



Walkkill Valley Land Trust

ESOPUS, GARDINER, LLOYD, MARLBOROUGH, NEW PALTZ, PLATTEKILL, ROSENDALE, SHAWANGUNK

SPRING 2013 NEWSLETTER

PROFILE: Schneller Easement

The Schneller Easement, located in the Town of Shawangunk, protects 6.9 acres of rich upland forest, and a portion of the property is in the Dwaar Kill watershed. Put under easement in 2003 by Eileen Schneller, her daughter Karen Schneller-McDonald shares with us what the land, and knowing it is protected, means to her:



THE CLOSING

The house has been sold. I sit at the backyard stone table on a crisp, clear September morning. The closing is in four days. More than a real estate term, this “closing” also represents the very tangible closing of an entire era of my life. I look down the hill to the pond, fiddle halfheartedly with my camera and wonder: How can you take a picture of your childhood?

This place shaped me. As a kid I hid in the cavity enclosed by the five trunks of a huge maple at the pond’s edge. This pond, with its sphagnum moss mats and shrubby fringe of blueberry, red maple, and buttonbush was my home, and the scene of countless adventures. The first time I fell into the pond, I was five years old. Wearing a pretty red and white dress, I was trying to catch a fat green frog, and as I lunged and missed, the momentum of my effort launched me into the shallow, peat-stained water. Muddy, crying, undaunted - this was only the beginning. I never lost the thrill of the hunt for frogs, turtles and newts: first the movement glimpsed among the water weeds; then the stalking, the capture, the quarry squirming in my hands - or escaping. I took cats for canoe rides, waged personal war on water snakes, and caught tiny frogs the size of a thumbnail. Once I watched a bullfrog try to swallow a dead sparrow. I was always out here as a kid. Every day. All weather.

I pick a few wild grapes, and am revived by their tart sweetness. A partially overgrown trail near the pond’s edge disappears into the woods, following a gentle slope down to the brook. My feet follow the old familiar path of their own accord. The scent of ferns and fall leaves reassures me: some things never change. The path winds through the woods where my father taught me how to recognize tree species in winter. Ahead of me, at the edge of the brook, is the hemlock stand where he taught me to call crows, and in the evening, great horned owls. I spent hours here with an array of aquarium nets, ‘fishing’ for young pickerel, greenly motionless torpedo shapes that disappeared instantly only to show up again just out of my reach. In this stream-edge world of moss, ferns and muddy rivulets, with its occasional stunning red cardinal flower or orange-legged wood turtle, I am completely at home.

I crouch at the edge of the brook. The sound of stream water over rocks calms me. The water hurries on, ruffles past me. It will continue like this when I’m gone. Suddenly, effortlessly I’m engulfed in complete peace. The relief, the joy of it, brings tears to my eyes. I could stay here forever.

Over the years, my adventures took me to Maine, North Carolina, Florida. I came home as often as I could to rest in my parents’ hospitality, sustained once again by this place, this peace. The peace was shattered when my father died. I moved west, to Colorado. Over the next 20 years I returned to visit my mother every year.

Continued on next page...

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Mission:

Wallkill Valley Land Trust's mission is to enhance the quality of life in Southern Ulster County by conserving lands of scenic, agricultural, ecological, recreational and cultural significance.

Continued from front page....

When our youngest son was ten, my husband and I moved back east and stayed with mom, until we found jobs and figured out where to live. My mother, 75 years old, suffering from macular degeneration, lost her drivers' license that fall.

When we finally found new jobs, my husband and I needed to relocate, and the move that mom had dreaded was suddenly inevitable. The house of my childhood sits empty. In four days it will belong to someone else. Where will I go now for that welcome, hospitality, and peace? Do I carry it with me? Maybe. But my frogs' chorus will enliven the spring air for someone else next year. I leave the house, this last time, and pick up my camera from the stone table. I haven't taken one picture.

Time passes, and we all change. But if we're lucky, the land remains in its natural state. It changes with the seasons, but is overall a constant presence. So when it was time to sell, I insisted on the conservation easement. For me, it was an essential condition of being able to let go. But it wasn't easy to convince everyone else. There was plenty of resistance from the realtor who was sure an easement would make it impossible to sell. But I never considered backing down. The sale netted our full asking price, in less than four months- and the buyer was excited to have the easement.

We did all we could to ensure that this property continues to be taken care of - and the natural world that nurtured my own growth is allowed to flourish. At the time, I thought that was all I could do. Today I think I can do more. I've seen the potential for special places - other ponds, streams and woodlands - to make a difference in individual lives. These places need to be the next conservation easements, refuges for future generations of kids who love to poke around in the mud and revel in the intoxicating variety of life. Maybe advocating for those places will be my opportunity to give something back. My parents gave me the great gift of a childhood in a special place. And although I had to leave it, I hope somehow its impression never leaves me. ~ **Karen Schneller-McDonald**

From the current land owners:

When looking for a new home in 2003, we fell in love with the house and property on New Prospect Rd. We met with Karen who told us there would be a conservation easement established on the property as we took ownership. At first we were skeptical on how the restrictions would affect what we



**Current landowner, Harriet Lettis,
beside the pond on her property
(October 2010)**

were allowed to do, but soon realized that our love of nature and appreciation of the property were in line with what the easement was protecting. In essence, the easement does not allow development in the wooded area or to have the trees clear cut (which we would never want to do!). There are some restrictions on the height we can add on to our house, but again, it is beyond what we would desire. We still are allowed to cut down trees for firewood and the number of acres on the property sustains our firewood usage without endangering the forest. Since we moved in, we have enjoyed the woods, pond, flowering bushes and wildlife in this diverse eco-friendly environment. Lynn (the WVLT Land Steward) visits us each year to monitor the property and we look forward to her visits. She is very knowledgeable about forests and we always learn something new during our walks through the woods. We feel privileged to be a part of the Wallkill Valley Land Trust and as an added bonus: New York State established a New York State Tax Credit for Conservation Easements! ~ **Harriet Lettis**

Rosendale Trestle Restoration:

The dream is about to become reality...when the Wallkill Valley Land Trust partnered with the Open Space Institute in 2009 and acquired 11.5 miles of rail bed in the Town of Rosendale and the Town of Ulster, including the iconic trestle, the concept was simple: Turn the land into an extension of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail. By adding on to the existing 12.2 miles of much enjoyed recreational trail which travels through the heart of Gardiner and New Paltz, such an extension would bring people right through Rosendale, Ulster, and to the City of Kingston line. And the highlight of doubling the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail? The 940-foot long, 150-foot high trestle in Rosendale! Thus, the restoration of the trestle has been our main focus since that time.

A review of the restoration work: Structurally, the trestle is in great shape. We had engineers perform a general analysis, and then later, a more thorough inspection, looking at every part of the trestle. A few minor repairs were identified, and those have been taken care of. We had the old decking and railings, which were partially across the trestle, removed.

Next the tie work began: the existing railroad ties were flipped on their sides. This way we had a larger surface area, and we could remove any of the ties that were badly damaged. As this work continued, we learned that more ties were deteriorated than previously thought. We had to order replacement ties, which caused some delays. The ties on the trestle are longer than usual ties, so they were harder to find. Once we had all of the ties flipped or replaced, the newly constructed steel railings went up. Many of you might



recall the excitement when the first sections of railings started to peek out from the trees in 2012. The railings are made of a natural-weathering steel, and they are welded directly to the steel of the trestle itself (so they are not going anywhere.)

The last step in the restoration that is needed in order to open the trestle to the public is to put on new decking across the entire 940-foot long expanse. There has been a great deal of discussion and investigation into what is the best decking material to use. Naturally, we want something that will last for a while, but that will also hold up to all of the visitors and residents who will be on the trestle year round. We are going to use a composite decking material which will be installed this spring. With the decking in place, we can open the trestle while still working on some of the other restoration needs. Those needs include dealing with the erosion issues on the south end of the trestle, cleaning out debris on the truss bases, and then applying a protective sealant to prevent further deterioration of the metals from future dirt build up.

Another project that will be put in motion after the trestle opens is the construction of a trail that will take people underneath the trestle, and into Town. We think it is important to ensure safe passage for people to get to and from the Town of Rosendale to enjoy the shops, restaurants, and have access to things like the public transportation, the Rosendale Recreation Center, and the Bike Shop, all located along Route 32. The Town of Rosendale is also examining trail connections through the town to address access, and we look forward to working with them on these efforts.

But there is another need: The restoration of the trestle is a \$1.5 million project, and while both the Wallkill Valley Land Trust and Open Space Institute are very thankful and grateful for all of the support we have received so far, we still need \$200,000 to finish this trestle and open it to all of you! **PLEASE DONATE TODAY!** You can visit the Track the Trestle website to donate, or contact the Wallkill Valley Land Trust and indicate that you want your donation to go for the trestle restoration.

We hope to raise the funds (with your help!), finish the decking, and have a grand opening of the trestle this June. Details on the celebration will be shared soon! Thank you for helping to make this dream a reality indeed!

Wallkill Valley Land Trust Historic House Tour:

“River to River: The Town of Esopus — From the Wallkill & Rondout to the Hudson”

Saturday, June 1, 2012 from 11 to 4, the Wallkill Valley Land Trust (WVLT) presents its third annual “Houses on the Land” house tour, this year featuring a rich variety of homes and gardens spread across the distinctive terrain of the Trust’s northernmost territory in the Town of Esopus. The historic properties we plan to visit are primarily situated beside the rivers and creeks that define that town’s boundaries and crisscross its rocky and picturesque interior. The tour will include early stone houses along the Rondout Creek and Wallkill River; glimpses of Rifton’s Civil War-era industrial past; a Quaker farmhouse on the Old Post Road between the Black Creek and Swartekill watersheds; and several stylish examples of 19th century country-house architecture that provided majestic views of the Hudson for New York’s burgeoning merchant class. The tour will conclude with a visit to the grounds of John Burroughs’ “Riverby” and a viewing of the great naturalist’s “bark” study (a precursor to “Slabsides”), followed by a reception at the acclaimed Global Palate restaurant in West Park.



Cumming-Parker veranda overlooking the Hudson River

The Town of Esopus—“Land of high banks & flowing waters,” was incorporated in 1811 from portions of New Paltz, Kingston and Hurley; it is flanked on three sides by the Wallkill River, the Rondout Creek and the Hudson River. Its rocky interior is watered by both the Swartekill and Black Creeks which create unusual elevated wetlands (“binnewaters”) that our itinerary traverses. Among the highlights of the tour will be a group of houses associated with the life of Sojourner Truth, and some others linked to the naturalist John Burroughs and his friends. The tour also features a stop at one of the oldest frame houses in Ulster County, a horse farm now bordering the Shaupeneak Ridge Preserve.



J. Burgher house overlooking the Wallkill River (detail)

Our highly praised and popular annual event is uniquely conceived to educate the public about the relationship between people and the land. The tour is designed to emphasize the role the environment has played in the settlement of southern Ulster County, how people have historically built on that land, and how its residents traditionally utilized its distinctive environmental and geographical features. We have been proud to collaborate with our sister environmental organizations and local historical societies and we expect this year’s tour, partnering with the Klyne Esopus Museum and Historical Society and the Town of Esopus, to be the most successful thus far. One of the primary benefits of these collaborations is attracting attention to our mission of land conservation from people who generally focus more on the built environment, and conversely, to show environmentalists the positive side of human interaction with the land.

Tickets are \$25 if purchased in advance through the Land Trust’s website www.WallkillValleyLT.org or \$30 the day of the event. Admission includes a reception following the tour at the Global Palate restaurant in West Park. On the day of the event, tickets, brochure and map will be distributed 10:30-2:30 at the Dutch Reformed Church on Main Street (between Decker and Greenkill in St Remy).

**Proceeds of this event will benefit the WVLT’s land preservation efforts.
For more information call 845-255-2761 or go to www.WallkillValleyLT.org.**

Donors to the Walkill Valley Land Trust

Our Thanks to all of our donors. The list below includes donations received Septemer 26, 2012 through March 15, 2013. We make every effort to keep our records accurate. If there are mistakes or omissions, please bring them to our attention so that we may both apologize and correct them.

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Rosendale Trestle Restoration

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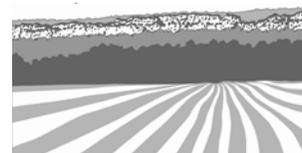
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- * **Money:** Your donation to the WVLT is fully tax deductible.
- * **Your Will:** Naming the WVLT as a beneficiary provides your legacy for land protection.
- * **Stocks:** Appreciated stocks may be transferred to the WVLT's brokerage account.
- * **Life Insurance:** Name WVLT as beneficiary on your life insurance policy.





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Announcing: WVLT Walks and Talks 2013

Box Turtle Day on the Smith Property in Gardiner!

Saturday, May 11th, at 10 am

Lend a hand at WVLT's Walk and Talk on the Smith Property, where the Smiths, with the aid of biologist Joe Bridges, have been monitoring the turtles on their 65 acres since 2005. Assist in the search for box turtles, which are active this time of year. So far 66 different individuals have been found and documented, some with the aid of the Smiths' Australian cattedogs, which have been trained to track turtles. You can learn more about this project at www.boxturtlesny.com. Come prepared for choppy terrain and ticks. Rain or shine (turtles like rain). Directions will be given upon registration, please RSVP to this event.

Joppenbergh Bird Walk and Talk, Rosendale

Saturday, June 1, 7:00 am – 9:00 am

Join Lynn Bowdery, WVLT Land Steward, to explore Joppenbergh Mountain, which towers over downtown Rosendale. The trail passes through forests, a power-line cut, overgrown meadow, stream drainage, and hemlock forest, providing breeding habitat for a wide variety of birds in a relatively short distance. There's no telling what we might find! Wear hiking shoes and be prepared for mud and ticks. Meeting place to be given upon registration.

Rail Trail Fern Walk

Saturday, August 10th at 10:00 am - 12:00pm

The rail bed of the former Wallkill Valley Railroad in Rosendale, which will become part of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail, passes through a variety of shaded limestone habitats. These support a nice variety of ferns and other plants. Join Lynn Bowdery, WVLT Land Steward, for a leisurely walk along the rail bed exploring the diversity of ferns (and whatever else is interesting!). Meeting place to be given upon registration.

Please Register for the WVLT Events, Walks and Talks by emailing info@WallkillValleyLT.org or call 845-255-2761. All of these Walks and Talks are free and open to the public.