

## A Poem

### *Painting in the Garden*

A gnarled stone bench is my outpost with the early dampness and last night's silence. Quiet as a dolmen in an ancient pasture, the stone leaves me to my work. New light, soft with garden things, flowers in the grasses, and revives a hummingbird, darting now to the flowers. I try to be in this one moment and avoid the thoughts of leaving this peace and in the thinking disturb my own mind's waters. But the morning is longer than the day and time regains gently in the garden.

between  
the birds' twittering  
the breezes

~ Colin Harrington



### THE HILLTOWN LAND TRUST MISSION STATEMENT:

- To conserve active farmland and other 'working' properties;
- To save native plant and wildlife habitats;
- To protect watersheds;
- To preserve the scenic and rural character of the Hilltowns.

*The Hilltown Land Trust recognizes that our towns must balance their need to create new housing and jobs with their need to preserve critical natural resources and their rural character. We're committed to being an important participant in this endeavor.*

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# NEWS

CHESTERFIELD, CUMMINGTON, GOSHEN, HUNTINGTON, MIDDLEFIELD,  
PLAINFIELD, WESTHAMPTON, WILLIAMSBURG, AND WORTHINGTON

## Springtime at the Vernal Pools

Northampton, MA, wildlife biologist Molly Hale's love affair with vernal pools began 20 years ago when she attended a workshop on them at Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary. "My eyes were opened," she said. "They were magical for me." On a Sunday afternoon in early April, Molly easily conveyed that feeling of magic and mystery to 25 or so folks who joined her on a Vernal Pool Walk sponsored by the HLT.

Vernal pools are temporary pools that dry up in late spring or early summer. Because they can't support a year round population of fish, vernal pools provide a relatively safe and essential breeding habitat for a variety of invertebrates and amphibians, such as spotted salamanders, fairy shrimp, and wood frogs.

Molly said this spring was particularly difficult for wood frogs and other amphibians

because of the cold nights. Wood frogs migrate back to breed in the same vernal pools in which they were hatched, often traveling up to a half mile away from their winter burrows. This migration often takes place on Big Night, the first night above 40 degrees, but because Big Night came so late this spring, the frogs had to "hedge their bets." Fortunately, their instincts to forge ahead were right on target. *(continued)*

## Breckenridge Memorial; Albert Farm Auction

Visitors to our Breckenridge property in Williamsburg will notice a weighty new addition—a 700-pound engraved boulder acknowledging Margaret Breckenridge for donating the 70 acres to the HLT. In June, HLT board member Lincoln Fish, Dan Pikett, and Tom Jenkins trucked, unloaded, and installed the boulder in the property's parking lot off Old Goshen Rd.

Margaret was an elementary schoolteacher in Williamsburg. She and her husband, Edwin, were avid horseback riders and rode the trails on their and surrounding properties, including the 40-acre Bradley property, a parcel also owned by HLT. In 1987 Margaret donated the land, which includes hiking trails, a cleared

field, and frontage along several lovely brooks, to The Nature Conservancy. TNC held the property temporarily, transferring it to HLT in 1988 when we incorporated and attained non-profit status.

Many thanks to Dan and Jessie Krug for donating the boulder and to Dan and Tom for trucking and stone wrestling.

On August 19, at a foreclosure auction, the 550-acre Albert Farm in Worthington was sold for \$700,000 to Milltowne Plaza, Inc., a New York-based farming corporation. Of the total, 365 acres are in the state's Agricultural Restriction Program (APR), which means that the land is protected from development and will continue to be farmed.

Over a decade ago, the HLT was instrumental in the preservation of about 90 acres of this farm along Route 112. With money borrowed from Worthington residents and the Trustees of Reservations, the HLT purchased an APR on what was then called the "Airport Property" for \$155,000 in cash and notes. Two years later, we sold the APR to the state Department of Food and Agriculture (now the Department of Agricultural Resources), which continues to hold it today. Although Milltowne Plaza plans to continue farming the 365 acres in the APR program, the future of the non-APR land, which has enough road frontage to allow for the building of several houses, is uncertain.

**Vernal Pools continued:**

Once the frogs get to the pond and lay their eggs, "it's a race against time to grow and move out," Molly said. After four weeks, if the eggs don't freeze or get eaten by a predator, they hatch into tadpoles and metamorphose into adult frogs that can breathe air and continue the cycle.

During the walk, Molly led us to four vernal pools located in different terrains of the Fox Den Wildlife Management Area in Worthington. Each pool offered a sample of the varying characteristics and inhabitants of these important resources.

One large, clear pool close to the trail was exposed to full sunlight. Clusters of wood frog and salamander eggs clung to underwater branches and twigs, and dragonflies skittered along the surface. Another pool, deep in the woods and shaded by hemlock trees, was murky and colder, and patches of ice still skirted its edges. No salamander eggs were visible, but large masses of tree frog eggs were plentiful, as well as shadows of fairy shrimp.

If certified by the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, vernal pools are somewhat protected from development, irrigation, and overuse of fertilization under Federal regulations, including the Wetlands Protection Act, and local bylaws.

To learn more about these critical habitats, Molly suggests visiting [www.vernalpool.org](http://www.vernalpool.org) or the Website of the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, [www.ma.state.us/dfwele/dfw/dfwnhes.htm](http://www.ma.state.us/dfwele/dfw/dfwnhes.htm).

## Land Lover Stories

We are pleased to print in this issue two more "Land Lover" stories. We hope you enjoy them. And if you would like to share your own recollections and reflections of special places in the hilltowns or beyond, we'd love to see them. Send submissions to Mary A. Koncel, Editor, PO Box 583, Worthington, MA 01098 or [mkoncel@smith.edu](mailto:mkoncel@smith.edu).

### Pescatelli's Garden, Montgomery, Mass.

Beautiful straight rows, stretching across the back acreage of the property...lettuce, squash, dill...then come the tomatoes, then the zucchini. Here is a vegetable garden rarely found in the hilltowns.

Fran Pescatelli saw the flat expanse of rich soil, backed and shielded by mountains to the east in the plain of the Westfield River. He must have thought it was a dream come true and he knew just what to do. He bought it and started creating his garden.

In my childhood, my family had a smaller, but equally lush garden in northern Illinois. There, the soil was the rich Wilbur Silt loam. Black as the ace of spades and not a rock in it. Here in New England, the soil is alluvial, scraped by the glaciers, thin in places, but leaving great fertile swaths along the rivers. Agriculture thrives, with a healthy commitment to work (slave, one might say) in pockets of the rugged terrain. Fran Pescatelli's garden is a sight to behold!

~ *Katheryn Darrow, Huntington*

### Fond, Fond Memories of Plainfield

As a child, I remember that Route 116 in Plainfield was a dirt road. My grandma would get so upset when an old Tin Lizzie or a horse and buggy went by, sending wafts of dust onto our lovely arched porch. She often took a pail of oil and with a broom would spatter the road, hoping it would deter the dust clouds. Gramps had a beautiful large collie who, right on schedule, would sit patiently by the roadside waiting for the butcher's truck to come along with his bone treat. He was never disappointed.

Back then, Route 116 ran down Dyer Hill and passed the old King house that overlooked a mill and brook in the valley that is now owned by the electric company. Sadly, that old road has been blocked off and discontinued.

Our family is proud to trace our ancestry to Plainfield, Ashfield, and Cummington, and to the dear souls who served in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars.

There is one wondrous moment, in particular, that I will never forget. My mother, my aunt, and I were walking along River Road just beyond the site of the woolen mill foundation when two riders in Civil War uniforms, sitting erect and proud in their saddles,

passed us and tipped their hats and wished us a good afternoon.

We were awestruck. Soon after, a car passed us, and the driver inquired in astonishment if we had seen what he just saw. No one recognized the riders and two horses. I honestly think that we witnessed a moment from another era. It was truly magical.

Continuing down River Road, near the old mill, we visited our favorite hidden paradise, which we dubbed The Potholes. Walking next to the brook, the rocks are smooth, and beautifully shaped by the gushing water as it makes its way toward the mill. The cool, clear water there has provided a summer retreat for several generations. This area is now protected by the town of Plainfield.

I could go on and on, but as space is limited I will conclude with praise for the hilltowns: "I love Thy rocks and rills, Thy woods and templed hills."  
~ *Margery Cooley, Hampden*

## Wild Wings *by Wil Hastings*

With twenty conservation restrictions to monitor (that is, review for conformity to their conservation objectives), we have begun annual aerial inspections, thanks to a pilot friend of HLT's, Norman Baker of Windsor. These flights take place after autumn's leaf-drop and before winter's first significant snowfall or in the spring after snowmelt and before leaf-out. The bright clear days of these transitional weather periods often are a tad windy.

So it was last April when one of our directors, Eric Weber, took his camera up in Norman's Piper Cub to take pictures of all of our conservation restrictions. When he e-mailed me after landing, Eric noted that the flight had been a bit bumpy. I e-mailed back, "Good work, Eric. No airsickness?"

Eric wrote back: "Nope. I was so intent on trying to locate the HLT properties below that I never thought of being sick until after I'd finished shooting all the pictures and we were rocking and bucking back toward the airport with nothing to concentrate on. Then it occurred to me that throwing up was something I could easily do, but it might have been hard to get another free flight from Norm if I did, so I didn't.

"The landing was really exciting, since it seemed for several seconds that we were going to do it sideways. But I guess Norm must have figured it would be hard to talk me into taking another free flight if we did that, so he straightened it out and we banged and bounced in propeller-end-first."

"Norm asked dryly as we taxied back toward the terminal how I'd liked the landing, so apparently he'd found it stimulating, too. I just allowed that any flight I could walk away from was a good enough flight for me, and thanked him. He's not going to bill us for the gas, either."

Our thanks to both Norman and Eric!

## Calendar

### HLT Fall Members' Party

**Sunday, September 24, 2 to 4 p.m.**  
**The Stevens property in Huntington**

Join us for a walk and talk on eco-forestry by Lincoln Fish, consulting forester and HLT board member. Kip Porter of Worthington and his team of draft horses will demonstrate the ultimate low-impact approach to wood harvesting. Refreshments too! Be sure to wear study shoes and brush-tough clothes.

**Directions:** Take Route 66 from Northampton in the east or from Route 112 in the west to the top of the hill on Route 66 at Allen Coit Rd., 50 yards east of the junction with County Rd. and Tucker Rd. Take Allen Coit Rd. north and bear right at the fork onto Pisgah Rd. We will be at roadside, more than a mile down, and quite obvious.

### PLEASE JOIN US!

To become a HLT member, send your name, address, and contact information, along with your check or money order payable to:

**Hilltown Land Trust**  
**PO Box 251**  
**Chesterfield, MA 01012**

- \$35 per year (our basic "Land Lover")
- \$50 per year
- \$100 per year
- \$500 per year
- \$\_\_\_\_(Other) per year

THANK YOU!