



PECONIC LAND TRUST NEWSLETTER

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SEPTEMBER 1990



Water Mill Target Area

As another indication of the Peconic Land Trust's ongoing effort to preserve open space and farmland, the Trust has targeted an agricultural area of Water Mill in Southampton Town as one of its highest priorities.

"We're trying to get involved at an early stage before development occurs," said John Halsey, President of the Trust. "We would like to make the landowners aware of a number of options for the future use, ownership, and management of their property."

The targeted land is a peninsula

that extends south of Montauk Highway to Mecox Bay, bordered on the west by Mill Creek and on the east by Hayground Cove - one of the least developed areas remaining in the hamlet of Water Mill. The Trust is focusing its effort on 15 parcels varying in size from 2 to 40 acres. Most of the land in the Water Mill Study Area has been owned for many generations by families who have used it for agricultural production. The Trust is now working with these owners in an effort to preserve a significant portion of this farmland.

Obviously, such well-situated

open space is valuable (the total value may exceed \$25 million). Unfortunately, the Trust does not have the financial resources necessary to preserve the area in its entirety and it is unreasonable to expect the owners to donate all of their equity to the Trust or a governmental entity. Thus, one of the options being considered is limited development. Through limited development, the most scenic and agriculturally significant land can be preserved while future residential development can be located in areas least likely to adversely impact

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Fifth Annual Peconic

The gods of land preservation efforts provided a picture-perfect day on June 10th for the Peconic Land Trust's fifth-annual "Peconic." A more down to earth blessing was provided by Mrs. Charles G. Halsey (a distant relative of the Trust's president), who hosted the event at her home in Water Mill. Mrs. Halsey's home is bounded by the Villa Maria on the west and open farmland adjacent to Mill Creek on the east.

Approximately 300 people attended the outdoor picnic, each contributing food for all to share. Tables, chairs, and other necessities were donated by Kevin McDonald and Special Events Catering. The setting and the community spirit were indicative of what the Trust is all about--to encourage people to work together to preserve farmland and open space throughout Long Island.

Unlike most events that crowd the East End's summer, the Peconic is not a fund raiser. "It's our thank you to supporters of the Trust," said John Halsey. "Throughout the rest of the year we depend on these people for financial contributions and other forms of help. We arrange the Peconic every year as a way for us to show how much we appreciate our supporters."

As Caroline Doctorow and the Moonlighters performed bluegrass music, children frolicked on the

grass and adults visited with each other. For Halsey, the casual interaction among Trust supporters and their guests has a special significance.

"The Peconic is a rare blend of the different types of people who make up eastern Long Island," he said. "It's gratifying to see farmers, tradespeople, business executives, artists, shopkeepers, local people and part-time residents spending time together and enjoying themselves, and to know the Trust has such a diverse constituency."

During the event, Halsey announced this year's Challenge Grant of \$100,000, to be matched by the end of September (please see separate story.) People who serve the Trust in various capacities were introduced to the picnickers, as were Richard W. King and Roy L. Wines, Jr., two co-founders of the Trust who retired after six years on the Board of Directors. The two men were presented with aerial photographs, the implication being that the photographs would no doubt show less open space if it hadn't been for their efforts.

"It certainly wasn't any work for me to have all these people here," commented Mrs. Halsey. "It was a lot of fun and looking out at the open fields was a reminder, I think, of why we support the Trust. It's a great organization and the Peconic returns that good feeling we have for the Trust."

The President's Column

While our July newsletter focused on East Hampton, this issue shifts us west to Southampton Town. As one of the oldest English settlements in New York State, Southampton is celebrating its 350th Anniversary. The Halsey family was among the first English settlers to land at Conscience Point in 1640. It is indeed fitting that the feature story herein should focus on Water Mill where the Halsey family still farms the land. Clearly, it is our hope that the traditions and heritage of this historic agricultural area will continue to sustain future generations.

In my lifetime, I have seen tremendous changes in this Town. I would venture to say that our landscape has changed more in the past 20 years than in the preceding 330 years. Perhaps this is why the Town Board recently voted to put a \$15 million bond act on the November ballot. These funds will provide the Town with the opportunity to acquire important access points to beaches and bays, recreational land, as well as significant archeological sites such as the Shinnecock Indian settlement recently uncovered. The Board of Directors of the Trust has endorsed Southampton's Bond Act. We look forward to working closely with the Town government to make the best use of the funds to preserve the heritage of Southampton.

In the meantime, with summer behind us, the work of the Peconic Land Trust continues. We are involved in over 30 projects in 6 of Suffolk County's 10 towns. Each project represents a unique set of circumstances and conservation opportunities. The Trust identifies and implements alternatives to outright development through planning, acquisition, and stewardship activities. Of course, all of this requires funding. As we approach September 30 and the conclusion of our 1990 Challenge Grant, I urge you to underwrite our conservation work by sending us a contribution today. For those of you who have already sent such support, thank you so very much! Until next time...

John v.H. Halsey, President

Water Mill Target Area

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the protected resources.

"The idea behind this effort is to keep the peninsula intact," Halsey said. "If one piece goes, we may lose the unique character of the area. Each owner has a different set of circumstances and needs. Our challenge is to work with each owner to come up with plans that meet their long-term needs yet preserve the integrity of the area. In order to succeed, however, we must preserve the farmer as well as the land."

He added: "It's almost like being in a time warp when you travel through this area of Water Mill. The way of life there goes back to the roots of this town. We don't want to lose that part of our heritage."

One parcel serves as an example of the possibilities. It is already under contract with a developer who has proposed 25 house lots. The Trust has prepared a concept plan that would create 8 lots. These lots ring a substantial agricultural preserve which would be managed by the Trust. Although the plan represents a dramatic reduction in density, the lots created would command a premium price given the perpetual protection afforded by the agricultural preserve. In addition, the costs to implement the plan would be dramatically less than a full-yield plan. Best of all, the prime agricultural soils would be preserved in a farmable block with an important view protected for the public. In essence, the proceeds from the sale of the 8 lots would finance the preservation of the most significant portion of the parcel, which would remain as active farmland.

The overall philosophy is to ensure there will be only a minimal impact on the farm's agricultural capacity while providing the fam-



ily with future equity. The Trust realizes that, for most farmers, the land represents their financial stability, retirement fund, and security for their children. Some believe, however, that the only way to take advantage of this equity is to sell the land in its entirety.

Part of the Trust's effort is to show landowners that liquidating their assets in this manner may not be fiscally prudent. For example, a farmer who sells land is taxed at the time of sale. The proceeds from the sale may be taxed again when the estate is passed on to the next generation. Through the use of conservation easements, bargain sales, and limited development, the tax burden can be greatly reduced, now and in the future.

"We would prefer a total lack of development, but there simply is not enough public or private funding to keep the entire parcel intact," Halsey said. "Our effort is one of conservation combined with pragmatism. We want these families to be financially secure while keeping the land agriculturally productive."

The Trust's efforts with the other 14 parcels on the peninsula can be compared to putting together a puzzle. As Halsey termed it, "we're shaping the pieces as we go along." While the Trust's plans will take months and many hours of hard work, there are indications of a promising outcome. Recently, seven acres of farmland in the Water Mill Study Area were restricted to two building lots with an agricultural preserve. The parcel is protected by a conservation easement held by the Trust.

"I think more people are realizing that limited development is an important tool to use in a situation like this," Halsey said. "It is an alternative through which we can both shape and reduce the impact of future development. It would be a shame if people in the future were to ask, 'Remember the farms and how much open space there used to be? Why wasn't something done when there was still a chance to preserve them?' It is the Trust's mission to explore every option."

THE 1990 PECONINIC...



... A CELEBRATION!





Historic Lore

Above left: early picture of old mill. Above right: Hildreth's Blacksmith Shop on Halsey Lane, 1865. Below: Looking east across Montauk Highway at windmill.

The hamlet of Water Mill was established in 1644, only four years after the founding of Southampton, one of the first English settlements in the state.

Unlike much of the rest of the town, Water Mill, particularly the peninsula south of Montauk Highway, has experienced little change. Indeed, a drive along Halsey Lane, past the active farmland that has remained in the hands of the peninsula farm families for many generations, provides an opportunity to understand what life in the town was like hundreds of years ago.

Water Mill derives its name from the grist mill built by Edward Howell, which was operated using water from the seven nearby ponds. Soon a settlement began around the mill, and over time some of the area's first families - Cook, Howell, Halsey, and Cooper among them - moved south to farm the rich soil of the peninsula, bordered on three sides by Mill Creek, Mecox Bay, and Hayground Cove.

In addition to its agricultural significance, the peninsula also became an important thoroughfare for travelers and farmers transporting their produce, particularly wheat for the grist mill.

What is now Halsey Lane was, in the 17th cen-



tury, the most traveled road in the town. At the end of the road, on the peninsula's southeastern edge, there was a "wading place" where

wagons could cross the water to Bay Lane in Mecox and continue on their way. During winter when the water was frozen, it was easy for travelers on foot to walk across Hayground Cove.

Over time the route saw less commercial traffic. Bridges were built so that wagons could ride over waterways instead of having to bypass them. Over time, the popular alternative route north of the peninsula evolved into today's Montauk Highway. In the 19th century, the Long Island Rail Road arrived. There was a stop in Water Mill on the way to Sag Harbor.

Although the farms along the peninsula's roads - Mohawk Avenue, Crescent Avenue, Halsey Lane, and David's Lane - contain signs of the 20th century, it is easy to view them as timeless. Standing at the foot of the "wading place,"

one can picture the wagons digging ruts in the moist earth, kicking up water as they forded the creek, and perhaps a farmer, having reached the other side, stopping to relay news from the west.

This area represents an era Southampton will never see again, yet it has endured thus far. And, if tended well, it will continue intact into the 21st century.



The 1990 Challenge Grant

It's that time again: The Peconic Land Trust is facing a very important deadline. As in the past several years, the Trust has until September 30 to raise the funds needed to match a Challenge Grant.

This year the amount to match is \$100,000, which has been provided by five sponsors - Ronald S. Lauder of Wainscott, James McEntee of Southampton, Joseph Cullman III of East Hampton, Fouad Chartouni of Amagansett, and Deborah Ann Light of Sag Harbor. Last year, through the generosity of members and other supporters, the Trust was able to raise a total of \$225,000. Money raised through the Challenge Grant effort funds the organization's conservation work.

"We've always managed to meet the challenge in the last five years," said the Trust's Treasurer, Lucy Bradley. "This year is especially important. Given the economic climate, some people may be reluctant or unable to help in the same way they have in the past. Yet the needs we have and the conservation projects we're involved in are as vital as ever."

Indeed, there is another reason why the economy is a factor. Due to a slow real estate market, prices of land have not escalated as they have in the last few years or may have actually de-

clined, even on the East End. This means the Trust's efforts can have a greater impact.

"It does present a unique opportunity," Bradley said. "The work of the Trust is all the more important in the context of a declining real estate market. We have an opportunity to acquire lands that were once beyond our reach. It's important that we accelerate our efforts during this period."

In addition to land preservation projects it has initiated, the Trust is working with East Hampton Town's Open Space Program and Suffolk County's Drinking Water Protection Program made possible by the quarter-percent sales tax. The myriad costs attached to locating, studying, and negotiating with the owners of sensitive parcels are covered by Challenge Grant funds.

"There are real opportunities that we should be taking advantage of," John Halsey stated. "And with September 30 closing in, we're really getting down to the wire. Our conservation efforts are dependent upon the financial support of the public."

The coupon part below can be returned with a contribution, or tax deductible donations can be sent to: Peconic Land Trust, P. O. Box 2088, Southampton, NY 11968. Either way, please don't delay!

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IT'S A CHALLENGE... TO RAISE \$200,000 BY SEPTEMBER 30, 1990!

Several of our supporters have pledged a total of \$100,000 if the Trust can match that amount by September 30, 1990. Please support our conservation work by responding as generously and as quickly as possible! Thank you very much!

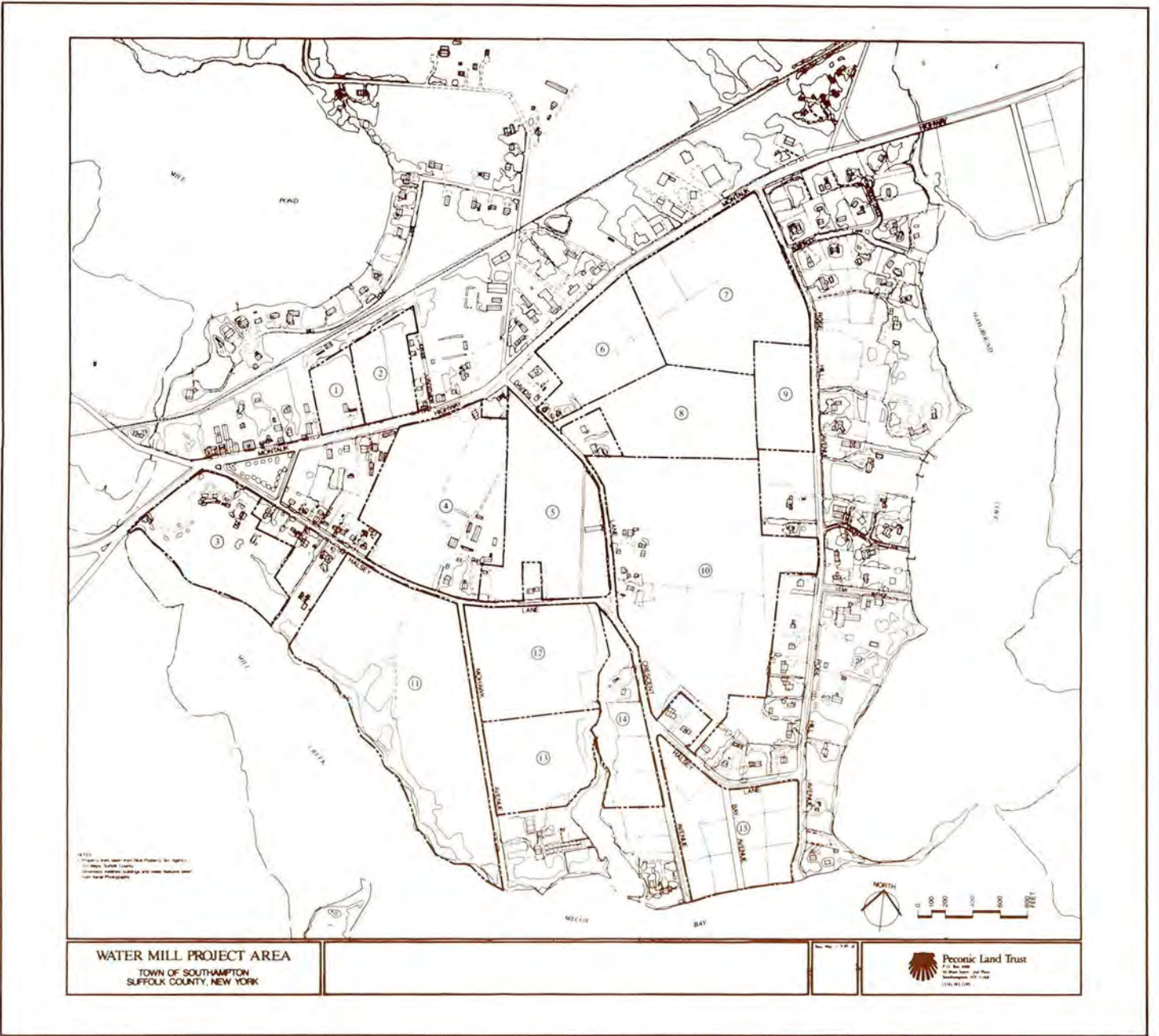
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