



AFOOT IN THE FIELD

A Resource for Conservation Landowners
in the Finger Lakes Region

Summer 2019

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We all know time is relative. A minute can seem like an eternity. On the other hand, a week, month, or year can slip by so quickly. Seasons come and go. For a geological formation, a century is a drop in the bucket. Like a rock or a waterfall, a perpetual conservation easement agreement is meant to last forever. While three decades is only the beginning for an easement, it is a long time for the people who run and support organizations like FLLT, working year after year to establish public nature preserves and protect private lands with conservation easement agreements.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust is celebrating its 30 year anniversary in 2019. While FLLT may not yet be “venerable” (the Trustees of Reservations in Massachusetts by contrast has surpassed 125 years old!), 30 years is a nice milestone, and anniversaries are good opportunities to look back and reflect. Over those three decades a large number of people – board members, staff, volunteers, advisors, partners, donors, and of course grantors of land and property interests – have together achieved a very impressive list of conservation success stories. I’m not sure which I am amazed by more – the breadth and diversity of the lands and waters we have helped to protect, or the breadth and diversity of the people who worked together to make each victory possible. Both the land and its champions are why I find working for the Land Trust so rewarding.

In this issue of Afoot in the Field we pause to look back and admire the wide variety of lands that have been protected by conservation easement across 12 counties; share with you some reflections offered to us by Martha Brewster, one of our early easement donors; and also offer some points to consider when it becomes time for properties to change hands, which is inevitable as the decades slip by.



Chris Olney
Director of Stewardship

A LOOK AT PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION IN THE FINGER LAKES



WORKING FARMS

Elderberry Pond Farm, an organic vegetable farm (right) and Catalpa Acres Farm, a large crop farm (left), are two examples of the nearly 30 commercial farming operations taking place on over 4,000 acres of permanently conserved farmland.



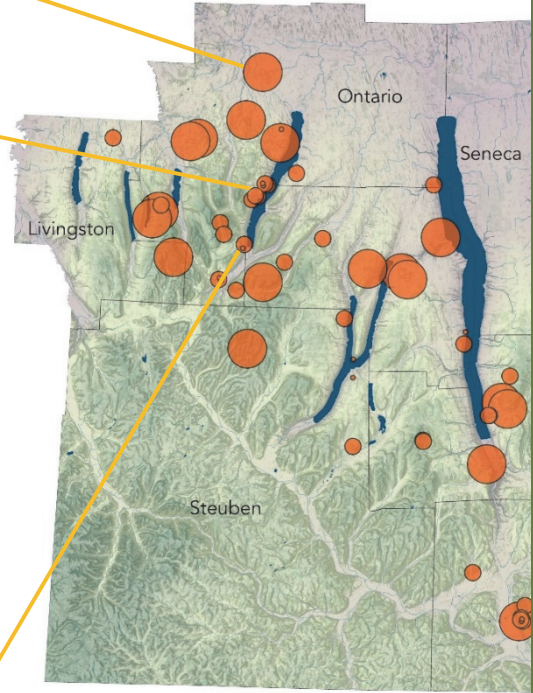
FORESTS

Trees will forever cover over 2,800 acres of protected forest land, including this beautiful parcel in the Canandaigua Lake watershed.



SCENIC VISTAS

Many iconic views in the region are protected with FLLT conservation easements, such as the meadow beneath Carolabarb Park, near the south end of Canandaigua Lake.



30th Anniversary Hikes!

In celebration of its 30th anniversary, the Land Trust is hosting 10 hikes led by knowledgeable staff covering a total of 30 miles. Visit www.fllt.org/30years for more information, and sign up for our e-newsletter www.fllt.org/contact/ to learn the latest.



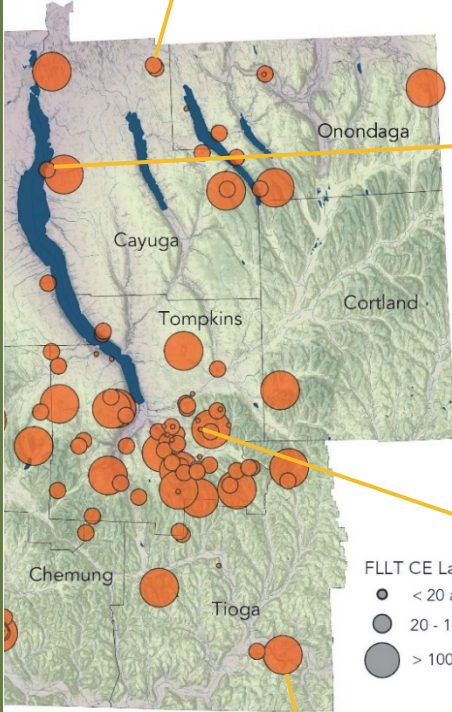
Photo: FLLT

LAKESHORES

Over 7,400 feet of lakeshore on Canandaigua, Keuka, Seneca, and Cayuga Lakes is protected with conservation easements.



Photo: Bill Hecht



WATER QUALITY

Clean drinking water across the region is protected by conserving natural stream corridors and wetlands, such as this dynamic wetland in the Cayuga Lake watershed.



Photo: Allison Bennett



Photo: Diane Morton

RECREATION

Long before it was opened to the public, the Logan Hill Nature Preserve was the first CE accepted by FLLT. Today, it and two additional CE properties are FLLT nature preserves. Additionally, several conservation easement landowners graciously host sections of the Finger Lakes Trail on their land.

LANDOWNER PROFILE: MARTHA BREWSTER

Martha and her late husband, Reverend Gurdon Brewster, donated a conservation easement on their 137-acre property in the town of Newfield, Tompkins County to the Finger Lakes Land Trust in 1997, which was the 27th conservation easement accepted by FLLT. In addition to the many activities described in this interview excerpt, Martha and Gurdon also planted fruit trees and shrubs, raised chickens, boarded horses, dug and stocked ponds, and hosted weddings and communion services on their property.



Photo: Provided

FLLT: Why did you choose to conserve your land?

MB: I've always been an earth person. I care about the planet and the earth tremendously. Gurdon followed likewise too.

FLLT: You have a beautiful, one-of-a-kind timber frame home. How was it built?

MB: Gurdon saw an advertisement for a barn to be taken down in Richford, NY for nothing. He asked, "What do you think?" and I said, "Well, let's go see." That's where it all started. It took a year to move it, to put it in the field to make sure it had no termites, and to make drawings and designs. Our friends, artist and architect Kumi Korf, and David Warren and Ed Franquemont of Natural Bone Builders, and Gurdon and myself, would sit at the table for hours and months while all of the pieces were in the field and then began to build a year later.



Photo: Provided

Taking down the barn in Richford, NY.



Photo: Provided

Raising the walls of the new house.



Photo: Aerobird, Inc.

FLLT: What were some of the joys and challenges of keeping bees for your honey business, “Bessie’s Bees”?

MB: Everything about bees is endless fascination. We caught a swarm once -- the colony was on a branch and we had a box to try to entice them to come to a new home. We saw the queen and got her to go in. As soon as she was in, so was the rest of the colony. I had two different bear incidents, which is kind of fun. They just come and help themselves. Then we moved the hives closer to our house so we could better keep an eye on them, and we put up a solar-powered electric fence.

FLLT: What other animals did you have?

MB: We moved there with homing pigeons. We’d drive to Watkins Glen and let them go and then they’d come back to Ithaca. It was a whole hobby, and we didn’t lose any unless a hawk came in. It’s a doorway into the wonders of nature. There’s so much to learn, there’s so much to nature. We were going to have a dairy, and we bought some cows and tried for a couple of years, but you can’t have a dairy when you have a small barn and you can’t make money.

FLLT: What makes your land special to you?

MB: It is a woven fabric of stories of people caring for the earth and each other in the past, present, and future. It is an incredible place to watch stars, and the movement of the sun on the horizon through the seasons.

FLLT: With your property currently for sale, what is your hope for the future of your land?

MB: It is so very difficult to move away – heartbreaking. I hope it is a place of community but also a place of individual connection to the mysteries and the depths of the earth and the lessons it can teach us. I really want to emphasize caring about the earth, that’s why I’m with the FLLT. You have to care for something if you want to be given the benefit or treasure of it. With a conservation easement, you are a guardian of the land. Being part of the correspondence with FLLT makes it easy to understand what can and cannot be done on the land. It’s a support system, a teacher, a guide. Not an authoritarian rule, but a real companion to help you be connected to something larger than yourself that cares about this earth.

Passing the Torch: Perpetual Land Conservation

Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, has been quoted as saying “change is the only constant in life.” Conservation easements are intended to limit the extent of this inevitable change on conserved property, but change still occurs nonetheless. Natural change, such as a windstorm or flooding, can also have long-lasting ecosystem impacts. Human changes also occur on conserved land.

As a single conservation easement property passes through different ownership, there are inevitable changes as each person manages and stewards the land according to their own goals and values.

For example, what was once a grassy field became a vegetable farm after the Baptist family bought a conservation easement property in Ithaca, Tompkins County. Fort Baptist Farm uses a Community-Supported Agriculture model, where customers buy a share at the beginning of the season and then enjoy the harvest all year long. In addition to growing organic crops, many of which are common in Jamaican cuisine, the farm has a social justice mission and donates much of their produce those in need of healthy food.

Similarly, Jenna Iannucci converted part of a grassy field to start her cut flower farm, Kindred Flora, in Italy, Yates County, on family land that her grandparents, Margot and Don Hughes, protected with a conservation easement. Jenna employs sustainable practices such as dense succession planting and cover cropping. Landowners such as Joe Paisley of Richford, Tioga County and John Rybinski of Manlius, Onondaga County are actively reforesting parts of their properties in order to expand forest habitat.



Photo: FLLT

Landowners Ed and Donnette Baptist, with their dog Leo.

Avoiding Issues With Good Communication

Research on conservation easements across the country shows that violations occur more often with successor landowners than with the original grantors of the conservation easement. The original grantor is deeply involved with crafting the terms of the conservation easement, whereas a successor landowner may not be as familiar with all the details of the conservation easement, or as supportive in general. Open and ongoing communication with FLLT, however, minimizes misunderstandings.

Contemplating a Change in Ownership of Your Easement Property?

Sisters Heidi and Amy are the newest generation of stewards of their family's property. See the back cover for more of their story.



If you are thinking about selling your conservation easement property, or passing it on to heirs, we encourage you to get in touch with FLLT early, so we can serve as a guide during the process. In addition to contacting FLLT, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Consider an appraisal.** Each conservation easement property is unique, and an appraisal can help you understand the value of the property.
- **Educate your realtor and potential buyers about the conservation easement.** Make sure your realtor knows about the conservation easement, and will communicate the purpose and subsequent restrictions of the conservation easement to potential buyers. Feel free to share FLLT contact information with the realtor and prospective buyers. Consider including language in the listing such as, “This property is protected from development by a conservation easement with the Finger Lakes Land Trust.”
- **Formally notify FLLT.** All of our conservation easements require written notification 30 days prior to when a property is sold. We will need the name and contact information of the buyer.
- **Reference the Conservation Easement in the deed.** The deed transferring ownership needs to include specific language that references the conservation easement.
- **Read the fine print.** Some conservation easements may have additional stipulations/clauses about property transfer, such as subdivision restrictions, a stewardship payment, or the right of first refusal granted to FLLT.
- **Share the survey.** If you decide to get a professional survey of your property as part of the sale, please send FLLT a copy of the survey to help us keep our maps up to date (especially for properties that may not have been surveyed in the past).

LOTS MORE LEARNING

Are you a newer conservation easement landowner? Past issues of Afoot in the Field are available online at <https://www.fllt.org/category/afoot-in-the-field/>. Topics include: vernal pools · woodcock · deer · citizen science · chainsaw safety · firewood · nature and health · grassland habitat · leasing land · invasive species · boundary lines · amendments ·



Photo: Provided

Art Woldt as a child on the family farm in Spafford, Onondaga County, which has been in the family since 1916. Art donated an easement on the property in 2017, just before he passed away. His daughters Amy and Heidi (page 7) now own the property and continue to enjoy time there with their families.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust is a member supported non-profit conservation organization that works cooperatively with landowners and local communities to conserve forever the lands and waters of the Finger Lakes region, ensuring scenic vistas, local foods, clean water, and wild places for everyone.

Afoot in the Field is provided for landowners in the Finger Lakes who own conservation easement properties, or who are otherwise committed to land conservation and wildlife habitat protection. For questions or concerns regarding your conservation easement, please contact Chris Olney by calling the Land Trust at (607) 275-9487 or email chrisolney@flt.org



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