



*Central New York Land Trust
50 Years of Conservation*

By Jim Karp



About James “Jim” Karp

James “Jim” Karp was a full professor and Chairman of the Department of Law and Public Policy at the Syracuse University Whitman School of Management where he taught real estate and environmental law for some 25 years. He was one of the founders of Save The County Land Trust, which later became the Central New York Land Trust. After he retired from teaching at Syracuse University, he moved to southern Arizona (which apparently has good birding) and he is establishing a new nature center and land trust. He has co-written two books: **Real Estate Law** with Eliot Klayman 5th edition in 2003; and **The Legal Landscape: Guidelines for Regulating Environmental and Aesthetic Quality** with Rick Smardon in 1993. His favorite writing and inspiration came from Leopold’s Sand County Almanac - as care for the land.

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History of Save The County / Central New York Land Trust

Narrated by Jim Karp

THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA

In January 1972, I began teaching my new course on Environmental Law at Syracuse University. To my amazement, 70 students showed up on Day One, among them three faculty members. Over the next few years, because of our mutual interest in things related to the environment, I got to know several of these students. To this day, forty-eight years later, one person stands out to me. His name is Jon Bart. Jon went into the military after high school and was, at that time, pursuing his undergraduate degree at SUNY School of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF), with whom Syracuse shares a campus.

By February, I knew Jon well enough that he had talked Dr. Bob Long, his wife Ellie, and me into going with him to Albany for a conference. The conference was sponsored by the Environmental Planning Lobby, a group promoting environmentally favorable bills in the New York State Legislature. The conference had multiple, congruent sessions, and we decided to split up so that we could cover as many sessions as possible. On the way back to Syracuse that night we compared notes.

Jon had attended a session in which a group from Rochester had created an event called a 'walkathon.' The group worked with several Rochester-based companies, like Xerox and Kodak, to encourage their workers to participate in this walkathon. The participants would get sponsors to pledge "x amount" of money per mile walked, then the participants walked the route designated, collected the pledge money, and the proceeds went to environmental causes in the Rochester community. By the time we reached



Syracuse, we had decided that we would “borrow” the idea from Rochester. We would have a walkathon on Saturday, April 22, 1972, Earth Day number three. We had two whole months.

On Monday morning I remember wondering if this was all just talk, not practical given the time constraint, and would I ever hear about it again. I didn’t know Jon Bart! Later in the week, Jon showed up at my office door. He had recruited two other ESF students, Connie Komarek, and Paul Chakroff, and they were ready to implement the skeletal plan. Our approach would be to work with teachers in the local schools, who would encourage their students to walk the prescribed route and obtain pledges. The goal was to raise money to purchase and protect valuable natural areas in Onondaga County. Because I had a title (professor) and was a little older, I was the “grown up” in the group who dealt with banks, school principals, and other people with titles. The three students and their friends did all the legwork. The history of the walkathon will be discussed in a separate section.

In March, I received a call from a teacher in Marcellus High School, who was approached about participating in the walk. He wanted to meet to discuss a parcel of land in their town known as Baltimore Woods. Jon and I met with the group in a dimly lit room on the second floor of a building in downtown Marcellus. The group included a high school teacher, Jim Moran, who, a couple of months later, left teaching to study to become a Catholic priest; Jim Kundle, another teacher, who later became a student in my Environmental Law class, a friend, and eventually a professor at the University of Georgia; and Jack Calvert, a psychologist in the West Genesee School District and an adjoining landowner to Baltimore Woods. There were a few other people in the room, but my memory of them has dimmed, like the light in that room.

They told us that Baltimore Woods property was for sale, and that the owner, Mrs. Reagan, was discussing selling it to a gravel mining company. The group believed that the sale would destroy Baltimore Woods, land that they valued for natural uses, like fishing, hiking, birding, and for its aesthetic value. Mrs. Reagan was willing to sell her 99 acres to anyone for \$25,000, but she wanted to sell it NOW. The Marcellus group wanted us to purchase the property before the gravel company got it. We were a small, penniless, pulpit-less, ad hoc group very loosely connected to the Onondaga Audubon Society, with an idea. We were also young and foolish, so we decided to pursue the purchase.

We contacted a national organization, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and asked for help. After some coaxing, TNC agreed to purchase Baltimore Woods for \$25,000, and they would take the title to the property. We agreed to pay TNC back the \$25,000 plus interest over three years, and they would transfer title to whomever we designated. So we were not yet a formal organization, but we had one of the trappings - debt.

In April, the first annual Walk to Save The County took place. The details will be provided in a later section, but it was highly successful. We collected \$24,400 in pledges from the Walk.

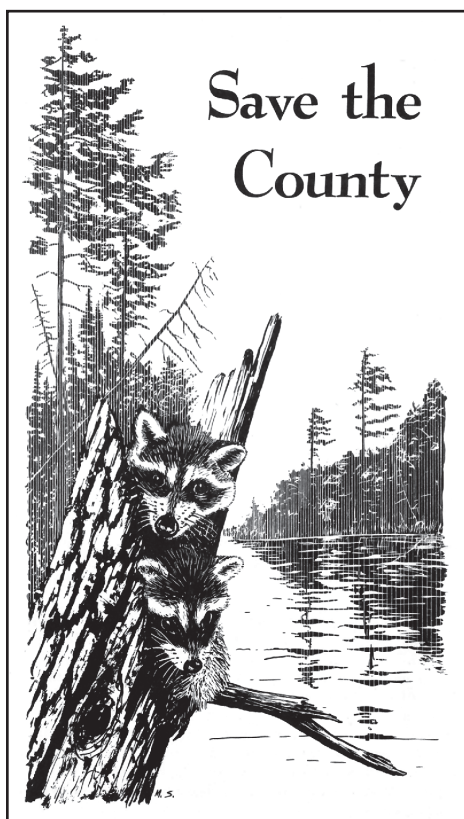


SAVE THE COUNTY WAS BORN!

On May 3 1972, a few weeks after the Walk, our ragtag group met to discuss future steps. There is no record of who attended that first meeting. After some discussion, it was decided that our group would become a separate organization, that we would elect a slate of officers, and we would create a 15-member Board of Directors that would be representative of as many environmental organizations in the community as possible.

By the second meeting, on June 28, the Board of Directors and Officers were appointed:

- Jim Karp, Chair, Onondaga Audubon Society, North Syracuse
- Karen Slotnick, Vice-Chair, Onondaga Audubon Society, North Syracuse
- Dee Atkinson, Treasurer, At-Large, Marcellus
- Debbie Boots, Secretary, At-Large, Baldwinsville
- Mike Krebill, Onondaga Nature Centers, Baldwinsville
- Jack Calvert, Onondaga Nature Centers, Marcellus
- Harry Payne, SUNY/ESF Faculty and TNC, Syracuse
- Connie Komarek, SUNY/ESF Student, Syracuse
- Pat DeSalvo, American Lung Association, Clay
- Jon Bart, Walk Chair, SUNY/ESF Student, Syracuse
- Sam Sage, At-Large-member, Pompey
- Diana Peil, Allenwood Garden Club, North Syracuse
- Jill Metzger, Onondaga County Planning Agency, Syracuse
- Don Federman, Adirondack Mountain Club, Syracuse



At that meeting we began talking about buying Old Fly Marsh in Pompey, agreed to continue the Walk for year two - 1973, and chose a name for ourselves. By November, at the suggestion of Connie Komarek, we had a name. Save the County (STC) decided that although it was in the land preservation business, it would seek other organizations to actually own the parcels. Which organization would own the land would be a case-by-case decision.



ENVIRONMENTAL BOND ACT

Although STC was in the land protection business, it was clear that to preserve land on the scale we believed necessary, it would need help from larger organizations. New York State placed an Environmental Bond Act (EBA) proposal before the voters for November 1972, for the purpose of obtaining funds to purchase wetlands and unique natural areas in the State. In September 1972, Jon Bart enlisted several students from ESF to conduct a pro-EMA campaign. They developed supportive literature, took up posts in busy commercial areas in the County, and promoted the EBA, relentlessly. Onondaga County had a history of voting against State bond proposals. In my opinion, due to the work of Jon and his group, Onondaga County voted to approve the EBA by the largest parentage of any county in the State. The EBA passed statewide.

STC had quickly gained a reputation in Onondaga County. I received a phone call from Bill Egan, whose real estate firm was the largest in the County. Bill was an avid hunter and fisherman, and was a force in organizations fostering those activities. Bill asked to combine our efforts, the environmentalists and the sportsmen, in designating natural areas to be purchased with EBA money. I agreed. We met in Bill's office, which was in the tallest building in downtown Syracuse, and his office was on the top floor. The office was mostly window, from which one could view most of the County.

After niceties, Bill asked STC to select a natural area it was most interested in preserving. Having some inside information on what the sportsmen were interested in, I asked Bill to select first. Bill chose Clay Marsh, the last large unprotected wetland in the County. Frankly, it would have been our first choice too. We then selected Labrador Pond area, a unique natural area. Those parcels were proposed for purchase under the EBA to our local legislators. Today, almost 1700 acres of Clay Marsh are protected by NY State, and close to 1500 acres are protected in Labrador Hollow. When STC, or CNY Land Trust as it is now called, assesses its impact on local land preservation, at least partial credit for Clay Marsh and Labrador Hollow must be included.



The 2002 Annual Meeting at Old Fly Marsh Pompey includes STC/CNYLT Board members Steve Kulick, Rick Smardon, Steve Schwab, Bernie Carr, Fran Zoellers, Jim Karp, Paul Cacchione, Larry Van Druff, Gail Calcagnino and Jack Gramlich.



THE GUIDING STAR

The most recent iteration of the mission statement of CNYLT adopted around 2014 is:

“The Central New York Land Trust seeks to preserve and protect natural areas in order to provide our communities clean water, clean air, wildlife habitat, and a chance to connect with the land.” It has the tagline, “Protecting nature’s gems - one acre at a time.”

For comparison sake, the previous mission statement adopted in 2001 read:

“To promote ecological diversity and active stewardship by acquiring and preserving valued natural areas in Onondaga and surrounding counties for educational purposes, scientific inquiry, biological conservation, and appropriate recreational use.”

Though many things have changed within the organization over its 50-year history, its guiding star has not. Its reason for existence is the protection of valuable natural areas. There are other stars that crossed the view path over the years, but they were secondary, and sometimes passing fancies. A secondary and consistent long-term goal has been to develop some of those lands with trails and other amenities so that the public who supplied much of the money for the land purchases could enjoy the fruits of their investment.

The initial decision of the STC Board to acquire lands but have other environmental organizations take title, like Onondaga Audubon Society, lasted only about a year. The difficulty in finding willing recipients and the desire to retain control over lands it purchased quickly led to a change of heart.

Elements of an Acquisition Plan

The elements of the acquisition plan developed in the early years of the STC included:

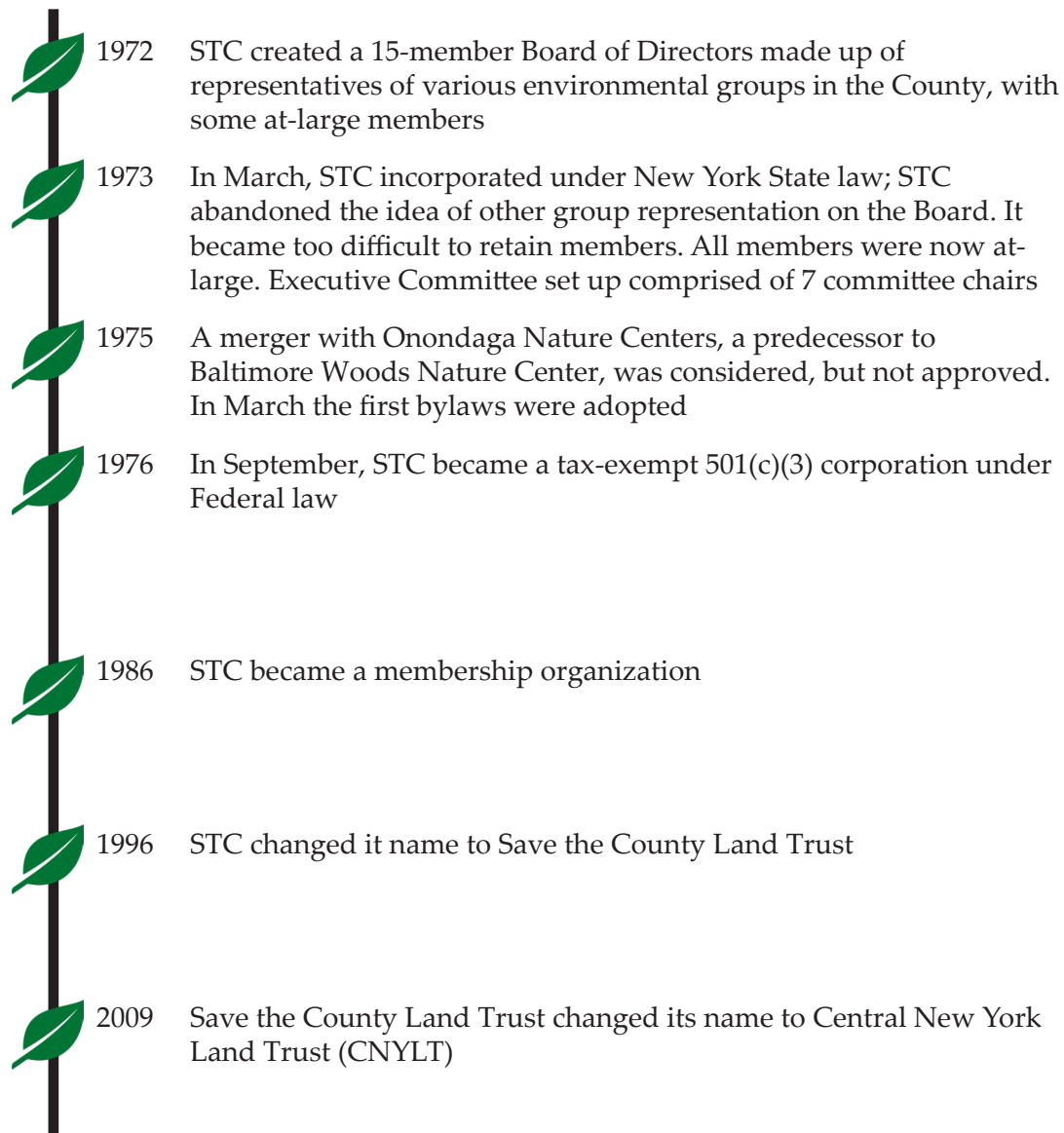
1. It would confine its purchases to the list of 58 sites identified by the Onondaga County Environmental Management Council as priority natural areas in the County. The list included Camillus Valley, Clay Marsh, Whiskey Hollow, Labrador Pond, Tully Lake, Old Fly, White Lake, Baltimore Woods, and others. STC soon found out that deciding that it wanted to purchase a particular parcel of land was highly dependent upon the owner’s willingness to sell and its affordability. STC never lost focus on these 58 sites, but by necessity, it had to be nimble and opportunistic in approaching land purchases. Where donations of land are involved, it used discretion to pick and choose based on its natural resource value. More on that later
2. An ideal would be to form a “necklace of green” linking public and private green spaces to form a circle around the County, emulating some communities in Europe. This goal did not get any serious traction because of land use development that had already spread across the County.
3. Each quadrant of the County would have its own nature center. Beaver Lake soon came into existence in the northwest, Baltimore Woods followed in the southwest, and speculation was that another would follow at Old Fly in the southeast, and



perhaps a small facility at Heron Marsh in the northeast. This plan continued to be discussed through 1986, but the latter two proposals never came to pass.

A summary statement written in 1975 from the Policy Committee stated that the business of STC was “land acquisition, as well as planning, developing, and programming on the acquired lands.” By 1983, the policy was altered to make clear that the primary goal was land acquisition, and that programming played a distinctly secondary role. That policy remains unchanged. In part, this explains the drift away from the idea of the additional nature centers.

In September 1989, Board Member Jane Hyde proposed, and the Board adopted as a goal, the slogan of “2000 by 2000,” STC would obtain 2000 acres of land by the year 2000. It was an ambitious goal because at the time the organization was 17 years old and had acquired only 630 acres. Despite the ambitiousness, ten years later in the year 2000, STC reached its goal of 2000 acres of land protected for present and future generations.



ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Generally over the years the number of Board members has fluctuated back and forth between 15 and 20. Average attendance at meetings was around 12 Board members. The number of standing committees has also fluctuated. During most of the organization's history the number has been 3 or 4 committees. Though the names changed over time they centered on major activities. For example, fundraising, land acquisition, land stewardship, and personnel/membership.

LAND ACQUISITION POLICY

As stated previously, the initial acquisition policy was to confine purchases to the 58 sites identified by the County Environmental Management Council. The policy did not address the possibility of lands being donated outside those 58 areas. This policy was expressly affirmed at a Board meeting in February 1978 with an added dimension. Due to concern about managing the lands, emphasis should be on purchasing lands adjacent or near existing lands. Despite not having yet acquired any land there, and the limiting language above, Camillus Valley (Nine Mile Creek) was singled out as an area needing the attention of the Board. So it was a policy with at least one exception.

Though new goals and policies were discussed in November 1986, no action was taken until 1989. The land policy going forward was that purchases were to concentrate on expanding the existing major holdings like Baltimore Woods and Old Fly, and to focus on preserving lands that were threatened or on which endangered species or ecosystems existed. Donated lands would be subject to a looser standard, including review using a matrix. If the lands offered for donation did not meet either of these two standards, they might still be considered for acceptance, if they might provide the organization an opportunity to use them as "trade lands" to acquire other lands that did meet the criteria.

The matrix developed to assess lands was used until 2018. The process included gathering information on the ecological/natural features on the site, such as plant and animal species, critical habitat, geologic and hydrologic features. The inventory also included the aesthetic, cultural, historical, and open space values of the land. There was a string of practical considerations too, like availability, cost, stewardship issues, and legal liability problems.

A few years later the restrictive acquisition policy began to come apart. In September 1995, the Land Trust amended its bylaws to enable it to acquire land outside of Onondaga County. In March 1996, Save Oswego County (SOC), a group founded in the image of the Land Trust, asked if the Land Trust would take over the lands that they were protecting in Oswego County. It is unclear in the records as to whether the impending demise of SOC motivated the Land Trust bylaws change several months before, but it is a safe bet that the two are linked. The Land Trust did in fact take over SOC's lands.



The door was opened further when in September 1997, STC agreed to become involved in the business of farmland protection. The State of New York had a program whereby it would provide funding for purchasing the development rights from farmers, so that the land would continue to be used for farm purposes indefinitely. Within weeks of the passage of the law the Land Trust was involved with four different farms involving 1000 plus acres. It agreed to accept farm conservation easements where there were natural areas of value on the farm. Negotiating the terms for protecting the natural features existing on the farms proved to be a sticking point for some of the farmers and ultimately for New York State. By May 2000, STC bowed out of the farmland protection business. Ultimately, the good news is that the farms were protected, and the Land Trust did not get involved in oversight responsibilities that would have stretched its resources very thin.

In 2003 the acquisition policy was revisited again by the Board. Though the matrix was still in use, the Board decided that the focus should be on enlarging its Diamond properties. It will be discussed in the Stewardship section in more detail, but in 1998 the Board adopted a gem-based classification system whereby its most important lands were designated as Diamond properties, next in importance as Emeralds, and the remainder as Pearls. There was also an emphasis on lands adjoining the existing Oswego County properties at Snake Swamp and Silver Lake.

By 2020 another shift in policy occurred. The Strategic Action Plan adopted by the Board addressed five areas, but did not include land acquisition. Chairman, Rick Smardon, stated that the omission was intentional. The Board believed that its attention needed to be focusing on the 3000 plus acres that it already owned. Any additional purchases would be centered on consolidating land at Three Falls in Manlius and High Hickory near Skaneateles Lake.

It should be realized that regardless of any land acquisition policy existing at the time, to some degree it is subject to opportunistic exceptions. If a wonderful land acquisition opportunity arises, the Land Trust would be hard pressed to walk away from it. And history has proven that practice to be true.



Cub Scout pack leaders at Old Fly Marsh during a stewardship project.

Photo by Jack Gramlich



STEWARDSHIP

Land acquisition is the exciting part of operating a land trust. Stewarding the land acquired is the required aftermath - the grunt work. In the early days, the limited number of active members made it imperative that stewardship policy be simplistic. Though all the lands would be open to the public, STC could not create and maintain trails, parking lots, and signs on any of its properties. Baltimore Woods was the exception because the predecessor of Baltimore Woods Nature Center soon moved onto that parcel providing educational programs, and handled most of the stewarding with financial help from the Land Trust. The interplay between the two organizations was sometimes rocky.

Beyond Baltimore Woods, the decisions about which trails would or would not be developed was made through an informal process. Smaller and less accessible properties, like Pumpkin Hollow and Carpenter's Pond did not lend themselves to public access. Heron Marsh was smaller at that time and almost completely wetlands. Bigsby Drumlin had an access issue. Whiskey Hollow already had some informal trails, but the Land Trust's holdings were a disconnected patchwork of lands. So the property characteristics made most of the stewardship decisions self-evident.

Old Fly was different. In 1972, when Old Fly was first visited by Jon Bart and Jim Karp during negotiations with Ralph Bayes, the former owner, it consisted of a large pond with a few small alder trees on the pond's bank and some lingering apple trees from an old orchard on the south end. The water, the size of the parcel (reputedly 86 acres), and its openness made it an appropriate area for a trail system and signage inviting public use. The natural habitat is changed markedly today, but the site continues to lend itself to active use by the public. But see another part of the story below!

As the Land Trust acquired more land, stewardship became much more complex. Ad hoc decision-making would not suffice. In October 1988, Miklos Gratzner, a Board member, submitted a proposed classification system for the preserves that would dictate which parcels would receive maintenance attention. That classification system was used, in part, over the following decade. In 1997, the Stewardship Committee was given oversight authority to make recommendations for improvement and maintenance of the sites, and to monitor and to report on site conditions and usage. Later that year individual Board members were assigned to each site to provide an additional layer of stewardship monitoring.

Precious Gemstones

In November 1998, the Board adopted a classification system for the preserves. The properties would either be classified as diamonds, emeralds or pearls. On the Diamond preserves, use by the public would be encouraged, maintenance attention would be fo-



cused on them, and trails and other amenities would be developed. Emerald preserves would be open to the public but would receive less maintenance attention and recreational amenities would not be provided. On Pearl preserves, few if any maintenance or recreational amenities would be provided, and public use would not be encouraged. This system remains in place today.

Dam, Here Come The Beavers!

Perhaps the best way to describe stewardship on the preserves would be to see it through the perspective of the types of issues that have arisen over the years. In general, a major question is should CNYLT actively maintain the ecosystems as they are at the time of acquisition, or should they let natural succession take place? How rigorous should the organization be, and how much time and money should it spend, in controlling invasive species? Let's look at a few examples in the context of individual preserves.

Beavers: If you are interested in nature, beavers are a wonder. They can gnaw down small trees with their teeth and build dams that flood and enhance many natural habitats. They are the subject of Disney films and the Discovery Channel. Everybody loves beavers. Not so fast!

In 2018, a family of beavers moved onto the HERON MARSH PRESERVE in Cicero south of Caughdenoy Road, dammed Mud Creek and flooded neighboring backyards. The neighbors complained to the Town, and the Town threatened action against CNYLT. The

local newspaper chronicled the story of a forest turning into a 'stinking swamp' and swallowing up residential backyards. A group of experts assembled and decided to put a "beaver dam prevention contraption" in, to route the water quietly through the existing dam. It worked! But then the beavers moved a little south and created another dam. Not to be outsmarted, the Heron Marsh stewards put in another contraption at that location. The beavers were foiled again. But, the beavers proceeded to move farther south and build a third dam on one of the resident's properties. Finally, in August 2019, an inspection revealed that the flooding was being caused by a beaver dam .75 miles north of Caughdenoy Road, not on the Heron Marsh Preserve. That ended the problem for the Heron Marsh stewards, but not the flooding problem for the neighbors.

Or, let's go to OLD FLY MARSH in Pompey. Old Fly was acquired in the mid-1970s by CNYLT and the beavers have often dammed the outlet to the pond, flooding the trails built for visitors' use. After the removal of numerous dams and insertion of anti-dam contraptions,



Local volunteers help move debris at Old Fly Marsh



CNYLT surrendered. The beavers won! The trails were moved to higher ground on the east side, and the existing boardwalk was removed and rebuilt on the west side trail to help where the flooding is more severe. Beavers are fun to observe, but are not always the friends of preserve stewards.

Everybody Loves Trees. Until They Fall.

What can be more in keeping with a nature preserve than trees? Residential homes surround the 13-acre FRIENDSHIP WOODS in Clay. The residents love the trees. In fact, the land is preserved because the homeowners asked CNYLT to take ownership of the land. Who wouldn't want their backyard nestled up to a forest that includes 100-foot high cottonwood trees? That is until a storm comes through and fells one of those cottonwoods or some of its huge branches. Cottonwoods are beautiful but brittle. When they do come down, CNYLT has an \$1,800, or so, removal fee on its hands unless the neighbors are willing to share the cost of the removal expense.

The falling stonewalls at Woodchuck Hill brought the local community together. They saw the wall as an asset to their neighborhood. Soon they were repairing the wall, putting the fallen stones back in place, and working together to clear the vegetation and debris from the remaining portions of the wall. Now the wall looks great, the neighbors are happier, and a sense of community is enhanced. Not sure Robert Frost had this in mind when he wrote in the poem "Mending Wall", but it seems that "good fences make good neighbors" in this case.

Unnatural Assets

When the estate now called WOODCHUCK HILL FIELD AND FOREST PRESERVE, that straddles the Manlius/Dewitt Town lines, was donated to the Land Trust in 1994/95, along with a house, a cottage, a horse stable, surrounded in front by an old stone wall, what could be a problem? The buildings would provide an endowment to support protecting the land. But it became a nightmare for the stewards and the Board of Directors. They were faced with renting properties, old buildings in need of many repairs, crumbling driveways, water line issues, and falling stone walls to name a few. It began to absorb an inordinate amount of the group's time and energy. As the saying goes, all that glitters is not gold.

Prey and Predator

THE FEN AT SILVER LAKE in Oswego County was preserved in significant part because the endangered Bog Turtle could be found on the site. An added feature was that the Bog Buck Moth, another endangered species, inhabited the site. CNYLT diligently acquired 156 acres of property and worked with others to assure that the site was monitored with protection of these species in mind. Two interesting and unexpected developments have occurred. Cattails have moved in pushing out Bog Buck Bean on which the moth relies, and the moth has disappeared. The bullfrogs are eating the Bog



Turtle babies and threatening the species survival on the site. The Land Trust is handed a dilemma. They are in the business of saving wildlife and letting nature take its course, usually. Do they now destroy frogs to preserve turtles? It is a complicated natural world.

Best Laid Plans

A very generous benefactor donated the money so that CNYLT could purchase 78 acres of land in Manlius called THREE FALLS WOODS. The area is hidden and especially beautiful. The surrounding neighbors and the Manlius Greenspace group had access to the falls, the trails and the beauty for themselves for many years. They didn't own the land, but it is a good bet that they paid a premium for their houses because of the availability of this natural wonder. So when CNYLT acquired the property and sought a permit to put in a small parking lot for public access, it was met with opposition from the surrounding landowners who feared inundation from visitors. After much ado, a compromise was worked out so that a small area with eight parking places was permitted and constructed.

Then the pandemic of 2020 hit, people had to physically distance, and mostly stay home. But, nothing 'like a day out in nature' at Three Falls Woods. On one day, 27 cars were parked in the eight spaces and on the busy road nearby. Just what the neighbors had feared, and CNYLT tried to avoid.



THE FUND RAISING STORY

Narrated By Steve Kulick

Although it is not likely the first (or even the second) thing that comes to mind when one thinks about their favorite non-profit organization - fundraising is the lifeblood of virtually every non-profit organization because it provides the wherewithal—the fuel—to support the range of activities needed to realize an organization’s mission, whether that mission seeks to advance the cause of literacy, reduce homelessness, or conserve important natural areas for public enjoyment. Without an effective and ongoing fundraising plan, few non-profit organizations will enjoy sustained success in realizing the purpose (mission) for which they were established. This is particularly true for land trusts because they seek to conserve in perpetuity the lands under their ownership and care.

Fundraising is a dynamic enterprise, responding to changing needs, opportunities and market forces. It also reflects where an organization happens to stand in its lifecycle evolution and it can respond to external forces, as well as be shaped by such forces.

At the outset, the Land Trust relied heavily—almost exclusively—upon participatory fundraising. In the context of 2020, that term might suggest a “Go Fund Me” site or some other vehicle capitalizing on the power of social media or the Internet. However, for an organization founded in 1972, it would be decades before these digital fundraising strategies and options would become a reality. Instead, the Land Trust drew upon not simply a growing public awareness of and interest in a wide range of environmental problems, but also the public’s interest in taking action to address these issues.

Earth Day, first celebrated in 1970, played a key role in sparking widespread public interest in the environment and promoting action among interested individuals. Indirectly, it also set the stage for the Land Trust’s initial foray into fundraising. From its beginning, a key feature of Earth Day was its focus on mobilizing individuals and communities for action on behalf of the environment. The emphasis on mobilization for action



was a perfect fit for the Land Trust as it sought to gauge the extent of public support for this new venture (i.e., a land trust) designed to protect important natural areas for the community.

Walk to Save the County is Born

The Land Trust's first experiment in fundraising focused on the participatory fundraising model whereby the interested individuals were asked to participate in a walkathon. Participants solicited financial pledges from family members, friends, and neighbors for every mile completed on one of several designated courses. Once they completed the designated course and provided evidence (provided by the Land Trust) of that accomplishment to their sponsors, they redeemed the pledged amounts for payments, which were, in turn, submitted to the Land Trust.

The "Walk to Save The County" was only an annual event, but it quickly grew to engage hundreds and hundreds of participants each year. For more than two decades, the Walk was a fixture on the spring calendar for Central New Yorkers and after the initial walk it was staged the first Sunday in May, regardless of the temperature, or daunting weather conditions such as rain or even snow (yes, even in May!).

In the early years, the distance for the annual "Walk to Save the County" was measured in miles, 10 miles after that first year. (The first year was 15 miles in rain, sleet and snow). Despite this ambitious distance, there never seemed to be a shortage of walkers, although some were clearly more eager than others to tackle such a distance. Eventually the Land Trust adopted the metric system and—to the relief of many—the walkathon distance was pegged at 10 kilometers rather than 10 miles.

While the Walk welcomed participants of all ages, it quickly became associated with and was supported primarily by students, especially K-12 students and their families. Eventually, the annual "Walk to Save The County" was actually four distinct walks, one held in each quadrant of the county simultaneously on the first Sunday in May. Since the overwhelming majority of the walk participants were young students, the four distinct walk routes made it possible for these young supporters to show their support for the environment while also remaining relatively close to home.

Walk participants were typically recruited through classroom presentations delivered by Land Trust board members or volunteers. These presentations were made possible





Long-time Land Trust supporter Bernie Schneider and three children setting off for the walk. "The twins were 6 and older sister eight years old," Bernie recalls. "After 5 miles, which was my goal, we had our participation cards stamped with a foot image. This energized the children, they wanted another stamp, so we went for the full 10 miles and made it. Next day they felt great but I was a little sore, fond memories."

through the generous cooperation of dozens of teachers (especially science and biology teachers) who were also interested in the environment and who saw the "Walk" as a means to encourage participation by their students while also introducing them to local environmental issues. The Land Trust also developed a rebate program to fund school-based environmental education projects by providing each school with a percentage of the funds raised by the participants from that school to support environmental education projects in the schools where the walk participants were students.

The walkathons were a resounding success for many years, raising crucial funds for the acquisition of key properties in the early years of the Land Trust, while also funding environmental education projects in the schools and, perhaps most importantly, engaging thousands of young people by providing the opportunity to become personally involved. As a result, many young people became directly and personally invested in the success of the Land Trust and could see the direct connection between their participation in the walkathons and the ability of the Land Trust to protect natural areas throughout the community.

No doubt the Walk owed much of its success to some rather fortuitous timing, with the establishment of the Land Trust following by just a few years the launch of Earth Day in 1970. As a result, the Land Trust was able to capitalize upon strong and growing public sentiment in support of the environment by providing a meaningful and easily accessible activity designed specifically to support the environment by conserving land that Walk participants could actually visit and enjoy. The fact that the Walk never followed Earth Day by more than 15 days surely helped to link these two events in the public's mind.

However, just as the Land Trust seemed to catch the growing wave of environmental awareness and enthusiasm throughout the 1970's and into the 1980's, the growing interest in fitness, running and the outdoors, spawned a real proliferation of running events and walkathons designed to support not only health organizations but many other charitable causes as well. Where the Land Trust's walkathon once stood virtually alone as a rather distinctive fundraising technique, there was soon tremendous company from



a wide range of very worthy non-profit organizations looking to raise money to support their own programs and mission. So, the local walkathon/running calendar grew rather crowded and some of the organizations entering this field even had national sponsors for their efforts.

With a growing number of walkathon-type events, a limited number of dates on the calendar available for such events (essentially weekends), and a relatively finite number of individuals to whom to appeal as walkathon participants, something was bound to give—and it did. Eventually participation in the Walk reached a plateau and, as it entered into its third decade (the 1990's), participation began to drop. Falling participation was attributable not only to the numerous alternatives presented by other organizations for walking or running in support of a bona fide cause, but also—and perhaps more importantly—to the loss of the Land Trust's access to the classroom where it has been able to appeal directly to students through classroom presentations and appeals. With a growing number of organizations also interested in appealing to students to participate in a run or walkathon that would support their cause, schools could no longer provide the access they once did without resulting in a reduction in instruction and/or an unwieldy number of classroom presentations. Soon one school district after another prohibited classroom-based presentations and appeals and the ability to appeal directly to potential walkathon participants was lost.

Faced with significant and growing competition for the relatively fixed number of individuals interested in either walking or running to support a good cause, the Land Trust tried to adjust by collapsing all four walks into a single walk that was held on the first Sunday in May and it sought to appeal for participants across all age groups. These changes enabled the Walk to continued for several years longer but eventually it could no longer be justified in terms of the money raised in relation to the number of participants or the volunteers needed to stage the event and, in 1999 the Land Trust held the last edition of its vintage walk. It had done yeoman service by raising \$598,641 over the time it existed. At one point, however, the Land Trust's walk was considered the oldest environmental walkathon in the country. As the walkathon era began to wind down as a successful fundraising strategy for the Land Trust, the organization began to explore several grant opportunities to fund key projects and initiatives and had several successes in this area.

The Land Trust also explored the implications of becoming a membership organization and in 1986 it formally changed its bylaws and charter to become a membership organization. The focus on membership development thus became a fundraising initiative as well. Whereas the participatory fundraising model called upon individuals to support the Land Trust through their active participation in a single annual event, the membership approach appealed to individuals to support the mission of the organization by becoming a member and paying annual dues rather than physically participating in an annual event. Thus members became invested in the Land Trust by virtue of the dues that they paid to help advance the mission. The Land Trust also hoped to leverage that investment by its members by encouraging additional philanthropic donations over the course of the year.



The shift to a membership organization underscored the growing need for the Land Trust to widen its appeal from the region's elementary and secondary students and many other young people—who helped launch the organization—to the widest possible cross-section of Central New York residents. A membership organization is an appropriate vehicle for effecting that change from a fundraising perspective because it seeks financial support based upon an individual's belief in the mission rather than an individual's ability to participate in an event held on a single day over the course of the year. Moreover, a membership organization encourages each member to renew that commitment to the mission of the organization every year, thereby providing a recurring and predictable source of revenue for the organization.

Financial support in the form of membership dues certainly does not preclude further philanthropic support from members, but it does help generate a "baseline" of financial support that helps make possible progress in realizing the central mission of the Land Trust. Thus fundraising through membership development and member retention remains a central and important element of the Land Trust's overall fundraising efforts. As of mid-2020, the Land Trust had 367 members, and growing.

In the 1990's the Land Trust also initiated an annual giving program (Annual Appeal) to supplement its move to a membership organization. The annual giving program encourages members and others to support the organization with unrestricted donations, beyond their core commitment of membership dues, to help sustain the organization and enable it to grow. The Annual Appeal typically takes place during the fall months and has been an important tool in raising dollars that the Board can use to address the organization's highest needs and priorities.

Also starting in the 1990's the Land Trust started the Millennium Club which had Board members pledged \$1000 a piece (or what they could afford) for five years. This eventually became a dedicated investment fund, which was to be only used for property acquisition.

With a steadily growing number of preserves and a burgeoning responsibility for the prudent stewardship of those preserves, shortly after the turn of the century the Land Trust again turned to event fundraising to supplement its membership and annual appeal revenue. Unlike the original Walk (which was also a fundraising event), the two events that became part of the Land Trust's fundraising portfolio—an annual plant sale and garden tour—were much simpler events to stage from a logistical standpoint. The plant sale operated independently for one year, until the garden tour came along, and thereafter the two events were paired together.

The garden tour was no ordinary garden tour and it became possible only through the commitment of two benefactors Karen and George Hanford, who so valued the mission of the Land Trust that they wanted to help strengthen the organization's capacity to achieve its mission. These benefactors were themselves careful stewards of their own land, who took great pride in developing and caring for their own private gardens, which over time, expanded to encompass more than 30 acres. There was a natural synergy, they imagined, between those who might enjoy touring those 30- acres of extraor-





Jane Field and Gail Calcagnino taking tickets at the Garden Tour.

dinary gardens and those who would be attracted to and inspired by the mission of the Land Trust. Thus began the annual garden tour as these benefactors opened their private gardens to the public each summer for the benefit of the Land Trust. These two events played an important role for many years in the fundraising history of the Land Trust but both were suspended in 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis.

As the Land Trust moved further into the 21st century, it began to pursue more significant grants for key projects and it quickly developed expertise in identifying suitable projects worthy of attracting support from external sources. It also developed the necessary expertise to execute in an effective manner projects for which it had received support from a variety of funding sources. At the same time, it began to develop a major donor program in which it appealed to individuals, rather than foundations, government agencies or corporate sponsors, to support the organization with funding either for specific projects (such as the acquisition of a particular tract of land or stewardship work) or for the general support of the organization.

The Land Trust continues to grow and evolve and 2022 will mark the 50th anniversary of its founding. As the Land Trust matures and moves through the life cycle of a non-profit organization, its fundraising needs—and its fundraising strategies—will also change. As any organization matures, it needs a more robust—and more diversified—fundraising program.

The Land Trust has grown from an all-volunteer organization into one that now employs full-time professional staff, working out of an office based in the midst of the community that it serves, to pursue its mission and to manage the several thousand acres under its care. It will continue to diversify its fundraising strategies to support its mission and those strategies will include membership development, a major donor program, annual giving, grants, special events, and targeted community campaigns focused on specific land acquisition goals or other priority projects. The Land Trust also anticipates launching a planned giving program to provide benefactors with a vehicle for supporting the mission of the Land Trust for decades into the future and even, in some cases, in perpetuity. The collective successes of these fundraising strategies will enhance the Land Trust's core mission, which is to protect important natural areas for public use and enjoyment.



THE PRESERVES

Each of the 46 preserves in existence at this writing will receive a brief historical description in this section. Also, each will be accompanied with brief vignettes called “Tales of the Preserve” that enliven the specialness of the preserve or of preservation itself. Sometimes finding Tales will be easy, and other times more difficult and I may have to stretch a bit. There is no intent here to detail how to get to the preserve, or to present an extended natural description of the site. That is done on the Land Trust website and elsewhere. Finally, the name of the land trust was Save the County (STC) from its inception in 1972 until 2009. Since 2009 the Land Trust is known as Central New York Land Trust (CNYLT). To avoid confusion in this section the organization will simply be referred to throughout as the Land Trust.

Remember the Land Trust has classified each preserve as either a Diamond, Emerald, or Pearl. Briefly, Diamonds are the most inviting for public use. They will usually have trails, signage, parking, and other amenities. Emeralds will have some of the above, but the trails may be informal. The parking and access may be limited. Finally, the Pearls will have the fewest opportunities for access and use, often wetlands or sites without formal or informal trails.

Austin Wildlife Preserve

The 16-acre site is located in the Towns of Manlius and Pompey. It was donated to the Land Trust, in 1995, by Barbara and Willard (Bill) Lipe. Barb was a member of the Land Trust Board of Directors for several years. Bill was a dairy farmer, and also was an Onondaga County Legislator.

The Preserve contains a tributary of Limestone Creek, which is a trout stream. A dam creates Edwards Falls, a 30-foot water drop to the streambed below. The property contains some marshland. It is classified as an Emerald property.

Tales from the preserve: In 1973, Jon Bart, one of the founders of the Land Trust, began to talk about acquiring the Lipe property. Jon grew up in that area and knew the Lipe family. They expressed willingness to donate their land to the Land Trust “some day.” That “some day” took 22 years, but the Lipes were true to their word. The Lipes hosted school groups on field trips at their farm promoting the use and enjoyment of the nearby Land Trust’s properties.

Obtaining the land with Edwards Falls, a sizable trout stream, and some marshland, was thought to be a ‘coupe de grace’ for the Land Trust Board; and it was. Since then it has become apparent that the Land Trust owns the earth embankment on the south side of the dam, not the dam itself. NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) has complained about the safety of the dam. The Land Trust has recently



removed trees that have grown on top of the earth embankment to enhance safety. Even coupes have their headaches. Stay tuned!

Baltimore Woods Nature Preserve:

This preserve is just shy of 180 acres in size, and was acquired through purchases and donations. The Land Trust owns 175 acres and Baltimore Woods Nature Center (BWNC) owns about 4.5 acres. The entire site is managed by BWNC, under agreement with the Land Trust, as a nature education center. The site is classified as a Diamond. Baltimore Woods consists of living collections of native flora and fauna found in various habitats including forests, meadows, and spring-fed brooks. The site has a rich diversity of habitats and plant communities, making it one of the most ecologically diverse natural areas in Central New York. The site is listed by NYS DEC as a “resource of state-wide importance.”

Baltimore Woods was created through the following transactions:

- 1972 - The Land Trust used The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as a surrogate in purchasing the 99-acre Reagan property. TNC provided the \$25,000 purchase price and the Land Trust agreed to repay the purchase price with interest within three years. The Land Trust did so, and after a management plan for the site was approved in 1977, the land was deeded to the Land Trust.
- 1975 - The Land Trust purchased the Nighingale property consisting of 25 acres for \$10,000
- 1978 - The Land Trust conveyed the 124-acre property to Onondaga Nature Centers (ONC), the predecessor to BWNC, that was offering nature education programs on the site
- 1979 - The 35-acre Parsons site was donated to ONC
- 1982 - Centers for Nature Education (CNE), the successor to ONC, conveyed the property, including the Parsons parcel, back to the Land Trust, retaining ownership of one acre. The Land Trust paid \$15,000 because the Parsons parcel had been added. CNE was struggling financially at the time and it was believed that the property was safer in the hands of the Land Trust
- 1995 - The Land Trust purchased 10 acres from Harrison for \$10,000
- 2000 - The Land Trust conveyed 3.5 acres to CNE to accommodate their expanded programming
- 2004 - The Land Trust received a donation of 11.3 acres from Phillips

Tales from the preserve: In mid-1972, after The Nature Conservancy (TNC) had acquired the foundation piece of land, the Reagan 99 acres, ONC agreed with the Land Trust to share half the cost of repaying TNC. Later in 1972 for financial reasons, ONC withdrew their offer. In 1975, ONC proposed a merger between the two organizations. But the idea never got much traction.



The relationship between the two organizations continued to be up and down in the following years. For most of its existence ONC, and its successor CNE, struggled financially, and found itself having to come to the Land Trust with proposals requesting money. Their proposals were always mutually beneficial to the two organizations. ONC developed management plans for several of the Land Trust properties, including Baltimore Woods. Whatever the plan proposed by ONC was, the Land Trust usually grumbled, but came through with the money. The Land Trust's first Executive Director, Lennie Epstein, was actually employed by ONC, under a contract paid for by the Land Trust. Today, under the leadership of the current BWNC Executive Director, the partnership between the two organizations is much smoother.

At the time of this writing, the Land Trust and BWNC are working to jointly acquire additional land that includes woods, stream, open fields, and a decommissioned gravel mine. They have received a grant from NYS for half the cost of the property and are in the process of raising the other half of the funding.

Whatever the organizational problems that plagued them over the years, Baltimore Woods Nature Center is a remarkable enterprise today. It is an important part of the community in providing extensive nature education programs.

In the mid-1990s, Executive Director Karen Slotnick received a call from a gentleman who was interested in the mushroom walk she was going to lead at Baltimore Woods. He asked if the Land Trust had "shrooms" at other sites too. Shroom is apparently the slang term for psychedelic mushrooms. She answered that she honestly didn't know, but sternly warned him that edible mushrooms often look very much like the poisonous ones and that he should be very careful in shrooming. He did not appear for the walk!

Beacon Pond

Beacon Pond, in the Town of Cicero, was donated to the Land Trust by O'Brien and Gere Property Development, Inc. in 2003. It consists of 13 acres including pond, wetland and wildlife habitat. It is surrounded by a business park. Currently there is no access to the site. A memorandum of understanding is being negotiated with SRC (Syracuse Research Corporation), a surrounding landowner, for joint management of the site. It is classified as a Pearl.



Jack Gramlich, Paul Cacchione, and Rick Smardon installing sign at Beacon Pond



Tales from the preserve: Currently the site provides an area for employees of the various businesses to eat lunch and relax with a bit of nature. If an easement is obtained as part of the negotiations mentioned above, other members of the public will be able to do likewise.

Bigsby Drumlin

Bigsby Drumlin is a 19-acre site located in the Town of Onondaga. It was donated to the Land Trust in 1982 by Mary Ormsby Bigsby on her 100th birthday in memory of her son, Gerald. Between 1964 and 1976 Gerald planted 12,000 evergreen trees on the site. The drumlin is mostly forested with an open field habitat at the top. It provides a scenic view of the City of Syracuse. There is a trail to the top, a kiosk, and a bench at the top with an overlook. It is classified as an Emerald.

Tales from the preserve: Gerald Bigsby's motivation for planting the 12,000 evergreen trees was to try to recapture the natural beauty that his great grandfather experienced on what was then known as Ormsby Hill. The dedication ceremony for Bigsby Drumlin was held atop the drumlin with the Bigsby family, members, friends, neighbors, and Land Trust Board members in attendance with a hilltop view of much of the surrounding region. Karen Slotnick, the Land Trust Executive Director, read a poem she wrote commemorating the occasion.

At a summer meeting of the Land Trust Board of Directors, a Board member, infatuated with the view from the top of the drumlin, proposed that the visitors experience could be enhanced by adding a rose garden to the natural beauty. Fortunately, some Board members who had not been out in the sun too long vetoed the idea.

There is a phenomenon seen in the Bigsby Drumlin transaction that is repeated on several of the donated properties. All of the early records indicate that the site was 27 acres in size. In fact, it is 19 acres. Surveys of large rural tracts are expensive and were sometimes avoided by the Land Trust, preferring to spend their limited funds on land acquisitions.

Another outgrowth of the failure to do an expensive survey for donated property gave rise to a recent controversy. An adjoining landowner complained that branches from a tree on the Bigsby Drumlin were dropping on his land. The Land Trust contended that the tree was not on its land but on a third landowner's property. The three parties hired a surveyor, and split the fee each paying \$225. The tree was found not to be on Land Trust property, so it avoided the tree removal cost of \$1500, but the hassle in getting there was expensive in time and energy.

Brickyard Falls View

This 47-acre preserve lies in the Towns of Manlius and Pompey. The initial parcel of 7+ acres was purchased from the Boy Scouts of America in 1985. The second parcel was purchased from Eve DeRosa and Adam Anderson in 2017. The funds for the purchase were provided by Harold Jones, a retired Syracuse University Spanish Professor. The



preserve is classified as an Emerald.

The natural features include Limestone Creek flowing through it, a steep ravine, a view of Brickyard Falls, some wetlands, and a forest consisting of a hemlock stand, red oaks, and other deciduous trees. A historic limitation is that the only access was via Farley Lane, which has restricted parking. With the purchase in 2017, additional access is provided from Quarry Road.



Brickyard Falls, Manlius

Tales from the preserve: Because Farley Lane has “no parking” signs posted all along the street, the wisdom of purchasing the initial parcel was much debated. Also, it did not include the falls but only a view of the falls. Despite the limitations on access, optimism about possible future acquisitions and the opportunity to have at least the view of the falls and Limestone Creek made available to the public influenced the decision to purchase the land. As noted above, the optimism was well placed even though it took decades.

Broad Road Heights

This Town of Onondaga site was donated to the Land Trust in 2000 by Bud and Nancy Haylor. It is 17 acres in size and is surrounded by residential housing. It is primarily forested and has no access at this time. It is classified as a Pearl.

Tales from the preserve: This site is a problem. The only access is blocked by a tangle of buckthorn, and many of the surrounding residential owners have encroached into the preserve. Due to the lack of access and the significant encroachments, the site may have to be sold at some point in the future.

Butternut Swamp

This preserve is located in the Town of Dewitt and the Village of East Syracuse. The 42-acre parcel was donated to the Land Trust in 1999 by Matderi Associates, LLC and Magnum Properties. A sizable stretch of Butternut Creek runs through the property, and there are numerous patches of wetlands. It is a silver maple floodplain forest and contains Buttonbush and Green Ash trees.



Tales from the preserve: The site visit by members of the Land Trust Board to determine if they were interested in taking the donation elicited a mixed reaction. It *looked* like an industrial area. Trash spread here and there, the noise of a busy nearby highway, and many other signs of disrespectful use of the land were plain to see. But, forty-two acres with a major creek running through it makes it very hard for a land trust to walk away. The Board knew that the dumping could be stopped and the trash cleaned up, and that the scars on the land would heal with time. Even in this noisy, busy area, tranquil respites were needed, maybe especially here.

More commercial development is taking place around the site jeopardizing decent access. Despite this bleak appearance, six of the nine species of bats reputedly making their homes in NYS have been recorded on the site. Trail cameras installed by NYS revealed fishers using the site.

Camillus Valley Natural Area

All of the sites owned by the Land Trust are classified using the names of valuable gems; Camillus Valley Natural Area is truly a gem. The 248-acre preserve in the Town and Village of Camillus is classified as a Diamond and sprawls south through the Valley from the Village for approximately three miles. Nine Mile Creek runs the full length of the preserve. Nine Mile Creek is considered the best trout fishing stream in the region. It has an array of wild and stocked fish including Brown and Rainbow Trout, Tiger Muskie, Smallmouth and Rock Bass, and other fish. The area is also known by birders - as a prime area for Spring Warbler migration, including the Cerulean Warbler, a species of concern. In addition to the stream, the area includes floodplains, wetlands and hardwood forests with a significant variety of trees.

As it currently exists, the preserve consists of four acquisitions that were made between 1996 and 2004:

1996 - Land Trust purchased 107.6 acres from Fernandez for \$91,000;

1998 - Land Trust purchased 51.4 acres from McKenna for \$25,700;

1999 - Land Trust purchased 86.96 acres from O'Neill for \$48,000; and

2004 - Land Trust purchased 1.49 acres at a tax sale for \$850.

The purchases were enabled in large measure by a donation of \$75,000 from the Wide-water Group, and by NYS DEC purchasing fishing easements along the stream in two transactions - \$15,000 in 1997 and \$55,323 in 2002.

Tales from the preserve: Jim Karp remembers birding in the spring from the railroad tracks on the south edge of the current preserve as early as the late 1960s. The treetop view of the migrating warblers was spectacular. The only red-headed woodpecker he ever saw in Onondaga County was deep in what is now the Natural Area. When in the 1970s opportunities opened up for natural area acquisitions, Camillus Valley was near the top of his, and many other birders, lists.



In the early 1970s a small student group chose as their course project assembling the basic information necessary prior to acquiring the land in Camillus Valley. They assembled an ownership map, and contacted and discussed with the owners their willingness to sell or donate their land for preservation. At least one owner seemed open to the idea of donating her land, but the semester ended and the window of opportunity closed. It was 25 years later that her land was purchased by the Land Trust.

Another college student group event was much less beneficial. In 2018 the group was filming on the active railroad track on the southern edge of the property when a train approached. The train had to be flagged down to avoid an incident. Since then the railroad has insisted that the tracks not be crossed to gain access to the best birding trail on the preserve. For the time being at least, this is a significant blow to using the east trail along the promontory ridge.

On the other end of the preserve, the Land Trust partnered with the Village of Camillus and the Camillus Canal Museum to create a trail from the Village parking lot south to an old dam. They also participated in providing the signage for the trail. This is the only trail currently described on the Land Trust website.

Karen Slotnick was a member of the Land Trust Board from its birth until 1979. At that point she left the Board to become the first Executive Director who worked solely for and was funded by the Land Trust. For the next 18 years she served as the face and voice to the public of the Land Trust. When she retired in 1997 and moved to South Carolina, the Board dedicated the lower southern trail to her as the Karen Slotnick Trail. A sign to that effect was erected to remind the community of her unselfish service.



Installing pedestrian bridge at Camillus Valley, Photo by R. Smardon

The McKenna and O'Neill properties were purchased in large measure using funds received from the Widewater Group as an in-lieu-of fee for disturbing wetlands elsewhere. Part of the agreement was that the Land Trust would use part of the funds to "enhance" the vegetation in the wetland floodplain areas. Professor and Board member Rick Smardon had a graduate student do a vegetation survey using 100 sampling points. It was discovered that the natural floodplain vegetation was returning on its own, no intervention was necessary. This is one of the last remaining floodplain vegetation communities in Onondaga County.



Canterbury Woods

This 21-acre site, in the Town of Lysander was donated to the Land Trust by Armani & Sons, Inc. It is surrounded by residential houses and access is difficult. It consists of wooded swamp. The original agreement was that the donor would donate \$15,000 for the Land Trust to build a trail on it. The land is classified as a Pearl.

Tales from the preserve: Despite the donor's agreement to pay \$15,000 to build a trail and steward the site, it donated only \$7,500. The Land Trust considered the agreement in breach and never built the proposed trail. Building a trail on a site with very limited or no access would not benefit the public.

Carpenter's Pond Preserve

This preserve consists of four separated parcels in the Town of Pompey that adds up to 24.5 acres. In 1981, the Land Trust purchased rights to 3 of the parcels at a tax sale. In 1982, the fourth, a 9-acre site, was donated by Onondaga Audubon. The habitat contains part of the pond, forest, wetlands, and a fen. Two of the parcels include part of Carpenter's Pond. The preserve is classified as a Pearl.

Tales from the preserve: Mrs. Maxwell offered to donate the 9-acre parcel to the Land Trust in 1973. At that point, the Land trust had decided that lands it was able to protect should be owned by other environmental groups. The policy was short lived, but during the existence of the policy Maxwell made her offer. The Land Trust talked Onondaga Audubon Society (OAS) into taking ownership of the property. In 1982, OAS decided it did not want to own the land and donated it to the Land Trust.

Years later the Land Trust discovered that one parcel had been illegally logged. In 2003 a settlement was reached with the loggers for \$7,500.

Case's Landing Preserve

This 75-acre preserve in the Town of Manlius was donated by members of the Case family in 1993. It consists of woodland with a cold, spring-fed Pools Brook running through it. There are signs and a trail on the site. It is classified as an Emerald. There was an active sugar bush on the property at the time of the donation.

Tales from the preserve: Peter Pool, after whom the brook is named, came to the area in 1813. He built a sawmill on the site. At some point the brook was diverted into the Erie Canal to help supply water to the Canal.

On one of the first trips to the preserve, Land Trust Board members were treated to a tour of the sugar bush (maple syrup making) operation being carried out on the site by a man named Edward DeBoer. The sugar shack was very warm, but the smells were so good.



Cheney (Route 81)

This 47-acre site in the Town of Tully was donated in 1992 by Lee and Margaret Cheney. The preserve is landlocked, so there is no access. The property is on a wooded hillside. It is classified as a Pearl.

Tales from the preserve: At the time of the donation in 1992, there was access to the property from the rest area along I-81. The rest area was moved and access was lost. The site visit prior to agreeing to accept the donation by members of the Board left one lingering memory. It would be an excellent place for mountain goats. The hillside is steep and unrelenting. But, apparently deer like it too.

The site is known for its wild mushrooms, but beware - the edible ones look very much like the poisonous ones. If you are not an expert, don't even think about picking them.

Cherry Valley

Cherry Valley is a 47-acre preserve in the Town of Lafayette. It was purchased from Frank Fatti Jr. in 1991 in a bargain sale. Its natural features include Onondaga Creek, a small pond, a forested section, and a sulfur spring. There is a trail running from Route 20 south past the pond to Onondaga Creek, but it is badly overgrown. Another access problem is parking along busy Route 20. There is a sign near the north end of the trail. It is classified as an Emerald.

Tales from the preserve: The sulfur spring on this property and other springs in the area give the place a distinct odor of rotten eggs. Apparently, the sulfur spring resulted from exploratory drilling for salt by Solvay Process in the mid-1800s.

Elbridge Swamp and Carpenter's Brook Meadow

The entire area, known as Elbridge Swamp, located in the Town of Elbridge, is 416 acres. The Elbridge Swamp preserve encompasses 254 acres of the entire swamp, and is divided into a north and south section. The sections are separated by other privately owned property. Carpenter's Brook Meadow, also physically separated, adds another 12 acres. The preserve is predominantly a forested wetland. Five tiny tributaries (the five fingers) unite in the north section of Elbridge swamp to become Carpenter's Brook. About 50-acres of the preserve are classified by NYS as designated wetlands on which development is strictly regulated. The preserve is classified as an Emerald. Below is the acquisition history:

1975 - Land Trust purchased 89 acres from Edward Sherwood

1989 - Land Trust received a donation of 6 acres from Janet Stacey

1989 - Land Trust purchased 18 acres from Onondaga County

1989 - Land Trust purchased 85 acres from Onondaga County

1995 - Land Trust purchased 18 acres from Harold Sweeney



1996 - Land Trust received a donation of 37 acres from Devillo Sloan, Jr.

2003 - Land Trust received a donation of 12 acres from Elbridge Land Co. (Carpenter's Brook Meadow)

Tales from the preserve: This preserve is one of the Land Trust's largest. The seven parcels were assembled over a 28-year period, and Steve Schwab, a long-serving member of the Land Trust Board, has been the driving force behind the project.

With hunting being restricted by "no trespassing" signs, and fewer hunters in the field, plus more land turning back to woodlands, deer have become a problem in Central New York communities, and many other communities across the country. Other than humans, the natural deer predators are gone or extremely limited. The damage can be seen in the destruction of forest understory, car-deer collisions, and backyard gardens. The Land Trust Board has prohibited hunting on their properties from day one. The issue has come before the Board many times, but the answer did not change. Recently, the Board, responding to the growing deer problem, decided to allow bow hunting for deer in Elbridge Swamp on an experimental basis. Stay tuned for the outcome.

Emerick Road Preserve

This 36-acre preserve in the Town of Lysander was donated in 2007 to the Land Trust by Stephen and Joy Swenson. There is an unmarked easement into the property, which is divided into three separate parcels by a power line. The habitat includes open meadow, young forest, wetlands and a cedar swamp. It is east of Beaver Lake and between it and Three Rivers Game Management Area. It is classified as a Pearl.

Tales from the preserve: Jack Gramlich, a long-time Board member and land stewardship leader, tells a story about the visit to the Emerick Road site before accepting the donation. Apparently, another member of the Board casually walking along suddenly found herself two feet deep in mucky soil. (Onondaga County's version of quicksand?). Other Board members were able to extract her from the muck, but without one shoe. After a heroic effort the shoe too was extracted, and the Board accepted the donation anyway.

Fen at Silver Lake

This preserve is located in Oswego County. It is 157 acres in size and encompasses a significant portion of Silver Lake itself. It includes some NYS-designated protected wetlands. The main attraction in protecting the land was the existence of the NYS-endangered bog turtle. It also included the bog buck moth, another threatened species. The moth has not been seen since 2018, probably related to the disappearance of the bog buckbean upon which it relies. There is a sign marking the site. It is classified as an Emerald. The following is the land acquisition history:

2001 - Land Trust purchased 89 acres from Lucille Joslyn for \$34,500. An anonymous donor contributed \$20,000 toward the purchase price, The Nature Conservancy contributed \$10,000, and the Land Trust provided \$4,500;



2011 - Land Trust acquired 42 acres from Reynolds for \$18,000. The money for the purchase was provided by SUNY-Oswego in mitigation for filling wetlands elsewhere;

2012 - Land Trust acquired 26 acres from Lyle Salisbury. The funds were provided by Target Stores in mitigation for damage caused at another site; and

2015 - Wilder donated 11.5 acres, though Land Trust paid \$990 in taxes due.

Tales from the preserve: Save Oswego County (SOC) was an organization formed in the 1970s with a purpose similar to the Land Trust, to protect important natural areas. When interest in the project began to wane, SOC merged with the Land Trust. Part of the merger agreement was that the remaining SOC members would provide a person to be on the STC Board. For several years that member was Tony VanGeet. Tony was a generous and hard working member of the Board. In recognition of his years of service, there is a memorial to him on the Fen property.

Professor Peter Rosenbaum from SUNY-Oswego has undertaken ongoing research and management of the Fen site with a focus on protecting the threatened habitants, and he is the authority on the site. A major effort was undertaken to control cattails, which were crowding out other natural vegetation. In 2012, an abandoned house on the site was removed at a cost of \$7,000 because it had become an attractive nuisance. It's all in the life of a land trust.

In 2017-18 it was discovered that pollution was entering from the northern edge of the Lake. NYS DEC undertook an enforcement action against the source resulting in a fine of the polluter. The money from the fine was managed by Professor Rosenbaum, and Oswego County Soil and Water Conservation District to protect the water quality plus habitat studies. Some of the funds were dedicated to the Land Trust to purchase other lands around the Lake.

Friendship Woods

This 13.4-acre preserve in the Town of Clay was purchased from the Boy Scouts of America for \$50,000 in 1988. Surrounding homeowners provided \$29,000 and the Land Trust contributed \$21,000. The interesting story behind the purchase is told below. The property is surrounded by residential housing on three sides and by busy Route 57 on the other. It is heavily forested with deciduous trees and has two streams running through it. It also contains a small hill - a glacial esker - and some wetlands in low areas. It has a trail, and is classified as an Emerald.

Tales from the preserve: Fred Gardener and his wife donated the property to the Boy Scouts with the condition that it be "forever wild." When it was found out that the limiting condition could be legally breached, the Boy Scouts entertained an offer of \$135,000 from a developer. When the word got out, the neighbors were incensed. Further fuel was added to the fire when the prospective developer held a meeting with the neighbors and told them that the houses he would build would be bigger than theirs but they would benefit because their property values would increase. Amidst the brouhaha, the Land Trust agreed to assist. Finally, the Boy Scouts, already getting bad publicity in the



local newspaper, agreed to sell the land to the Land Trust with the neighbors contributing almost 60% of the purchase price, and the Land Trust the remainder.

Having a 13-acre forest in your backyard is definitely a benefit for the surrounding neighbors. Unexpectedly, it became a headache too. Many of the large trees on the property were old and storms created hazards of whole trees or large limbs falling onto their properties or their houses. Some of the cottonwoods are over 100' tall. The financial headache became the Land Trust's as it had to pay up to \$1,800 for the removal of a single tree, and there have been several incidents where the trees created unsafe conditions and had to be removed or trimmed.

On the bright side, a youth group at Liverpool High School stocked the stream with trout. A wide variety of birds have been found on the site including, Barred Owl, Great Horned Owl and Wild Turkeys. One of the neighbors, Sue Gorham, joined the Board of Directors of the Land Trust. When she retired, her son became a Board member.

Granby Woods

This long, narrow strip preserve is in the Town of Granby in Oswego County. The 24-acres were donated to the Land Trust by Gordon and Leon Wilber in 2005. It is predominantly a forested wetland. It is classified as a Pearl.

Tales from the preserve: This property was owned by the Wilber family for over 100 years. As you are reading through these property stories, you can tell that some, like Granby Woods, provide little obvious benefit to the public. However, scientists today tell us that 30 percent of the land and 30 percent of the water areas worldwide must be preserved to halt the rapid extinction of wildlife species that is taking place. Currently, only 12 percent of the land has protected status. Granby Woods, and other Pearl properties, make a limited but important contribution to the 30 percent goal we need to achieve.

Green Heron Swamp Preserve

This 30-acre wetland in the Town of Clay was donated to the Land Trust in 2001. The donation was made by Kelly-Tobin Development Corp. to mitigate a negative impact their residential development had on existing wetlands. Part of the deal with the US Army Corps of Engineers was that the donor had to construct some compensating wetlands. The site consists of natural and man-made wetlands and a sedge meadow. It is classified as a Pearl.

Tales from the preserve: Easy access to the site can be had from Meltzer Park, but a small strip of private land separates the Park and the Preserve. So be careful. The Town of Clay has developed rapidly. Protection of 30-acre sites containing wetlands like Green Heron Swamp Preserve is important to the wildlife in the community.



Herbert Luke Sanger Wildlife Preserve

Carl and Doris Kohls donated this 23-acre site in the Town of Onondaga in 1994. The site is named in memory of the Kohls' uncle. There is an entry sign on Amber Road. The site is classified as a Pearl. The edge of the property has mature spruce trees, but they give way to overgrown bramble - making movement through the site difficult. There is a small brook on the site.

Tales from the preserve: With many of the preserves classified as Pearls, human access is limited or non-existent. So why preserve them? In a developing area like Central New York, the amount of land remaining for the non-human critters to carry out their lives is becoming ever smaller. In 2019, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology estimated that the world lost 3 billion birds over the last 50 years, about the lifetime of the Land Trust. The Pearls will do their part in seeing to it that in the next 50 years our avian allies will fare better.

Heron Marsh

Heron Marsh, in the Towns of Clay and Cicero, is composed of 92 acres of mostly wetlands. Some of the wetlands are certified under the NYS wetlands protection law. Eight different properties were aggregated to form the preserve. It is a hydrological connection between Clay Marsh and Cicero Swamp via Mud Creek, a major reason why the Land Trust began to pursue land protection in the area. All except the Pogrosky parcel are located north off Caughdenoy Road. It is known for its fall bird migration. The preserve is classified as an Emerald and the acquisition history is listed below:

1975 - Land Trust purchased 28 acres from Sarah Yarwood, et al. for \$8,200;

1979 - Land Trust purchased 14 acres from Howard and Irene Reed for \$5,000;

1980 - Land Trust purchased 2.4 acres from Elmer and Dorothy Verstreet (Price uncertain, see below);

1982 - Land Trust purchased 3.9 acres from Gerald and Anna May Miller (between Miller and Verstreet \$11,450 was paid. Exact breakdown is not recorded);

1982 - Hall-Stevens donated 22 acres to the Land Trust;

1983 - Land Trust purchased 19 acres from Arlene Lamates for \$15,800;

1985 -Mark Pogrosky donated 5.3 acres to the Land Trust; and

2006 - Cicero Associates donated 21 acres to the Land Trust.

Tales from the preserve: Once again you will note that the currently mapped 92 acres is fewer acres than the amount reputedly sold and donated by the 8 transactions that took place over the years.

Jim Karp remembers more than one long session sitting at Elmer Verstreet and his wife's kitchen table trying to talk them into selling a portion of their land so that the



Land Trust would have upland access to the 42 acres of wetland it had already acquired. Elmer quickly bought into the idea, and the talks then turned to getting other neighbors to do the same. Elmer's main focus was his next door neighbor, Miller, who proved to be a hard sell. But two years later the Miller deal was consummated. Jim does not remember a friendlier or more helpful landowner with whom to deal. There is an interesting story told in the Stewardship section about beavers and the Pogrosky parcel.

High Hickory Preserve

This 92-acre preserve in the Town of Spafford was donated to the Land Trust in 1989 by Barbara Rennick, Mary Ellen Trimble, and Margaret Wilson. It has 41 acres of mixed forest and 46 acres of open fields. There are four streams and a half-acre pond on the property. Ten Mile Brook has a series of falls, shoots and rapids. The fields are mowed to maintain the field habitat. The property is near Skaneateles Lake, and at several places on the site there are views of the Lake. The property is classified as an Emerald.

Tales from the preserve: This site was formally dedicated on the 20th anniversary of Earth Day in 1990. Cindy Page, a member of the Land Trust Board (at that time) and a wildlife rehabilitator, released a recuperated hawk back into the wild at the ceremony.

Rick Smardon, one of the long-time leaders and steady influences of the Land Trust, indicated that the site is being used in a program to demonstrate water quality improvement measures for the Skaneateles Lake Watershed. The measures include mowing of the fields and some of the brush; strategically placing small stream logs to create vernal pools, plus improving songbird habitat.

Once preserves are acquired by the Land Trust, one of the perplexing issues it faces is whether to let nature take its course, which usually means allowing the property to age to a mature forest, or to try to retain the habitat similar to what it was at the time of acquisition. Sometimes one of the chief reasons for acquiring a preserve is the current natural state. On High Hickory the entire site will mature into a forest, but the fields provide a more diverse habitat for birds and animals. So far, the decision made is to retain some of the field habitat by occasional mowing, and improve access to the site.

Holdridge Habitat Woods

The Woods in the Town of Marcellus is 21.5 acres and was donated to the Land Trust in the will of Esther Holdridge in 2004. It is predominantly a shrub swamp with some upland on the edges. It has a small stream running north and south through the property. It is classified as a Pearl.

Tales from the preserve: Perhaps Esther Holdridge understood the following. "The land belongs to the future... we come and go but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it — for a while." (Willa Cather, O Pioneers!)



Indian Hill

Donald McGinnis, the developer of the Pompey Pines residential complex, donated 37 acres to the Land Trust in 1986. It is located in the Town of Pompey, and is classified as an Emerald. There is diverse habitat on the preserve with a hemlock-lined ravine, a stream, and an overgrown apple orchard.

Tales from the preserve: There was a 17th Century Onondaga settlement in the area with remnants of a longhouse. French Jesuits had a mission in the area. The donation of the property to the Land Trust by the developer was probably motivated by existence of the historic Onondaga settlement. The top of the hill is pock marked with holes dug by archeologists seeking relics of the Onondaga civilization. The developer granted a 30' easement from the residential area into the Indian Hill site. The adjoining landowner is currently contesting the ownership of the easement, so access may be tricky.

Physical entry to the site has always been a little tricky. A visitor had to cross a tiny stream at the bottom of the ravine, and wrestle through an overgrown wild raspberry patch on the other side, which always required a small blood donation. Sighting wild turkeys was often on the agenda, and black-capped chickadees in the overgrown orchard were so tame you could almost touch them in the winter. A flock of American robins hunkered down all winter in a protected area on the preserve.

Lake Forest Preserve

This preserve in the Town of Cicero is 103 acres and is almost completely composed of wetlands. It is in the floodplain in the southwest corner of Oneida Lake. It abuts Oneida Shores County Park on the northwest. Though it is very close to Oneida Lake there is no direct access from the Preserve to the Lake and, in fact, due to the wet condition, access to the site is not available. The site is thinly forested, but many of the trees are dying due to the high water level. It is classified as a Pearl. It was acquired through three separate donations and the following is the history:

1985 - Lake Forest Beach Wildlife Preserve Association, a homeowners group, donated 57 acres to the Land Trust;

1999 - Robert and Elaine Bolton donated half an acre to the Land Trust; and

2000 - Humane Society of the US Wildlife Trust Fund donated 35 acres to the Land Trust.

Tales from the preserve: In the 1920s a dam was built near Caughdenoy Road causing farmland near the Lake to flood and form the wetlands of which the Preserve is a part. Much later, residences were built on the lakeshore reducing the area where floodwaters could escape, and raising the water level on the property still higher.

Shortly after the acquisition, a group of Board members made a winter visit to the Lake Forest Preserve. The property is only accessible in the winter when the ground is frozen. One of the longest-serving board members, Jane Field, stepped on some thin ice and dropped into the shallow water. She is still teased about it today.



Marie's Woods

The Woods in the Town of Cicero is 66 acres in size and was donated to the Land Trust by Marie and Jerome Blackman in 2008. It abuts the parking lot of Joseph F William Memorial Park, and is separated from Oneida Lake by a row of houses built on the lake-shore. It is a mixed, second-growth forest with 15 acres of wetlands. The property has some surprisingly large trees. There is signage, and a trail leading from the Park parking lot. It is classified as an Emerald.

Tales from the preserve: The Blackmans purchased the property shortly before donating it to the Land Trust. Their purpose was to prevent the development of the site and to keep it as a natural area. At some point in time in the past a portion of the land was used as a “muck farm,” a common usage of land in this area.

Mason Hill Preserve

The 86-acre preserve is in the Town of Lafayette and was donated to the Land Trust in 2004 by George and Mary Earle. The property is predominantly a wooded hillside, but has an assortment of natural features including hardwood forest, successional fields, two ponds, a small creek, and a ravine with some riparian areas. Entry is via an easement on the northern edge, and there are several trails on the site. The land is classified as an Emerald.

Tales from the preserve: George Earle, one of the donors, was a Professor of Landscape Architecture at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. In addition to the varied natural features on Mason Hill Preserve, there are a few man-made ones too. They include a wedding altar, a lean-to, two man-made ponds, and a suspension bridge across the ravine. The Earle's son was married at the wedding altar, and the ceremony was presided over by an Onondaga Chief.

The suspension bridge across the ravine was built by George Earle in the 1950s, and is the only easy access to the property. Access easements north and south of the bridge are difficult at the moment but are being improved for better access. Once across the ravine there is a gradual to steep slope that provides great habitat for raptors.

Old Fly Marsh Preserve

This preserve was one of the first to come under the protection of the Land Trust. It is in the Town of Pompey and consists of 77 acres with 45 acres of it in marsh and pond. The initial parcel of 67 acres was purchased from Ralph and Helen Bays for \$45,000 in 1974. The second parcel of 9.8 acres was purchased from Carl and Barbara Olcott in 1978 for \$12,500. The preserve is classified as a Diamond. It has an extensive trail system, a kiosk at the parking lot, a bird blind, an observation deck and benches, an amphitheater, and a shifting boardwalk (see below). Other than Baltimore Woods, it has more man-made amenities than any other preserve. The wetland and open area was created by damming the headwaters of Fabius Brook. As noted in the Stewardship section, the dam has provided a continuous battleground between the Land Trust and local beavers. The pond is a significant resting place for migrating waterfowl, and a nesting site for Wood



Ducks and a few other waterfowl.

Tales from the preserve: The wetland and pond were created in the 1950s by a local legend in nature circles, John Weeks. John was working for NYS DEC at the time. There were other “builders.” Charles and Martha Estabrook donated \$4,000 to have the observation deck and benches built in memory of their daughter, Laura. It was a favorite place for her during her early, untimely fatal illness. A local Eagle Scout built the bird blind. A Scouting group built the kiosk, and Cub Scout Pack 115 continues to do maintenance on the site. The boardwalk along the east trail (now partially moved to the west trail due to determined beavers) was constructed, in one day, by members of the Land Trust Board and several friends of the organization. “Wood” made from recycled plastic was used and many years later continues to endure.

There is a trail marker on the East Trail, not far from the overlook, remembering former Board member Jane Hyde. She and her husband, Jed, served on the Board for many years. When the Hydys joined the Board there was only one opening. So they shared a vote, each of their votes counted as 1/2 a vote, not that it ever mattered. Closely divided votes were rare.

Earlier it was mentioned that the reality of how many acres the Land Trust was getting differed from the acres described by the prior landowner. Old Fly is a classic example. Ralph Bays assured the Land Trust that it was getting 86 acres, when in fact it was 67. The Olcotts informed the Land Trust that it was getting 12 acres when it was only 9.8 acres. With limited funds, the Land Trust took them at their word. If you look at it as strictly a business transaction, the Land Trust thought it was paying \$523 an acre for the Bays property when it was actually paying \$667 per acre. For the Olcott property it thought the price was \$1,041 per acre, but it was actually \$1,275. Was some ‘skullduggery’ going on here? Though the Land Trust participants in the transactions cannot explain the discrepancy, deviousness is not suspected. Would the Land Trust have purchased the properties anyway? Yes!

Pleasant Valley Project Area

The project area is in the Town of Onondaga, currently consisting of about 301 acres. In reality the project area is comprised of three separate areas, and within two of the three, parcels are not all contiguous. To simplify, the description each of the three will be handled separately.

Pleasant Valley - The largest of the three is the 203-acre Pleasant Valley section. The single parcel is under a 2019 contract to be purchased by the Land Trust upon raising the funds to do so (completed 2022). The property was owned by Barbara Root and Harvey Nusbaum, who purchased it from the previous owners to prevent development of the land. The purchase price is \$285,000.

The property has a wonderful mixture of habitat. There is a small area of active agricultural use, open fields, 50 acres of government designated protected wetlands, 3 ponds, a sugar bush (maple syrup production), a tributary to the West Branch of Onondaga



Creek, woodlands, and ridge lands. The vegetation is very diverse. There are active beavers on the site, and fishers and many animals and birds use or live on the site. It is classified - no surprise - as a Diamond.

Lockwood Properties - Judith and Robert Lockwood donated 5 parcels comprising 87 acres of land in 1995 and 1996 to the Land Trust. Two of the parcels are contiguous to the Pleasant Valley property, and the other three are close by. The parcels range in size from four acres to 24 acres. The properties are all mixed woodland, and have informal trails throughout. This property, too, is classified as a Diamond.

Pumpkin Hollow - This site is eleven acres in total that were acquired in four transactions. The initial one-acre parcel was donated by Onondaga Audubon in 1982. A second four-acre property was purchased at a tax sale in 1992. The Lockwoods donated two parcels totaling three acres in 1995, and Arthur Horsington also donated three acres in 1995. These parcels are all wooded swamplands with a small stream. The site is classified as a Pearl.

Tales from the preserve: The initial Pumpkin Hollow parcel (1 acre) was purchased by the Land Trust, in the name of Onondaga Audubon Society circa 1973. The acquisition took place during an early period when the policy was for lands to be purchased and given to other environmental organizations for safekeeping. The policy only impacted two sites, this one and a 9-acre parcel at Carpenters Pond. Though the acquisition policy changed in 1974, Onondaga Audubon did not re-convey the lands to the Land Trust until 1982.

The reason for acquiring the initial Pumpkin Hollow site was because rare orchids grew on it. A member of the Board, Sam Sage, who undertook some of the responsibilities of an executive director (remuneration for expenses only) for the nascent organization, tried to convince several of the other owners of the orchid rich land to sell to the Land Trust, but without success. The Land Trust was able to acquire some of the parcels decades later, but by this time large trees had shaded out the orchids and they have disappeared from the site.

The Pumpkin Hollow parcels are near the famous Disappearing Lake, once written up in Ripley's Believe or Not. The Lake appears in the spring when the snow melts. The water collects faster than it can sift through the limestone bedrock below. Seasonally, it disappears! The Town of Marcellus has recently built a large garage near the Lake, reducing the dramatic fluctuation of the water.

Jack Gramlich tells of a tale within the tale. A young man parked his mobile home on the south side of the lake one summer when the water was gone. By winter he and his bride found it almost impossible to leave their home on the seasonal lake. His distraught bride left! The following summer the young man built an elevated driveway five feet above ground level. His wife returned, winter set in, and Lake rose above the level of the five-foot driveway. His wife left - for good. Eventually, the man left too. Eerily, the mobile home is gone, but the driveway remains. Believe it or not!



When the habitat-rich Pleasant Valley property came on the market and the possibility arose that the land would be purchased from the Wiles family for development, a neighboring landowner sought the help of the Land Trust. The neighbors, Barbara Root and Harvey Nusbaum, agreed to purchase this property themselves with the understanding that the Land Trust would fundraise and purchase the land from them for permanent protection. That process is in motion. It is reminiscent of one of the Land Trust's earliest transactions. In 1972, Baltimore Woods was threatened with being sold to a gravel miner. The Land Trust did not have the funds but was in the process of holding its first "Walk to Save the County" to raise funds. It asked The Nature Conservancy to step in and purchase and hold the lands temporarily. That transaction led to a real treasure - Baltimore Woods Nature Center in Marcellus.

What is in the future for Pleasant Valley? Currently there is active farmland, a sugar bush, open fields, a Christmas tree plantation, and ponds susceptible to filling in. Will these areas be actively managed to retain some or all of these habitats, or will nature simply be allowed to take its course? Once the purchase is completed, many issues lie ahead for the Land Trust.

Rathburn Wildlife Sanctuary Preserve

This preserve is in the Town of Oswego in Oswego County. It was donated by Richard Slobe in 2007. The 51.5-acre site is about 50 percent wetland and the remainder is beech/maple forest. A tributary of Rice Creek flows through it. It is classified as a Pearl. There is evidence of beaver activity on the preserve.

Tales from the preserve: Though the Land Trust set out to preserve land in Onondaga County only, it has become active in Oswego County in recent years. The demise of the organization, Save Oswego County, started the process, as the Land Trust became the recipient of lands they had acquired. Will the domain of the Land Trust expand beyond the two county areas? Only time will tell!

Ripley Hill Nature Preserve

The preserve is located in the Town of Spafford and is 109 acres in size. It was donated by Janice Hinman in 2011. The property was originally offered to the Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT), as it adjoins their Hinchcliff Family Preserve. Because the property is in Onondaga County, the Land Trust agreed to accept the donation instead. The property consists of two parcels dissected by Ripley Road. The property offers mixed habitats of meadows, active farmland, and a rare hilltop hemlock swamp. The active farmland portion is being leased to a local farmer. The land is classified as an Emerald

Tales from the preserve: The preserve contains the highest point in the Skaneateles Lake watershed, and the third highest point in Onondaga County. In the summer of 2019, a trail was completed connecting the FLLT Preserve with the Land Trust Preserve. It was a joint project between the two land trusts and will be maintained cooperatively. There is a sign marking the trail and boardwalks facilitating walking in wet areas.



Riverwalk Nature Preserve

This preserve in the Town of Clay is 93 acres and was donated by The Bragman Companies to the Land Trust in 2011. About one-half of the parcel is government-designated wetland, and within the floodplain. Much of it is silver maple/ash swamp forest. An interesting feature is that it has several very large, white oak “wolf trees” that remain on the property. When the area was farmed, these trees were allowed to remain and spread their limbs without competition from other vegetation and have grown to an impressive size. Despite the wetness of the area, a trail with a boardwalk where necessary, is partially built, and should be completed soon. The area is classified as a Diamond.

Tales from the preserve: The parcel that includes the preserve was cut from a larger tract that was developed for residential housing by The Bragman Companies. For some reason the buyers of the houses thought they would have access to Oneida Lake through the preserve. Unfortunately, a small piece of land lies between the preserve and the lake, owned by NYS Canal Authority. There was some unhappiness among the homeowners, and at the time of this writing, The Bragman Companies were working diligently with the NYS Canal Authority to find a solution.

Professor Rick Smardon had a landscape architecture class do an inventory of the predominantly wetland site, and used the inventory as a basis for applying for a permit from NYS DEC to locate a trail at the southern edge of the wetland. When the permit was granted, The Bragman Companies provided much of the construction material and physical labor, with help from others, to construct the trail. It is a good example of developers and the Land Trust working together.

Update: NYS Canal Authority piece is going to be transferred to the Town of Cicero. The remaining problem is how to connect the existing trail across the 950 feet of intervening land to the Lake. The Bragman companies, the Land Trust, the Town of Cicero, a construction company, and resident land stewards are trying to develop a plan for accomplishing that task.

Robert G. Hildreth Esker

The preserve is in the Town of Manlius, and was donated by Robert Hildreth’s widow, Faith, in 1999 in his name. The 15-acre site is classified as a Pearl. The first few feet of entry are overgrown and difficult but after that, a gravel path smoothed the way. There is an assortment of hardwood trees on the esker, and some lower wetland areas.

Tales from the preserve: Though the property is listed as a donation, the Land Trust paid \$1,500 at the closing. The records do not indicate why, but it was probably for back taxes.

Under the conveyance, Edward DeBoer retains the right to harvest sap from the maple trees on the site. This property is very near to the Case’s Landing Preserve where Mr. DeBoer had an active maple syrup line at the time of the Case acquisition.



Robert's Woods Preserve

This 60-acre preserve in the Town of Manlius was donated to the Land Trust in 1990 by a group of four lawyers. Much of the land is Federal and State protected wetland. It is an excellent example of a black tupelo/white oak swamp. There is an old logging road on the northern edge of the property. It is classified as an Emerald.

Tales from the preserve: The preserve was named for Bob Arbib who bequeathed \$1,000 to the Land Trust in 1987, which was a sizable donation to the Land Trust at that point. Bob was an ornithologist, author, and civic leader in Westchester County, NY. He was also a good friend with Karen Slotnick, who was the Executive Director at the time.

NYS DEC was doing a fisher survey in 2013-14 and found fishers on the site. Subsequently, DEC placed trail cams on the property to study fisher activity.

Rosewood Wetland Preserve

This 13-acre preserve in the Town of Cicero was donated to the land Trust in 1998 by Verna and Patsy Viscounti. The Viscountis bought the property from Onondaga County with the understanding that they would donate it to the Land Trust for permanent protection. There is a stream and wetlands on the property. It is a hardwood swamp. It is surrounded by houses, and is classified as a Pearl.

Tales from the preserve: A genuine question can be raised as to whether it is worth it to protect relatively small parcels of land with limited access, surrounded by houses. They don't add much benefit for the general public. They do add some economic and enjoyment benefit to the surrounding residences. But they also address in a modest way some serious issues. As climate change grows as an issue, the vegetation on 13 acres provides another carbon sink for absorbing a modest amount of carbon dioxide. Every 13 acres counts, whether we humans have access or not.

Snake Swamp Preserve

This preserve is in the Town and County of Oswego, and was acquired by the Land Trust in two transactions. In 1998, Save Oswego County, the owner of 41 acres, was merged into the Land Trust along with the property they owned. In 2003, the Land Trust purchased 25 acres from Thomas Chiappa for \$4,000. The 66-acre site is only accessible by lake, as it includes shoreline on Lake Ontario. It is predominantly a shrub scrub wetland forming a barrier bar leading to a cobble stone beach. The property is an important area for nesting and migratory shore birds.

Tales from the preserve: Having water on a preserve is important for attracting a variety of vegetation and wildlife. Snake Swamp Preserve is unique for the Land Trust in that it abuts the largest body of water in the region, Lake Ontario, and it can be accessed by boat. Black-crowned night herons have been known to nest on the site.



Snow Creek Ravine

This is one of the smallest preserves consisting of only seven acres in the Town of Skaneateles. It was donated by Sail on Ventures, Inc. to the Land Trust in 1998. The parcel is one of several in a development named Schooner Hill. It is about 50 percent meadow and the remainder is mixed hardwoods. Just off the east-north-east corner of the property is a 25-foot waterfall. The meadow is bush hogged each fall to retain the existing habitat on the site. It is classified as an Emerald.

Tales from the preserve: There is an unusual feature in the conveyance of the property to the Land Trust. Owners of property in the Schooner Hill development have access to Skaneateles Lake across the road. The deed to the Land Trust makes clear that this privilege does not apply to it or to other members of the public. (SNIFF!). If you want access to the preserve itself, you must notify the local steward a minimum of one hour before time.

In 2017, logging upstream led to massive downstream erosion and sediment heading toward Skaneateles Lake. The Town and the Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation Council assisted the Land Trust in taking corrective action to mitigate the damage.

South Meadows Nature Area

This nature area is in the Town of Tully adjacent to Cummings Park. It is 27 acres in size and is classified as a Diamond. Greif Brothers, Inc. donated the property to the Village of Tully, but the Village felt it did not have the resources to develop the site as part of the existing Park. The Land Trust purchased the property from the Village in 2003. The site includes State and Federally protected wetlands, a stream on its northern border, and forested areas as you traverse to the south and go up the hill. The nature area contains a loop trail system, and scenic views of the surrounding valley as you reach the higher elevations on the site. Over one hundred species of birds have been recorded on the site.

Tales from the preserve: Greif Brothers, Inc., originally purchased the property in the hopes of filling the wetlands and making a railroad siding for industrial purposes. Fortunately for the natural area their plans never materialized. The Greif Brothers, having no other use for the site, donated it to the Village of Tully.

After the acquisition of the site by the Land Trust, various boy scouts and the Tully Action Group constructed a loop trail system complete with boardwalks, where necessary, significantly improving the opportunity for the public to enjoy the site. In 2016, Jack Gramlich organized an award ceremony in Tully Town Park to recognize the stewardship work that Tully Action Group (TAG) had done for decades in maintaining South Meadows and Tully Lake properties. TAG continues to provide yeoman stewardship services on the sites.



South Onondaga Marsh

One of the Land Trust's smaller preserves, it is six acres in size and was donated by William Pinkes in 1993. It is in the Town of Onondaga, and is classified as a Pearl. The West branch of Onondaga Creek forms its northern border. The site also includes marshlands and some deciduous forest. This is another site with limited people access; it's for the other critters.

Tales from the preserve: As part of the West Branch of Onondaga Creek, the upstream and upstream corridor is one of the last intact natural areas in the Onondaga Creek watershed. In 2008, SUNY ESF Biology Professors Don Leopold and Rick Smardon gave an orientation group tour of this preserve as part of an Onondaga Creek Revitalization Planning Process.

In the late 1980s, Karen Slotnick, then Executive Director of the Land Trust, received a call from a very pleasant gentleman who asked her about the opportunities for using some of our larger, forested sites. This tiny, wetland preserve was not what he had in mind, but ... Karen enthusiastically described the flora and fauna on the sites, the streams and trails features, and the like. He then informed her that he was a member of a nudist colony, and wondered if it was all right for his group to use the properties. Taken aback momentarily, she told him that it was probably not a good idea since our lands were open to the public. He thanked her politely and hung up. As far as anyone knows, the colony never put in an appearance at any of the Land Trust preserves.

The Pastures Preserve

The 21-acre Pastures Preserve was donated to the Land Trust by the Bragman Companies in 2004. This Town of Cicero site abuts on two sides the Cicero Swamp State Wildlife Management Area managed by NYS DEC. It is a wooded swamp, and is classified as a Pearl. The current plan is to donate the preserve to NYS DEC adding to the existing 3,787 acres that they already manage in Cicero Swamp.

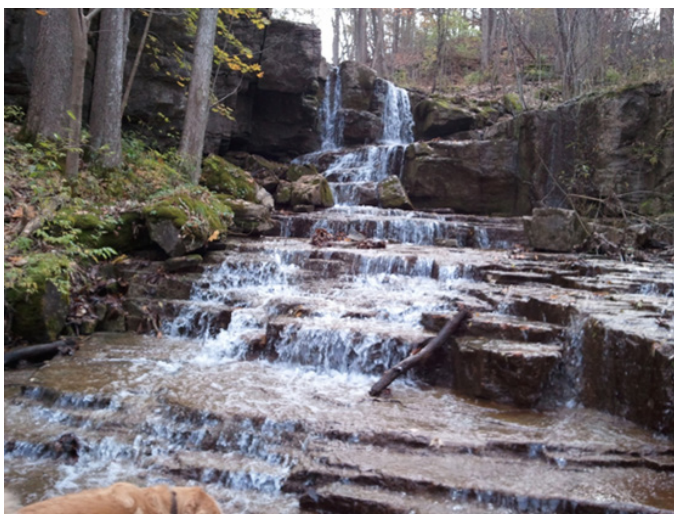
Tales from the preserve: Cicero Swamp is home to the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake that is classified as a threatened species. It is one of only two colonies of this poisonous snake in New York State. The Land Trust's Executive Director, Karen Slotnick, was in the local NY DEC office in the mid-1980s when the topic of the Massasauga came up. One of the young scientists noted that soon they were going into Cicero Swamp to survey the snakes. They casually asked if she would like to accompany them deep into the Swamp. They were taken aback when she gave them a strong, OH YES. As a child in Bronxville, Karen was a big fan of Frank Buck and Asa Johnson movies where they traipsed into the African jungle in search of all manner of critters. On the assigned day, Karen, decked out in her deep swamp garb, joined the hike, er, slog for about an hour to reach Massasauga territory. They found three snakes and were able to temporarily capture one. Karen got to hold the scale for the snake weighing, and she smiled all the way back. Frank Buck had nothing on her!



Although the Land Trust has an easement over a property on the western edge of the Pastures, the landowner refuses to recognize the easement and grant access. Hence, this is a big reason why the Land Trust plans to donate this property to NYS DEC (completed).

Three Falls Woods

This spectacular preserve in the Town of Manlius includes 78 acres of the total area of 275 acres called Three Falls Woods. The preserve was purchased for \$760,000 by Harold and Barbara Jones and donated to the Land Trust in 2017. There were actually five parcels involved, four totaling 60 acres from Camperlino Custom Homes, and one of about 20 acres from Sandra Wiley. The land is classified as a Diamond.



One of the falls at Three Falls Woods in Manlius.

The Woods has been labeled as a “critical environmental area” by New York State. Some of its many natural features are an old growth forest, five seasonal waterfalls, and 19 protected species of plants. The threatened Indiana Bat inhabits the site. A vernal (seasonal) pool exists that harbors an array of frogs, toads, and salamanders. The vernal pool was formed when an underground cavern collapsed creating a sinkhole

Tales from the preserve: The Manlius Greenspace Group (MGG) has fought in court and out over two decades to have Three Falls Woods preserved because of its significance as part of the Onondaga Escarpment, and its other natural features. When the Land Trust acquired the property through the generosity of Harold Jones, it was understood that it would work in partnership with MGG in stewarding the site. Historically, MGG has developed and maintained trails on the site. This is a nice example of two like-minded not-for-profits working together to achieve natural area benefits for the public.

There are the remains of 200-year-old walls on the site that date back to the Revolutionary War Era.

Tobias Shaver Nature Preserve

This preserve in the Town of Clay is 37 acres in size and was donated by Jean Howell in 2000. The entrance is off Verplank Road. The preserve is named after the donor’s great, great grandfather who purchased the land in 1873 to farm tobacco. Currently, the land has open grasslands under power lines, a pine stand, and forested areas. It is classified as a Pearl.



Tales from the preserve: “In the end, our society will be defined not only by what we create but by what we refuse to destroy” (John Sawhill, former President and CEO of The Nature Conservancy). Shaver may be one of the Land Trust’s smaller properties, but it is preserved nonetheless.

Towpath Road Preserve

This 22-acre preserve was donated to the Land Trust in 1994 by Christopher and Margaret Hebblethwaite. It is in the Town of Elbridge, and is classified as a Pearl. The property borders the Erie Canal Trailway, and the only access is from the Trailway. It is predominantly a wetland area.

Tales from the preserve: “Conservation can be defined as the wise use of our natural environment: it is, in the final analysis, the highest form of national thrift—the prevention of waste and despoilment while preserving, improving and renewing the quality and usefulness of all our resources.” (President John F. Kennedy).

This area was used as a partial match to enable the Camillus Canal Park to obtain funding to rebuild the Erie Canal aqueduct passing over Nine Mile Creek in the 1990’s.

Tracy Lake

Tracy Lake is a 79-acre preserve located in the Town of Tully, and is designated as a Diamond by the Land Trust. The land was purchased in two transactions for \$50,000. Initially, the Trust for Public Lands (TPL) provided the funding to the Land Trust. Subsequently, NYS Office of Parks and Historic Preservation issued a grant of \$50,000 to the Land Trust, which was used to repay the loan from TPL.

The preserve includes Tracy Lake, and parts of Mud pond and East Gatehouse Pond, which are all part of the Tully Lakes. The Tully Lakes are glacial kettle lakes formed by depressions caused by ice left behind as the glacier moved north some 14,000 years ago. The preserve also includes wetlands and marshes that surround the lakes. The wetlands are protected under State and Federal Law. In addition, you can find woodlands and other scenic glacial remains.

Tales from the preserve: The Land Trust, working with the Tully Action Group and other volunteers, has built trails and a parking area to make the site more accessible to the public. Jack Gramlich planted white pine trees in the parking area. Peter Huntington is the steward and long-time advocate for protection of the property.

Some things just take time and persistence. The Master Plan for the Town and Village of Tully in 1974 identified the preserve for protection. Over twenty years later it became a reality.

Whiskey Hollow

This preserve is in the Town of VanBuren and is 43 acres in size. The property was amassed in four transactions. In 1981, the Baldwinsville Conservation Commission do-





Professor Don Leopold conducting a SUNY ESF class at Whiskey Hollow. Board member Steve Schwab is among the crowd. Photo by Jack Gramlich

nated the largest piece of 28 acres to the Land Trust. In the same year, the Land Trust acquired 10 acres from William Crego. In some records, the transaction is listed as a donation, but the Land Trust minutes indicate that it paid \$1,000 for the land. Perhaps it was the payment for back taxes. In 2001, the Land Trust purchased a 1.45-acre piece from the County at a tax sale or \$1,290. The final parcel included 5 acres donated by Robert Warner in 2002.

The preserve includes a variety of interesting natural features including an esker, a spring, a stream, and a wet forest with several very old trees. It is classified as an Emerald. The area has been classified as an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society. Birders report a wide variety of birds on the site including the threatened Cerulean Warbler. Several rare plants have been documented on the preserve. The array of trees includes oaks, hemlocks, maples, beech, among others.

Tales from the preserve: The spring has a pipe connected to it at the road, and some people come to the spring to collect the water for drinking and other uses. Reputedly, the water tastes sweet. However, the County has tested the water and found that after rainfalls it has a high coliform count and is not fit for drinking.

In the early to mid-1800s the Whiskey Hollow area had a shingle mill, and later a saw-mill. The name for the area reputedly arose from an incident “when the country was new.” A horse-drawn wagon was climbing the steep hill with a barrel of whiskey in the back. A board at the rear of the wagon broke and the barrel of whiskey fell off, breaking open, and the whiskey rolled down the hill and collected in a hollow below. There is no mention of the locals drinking the whiskey from the hollow.

Woodchuck Hill Field and Forest Preserve

This preserve consists of 94 acres in the Towns of Manlius and Dewitt. Beryl Digney donated 59 acres in 1994 and 1995, and The Nature Conservancy donated 35 acres in 2009. The site has more man-made features than any other preserve owned by the Land Trust. Among the possessions are a house, a cottage, a horse barn, and some structures for carrying on horse shows.



The property includes a stream that connects White Lake and Snooks Pond, though neither is on the preserve. The stream is surrounded by protected wetlands that give way to a cedar forest, and then to hardwoods as you move up slope from the stream. Much of the forest is dense with trees, with little understory growth. It is classified as a Diamond.

Tales from the preserve: Beryl Digney contacted Karen Slotnick, the Executive Director for the Land Trust, in the early 1990s concerning a long-range plan for protecting and managing her property. This eventually led to Digney donating 59 acres of her property to the Land Trust. The donation included a house, cottage and horse barn mentioned above, but there was a twist. These features would continue to be managed by Beryl and her son, Kevin. The proceeds of the rentals from the three features would be used to reinvest in the house, cottage, and barn. So, the Land Trust could manage the property like all the others it owned, and the buildings were a sideshow for the time being.

Beryl eventually passed away, but Kevin and the Land Trust continued their agreement as initially constructed. Unexpectedly, Kevin passed away. The Land Trust was now in the rental and maintenance business for the house, cottage and barn. Sounds like an opportunity, lots of new income. It was a very time-consuming ordeal dealing with renters, house maintenance, etc. Recently, the Land Trust has stopped renting the house, cottage and barn.

The “great fire” of 1865 apparently burned the site badly. Since then there is evidence that the site was used for pasturing, hence the stonewalls. Most of the trees are estimated to be about 60 years old, so that is an indication of when the land stopped being used for pasturing and started its slow journey to returning to forest.

Preserved, but not Land Trust Preserves

The Creation Story section chronicled the important role that the Land Trust played in the purchase by the State of Clay Marsh (almost 1,700 acres) and Labrador Hollow (almost 1,500 acres). These are two of the largest and most valuable parcels of natural areas in the region. These sites were not the only preserves that the Land Trust played a key role in protecting, but did not retained ownership.

In 1976, the Land Trust loaned the Village of North Syracuse \$5,000 so that it could purchase and preserve a seven-acre wetland in the Village. In 1990, the Land Trust acquired the Maestri property in the City of Syracuse through a donation. The 5.6-acre site, also known as Furnace Brook, was donated to the City to use as a nature area. The City subsequently conveyed the parcel to the Syracuse School District to be used for environmental activities by the schools in the District.

In 1993, George Gelsomin and family donated 20 acres of wetlands in the Town of Cicero to the Land Trust. Since the land was adjacent to an existing Town of Cicero park, the following year it was donated by the Land Trust to the Town. About the same time the Land Trust purchased 73 acres of wetlands in the Town of Cicero at a tax sale for \$2,979. Subsequently, the land was given to NYS DEC.



In the early months of 2015, the Friends of Great Bear were looking for help. Part of their beloved Great Bear Springs Recreation Area in Oswego County was put up for sale and there was no way to raise funds. The Friends group fortunately made a connection with CNYLT and a partnership was born. A successful fundraising campaign included contributions from individuals, community organizations, local businesses, local banks and the Richard S. Shine-man Foundation. Over \$170,000 was raised to purchase the property in September 2017. Shortly thereafter there was a formal transfer of ownership to the Town of Volney to ensure that Great Bear Springs Recreation Area remains intact and permanently accessible to the public for recreation in a natural area. This whole effort also netted CNYLT a valuable new board member, Margaret “Maggie” Bocsor, as a representative of Oswego County.



Friends of Great Bear and CNYLT members during the Great Bear fundraising campaign. Photo by R. Smardon



Past and current board members at an annual board dinner: From left to right; Steve & Kathy Schwab, Bernie Carr, Fran Zollers, Rick Smardon, Gail Calcagnino (with husband Rick), Steve Kulick, Marianne and Chris Sandstrom, Peggy Ries, Phil Zaccheo, Kathy Bennett, and Gail Calcagnino.



CONCLUSION

This history is clearly remiss in not giving adequate coverage to the many Board of Director members who worked long and hard and selflessly to make the land trust what it is. I have tried to work some of them in throughout the history, but inadequately. One major problem is that to mention some, I will leave out so many others. Also, I have a time bias in that I left the Board and the area in 2004. Dee Piel and Steve Kulick have almost exclusively held down the Treasurer's job for the entire history of the Land Trust. Fran Zollers did the legal work for decades. Rick Smardon has been a leader with a steady hand, who was able to bring his many talents and resources from SUNY-ESF to facilitate the activities of the Land Trust. Jack Gramlich, always with a smile, ready to do whatever was asked of him. Paul Cacchione, intense and sometimes demanding, but you always knew where his heart was. Steve Schwab – Mr. Elbridge Swamp - stepping to the forefront to lead the organization many times.

Where are the originals? Here is what I can tell you. Jon Bart eventually got his PhD, and spent his career working for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, specializing in studying shore birds in the Arctic. Later, he founded a non-profit created to fight poverty in Sierra Leone in Africa, where he currently lives. I have lost track of Connie Komarek, but the last I heard she was Assistant to the President of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Paul Chakroff went on to get his Masters degree at SUNY-ESF; from there he served in the Peace Corps in the Philippines. He worked for a time with US EPA and elsewhere as a biologist. The latter part of his career is being spent in the US Virgin Islands. Karen Slotnick is retired in coastal South Carolina. Jim Karp, that would be me, is retired in Tubac, AZ and leads bird walks and is a founding member of Tubac Nature Center.



Former CNYLT board member Matt Young hugging a tree during an interpretive walk. Photo by Rick Smardon



The first 50 years have been a remarkable success, and the next 50 holds great promise. Let's leave it with the words of Richard Nelson in "The Island Within."

"As time went by, I realized that the particular place I'd chosen was less important than the fact that I'd chosen a place and focused my life around it. Although the island has taken on great significance for me, it's no more inherently beautiful or meaningful than any other place on earth. What makes a place special is the way it buries itself inside the heart, not whether it's flat or rugged, rich or austere, wet or arid, gentle or harsh, warm or cold, wild or tame. Every place, like every person, is elevated by the love and respect shown toward it, and by the way in which its bounty is received."



ADDENDUM - THE PAST FIVE YEARS

Narrator Rick Smardon

During the past five years, the CNYLT has achieved significant progress in becoming a much more sustainable organization that all past and present board members should take pride in. So here is a brief summary of the last five years by the current CNYLT Board Chair.

Meredith Perreault was the part-time CNYLT Executive Director during the Great Bear Campaign from 2016 to 2018. She and current Board Member Maggie Bocsor were responsible for working with the Friends of Great Bear to move through the many steps of acquiring that property. It was also during this time that we developed a relationship with SU Professor Emeritus Harold Jones who provided the funding for the Brickyard Falls View expansion, as well as Three Falls Woods in Manlius.

One of the other aspects of Meredith's tenure was improving our support through the regional Land Trust Alliance (LTA) office in Saratoga Springs. This LTA support included being awarded two grants, use of an LTA circuit rider, and facilitating board member training workshops. This provided support for our organizational capacity building, as well as preparation for national land trust accreditation with the LTA.

When Meredith left for full-time employment in 2018, we knew that we needed to search for another executive director to build the CNYLT organization and raise funds. In the summer of 2018, we hired Albert Joerger who had previous land trust and fund-raising experience in Florida and was a former Finger Lakes Land Trust board member.

Fast-forward to the present and the following Land Trust accomplishments were completed:

- CNYLT has become a fully accredited land trust and developed management plans for all of its properties;
- CNYLT raised over \$3 million during 2020-2021;
- CNYLT membership has greatly increased;
- CNYLT has a new office location in the Village of Skaneateles, which also serves as a Watershed Best Practices and Interpretive Center.

Currently, CNYLT has four full-time staff, which includes an executive director, an office manager, and two positions focused on stewardship work. We also have several part-time employees, which includes land stewards and a fiscal controller, all augmented by



a robust group of volunteers. Finally, in 2022, the Land Trust hired Simon Soloman as our Executive Director. Simon spent a decade as Executive Director of Rogers Environmental Center in Sherburne, NY.

One of the more amazing accomplishments is being granted \$1.7 million dollars from the Robert J. Vitkus estate, which is being utilized to acquire Camp Longhorn Property, adjacent to Lourdes Camp (in Spafford), and the Bachar Property, adjacent to our existing High Hickory Preserve. The plan is to turn all of these adjacent properties into a Skaneateles Lake conservation area, which would be both a wildlife habitat area and which will demonstrate best practices for maintaining water quality.

The CNYLT was recently awarded two grants- The Department of Interior's Fish & Wildlife grant titled- Pleasant Valley Preserve; and the New York State Water Quality Improvement Program (WQIP) for the Robert Vitkus, DDS Conservation Area project. These monies will allow CNYLT to institute educational programs, create Universal Access Trails, and construct sensory exhibits along the trails. At the Vitkus Conservation Area, some funds will be used to stabilize an esker down to the lake, among other upgrades.

This spring, CNYLT redesigned the organization's website with help from many employees, professionals and volunteers. We have seen a substantial increase in individuals and donors engaging with CNYLT's Facebook page, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts.

Please join us in 2023 as the Central New York Land Trust celebrates its 50th anniversary!

