

Views *from* Mount Grace

Volume 19, No. 2 • Summer 2008

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



Gale's Hilltop Farm looking north to Butterworth Ridge

Gale's Hilltop Farm

BY DAVID KOTKER

Looking across Tully Road from Tully Meadow, travelers can see the familiar Tully landmark Gale's Hilltop Farm. The 71-acre farmstead is mostly tree-covered, with a cleared pasture along the road. Last fall, development was planned for ten to thirty homes on a new road cutting into the forest. Today Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust is looking for partners to help save the historic North Orange farm.

Butch and Judy Gale ran a small cattle and poultry operation there until Butch's death in 2006. Earlier this year, Mrs. Gale made the decision to move, selling the property to Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust in order to conserve the farm's pastures and wooded hillside. Mount Grace secured a two-year loan from The Conservation Fund, to "pre-acquire" the property, planning to sell it to a conservation buyer or state conservation agency to guarantee protection of the land.

The property includes an early nineteenth century farmhouse, a barn, and ten acres of open pasture. The farm abuts 1200 acres of conservation land, much of it protected by Mount Grace and MassWildlife during the Tully Initiative, and has frontage on the West Branch of the Tully River. The Tully Trail runs by the front yard, and the property offers panoramic views of Tully Mountain and Tully Meadow.

(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

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Dear Friends,

June 20th marks the 22nd anniversary of the Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust. With the passing of nearly a generation in time, I've had the opportunity to meet many of the children of our supporters and am happy to note that many of them have also become members of Mount Grace. In fact, current board member Jon Waidlich is the son of former Mount Grace board president and Millers River Watershed Council co-founder, Henry Waidlich.

Today's visit to Skyfields by a class of first-graders, chaperoned by several grandparents, is a reminder of how important conserved land is to families. Often it is a family member that introduces us to nature via a love of the outdoors. Perhaps the children here today will return with their parents for another visit to Skyfields Arboretum or to one of our other public conservation areas described in Mount Grace's guide, *Twenty Years, Twenty Hikes*.

It seems natural for several generations of the same family to become involved with Mount Grace. The children of Judy Gale joined her the day Mount Grace pre-acquired Gale's Hilltop Farm. While these grown children no longer lived there, the selling of the family farm affected them all.

This summer I hope to see you and your family and friends at one of Mount Grace's events. In June, you'll be able to hear from Mark Fellows of Chase Hill Farm how he first learned about dairy farming working with his father. At the Murdock Dairy Farm in August, the Girouard brothers will recount stories from four generations on the land.

The mission of Mount Grace includes protecting land and encouraging stewardship for the benefit of future generations. Thank you for your help in doing that.

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:

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Visit our web site at www.mountgrace.org

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Mike Roche	Orange
Kasey Rolih	Warwick
Colleen Sculley	Montague
Jon Waidlich	Montague

The proposed development would have dominated half a mile of the Tully Trail. Now Mount Grace is focusing on finding a conservation partner to buy the house, built in 1820. "Finding a conservation-minded buyer to keep the house makes it possible for us to partner with the town and state together to conserve the entire property.", said Leigh Youngblood, Executive Director of Mount Grace.

The Orange Conservation Commission voted unanimously to support Mount Grace's intent to pre-acquire the property, and to work to obtain funding from the Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services to purchase either a conservation restriction or the land. Members sponsored a warrant article urging the town to apply for a half-help grant to protect the property at Town Meeting in May. "It's important open space for the town", said Conservation Commission Chair Alec

MacLeod, "not only because of the land itself, but because it connects the protected space of the Tully Mountain Wildlife Management Area to the woodlands on Temple Hill."

Without a buyer, the house may need to be removed before an agreement to protect the farm's fields and woods can be reached. Funding for land conservation projects is complex, and many of the feasible conservation options left available to Mount Grace involve removing the house. But whatever happens, the land will be protected, as the Gales wanted. "We chose to work with Mount Grace because we wanted to protect the land.", said Judy Gale, "Butch was an outdoorsman all his life. He didn't want a whole lot of houses there, he wanted to keep the land open, and that's what we've done."

REMEMBERING BOB ROULEAU

BY DAVID KOTKER

Bob Rouleau, who passed away this March after a brief illness, was recognized as a member of the Margaret Power-Biggs Society in the Spring issue of *Views From Mount Grace*. Bob was a student of the natural world and a strong advocate for land protection with his words and deeds.

Bob grew up fishing in the creeks around Cass Farm in Athol, and began tying his own flies at the age of 12. His understanding of nature was rooted in his love of fly fishing, which led him to seek out many of the most pristine spots in the Connecticut and Quabbin watersheds and to learn the life cycles of the fish he caught and the flies he could mimic so well.

Bob married Maggie Blackmer in 1953 and moved to a house on Athol Road. The neighborhood was rural, near the streams Bob knew from childhood, and surrounded by woods and farms, including the Blackmer family farm across the road. By the time Maggie Rouleau inherited the Blackmer farm, development had changed much of Orange and Athol, but North Orange was still a haven for farming, hunting and fishing.

In 2001, Bob and Maggie helped keep those traditions going by putting an agricultural preservation restriction (APR) on Maggie's Farm, which is now leased by the Farm School serving as the headquarters of their adult education farm. "We chose the APR to keep the land in farming", said Maggie Rouleau, "It had been in the family since 1893. People had worked too hard to give up on farming there, so we wanted it to go to the Farm School."

The Rouleaus also protected their own land during the Tully Initiative, transferring a conservation restriction to the Department of Fish and Game to guarantee that the land would be free from development and open to the public.

As Mount Grace board member Mike Roche recalls, this was not Bob's only connection to the Tully initiative. "I went hunting with Secretary Bob Durand in the fall of 1999 and we stopped in at the Rouleaus' and spoke with Bob. He talked about being an outdoorsman and wanting to be a responsible steward of the land he owned. I could see the way Bob spoke had a great impact on Durand. When we went up to Jacobs Hill and looked out over the landscape we were still talking about what Bob had said. It's fair to say that the Tully Initiative, which started the next spring as a collaboration between the state, Mount Grace, and local landowners, took part of its inspiration from Bob Rouleau."



Bob at work, tying flies

Inaugural Celebration

On April 18, more than thirty Mount Grace supporters gathered in Northfield for the Margaret Power-Biggs Society inaugural celebration. The Power-Biggs Society is Mount Grace's donor recognition circle made up of individuals, businesses and foundations who give \$1,000 or more annually in support of Mount Grace. The celebration began with an afternoon hike from Northfield's Brush Mountain Conservation Area (a project of Mount Grace) to the Crag Mountain overlook. We then moved to the Northfield Mount Hermon campus where guests enjoyed the beautiful valley views from the porch of Moore Cottage while savoring good food and lively conversation. Later in the evening, Scott Jackson



Moore Cottage during Scott Jackson's talk

of UMass - Amherst (one of the people behind Amherst's famous salamander crossings) gave a humorous and thought-provoking presentation on the importance of land conservation in protecting biodiversity. For more information about the Margaret Power-Biggs Society, please contact Nathan Rudolph, Director of Donor Relations, (978) 248-2043 X18, rudolph@mountgrace.org.

NATIONAL GRANT TO CONSERVE WETLAND

BY JAY RASKU

One of the biodiversity jewels of our region is one step closer towards permanent conservation. Thousand Acre Swamp is a unique wetland system located on the border of Athol and Phillipston, Massachusetts – those of us who drive Route 2 or 2A pass just south of this wildlife hotspot. Excellent water quality and isolation from heavily developed areas have made Thousand Acre Swamp important habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, and a favorite of hunters, anglers and wildlife enthusiasts. In just one year's sampling by the Athol Bird and Nature Club, 108 bird species were observed in the wetland (the 109th bird species turned out to be a giant mosquito).

The North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership led a team including Mount Grace, the Town of Athol, Phillipston Open Space Committee, Department of Fish and Game and

private landowners to submit a \$74,800 application for a North American Wetland and Conservation Act (NAWCA) Grant, a program administered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service designed to protect important migratory bird habitat. The team received word this past March that the grant award ranked #2 out of 94 grant requests from across the country.

NAWCA funding will allow Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust to work with private landowners to purchase a conservation restriction on 88 acres of the swamp and adjacent uplands. In total, this project, and others nearby, will add roughly 400 wetland and upland acres to 5,800 previously protected acres, including land managed by the Athol Conservation Commission, the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation, the MA Department of Fish and Game, and non-profit conservation groups.

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The view from the trail on the Phillipston side of the swamp

This project is expected to be completed within the next year. In the meantime, the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership will continue working with interested landowners and organizations to conserve other important areas of Thousand Acre Swamp.

If you'd like more information about this initiative, or know of other wetlands that could benefit from NAWCA funding, please call Jay at (978) 248-2118.

Jenny Tufts, Executive Director of the Greater Northfield Watershed Association, is currently an intern at Mount Grace through an innovative land trust fellowship program sponsored by a grant from the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition. The program allows members of smaller, usually local, land trusts to work with regional land trusts in order to gain knowledge and experience of land protection, outreach, fundraising, and other aspects of conservation work.

Two Landscape Scale Forest Legacy Projects Nationally Ranked

BY JENNY TUFTS

Speaking at the inaugural of the Margaret Power-Biggs Society, Scott Jackson, Director of UMass Extension's Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation Program, told a group of Mount Grace supporters that the latest thinking about land conservation is evolving to take into account not only impacts of housing and road development but also anticipated climate shifts and the inter-connectedness of species. Tactics such as new culvert designs to allow easier movement of animal life under roadways, linking vernal pools, preserving contiguous tracts, and focusing on habitat corridors are all part of the new broader strategic approach.

Mount Grace has been ahead of this curve and currently has one active ecosystem-linking project, and one nominated for funding approval under the federal Forest Legacy Program. Mount Grace, the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership and the Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA) have each put together innovative projects one key player at a time. The final designs are carefully patched together into a quilt composed of the vision, good will, responsible stewardship and mutual self interest of private land owners, institutions, and government agencies. While the complexity of these partnerships is formidable, the potential benefits look to stand the test of time.

Mount Grace has joined with the towns of Warwick, Northfield, and Erving to propose the Metacomet-

Monadnock Forest project, bringing together institutional and private landowners in and around the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail System. Five landowners, including the Northfield Mount Hermon School, are planning to add more than 900 protected acres to the existing 17,000-acre Warwick to Wendell State Forest block.

At the eastern end of the North Quabbin Region, NRWA's Southern Monadnock Plateau Phase II project builds on a \$2.5 million Forest Legacy award to conserve working forests facing development pressures. This multi-year effort will create corridors of protected working forests, linking over 15,000 acres stretching from Massachusetts into New Hampshire. The project conserves more than 1,800 forest acres, buffering drinking water supplies for four towns.

Thanks to board and staff traditions of innovative approaches to conservation, Mount Grace has consistently proposed winning Forest Legacy projects. Recent rankings have the Southern Monadnock Plateau project 5th and the Metacomet-Monadnock project 17th on the federal list.

These multi-owner, landscape-scale Forest Legacy projects are a key tool for a healthy future. Mount Grace is successfully building on its networks in the community to put together financial and conservation partnerships to leave the North Quabbin region a lasting legacy of biodiversity.

Grants Received

Entergy Corp - \$5,000 for Brush Mountain II

Greenfield Savings Bank - \$1,000 for Newsletter

North American Wetland and Conservation Act Grant - \$74,800 for the Thousand Acre Swamp project

Gifts were Received *in Honor of*

Barbara Corey

Charles Crowley

Gifts were Received *in Memory of*

Frederick Hellen

Bob Rouleau

George Thomas

Special Thanks *from Mount Grace to:*

Droll Yankees for their donation of a Yankee Flipper bird feeder

Lisa Lavasseur of Gardner Agway and **Lisa Cormier** of Mount Grace for the gift of a garden cart

Brian Szyndlar for his assistance with the Brush Mountain Entergy Grant

Carlie Gaida, Mount Grace's most indefatigable volunteer

Anne Cervantes for her work on volunteer projects in and out of the office

Lisa Sihvonen-Binder for assisting with grants and grant research

Celt Grant, Ray Purington, and Norm and Don Flye for their volunteer work around Skyfields

Norm Eggert for coordinating and leading the digital photography workshop at Skyfields

Bill Rose, Zach Koziol, and Jeffrey Phillips for their demonstration work at the April Apple Tree release

Everyone who helped at the April 18th Inaugural of the Margaret Power-Biggs Society

Scott Jackson for his keynote presentation

Brazell's Package Store in Gardner for donating beer and wine

Rafaela Calicchio of Northfield Mount Hermon for her efforts coordinating the event

John Burk for leading the Brush Mountain hike



Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust welcomes our newest staff member, Amanda Lewis.

As our Land Conservation Associate, Amanda specializes in conservation planning, GIS, and database development. Amanda began her conservation work as an intern at Lava Beds National

Monument, assessing bat populations, maintaining trails, and creating a GIS database of all trails and caves in the park. She has worked for the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) as a GIS Technician and Forestry Assistant. Amanda also worked as a consultant for DCR on an ambitious project to inventory all roads and trails on DCR State Parks and Forests. Amanda has a B.S. in Geography from Penn State and an M.S. in Geography from UMass, Amherst.



Thanks to Bonnie Benjamin's class at the Sanders Street Elementary School for helping with spring planting at Skyfields.

Upcoming Summer 2008 Events

Open House

Chase Hill Farm, Warwick

74 Chase Hill Road

Sunday, June 22nd

10 am – 4 pm

Come visit a sustainable organic dairy farm protected by Mount Grace in 2001 with an agricultural preservation restriction. Chase Hill Farm produces cheese, raw milk, beef, and veal from 100% grass fed cows. Owners Mark and Jeannette Fellows will demonstrate milking and grazing techniques and provide a tour of the cheesemaking facilities with samples of organic raw milk and cheeses; bring a picnic lunch.

Gale Farm Summer Series

In and Around Gale's Hilltop Farm, Orange

485 Tully Road

July 1st through August 2nd

To help Mount Grace keep the Gale Farm project in the public eye, volunteers from the community have come together to run a series of walks, talks, and get-togethers focused on the farm and its place in the Tully landscape. Mount Grace invites all members and friends to attend one, some, or all of these events and take the opportunity to get to know this lovely spot. Parking for all events is at the farm, unless otherwise listed.

Tuesday, July 1st 10-12: Join Mary Williamson in a walk down the woods road behind the Gale property. Park at the intersection of Tully Road and Flagg Road, about one mile north of the Farm. We will hike south to North Orange and carpool back. The walk will be repeated on **Saturday, August 2nd**.

Wednesday, July 9th 11-2: Allen Young will lead a hike from the bioreserve boulder, up the Tully Trail to Fish Brook Gorge. Bring a picnic lunch and water, we will lunch at the Gorge and return. Hike is moderate with some steep areas

Sunday, July 13th 9-12: Join Dave Small to explore the Gale Farm and adjoining Tully bioreserve for butterflies, dragonflies and birds. Be prepared to wade in shallow water. Bring binoculars, camera, insect net (if you have one), drinking water and your sense of fun and adventure. Hiking will be easy to moderate and suitable for children.

Tuesday, July 22nd 3-5:30: Reading the Landscape, with John O'Keefe will teach how to find signs of historical land use by looking at the land today. The tour of the landscape will move from the farm to Flagg Road.

Saturday, July 19th 9-12: John Burk will lead a tour of the wildlife habitat around the farm and nearby Tully Meadow, focusing on wildflowers, and the variety of insects, birds and small mammals that make use of open fields and early successional habitat. All ages.

Thursday, July 24th 11-2: Picnic on the lawn at Gale Farm, hosted by Kasey Rolih and Brad Compton. Lunch will be followed by a wildlife walk around the farm. Bring food to share, a hand lens and binoculars if you have them. All ages.

Saturday, July 26th 9-1:30: Don Flye, of the Appalachian Mountain Club, will lead a 6.5-mile hike from the farm north along the Tully Trail into the Warwick State Forest and back around Sheomet Lake. The hike will be at a moderate pace with a stop for lunch beside the lake.

Wednesday, July 30th 8-10: Tracker David Brown will explore wildlife habitats at Gale Farm, looking for signs of the mammals and birds that use the property as well as the ecological factors that attract them to this beautiful place. Wear long sleeves and long pants and bring binoculars. All ages. For information on David Brown, see www.dbwildlife.com.

Farm Tour and

Ice Cream Social

Captain's Farm and

Murdock Dairy Farm, Winchendon

Elmwood Road

Saturday, August 16th

12:30-4:30 pm

Join Stewardship Biologist Tom Wansleben on a walk around 300 acres of working farmland. Beginning at Captain's Farm, protected by Mount Grace last year, the walk will examine the importance of fields as wildlife habitat. From there, we will walk to the adjoining Murdock Farm, where owners Frank and Ken Girouard are applying for an agricultural preservation restriction with help from Mount Grace. The walk will finish at the Murdock Farm Ice cream stand.

For information, register for an event, or for rain dates, please contact David Kotker at (978) 248-2043 X19 or kotker@mountgrace.org



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Think Globally, Donate Locally!™

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 more than 21,000 acres of the local landscape.

Name _____

Address _____ Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

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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 list 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 01331-9734. Thank you!

SUMMER 2008