

WHEEL-A-THON AT MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL

On Saturday, June 30th the East Quabbin Land Trust hosted a Wheel-A-Thon at its section of the Mass Central Rail Trail in New Braintree and Hardwick.

The rail trail is flat with a firm surface, giving everyone a chance to get out into nature. "Our goal is to introduce the rail trail to people who need wheels to get around, whether that's people who use wheelchairs or families pushing youngsters in strollers. This is a safe and interesting trail to enjoy," said Mark Mattson, the originator of the Wheel-A-Thon event.

The heat and humidity didn't deter folks from coming out to explore the rail trail with friends and family, learning about the area in the process. Stations along the trail included, 1) Ken Carlson, sharing the tools and tips he uses when going out in the woods in his wheelchair, 2) Brad Blodgett, recounting the railroad history and fun facts about the area, 3) Ross Hubacz, warming people up as they cored a nearby tree and read the rings, and 4) Dick Reavey, showing his fly-fishing ties and equipment at the edge of the Ware River.

Visitors could also read a story about Wood

Ducks (by Hope I. Marston and Maria M. Brown) as they made their way along the trail. We've seen wood ducks along the Ware River and installed nest boxes to support breeding pairs.

Many thanks to former State Senator Stephen Brewer for taking visitors on wagon-rides. Driving through a tree-lined trail, crossing the historic pony truss bridge and seeing things from a new height is a great treat! Also, thanks to all the volunteers that made the Wheel-A-Thon possible, with an extensive appreciation for the planning committee members - Ken Carlson, Tom Clough, Ashley Dziejma, Cynthia Henshaw, Mark Mattson and Dick Reavey.

Go out for a roll or walk! The main parking area is at the location of the former New Braintree train station, on Depot Road - the short cut-off road between Hardwick Road and West Road in New Braintree. GPS 1700 Hardwick Road to get to the access point. Parking at either end of the 3-mile rail trail is also available at the end of Maple Street in Wheelwright or just below the active railroad line on Creamery Road. ■



Ken Carlson, at left, talks with Wheel-A-Thon participants about getting out in the woods with his wheelchair. Ken is an avid hunter and fisherman.



Ross Hubacz, forester at Hull Forest Products, teaching Wheel-A-Thon participants to core a tree and read the growth rings.



Former State Senator Stephen Brewer and his Farmall tractor taking Wheel-A-Thon participants on a wagon ride on the Mass Central Rail Trail. Catching a quick break at the historic pony truss bridge over the Ware River.

MESSAGE FROM THE Executive Director

Cynthia Henshaw



Typically, there's a slight slowdown in the pace of activities over the summer, providing a moment to reflect. I'm reminded of how special a place we live in – with a large group of volunteers that came together at the Mass Central Rail Trail to encourage people of all physical abilities to explore the outdoors during the Wheel-a-thon. There were baby-strollers, wheelchairs, and bicycles. Plus, Senator Brewer took participants on wagon rides, which was a big hit. It's because people care about each other and the land, that unique events like this happen.

Our rolling hills and river valleys are special places in their own right. The land reflects the care and stewardship of the generations who came before us. Our open fields and well-managed woodlands are a testament to the hard work of farm families raising the food that sustains us. And it's their legacy that the East Quabbin Land Trust is helping to conserve. Right now, we are seeking grant funds to conserve another farm in Barre, while several other farms in the region are recently listed for sale.

For land conservationists, central Massachusetts is a special place, where land prices are lower than in heavily populated areas and yet, we are close enough to the markets to have profitable farms. Though, the next wave of development is upon us. This time the threat is from solar panels – acres and acres of solar panels. Often put on top of the highest quality food growing soils or by cutting down large swaths of woods. It's the impact to the natural resources – which otherwise help mitigate impacts of climate change – that makes these developments damaging. Especially when we have acres and acres of parking lots or building roofs that could host solar panels successfully. Finding the balance seems elusive at the moment, but by working together we can conserve our critical fields, woods and waters, and find appropriate sites for renewable energy development.

By fixing that balance, we honor the families who came before us, leaving a beautiful and wondrous place to raise our own families, and generate more of the energy we use without sacrificing important farm or woodlands. ■

THE EAST QUABBIN LAND TRUST

works to foster the sustainable use of our natural and historic resources for the benefit of all generations through the conservation and stewardship of the farms, woods and waters in our region of Massachusetts.

As a non-profit organization the East Quabbin Land Trust envisions a regional community that continues to care for its natural environment and supports a sustainable local economy, ensuring a high quality of life for generations to come.

For more information about the land trust, to become a member, or request a change of address, please contact us at:

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Visit our website at www.EQLT.org
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GARY BRIGHAM AND LISA BRINKMAN

Making Every Day Count

By Cynthia Henshaw

Gary and Lisa moved to Barre eleven years ago, to a beautiful spot with a small pond and lots of wildlife to watch from the window. But really, their passion is to be outdoors – riding their mountain bikes, taking Lelu (their German shepherd) for long hikes and helping to keep the trails open for recreation. During the winter, they can be found cross-country skiing or snowshoeing on trails all over the region. And they are regular visitors to the gym to get more weight-bearing exercise.

Gary is a “regular” at trail work-days. Always ready with a chainsaw, loppers, or rake – whatever is needed to clear or build trails. He knows that trails are essential to making people comfortable in getting outdoors.

There is a long list of trails that he’s worked on in Massachusetts and beyond. That includes the Mass Central Rail Trail, and other EQLT trails. Most recently, Gary began creating a trail at the Quabbin Retreat Center in Petersham, that loops along the edge of a cat-tail marsh and under mixed hardwoods.

While we were talking, Lisa pulled out a small spinning wheel. Lisa finds spinning soothing and good exercise for her hands. The dexterity needed and natural oils help keep arthritis at bay. If you’ve ever thought about trying to spin you can find Lisa and others with their spinning wheels at the Hardwick Community Fair. Their station is near the alpacas, across from the post office. Lisa encourages everyone to try it.

Earlier this spring while walking on the trails behind the house, Lisa found a two-day old Barred owl chick. It was after a big wind storm, where the chick got blown out of its nest, and it was wet and cold. Generally, animal parents will continue to feed and care for young if they leave the nest prematurely, so it’s best to leave them in place. But in this case, the chick was wet and shivering; 99% chance of mortality without intervention. So, Gary and Lisa took the chick to a wildlife rehabilitator, and now weeks later the male chick is eating four mice and two chicks a day. They affectionately call the chick ‘Herkimer’, and look forward to releasing him back into the woods in Barre later this summer.

You might be wondering how Lisa and Gary became so engaged in the outdoors. For Lisa, her

introduction to being outdoors began as a young child growing up in northern Maine. There, her dad took her skiing, snowshoeing and climbing up the small mountain near their house. After graduating from college as an English major, Lisa looked around for something to do with her literature degree, but didn’t want to teach in a school setting. Early in her career, Lisa taught yoga and practiced vegetarianism. But after a car accident, she became a chiropractor to help people with similar injuries and life-style choices. She encourages all her patients to eat vegetables, practice good posture and get lots of exercise.

Gary has an amazing suite of jobs and activities he’s mastered over the years – tree cutting, martial arts training, boxing, car repair, demolition derby driving, massage therapy and personal training. Most of his adult life, Gary spent as an iron worker. That means that he’s had great views over cities while guiding steel beams into place building skyscrapers. He’s worked all over the country, but it’s dangerous work. One accident happened when the crane operator dropped a beam. As the beam came down, the 500lb pill (it looks like a ball where the hook connects to the cable) hit Gary with a glancing blow to his head, dislocating his shoulder and crushing his pelvis. Those injuries took years to recuperate from. A life of physical work makes it all the more important for Gary to keep active.

Gary and Lisa both know that recreating outdoors can be an important part of being healthy. That’s why they make outdoor adventures a part of every day.



Lisa Brinkman and Gary Brigham with Lelu, ready for another adventure.



Gary (looking at camera) with loppers in hand, as Bob Clark talks with students about trail construction on the Bob Marshall Trail in Petersham.

SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL DINNER AND SILENT AUCTION - April 28, 2018

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With over 200 people in attendance at the 17th Annual Dinner and Silent Auction, Magi Ziff would've been proud to see so many people breaking bread together and supporting land conservation. This year we had a \$20,000 challenge grant encouraging attendees to make additional contributions to the East Quabbin Land Trust, to be matched one for one. Thanks to our generous supporters we raised over \$33,000 in additional gifts. The silent auction raised over \$13,000. With your generous support, we raised over 1/4 of our annual general operating budget!

Thank you to everyone who made this year's fundraising gala event a huge success, including Judith Jones and Nancy Grimes for organizing the event, John and Linda Tomasi for their generosity and expertise setting up the auction, Robinson's Farm for donating cheese and Rose 32 Bread for donating dinner rolls.

We are grateful to all who support the East Quabbin Land Trust.



GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN:

the Massachusetts Central Railroad in the East Quabbin Area

By Brad Blodgett

Overview. At the end of the Civil War, Massachusetts was already a dense spaghetti of railroad lines. Included were the Boston & Albany Railroad (B&A) and the Fitchburg Railroad's Hoosac Tunnel Route—two east-west mainlines only about 40 miles apart—that already connected Boston and most of the state's larger municipalities with the "Great West." But no matter, the idea of building yet another east-west route gained traction amidst the frenzied atmosphere of postbellum railroad building. Good roads and automobiles still lay in a future unknown. Towns that had been bypassed by railroads in the antebellum period now realized how disadvantaged they really were and wanted to be connected. Thus in 1869, the Massachusetts Central Railroad was chartered to build from N. Cambridge to Northampton and construction began in 1871.

The Financial Panic of 1873 halted work for five years, but work resumed in 1878 and the road opened for business as far west as Jefferson in 1882. Then in 1883 the railroad went bankrupt and shut down. In 1885, reorganized as the Central Massachusetts Railroad, it reopened under control of the Boston & Lowell Railroad (B&L). In 1887, amidst a wave of railroad consolidations then sweeping the New England railroad scene, the B&L leased itself to the Boston and Maine Railroad (B&M). The B&M completed the road to Northampton in 1887 and it became its 99-mile Central Mass. Branch. The branch was an unsignaled, single track road with passing sidings at most stations. Seeking an outlet to the west, a north-westward extension from Amherst to access the Hoosac Tunnel was considered, but never built. Business prospects for the branch—given its redundancy and the very rural areas it traversed—were not bright.

In 1903, construction of the Wachusett Reservoir forced a relocation of a section of the Central Mass. Branch in the Nashua River Valley between Berlin and Oakdale. The relocation resulted in an increase in the branch's length from 99 to 104 miles. Mileposts (MP's) along the Central Mass. Branch have a "B" and an "N" on their opposite sides with numbers. In the B&M scheme of things, these are the distances from North Station-Boston and Northampton respectively. The numbers will always add up to 104.

The Central Mass. Branch in the East Quabbin Area. Passenger stations along the final alignment through the East Quabbin area followed the Ware River

Valley. Stations in this section and their mileages from Boston included Barre (61.68), Barre Plains (63.46), Wheelwright ["Hardwick" before 1894] (65.85), New Braintree (66.77), Gilbertville (70.57), and Ware (74.91). Only the Gilbertville station building has survived and it is now a pizza shop.

The Boston & Albany's (B&A) Ware River Branch, which ran from Palmer to Winchendon, had built up the Ware River Valley some 15 years before the arrival of the Central Mass. The two lines generally paralleled each other through the valley, the B&A occupying the superior alignment. The sparsely populated valley was clearly overserved by railroads.

The Great Depression had devastating effects on the railroads all over the country. In response, the railroads implemented a wave of efficiencies and abandonments. All Central Mass. Branch passenger service west of Clinton was discontinued April 23, 1932. The same year, B&M took the Central Mass. track between Forest Lake Jct. and Barre Jct. out-of-service and negotiated trackage rights on the parallel B&A track. A connecting track was installed at Creamery to allow B&M trains to connect with a remnant of Central Mass. track to reach Wheelwright, where the paper mill was an important customer. The B&M's track between Forest Lake Jct. and Barre Jct. languished until it was formally abandoned in 1941.

The September 1938 hurricane dealt the Central Mass. a crippling blow.

Due to catastrophic flood damage, the Central Mass. between Oakdale and Wheelwright was abandoned, bifurcating the branch into eastern and western parts. The 40-mile western part from Northampton to Wheelwright would become the "Wheelwright Branch." The 2.88-mile fragment of Central Mass. track between Creamery and Wheelwright, not officially abandoned until 1983, is now owned and maintained by the EQLT as part of the Mass Central Rail Trail.

Some notable surviving infrastructure to watch for along the rail trail include the roadbed itself (worth millions in today's construction dollars), mileposts, iron truss bridges over the river at mileage points 66.35 west of Wheelwright and 67.49 west of New Braintree, and granite abutments just east of River Run Road that once supported the bridgework that carried the Central Mass. tracks over the B&A and Route 32 at this point. ■



Both sides of the milepost west of Creamery Road in Hardwick.

LEADERSHIP CIRCLE TOURS PRESCOTT PENINSULA

By Richard Cavanaugh



Jim French, Land Acquisition Specialist for the MA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation, leading a tour of the Prescott Peninsula, a restricted area in the middle of the Quabbin Reservoir.

Members of the East Quabbin Leadership Circle captured a rare glimpse of the Prescott Peninsula - that part of the former town of Prescott that has remained above the waterline of the Quabbin Reservoir. Jim French, Land Acquisition Specialist for the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation, led the tour in early May and provided information and insights about the pre-reservoir history of Prescott as well as what has happened there since the town was disincorporated in 1938.

“We were thrilled to see this area and travel down roads that, as Jim French reminded us, were designed for Model Ts,” remarked Becky Bottomley. “A number of years ago, I had a chance to visit the area with some researchers as part of my high school biology teaching duties, and it was very interesting to learn what the Department of Conservation and Recreation has done there more recently in monitoring and fostering wildlife habitat. Plus viewing some bald eagles nesting on a nearby island in the Quabbin and the Hardwick shoreline beyond that were a real treat.”

The Commonwealth restricts access to the peninsula to very specific purposes. For example, foresters and maple sugarers can bid on contracts with the state for access to the resources there. From 1969 to 2011,

the former site of Prescott Center was the location of the Five College Radio Astronomy Observatory, which has since been removed.

“The trip was fantastic, and the tour leader was amazing,” commented Judi Korzec. “He helped ‘piece together’ this important part of Massachusetts history and certainly opened our eyes on the challenges to move those in the towns to produce the reservoir.”

According to EQLT Executive Director, Cynthia Henshaw, “This outing of the Leadership Circle revealed how much fun we can have getting outside together and learning more about our region. I’d also like to again express my sincere thanks to Jim French who graciously offered his time and expertise to provide such a well-planned and informative afternoon.”

Membership in EQLT’s Leadership Circle is available to supporters who donate annual operating gifts totaling \$500 or more, whether as one gift or through periodic contributions. The Leadership Circle provides critical organizational funding which sustains the East Quabbin Land Trust’s diverse program offerings.

As Judi Korzec explained, “We are glad to support the land trust because we know it takes community and funding to protect this land for generations to come. There is great thought and collaboration provided to the effort, and it is admirable. We are now introducing EQLT to the next generation and have our grown children join us at events, so that they can help continue the mission.” ■



A bald eagle was resting on this island in the Quabbin Reservoir.



WHEEL-A-THON AT MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL



SUMMER 2018 | VOLUME 15 | ISSUE 3

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7TH ANNUAL STATION LOOP RAMBLE...

Kid's One Mile, 5-Mile Classic, 5k Run/Walk and a 5-Mile Race Walk! Sunday, October 14, 2018

at the intersection of West and Hardwick Roads, in New Braintree

Start Times:

- Kid's One Mile at 9:30 am
- 5-Mile Race Walk at 9:50 am
- 5-Mile Classic at 10:00 am
- 5k Run/Walk at 10:05 am

All events incorporate part of the *Mass Central Rail Trail* and begin and end at the site of the former New Braintree Train Station. The races travel past scenic farmland, and through deep woods, and skirts the Ware River.

The 5-Mile Classic and Race Walk route is a hilly road and trail race with a flat, fast finish on the Mass Central Rail Trail. Kid's One Mile and 5k Run/Walk are entirely on a flat course. Adults must accompany children running this course. Each mile is marked and mid-run water stop provided. Post race refreshments and free raffles.

Entry fee: \$20.00 per adult -- \$10.00 for children age 13 and under
Special discount for veterans - \$10.00

All fees are non-refundable. Registrations received by September 14th will receive a T-shirt.

Day-of registration: Begins at 8:30 am and ends at 9:30 am on October 14th.

