



View of Esopus Gorge as seen from the Dunbar Easement

NEWS • • • SPRING 1996

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THE DUNBAR EASEMENT

A veritable Shangri-La in Lomontville is the location of a significant easement now being completed by the Conservancy. Marjorie and Jim Dunbar's 75 acres contains serene meadows, dramatic rock faces and escarpments, seasonal waterfalls up to 80 feet high and towering conifers.

All of this, located on the lower Esopus, is smack in the middle of the Esopus Gorge, a priority area for preservation efforts by the Conservancy. Nature marked this area for special beauty and distinction 350 or 400 million years ago, in the Middle Devonian Period, when oceanic upheavals and subsequent erosion left the Catskill Delta marked by dramatic gorges and perspectives.

A special viewing of the Dunbar Easement is set for Saturday, June 15; details on page 5.

The lower Esopus makes a graceful horseshoe turn at the Dunbar property, framing it and affording exquisite views. *(cont'd)*



*The Dunbar Picnic Grove
"...of murmuring pines and hemlock"*

Dunbar Easement (cont'd)

Jim came here in 1947, after his family had bought the property, and Marjorie joined him in 1954. Their effort since has been to manage the property for maximum beauty and benefit.

“Biodiversity,” says Jim. That has meant the planting of various tree varieties and some farming enterprises—corn, hay, even beans one year (“Not very successfully,” says Jim). Fifty-six of the property’s acres are woodland, and for 10 years a state-supervised forest management program has been in force.

It has been a long time, but they still get excited when the spring runoff generates 80-foot waterfalls over the sheer rock face across the broad meadow in front of their house. And, says Marjorie, “We’ve enjoyed the wildlife here.”

That includes Great Blue and Green Herons, osprey, great



Jim & Marjorie Dunbar

horned owls, beaver, turkeys, coyotes, muskrat, mink and, of course, deer—all too many deer. Marjorie laments their depredations of the laurel, pink lady slippers and hepatica, among other plants.

Marjorie and Jim are looking to the long term in doing their easement. “We hope the property will remain in the hands of a family member who will love it as much as we do,” says Marjorie. But they want protection in perpetuity. “The shoreline and the creek shouldn’t be spoiled by development or devastation of the forest,” says Jim.

RELC directors voted at their April meeting to accept the Dunbar easement, subject to negotiation of final details on the location of two additional house sites that would be allowed under the agreement.

There already are two other easements on the Esopus Gorge, and the Dunbars would like to see more of them in their neighborhood and around Ulster County.

“The day of easements seems to have arrived,” says Marjorie, who served three terms on the Marbletown Town Board. B.N.



The Dunbar Meadow with Jim’s stand of native black walnut trees in the background.

A Sense of Place

A recent recipient of a Masters Degree in Landscape Architecture, Board Member Fred Steuding has studied how residential development on steep slopes interferes with people's experience of historic landscapes, that have been valued for their scenic quality and the meanings they have held. The following are excerpted from Fred's master's thesis, Woodstock's Overlook Mountain: Preserving the American Heritage.



Landscapes that have been the setting of significant events in the life of a community are visible reminders of the past and become, as Donald Meinig writes, "... part of the shared set of ideas and memories and feelings which bind a people together." Folklorists like Richard Dorson refer to this experience as a "folkloric *sense of place*" linking residents of a region to traditional themes and values. Although this regional folkloric sense of place is expressed in different ways, how it's expressed says something about a people's relationships with the environments in which they live and work.

For example, cultural geographers explore the human *experience of place* by focusing often on a particular region's intellectual culture to better understand the impact landscape has on creative expression. Based on this approach, the Catskills have become a landscape rich in meaning and have influenced our regional folklore, art, literature, and lifestyles for generations.

As a matter of fact, The Catskills have become integrated into the fiber of our daily lives. Author Kent Ryden maintains that there are "four categories or layers of meaning which overlie the facts of the physical world."

*The first layer: personal memory and a *sense of place*.* To talk about how experiences have influenced us, we must talk about where they occurred. Edward Relph explains that the particularly moving experiences we've had in a place can be a source of both individual and cultural identity and security. And Ryden further adds that it's these personal memories of a place that can also help us understand the complexities of our lives and provide us with an imaginative refuge from change and flux.

Community history is the term Ryden uses to explain the *second layer*: a "deeply known and felt awareness of the things that happened . . . within the bounds of a region." This awareness creates shared meanings within a community and shapes our feelings about where we live and our attitudes about issues related to that place.

The landscape to which we're daily exposed, the physical face of geography, is the *third layer*. Concrete and accessible to the senses, this becomes an integral part of our lives as we absorb both its beautiful and comforting qualities. However, these positive



Board Member Fred Steuding

experiences are often combined with the disconcerting realization of how uncontrolled and insensitive development can alter and/or eliminate these special places.

Our sense of emotional attachment to a place, the *fourth layer*, is an outgrowth of our relationship to the other layers. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan refers to it as topophilia—"the affective bond between people and a place or setting." Ryden states that the emotions residents attach to a place are feelings that are based on knowledge of that place's history and identity, and that this knowledge influences their "contemplation of their physical surroundings."

Each of these layers of meaning contributes to our overall sense of either the place from which we have come or the place to which we have become accustomed. Together, all of these layers can shape who we are as unique individuals and collectively contribute to who we are as communities committed to protecting our landscapes. F.S.

NEW CONSERVANCY DIRECTORS

RELC happily announces the election of three new directors whose widely varying skills and experience will bring new dimensions to the Conservancy.

Reggie Smith of Accord is a World War Two Marine veteran who trained and worked as a pharmacist, then got a masters in library science, then combined the two talents to become librarian for major pharmaceutical companies and for the New Jersey University of Medicine and Dentistry in Newark. Now retired, he has been working as a volunteer and board member for Gods Love We Deliver, a New York City group that delivers meals to homebound AIDS patients. Reggie's motive in working for RELC is his desire to preserve "the overwhelming beauty of this area."

Rita Shaheen of Kerhonkson is a professional planner and consultant in land planning and design with a master's degree in landscape architecture from SUNY in Syracuse. She has served on the Rochester Environmental Commission in Accord,

helped in securing grants for the local "Rail Trail" program and has done projects for Scenic Hudson and other regional agencies. She is interested in developing environmental education programs in our area, particularly for childrens' groups. Rita also has a certificate of Fine Arts from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia.

Many members will be familiar with Mary Mendola as a recent Democratic candidate for supervisor of Rochester. She lost the election, but now we can benefit from her energy. Mary used to be a vice president at the Television Bureau of Advertising in New York City. Previously she had been a sales promotion consultant and speech writer. She has been teaching advertising and communications at the Fashion Institute of Technology and she serves as an adjunct professor at Ulster County Community College.

We welcome Reggie, Rita, and Mary to our board.

B. N.



LAND TRUST ALLIANCE OF NEW YORK

DIRECTORS ATTEND LTA/NY CONFERENCE

On June 9 & 10, RELC Conservancy Directors will be attending The Land Trust Alliance of New York's Fourth Annual State-wide Conference in New York's beautiful Thousand Islands.

This conference will bring the state's volunteer land trusts, staffed land trusts, and conservation professionals together to exchange expertise in a series of lectures workshops, and sightseeing tours.

With the current number of land trusts at 1,095 in the United States, the movement has experienced significant

growth in recent years and holds over 4 million acres. This is particularly true in New York, where 65 land conservancies hold conservation easements on over 125,000 acres, most of which remain in private hands.

In its four years, LTA-NY has established itself as a source of technical assistance, lobbyist, and regranter of funds under the Rural New York Grant Program. From this grant program, the RELC has received two grants, each for \$3,000, in 1993 and again in 1995.

E.B.

