



PECONIC LAND TRUST NEWSLETTER

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DECEMBER 1990



Photo: Paul Stoutenburgh

North Fork Initiatives

The North Fork has some of the largest and most beautiful tracts of farmland and open space remaining on Eastern Long Island. Thus, it is only natural for the Peconic Land Trust to increase its conservation efforts on the North Fork given the opportunities to retain its charm and heritage.

"In a relatively short period of time, the Peconic Land Trust has proved to be a valuable tool in preserving open space without the expenditure of public monies," said Joseph Townsend, a Trust board member and resident of East

Marion. "And I think the Trust is going to have to take a much larger role in order to preserve the North Fork as we know it, because it appears government funds for purchases will be much harder to come by."

The Trust's involvement on the North Fork began modestly yet effectively. A few years ago, an opportunity arose to acquire a small parcel in the hamlet of Southold, and the Trust was called in to negotiate the transaction.

According to Townsend, a primary benefactor, George Wells, stepped forward, and the parcel's

owner, Herbert Mandel, agreed to transfer the parcel to the Trust through a "bargain sale." The parcel was sold to the Trust at below fair market value, enabling the seller to realize a charitable gift while the acquisition cost to the Trust was less than it might otherwise have been. The Trust helped to coordinate the improvements to the site with community support and donations from local businesses. The parcel is now the Southold Town Green.

"A lot of hard work went into the project and, as a result, the local
continued on page 3



Above left: John v. H. Halsey with Robert D. Yaro, principal speaker at the Trust's annual dinner. Above right: Mrs. Charles G. Halsey receiving a photo collage of the 1990 Peconic.

Trust Annual Dinner

The Trust held its Annual Meeting and Dinner on Friday, October 19 at the Indian Cove Restaurant in Hampton Bays. Robert D. Yaro, Senior Vice President of the Regional Plan Association, addressed the gathering. The Board of Directors and its guests, about 80 people, also had an opportunity to honor several individuals for their involvement with the Trust.

The Regional Plan Association (RPA) is currently preparing a new regional plan for the greater New York metropolitan area including Long Island. Mr. Yaro joined the RPA staff in January, 1990. Prior to that, he was the Founder and Director of the Center for Rural Massachusetts at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. A Professor of Regional Planning, Mr. Yaro is co-author of "Dealing with Change in the Connecticut River Valley." Mr. Yaro's parents live in Southold, an area he has frequented since 1955.

"It took me 4 1/2 hours to get here today from New Jersey. I experienced firsthand the potential future of the East End," said Mr. Yaro at the beginning of his talk. "The farmland, shorelines, and open space of Eastern Long Island are the draw to this unique area. As it disappears, however, you have to

remember that those who are developing the land are doing so according to your master plans." Mr. Yaro went on to describe how local master plans and large-lot zoning regulations are, in fact, contributing to the loss of our rural character. "There is a way to maintain the character of your hamlets and allow development to continue. Clustering can be done around the hamlet centers and development can be adjusted to fit the character of the East End." Mr. Yaro also pointed out the need for planning staffs and boards of the various East End towns to be work more closely together. "You are all in this together and need to be working towards a common vision to the best of your abilities," Mr. Yaro concluded.

John Halsey, President of the Trust, made several presentations during the Dinner. Thomas M. Thorsen, Director of the Southampton Town Planning Department, retired from the Board of Directors after 6 years of service. Mr. Halsey noted that Mr. Thorsen had been invaluable to the Board during a period of great growth for the organization. Mrs. Charles G. Halsey was also honored at the Dinner for having hosted the 1990 Peconic at her home in Water Mill. Mrs. Halsey was presented with a photo collage of the event.

The President's Column

This is our final newsletter for 1990. We are very pleased to have produced three newsletters this year and look forward to doing more in 1991. This newsletter focuses on another area of Eastern Long Island where the Trust is hard at work, Southold Town.

Southold Town is celebrating its 350th Anniversary as one of the oldest English settlements in New York State. One of the stories herein focuses on the Wickham family which was among the early settlers of the North Fork. The family's current effort to assure the protection and proper management of Robins Island, of common interest to us all on the East End, is particularly noteworthy.

Of course, the English were not the first inhabitants of Long Island. In fact, Southold Town includes within its borders Fort Corchaug, a national historic landmark consisting of an old Corchaug Indian settlement. The Corchaug Indians were one of four tribes, including the Shinnecocks, living on the East End at the time of European settlement. The site of Fort Corchaug, of great interest to the Trust, is expected to be protected thanks to the Open Space programs of both Suffolk County and Southold Town as well as the cooperation of the Baxter family.

And so, our work continues in Southold and elsewhere. 1990 has been a very good year. The Trust successfully completed the acquisition of the Bistrrian property in Amagansett. Promised Land Farm had a very bountiful growing season at the Quail Hill Preserve. A number of conservation easements and parcels of land were donated to the Trust in Orient, Sagaponack, and Water Mill. And we have over 30 projects in the works.

Your support has made all of this possible. As we look to even greater accomplishments in 1991, the Board and Staff of the Peconic Land Trust thank each and every one of you for working with us towards our common goal of preserving the heritage of Long Island. Have a wonderful Holiday Season!!

John v.H. Halsey, President

North Fork Initiatives

continued from page 1

residents have gained something of lasting benefit," notes Townsend.

More recently, the Trust became involved in an attempt to defuse an acrimonious tug-of-war over land in the Hallocks Bay area. Several years ago, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation notified a number of landowners that it wanted to purchase significant portions of their land. Much of the land, however, had been held by the same families for generations stretching back to the early 1700s and the current generation was not excited at the prospect of having New York State take over, especially when the owners thought they were managing the land quite well. So, a number of owners refused to sell.

Pressure from the DEC increased and it became apparent that condemnation proceedings would be initiated, if necessary. A number of landowners responded by requesting that the Peconic Land Trust intercede. Because the Trust specializes in presenting alternatives and avoiding confrontations, it was able to offer a variety of options that would result in the owners retaining their land while achieving the DEC's expressed goal of preserving the environmentally sensitive properties.

Constance Terry and Hope Gillispie granted a conservation easement to the Trust over 8 acres of land originally targeted for acquisition by the DEC. The family was able to retain ownership of the land while the DEC was able to save its funds for more threatened land elsewhere. Next door, 10 acres of the 42-acre Orville Terry farm were donated to the Trust. The Trust will ultimately own and manage the balance of the farm through a testamentary gift. The



Conservation easement area in Orient.

Trust also negotiated a sale of the farm's development rights to Southold Town on behalf of the owner. Thus, the owner realized immediate and future tax benefits while assuring the preservation of the farm.

"We're very happy with such solutions," said Joyce Terry. "We didn't want to part with our land or risk its development. We have faith in the Trust's management abilities and, without its help, the problems with the DEC would not have been resolved."

The Trust has recently embarked upon a new effort: Cove Beach. A total of 96 acres in East Marion, some of which borders Long Island Sound and Dam Pond, Cove Beach is under imminent threat of development. The Trust is now working with Southold Town and the owner to identify a limited development alternative for the site. The Trust has prepared a plan that dramatically reduces the number of potential lots from 34 to 6, allowing the majority

of the tract to be preserved as open space.

There is a potential win-win situation at Cove Beach. The owner is still able to realize a return on his investment in uncertain economic times while the public is still able to enjoy the site. The Trust's plan would create highly unique, marketable lots surrounded by a perpetual preserve managed by the Trust.

Though the initial projects on the North Fork have proved to be auspicious, the Trust knows it is only a beginning and that there is much more preservation work to be done. "Given the current tax picture and the fact that both Southold's and the state's land preservation bond acts were defeated in November, I don't see any other route to go other than that of the Trust," Townsend said. "Its work is really our best hope. Many parcels are already in the subdivision pipeline. Once the economic slump is over, we can lose the rural character of this town very quickly."

Historic Lore

The North Fork of Long Island and the Wickham family have been inextricably linked for centuries. Beginning in the 1600s when Parker Wickham was given deeds to between 2,000 and 3,000 acres, including parts of Riverhead and Robins Island, the Wickham family has farmed the land and carried on the rural traditions of one of the most unique areas in the United States. That tradition continues with John Wickham, the 82-year-old patriarch of the family, who has devoted time, energy, and money over the years to reacquiring some of the land of his ancestors.

One effort of the family is known as the Wickham Claim, which may set courts and would-be developers of Robins Island on their collective ears. The claim insists that the Wickham family is the true owner of Robins Island, and according to John Wickham, there is documentary evidence to support the claim. "Some of the land taken illegally from Parker Wickham includes Robins Island, and we're now in Federal court trying to get it back," he said. "I have the original deed from 1698."

At stake is the future of the 460-acre island that lies between the North and South Forks. It has hardly been touched by development ... yet. Its future is murky because it is owned by a German company that has hoped to develop it or resell it for development. However, the company has filed for bankruptcy having signed a contract to sell it to Suffolk County. But the legal entanglements are even

more complex due to the existence of two other signed contracts with other prospective buyers. Another compli-

well as 200 acres that continue to be devoted to agriculture.

"Our farm has the distinction of being the oldest farm in the state continuously cultivated by the same family," Wickham said. "It's also unique in that the property runs from Route 25 to Peconic Bay and from creek to creek with a lot of shorefront. We want to see that stay intact and preserve the special heritage it represents."

One avenue he has pursued is the sale of development rights. Thus far, Suffolk County has purchased such rights on 150 acres which ensures their preservation. Why is this helpful to a landowner? Wickham commented that he's "getting on a bit" and when the time comes, having sold the development rights, the land will be appraised at its agricultural value for estate tax purposes rather than a much higher value based on its potential for residential development.

"Without taking this step, the taxes would be unbearable," Wickham said. "I

have grandchildren who are quite anxious to continue farming our land, and they should be guaranteed that opportunity. Other farmers would do themselves and their descendants a favor by exploring the option of selling development rights."

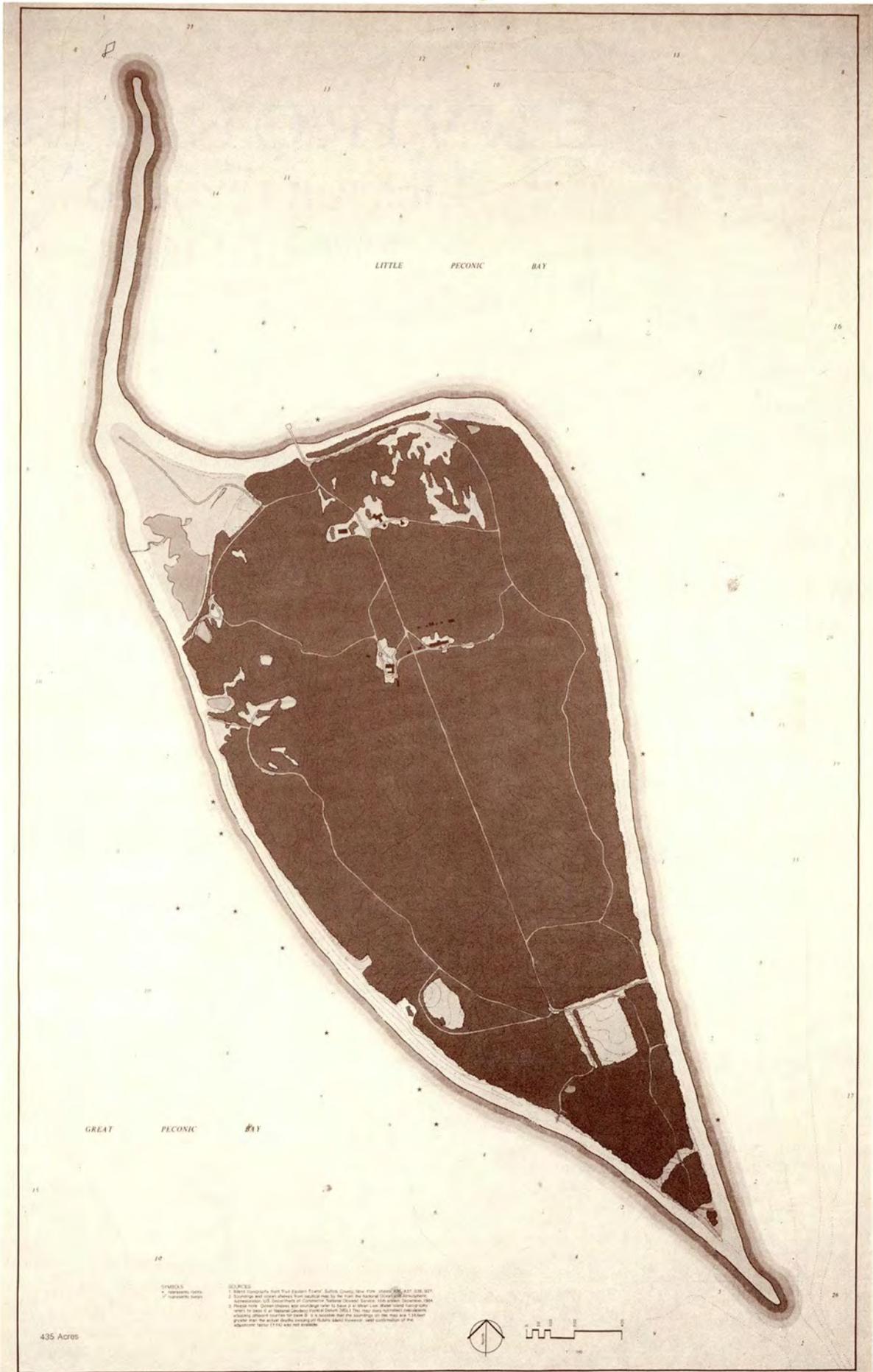
Wickham land represents not only the proud agricultural heritage of the North Fork but of the country. And the conservation efforts of that family demonstrate that history is not just about the past but is an integral part of our present and future.



John Wickham, 82-year-old patriarch of the North Fork's Wickham family.

cation is that with a tightening county budget, there is growing resistance among some legislators to go through with the purchase.

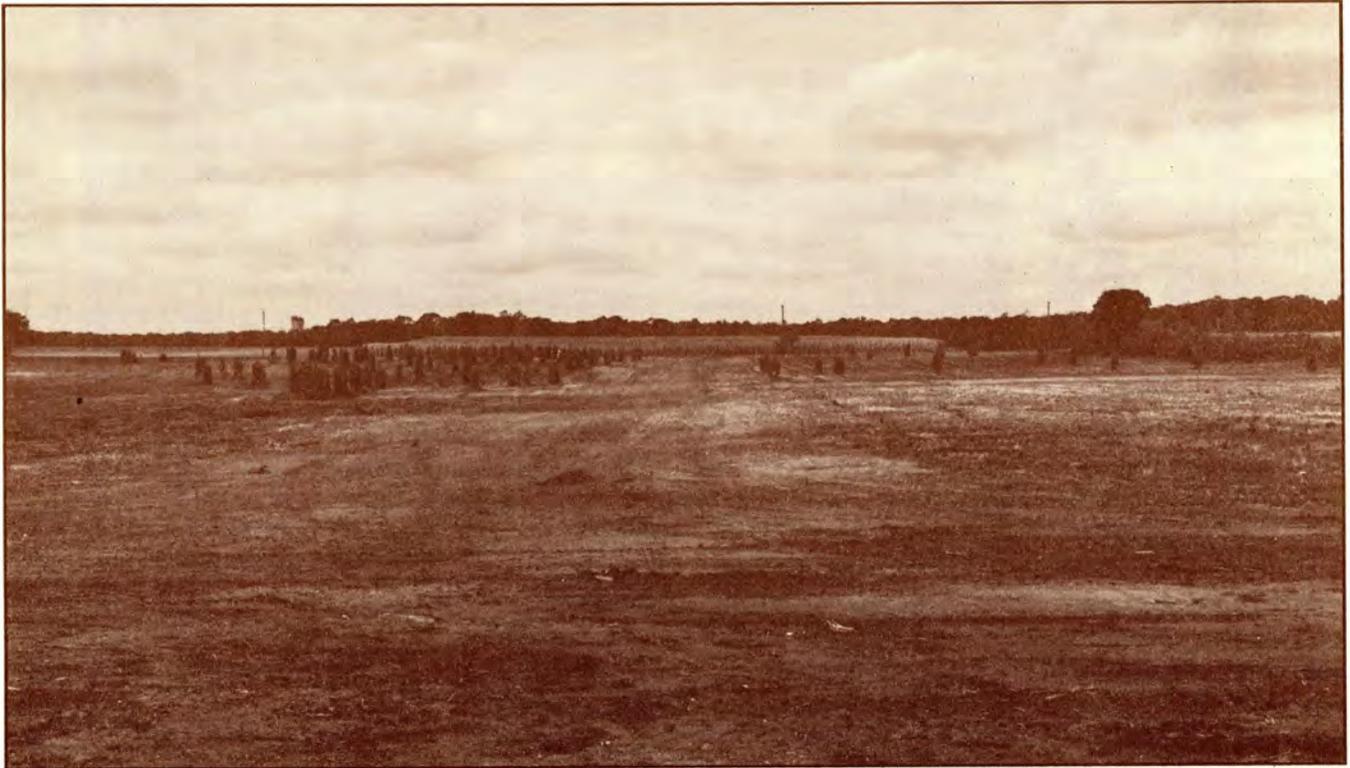
While the Robins Island matter is being sorted out, John Wickham is making progress on another front: reacquiring the family's ancestral land. Starting with 33 acres of farmland he inherited from his father, Wickham has purchased about 300 acres that in past centuries had been owned by the family. This property contains salt marsh and woodland as



ROBINS ISLAND
Town of Southold, Suffolk County, New York

Map No. 100-1-100





Key Parcel in Amagansett Purchased

For the Peconic Land Trust, it was a good news/bad news situation. The good news was that Deborah Ann Light had pledged to donate her farmland in Amagansett, the second largest agricultural area in East Hampton Town, to the Trust. The downside was that a 25-acre parcel adjacent to the Light property, owned by the Bistran family, had been proposed for development.

However, this story has a happy ending. The Trust entered into negotiations with the Bistrans, facing imminent approval of the subdivision plan by the Town Planning Board.

"We were just two weeks away from preliminary approval when we struck a deal," said Randy Parsons, a consultant with the Trust. "There were 10 meetings with the family, and as progress was made, we realized that this was one of

those situations where everyone could benefit."

Thanks to the overwhelming approval of East Hampton's \$5 million Open Space Bond Act in the fall of 1989, the town was able to acquire the development rights of 6 of the proposed 10 building lots. The remaining four lots and an access road would be clustered on nearly four acres, with future houses subject to architectural restrictions.

In addition, the Trust raised funds privately to acquire and manage the remaining 20 acres of protected land. Parsons noted that the four buildable lots "were relocated in a less intrusive area of the parcel, next to existing development."

Resolution of the Bistran situation highlights an important role the Trust can play in the acquisition of open space.

"We had the advantage of going in as a third party and representing the town in negotiations," Parsons commented. "We've acted in a similar role for the county, too. Sometimes you need that outside

party to negotiate with the other two parties who could find themselves in adversarial positions. In the Bistran case, through the cooperation of the Town, the Bistran family, the Trust and its supporters, much of a vital piece of land has been preserved. We hope to assist other local governments in projects like this one."



On hand at the closing to purchase the Bistran property were (L-R standing) Randall T. Parsons, John v. H. Halsey and Bonnie Krupinski along with Peter and Mary Bistran.

Donations in Water Mill

In the September newsletter, it was reported that the Trust is devoting much of its time and energy to preserving a peninsula in Water Mill that extends into Mecox Bay. While this effort is ongoing, there have been two significant signs of progress.

Ray and Peachie Halsey have donated a 1 1/2 acre parcel to the Trust. Located south of Halsey Lane, the parcel contains the headwaters of Mud Creek which runs into Mecox Bay. "This gives us a toehold in one of our main target areas," noted Trust president John Halsey. "And I think it indicates that the families who have farmed for many generations appreciate the benefits of working toward preserving the unique heritage and scenic beauty of this area. While not large in size, this gift is an important one."

Another sign of progress is the fact that the Trust has received a conservation easement from Abram and Ellyn Halsey on a 2 1/2-acre parcel located on Rose Hill Road. The easement limits the parcel to agricultural use. Brian Marlowe of Rose Hill Road has made a substantial charitable gift to the Trust to further its efforts to preserve the area. Consequently, the Trust is vigorously pursuing conservation options with other landowners in this area of historic Water Mill.

Bond Acts Fail to Pass

Last month's Election Day did not provide many happy returns for conservationists on Long Island.

The state's 21st Century Environmental Quality Bond Act, which called for nearly \$2 billion for the acquisition of open space in addition to funding landfill closures and other environmental programs, was defeated by New York voters. The majority of Long Island voters supported the bond act, but heavy opposition from upstate tipped the scales toward defeat.

Southold Town's \$2 million Bond Act was also narrowly defeated. One million dollars of these monies would have been devoted to acquiring development rights on farmland parcels while the balance would have been used to acquire significant open space parcels in Southold.

It is said that "bad things come in threes," and the third bit of bad news was the defeat of Southampton Town's \$15 million Heritage Bond Act, which was introduced by Supervisor George Stavropoulos to coincide with the town's 350th anniversary. Much of the money was to go toward acquiring recreational parcels with shorefront access for the public.

Given cutbacks in municipal budgets due to declining revenues, it is unlikely that the state and local towns will have funding to acquire

properties that would have been preserved through the bond act monies. The absence of such funds serves to emphasize the importance of organizations like the Peconic Land Trust, whose expertise is to work with landowners to preserve farmland and open space, often without relying on public expenditures. In light of these three defeats, it has become crucial that the Trust work harder than ever before.

Countryside Grant to Trust

Hearst Magazines has recently launched a new magazine called Countryside. It is dedicated to the American landscape and is committed to supporting the land trusts which help protect this legacy. This past summer, Countryside donated all advertising revenues from its premier issue to land trusts. The Peconic Land Trust is one of eight land trusts nationwide to have received a Countryside grant. The funds will be used to purchase equipment for the Trust's cooperative farm project in Amagansett and related land management activities.

For those interested in a subscription to Countryside, Hearst Magazines is offering a special offer to Trust supporters - 6 issues at the special rate of \$5.99. For each subscription, the Peconic Land Trust will receive \$3.00. For more information, please contact the Trust office.

SUPPORT THE WORK OF THE PECONIC LAND TRUST!!

The Trust provides farmers and other landowners with unique alternatives to development. Our gifts to you of farmland and open space are dependent upon your gifts to us. Please consider a year-end contribution. Thank you very much and have a wonderful holiday season!

\$5000 ___ \$2500 ___ \$1000 ___ \$500 ___ \$250 ___ \$100 ___ \$50 ___ \$25 ___ Other _____

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A copy of the last financial report filed with the Department of State may be obtained by writing to: 1) New York State, Department of State, Office of Charities Registration, Albany, N.Y. 12231, or 2) Peconic Land Trust, P.O. Box 2088, Southampton, N.Y. 11968.

Autumn, Quail Hill

At day's end on Deep Lane
sun descends into cool sand and clay.
Opposite, a full moon whitens

the cedars of Quail Hill.
I am alone and within a wind
covered with silver and the deep orange.

Alders brush and buoy up the mixed light.
The stray cat haunts the grasses-
songbirds fall like shadows through the apples.

I walk through the autumn order of trees-
leaves given to grass,
fruit set like stars on the canopy.

A buck shines through the valley
and breaks into beechwoods.
On the hill, over the hollies,

I am midway between these lights
of our sky. And as day and the season end
the wind I am now become

is a sibilant beginning.
I am the sound of the cedars-
orange and whitening into night
to return on the shawl of morning.

Scott Chaskey



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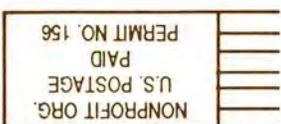
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