

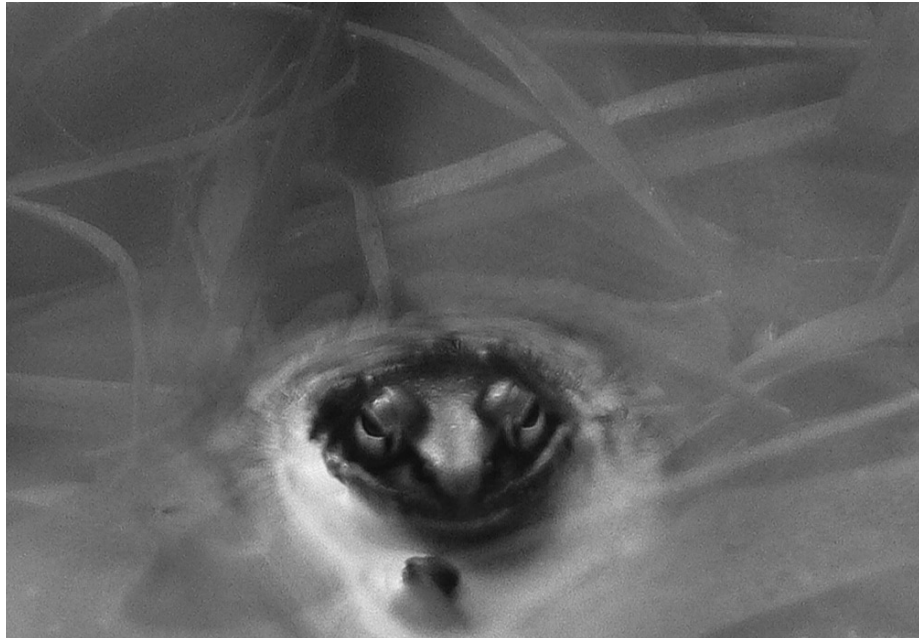


Pascommuck post

Spring 2010

Take a Hike

It's Spring!!



I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order.

John Burroughs



What about you? You can do all that and more, within five minutes of downtown Easthampton, on a trail at one of PCT's properties. Throughout the year, I regularly visit several of these conservation gems for a leisurely stroll (in addition to a little soothing and healing!) and am always pleasantly surprised by what I encounter.

Most recently (late March 2010), I've been walking at our Trolley Line property, adjacent to Clapp Street, not far from Arcadia. The meadows here connect to the Manhan River and its floodplain, providing habitat for diverse flora and fauna. I'm searching for the first signs of spring and I'm not disappointed. It's still early enough in the new season to keep track of

the changes. Soon, the explosion of new life will be everywhere, but at this moment in time, I can still count the signs on both hands.

I see blooming maples and skunk cabbages, bluebirds, wood ducks, great blue herons, robins and woodpeckers. On a warm afternoon, I hear wood frogs calling from a vernal pool; their duck-like quacking heralds the commencement of their mating season. From the woods beside a wetland, I watch a muskrat swimming along, in search of tender shoots; it climbs onto a log to groom its fur, then continues on. A grove of young white birch trees bordering one end of the meadow speaks of a late winter snow that bent many trunks, while leaving others unaffected. The first tiny leaves of trout lilies poke their way through the leaf litter. From somewhere in the woods, between the fields and the river, I hear a tom turkey gobbling, practicing perhaps, for its upcoming mating season. It's still too early for the slopes of Mt. Tom, in the distance, to sport green flanks, but in a few short weeks, that too will change.

My senses are put back in order. I leave feeling reassured that winter has once again given way to the forces of spring. Nature pushes on, oblivious to our latest technological achievement, political debate or celebrity gossip. Next time you're in need of a little "battery recharging", take a hike and discover some natural wonders, protected for you by the Pascommuck Conservation Trust. You'll be glad you did!

Marty Klein



Up a Tree

Or, How I Got Hooked on the PCT

So there I was, high above the forest floor, standing atop a ladder with a bird box in my right hand and my left arm tightly wrapped around a tree. I was pondering which one I would need to let go of so that I could grab on to the cordless driver hanging over my shoulder. Unfortunately, it was clear that I needed to let go of the tree, as letting go of the bird house would not let me do what I was there for – to hang the bird house on the tree. Below me was a group of onlookers, alternately earnest and humorous in their support of my efforts. These were the members of the Pascommuck Conservation Trust who had turned out for Bird Box Sunday on a splendidly beautiful Saturday morning in October. How did I end up in a place like this?

I discovered the PCT one day while I was out for a run, and happened on the Fall Festival. After a brief chat, I admired the plants and picked up a brochure, and eventually sent in dues. Since I have only been living in Easthampton since 2006, I had not yet found a way to connect with the community that seemed to really fit my interests. Maybe this was it?

I started attending the monthly Board meetings in the fall of 2009. I signed up to help with the plant sale (and I nearly emptied my wallet that day!) and came out for bird box Sunday (I did eventually get the bird house attached to the tree). What I found at these meetings and outings was a group of people who have a very diverse set of talents and personalities, and a shared commitment to land preservation and to the community of Easthampton.

The meetings are a mixture of business, catching up, and a generous sprinkling of humor. I have also found that this group not only cares about their mission of land preservation, they care about each other and the members who have supported the trust over the years. I had no doubt that this was a group that I wanted to be a part of, and I am so pleased to have been made a member of the Board. Thank you to all who attended our annual meeting, and to the Board members who have helped me to get grounded in the community of Easthampton. I encourage anyone who is interested in getting involved to come out for an event or a meeting, you'll be glad you did!

Abby Kingman



volunteering

Watch our web site, pctland.org, for a new look coming soon! We have been at work on a redesign and are excited about publishing it this summer. We'll let you know when it's done if you are on our mailing list, or you can join our facebook page for updates on PCT happenings."

The Saga of John Bator Park



There's a small jewel in our city of Easthampton that sits on the banks of Rubber Thread Pond, in view of Nashawannuck Pond. Creating and maintaining this treasure has been the work of the entire community. It was obtained by the Pascommuck Conservation Trust (PCT) in 1989 for \$1 from B-G Mechanical with the help of city officials. Starting in 1990, many volunteers over the years helped to build and to maintain the area as it progressed from an overgrown wasteland and unofficial dumping grounds to a full fledged mini-park containing a pathway, benches, picnic table, gazebo, flower beds with shrubs and trees, a shoreline nature trail dedicated to PCT volunteer and former board member Stella Wiernasz and the Angel Monument installed and maintained by the local chapter of Compassionate Friends, a national bereavement group for parents and families memorializing their children who have died.



Landscape architect, Bill Canon drew up the original plans for the park and later added plans for the shoreline steps. John Bator, a stalwart PCT board member and current president, supervised and coordinated the project. There was no official name at first. It was known merely as Lake Street Park. However, in the early to mid 1990's, it was officially named John Bator Park by vote from the PCT board officiated by Ken Larsen at the time. The Board recognized John's horticultural skill and extensive efforts made to initiate and maintain the area and probably suspected, as it has turned out, that these would continue. Plantings there include high bush cranberry, shadblow, umbrella magnolias, willow wood viburnum, rhododendrons, grasses, roses, clematis vines, iris and other perennials and annuals. In 1996 the gazebo, dedicated in memory of Joyce Brown, a former PCT member and city employee, replaced an existing kiosk. The nine benches and picnic table contain plaques in memory of local loved ones. The Angel Monument was installed in 2001 by the Compassionate Friends led by Robert and Nance McDonald, then the local group's leaders. About 300 people attended the grand dedication ceremony on 9/9/01 and there has been a yearly December

candlelight vigil there since. There are now 216 names memorialized in engraved granite bricks.

The park has been lovingly maintained with the help of volunteers and local businesses over the years including PCT and Compassionate Friends members, neighbors, city officials including Mayor Michael Tautznik, Shea Tree Service, Center for International Studies in Northampton, Students from Williston-Northampton School, Merrit Loomis Trucking, Mike Superson from Big E's Foodland and many others. The park is the site of many activities including visits to enjoy the scenery, reading, meditating at the Angel Monument, fishing at the nearby pond, gatherings of friends, weddings, Veterans Day ceremonies and PCT and Compassionate Friends events.

Unfortunately, vandalism and vagrancy have also been present. There has been evidence of people sleeping there overnight. Huge amounts of trash including alcohol containers, cigarette butts, clothes and food containers have been strewn throughout. Benches have been broken and thrown in the pond. Links of the railings around the Angel Monument have been cut. The gazebo has taken the brunt of the abuse with broken railings and seats and extensive and disturbing graffiti. A solar light installed to discourage vandalism was destroyed. The PCT has spent hours of their time strategizing how to handle this concern. We have spoken to the police and the local high school has been involved. The school was particularly effective when they had a School Resources Officer. Several young women were identified when the graffiti escalated to a point of trashing each other by name on the wooden seats of the gazebo. They have written apologies and paid for repairs as mandated by the court.

So the PCT is turning to our community, a source of so much support, for help in keeping John Bator Park the jewel that it was meant to be. Members of our city, young and old, come there to relax, to enjoy nature, to fish, to get married and to remember their deceased children. We are an organization dedicated to preserving open space and natural resources in our community. We are looking for help in preserving this space as a peaceful spot which all can enjoy – a spot free of trash, destruction, hatred and ugly words. We are also hoping that we can engage the children of Easthampton in this pursuit. We continue to work with the local schools to this end. This has been a long term problem but seems particularly relevant given the recent discussions regarding bullying among our school children. We welcome any ideas and helping hands to achieve these goals.

Molly Goodwin

Historical information provided by John Bator



Reflections on Perpetuity

Twenty-eight years ago the Pascommuck Conservation Trust, Inc., was formed “to permanently protect land in Easthampton with significant natural and scenic resource value.” During that time, this organization has kept a close eye on the Easthampton landscape, and earned a good reputation not only with the public but also among the community of land trusts in Massachusetts for its agility to step and do deals when opportunities present. The trust now controls some 16 properties comprising 190 acres, and has provided good stewardship of those lands.

But how do we – or any land trust – know that our work will last long enough to benefit posterity? Does forever really last forever? The answer is not necessarily.

The principal mechanism with which we attempt to “permanently protect” land in Massachusetts is an instrument known as a “conservation restriction.” Think of it as a contract between the “holder” of the restriction and the current landowners, whereby the landowners pledge not to do certain things, and if they violate their promise, they’ll be facing what is euphemistically called enforcement action, i.e., a lawsuit. How can things go wrong, between now and eternity? Let me count the ways.

1. A restriction could be merely forgotten or overlooked. Perhaps the landowner’s lawyer, when he examined title to the land, missed the restriction. If more than 50 years have elapsed, he would not be expected to look beyond that time.
2. A town or the state could exercise its powers of eminent domain, which could trump a restriction if the land was needed for a public purpose.
3. A politically well-connected landowner could convince the legislature to release a restriction.
4. A court could rule a restriction invalid, perhaps because of technical defects, in response to a landowner’s attempt to break the restriction.
5. The holding entity could fade from existence; thus, there would be no one to bring enforcement in the event of a violation.
6. Public support could shift away from conservation, gradually or dramatically. For example, proponents of clean energy could convince the public that conservation land ought to be used for wind turbines. Or, a calamity – such as the release of a dirty bomb in a large city – could open up conservation lands to “temporary” tent cities for refugees.

Fundamentally, conservation restrictions are fragile instruments, as they are an exception to a doctrine disfavoring “restraints on alienation,” a legal doctrine that can be traced back to ancient rules of English and American property law. When the legislature passed the enabling act for conservation restrictions in 1969, such arrangements were granted legal status so long as they complied with the various technical requirements of the law, such as obtaining local and state approvals. If a restriction does not comply with those rules, however, it would be vulnerable to challenge as a violation of the ancient rule. That vulnerability is the dirty little secret of land protection.

Statutes are easily enacted and rescinded by the legislature. If the statute creating that

exception were to be repealed, then all the restrictions held by land trusts would fall to challenge as in violation of the common law doctrine of restraints on alienation - and that would really send the salamanders scrambling!

What can a land trust do to fortify its restrictions and protect against these perils?

1. Do things right: Dot all the i's and cross all the t's. Keep thorough records, good baseline documentation and stay on top of monitoring. In other words, be good and active stewards.
2. Be prepared to take enforcement action when violations occur. Land trusts should certainly have a war chest set aside to hire the right lawyer, but in addition, land trusts should be planning for the prospect of violations, and discussing now how they are going to respond then.
3. Anticipate the need for amendments to existing restrictions and be prepared to bend and flex if and when necessary.
4. Keep memory alive: don't think just because a restriction is mentioned in a deed that people will notice it. Take steps to insure that no one can claim ignorance. You may consider publishing a map showing all protected land in the area, and sharing that regularly with the real estate community. Maintain active dialog with landowners, and welcome new owners. Stay in close touch with Town Hall so as to respond to prospective takings or Chapter 61/61A first refusal options. Record an inventory of all restrictions every ten years in the registry of deeds.
5. Maintain strong public support for conservation. Lincoln said, "With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions." In other words, public opinion is more powerful than legislatures or executives or courts.
6. Keep the organization alive and well, fit, relevant, and on its toes. Remember that "He who marries the spirit of his age soon finds himself a widower." It is important that conservation not become the spirit of any age, but rather the spirit of all ages. The restrictions held by a land trust are only as strong as the land trust itself.

All of us who are engaged with land trust activities are dedicated to the idea of conservation. What fuels our resolve to protect the land is not only the knowledge that we are saving farms and open spaces and important habitats for splendid creatures who don't have a vote or come to meetings; it's more than that:

One doesn't have to walk for long in the New England woods to realize that when we are saving land, we are saving beauty, and strength, and resilience and ingenuity and adaptability and perseverance and so many qualities of nature to which we aspire as humans. Therefore, securing the blessings of nature to ourselves and our posterity may well represent the ultimate expression of our humanity.

Richard Evans, Esq

Ol' Mr. Tom



John Bator Slide Show “*The Kingdom of Mt. Tom*”

Fri & Sat, June 11 & 12 at 6:30
Easthampton Historical Society,
7 Holyoke St

Shots in all seasons, focus
on the mountain & points of
interest in our valley. It includes
some geology, natural history,
human history, and very scenic
landscapes - quite educational.

Suggested donation - \$5.00

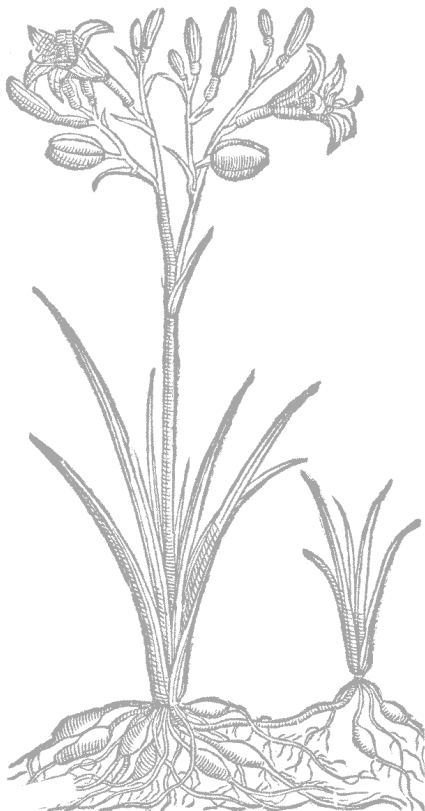
Jurassic layers of molten lava – hardened flows of basalt tilted and exposed by
eons of erosive forces
Talus rubble beneath your cliffs, the curse of weathering elements upon your face
Ancient reptiles once roamed throughout your domain
did you not ponder their demise?
Expanding glaciers scoured your ridge, depositing erratic boulders and sediments
from another kingdom, another era
Perhaps a brute ice sheet created that rift between you and Mr. Holyoke
thus allowing Mr. Connecticut to course through the gap on his southerly journey
to the Atlantic
And as the frigid monster retreated, the ensuing meltwater lake
must have seemed as an ocean from your lofty viewpoint
Native tribes traversed your heights, and undoubtedly kept close observance
on encroaching foreign settlements below
White-hooded racists cloaked in robes burned crosses on your peaks
sending messages of terror into the very souls of dwellers in the valley
Glorious summit houses, a beloved park, a ski slope – all have come and gone,
but you remain
Hikers, picnickers, nature seekers, rare species, migratory raptors, diverse
microclimates, a quarry, towers of metal
all part and parcel of your modern landscape now
In your 200 million years you’ve witnessed incredulous changes and challenges
Is it true, as some claim, that you’ve become a lone island of reprieve
in a sea of exploding human development?
We trust you will fare well against what may be the greatest onslaught to your
integrity you’ve ever experienced so far
And, be heartened, old man, for you have steadfast friends to take up your banner
enlightened crusaders well versed in the virtues of your treasures, your history,
your majestic presence
Good day, sir - may you forever grace our lives and hold us within your
comforting shadow

John Bator

Spring Plant Sale

The Pascommuck Conservation Trust Inc. Spring Plant Sale held on May 1st was a blooming success! The weather was perfect, and the combined team effort of all the invaluable volunteers paid off. We had a wide selection of perennials, house plants, shrubs and trees. We also had some native plants and shrubs from Nasami Farm in Whately, which were snapped up quite quickly! In addition to all the wonderful green things for sale, we had raffles and a silent auction. A comfortable resin wicker rocking chair with many garden goodies was our first prize-that was won by Bernice Lord. Second and third prizes were beautiful gift baskets, second prize was won by Lillian Alvarez, and third prize went to Annette Szczygiel. The silent auction was two well built, painted hard wood Adirondack chairs with cushions, these were won by Lee Ann Connor, our highest bidder. The sale was fast and furious starting at 7:20 until 9:30 am at which point the line for the cashier was across the parking lot! The early birds were out in force! It seemed the majority of the plants sold quickly, but shoppers that came later still found many plants and good bargains. The sense of community struck us all as we greeted friends and neighbors all morning! We truly appreciate all the fantastic volunteers that help us make our sales successful. A big thank you to all our generous donors, our volunteers and our wonderful customers!

Dawn Ackley



Whether you have a particular skill or just feel like spending an hour helping the **Pascommuck Conservation Trust**, you will always be welcomed.

Please contact
Molly Goodwin
at 529-1805 or
goodmol@hotmail.com.

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Reflections for Earth Day, 2010

One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on land is quite invisible to laymen. An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise.

Aldo Leopold
Round River, 1953

As we celebrate the 40th anniversary of Earth Day this year, I have a confession to make: I'm not a great environmentalist. My vehicle gets 20 miles to the gallon. I ignore climate change related e-mails from Al Gore. My conscience twinges when I think of the all the times I haven't spoken up for wolves in Alaska or against deforestation in the Amazon. I regularly see Bill Burgart riding his bicycle for his errands in all weather, and am inspired to do the same...but then when it's time to go, I generally reach for my car keys.

These shortcomings are puzzling to me. For more than two decades, I've spent considerable energy and time in a committed effort to learn about nature, and thinking about humanity's impact on natural systems. Everything I've learned leads me to the conclusion that our civilization's reliance on the concept of perpetual growth is wrong, not just because it is thermodynamically impossible in a finite world, but also because it is morally corrupt. I took an online survey recently that indicated that we would need 3.1 Earths for everyone on the planet to live my lifestyle. Since in the real world, we only have one Earth, obviously some factors need to change. The way I see it, the life I have the most control over—my own—is the place to start. So what's the holdup?

One of the core issues is that we are embedded in a society and culture that influences all of our actions, and in the case of the modern United States, virtually every cultural influence is in direct conflict with truly sustainable living. For most of us, the decision to be counter-cultural, to reject the common principles and practices of our peers, is a hard thing to do. Key realities, such as the distance from home to work, tight household budgets, and myriad demands on free time, lock us into actions that we might not freely choose. Taken alone, these decisions are generally justifiable in one way or another, but in the aggregate, my ecological education shows me that they build inexorably to create problems on a global scale: anthropogenic climate change, species extinctions, and pervasive pollution, to name a few.

With problems like these, scarcely even imagined before modern times, what is an ecologically literate citizen to do? In the face of these demonic problems, one possible reaction is to be paralyzed and hopeless, keep one's head in the sand, and make do. A second is to become an ultra-radical über-activist, fighting in a blaze of lawsuits and monkey-wrenching. For me, the middle path has been the way, making the changes I can, and building my life so that over time, some far distant goals come into reach.

As in many things, Aldo Leopold was right in the idea that an ecological education is not without penalties. I often feel restless and dissatisfied with my ecological footprint in the world, and I am acutely aware of the many environmental crises near and far that my actions exacerbate. But in one important thing he was mistaken: one is not necessarily alone in this world of wounds. In this Valley, I live among farmers, hybrid car (or better, no car) owners, off-the-grid families, activists, and others – all regular people in most ways, yet all doing a part to build a sustainable community. Indeed, the support of a community can be critical to the success of any individual's effort, and moreover, against the global scope of many environmental problems, any individual effort is a tiny part of the required collective response.

So, for this Earth Day, don't feel that you have to shoulder all of the world's problems. Just do something, even a small thing, and better yet, do it with other people. There are many environmental groups active in the Valley that depend on volunteer commitment, and they are entries to a community of like-minded people. PCT is just one of them, and we would welcome your active participation; you also don't have to look hard to find other groups of local, statewide, or greater scale, including Mass Audubon, the Trustees of Reservations, the Sierra Club, and the Nature Conservancy. Join in, and you can be inspired, and inspire others, in the great work of reinventing our modern society, one step at a time.

Tom Lautzenheiser

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- ___ Donating plants for plant sales
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- ___ Grantwriting/fundraising
- ___ Professional services (accounting, etc.)
- ___ Land conservation (landowner contacts, planning, etc.)
- ___ Advocacy (letters/emails/phone calls to support conservation)
- ___ Serving on Board of Directors
- ___ Other: _____



***Pascommuck Conservation
Trust, Inc.***

*Preserving our past . . .
protecting our future*



Pascommuck Conservation Trust

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In Memoriam

We mourn the passing of ***Stella D. Wiernasz***, a long time member of Pascommuck Conservation Trust, who passed away on May 1, 2010. Stella was 92 years young. She faithfully supported not only the Trust but “Dollars for Scholars” and many charities and groups needing funding over the years. When called upon, she could be found at Big E’s, ESB or FSB sitting in her scooter, with her Folgers can, collecting for a worthwhile cause and asking for “whatever change you can spare” ...That was our Stella...

