise that Dick is passionate about conserving the fields and forests of his hometown.

Dick is modest about his work: "Since much of the land came from my family, I don't feel as if it is really mine, my ancestors are the ones who deserve the credit for protecting the land". However, those familiar with conservation in the region know that Dick has been instrumental in local conservation well beyond his family's land, and a true asset to Mount Grace.

If you are interested in helping local land conservation efforts through donations of land, conservation restrictions, service or financial support, please contact Nathan Rudolph, Director of Donor Relations (978) 248-2055 extension 18 or rudolph@mountgrace.org.

RUSSELL HILL, PROTECTED

BY DAVID KOTKER

Ashburnham's new town forest climbs the eastern side of Russell Hill, in the southeastern section of town, about a mile from the Fitchburg Reservoir. The 205-acre parcel was withdrawn from Chapter 61 last year prior to being put on the market for development. The town had the right of first refusal on the property which, at the time, was valued at one million dollars.

The property was part of the 1778 Cambridge Grant and was first owned by Captain Thomas Adams, a veteran of the French and Indian War. Numerous small streams drain westward into Brown Brook, part of the headwaters of the Nashua River. The southwest and west facing slopes contain a number of old growth trees, which provide exceptional wildlife habitat. The forest cover is typical of the Southern Monadnock Plateau Region consisting of a mix of northern hardwood and conifers. Logging and cart

paths throughout the property offer significant opportunities for hiking, skiing and viewing wildlife.

Hoping to conserve the land, but faced with some serious financial hurdles, Gary Howland, who wears two hats as President of the Ashburnham Conservation Trust and associate member of the Ashburnham Conservation Commission asked Mount Grace to join the project. Over the next months, as a project partner, Mount Grace put together funding and bought the entire parcel in February—pre-acquiring it to give the town time to get its own funding ready. After the Commonwealth of Massachusetts awarded Ashburnham a Self Help grant and a Water Conservation Fund grant for the project, town residents approved funding the purchase at a special Town Meeting. Ashburnham purchased the forest from Mount Grace on May 31st and held a ribbon cutting in June.

(continued on page 5)

Ashburnham expects the hill to serve as a nucleus for further conservation in the area. "It's a property we've wanted to conserve for more than 3 years." Said Howland "The Russell Hill / Jewell Hill area of Ashburnham has a high environmental value and has seen a lot of residential development so we are extremely pleased to have our first large protected property in that part of town." Protecting the hill also serves as a buffer for the Midstate Trail, which runs nearby through a mix of protected and unprotected lands. Town ownership will allow the town and other partners to plan for a spur trail or, if necessary, an alternate trail route on protected lands for the Midstate Trail.



Farm Protects Forest

Rose Family Donates CR to Mount Grace

BY DAVID KOTKER

For four generations the Rose Family has run the orchards at Phillipston's Red Apple Farm, first as a wholesale operation and today as direct marketing farm selling retail and pick-your-own apples and peaches. The colonial farmhouse stands on Highland Avenue, between Phillipston Four Corners and the undeveloped tracts of land in Thousand Acre Swamp. The farm is protected by an APR and will be the site of the upcoming Mount Grace Annual Meeting on September 29th.

This year the 103 acres of woods that buffer the apple orchards have been protected by a conservation restriction (CR) donated to Mount Grace by Bill Rose, now of New Hampshire, a long time Phillipston resident who ran the Red Apple Farm until turning it over to his son Al in 2002. The woods, formerly cow pastures, are crisscrossed by several stone walls and contain mixed stands of pine and hardwoods as well as wetlands, blueberry thickets, vernal pools and a stream draining Lamb City Pond.

By protecting his land, Bill Rose hopes to maintain the neighborhood's open space and to help Al and Nancy

Rose continue the traditions of Red Apple Farm. "We sell the experience of being on a working New England farm", says Al Rose, "The key to selling that is protecting the landscape around the farm. The landscape is an asset that helps keep the farm viable."

Cross-country ski trails running through the woods connect the orchards to the pond and have been popular winter feature of the farm. The CR prevents further large scale development of the woods but allows agricultural improvements and forestry as well as skiing, hiking, hay rides, and the other recreational uses enjoyed by visitors to the woods today.



Mount Grace, which holds the CR, expects that the gift will, in addition to protecting wildlife habitat around the farm, help leverage funding for other conservation projects nearby. As town Conservation Commission chair Rose Frizzell said, "protecting a large parcel makes the land around it more attractive for conservation. Thousand Acre Swamp has been a primary focus area of ours for a while and we're thrilled to add a buffer of protected land in the area around it."

Grants Received

Fields Pond Foundation - \$10,000 for Brush Mountain II
North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership - \$4,000 for Rose Project
Robinson Broadhurst Foundation - \$10,000 for Murdock Farm
Greenfield Savings Bank - \$1,000 for Twenty Years, Twenty Hikes hiking guide

Foundation Gifts

Echo Rock Fund at the Boston Foundation - \$3,000 for Quabbin Corridor Forest Legacy Project
Moccasin Brook Fund at the Boston Foundation - \$3,000 for Quabbin Corridor Forest Legacy Project
September Fund at the Boston Foundation - \$5,000 for Quabbin Corridor Forest Legacy Project
Skylight Fund at the Boston Foundation - \$3,000 for Quabbin Corridor Forest Legacy Project

Memorial Giving

Gift were received in memory of **Donald V. Johnson** and **Juliette M. Roy**.

Special Thanks *from Mount Grace to:*

Main Street Millwork and the **Forest and Wood Products Institute of Mount Wachusett Community College** for the donation of wood flooring for the office renovation

Carlie Gaida and **Anne Cervantes** for their volunteer help in the office

Elizabeth Farnsworth for leading the Fern Glenn Botany Hike and writing the *Foret Stewardship* handbook

Glenn Freden for leading the logging tour at Guiney Memorial Forest

Chef Gail Beauregard, Nicol Wander and the staff of the Copper Angel Restaurant for hosting another successful dinner for Mount Grace

Henshaw and Haley and the Rudolph family for co-sponsoring the Copper Angel dinner

Susan LaScala for her contributions to the newsletter

Mary Canning and **Mick & Louise Huppert** for hosting Lorinda Pond fundraising events in their homes

Irene Del Bono for leading the Conservation Restriction policy discussion at the July board meeting

Bruce Spencer for providing chain saw instruction

John Burk, Allen Young, Elizabeth Farnsworth, Greenfield Savings Bank, Sirius Design, and the Highland Press for their efforts in creating *Twenty Years, Twenty Hikes*

John M. Woolsey, III for his contribution of architectural drawings for the Skyfields renovation

Harvard Forest for hosting the recent North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership meeting

Bernie McHugh of the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition and University of Massachusetts research associate **Tony D'Amato** for their presentations at the Partnership meeting

Rick Kwiatkowski and the **Town of Orange** for hosting a workshop on Commonwealth Capital for the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership

The Millers River Environmental Center for hosting numerous Mount Grace and North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership meetings

Wendy Lavallee for consulting and advising the development staff

Christine Beckert Long for her help in working on the shade garden at Skyfields

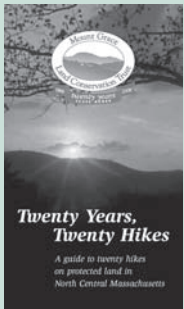
Dr. Betsy Colburne for designing and editing our new conservation manual



On the Skyfields tour, June 2007

Twenty Years, Twenty Hikes Trail Guide

Authors Allen Young, John Burk and Elizabeth Farnsworth have compiled twenty hikes (actually nineteen hikes and one canoe trip) that highlight some of the projects



Mount Grace has worked on that are best suited to hiking or visiting. Selected from more than two hundred land protection projects Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust has assisted

with over the years, each of the trails crosses a portion of the extensive mosaic of protected land that characterizes the local landscape of the greater North Quabbin region. Sponsored by Greenfield Savings Bank, Sirius Design, and the Highland Press.

Available at
www.mountgrace.org/store.html
\$9.95 plus \$2 shipping and handling

Volunteer Stewards

Tuck Conservation Area, on Old Turnpike Road in Ashburnham has been owned by Mount Grace since the Summer of 2000. The job of managing the land falls to Mount Grace's Stewardship Biologist, Tom Wansleben, who also monitors the conservation restriction (CR) on the 392-acre Massachusetts Audubon property at the end of Old Turnpike Road. All told, Tom manages over 1400 acres of Mount Grace owned land and monitors another 3600 on which Mount Grace holds CRs. With so much land, it's helpful to have extra eyes watching over the forest so Tom enlists the help of conservation minded local volunteers.

Phil Hagar, Tuck's nearest neighbor, has roamed the land along Old Turnpike Road for over thirty years. On foot or on horseback, he keeps an eye out for incursions by motor traffic, damage to stone walls or the land, and trash left by inconsiderate visitors. As one of the original partners in the work of protecting the property, he was a perfect candidate for volunteer land steward. Thoroughly checking the conservation area four or five times a year, he can report back to Tom with news of any damage or invasive species. He also compiles evidence of wild species living at Tuck. His two page reports are a valuable supplement to Tom's own visits, giving Mount Grace a fuller picture of the stewardship needs on the lands it owns.

Phil is one of a handful of volunteers who have assisted Mount Grace for years, but with over 1400 acres of widely dispersed conservation areas to manage, more are needed. "Our volunteer land stewards act as the eyes and ears on the ground," says Tom "They help us to manage our lands and also to connect with people in our region. Phil exemplifies the perfect volunteer land steward as he holds a wealth of knowledge about the property and is truly concerned about its stewardship."

Several Mount Grace properties are currently without volunteer stewards. Anyone interested should meet first with Tom and be able to commit to walking through a property at least four times over the course of each year. For information about joining the volunteer stewards contact David Kotker at (978) 248-2055 x19 or kotker@mountgrace.org

Upcoming Fall 2007 Events

Annual Meeting Red Apple Farm

Phillipston
Saturday, September 29th
11am to 2pm
\$25 per ticket

Join fellow Mount Grace members at our annual meeting. The program will include local landowners speaking about their conservation efforts. Lunch will be provided by the farm after the election of new board members. There will be a pre-meeting hike on the newly donated CR next to the farm.

Interface Acorn Moon

1794 Meeting House, New Salem
Sunday, October 21st, 10am
Old New Salem Library

Mount Grace is co-sponsoring this annual collaboration of word, image, and music honoring art and the environment. Environmentalist Russ Cohen will give a talk on wild edible plants and local historian Rick Leonard will lead a walking tour through historical New Salem, adjacent to the West Hill project. The presentations will be followed by an art gallery show and poetry readings.

Volunteer Workday

Skyfields Arboretum, Athol
1461 Old Keene Rd.
Saturday, November 10th,
10am to 3pm

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

Hike Mount Grace

Mount Grace, Warwick
Saturday, November 17th
10am to 3pm

Meet at the Warwick fire station and join our own Brenda Bhatti as well as Oliver Mutch, of New Hampshire's Harris Center for Conservation Education, in a moderate hike to the summit of the mountain. Bring water and snacks or a lunch.



Non-profit Organization

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Please join Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust. Thanks to our members, Mount Grace is one of the most active land conservation organizations in Massachusetts, conserving 20,000 acres of the local landscape.

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MEMBERSHIP FORM—Please check all which apply:

_____ I would like to renew / start my membership with a tax-deductible contribution of:

_____ \$25 _____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$250 _____ \$500 _____ \$1,000 _____ other

_____ I would like to pledge \$_____ per quarter to Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust.

_____ I would like more information on how to protect a piece of land that is special to me.

_____ I would like to include Mount Grace in my will or as part of my estate. Please send me more information.

_____ I am interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities at Mount Grace.

_____ Please do not use my name in your lists of contributors.

_____ Please do not share my name with other organizations.

Please forward to Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, 1461 Old Keene Road, Athol, MA 01331-9689. Thank you!

FALL 2007