

The MIDDLESEX LANDSCAPE

Serving the towns of Durham, Middlefield, Middletown, Cromwell, Portland and East Hampton

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The Middlesex Land Trust, Inc.

Spring 2005

A Hike at the Palmer Preserve

Situated between Middle Haddam Road and Route 66 in the southeast corner of Portland, the 80-acre Palmer Preserve offers the visitor a wide array of natural environments. From trickling streams and serene garden pools, to open meadows and undisturbed forests, a flowered hillock and wooded ridge, to old mill sites and an abandoned reservoir, the preserve has it all. Bisecting it, the Airline Rail Trail connects the Preserve with the East Coast Greenway, a 2000-mile national trail in the process of being built from Maine to Florida.

The main entrance to the two-mile trail is just east of the former home site of Prudence (Taylor) and TJ Palmer at 247 Middle Haddam Road. Prudence and TJ, who passed away in December 2003 and January 2004, respectively, willed their property to the land trust on their passing. Parking is at the barn just across the road from the entrance.

The orange-blazed trail enters a brushy area and soon climbs a 20-foot high ledge hillock, so-named Snowdrop Hill for its cloak of spring's earliest of blooming flowers. Here a gazebo once stood providing a view of a reflecting pool built in the late 1800s. The trail winds down the slope to pass by the pool before entering the tree line between the Palmer's converted barn house on the right and the Knowles' house on the left. Soon, the visitor passes a stone staircase, which ascends to a spot where a view of the Connecticut River was once enjoyed before the forest overgrew the

MLT Annual Meeting to Feature Palmer Preserve Dedication and Hike

Come celebrate with The Middlesex Land Trust at our 2005 Annual Meeting and dedication of the recently acquired 80-acre Palmer Preserve on Saturday, April 30, 2005 at 10 a.m.

Land Trust members and members of the public are invited to the meeting and ceremony in memory and appreciation of the generosity of Prudence (Taylor) and TJ Palmer, to be held at the barn and trailhead in the vicinity of 245 Middle Haddam Road in Portland. Refreshments will be served.

Following the dedication, the Trust will sponsor a 3-mile walk on the new trail. Interested folks should come prepared with good walking shoes and hiking attire. Please RSVP at the land trust office, 343-7537.

abandoned fields. Here the trail forks to create the two-mile loop, the right branch arriving at a place known as the 'Artist Camp'. Artist friends of the Taylor family gathered here to share ideas and philosophize.

Continuing north, one passes a large granite boulder with rusting iron wedges buried in an aged crack, spelling perhaps the end of the quarry operation. The trail crosses a small swale and follows a stone wall before descending to a small stream.

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The Middlesex Land Trust, Inc. is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to preserve open space in northern Middlesex County (Durham, Middlefield, Middletown, Cromwell, Portland and East Hampton).

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The Chairpersons' Corner

Dear MLT Members:

Spring will soon be upon us. Although it is often still cold in the mornings, the magazines and store flyers no longer tout scarves, snow blowers and sensible footwear. Intermittent mud tells the tale – new growth will not be far behind.

The hottest season for real estate closings is also on its way, even if building and development have hardly slowed down for the winter season. Northern Middlesex County's growth boom continues, and more woods, fields and farms are lost each year. While forward-thinking folks are lobbying our state legislators and the Governor for reestablishing reasonable levels of state funding for open space protection and farmland preservation grants, in another very tight budget year we know the funding will not be commensurate with the real need. At the same time, too many municipalities still labor under the misconception that real estate development, especially residential real estate development – the most common form of development in northern Middlesex County – can generate new tax revenues to fill municipal coffers, when in reality the new or additional services such development requires is surely a net loss to our towns and cities.

Despite these realities, the voices for balanced, reasonable development that respects the preservation of open spaces, farms and the character of our towns and cities grows louder and more organized each year. There are encouraging sounds from the grassroots – all of us who must live with the consequences of our land use decisions and policies.

Your MLT remains committed to being part of the preservation solution. After all, it's not just about protecting certain parcels of land for our collective futures – it's about preserving the quality of our lives through respect for the physical environment we all share.

Thanks for doing your part. We urge you to join us on our hikes and stewardship projects. Please stay tuned and stay involved. We always welcome your input.

Ralph and Diane

Thanks to Meshomasic Forever Wild Fund Donors

Many thanks to the following additional donors to the Meshomasic Forever Wild Fund in recognition of Chuck Bernstein, George Rolland, and Board Member John LeShane's 45-mile hike on the Airline Trail last fall:

Cathleen Glasson Lee Rogers Robert and Nancy Godwin

Also, our apologies to Linda and John Cunningham, whose donation was incorrectly attributed to Linda and Denis Cunningham in the fall issue.



1000 Members in 1000 Days Tally
As of December 2004, total membership stood at 359.
Membership renewals for 2005 will go out this month.
Thank you for keeping MLT strong!

A Hike at the Palmer Preserve *(continued from page 1)*

Approaching the elevated railroad bed, the dark entrance to a great brownstone tunnel appears. In low flow months, the visitor can easily pass through here to another section of the trail. Before reaching the entrance, the trail crosses the stream and slowly ascends the heavily wooded slope on the other side. Soon the walker reaches a ledgy ridge, which looks down on the stream valley, and in 100 yards arrives a vernal pool. Reversing direction, the trail reaches its highest elevation on the preserve at 290 feet.



Thomas Wells

The trail descends from the summit to a man-made canyon cut for the passage of the famed ghost train that once passed through around the turn of the century. Crossing the now-abandoned bed, the trail picks up on the other side and climbs to a rock outcropping where the great expanse of the Connecticut River suddenly appears 250 feet below. From this perch, the trail winds its way down the steep slope beside Route 66 past the same stone conduit spoken of earlier and back up the other side.

At this point Route 66 is never far away from the trail but manages, for the most part, to avoid the glaring view of it. The trail passes an empty concrete reservoir, built in the early 1900s to provide water for the gardens of the Taylor mansion. This estate was later to become known as St. Clements, and is now one of the most prestigious conference and wedding destinations in Connecticut.

Reaching a large open field known locally for its large herd of deer seen grazing in the spring months, the route skirts the upper side arriving at another reflecting pool beside the old road that connected the Taylor residences on Middle Haddam Road to the mansion. The trail follows a small brook before crossing it to regain the existing trail on the original Taylor Brook Preserve. More commonly known as Great Hill Pond Brook, this much larger stream passes by a couple of old mill sites. The silent remains of the sluiceway and foundations in no way reveal that the water power served to saw the wood for the construction of coffins.

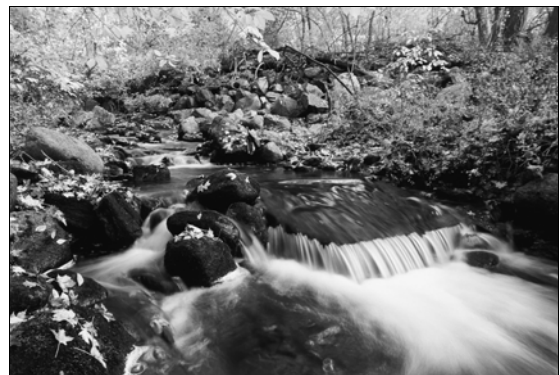
A short stroll up Middle Haddam Road rejoins the walker with the Airline Railroad bed and the last connecting section that closes the loop just south of the Palmer house.

Color Flagship Preserve Postcards Available

In the Summer 2004 issue of *The Middlesex Landscape*, we reported on the postcards we produced through a grant received for our Flagship Preserves Project. Thanks to the same grant awarded from the Middlesex County Community Foundation and the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust, a new version of the Taylor Brook Preserve postcard is now available *in full color*. Board member and photographer Thomas Wells, captures the essence of this local gem located between Middle Haddam Road and Route 66 in Portland. The preserve, visited frequently by deer and wild turkey, was generously donated to The Middlesex Land Trust in 1993 by Prudence (Taylor) and T.J. Palmer.

More postcards are on the way for additional MLT flagship preserves in northern Middlesex County, including Mica Ledges, Abe Temkin and Sellev Preserve. Postcards are sold in packages of six for \$5.00. Proceeds will help fund our land acquisition and stewardship programs. These make great gifts and can be mailed to family and friends to show your community spirit for local natural area protection.

Postcards will be sold at MLT outings, such as hikes, canoe trips and work parties, or at our meetings or educational programs. If you would like to purchase postcards, you may call the office at 343-7537. Please make checks payable to "The Middlesex Land Trust, Inc." *Thank you for your support.*



Fall at the Taylor Brook Preserve in Portland, Connecticut, generously donated to The Middlesex Land Trust in 1993 by Prudence (Taylor) and T.J. Palmer. Photo by Tom Wells

The Middlesex Land Trust, 27 Wedgton St., Middlesex, CT 06457
800-343-7537, www.middlesexlandtrust.org

This card was funded in part by the Middlesex County Community Foundation and the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust.



Upcoming MLT Activities

Please join us for a hike, or to help with important preserve maintenance activities at one or more of our work parties. For more information, contact John LeShane, 342-0658.



Saturday, April 16, 9AM - Palmer Preserve. Help work on trails, mark boundaries. Bring loppers and gloves. Meet at the barn on 245 Middle Haddam Rd. in Portland.

Sunday, April 24, 1PM - Visit the Preserves. Meet at the Portland Police Station to carpool to the MLT preserves in the Portland and East Hampton area.

Saturday, April 30, 10AM - Palmer Preserve Dedication and Walk/MLT Annual Meeting. Join us for the MLT Annual Meeting and dedication of the new 80-acre Palmer Preserve in Portland. The ceremony will be followed by a 3 mile walk on the new trail. Hiking boots recommended.

Saturday, May 7, 4PM - Sellow Preserve. We will install the new sign if it is ready or work on the trails. Bring gloves, shovels, and loppers. Meet at the end of Dogwood Drive in East Hampton.

Saturday, May 21, 9AM - Highland Pond. Help build a bridge over Sawmill Brook to reconnect the old trolley bed. Contact John at 342-0658 to find out what tools to bring. Meet at the intersection of Sawmill Road and Bell Street in Middletown.

MLT to Co-Sponsor Live Wolf Program

The Middlesex Land Trust will co-sponsor the program *Wolf Talk* with the Mattabesec Audubon Society, Wesleyan Public Science Lecture Series, and The Rockfall Foundation on Wednesday, April 13, 2005



at 7:00 p.m. The program will be held in Room 150 at Wesleyan University's Exley Science Center, located between Church Street and Lawn Avenue in Middletown.

Presenters Michael LeBlanc and his wife Amy will bring a live timber wolf as part of this program designed especially for children and their families. They will talk about how wolf studies have added to our knowledge of these mysterious – and often misunderstood – animals, their role in the ecosystem, and how humans have interacted with them through time.

Don't miss this unique opportunity to learn firsthand about the magnificent wolf. For more information, contact the Land Trust office, 343-7537.



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LAND TRUST



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