A Quilt Made to Last

The Tucquan Glen Nature Preserve is a work of art comprised of many pieces.

The Lancaster County Conservancy protected a square of land here and another there—slowly and persistently stitching together twelve parcels into the popular 338-acre preserve, plus two conservation easement agreements that increase the total protected habitat area to nearly 500 acres.

A Special Place

Tucquan Glen Nature Preserve is a work of art comprised of many pieces, each a piece of the whole. It's one of the most beautiful and mostly untouched lands in Lancaster County.

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In the past, the Glen was a tourist destination, hosting private cabins. Later it was the site of a Boy Scout Camp. The 1993 book The History of Lancaster County describes its beauty:

“The rocks, crowned with magnificent growths of the mountain laurel, that cast the faintest glimmer of the sunlight, and one can almost imagine that he is surrounded by fairy enchantment.”

Protecting the Glen

For more than two decades the Conservancy has engaged in a low-key, yet persistent conservation effort in the Glen. The first acquisition took place in 1983, a 32-acre plot.

“We had pieces donated and others sold at bargain rate,” said Frank Wint, one of the Conservancy volunteers involved in early land acquisitions. “We'd get a map of who in Tucquan Glen, knock on doors, and get the job done.”

“Then some people who were truly sacrificial with the amount of money they gave up in light of their finances,” Frank recalled. “When we told one farmer who donated his land that his contribution may be tax deductible, he said, 'I don't make enough money to pay taxes'.”

“Then it's not to say we didn't run across people who wanted to get every buck they could,” he added.

Land purchases now funded through grants from Lancaster County, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund, private foundations and individual donors.

When approached by the Conservancy, some landowners responded: “You too busy give me the money and I'll sell.” But more often than not, landowners wanted to be sure their land would be protected.

John Synnott, former executive director of the Conservancy, remembers how employees of Pennsylvania Power and Light Corporation, from top management to janitors, loved the Glen. In 1996, the corporation agreed to sell 97 acres to the Conservancy.

“There were some people in the company who were truly thinking of the community good,” he said. “That was a great acquisition. All involved in the decision and subsequent negotiations had a love for the area—stated a love for the area before a love for the Conservancy. We had to earn that.”

Tucquan landowner, Bob Harnish explains why he donated two parcels and a conservation easement* to the Conservancy.

“In Lancaster County, there has been so much effort to protect forested land that developing forest land, LLC, is in the business of preserving timberland—it’s just as important. To sell timber off of my land right now, that’s something you can do every 20 years. You can’t do if you build houses on it.”

Protection efforts in the Glen are ongoing.

“A very land in the Tucquan watershed is a target for conservation,” said Ralph Goodno, the Conservancy President. “It’s high priority and always will be. We hope to continue our expansion of the preserve.”

*The terms “conservation easement” is an agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government entity that limits development on a property. Although the land remains in private ownership and use, the restrictions the conservancy imposes may limit it to nature-based activities.

Tucquan Glen: Classroom

The sixth graders become quiet.

They stop and listen to the gurgling and rushing of Tucquan Creek, sounds some are hearing for the first time.

Huge boulders rise for their attention, and the deep smell of deep forest permeates the air.

One day each spring, Tucquan becomes classrooms for every sixth-grader in the Manheim School District. The lessons include history, biology, creative writing, geology, and physical education.

The day begins in the creek, scooping up macro invertebrates for study. Then it’s time for wildlife and tree identification.

Next, creative writing on Poet’s Rocks. Poetry is followed by an orienteering course. Then local history is taught on a hike to where Tucquan Creek flows into the Susquehanna River.

“Wonder is easily elicited in a place like Tucquan. Neither students nor teacher are immune to the magic.”

“Tucquan landowner, Rod Harnish explains why he donated two parcels and a conservation easement* to the Conservancy:

“Tucquan was in my backyard. It was my great-grandfather’s land. I’d go hunting there. I’ve seen many herons before, but this was beautiful to see in the early evening with the water glistening in sunset and the bird following the twisting stream path.”

“Tucquan was where I learned the importance of being a conservationist.”

“One of the neatest things I ever saw was a blue heron that took off gliding along the stream path. Ron said, ‘I’ve seen many herons before, but this was breathtaking to see in the early evening with the water glistening in sunset and the bird following the twisting stream path.’

“The rocks, crowned with magnificent growths of the mountain laurel, that cast the faintest glimmer of the sunlight, and one can almost imagine that he is surrounded by fairy enchantment.”

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“What Land Gets Conserved?

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“It’s a lot of fun to do,” said Ron Walton, hike leader and teacher. “The kids have a great time when they’re down here.”

“Tucquan is one of the treasure taking advantage of the Conservancy’s program. "We work with six school districts,” said Vic Branson, Education Coordinator for the Conservancy, describing their programs that get students out of the classroom and in touch with the topics they are studying. The program also helps teachers meet Pennsylvania Department of Education requirements for science and ecology. There’s even a web-based education guide to the preserve.

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