In Perpetuity

The Hamilton/Trenton Marsh: A Collective Memory

PART I

The Hamilton/Trenton Marsh is a regional treasure—rich in natural and historical resources. To many, it is a personal treasure as well. The stories of childhood adventure, exploration and play, have created in those who lived in the area as children, a great fondness of the marsh. These fond and colorful memories kindle a sense of joy and a sense of place among others, when shared. Often the storyteller’s face lights up with the child-like wonder and pleasure they knew in the experience itself. Their stories are an important part of the Hamilton/Trenton Marsh story, a story we hope to preserve in perpetuity.

The earliest memories come from life-long Hamilton resident, Bob Simpkins, who was born in the tenant house of the Bow Hill Mansion in the early years of this century. While he can’t remember the earliest experiences personally, he does remember the stories he’s heard told about them.

“My father farmed the land of what was known as the Lolor Farm. The fields were planted with crops of corn, wheat, and potatoes. Cows were pastured on the low lying lands that are now marshlands. In the earlier part of the century, these areas flooded only at high tide or in heavy rains. To be sure the cows could get to the barn at milking time, Mother used to hitch a horse to the jigger wagon, and place her baby in the basket at her feet. Timing was everything. If the tide was high, the water would run over the boards at her feet and she would have to lift the basket so her infant son wouldn’t get wet.”

When he was a bit older, Bob traveled with his mother to shop in Trenton. He remembers the bridge crossing the Delaware & Raritan Canal was often raised for a boat to pass and those traveling along the road had to wait. It was interesting to watch the boats. Freighters didn’t get much attention, but passenger boats, with their more interesting fashions, were always more carefully observed.

Bob remembers attending a State grange picnic when he was eight or nine years old, at the White City Amusement Park, so named because all of the buildings were painted bright white. Located just off Broad Street, the park included the White City Mansion, a dining hall, a dance hall, several rides, including a merry-go-round, walking trails, and picnic areas. While most of the activities were on top of the bluffs, a favorite ride—the chute-the-chute—went down over the bluffs and onto the lake.

By the 1940’s and 50’s, the area had changed substantially. Houses sprang up on top of the bluffs, where potatoes and wheat once grew. The marsh became a playground for the neighborhood children who lived in the houses that lined streets with names such as Schiller, Annabelle, Bow Hill, New Cedar Lane, and Sewell.

Few traces remain, indicating the numerous small neighborhood grocery stores, taverns, and other shops which were so integral to the community. Many of the buildings are gone, others are used as houses. Only in the mind’s eye, through memories shared, is the picture of yesterday vividly recreated.

The stories we share here are the combined memories of Hamilton resident, Clyde Quin, Hamilton Township Mayor Jack Rafferty and Richard Switlik, Sr.

Continued on page 6
Common Ground

The night sky in central New Jersey was transformed during the 1980s. Darkness gave way to the glow of streetlights. As the sky above grew more orange, the land below became less green.

Hershey Greenway, the organization of C. M. McInnis Norton. In 1987, a far-sighted, determined group, led by Bob Johnston, launched Hershey Greenway. To those who started the Greenway and stayed, and to those who strengthened it and moved on, the organization owes its success—nearly 600 acres preserved.

Hershey Greenway’s future depends on the board, staff, volunteers and an ever-growing membership. It depends on people’s increasing awareness of the need for open spaces. It depends on landowners’ willingness to preserve their property. One preservationist, landowner summed it up, “Once it’s gone, it’s gone.”

New Trustees and Officers Named

The board of trustees of Delaware & Raritan Greenway, Inc. appointed four new members—Joyce M. Coplen, Charles M. Hartman, Hella McVay, and John E. Parks. In July, the Greenway’s annual meeting, Kate Litvak of Princeton, format vice chair, was newly elected as chair. Other board members elected to leadership positions include Susan R.annam, Jr., of Princeton, and William Swain Jr. of Princeton. The board also elected Honora Major, Hershey of Pennington was elected treasurer and executive director. Peg Rodriguez was named secretary. A Lawrenceville resident, Joyce Coplen, is project coordinator of The Network for Family Life Education at Rutgers University. She is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Lawrence Township Conservation Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit land trust.

M.B.A. from the University of Chicago.

Hella McVay, founder and president of the Whole Earth Center of Princeton, previously worked at Seidman’s Corporate Research and Support, Inc., Research and Technical Laboratories. Prior to that she headed the mathematics department at St. Mary’s Catholic School.

She is a graduate of Free University and holds a master’s degree in Greenway.

Long-time Princeton resident, Mr. Rassweiler, Ph.D. serves as chairman of Health Enhancement Systems, Inc., a company he founded in 1982. The company designs, markets and manufactures fitness, wellness, preventative medicine, occupational health and safety programs for employers.

Mr. Rassweiler has served as Treasurer of the Board of Trustees of Marquand Park Foundation. Arboriculture in Princeton and was a Governor’s appointment to New Jersey Governor’s Council on Open Spaces. A graduate of Amberger, Mr. Rassweiler received a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois and did postdoctoral research at the Federal Forestry Laboratory.

Kate Litvak is Executive Vice President of JRS, Inc., a Princeton-based agency. A Princeton resident since 1966, she served two terms as a member of the Princeton Township Committee and was mayor of Princeton Township for two years.

She was the first woman to serve as executive director of the New Jersey State Democratic Committee and as a director of First Fidelity Bank, Princeton. Litvak has served as chairman of the Princeton Joint Committee of Art, a member of the Princeton Regional Planning Board, as a trustee of the Princeton University Pennsylvania Foundation and is currently a vice-president of the Princeton University Foundation.

Former Chairman

Robert C. Johnston, a founding member of D&R Greenway who chaired the board since the organization’s incorporation in 1982, will step down in January. He received a B.S. in chemistry from the University of Notre Dame and a meeting. Jim Anon, Executive Director of the Princeton Canal Commission and Advisor to the D&R Greenway board, spoke on behalf of D&R Greenway and congratulated Mr. Johnston on steering D&R Greenway from its infancy through several dramatic changes in the organization’s structure.

Upon Mr. Johnston’s leadership D&R Greenway preserved nearly 800 acres of land. We private contributions and public and private partnerships, nearly $20 million for land acquisitions.

Mr. Johnston is a partner in the law firm of Smith, Steen, Wise, Heber, and Brennan. Mr. Johnston, who is a board member of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space, he served as chairman of the board of the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association from 1985-1988 and on the Hopewell Greenway Board from 1972-1982. Mr. Johnston received an A.B. from Princeton University and an L.L.B. from Harvard Law School.

1994 Highlights

For Delaware & Raritan Greenway, 1994 was a fast and creative year filled with new opportunities, new friends and many challenges.

We began the acquisition process for our five projects that received $2.5 million in grants from the State Green Acres program and closed on three of them by the end of the year. With the help of volunteers we began a began a monitoring program and coordinated a small cleanup. Cooperative relationships with area businesses and government agencies developed, producing interesting joint projects. One such project involves PSE&G employees constructing and installing wood duck boxes at the marsh while the county assisted in locating and installing sites. The William Penn Foundation continued funding the project with a generous year two grant of $65,000 per year.

In the fall, D&R Greenway sponsored a very successful “Best of the West” Tour of the Delaware & Raritan Canal. Our guide, Jim Anon, fostered both intrigue and delight with his colorful commentary.

The year was one of transition for staff. In February, Patti Quinby joined the staff as Hamilton/Trenton Branch Director and in July assumed additional responsibilities as Director of Development and Special Projects. In May, Peggy McNeill took the helm as Executive Director. Later in the year, Chris Miller joined the staff as Administrative Assistant and Jennifer Ferrick an AmeriCorps member joined us to work on the Hamilton/Trenton Marsh project.

People have always been the root of our success. Our volunteers and contributing members continue to increase in number and play a tremendously important role in the success of our organization. With their time and financial support we remained committed to the goals for the year and went beyond our expectations in other areas.

In those folks we owe a great thank you. We could not, nor would we want to, do without you. Let’s look forward to working together and another year of continued success.

1995 Membership Campaign Announced

The new year is here—broughting new opportunities and new challenges. We are making exciting progress on several land acquisition projects and moving full steam ahead on the Institute Lands Preservation project. The outreach program at the marsh is expanding to reach more public school students through educational programs and service projects. We are now a proud member of the National Park Service challenge grant to provide interpretive and directional signage at the marsh.

Exciting possibilities are beginning to take form. We need your help to make them a reality.

Membership contributions provide greatly needed support for our day-to-day operations and programs. Land preservation, public outreach, and membership programming require time and resources.

Now, more than ever, your membership dollars are needed to support our growing efforts.

For those who renewed in November or December of 1994, your membership card will carry through December, 1995. The newsletter is also available to non-members for a subscription fee.

Thanks for your continued support. It is key to our preservation efforts and to our ongoing success.
The Institute Lands
Preserving the Culture of Two Working Farms
BY DAVID LAMOTTE

As you drive south on Quaker Road, with the Quaker Lake Meeting House at Stony Brook just behind you and the canal crossing at Port Mercer on up the road ahead, you cannot help but be refreshed by the broad expanse of farmland off to your left and the two graceful barns nestled among them, the Eno and Updike Farms. Together, these two pre-Revolutionary buildings, make up roughly half the 585 acres of the Institute Lands, and they epitomize the graceful balance of natural history and human history that makes these lands at once a renowned bird sanctuary, a treasured source of recreation and renewal, and a landscape full of historical significance. Indeed, if you allow yourself to slow down and take it in—farmland to one side, thickets and woods along the Stony Brook to the other—the landscape through which you pass might just conjure up some 18th-century traveler, coming toward you in hisreaking wagon, bringing his grain to mill.

The Eno and Updike Farms were settled before the Revolution, and the Eno Farm still has today a pre-Revolutionary building and a Native American architectural site. Both farmsteads are composed of well-maintained buildings in the historic style, set well back from the road among their fields and surrounded by stately shade trees. But something more than historic structures and old trees are preserved in this land that has been farmed continuously for more than 200 years. For generations, our traditions, values, and sense of identity were rooted in the work of the family farm. Today, when we drive along Quaker Road and see the old farm buildings alive and thriving, as when we took our cattle across the freshly plowed earth, the tall corn, with wild flowers, we witness a living heritage of stewardship, devotion to land, and love of place.

The history of these farmlands is intimately bound to key events in the history of Princeton. They lie near the original Quaker settlement of Stony Brook, founded in the 1680's. And Washington's encampments marched across them in the pre-dawn hours of January 3, 1777, just before the Battle of Princeton, which proved to be a pivotal engagement of the Revolutionary War. Preserving productive farmland protects one of our most important resources: food. As population growth puts increasing demands on the nation's system of food production and distribution, renewed attention has been given to the benefits of local cultivation of fresh, high-quality produce. Eliminating long-distance transport reduces costly energy consumption, pollution, and spoilage.

While New Jersey leads the nation in vegetable production per square mile, the state's productive farmland is giving way to development at a distressing rate, especially along the Route 1 corridor. The Institute Lands provide an extraordinary opportunity to preserve, in a mile of Route 1 in the center of the state, two historic farms that are highly productive, well-managed, economically viable, and nourishing to both body and spirit.

When we think of preserving ecosystems and wildlife habitats, we tend to think of forests, wetlands, and uncultivated land. But in fact the interaction between human cultivation and wilderness is an ancient and essential element of many ecosystems, embedded in the classical idea of the "Middle Landscape." The extensive farmland fields of the Institute Lands play an important role in ground water discharge and provide ideal habitat for many bird species that prefer open land and forest edge to deep woods. Such species include the following members of the New Jersey Audubon Society's "Blue List:" Northern Harrier, Red-Shouldered Hawk, Bobolink, Upland Sandpiper, Purple Martin, Barn Owl, Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Meadow Lark, and several species of sparrows. From the open fields of the Eno and Updike Farms, to the wetlands along the Stony Brook, to the deep and varied woodlands of the "Institute Woods," the Institute Lands embody the diversity, abundance, vitality, and serenity of nature that can result from a caring and conservative human presence.

The Institute Lands are indeed a cornucopia of nature and culture. Join us as we explore the mysteries and sounds of an early evening in spring. The marsh is home to many species of birds, including the ricebird and the marsh wren, both of which are birds-of-rice. A ricebird and ricebird can be heard in the marsh during the early morning when the sunlight is just beginning to warm the last few degrees above freezing. The ricebird's clear trills are a perfect match for the marsh's serenity.

Join us as we do this winter and see if you can identify the birds that sing in the marsh. Look for the ricebird, or the ricebird, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the marsh wren, or the 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In Perpetuity

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Others have provided similar glimpses into this shared life. Always, the storyteller’s eyes sparkle as the thoughts travel down memory lane. Jack Rafferty lived at the corner of Annabelle and Rob Hill, just south of Jack’s house, Bow Hill became Sevillier Avenue. Clyde Quinn lived at the corner of Sevillier and New Cedar Lane. With their bedrooms facing the same direction, their treasured directions via a string crossing their backyards and the street like a telephone wire. The paths, via flashing signals they beamed across the dark of night, in a language all their own, they made place for their days and years to pass. As the corner grocers were transformed, in a child’s eye, into “candy” stores, so too, notable natural landmarks took on their own magic and beauty and became designated meeting points.

It was a natural playground,” Jack explains. “At the end of Annabelle Avenue was “the canyon”, a steep drop that led to the marsh. To the left of the street was the marsh from Annabelle was White City Lake now known as Sping Lake. Southwest of the lake were “the coves”, two heavy cables, stretched across tidal channels and divided by the other approximately six feet apart, the lower on which to walk, the second to grip tight in first. The cables provided access to the network of walkways that crossed the high marsh and tidal channels leading to the PEEG high tension lines and a playground of marshland filled with mysteries, muskrats and secret fishing holes.

At the northwest corner of White City Lake, the trail led to the wooded upland, another environment equally as intriguing and ripe for exploration. Here squirrels and birds filled the tops of tall cypress poplar and other trees as the boys played under the protective canopy, and later armed with sling-shot or gun, sometimes hunted their quarry of birds or squirrels. Further along the “death path” crossed the marsh to the walkway.

Along the lake, a five-foot-wide path, lined with bushes whose branches formed a tangled arching ceiling, led to a favorite swimming hole known as Sandy Sound. “Only the boys went swimming at Sandy Sound. We didn’t wear suits or anything. One time, a group of girls came along on horses and stole our clothes,” says Clyde, with a laugh.

The “B.A. Beach”, a second swimming hole frequently mentioned today, was probably just as popular as those described, but it was not for swimming, than perhaps for lounging.

“She spring” was also just off the path along Watson Creek. Someone had put a box in to keep the leaf litter and weeds out of the water that gurgled from the ground. Here the boys would wash their clothes and then with their clothes refreshed, continue their work of exploration and mischievous activity.

Further along, by the flood gates, a second set of cables, stretched across another cove. Further back, following another access point to the marshlands that stretched nearly to the river, just beyond that, the trail. As Clyde was allowed to “earn” a turn and climb a small hood-like knob known as “beaver dams wanted to make that hole go!”

Wildlife was abundant and diverse and there was no difference in the wild or the marsh. Boys armed with sling-shot or, a practiced aim, and they would shoot at birds, squirrels or even at the marsh. “There were so many of them, you just took them for granted—we thought they would always be here,” the now wiser men reflect.

Clyde was fortunate to meet Nathan Wykoff, a naturalist with the Trenton Naturalist Club. Nat, who was sixty-five or perhaps older, invited the young boy to go to the marsh with him, coaxing “I could use your eyes today. Today, I need your eyes.” Clyde gave him a voice and story, the excitement and love of nature Nat instilled. All of this were plentiful.

“Did he know his birds?” Clyde explains. “He knew them by flight, by sight, by sound. He knew their habits.” He continues the story: “Today, I said, I don’t have a thing stuck in my back pocket. I soon got the idea I shouldn’t be spending my time out there.”

“I also discovered I had a knack for finding nests. At the marsh, they were abundant. Just walking down White City Lake Hill, I found the nest of catsbirds, blue jays and cardinals.”

“One morning I hit it right. We walked down the lake hill and back along the lake into the woods toward Russ Abram’s place. About twenty-five yards up the bank, I spotted a ruby-throated hummingbird’s nest. I just saw a little knot, and said, ‘Boy, that’s a little bird’. Nat grabbed his glasses, focused on the tiny nest, and exclaimed, ‘My God! That’s a ruby-throated hummingbird’.

“First thing I know he had the Trenton Naturalists making doors for them with their tripods and cameras. They followed it through its nesting cycle. Then when it was done, they clipped the nest and took it somewhere to display it.”

Behind where Independence Mall is today, the path led the road coming into the woods. It continued down the hill, around Indian Creek to Water Creek. From there the riders followed a path across the creek to the narrow path around White City Lake. Although Watson Creek was forbidden, the path called and the spirit overruled, and Carney Rose had his hands full. His hands full, now he wrote, “We paid our dollar or two in town and went over to the pond, wanted to make that hole go!”

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With his interest sparked, Clyde began writing more about birds. “Around this time you couldn’t get a pair of binoculars to save your neck since the war was going on. But Nat gave me an old pair. Then I really started watching birds and anything else that was moving around the region.

Five or six years later on a trip to the lake with Nat, Clyde had another memorable experience.

“We came down to the bottom of the lake hill and around cornfield making the turn toward Russ’. There used to be an old red stump there. Sitting on top of the stump was a mature and an immature bald eagle. They took flight and headed down along the lake edge and across the marsh. Now there’s a sight I bet you aren’t going to see too often in your lifetime; the four marauders flying.

The marsh teemed with red-winged blackbirds. Each spring, thousands would come. The males first came, staking out their territory and then singing to attract a mate. You’d hear their chick-a-ree, chick-a-ree. To many it was, and still is, the first call of spring.

Marsh walks, the Long-billed and the Short-billed, were also abundant. Their tiny legs, so small they could not to catch all the seed, were very hard to see. ‘Spring peppers used to be used all over the place. The marsh was loaded with them,‘ Clyde relates, his eyes, as well as his ears, shining with excitement. ‘Those were the days… You’d hear their musical chorus,‘ he adds, pausing to purse his lips to a Whistle. ‘Two people whistling and you have just the sound. It sounds exactly like that.’ In the next breath he adds, ‘You hear them now, but not like it was.”

The marsh also harbored snakes of all kinds—water snakes, garter snakes, black racers. They were about six feet long and would whistle through the bushes. Jack shares the memory of bringing a snake home and putting it in the garlic in a small aquarium. ‘When I told my mother, she insisted I get rid of it. So I went out to the garage, but the snake had disappeared. I never told her that.”

To be continued . . .

This story was excerpted from an oral history of the marsh currently being compiled. Spoken thanks to Glenn B. Clein, Mayor Jack Rafferty, Bob Simpson, and Michael Benthek, Sr. If you would like to participate, contact Pati Quade at (609) 924-4646.

Help close the deal!

By becoming a member you can play an active role in preserving vital stream corridor lands throughout the region.

Yes! I want to help create greenways! Enclosed is my gift of:

- $35 Basic Membership
- $40 Family Membership
- $50 Sustaining
- $100 Supporting
- $500 Donor
- $1,000 Headwater Donor
- Other $

My gift is covered by an Employer Matching Gift Program. The matching gift form is enclosed.

*Contributions of $10 and more will receive a set of wildflower seeds courtesy of Haeger Congratulations. Depending on IRS rules, the value of this gift in 2015 must be added when calculating the tax deductibility of your contribution.*

Also enclosed is a gift towards D&R Greenway’s:

- Management & Monitoring Fund $____
- Land Acquisition Fund $____

I’d also like information about:

- volunteer opportunities
- preserving our stream corridor lands
- D&R Greenway ways
- Hamilton/Trenton Marsh

Name:
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State:
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Telephone/area code:

Please make check payable to D&R Greenway and mail to:
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Princeton, NJ 08540
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