

BECKET LAND TRUST NEWS AND EVENTS 2004

THE CELEBRATION

On Sunday, September 5th, in perfect fall weather, some 40 outdoors enthusiasts helped celebrate completion of the Becket Land Trust's trail network by hiking two of its trails and then attending a fabulous wine-and-super-snack reception in woods leading out of Quarry Junction. One of the hikes was led by Ken Smith, president of the Becket Land Trust, and the other by Ann Connell Smith, Land Trust secretary. Among the highlights of the upward treks was seeing the many-ton stone bench at the end of the Vista Trail, in which a tribute to the late Ron Mandler, a key player in the acquisition of the Quarry land, has been beautifully carved by Allen Williams, who owns a quarry nearby.

The hikes were preceded by a brief talk in the Quarry Gateway area in which Ken Smith asked that anyone with artifacts, documents or other memorabilia relating to the Quarry, inform Dorothy Schindel, head of the Becket Quarry History Project. Display of these artifacts is planned for a soon-to-be opened museum in the Mullen House in North Becket.



THE HISTORIC TRAILS Great progress was made this year in the building of historic trails at the Quarry. Along a mile-and-a-half stretch that weaves through the forested land, there are now 14 sites at which hikers can see unique relics from an incredible, long-ago era during which fine granite was produced — much of it for cemetery monuments — before being suddenly abandoned in the 1940s. Thirty-five more sites are planned for next year. All will have markers containing important data for hikers conducting self-guided tours. The trails, built along old footpaths and rail grades that led to derrick sites, now encompass 25 acres.

Among the relics a hiker can see along the trails are remnants of an old generator shed, compressors, abandoned trucks and four derricks. One of the derricks has recently been stabilized with the installation of a 65-foot boom. Getting the boom up the trail was accomplished with the help of a crane truck,



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REPORT

owned and operated by Allen Williams, whose father worked at the old quarry. Others taking part in the trail project include Neil Toomey, Land Trust vice president who owns an adjacent farm; board member Dan Woiski, a video producer; Jonathan Duvall, a wood carver; Shawn Myrick, a quarry worker, Waino Tuminien, a farmer; Dough Andersen, an expert on local railroads, and Josh Toomey, a mechanic.

THE HIKING TRAILS With the construction this year of the Hemlock and Laurel Knobb Trail, the building of almost five miles of hiking trails is complete. Two of them — The Old Motion Loop and Staple Rock Trail — are also cross-country ski trails. The others, besides Hemlock and Laurel Knobb, are Circle of Stone Trail, Founders' Loop Trail; Finn Trail and Vista Trail. All the trails are blazed — hiking trails blue and ski trails red. Trail work was done by volunteers from the community as well as members of Americorps.,

AMERICORPS The Becket Land Trust owes many thanks to the volunteers from Americorps who spent two weeks working eight to 10 hours a day at the quarry over the past three summers. Students between the ages of 18 and 22 from all over the country, they were working off tuition costs by spending two weeks cutting brush, digging tree stumps and roots and moving stone and rock. All were safety trained and wore helmets, heavy boots and work gloves. Arriving from regional Americorps headquarters in Hawley, Massachusetts, in a van, they were then hosted by Neil Toomey, who let them set up their tents and camp out on his adjacent farm. Each summer Americorps sent a different crew, usually in groups of four or six.

THE MULLEN HOUSE The Becket Land Trust was instrumental in the creation of the Mullen House Education Center (MHEC). Located in the heart of the North Becket Historic District, in the 1845 Mullen House, the MHEC's existence was the result of the foresight, imagination and hard work of many members of the Becket Land Trust Board. The Town of Becket had been searching for an appropriate use for the property which was donated by the family of Eleanor Mullen, a long time teacher in the Becket elementary schools. The Becket Land Trust, as a result of its acquisition of the Becket Historic

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BECKET LAND TRUST HISTORIC QUARRY MUSEUM UPDATE 2004

by Dorothy Napp Schindel, Coordinator of Historic Interpretation

We are very happy to be approaching the completion of the first phase of our Self Guided Historic Walk. This initial portion of the walk will be comprised of 12 - 14 interpretive stations designed to acquaint visitors with a brief history of the quarry and its operations, while at the same time enabling them to follow a designated route for study of representative objects of interest and relevance to the site. Specific objects will be identified and explained along the trail/walk by means of numbered markers and descriptive labels. These signs will be placed atop rough granite posts created by Allen Williams. Formerly known as the Chester-Hudson Quarry, this site was in existence for over 100 years - spanning the Industrial Revolution,

In addition, thanks to clearing work headed by Neil Toomey, visitors will see vistas that had previously been blocked from view, such as the large grout piles on the access path, and artifacts that were hidden in the brush and trees. Importantly, visitors will be able to learn about former fallen derrick sites as well as our main derrick, which is being renovated under the guidance of Neil Toomey and Allen Williams. In addition to the derricks, the tour will include such objects as the Downhaul Ball, the Sullivan Drill, rail grades, pieces of machinery (steam to electric and wood to steel), the Worthington compressor, large grout pan, the generator shed, haul truck, stand pipe, and old motions, among other things.

We are indebted to our funders for making this historic walk possible: Highlands Communities Foundation, Berkshire Taconic Foundation, and Recreational Trails. And we thank



our board members who have worked hard to see this project to fruition, especially those who have been involved in the details of the historic walk. Working with me have been Neil Toomey, Eve Cholmar, Sid Cholmar, Steve Schindel, Allen Metrick (for signage input), and Ann Smith for steadfast work on securing the grants.

At the same time, we will be moving into our new office and exhibit space at the Mullen House Education Center. Utilization of this new non-profit organization and facility (presently awaiting renovation), will enable the quarry museum to offer off-site public programming, themed exhibits, and collaborative programs with the Becket Washington School. We will have storage capabilities for artifacts and primary research materials, and a library available for those wishing to do research.



Please note that we now hold a membership in the Berkshire Visitor's Bureau and have a wonderful brochure, soon to be available throughout the Berkshires. Our office telephone number is (413) 623-2100, e-mail: beckethistoricquarry@starband.net; mailing address: 12 Brooker Hill Road, Becket, MA 01223. And, thanks to David Stein, we will have a website: www.BecketLandTrust.org Please visit us soon and take part in the varied activities we have to offer.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER STATE OF THE TRUST

Ken Smith, President



As you can see throughout this newsletter the Becket Land Trust's accomplishments and scope have continued to evolve. In addition to completing our recreational trail network, we have begun an interpretive historic trail where visitors can learn about traditional quarrying techniques.

Our commitment to being responsible caretakers of the land has prompted us to undertake combined studies of the flora and fauna on the Historic Quarry and Forest property in order to better understand what we can and should do to encourage and promote a healthy woodland habitat. You can look forward to watching the execution of the management plans and enjoy the fruits of an improved woodstand and home for wildlife. Just as it takes broken eggs to make an omelet, we will be cutting some diseased trees and leaving initially unsightly brush piles. Ultimately this will yield a healthier environment for existing and new members of our wildlife community. It will also provide an opportunity for our membership and the general public to see firsthand the process of responsible forest management and what that means from an economic, environmental and aesthetic perspective.

It is with great pleasure that I am able to announce that the BLT now has office and exhibit space in town. We have a lease with the newly formed Mullen House Education Center, which abuts the Becket Athenaeum in north Becket village. A signifi-



cant added bonus to this new stage for the Trust is that we are sharing the facility with the world's largest international conservation organization, The Nature Conservancy. Quoting from their press release: "The Nature Conservancy recently hired Bill Toomey (no relation to our vice-president, Neil Toomey) as Westfield River Watershed Program Director. Toomey's role in this newly created position is to direct the Conservancy's outreach, conservation and land protection activities in the Westfield River Watershed landscape."

We are excited about this new relationship. The BLT will certainly be more involved with land conservation projects and our proximity to TNC's office will put us in good stead for accessing grant information.

As always, the Land Trust depends on the support of its membership in order to be able to continue with our efforts.

This year we are focusing on increasing our member roster. We know that there are many fans of the Quarry who do not get around to joining. We are now a member organization of the Berkshire Visitors Bureau and will be looking to them for support in this goal.

Thank you for being an important part of this unique endeavor. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at BecketLandTrust@aol.com.





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OFFICERS

PRESIDENT:
 Kenneth Smith

VICE PRESIDENT:
 Neil Toomey

TREASURER:
 Allan Metrick

SECRETARY:
 Ann Connell Smith

TRUSTEES

Eve Cholmar	Stephen F. Schindel
Sid Cholmar	Martin Schlanger
Giles Falcone	Leo Seligsohn
Roberta Goldman	Alice Shabecoff
Sharon Hughes	Philip Shabecoff
Barbara Mandler	Waino Tuominen
Jonathon Nix	Daniel Woiski
Dorothy Napp Schindel	Gretchen Woiski



Map of the Becket Land Trust Historic Quarry and Forest.

DIRECTIONS TO THE QUARRY:

Take Route 20 to Becket. At the intersection of Route 20, Route 8 North, and Bonny Rigg Hill Road, turn onto Bonny Rigg Hill Road. At a 4-point intersection, turn left onto Quarry Road. Continue on Quarry Road, until you come to our signs and parking area on the right.

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Quarry and Forest, needed office and archival storage space. The Becket Land Trust proposed to the town that a task force be constituted to recommend an appropriate use for the Mullen House. On October 16, 2002, the Mullen House Task Force came into existence. Many of the members of the Becket Land Trust were sworn in as members of the Task Force, together with other interested members of the community. More than six months later, at the annual town meeting in May 2003, the Task Force recommended that the Mullen House be renovated and rededicated as an educational and environmental center. This recommendation was approved by the town.

The Task Force had already received inquiries from organizations expressing an interest in locating an office in the Mullen House. The main job of the Task Force became readying the Mullen House for occupancy. Since the Task Force promised the town voters that this project would not be an expense to the town, the Task Force recommended to the Selectmen that a separate non-profit corporation be created so that grants could be sought for the renovation. On September 17, 2004, the Mullen House Education Center, Inc. was born and on September 29th, a lease was signed by the Becket Selectmen leasing the Mullen House to the MHEC for \$1 per year.

The Nature Conservancy, an international organization dedicated to preserving the environment, became the first tenant at the MHEC when it opened a Western Massachusetts office there in September. Shortly thereafter, the Becket Land Trust signed a lease and opened its office there. At this time, while renovations are in the planning stage, there is room for only these two organizations but we expect that one or two others, with similar purposes and goals, will eventually be housed at the MHEC.

With the help of funds previously earmarked by the Town of Becket for this purpose, a new well has been drilled and a new septic system has been installed. It is now up to the MHEC to seek additional funding to complete the building renovations.

Steve Schindel, Becket Land Trust Vice President