



The MIDDLESEX LANDSCAPE

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

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The Middlesex Land Trust, Inc.

Summer 2005

Land Trust Members and Friends Celebrate Palmer's Generosity

On Saturday, April 30, 2005, The Middlesex Land Trust held its Annual Meeting and celebrated the dedication of the Palmer-Taylor Preserve. Over 60 people attended, including old friends and neighbors of TJ and Prudence Palmer who bequeathed the property, land trust members, board members, and four Wesleyan students (see story on page 5). The nearly 80-acre preserve located in the town of Portland adds to several smaller donations made by the Palmers in prior years. We would like to thank all of those who came to the dedication to celebrate with us.

Portland resident, and MLT Board member and Stewardship Chair John LeShane, who with many volunteers established a trail through the preserve, led a hike through the property following the ceremony. About 25 people joined the hike to experience firsthand this generous gift.

We thought the best way to share the dedication with those who were unable to attend would be to publish the dedication speech given by MLT board member Stuart Winquist, which touches on the meaning of the bequest to the land trust, and the remarks given by long time colleague, friend and neighbor, Alain Munkittrick, which includes a personal story of how Prudence came to the decision to protect her land through the Land Trust.

Palmer-Taylor Preserve Dedication by Stuart Winquist

"I would like to welcome you to this dedication of the new Palmer-Taylor Preserve. I am Stuart Winquist, Member of the Board of Directors for The Middlesex Land Trust, Inc. For those of you not familiar with The Middlesex Land Trust, we serve the towns of Cromwell, Middlefield, Middletown, Durham, Portland, and East Hampton in northern Middlesex County, and our mission is to preserve open space for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations. The Land Trust was established in 1987, and currently holds and protects close to 600 acres in 46 preserves.

In a few moments, I will share a few thoughts on what this preserve means to The Middlesex Land Trust. Alain Munkittrick, long time friend, of the Palmers, will share some memories of TJ and Prudence. John LeShane, a long time Portland resident and board member, will give a short description of the hike through the preserve that he will lead following this ceremony. Before the hike I invite all of you to join us for refreshments and conversation.

We are gathered here today, as friends of TJ and

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Thomas Wells

Palmer-Taylor Preserve field in the fog

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:

On April 30, 2005 a diverse group of people gathered under a dripping tent, next to a New England barn with a stone foundation. Although it was rainy and a bit chilly, the mood under the tent was decidedly sunny and warm. There were octogenarians, toddlers, college students, and all ages in between. Some were in slickers and jeans, others in dressier attire. Despite the differences in appearance, there was a strong sense of community under the tent. For unlike so many gatherings, it was not controversy or disputation that had brought the group together. Rather, all present shared an atmosphere of celebration and gratitude for a most wondrous and enduring gift -- the product of the wisdom and generosity of TJ and Prudence Palmer.

The Palmers, who in life had selflessly given significant tracts of land to The Middlesex Land Trust, upon their passing left a legacy that will serve to enrich the lives of all of us, and our children for generations to come. The Palmer bequest, a gift of unprecedented generosity, means that some eighty acres of forests and fields, streams and coverts, ledges and trails will remain forever available for hiking, birding, photography and quiet contemplation—eighty acres of life-renewing green space that will help to quietly ensure the preservation of the quality of our lives.

The crowd who came to honor, thank, remember and celebrate the Palmers—neighbors, life long friends, students, friends of the environment—could not help but be awed by the magnificence and farsighted wisdom of the Palmers' gift. TJ and Prudence surely felt the sense of collective gratitude and admiration. As the group spilled out from under the tent to participate in a celebratory hike of the new preserve, all, young and old and in between, knew their time on earth had been enriched.

Ralph and Diane



Hikers enjoy the Palmer-Taylor Preserve after the dedication ceremony.



Prudence Palmer, friends of the Middletown Garden Club of which Pru was a past president, friends of The Middlesex Land Trust, and members of this community, to dedicate this incredible gift, and express our appreciation of Prudence and TJ Palmer, whose attachment and love of this land, made this bequest to The Middlesex Land Trust and this resulting preserve a wonderful reality.

I feel honored to stand before you, not only as a representative of the Land Trust expressing our happiness of the protection of this property, but as a recent acquaintance of the Palmers who is humbled by their vision and generosity. We accept their trust in us to hold and protect what was dear to them. This preserve, the Palmer-Taylor Preserve, is named to honor the memory of TJ and Prudence Palmer, and to recognize the strong historic tie that Prudence's family, the Taylor family, had to this land for five generations.

The Palmer's generosity to the Land Trust began in 1993 with the gifts of Cobalt Landing, a quarter acre lot at the end of Oakum Dock Rd, and directly on the Connecticut River at the site of an old paddlewheel landing dock, and of a six acre property down the road from here, that has been know as the Taylor Brook Preserve, which encompasses several old factory foundations from the turn of the century.

Several years ago, Prudence invited a few members of the board to discuss her and TJ's plans for their property. She invited us into her house to view a topographic model of their property holdings. She told us about a wildlife corridor that she wanted to protect, that ran between her and Gary Egan's house, and up the ridge behind where we are standing to Breezy Corner Rd. We then walked around to this field, and then back by her house and over "Snow Drop Hill." She told us a little about the history here, about the importance of the locust trees to her great great grandfather's ship building business. She showed us where the old road bed lay and how you could still find granite blocks laid down to prevent the carriage wheels from sinking into the mud. She showed us where a gazebo stood on Snow Drop Hill where she played as a girl, and explained that the hill was named for all of the snow drops planted there, which still bloom each spring. Her passion for this property really shone. Sometime later, they deeded part of that wildlife corridor to us, and later, they donated land along Rt 66, adjoining the Taylor Brook Preserve, behind the houses adjacent to the preserve on Middle Haddam Rd.

Prudence and TJ joined us at the Land Trust's Sellew Preserve dedication. Another time I ran into Prudence after a work party on the Taylor Brook Preserve when I went back to retrieve some clippers I had left on the trail and she was out walking enjoying the warm, spring weather. Her joy and appreciation of the natural world



MLT Board Member and Palmer Subcommittee Chair Stuart Winquist makes a point in his dedication ceremony speech.

always radiated through her smile.

Still, it was quite a shock to learn, upon Prudence's and TJ's deaths, that at their direction, we were to be the recipients of the remainder of their property. This gift is very important to us on many levels.

First, and maybe most importantly, it inspires us. Generosity on this scale serves as a positive rallying point for conservation. It inspires us to contribute our efforts and our assets to preserve and protect open space. It inspires us to think globally and to act locally. My own eight year involvement in the Land Trust can be traced back to when my wife, Irene, saw a press release in the local paper inviting volunteers to a work party on the Taylor Brook Preserve. Once there, I met Alan Hurst, who is very effective at roping in new volunteers. Over the years, on the Taylor Brook Preserve we have had Boy Scouts, High School Interact Club kids, and other interested parties help out on work parties. We have already had several new volunteers helping out on this new preserve.

Connecticut is bubbling over with wildlife. We have black bear in Portland and Middletown, last year I saw a fisher in my backyard in East Hampton. A walk through this preserve often means an encounter with wild turkey and deer. But many species, especially bird species, are in serious trouble, and they require protection of large tracts of land for their survival. Both large contiguous blocks, and greenways linking large protected areas to other important open space blocks to facilitate the movement of wildlife are required. This property protects a little of both. At 80 acres, it is a large tract of land in its own right, and it also helps preserve the green connection between the Meshomasic Forest and the Connecticut River. It preserves forest, wetlands, stream banks and open fields. It also preserves a slice of Connecticut history, with reservoirs, a spring house, and a brownstone viaduct under the Airline Railroad bed

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contained on the property.

Donations of this size truly help protect landscapes. In this part of Connecticut in particular, where the growth rates and development pressures are so high and unrelenting, we are in very real danger of losing the woodlands and pastures that have defined Southern New England. There isn't a person who commutes or drives on Route 66 that doesn't appreciate the greening of the big field and the deer grazing in the late afternoon light at the end of a long, snowy winter. Or appreciate the cooler temperatures as you drive out of town and into the cool of the trees on a hot, sticky summer day. Or appreciate the splash of gold, yellows, red and browns, un-interrupted by houses, on a crisp fall morning. These sights are disappearing from our landscapes, but they won't disappear from the land upon which we are now standing, thanks to Prudence and TJ.

The Palmers also left us with other considerable assets including their residence, which we are in the process of selling. These assets will help with the protection of additional lands in northern Middlesex County in the future.

The property does need care, to keep trails open so the property is accessible to the public. It requires work to try to tame the virile invasive plant species that are threatening the quality of the ecosystems here. We at the Land Trust are committed to doing our best to address these issues and provide good stewardship for this Preserve. At this time I would also like to recognize our volunteers who have put in countless hours to date on Cobalt Landing, the Taylor Brook Preserve and this new Palmer-Taylor Preserve, by working on trails, removing invasive plants, and working on their residence to get it ready to sell.

So today we honor the memory of two very special and very generous people, and every day I pass or walk on this Preserve, I send out a sincere thank you to the two people who made this open space – OPEN – for generations to come.”



Hikers pause as John LeShane points out a special feature along the trail.



Alain Munkittrick (center), colleague, friend and neighbor of Prudence and TJ, listens with others at the ceremony.

Remarks at MLT Dedication of Palmer-Taylor Preserve by Alain Munkittrick

“In 1988 when Rosemary and I relocated back to the Valley from Boston, Prudence and TJ offered me a job working with them to plan the development of this land—Taylor Hill.

Because Taylor Hill was associated with Pru's ancestors back to the mid 18th century, and because Pru and TJ did not have an obvious family heir to whom they could entrust the land, Pru believed that it fell to her to plan for a rational development of Taylor Hill.

This rational development entailed her own vision, fine-tuned by years of personal familiarity with the land and her training in landscape design. Her wish was to locate house sites on the land by the dictates of solar orientation, views, topography, landscape features, deer trails and vegetation. Such an approach is, of course, contrary to the standard practice of most cookie-cutter real estate development where the minimum standards of zoning regulations are applied for the maximum financial gain.

TJ and I did a number of planning studies under her direction. After a year or so, with not much to show for our efforts besides a thorough computer mapping of the land and the successful rezoning of the Big Field parcel on Route 66 from industrial to rural residential; it became clear to me that Pru was not comfortable with her well-meaning vision that had directed our efforts. But we pushed on while she often chided TJ and me about our architect's genetic predisposition to clear and construct. TJ channeled his energies into more intensive bittersweet hacking with his ratcheting loppers and the mowing of fields and brush high atop his 1940's era Ford-Ferguson tractor, so aptly named “Pour quois pas” (Why not?) I simply moved on, although not literally, as we made our home here in Elizabeth Palmer's house down the street.

Before I left their employ, however, I was fortunate to witness the moment, I think, when the solution for the disposition of Taylor Hill may have presented itself to Prudence. After her initial contact with the nascent Land Trust organization, we set a date for a walk about the Hill with a Land Trust representative – I wish I could

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Katchen Coley, friend and fellow member of the Middletown Garden Club, reminisces about Prudence and TJ.

remember her name, was it Susan? – Maybe she is here or at least you can remind me who this was. Anyway, Susan, Pru and I began our tour by fording a stream. Mid way across, Susan stops, points excitedly and identifies wild watercress growing on the stream bank. A smiling glance in my direction from Pru was all I had to see to know that

this was a relationship with a future.

Of course, everyone who knew Pru, understood how visceral was her attachment to the land, how absolutely dedicated she was to understanding the total ecology of the Hill of her ancestors. She could talk in a rapturous state about its boundaries and contours, the pattern of its ledge outcroppings, watercourses and deer tracks, old stone walls, wellsprings, barn and mill foundations, the hemlock copse, woodland ash, the mugo pine, the snowdrops. Even TJ became infected, and I must say, so did I, by her boundless curiosity, this seat of the pants study of every physical aspect of the Taylor Hill habitat.

Now, someone who could identify watercress in a stream? – that was someone worth knowing. I suspect that at that moment, Pru had her answer.”

Wesleyan Students Complete Important Mapping Work for Land Trust

This spring we had the honor of working with seven very talented Wesleyan students in Professor Phil Resor’s Introduction to Geographic Information Systems class. In February, Dr. Resor approached us about possible projects his students could complete as part of their course requirements. Mapping some of our preserves was on our agenda this year but we weren’t sure we had the manpower to get started. Needless to say we jumped on the opportunity, and the students were a great resource to us.

The students worked on two projects, one focused on two of our flagship preserves, Sellew in East Hampton, and Highland Pond in Middletown, and the second focused on the Palmer-Taylor Preserve in Portland. Both projects were initiated in March with guided preserve tours led by board members Cathy Hull, Doug Bonoff and John LeShane. From there, the students conducted further research, compiling existing natural and historical resource data, and gathering new data in the field.

We were very impressed with the end results, and are very grateful for their contributions. We not only have beautiful maps of the preserves to share with our public, but also information we can use to plan for a connection from the Palmer-Taylor Preserve to the Airline and Shenipsit Trails, and an inviting web site highlighting the special features of our Sellew and Highland Preserves.

As a bonus we got to meet and get to know a great group of students. As we walked the land and talked about the different features of our preserves, they shared their passions for hiking, traveling and protecting the environment, both locally and globally. What they loved most was to get out of the classroom

and be a part of the land, to breathe the fresh air and be out exploring as the environment changed during their spring work.

Those of us who love the outdoors worry that our next generation does not appreciate it as much as we do, that they have become too caught up in the technical world and have forgotten to enjoy the beauty of the natural world. It was encouraging to learn firsthand that there is a new generation of environmentalists and stewards of this earth coming out of our classrooms to take over for us.

We thank the students for their efforts, and look forward to sharing the products of their work soon on our web site.



MLT Board Member and Stewardship Committee Chair John LeShane introduces Wesleyan students Jeremy Fairbanks, Emily Kachergis, Gabe Knight and Evan Browne, who gave a brief presentation on their project at the Palmer-Taylor Preserve dedication ceremony. Working on the Flagship Preserves project were Vanessa Meer, Adam Rose, and Beck Straley.

Upcoming MLT Work Parties

Please join us for one or more of our work parties. For more information, contact John LeShane, 342-0658.



Thursday, August 18, 5:30—7:30 PM - Palmer-Taylor Preserve. Help work on trails and mark boundaries. Bring loppers and gloves. Meet at the barn on 245 Middle Haddam Road in Portland.

Thursday, September 8, 5:30—7:30 PM - Sellew Preserve. We will work on the trails. Bring gloves, shovels, and loppers. Meet at the end of Dogwood Drive in East Hampton.

Saturday, September 24, 9:00 AM—12:00 PM - Abe Temkin Preserve. Help with trail work. Bring gloves, shovels, and loppers. Meet at the preserve on Cedar Terrace in Portland.

Congratulations to MLT Board Member John LeShane and his wife Sylvia on the birth of their daughter, Annette, on Sunday July 10, 2005. All the best to the new parents. We are all excited to have a budding new nature lover and land trust volunteer in our midst!



MLT Supports Organic Farming in New Endeavor

The Middlesex Land Trust is cooperating in a new endeavor in Middletown: a small organic garden located in a field on the South Farms Preserve. Daniel Schmitz, a local organic gardener and member of the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA), has planted an educational demonstration garden for the 2005 growing season. Mr. Schmitz will follow organic gardening practices consistent with NOFA. He has planted heirloom vegetables in two plots totaling less than half an acre combined, north of Lyceum Road.



A wide vegetative buffer between the garden and Summer Brook will be maintained and the area will be restored to native grasses upon completion of the project. Mr. Schmitz will document the progress of the garden and be prepared to make educational presentations at the end of the season. The project will be evaluated yearly by the Board to determine whether it should be continued.

Interested persons are welcome to stop by and check out the garden during the summer.

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