

Winter 1997

PASCOMMUCK

CONSERVATION TRUST NEWSLETTER. WINTER 1997.

SAVING PARK HILL.

By Gerrit Stover.

Question: What has a thousand trees bearing the best apples in Hampshire County, a flock of blue-birds, stunning vistas of Mt. Tom and Mt. Holyoke, beaver dams and a bear, towering pines and hemlocks, soaring hawks, dense briar patches, trout swimming a pristine brook, sweeping fields of corn and delicate sky-blue asters, and over seventy years of loving care by four local families? The answer is Park Hill, Pascommuck Conservation Trust's newest project. With 347 acres in Easthampton and 69 acres in Northampton, Park Hill is both the Trust's biggest project and one of the largest land conservation efforts in Western Massachusetts.

The Park Hill properties are owned by four families, who began farming back in the '20s. Two are still raising apples, corn, and vegetables on their land, while the others are either renting their land to other farmers or have left it fallow for several years. However, all the families hope to keep their land in agriculture, provided they can recover some of the investment they have made, and like all of us, pay the bills. While one option open to them is to sell off the property to the highest bidder for development - - - a fate which has befallen too many of Easthampton's beautiful farms - - - there is another route which would allow them to preserve the farmland yet make a decent return on their property. This route is called the 'Agricultural Preservation Restriction' program, run by the state Department of Food and Agriculture. Enrollment in the APR program (to which all four families have applied, but not yet committed) means that the state buys the 'development rights' to the property keeping it forever in agriculture. The owner receives the difference between its farm value and the price a developer would pay.

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Farmer's Club Makes Donation To Trust.

by Ed Dwyer

At our last Board meeting, a generous monetary donation was presented the Trust by Samuel Cernak on behalf of the Easthampton Farmer's Club, which dissolved following their final meeting, held last month.

The club was incorporated at a meeting held February 20, 1858, at the First Church, (it was located at the present Memorial Building parking lot), and was the first club to be organized in Easthampton.

We thank the Farmer's Club for their generous donation and for their years of service to the town of Easthampton.

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Saving Park Hill, (Continued from Front Page):

Where does Pascommuck enter into this? We, along with the Valley Land Fund, (a regional land conservation group), approached the landowners and funded an appraisal of the properties, using anonymous donations made to the land trusts. Once the state and the owners have reviewed the appraisals and made a decision about selling an APR (both of which should happen soon), our real work begins. The program will ask both towns to contribute around 10% to the APR purchases. This will be a substantial sum, but it will be a sound investment in the future of our communities, because of the benefits of continuing productive use of the land, preserving the Manhan's watershed and wildlife and plant habitat, and enhancing the attractiveness and value of neighboring properties. Furthermore, keeping the land open will forestall the large new tax appropriations needed for large housing developments (schools, police, sewer treatment, etc.). Educating the town about these benefits will be one of our jobs.

As always, the other major task will be fundraising. Because the APR program has a large backlog of applicants and state money is flowing slowly (that's another story!), we will need to take out loans to pay some of the purchase price up front while waiting for the state to come up with the full amount. Donations from our members and Easthampton and Northampton residents, and grants from other organizations, will be needed to cover interest on these loans, which may be up to \$100,000.

While the logistics seem overwhelming, the land, which we will be working to protect, is both substantial in size and truly special in character. Even now, many of us have fond recent or old-time memories of time spent on Park Hill (or of savory apple pies cooked from its produce!). And once the landowners have made their decisions, Pascommuck Conservation Trust will be holding a special meeting for its membership to discuss the land and the project. Following this meeting will be other sessions to re-acquaint the town with this very special place. We are confident that seeing and understanding what a treasure is at stake will inspire us all to accomplish what needs to be done.

A Note From Stella Wiernasz

A Word Of Thanks And A Note Of Apology

A big book, food and tag sale was planned for November. It rained November 8 and 9, ——— the first dates the sale was scheduled and it was postponed until November 15, with a rain date for the 16th. Calls went out for home baked foods. Unfortunately, we received a record breaking early winter storm on the 15th.

However, this storm did not discourage your stubborn fundraiser and many of you dedicated members baked and looked for the sale, but I let you down! I completely forgot that I had made an earlier Sunday morning commitment earlier in the month for the 16th.

My only fear (regret) is that by my careless actions, I may have discouraged you faithful members and cooks from supporting the Trust and our big April Bake Sale. I will be away, but I plan to contact you to remind you of the sale. May I ask you to forgive this stubborn fundraiser for the scheduling mix-up.

Big E's Open House.

On a more pleasant note, it was an honor to join many Easthampton residents gathered to honor the owners and employees of Big E's Foodland at their November 1 Open House and Grand Re-Opening ceremony.

Big E's has been a great service to the Town and has been very generous to non-profits throughout the years.

The Trust has been one of those who benefited from their generosity. For several years, we have held our spring bake and plant sale at the store and always had great success.

In addition, the Trust has been able to borrow the Pepsi wagon from the store for our fund raising projects.

It is because of this outstanding cooperation with non-profits that has made Big E's a super asset to the town. May we wish Big E's much continued success.

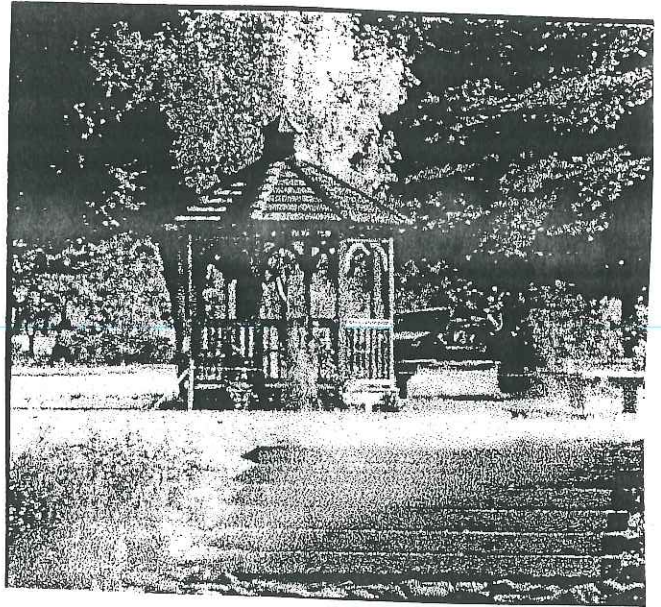
"Six Giant Steps for Mankind"

By John Bator

Shiver my timbers. Autumn was approaching and we still had four major chores to tackle - the Fall Festival and three projects at John Bator Park:

1. Installing a bench in memory of Stanley Bogdanski.
2. Staining the Gazebo.
3. Building five steps into the steep banking leading to the shoreline.

First things first; so it was full steam ahead preparing for the annual Easthampton Fall Festival. Miraculously, we somehow pushed through this weekend event intact, though the setup was drastically different this year. But now it was the end of September, with much legwork and bull-work ahead. Would everything get accomplished before the white crap descended upon us? Okay, attacking the weakest link in the chain, four volunteers stained the gazebo one Saturday morning - looked brand new once more! Moving right along, we ordered an English style round-backed garden bench from Skip's in West Springfield, stained it, added vandal-proof features, and ordered a bronze plaque from Canal Achievements in Southampton. The damn November 14th snow/sleet storm hit before we could install it, but if not soon, we'll wait for spring to do it. While all the above was going on we were frantically pecking away at the steps project. Stella Wiernasz put her bionic legs in gear and obtained the last of the legal papers we'd need to start work. I couldn't find cedar timber anywhere so we decided on green hemlock from Lashway logging in Williamsburg. Upon delivery, my body started to tremble, and my back informed me it had just decided to go south for the winter. There we were, myself and a truck driver who had a triple bypass surgery, attempting to unload and stack several 8"x8"x12' green beams that normally would require three or four big bozos to



carry, uncomfortably at best. Needless to say, the next day Lashway's secretary called to give me hell for making their driver handle the lumber.

Thus, in the waning weeks of autumn, in the dark evenings and on mostly rainy weekends, various slaves toiled to build the pyramid, so to speak. Some of the fun stuff we had to contend with resembled the hardships of constructing the Panama Canal:

- a.) Collect and place over two dozen small boulders at the edge of the shoreline for erosion control; add bales of hay and a plastic barrier fence while construction occurred.
- b.) Dig into the banking for each step level - encountered stone, clay, and large globs of concrete and asphalt.
- c.) Lug timbers and support beams down the banking, get each step level, drill holes and drive one-foot spikes through steps and support beams, nail metal plates across the sides to hold everything in place.
- d.) Fill in each layer with crushed stone ordered from Loomis Trucking.
- e.) Remove excess soil and debris.
- f.) Re-grade and replace sod where needed.

From Page 3:

Now, I mentioned six giant steps, didn't I? But say, the plans called for five, right? Well, yes, but when we finished we realized a sixth step was needed to arrive at the proper level. (Screeeeam!) Back to ordering another timber and transporting it alone in an eight foot bed pickup I borrowed> The timber wouldn't stay on the truck until Lashway placed a huge old truck tire on top of it for balance. By early November the task was behind us, and everyone thought we did a dandy job. The only thing to do now is give a giant round of applause to those poor souls involved in this undertaking:

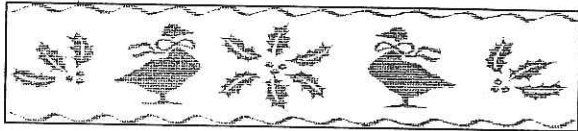
Dave Poulin, Ed Dwyer, Ken Larsen, Stan Greenberg, Gerrit Stover, Bill Burgart, John Watling, Bob Banas. Thanks also to Stella Wiernasz for obtaining the permits, Bill Canon for creating the blueprints, which enabled us to proceed professionally and legally, and Ilona Murray for helping with staining the gazebo. Hell, we're glad it's all completed; but, "Never Again"!, quoteth the crow.

Trust Awarded Grant By Ed Dwyer.

The Pascommuck Conservation Trust was awarded a grant totaling \$3,500.00 from the Sweet Water Trust. The grant funded the costs of maps, overlays, and printing costs associated with the Mt. Tom Assessment and Protection Program.

The maps, together with a short narrative will be used as part of a program to explain the benefits of protecting the Mt. Tom Range, a valuable ecological resource for the citizens of this region.

The Trust thanks the Mt Tom Steering Committee and Judith Eiseman, Project Leader, Massachusetts Audubon Society, for their support in preparing this grant.



THE MANHAN RAIL TRAIL - - - A Benefit for Easthampton.

An Opinion By William Burgart.

As members of the Trust, we can think of the Manhan Rail Trail as an open space that will provide not only recreational use for bicyclists, but will provide people with an alternative commuting method to cars. The path will connect with the well used trail in Northampton. Eventually, there could be a whole network of interconnecting rail trails. A user could, conceivably start in Easthampton and travel throughout the country. Imagine biking to Florida on rail trails!

The rail trail will be an asset for our community. It will provide a safe place for recreation and commuting. Families can feel secure either biking, walking, roller blading, or even pushing a baby carriage. The timid commuter could use the rail trail in safety and not compete with cars on the roadways.

The main source of funding for these trails will be for commuter use, and Easthampton can feel it is keeping pace with tomorrow's transportation needs. Get ready to peddle that bicycle!

Easthampton Fall Festival

By Stanley Greenberg

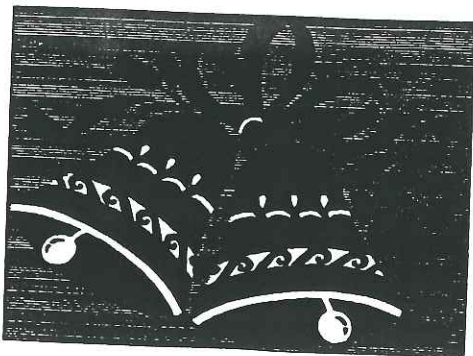
The Pascommuck Conservation Trust, Inc. participated in the Easthampton Chamber of Commerce sponsored annual Fall Festival. This event was promoted as a mini "Taste of Easthampton". Many town restaurants, clubs, and organizations set up food booths in a designated area outside the Easthampton High School gym.

In addition to our food booth, which featured warm apple shortcakes, whoopee pies, cider and coffee, the Trust staffed a plant and tag sale area. Although we had some concerns with this new arrangement, the board of directors remains quite pleased with the success of our participation in this event. Many visitors took advantage of the wonderful variety and deals at our plant and tag sale. As always, the plant sale was a great success. It was at this display that visitors had the opportunity to sign a petition, showing their support for the preservation of the Park Hill properties in town currently seeking APR protection. (See cover story) Trust member Gerrit Stover produced wonderful signs and storyboards that depicted the properties and mission of this critically important venture.

Stella Wiernasz came through as always with her wonderful charm, soliciting the generosity of raffle purchasers that purchased chances on a painting, "sight unseen". Local artist Rebecca Schiffrin donated an attractive autumn scene watercolor to the Trust. The lucky winner of this painting was Easthampton resident, Tom Tompkins.

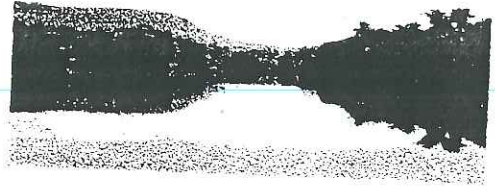
The Mt. Tom Assessment and Protection Committee borrowed our visual aid pod. This apparatus allowed them to show a slide presentation of their recent work at their display booth at the Fall Festival. We expect to continue our support and work with this committee so as to guarantee the character and resources of this wonderful mountain range remain protected from unfavorable development.

Discussion will continue into the New Year regarding plans for 1998's Fall Festival. Your ideas and input will be gladly received and considered. Thanks to all that made this year's event the success that it was.



Nashawannuck Pond May Benefit from Mass. DEP "Section 319" Grant

By John Watling



The chill may be in the autumn air but so too is optimism regarding a \$55,000. EPA funded grant for the Nashawannuck Pond. A recent discussion with Mayor Mike (Trust lorefather) provided good news that Mass. DEP has approved this grant. The community is now waiting for final grant approval from the Environmental Protection Agency, which provides the federal money to the states issuing these grants. The money will be used to:

- Stabilize and rebuild four badly eroded "point" regions on the pond. Improved structures to control access by pedestrians and fisherman will be provided.
- Produce and promote a watershed management education program promoting concepts of safe and sound "urban housekeeping" techniques.

These two projects are recommendations outlined in the Diagnostic/Feasibility Study performed and produced by Bay State Environmental Consultants in 1990. The mayor continues to seek various financial assistance from both the state and federal levels.

All Easthampton would love to see this beautiful resource restored to its earlier condition. 1998 should be a good year for the Nashawannuck. With this grant, and the installation of the designed siltation detention basin on Broad Brook, progress will be made to ensure we are indeed "Saving Our Pond...One Step at A Time".

Please send your support, comments, questions, and ideas to the Nashawannuck Pond Steering Committee or Mayor Michael Tautznik at the town hall. Thank you for your patience regarding this important restoration project.

PLEASE BECOME A MEMBER TODAY!

NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE

Please check appropriate membership and level of support:

- Limited income \$ 6.00
- Individual \$ 10.00
- Family \$ 18.00
- Contributor \$ 25.00
- Patron \$ 60.00
- Corporate \$ 100.00
- Sponsor \$ 150.00
- Life Member \$ 1,000.00
- I would like to be active in the Trust, helping with activities.

(Cut along dotted line)

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