



Littleton Conservation Trust

Newsletter

Autumn 2003

Prouty Woods Community Forest—A Success Story by Don MacIver

With a unanimous vote of approval at the September 22nd Special Town Meeting, Littleton residents appropriated funds to acquire a Conservation Restriction (CR) over the Prouty family property, thereby achieving a major conservation milestone. On October 8th, the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) closed on the purchase and sales agreement with the Prouty family. This land transfer concluded an era of Prouty ownership and community involvement extending four generations and began a new community conservation legacy.

About the Prouty family's contributions

Donald Prouty, a generous friend to the Littleton Conservation Trust (LCT), provided the Trust with pro bono legal counsel and guidance for many years. Always mindful of the public interest, the Proutys allowed the LCT to extend the Two Brothers Trail from the adjacent Morgan property over their lands to reach Long Lake. All three land owners, Don, his wife Carey, and his brother Roger, worked together with the LCT to explore conservation options to protect the family's lands and provide public access. The Prouty family and the LCT concluded that a CR over the entire open space portion of the property would meet conservation and community interests far better than an outright gift to the LCT of a substantial, although smaller, land parcel. Suddenly and tragically, Don died in the spring of 2002.

After Don's passing, Carey and Roger decided that it was time to sell their mutually-owned property. The Proutys selected LandVest (a conservation-oriented real estate broker) as their representative, who in turn matched the Prouty family interests with conservation buyer NEFF, another highly regarded conservation organization. The LCT, as a nonprofit, charitable, community-based conservation organization, was glad to join their efforts.

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New Conservation Land Acquisition for the Trust by Art Lazarus

This year, the Littleton Conservation Trust received a generous gift of land and conservation restrictions from the Cobb family. The gift will preserve more than 80 acres of woodland and meadow and establish the Cobb Memorial Footpath. The Trust received 21.5 acres outright and conservation restrictions on an additional 60 acres as part of an open space subdivision under Littleton's zoning by-law. The land is located between Pickard Lane, Cobb Pond, and Nashoba Road. It is heavily forested with a high canopy of pines, oaks, hickory, and black birch. A beaver dam on a brook has created a small pond that is attractive to a variety of wildlife and vegetation, with an extraordinary display of red cardinal flowers in the late summer. Evidence of deer and bear are seen at the beaver dam. The land surface includes a number of small steep bedrock hills to 50 feet in height, the shoreline of part of Cobb Pond, small swamps, and steep wooded small valleys with hemlock stands.

Running through this unique and beautiful property will be the Cobb Memorial Footpath, a mile long path with bridge and boardwalk crossings of streams and wetlands. The trail is currently marked and passable, but walkers should be aware of barbed wire and old fencing slated for future removal. The trail access is at two locations. The first is at the end of the cul-de-sac for Pickard Lane (off Route 2A, 119) and the second is at a parking area on Nashoba Road. Yellow signs, placed discreetly off the road say "Cobb Trail". The trail is about one mile in length and connects near the center with the trail that leads into the 30 acre parcel that was acquired by the Town with the Morrison Orchard purchase. This one-half mile trail leads to Nagog Hill Road, near Newtown Road, and is marked with a small yellow sign saying "To Cobb Trail". Most of the trails are on old cart roads which make walking relatively comfortable. The public is encouraged to visit the property and enjoy the varied landscape and its interesting features.

When you drive down Great Road through Littleton you can still see the open fields of working farms that help maintain the rural character of our town. Our local farms help provide fresh food for our tables, flowers for our yards, and open space for human and wildlife use and enjoyment. In an effort to highlight the importance of farms to our town, as well as our world, the Littleton Conservation Trust is doing a series of newspaper articles about some of our local farms for the *Littleton Independent*. The following are some excerpts from those articles. We hope they serve as a reminder to buy local whenever you can to keep our farmers in business!

SpringBrook Farm (Rt. 119/Great Road)

One of the oldest farms in Littleton, indeed the 11th oldest farm in the state of Massachusetts, SpringBrook Farm is owned and operated by the Matheson family. SpringBrook has been a working farm since 1713, owned for 8 generations now by the same family. Frank and Eunice Matheson are the current owners of the farm and their two sons Frank, Jr. (Junior) and Irving work with them. They are happy to say the farm will remain in the family for at least the next two generations as Junior's sons, Frank III and Scotty, are already "10th generation farmers in training".

SpringBrook was also a working dairy farm beginning in the 1950's, but in 2002 a fire burned down their milking barn. The day of the fire all the dairy cows were sold to Gardner's farm in Pepperell. Now the milk they sell is bought from a local dairy in Sutton (Whittier Dairy) and bottled for SpringBrook. Although their dairy cows are gone, they do still have calves and steers 'out back'. They are unsure right now if they will bring back the dairy cows. They do intend to rebuild the barn, but have not yet decided how they will use it.

The Mathesons built a new retail farmstand in 2002. Today it is one of the few farmstands on a working farm in Littleton, and one of the only ones open year-round. Currently, the stand sells organic milk in returnable glass bottles, cheeses, breads and baked goods, local apples, other produce (including their own in-season), bird seed, dried and pressed flowers, jams, honey, chocolates, and garden and house accessories. They have a pick your own pumpkin patch and a new greenhouse full of plants and flowers.

In addition to the goods available in the farmstand, the farm has firewood and composted fertilizer. It sells wholesale grains and feed (such as horsefeed, pigfeed, layer mash, soybeans, wheat, cracked corn, hay, and straw) to other local farms. All grains and feed are grown and mixed by the Mathesons. They use integrated pest management (IPM) for growing their crops, utilizing natural growing methods that greatly reduce or eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. It is part of their commitment to taking care of the land and being good stewards of the farm for future generations.



Gary's Farm Stand (Rt. 119/Great Road)

Just across the street is Gary's Farmstand. Owner Gary Wilkins is an animated farmer who loves his work and takes great pride in seeing happy customers come back time and again for his wide variety of produce and flowers. He claims he'll never retire as he loves farming and pleasing his customers so much. He is currently planning to build new greenhouses that are connected to the farmstand building in an effort to make things more accessible and comfortable for his customers.

Gary is best known for his corn, but he also sells fruit, his own vegetable plants, herbs and flowers, as well as jams/jellies, baked goods, drinks, frozen entrees and even sheds for the yard. Gary hopes to add ovens to the stand for baking fresh bread and the 5,000 or so pies that his wife, Barbara, makes every year. In addition to his retail business, Gary supplies fresh corn to Kimball's in Westford for their luncheon grill. He supplies Johnson's in Groton with corn and lettuce for their salads, and provides their flowers.

Gary's farming tradition began in Pepperell where his father, a native of Littleton, had a dairy farm in the early 1900's. Gary and his brother, Russell, worked for the family on their expanding farm, which grew to a busy retail operation. Then, in the 1950's, Gary and Russell bought a farmstand of their own, which they soon moved to Pepperell. They operated that farmstand together until the 1970's, when Gary bought his own in Littleton. Now the brothers each have a farmstand and grow crops on their 238 acres of land in Groton and Pepperell. Gary loves Littleton and says the town has been good to him. As a youth, Gary worked for Fred Herpy on his dairy farm here in Littleton and really enjoyed it. He believes the rewarding labor of working on a farm is a great character builder for kids, keeping them healthy and helping them appreciate the money they earn.

Summarizing his thoughts about running the farmstand and his life as a farmer he says he has a lot of nice stories about people to tell, and that happy customers are what makes it worthwhile to get up in the morning.

Nagog Hill Orchard (Nagog Hill Road & Nashoba Road)

The Town of Littleton acquired the Nagog Hill Orchard in 1999 from John Morrison's estate after his passing. The land purchased consists of approximately 129 acres of land, about 70 acres of that in cultivation as an orchard. Historical data shows the land may have been in agricultural use since as far back as 1672 and has a rich Native American history associated with it. In the 1930's it was a traditional New England farm with milk and veggies sold, then John Morrison bought it in the 1970's and transformed it into the orchard we now know.

The orchard is now proudly managed by Charles Auger, who has been there for 15 years. He has planted over 2,000 new trees in the past 4 years, replacing old ones and adding varieties that will produce more apples per acre while giving the public the types of fruit they want. Nagog orchard sells

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Membership Information

Your membership, in any amount, is a statement of your support for our all-volunteer efforts. Membership funds allow us to maintain and expand our trails, offer educational programs, promote environmental advocacy, and provide access to our properties at no charge for all residents. Our Permanent Fund is our stable, long-term endowment fund.

Littleton Conservation Trust Membership Form

☐ New membership ☐ Renewal

Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Please send this form to: Kathy Stevens, Treasurer
Littleton Conservation Trust
PO Box 594
Littleton, MA 01460



- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual: \$10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Family : \$15 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting: \$30 | <input type="checkbox"/> Contributing: \$60 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron: \$100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Life Patron: \$1,000 |

☐ Permanent Fund Donation: \$_____

☐ Please send me information about how to preserve my own land.

The Littleton Conservation Trust would like to say "thank you" to all of our members and supporters. We greatly appreciate the funds and goods you donate, as well as the time that so many of you contribute to help us by maintaining our conservation properties, sorting returnables, leading educational outings, and by providing professional services. We count on this support to help us in our efforts to maintain the beauty of Littleton's rural character and landscape.

Also, just a reminder, your workplace might allow you to make charitable donations through payroll deductions and/or have your employer match your donations—so check it out and see if you can double your contributions!

THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Littleton's Local Farms *(continued from page 2)*

wholesale to 26 local specialty stores and produce stands like Idylwilde, Verrill Farms, Gary's Farmstand, Russell Farms and Gerard's. The "drop" apples that fall from the tree are also sold to local cider mills like Carlson's and Boxmill.

The business is rounded out by the retail stand at the corner of Nagog Hill and Nashoba Roads and the ever popular pick your own option. Currently the stand is being improved to make it more customer friendly, and to add an indoor space for when the weather turns cold. Auger works hard to keep the orchard healthy. One way he does that is with the use of integrated pest management, which allows for minimal use of pesticides. By keeping the grass short and the areas under the trees clear, the rodent population is controlled and they don't have to use poison that can harm wildlife (and neighborhood dogs and cats) that come into the orchard. Auger also employs a variety of consultants to monitor the health of the orchard and help guide him in using as many natural means as possible to grow the quality fruit desired. There are about 7,000 trees in the orchard

today with 26 varieties of apples, plus peaches, nectarines, raspberries and pumpkins. Under cultivation for future availability are plums, cherries, apricots, and gooseberries.

Other Farms

Don't forget some of the other farms to buy the things you need . . . Dan Pickard's pumpkin patch on Rt.119 for pick your own (and ready-picked) pumpkins and he sells cordwood, mulch, and hay as well . . . Rich Halloran on Harwood Avenue sells organic veggies and flowers in season, as well as cordwood . . . Ames Farm on King Street sells flowers and plants as well as christmas trees . . . Durkee's Christmas Tree Farm on Foster Street . . . Springdell Farm on Rt. 119 sells fresh veggies and fruit, flowers, wagons, and picnic tables . . . I'm sure I've left some out, like our local horse farms (no offense intended!). What is important is to remember that we have all these great opportunities to stay right here in town for so many of our needs . . .

So please, buy local whenever you can!

LCT's role in the Prouty Land CR purchase

The LCT provided the following support for the purchase of the Conservation Restriction (CR) on the Prouty property:

- Commissioned both an independent landscape and environmental inventory of the Prouty land and a necessary property appraisal.
- Sponsored community events including several walks on the Prouty lands for the public, for regional and local reporters, and for Senator Pamela Resor and Representative Geof Hall.
- Provided several neighborhood informational coffees.
- Wrote articles for the local newspaper and mailed a town-wide special issue of the LCT newsletter to assist voters with conservation-oriented warrant articles at Special Town Meeting.
- Reviewed and critiqued the state open space funding reimbursement application, generated collateral materials and letters of project support, reviewed the CR document offered to the town by NEFF.
- Reworded and negotiated a more flexible Special Town Meeting motion, as described in more detail below.

LCT overcomes barriers

One of the most important contributions the LCT made to the Prouty Land purchase process was rewriting and negotiating the proposal for Town Meeting.

When the warrant article for the acquisition of the Prouty land CR was posted, the wording did not accommodate some of the legitimate concerns previously raised at public meetings by conservation savvy citizens, the finance committee, and LCT Trustees. The motion's original wording was so rigid that if the state did not fund the town's submitted reimbursement application for exactly the maximum allowable amount of \$500,000 that no money, not even the initial \$500,000 available to the town through its own cell tower leasing funds and bonding could be used. In that event, the entire process would have to start over, with another special town meeting, a new warrant article, and a new motion. Historic state open space funding trends indicated that Littleton might not get fully funded. Current state cuts in open space funding suggest that it is highly unlikely Littleton will see full funding, and like many other towns may see none at all. Additionally, the LCT learned that the Office of the Attorney General opposed any rewording of the motion because it would violate the scope of the legally-posted warrant article.

LCT Secretary, Doreen Morse, reminds Littleton folk that she is happy to email advance notice of Trust events to those interested.
Please send your email address to her at dannmorse@yahoo.com

Since town counsel's home abuts the Prouty family property, an automatic legal presumption for potential conflict of interest was raised. As a result, the town's own highly-experienced and well-respected counsel was prohibited from crafting or reviewing this motion. This left the town with just a volunteer lawyer who had limited municipal law experience and no experience initiating CR documents.

The LCT sought advice from several well-seasoned municipal attorneys and then decided it most prudent to hire its own special counsel at professional rates. In a whirlwind effort during the last few days before the Special Town Meeting vote, the LCT along with its own special counsel rewordsmithed the legal motion text with minimal word changes to create a more flexible motion that accommodated all previously-raised concerns, accommodated all possible financial outcomes from the state's open space funding reimbursement program, and maintained all modifications within the intent and scope of the posted and advertised warrant article.

LCT's special counsel next presented the case before the Attorney General staff. Given the tight time frame, this required working over the weekend. Upon return that Monday, the day of the critical Special Town Meeting vote, the reworded motion was reviewed again by NEFF's attorney, the Town Administrator, the Attorney General's office, the article's sponsoring selectman, and finally the town's bond finance counsel.

After more quick review and fine-tuning that afternoon, the final revised motion was returned for, and approved at, the late afternoon special selectmen's meeting immediately preceding Special Town Meeting.

LCT's rewards that evening were multiple:

- The overwhelming successful public approval of the revised motion that both protected this long sought after conservation land by granting the town's own Conservation Commission with a CR and helped fund its purchase regardless of the state's ongoing unpredictable open space funding support.
- The elimination of any need to reschedule an additional Special Town Meeting and vote on yet another motion.
- The collaborative and constructive nature with which it was all executed.
- The opportunity for the Prouty family to attain closure on providing the community with a significant land legacy.
- The warm welcome provided to NEFF, with all its conservation strengths and capabilities, by the community in which they choose to invest as their home.

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Future efforts for community support and participation

Roger Prouty initiated NEFF's Prouty Woods Community Forest fund raising with a generous \$500,000 cash donation to commemorate the family's long term tenure and extensive service within the community.

NEFF will use this donation both to relocate its Headquarters to the Prouty family homestead and to invest in the acquisition of the adjacent, critical community conservation lands. Next, NEFF will focus on fully funding the purchase of the Prouty property. Deputy Director Tim Storrow will lead these efforts. Starting in December, Community Forest Program Director Cynthia Wood will initiate work with the local community in seeking input on how best the Prouty Woods Community Forest can serve Littleton's needs.

The LCT will continue to work with NEFF on its Prouty Woods Community Forest Project and its conservation efforts in town. Additionally, LCT will work along with NEFF in the ongoing effort to help the town achieve state open space funding even as the project selection criteria continues to be modified long past the mandated application submission deadline.

The LCT has expended approximately \$9,000 in its efforts to help the town acquire the Prouty Woods Conservation Restriction and prepare application materials for state reimbursement funding. If you would like to help defray these expenses, you can either forward a check to the LCT with a memo notation for Prouty Woods or you can contact LCT Secretary Doreen Morse at 978-486-8292 for more information. If you have additional discretionary funds and you wish to assist NEFF with its own acquisition fund raising and Prouty Woods endowment effort, contact NEFF as suggested on their web page. You can find the most up-to-date information on NEFF's efforts on Prouty Woods at <http://www.newenglandforestry.org>.

Editor's Note: *The majority of the accomplishments attributed to the LCT in this article were led by Don MacIver, President of the LCT. Thank you, Don, for your expertise, many hours of hard work, and for your perseverance in helping make the Prouty project such a big success!*



View at the top of Wilderness Hill, Prouty Woods

Pictured left to right: Tim Storrow (Deputy Director of NEFF), Senator Pamela Resor (Chair of the Agricultural and Natural Resources committee), Don MacIver (President of the LCT), Carey Prouty, (land owner)

The Littleton Conservation Trust (LCT), distinct from the Town's Conservation Commission, is a private land trust formed in 1962 to promote Littleton's rural character; to preserve its water, plant, and wildlife resources and its unique views; and to provide environmental education. The LCT is caretaker of over 300 acres of property (all gifted from far-sighted residents) on which we manage a system of trails for public use.



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The Book Corner

These and other books donated by the LCT are available at the Reuben Hoar Public Library

Believing Cassandra: An Optimist Looks at a Pessimist's World
by Alan Atkisson

Cassandra was a mythological figure who was given the special gift of being able to see the future, but also cursed so that no one would believe her. Using Cassandra as a metaphor for the modern day concerns about the state of our global environment, Alan Atkisson takes head-on the many facets of the challenge that humankind faces if we are to avoid predictions of self-destruction. In a very upbeat and readable fashion including inspiring stories and personal anecdotes, he examines a wide variety of scientific, economic, and political information about the state of the world environment, making it quite understandable. His main objective is to offer a new way of viewing the dynamics of our global systems, steering the reader towards a definition of sustainability that can help "reinvent the World" (without killing the economy), including thinking long term, recognizing limits, protecting nature, transforming business as usual, practicing fairness, and embracing creativity. (Some of these may sound esoteric, but his use of them is very practical.)

I found this to be a fascinating book that took the complicated and too often discouraging subject of the state of our global condition and made it more concrete. It gave me an optimistic view of how change can be brought about. The real point being, of course, that we can all take part in the positive changes that need to take place.

Review by Kathy Stevens

Seeing Nature . . . Deliberate Encounters with the Visible World by Paul Krafel

Seeing Nature is a compilation of short chapters detailing the author's thoughts and philosophies derived from his examination of the natural world. Mr. Krafel is a former National Park Ranger who is now a teacher at the Chrysalis charter school in California which emphasizes nature study. He attempts to lead the reader to a new way of observation . . . to see from a different vantage other than the self centered one. Is what we see at night a sun set or an earth rise? Have you turned the other direction to see the daily affect of this phenomenon - the shadow of the earth passing into the sky? He relays his intense study of the decomposition of a deer, the chain of usage of the body, one animal leading to another, one insect leading to another. Learn his view on why birds in flocks land as they do, or the affects of scattered dessert rocks on vegetation, or the affects of sea kelp forests in the ocean. He talks about natural "fits", nature's checks and balances and life cycles from a very earthy prospective. His style is thoughtful yet "nitty-gritty" and unsentimental.

Review by Doreen Morse