

## 1992 to 2012 Twenty Years and Growing

2012 is the Conservancy's 20th anniversary. Let's take a look back at some of our early adventures and see where they have led us!

The first article in our scrapbook is from the September 21, 1992 Times Union. It focuses on founding member David Shern and his inspiration for founding the Conservancy:

*"When David Shern built his house on Maple Avenue in Slingerlands, he had no idea what he would be walking into. ...Out his back door, just beyond his property line was a small thick patch of woods. ... [He] found a place laced with trails and dotted with pocket-sized ponds.... He thought to himself, 'Wouldn't it be nice to preserve this as open space?'...From that flash of inspiration, followed by a few phone calls... grew Shern's effort to found the Albany County Land Conservancy."*

David's special place is John Abbuhl's Pine Hollow Arboretum.

The first newsletter printed in the spring of 1994 devoted a page to the board members. You may recognize many familiar names of individuals who continue to support the Conservancy: John Abbuhl, Sally Daly, Dan Driscoll, Mary Evans, Mark Fitzsimmons, Helene Goldberger, Ken Grudens, Michael Kallaji, Mark King, Candie Leunig, John Privitera, David Shern, Vincent Valenza, and Maggie Vinciguerra.

The Conservancy acquired its first preserve – the Holt late in 1994. The Spotlight (January 4, 1995) reported:

*"A New Scotland family backyard park has become the first preserve of the Albany County Land Conservancy. Dr. William Holt donated 148 acres of land along Copeland Hill Road in memory of his late wife Winifred Matthews Holt."*

As with anyone's first "born" the Conservancy appears to have been a little over protective of its first property and projections for its use were somewhat exaggerated. According to the article:

*"The conservancy is working on a plan for the property that will probably allow limited public use of the*



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## Preserve Stewards Needed

Do you love to explore nooks and crannies and find out what lies around the next rock?

Would you like to take an active role in helping MHLC manage its properties?

Are you willing to commit to an evening and half day of training to learn about MHLC and its properties?

Do you have the ability, time and interest to hike one of our properties a few times a year?

If you answered yes to all of the above, you may want to become a Preserve Steward.

Over the past couple of years, we have developed management plans for all of our properties and have begun to inspect them annually to look for any potential threats to their resources. We've also added and expanded trails, built bridges and boardwalks, and installed kiosks and parking areas. We've really created a lot of work for ourselves! We believe it is well worth it, but we'd like to share some of the satisfaction and enjoyment we get from this work with others.

This winter we will be offering training for those interested in helping us with this work. If you think this might be the right volunteer opportunity for you, please call Jill at 518-436-6346.

## Strong Growth In Land Conservation

Our progress in protecting land in the past few years mirrors the trend of land protection by local land trusts across the state and nation.

A recent report by the Land Trust Alliance showed that between 2005 and 2010, land trusts in NY protected 973,807 acres. This is an 88% increase in acres conserved since 2005.

The report listed some interesting trends in New York's Conservation between 2005 and 2010:

New York State ranks 6th in the nation in acres conserved and 2nd among the Northeast.

There are 97 land trusts in NY including 57 with staff and 23 all-volunteer groups.

New York land trusts increased their full and part-time staff and contractors 41% in 5 years for a total of 392 paid positions in 2010.

New York land trusts had 5,956 active volunteers and contributions from 70,753 members and financial supporters.

For more information on the 2010 National Land Trust Census visit <http://www.lta.org/census>.

## Mission Statement

The Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy saves special places by promoting voluntary conservation of farmland and natural landscapes in cooperation with landowners and local governments for the use and enjoyment of current and future generations.

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ViewPoints is also available at  
[www.mohawkhudson.org/pubs.htm](http://www.mohawkhudson.org/pubs.htm).

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## President's Message - Judy Thomson

In November I realized a long-term dream. My husband and I spent a week on a National Geographic/Lindblad expedition in the Galapagos Archipelago, birthplace of Charles Darwin's "Origin of Species" and the world's understanding of the concepts of natural selection and evolution. The experience was everything that I had hoped it would be, and much more. As an example of how the value of a complex collection of natural environments is recognized, and then translated into policies of protection, preservation, and observation, the Galapagos stands tall. The designation

of the islands as a national park of Ecuador has come rather late in their natural history. Early explorers driven by human need took the giant tortoises to their ships and later introduced grazing goats to some of the islands rendering some species nearly extinct.

We had the pleasure of eating with one of the naturalists who served as guides on our daily forays. All employees of the park and of approved expeditions on the islands are Ecuadorian. It struck me how important their local connection to the environment nourished their vast knowledge and enthusiasm. In our conversation, he spoke of the regular roundtable meetings that include all stakeholders in the life of the islands: fisherman, native residents, farmers, environmental officials, expedition companies, scientific investigators, etc. Everyone has input, people listen, and policies are developed with timelines for evaluating how they are working, all with the goal of protecting this valuable treasure. We left our adventure largely reassured that this genuine commitment by people from a small developing country will continue to be successful in saving a phenomenal place in our world. While we can learn much from such action, it makes me realize how important our partnerships have been to our own mission.

We appreciate and benefit from the many partnerships we have formed over the past several years to save special places locally: with willing landowners who donate land or put an easement on their property; with environmentalists and naturalists who advise us about the best ways to protect the quality of water and air; with town and county officials who are helping open parts of the rail trail despite being challenged by fiscal constraints; with volunteers who steward the land, build bridges and kiosks, and help us spread the word; and with donors like you whose contributions enable us to protect and care for the land.

Protection of our land, water and air is fundamental to our health and happiness, and to life itself. As we enter our 20th year, help us educate others and gain their support for our mission. As Baba Dioum, environmentalist and Senegalese poet, stated "In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught."

## SPECIAL HIKES TO SPECIAL PLACES, SPRING 2012

We will start off our hikes in April with visits to a variety of landscapes. More hikes are planned for May. Please visit our website for an updated listing.

**Please sign up for hikes at the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy Office by calling 436-6346.**

**April 14 (Saturday) ALBANY COUNTY RAIL TRAIL:** All aboard! Keep your New Year's resolution by hiking this historic and unique trail, purchased in 2009 from the Canadian Pacific Railway. The recently opened first section of trail is 1.9 miles and stretches from the Slingerlands Firefighter's Memorial Park to the Bethlehem Veterans Park in Delmar. We will meet at Slingerlands Community Church, 1499 New Scotland Ave. at 10 am to car pool, and share ice cream afterwards.

**April 19 (Thursday) SCHOHARIE CREEK PRESERVE:** This beautiful 198-acre preserve is located in Montgomery County on the banks of the Schoharie Creek. There are a series of lovely waterfalls and an unusual rock formation. We will meet at Slingerlands Community Church, 1499 New Scotland Ave. at 10 am to car pool

**April 26 (Thursday) THE KELEHER PRESERVE:** Our largest preserve (287 acres) is a work in progress. Located outside of Clarksville, this property is highly visible from many locations in Delmar. Join us to see what it looks like up close. We will meet at Slingerlands Community Church, 1499 New Scotland Ave. at 10 am to car pool.

**GENERAL INFORMATION:** We recommend that hikers bring waterproof boots and lunch. These hikes are coordinated by Dodie Seagle, MHLC board member.

The Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy is partially funded by the New York Conservation Partnership Program administered by the Land Trust Alliance Northeast Program with support from the State of New York.

preserve....The county land trust will closely monitor public use of the preserves, looking out for timber thieves, beer parties and illegal camping. If it becomes a problem, we may have to limit use to guided walks," [Mark] King said.

Beer parties continue to be an occasional problem, but so far no timber thieves. Fortunately over the years we have had relatively few problems with our preserves and overuse has not yet become a problem.

The Rail Trail was first mentioned in 1995. Mark King stated the rail line would make an excellent bicycle and hiking trail. "It's a golden opportunity," King said." Yes, it took a while, but we finally were able to open a section in 2011, and there are plans for opening additional sections in 2012.



Land protection was slow until 1997 when we received the 129 acre Winn Preserve from Nancy Winn. In 1998 we acquired Bennett Hill from Dr. Jerry Bilinski and Schoharie Creek from Drs. Tepper and Citrin. This brought our protected lands to over 600 acres, but we still hadn't protected any with a conservation easement. This was somewhat unusual for a small local land trust, most which start with easements. But it also gave us the advantage of being able to learn from others' mistakes. By this time some of the restrictions that early easements sometimes contained on house color, height and square footage, were recognized as problematic, to say the least, and of little value in protecting natural areas.

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An easement was in the plans in 2000 when the Ten Eycks made the decision to protect Indian Ladder Farms with an agricultural conservation easement. This was the



biggest project the Conservancy has tackled to this day. The three-year effort to purchase the development rights, permanently protecting 317 areas of the farm, was completed in the spring of 2003. The May 16, 2003 Albany Times Union stated:

*"Indian Ladder is an important community resource, offering 'pick your own' opportunities to local families and out-of-town visitors. The property also has stunning views of the Helderbergs and encompasses sections of two environmentally significant wetlands, the Vly Creek Marsh and the Black Creek Marsh."*

We now had an easement to annually inspect -- and future land protection opportunities in Vly Swamp and Black Creek Marsh.

In 2005, the Conservancy made two significant changes. It hired staff and expanded into Schenectady and Montgomery

counties. The pace of land protection picked up. By the end of 2007, the Conservancy had acquired four more easements. By 2009 another four were added, bringing the total to 10, encompassing 1053 acres. Our preserves increased at a similar pace. At the end of 2011 we have 16 preserves on 1383 acres. In addition, a 40 acre parcel of land we owned was transferred to the state Department of Environmental Conservation to enlarge the Black Creek Marsh Wildlife Management Area.

**So where are we going now?** The Rail Trail will continue to be a major effort in the next year. Building on our success in opening a section in 2011, and a crew of truly passionate volunteers, there are plans to open a section from Voorheesville into New Scotland in 2012. Also in 2012, with funding from Hudson River Valley Greenway, we will be holding community meetings to solicit ideas for a Rail Trail theme to be incorporated into signs and amenities along the trail. Finally, the Rail Trail is more than just a "golden opportunity."

Lest Indian Ladder Farms become an island of protected land in the middle of suburbia, we are working to permanently protect three parcels of land totaling 375 acres near the farm. These parcels buffer critical wildlife habitat in the Vly Swamp/Black Creek Marsh wetland system, provide potential recreational opportunities, and will help create a contiguous wildlife corridor of 3400 acres. This area is recognized as a biodiversity hotspot with records of at least 13 bird species listed as New York Species of Greatest Conservation Need, at least 20 amphibian species, and many other animals and plants of conservation concern.

After 20 years, we are nearing the age of majority and becoming a mature organization. We expect this will be demonstrated when we apply for accreditation. Thanks to our founders' vision and strong technical support from the Land Trust Alliance, we have made steady progress on building a sustainable organization over the past two decades. This is essential if we are to protect properties in perpetuity!

And to start off 2012, we will add another preserve in the Town of Bethlehem. This 34-acre parcel is a donation from Cobleskill Properties Associates, LLC. The parcel has frontage on the Philipin Kill and access from Van Dyke Road.

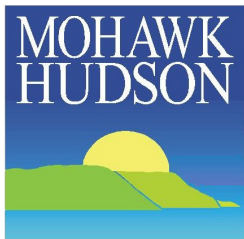
As we develop plans for the year, we will keep you informed. I hope you will be able to join us at events throughout 2012 as we celebrate our 20th Anniversary.

## Activity at Our Preserves

There has been plenty of activity at the Schiffendecker lately, thanks to our beaver family. As of December 20, several dozen small trees have been chewed down and hauled off. It is not obvious where they are taking them since no new dam has been constructed. So keep watching for their plans.



The kiosk and parking lot are now completed at our Keleher Preserve. Trail work will be completed in the spring and a June opening is anticipated.



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*Saving Special Places*

## Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy

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### ***Coming Events***

#### ***Eat for the Environment -- Back for 2012***

**MHLC is excited to continue this fund and friend raising idea! Bring all your friends out on these Tuesdays each month to feed us and yourself! A percentage (10-25%) of the tab for customers is donated to MHLC, so tell everyone you know!**

Tuesday, January 24: Central Steak Restaurant (1632 Central Ave, Albany) 4-9 pm. 518-456-1653

Tuesday, February 7th: Garden Bistro 24 (1839 Central Ave, Albany) 4 -10 pm. 518-456-4566

Tuesday, March 13th: Mangia Neighborhood Bistro (1562 New Scotland Road, Slingerlands) 11 am - 9 pm. 518-439-5555

Tuesday, April 17th: Gold Coin - Dine in only (360 New Scotland Road, Slingerlands- across the road from Price Chopper Plaza) 4 - 9:45 pm No take out. 518-439-6428

#### ***Why Did the Salamander Cross the Road?***

Monday, February 27, 7:00pm

Join Laura Heady of the Hudson River Estuary Program for a free lecture on the importance of forest and wetlands in the Hudson Valley, and the "Amphibian Migrations and Road Crossings" volunteer project. Learn how you can get involved by witnessing spring migrations of salamanders, frogs, and toads; helping amphibians survive their overland travel; and conserving important habitats in your community. Location: Albany County Cornell Cooperative Extension Office; 24 Martin Road; Voorheesville, New York For event details, contact [mhlc@mohawkhudson.org](mailto:mhlc@mohawkhudson.org) or call 518-436-6346.

#### ***Annual Awards Dinner***

We are delighted to announce that Charles Gehring, Director of the New Netherlands Research Center will be our guest speaker this year at our Awards Dinner. Please save the date Tuesday April 3, 2012 for this event as we celebrate our 20th Anniversary. The dinner will be at The Stockade Inn, Church & Union Streets, Schenectady. Reservations: 518-436-6346