

Hedgerows

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Earlier this spring, during our April meeting, it was decided that I would write a letter to the Observer Tribune Newspaper. This letter would state that the trustees of the WTLT were firmly against the destruction of these buildings. This letter would then be sent to the Township Committee and The Planning Board. We felt that this was necessary since we had been an integral part of the deal that enabled the mall to be built. We agreed because it was conditional with 85 acres of land which would be permanently preserved vs. the threat of a huge housing development, it made this look like the best of a bad situation. We never imagined that it would lead to the destruction of these historic barns.

The letter was published alongside a letter from our treasurer Chris Steffan. The paper also did a feature article and there have been letters to the editor from various townspeople in each edition since the article. Obviously, this issue seems to have shown that the local citizens had no idea of what was about to happen in the downtown area. Most of the people that I spoke with thought that the mall was going to be located somewhere else on the property.

Since then we seem to have become the group leading the crusade against the barn razing. Chris and I were interviewed for the local radio station with our comments being broadcasted all day

Barn Razing

HISTORIC LOSS FOR LONG VALLEY

by Keith Hayes, President WTLT

At the time that you are reading this article, it may already be too late. As I sit here writing on September 13th, the two 19th century barns are still standing, but, since a demolition permit was issued on September 4th, their fate appears sealed.

long. Steve Sciaretta (the developer) of Claremont Properties called me at home to explain the economics of rehabbing this group of buildings. He informed me that because of square footage of the site in relationship to the square footage of the mall and all of those costs, the banks would not finance this project unless it was seen as a profitable venture. There was no extra footage to work around these buildings and there was no way he could incur the cost of actually working with these buildings. BUT, if WE wanted to save these barns, WE could take them apart and move them, or find someone else to move them. Well, since WE are already half a million dollars into restoring the grist mill, we are a bit strapped for the money to do this.

Is it more economical to do this in Far Hills than in Long Valley?

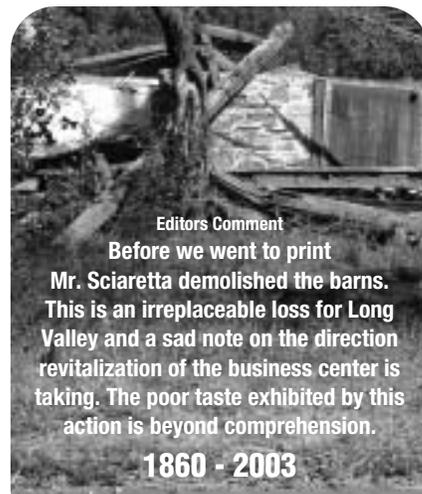
It was very brave of Mr. Sciaretta to call me to explain his position and I found him very polite and articulate, but I just could not accept his position on this matter.

After this conversation with Mr. Sciaretta, I decided to take a look at his offices. I drive by these on a weekly basis, and I thought that they were in some type of rehabbed building, but I had never taken a close look. Right I was! His offices are in an old lumber yard that has been renovated into a very beautiful group of offices and shops in Far Hills. It is right

on the main road, Rt 202, in the town. The parking is in the old lumber bins, some buildings are used for storage, some for shops and others for offices. Is it more economical to do this in Far Hills than in Long Valley? Obviously it will cost more, but "you get what you pay for" and I see rehabbing as the difference between just another strip mall and something truly spectacular.

I don't know if we made any difference in this matter but we gave it a very good effort. Maybe if we lose this one, we can save the next one.

Maybe Mr. Sciaretta would like to renovate these barns and move his offices to Long Valley. I would welcome that. Till then I will keep my fingers crossed.



Editors Comment

Before we went to print

Mr. Sciaretta demolished the barns. This is an irreplaceable loss for Long Valley and a sad note on the direction revitalization of the business center is taking. The poor taste exhibited by this action is beyond comprehension.

1860 - 2003

Mission Statement

The Washington Township Land Trust was organized to protect and preserve the ecological, cultural, and historical integrity of the areas that contribute to and enhance the rural character of Washington Township and its environs. The Trust also promotes public interest in conserving land for open space uses in harmony with the natural environment and acquires interests in land by purchase or donation. It also manages land and property easements for the benefit of the public and educates the public to be stewards of the land.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

October 29, 3PM

**Halloween
Walk for
Ghosts &
Goblins**



NJCF - Bamboo Brook Park
Outdoor Education Center.
Contact Tara Vieira
908-234-1225 or
tara@njconservation.org

December 12

**2003 Annual
Meeting and
Potluck Dinner**



Mark your calendars and plan to join us at 7pm on Friday, December 12, at the Middle Valley Community Chapel on Rt. 513. Please bring a salad, main dish or dessert to share. The meeting will be very short, the food delicious and the company scintillating!

Support Open Space Funding Vote "YES" on Question #1

by Tim Morris

This November's ballot will contain a very important referendum, "Public Question #1", which would raise the bonding cap for the Garden State Preservation Trust by \$150 Million. If passed, this referendum would increase funding for land preservation without requiring any new taxes or raising other revenues. The change would allow the state to take advantage of the current low interest rates to increase available open space funding, while continuing to service the debt with existing sales tax revenues.

The need for these funds is obvious. Everyday, we are losing more of our farms and natural areas to development. Please support this important public question, and ask your friends and family to do the same.

Please visit <http://www.gsenet.org/host/gcpt-ballot/> for more information.

*The time to protect
our remaining open
spaces is now.*



The Tax Advantages of Preserving Your Land

by Tim Morris

Working with Washington Township Land Trust to preserve your land has obvious benefits: protection of water quality, protection of our community's scenic beauty and rural character, and new recreational opportunities for hiking and other outdoor activities. It is usually the desire to further these goals that motivates our landowner partners. However, there are very real financial benefits that landowners can often take advantage of, including tax incentives.

Income tax- Making a gift to the land trust can qualify donors for a standard income tax deduction. Qualifying gifts may be in the form of cash, land, or a conservation easement that restricts a property from further development. In the case of real estate or easements, a full donation is not necessary. Selling your property to a conservation group for less than market value can merit a charitable deduction for the balance of the property's value.

Donation of certain properties that have increased in value since having been acquired can yield special advantages. A charitable deduction can be claimed for the property's current higher value. The landowner avoids paying capital gains and can claim a deduction for giving away accumulated value that has never been taxed. It could be compared to being able to make a contribution to your favorite charity from your pre-tax paycheck. Your gift goes farther because tax has not yet been deducted, and you may be able to claim a larger deduction on your income taxes.

Estate Tax - Families wishing to pass property on to the next generation should pay particular attention to the estate tax benefits of conservation easements. An estate in excess of \$1 million (for 2003) will incur significant estate taxes. A conservation easement would reduce the estate value, possibly avoiding estate taxes all together. The sale or donation of a conservation easement could save the heirs from being forced to sell the family property just to pay the estate tax.

Fall

in the Land Trust Park

by Keith Hayes

Walking in the park at this time of year, one will find an assortment of blooming and fruiting native species. Most prominent at this time are the flowering clematis and the elderberries.

The "native" clematis is possibly not native but maybe an early introduction with origins in the Far East. It also goes by the name Virgin's Bower. It is a deciduous vine with a tendency to be partly evergreen during a mild winter. The vines can grow up to 20' long and will ramble along the tops of medium sized shrubs and tall weeds.

The leaves are usually dark green and under 2" long. The plant is barely noticeable until the fall when thousands of tiny white flowers bloom and create white cloudlike mounds throughout the landscape. The flowers are a favorite of bees, wasps and other pollinating insects.

The seeds are tiny and are eaten by birds although they are not an important food source for wildlife. The seeds spread by wind and therefore the plant is easily spread and is considered quite invasive. While it a beautiful flowering vine, it is best left out of the home garden.

The Elderberry is in full fruit at this time and is a very important plant for the local wildlife. The plant is a multi-stemmed shrub growing 6"-10" tall. The leaves are compound numbering about 7 leaflets up to 6" long. The color is a bright green throughout the summer. In early summer the plant produces hundreds of flat topped flower clusters which will be covered in bees and wasps. In the fall these flowers turn into flat clusters of purple berries, their weight arching the branches.

Birds will feast on these berries which are a very important part of their diet. In days past, the berries were used to make jellies and pies and were used to dye fabric. They also had a medicinal use and were considered useful in fighting colds and influenza. The plant is currently being studied for its' antiviral properties. This is an excellent native plant but is not suitable for the home garden due to its' unkempt habit. However it can be grown if one is willing to give it the space it requires.

SPOOM Tour

This year's annual national conference of The Society for the Preservation of Old Mills (SPOOM) was hosted by the Monmouth County Park System. We were honored to be one of three mills visited on September 20 by approximately 150 people from as far away as Texas, California and Washington State. It was a wonderful opportunity to show off our efforts to people who love mills, and their complements gave us renewed enthusiasm for preserving this symbol of our farming heritage.

The Tax Advantages of Preserving Your Land (continued)

Capital Gains Tax – The properties that have increased greatly in value since being acquired leave landowners vulnerable to capital gains taxes should they decide to sell the property. By selling the property to qualified conservation organization like the Washington Township Land Trust, the owner can offer a partial donation of the property's value, thereby lowering the capital gains tax and having the additional advantage of an income tax deduction.

Property tax – Property taxes are an increasing concern for many landowners in our area. These taxes are based on the value of land if sold on the open market for its "highest and best use", which in this area is usual development. By preserving their land with a conservation or agricultural easement, a landowner can justify a lower property tax because the land would no longer be usable for future development. The "highest and best use" is no longer development.

Sale For Full Market Value – In instances in which a landowner simply cannot offer a donation or partial donation to the land trust, property or easements can sometimes be purchased for their full market value. This means that the land trust can match the purchase price offered by a developer. In fact, conservation groups like the land trust can often offer a better package than developers, due to more favorable terms in the purchase contract.

When used in conjunction, these tax advantages offer great incentive for landowners to work with a qualified conservation group like Washington Township Land Trust to protect their land. The land trust is more than happy to meet with any landowners in the Washington Township area to discuss the conservation options that are currently available, and how preserving their property may yield financial benefits.

Holiday Gifts

Need an idea for a gift this holiday? Consider WTLT beer glasses (\$5), a scenic Middle Valley poster (\$20), a cozy sweatshirt (\$25, XL only), a German Valley t-shirt (\$10, L or XL), or German Valley gift bags (\$2). The t-shirt and the 6" x 11" cloth gift bags are replicas of the flour sack (right) used at the Obadiah LaTourette Grist and Saw Mill in the 1920's when it was called the German Valley Roller Mill and owned by I. A. Hoffman. *Don't just show up with a bottle of wine, wrap it in local nostalgia.*



To order any of these products, please call Caryl Brackenridge, 876-4478.

Update on the Fall 2002 Tree Planting

In late August I took a walk in the park to check on the progress of our 2002 fall planting of 25 Black Gum and 25 Swamp White Oak trees.

The majority of the trees are hidden among the dense weed growth and I was not willing to venture too deep into this jungle due to the presence of ticks in the heavy growth. It was best that I stay on the trails. I did locate one of the white oaks that we planted next to the Helen Andrews memorial garden.

The oak tree had originally been a long stick about 18" long. Now it was close to 2' tall and had some side branches. The deer guard was still in place around the tree, although the wildlife had been nibbling.

The tree was in excellent health and looks to be well on its way to a strong future. During the winter I will return and take a survey on all 50 trees, hopefully they will be as healthy as this one.



Land Preservation Moving Forward

One of the most visible WTLT projects in progress is the Obadiah LaTourette Grist and Saw Mill restoration in Long Valley. Other less visible projects are the number of land preservation negotiations currently in progress. Land preservation is a lengthy, costly process of research, negotiation, and fund raising. It is something that can not be discussed openly and as such is not mentioned often in our newsletters. But,... it is happening!

Spotted Turtle (*Clemmys guttata*)
Photographed in Long Valley

New Mill Grant

We have just received a \$60,000 matching grant from the Morris County Historic Preservation Trust Fund for mill restoration. The timing could not have been better as our New Jersey Historic Trust grant ended June 30.

This new grant will fund restoration of the structural framing, soffit, decorative trim, and doors and siding of the street facade. It will also enable us to complete the structural restoration of the first floor and restore thirteen more windows.

Once the plans have been approved we'll start work. As always, we need volunteers. Stop in for a tour and maybe you'll be motivated to stay and help. We are open for tours most Saturdays between 10am and 2pm. Look for the MILL TOUR sign outside.

Variety in the Valley

We are presenting a "Variety in the Valley" show on November 8, 7:30-11:00 p.m., at the Middle Valley Community Center. We are looking for magicians, musicians, actors, comics, poets and other performers who are at least 16 years old. If you have an act to share with us or wish to purchase a ticket (\$8 advance, \$10 at the door) please call Caryl at 908-876-4478 or Chris at 908-832-9603.



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