

# FIRST ANNUAL BECKET LAND TRUST EVENTS DAY 2003

Ken Smith, with Sid Cholmar and Dorothy Napp Schindel

On Saturday August 23rd the BLT held its first Land Trust Events Day. The focus of this exciting event was the dedication of a newly commissioned memorial in memory of Ron Mandler, a founder of the quarry who will be missed as a friend, as a Board member, and as a prominent member of our community. Before the ascent to Vista Point, home of the memorial, nearly one hundred attendees had a choice of led hikes through the forest trails and along the first phase of the proposed self-guided museum walk. Then everyone climbed way up to the view point for the formal dedication of an extraordinary stone bench created by Allen Williams. Before departing everyone was treated to a lovely champagne reception in the woods near Quarry Junction. A meaningful, good time was had by all.

In planning the event, the Land Trust board of directors decided to undertake the project of creating a memorial bench along the trail network honoring Ron for his significant contribution to the effort to preserve the quarry property. To this end, we asked Allen who is one of our most active and knowledgeable Land Trust members and a local quarryman and artist, to design and construct this engraved memorial. Assisted by Neil Toomey and some of Allen's employees, the stone for the bench was moved into place. Weighing in at 8 tons and stretching over 13 feet long, this bench, a naturally formed granite boulder was coerced up hill and reoriented into its new location all through Yankee ingenuity and hard work. Once settled onto its new platform of bedrock it was landscaped with native plants and forest duff to make it look and feel as if it had been dropped there millennia ago by the glaciers. Serendipity alone would not have taken such care to ensure that this bench would be appropriately oriented to afford the weary hiker of the best view of the distant mountain ridge, or to keep the hiker nicely shaded by the nearby trees. It took Allen's careful planning and well-honed craftsmanship to pull all the aspects of the project together to achieve such spectacular results.

While it would be easy to come upon this bench while hiking the Vista Trail and miss the fact that this natural resting



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**REPORT**

place was a man-made creation, do not let yourself be so deceived. The brilliance of this memorial is exactly that; it is so inconspicuous and yet so successful in all that it was meant to be that you really need to take the time to ponder the bench and its environment to fully understand what it represents. In

so many ways this is a perfect tribute to Ron. Now that we are able to take the Historic Quarry and Forest for granted and let ourselves feel comfortable in its preservation, it is easy to forget that without Ron's efforts we could easily have been faced with unrelenting traffic and industrial activities that would have substantially affected the quality of life in Becket. Through Ron's work we now have something that seems perfectly fitting within our community: a special place to enjoy the best that nature has to offer and a unique opportunity to experience part of our Town's history.

When you have the chance, take an hour or two, walk up the Vista Trail, sit down at the bench and remember how lucky you are to have a place like this to enjoy and call your own. And say thanks to Ron while you are there.

Special thank you to Eve Cholmar and Steve Schindel for heading the reception committee, to Neil Toomey, Ann Smith,

Ken Smith and Dorothy Schindel for leading tours, and to Marty Schlanger and Neil for transporting people and supplies to various destinations in the forest and beyond. This was truly a labor of love and everyone pitched in to carry it off to a perfect 10.

**THE 2003  
ANNUAL MEETING  
WILL BE HELD  
ON OCTOBER 18TH  
AT 10:00AM  
AT  
BECKET TOWN HALL**



Dedication of Ron Mandler Memorial.

## BECKET LAND TRUST HISTORIC QUARRY MUSEUM UPDATE 2003

by Dorothy Napp Schindel, Coordinator of Historic Interpretation

This past year has been a very exciting and busy one for the Historic Quarry Museum Team. Last summer we mounted our very first exhibit in conjunction with Becket Arts Center's Earth Art event - a celebration and exhibition highlighting creations emanating from the earth. Our portion of the exhibit, entitled: Preserving the Historic Quarry: A Work in Progress, featured two major displays. The first presentation was a social history room filled with maps, a model, and a plethora of photographs and news clippings given to us by various people from the community and beyond. The photographs and clippings documented aspects of life in the village and work at the quarry during a one hundred year period. A highlight of this history room was a video presentation of the Oral History interviews completed to date. The second exhibit featured a full array of actual artifacts housed under plexiglass with descriptive narratives, signage, and in some cases technical drawings completed by Sharon Hughes.

This museum quality exhibit was further enhanced by photographs of the quarry taken by Matt Kierstead and David Stein. A highlight of the presentation was the presence of the Sullivan Drill and the Headache Ball, placed strategically outside the arts center for all to see and touch. These two objects now grace our new parking lot. As an addition to the exhibit, Allen Williams showed his granite sculpture and demonstrated stone cutting techniques, while an informative tour he had previously led at the quarry was projected for all to see. Tours of the actual grounds were given simultaneously. This event served to launch the Quarry Museum and inspire us to continue on our mission to preserve the historic quarry and make its history and many splendors accessible to the public. I want to especially thank the expert exhibition team that I was so lucky to work with in the mounting of this enormous project: Eve Cholmar, Dan Woiski, Sharon Hughes, and Stephen Schindel, and to the members of the Becket Land Trust board for their support and guidance.

In our quest to enable the public to learn about the quarry, we are happy to announce that we have received grants from Highland Communities Foundation and Berkshire Taconic Foundation to create a self-guided walk through the site (see *Recent Grants Awarded to BLT*, page 4). We are presently identifying specific stopping points along a loop that will contain already existing trails as well as newly cut paths that will afford greater visibility and access to many of the artifacts and views. Phase One of the project will include narrative signage along this designated path. A highlight of this "walk" will be a visit to the partially restored wooden derrick, the largest on the property. A brochure and map will augment signage that will begin in the parking lot, go up the entry trail and into the quarry area itself. Future phases of the project will entail restoration of the Blacksmith's shop and other areas such as the block house, skeleton building and tunnel. We will be hiring an intern to help with research and identification.

Since our last Newsletter, the on-going Oral History project

(as mentioned above) under the direction of Eve Cholmar, has continued with its charge to interview and identify key players in the life of the quarry. Along with Dan Woiski, our videographer and documentation expert, we have interviewed Arthur Wilander and Jack Winn. Both had a wealth of information that they were willing to share with us. Arthur is a Chester native of Finnish ancestry, who comes from a family of stone cutters. Many workers came from Finland to work in the quarries, bringing their cultural heritage, such as the language and saunas, with them. According to Art, almost every house in Chester had a sauna and there was one at the quarry site also! The cutting and carving of the granite from the Hudson-Chester Quarry was done in Chester. Jack is the son of Johnny Winn who bought the Hudson-Chester Quarry in 1949. According to Eve, Johnny was an adventurous soul. Early in his life, he went to Kansas to learn how to fly. His teacher was Carl Lindbergh. We are most grateful to him because for many years he guarded the quarry making sure that no one would take any of the artifacts that were exposed and vulnerable. These artifacts are now the foundation of the museum we are planning. We have also been in touch with Elmer Linden, who now lives in North Carolina. He has sent us memoirs of his days as a young boy when his parents ran a boarding house at another quarry near ours. We are still trying to find information about the boarding house that accommodated workers at the Hudson-Chester Quarry. Please let Eve know if you have any information concerning our quarry, boarding house, sauna, the workers, etc. She can be reached at: 623-6040.

In addition, we have inaugurated public programming with a special event funded in part by the Becket Cultural Council (a branch of Massachusetts Cultural Council) that featured Davis Bates who gave an excellent storytelling program to the 4-6 graders (approximately 120 students) of the Becket School (housed in Dalton this past year). He wove information about the Becket quarries, the workers, the boarding house, Becket in general and the Hillowns into interesting stories. Davis also presented a similar program for the Becket Council on Aging, which included a lovely dinner.

As for the future, with guidance from Neil Toomey and Allen Williams our museum team continues to plow ahead in its mission to help people appreciate how the quarry and its workers were instrumental in the development of Becket and the Hilltown communities. At the same time we hope to provide a museum that will teach us about quarrying over a period that spanned pre-electricity through the industrial revolution into modern times. And, in addition to our self-guided on-site walk, we look forward to further explorations of indoor exhibit space and joint educational projects with the schools.

*Correction: In last year's Newsletter, we misstated the Mitchell relationships. Leslie is the son of Frank Mitchell, and grandson of John L. Mitchell. Paul and Malvina Frisbie, children of Charles Mitchell, are the grandchildren of William Mitchell.*



The past year has been as exciting and event-filled as previous years. The Trust is working on four general areas of interest and much progress has been made on each front. We have been active with the development of the Historic Quarry and we continue building hiking trails. Our land conservation efforts are moving forward with help from larger conservation groups. The fourth area of focus for

the Board of Directors has been addressing the issue of forest management and the creation of a management plan for our 300 acre property.

The Historic Quarry and Forest, of course, represents our most significant efforts and focus. Last summer we worked with the Becket Arts Center to present an EarthArt exhibit which was a forum for artists whose work is connected to nature. This event gave the Trust's Historic Committee the impetus to assemble the core of an on-going exhibit that tells the story of the Historic Quarry. This includes photos, videotaped oral histories and artifact and document displays. If you didn't have an opportunity to see our historic exhibit, you will have many more chances in the future. We have plans for upcoming display spaces; ultimately we intend to have permanent display space in town for this and other exhibits. Stay tuned for the Becket Land Trust Museum!

Of course, even without indoor exhibit space, there is plenty of opportunity to view some of our historic artifacts. Near the entrance to the quarry, on the parking lot island, you can see an antique Sullivan drill on its tripod and a headache ball with lifting chain.

Work continues on the renovation of the still-standing guy derrick. Last year we cleared out the rotten footing, removed the old bull wheel and outfitted a replacement boom. Last winter a new bull wheel was fabricated and we are now installing it under the mast. Ultimately the derrick will be rigged and staged in a configuration that will illustrate how this tremendous piece of equipment was capable of lifting a 40 ton block of granite.

As anyone who went hiking at the quarry last year knows, parking had always been a problem. But it is no longer. Please see the article in this newsletter describing process by which our parking area was created. Of course, if you have any occasion to speak with John Guachione or Ed Williams, please be sure to thank them for their tremendous contribution to the community.

Now that there is plenty of parking for the Quarry, be sure to take a walk along the newly expanded hiking trails. We have several additional miles of trails open and more that are still under construction. In early July of 2003 we benefited from the hard work of an Americorp crew. Six volunteers put in over 200 hours of backbreaking labor cutting new trails. We are in the process of marking these trails and updating our maps.

Meetings with The Nature Conservancy and Berkshire Natural Resources Council have helped us move forward on

our conservation efforts beyond the Quarry property. We are sensitive to the rural character and beauty of Becket and are working to find ways to protect and preserve our town. We are developing a plan and policy which will guide us in identifying vulnerable properties and establishing a process whereby we can take action to conserve these areas. If you are a landowner and want to learn more about conservation, please contact us at [BecketLandTrust@AOL.com](mailto:BecketLandTrust@AOL.com).

Earlier this year we received a grant from the Massachusetts Forest Stewardship Program for \$3030. The funding went towards creating a management plan for our 300 acre property. We have identified six zones within the lot and are considering the best approach for executing the recommendations of our forester. It is our goal to responsibly manage the forest resource while maintaining a balance of multiple and often conflicting criteria. As a conservation group we want to provide a model for how landowners can promote healthy forest growth, encourage wildlife habitat and at the same time realize at least some of the potential of the timber value on their land. It is our intention to maintain the natural beauty of our forest and at the same time encourage healthy and diverse flora and fauna growth.

We want to establish a demonstration forest where landowners can visit and see first hand what a variety of land management techniques mean and how those techniques effect the appearance of the forest. Please contact the Trust if you are interested in learning more about our management plan.

In addition to the Forest Stewardship Grant, we have received two other grants in 2003. The Berkshire Taconic Foundation and The Highlands Community Initiative granted us \$1000 and \$3000 respectively for the Historic Quarry interpretive trail planning. We sold a building lot that had been donated to the Trust many years ago as a capital asset. We are pleased to note that the lot was purchased by an abutter who is interested in keeping it as open space. The proceeds from the sale will be used for many of the efforts already underway.

As we look forward to the coming year and beyond, we are hopeful that the Land Trust will continue to develop into an important community resource. Our success at providing outdoor recreational opportunities, historic education and research and land conservation will give us the momentum to continue to grow and prosper. We are a healthy and vibrant organization that has an excellent track record for obtaining funding sources for all of our diverse activities. Please note, however, that none of the grants we receive can be used for the general expenses of the Trust. We rely solely on the support of our membership to provide the funding for our administrative costs. Your donations are necessary for our continued success. Each year we benefit from hundreds of hours of volunteer time provided by dozens of people. I would like each one of them to know how greatly appreciative the Board of Directors is to them for the wonderful work and services they generously give to the Trust. Without them, we would be nowhere. Thank you.



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## HISTORIC QUARRY PARKING LOT

*Gil Falcone, Board member*

The Becket Land Trust Historic Quarry and Museum is pleased to announce another step forward in our continuing development with the completion of a new entrance and parking area. Visitors may now readily identify the location and have a place to park cars and busses off the somewhat narrow Quarry Road.

This important phase of our growth was made possible through the generosity of several civic and cultural minded businesses and individuals. Robert F. Knowlton, of Becket, recently deceased, deeded over a portion of his adjacent property which was vital in providing the necessary space for this project, inasmuch as only a narrow roadway led to the main quarry property.

The physical construction, including the use of his heavy equipment, trucks, expertise and the man hours of his employees, was given by John Guachione, also of Becket, owner of All Season Grounds Service.

The many truckloads of crushed stone that surface the road and parking area were donated by Ed Williams, owner of the Williams Stone Company of the neighboring town of Otis.

The Board of Directors extend our deepest gratitude, on behalf of our members. Such generosity will long be

## RECENT GRANTS AWARDED TO BLT

*Ann Connell Smith*

We are proud to announce that this year we have received three grants. This funding will support a number of our continuing projects. Last spring we received two grants, one from Highlands Communities Initiative for \$3,000 and the second from the Central Berkshire Fund of the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation for \$1,000. Both of these grants are directed towards the development of the maps, signage, brochure and trail building for the Historic Quarry Walk.

We have recently learned that the newly formed Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation has granted us \$14,000 for the construction and signage for both the Historic Quarry Walk and the Forest Trails. This is a grant that we applied for in the summer of 2002. This grant is funded from federal money which is administered through the Commonwealth.

It is the intention of the Board of Directors to use these funds to complete both the hiking trail network and the Quarry Walk by the end of 2004. While these are significant steps of progress for us we recognize that in many ways this is still just the beginning. We will take great satisfaction once the Forest Trails are fully open and in use and visitors can take a self-guided tour of the Historic Quarry. We also are looking forward to taking these initiatives on to their next phase of exhibit space, educational programs and industrial archeology research. That, of course, will have to wait until 2005 and beyond.

While these grants make possible most of our physical improvements and developments, they specifically do not cover our operating expenses. In fact, without membership support, we would not be eligible for grants like these. We depend on the generous community based contributions to make us a viable organization and it is with that identity we can appeal to and receive state and national funding like these three grants. Thank you for your continued financial support.