

# Comments on Connetquot

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings Friends!

Spring has arrived! I hope you are like me and find joy in walking through the Preserve, taking notice of the daily changes as spring takes hold. On my walks along the Red Trail, I look for the skunk cabbages pushing up through the soft soil in their alien/mushroom-shaped striped foliage. I strain my ears to hear the peepers singing their ode to spring. The yellow bloom of the daffodils always brings a smile to my face, as I hope it does to yours.

New York State's annual I Love My Park event is scheduled for May 6. See page 4 or our website for more information. I love my park 365 days of the year, and I hope you do too! You can show your love for Connetquot more than one day a year by signing up to be a volunteer. The flowers we plant on I Love My Park Day need to be watered, as does the Pollinator Garden. Trails always need attention. As you hike or ride, take note of what needs to be addressed, and let us know! Do you love the history of the SSSC and Islip? Consider becoming a docent (aka house tour guide) or joining the History Team. Do you fish the Conny? Wish to help maintain the water flow? Let us know and we can connect you with the many organizations that volunteer to keep the Connetquot River pristine.

Thanks for being a Friend of Connetquot!

Janetmarie Soley

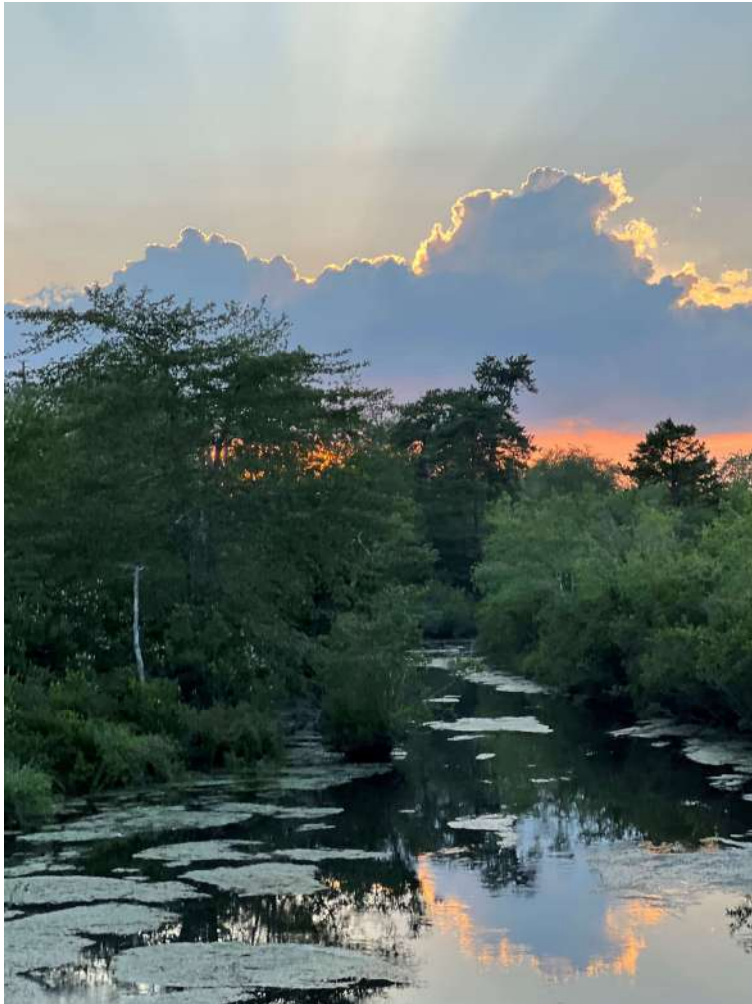


Photo: Patti Grasso

## *And There Was Light!*

The next time you visit Connetquot River State Park Preserve, take a look at the rear of the Clubhouse and admire the new skylight in the Fish Prep Room. Its leaky predecessor, some rotted wood and old, water-damaged tin ceiling have been replaced in another of FOC's restoration projects. Also, ugly fluorescent lights have given way to period-appropriate fixtures.

The New York State Regional

Economic Grant FOC received last year funded the work. We remind you that the grant was a *matching* grant. Your contributions can help us fulfill our part!



Photos: T. Casey

Not yet a Friend of Connetquot? Please support our efforts to enhance our beautiful preserve. Join us online! Visit our website, [www.friendsofconnetquot.org/join](http://www.friendsofconnetquot.org/join).

## TWO THOUSAND YEARS OF FISHING AT CONNETQUOT

by Bob Giffen

The first fishermen on the Connetquot River were Native Americans. A spot on the river, now called the "River Bend Site", was carbon dated in 1976 by Walter Saxion, an archeologist for the Nassau County Museum, at 2000 bp. I got an invitation to do some late work with Walt on this project, after I had found several projectile points, fire-cracked stone and charcoal at this site. These were uncovered after a new fire lane widened the existing road around 1971. Walter's survey found that this site consisted of a large area about 250 feet by 300 feet covered with many dozens of uniformed-sized rock platforms of ring-shaped stones.

In these stone features were several layers of red-fired quartz cobbles, many blackened, greasy, and covering bits of charcoal. It was determined later that the charcoal was of the red oak group. Walter mentioned that several other sites in the Northeast had similar features, and he first attributed the rock formations to stone boiling. However, we both concluded that Native Americans were harvesting and smoking fish.

I also knew that a nearby section of the river had an unusual feature: it had lots of cobble-size stones, about the size of a softball, similar to the ones in the stone platforms. We theorized that Native Americans could have used these stones not only in the fire pits, but also for constructing stone weirs, thereby constricting the river. This would make the fish move through a narrow gap making it easier to spear or net. I also knew that anadromous fish would have spawned in the river, since there was access to the sea before the mill pond was dammed up about 1750. Alewives, smelt, and shad in the spring, and large sea-run brook trout in the fall, would most likely have swam upstream to spawn.

I know from a friend of mine, Joe Lynch, that to keep a fire smoky, you start a fire with dried oak, then add green hickory, then bank or cover the fire. That explained the many layers of stone, since the Native Americans were smothering the fire with stone cobbles to produce smoke.

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### Mission Statement

The Friends of Connetquot is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation, conservation and history of the 3,473-acre Connetquot River State Park Preserve. We work to help management protect a pristine environment and historic buildings and artifacts. We also support educational programs, fishing facilities and hiking and equestrian trails.

The records of the Friends of Connetquot can be viewed in our room at the Preserve. The New York State Office of Charities Registration holds copies of the annual charities reports required by law.

PLEASE NOTE: Automatic defibrillators are available in the administration office, the BOCES room, the main building and at the hatchery. Preserve staff is trained in their use.

For Emergencies in the Preserve: Call the New York Park Police at 631-669-2500.

Also notify the Entrance Booth at 631-581-1005.

## HOOF BEATS

by Carole Scialdone

The mild winter of 2022/23 is just wrapping up with only a few bitter cold days to speak of. We all thoroughly enjoyed riding the unusually warmer days we've been experiencing. Luckily, due to the mild temperatures, the ground stayed soft all winter long, making it easier on us and our horses.

The equestrians appreciate how busy the Park staff has been; dragging trails, trimming deadwood from high up in the trees, clearing downed branches, picking up rocks, adding sand to Collins Crossing and much more. They do an outstanding job maintaining the beautiful trails of Connetquot.

With spring here now, the daffodils are already starting to sprout. Soon the thousands of beautiful yellow flowers will bloom for all to enjoy. The trees along the trails will be greening up and best of all we'll start seeing the adorable fawns, goslings and poultts strutting their stuff.

It won't be long before each day gets a little longer and a little warmer. Spring is definitely one of my favorite seasons because every part of the Park comes alive. From plants and trees, animals and their babies to hikers and their families, all celebrating the wonder of Connetquot River State Park Preserve.

A rare snowy day this winter. Photo: Kathy Schlosser Bohm



## *Restorations: The Icehouse ...*

by John Remmer

*The mission of the Friends of Connetquot is to protect the environment and historic buildings of the Park, as well as its history. We also support educational programs. This is all apparent with the work that we've done on the Hatchery, the Mill and the Pump House as well as throughout the Clubhouse. We now have embarked on two new projects to further those aims: the Icehouse and the Marsh Room, a duck hunting exhibit we will describe in the next issue.*

The Connetquot icehouse is unusual in that it is larger than most estate icehouses and smaller than commercial ones. It is also a historic Park building. Over 25 years ago, the Icehouse appeared to be in jeopardy, especially the brick portion of the northeast wall. Engineers and architects examined it and drafted a concept to repair or rebuild the structure and turn it into a library. The funding required to achieve this made the project unattainable.

The deterioration continued, and we realized that the Friends would have to step up to face the challenge. The building first needed to be cleaned and sanitized and then stabilized. After this was completed, we could repair the brickwork and interior wood paneling. If we could achieve this, it would be possible to open the Icehouse to visitors as an exhibit of its original function: before refrigerators, ice had to be harvested and stored for later use in iceboxes.

The challenge for the cleaning phase was that the interior of the building was filled with firewood, snow fence, chain link fence, old furniture, and 12" to 18" of bird and animal feces. What a mess! When the hardwood and hardware had been removed, a hazmat team was hired to clean out the droppings and sanitize the building, including the attic area.

The second phase had to focus on the fact that lower portion of the Icehouse had been constructed with a 1-1/2-brick-wide, or 14" thick, wall. In addition to bulging out, the middle portion of the interior exhibited serious

deterioration on the inside, with areas only 1/2



brick wide, or 4" thick. Fortunately, when an exploratory trench was dug outside, the bricks appeared to be in good condition. For safety while working on the wall, columns to support the roof were erected inside on top of concrete pads. Three steel tie rods were also installed across the building to prevent any further spreading.

With the safety steps completed, a steel reinforced concrete footing and wall support were pumped into place. This addition to the brick wall bonded to the old wall and filled in the voids. The building was now stabilized.

Isachsen Dock Builders donated their time to erect the columns and install the tie rods. Dennis Buckshaw Builders donated their time to install the new concrete footing and foundation wall. The materials for both projects were paid for by the Friends.



## *... and Another Project at the Carpenter Shop*

by John Remmer

Attached to the back side of the Carpenter Shop is a "five hole bucket privy." Whereas a "pit privy" must be relocated periodically over a new pit, or hole, this structure did not. There are three seats in the women's side and two on the men's side, with a partition in between. The seat nearest the door to the women's portion is smaller than the other two seats and was probably used by children.

This privy was a significant facility until regular plumbing became available with the installation of the water tower and pumphouse, probably around 1900. Of note is that toilet paper became commercially available in America in 1857 and Scott Paper Co. introduced it on a roll in 1890.

Part I of Clubhouse Projects described the repairs to the siding on the Carpenter Shop. In addition, new doors and windows were fabricated and installed in the men's and women's sections of the privy. The Park crew then painted the building.



The Women's side of the privy. Photos: John Remmer



## Board Spotlight: Ritamarie Weigand

Our most recent addition to the FOC Board, Ritamarie Weigand, has enjoyed a remarkable varied career. After earning several majors and minors at SUNY Cortland, she taught Social Studies in Queens. Upon moving to New Jersey, she became a social worker for Family Service of Morris County. While there, she facilitated two groups of Parents Anonymous, which resulted in her being installed on the N.J. State Board of the organization.

Eventually, she found her way to Morris County Probation Department where she was assigned to the Juvenile Division for 20 years, then the Community Service Unit for the last six. Presaging her work at FOC, Rita says, "If my caseload had more than three crises, I would lament my career choice of dealing with other people's problems, preferring to be locked in a room without a phone where I could do research, because books don't talk back, as many juvenile delinquents frequently do."

Her love of history led her to participate in archeological digs, including one in Maryland along the Chesapeake and another in a county park in New Jersey, yielding evidence of a 500-year-old Native American village and a hose and slave quarters, respectively.

At that stage of her life, she loved blues music. While still working full time at the Probation Department, she became active with the newly-formed Skylands Blues Society of Northwest New Jersey, eventually becoming Vice President. She began taking photographs of blues musicians who played locally, publishing them in the Society's newsletter along with occasional articles. Her work came to the attention of a national blues magazine, and she became a staff photographer. Later she was photographer and columnist for *Big City Blues* magazine and contributed to other magazines as well as several albums, newspapers, books and a PBS documentary.

When her mother needed care, Rita moved back to Long Island. Her nearly lifelong friend, FOC Board Member Janice Fischer, told me about the History Project she had been working on. She jumped at the chance to get involved, spending time in a room where the books don't talk back, or as she puts it:

"Involvement in the History Project has been an absolute joy. The location in the park is fantastic. Seeing the daffodils in the field in the spring, the geese, deer and horses going past the Conference Room window every day, are all a delight not found elsewhere. I love finding new, permanent homes to preserve historical documents being discovered daily in the unmanaged collections stored in our building. I'm thankful for the opportunity to repurpose the skills I've learned over the course of my lifetime and transfer them to the Friends of Connetquot projects, where I'm in it for the history. Board members Janet Soley and James Fitzpatrick, apparently want to expand my horizons by taking me fly fishing in the warmer weather, which I'm looking forward to doing, as long as someone else takes the hook out of the fish's mouth, should I actually catch one!"



**May 6, 2023 - 10:00 to 12:00**

I Love My Park Day is an exciting statewide event to improve and enhance New York's state parks and historic sites and bring visibility to the entire state park system and its needs. Volunteers from across the state will participate in cleanup, improvement, and beautification events at New York State parks and historic sites. Volunteers will celebrate New York's state park system by cleaning up park lands and beaches, planting trees and gardens, restoring trails and wildlife habitat, removing invasive species, and working on various site improvement projects.

If you love Connetquot, please plan on coming to the Preserve on Saturday, May 6 and join the Friends as we join together to help maintain the beauty of our treasured state park and historic site.

Those interested in volunteering in the project at Connetquot River State Park Preserve can register beginning April 1 at [www.ptny.org/ilovemypark](http://www.ptny.org/ilovemypark) or [www.friendsofconnetquot.org](http://www.friendsofconnetquot.org).

**Friends of Connetquot Program Series  
at Connetquot River State Park Preserve**

*Long Island Lighthouses: Past and Present*

**Presented by Robert Müller  
President of the Long Island Chapter of the US Lighthouse Society  
Saturday, April 29 - 1:00 PM**



*Long Island Lighthouses: Past and Present* examines the history of more than 20 light stations over 200-plus years. It is based on Müller's 2004 book of the same name and his experience as a local lighthouse history researcher and preservationist. Images in the program range from the 1850s to the present and include lighthouse keepers, lightships, and lighthouses that no longer stand. Information includes personal stories about many of the personalities involved in this history.

Mr. Müller has been researching the history of our local lighthouses since 1998, having served as a volunteer at several of the area's lighthouses. He is currently a member of the Old Field



Lighthouse Foundation's Board of Directors and a member of the Stepping Stones Lighthouse Preservation Committee. Mr. Müller was the founding President of the US Lighthouse Society's Long Island Chapter (2000-2005), a position he resumed in August 2019, and a past President of the East Islip Historical Society.

*Fishing with Friends*

**Club-style fly fishing for FOC Members ONLY!  
Memorial Day, May 29**

What's club style? There's no assigned beat! Walk the river from beat 1 to 30 and back again! This is a wonderful opportunity to try a site you've wondered about but didn't want to commit to! Three sessions are available at \$30 per session. Choose the session that works around your Memorial Day Plans! There's a maximum of 25 spots per session. Purchase the day and we will supply lunch!

Sessions:

8:00 AM - 12:00 PM

12:00 PM - 4:00 PM

4:00 PM – Sunset

Valid New York State Fresh Water Fishing License Required.

You will be contacted prior to the 29th with additional information and instructions.

Due to space limitations, we are accepting only one person/one session per registration form. No refunds.

Registrations are open through May 25th.

Lectures are free for members of Friends of Connetquot. Non-members pay \$5/person.  
Please consider becoming a member and enjoy our programming all year long. Seasonal parking rates apply.  
To register or to become a member, please visit [www.friendsofconnetquot.org](http://www.friendsofconnetquot.org).

# History Being Preserved

by Ritamarie Weigand

In the fall of 2022 the Friends of Connetquot began a volunteer History Project whose mission is to inventory, sort, archive and preserve the contents of the more than 160 boxes of documents, photographs, books and artifacts it possesses related to the history of the Connetquot River State Park Preserve. FOC also holds more than 75 ledgers containing dates and signatures of every member and guest who stayed at the private South Shore Sportsmen's Club from 1866 to 1976. The team is also winnowing out material not related to FOC's collection policy and donating it to other appropriate facilities, the Vanderbilt Museum in Centerport, the Queens Historical Society, the Long Island Maritime Museum, the Oakdale Historical Society, the Idle Hour Taxpayers Association and the Islip Town Historian, George Munkenbeck.

As of this writing the History Team has sorted and inventoried about half of the boxes but have not yet touched the ledgers. Every day is filled with the thrill of discovery, as each box is a trove of historic significance. Examples of Team findings are scrapbooks, letters and photographs that belonged to Muriel Vanderbilt. After the death of her father, Willie K., in 1920, the 900-acre estate initially sold to real estate developers, the Burke Brothers. We found flyers advertising lots of the Vanderbilt Estate for sale, complete with rides from Brooklyn offered to prospective buyers.

In 1926, Mrs. Lucy Pritchard Sawyer Thompson, a wealthy widow, fulfilled her lifelong dream by founding the Idle Hour Artist Colony on the approximately 14 acres of the barn and surrounding buildings, which were converted into residences and building lots. The team found original maps of the Artist Colony with the names of the residents, along with the prospectus, deeds, bills of sale, receipts, cancelled checks and even court orders. We also located correspondence between Mrs. Thompson and her sons, Sawyer and William A., who managed the community, along with photographs of the colony. One exciting find is Mrs. Thompson's 1923 U.S. passport, including her photograph.

Artists in the Colony included Lynn T. Morgan, muralist Ed Deming, and wood carver and self-proclaimed last Pony Express rider, Bronco Charlie Miller. Bronco Charlie operated a local favorite restaurant that bore his name on Montauk Highway in Oakdale. The team discovered a pen and ink drawing by Morgan, a signed exhibition catalog by Ed Deming dated 1925 and an autographed photo of Bronco Charlie.

Aside from Artist Colony artifacts, the FOC boxes have yielded material from various other time periods. During the 1930's, the Vanderbilt mansion was the home of the cult-like Royal Fraternity of Master Metaphysicians, who preached that thoughts could manifest material outcomes and believed that immortality was achievable. Baby Jean was their experiment in eternal life. FOC Board member and Scholarship Director, Janice Fischer, has studied Peace Haven, the cult's name for Idle Hour, in depth. FOC was fortunate enough to have Mrs. Fischer present an informative, well-attended program about the organization—and its eventual demise—last June.



Recently the History Team uncovered documents pertaining to the Bourne Estate, Brookwood Hall, Long Island shipwrecks and the development of the Long Island Rail Road. FOC Historian Keith Snedecor and computer specialist Bob Simmons are diligently working on updating the Sportsmen's Club membership and employee lists. Both lists continue to expand as new information regularly emerges from their research. Additionally, Keith is researching and writing biographies for as many members the Sportsmen's Club as possible.

The Long Island Library Resources Council has provided the History Team with several all-day training sessions with archivist Nicole Menchise. The intensive training taught about 20 volunteers how to inventory, sort and archive our collection.

A significant part of preservation is the scanning and storing of documents, photographs and artifacts. The Vanderbilt Museum has been scanning more than 55 archived boxes gifted by the Friends of Connetquot. Those scans will eventually be placed on the New York Heritage web site, to be viewed by anyone with access to the internet. The actual documents will be stored in the museum's professional archive, accessible to historians and researchers. FOC may scan materials ourselves with the fabulous book scanner donated to us by the Long Island Library Resources Council, of which we are now a member. Also, LILRC may scan documents and upload them to the New York Heritage web site. Whichever option is chosen, our goal is the preservation and protection of historical material, using the best modern technology available, and making the collection accessible to the people of Long Island.

Found by the History Team: photo right: Lucy Thompson's passport; photo left: map of the Artist's Colony

## *A Bit of Connetquot Surfaces in California*

About ten years ago, Sacramento, California resident Terry Flowers purchased a painting, “Billiard Room at the Connetquot Club,” shown right, by Myrtle York. It’s been hanging in her art studio ever since. Recently, curiosity about the historical significance of the work sent her on an internet search that yielded just one photo of the room. She emailed FOC President Janetmarie Soley, who in turn forwarded her message to our very knowledgeable Keith Snedecor.

Keith replied with a brief history of the Club and an old black-and-white photo that confirmed Terry’s suspicions about the setting of the painting. He also noted that the painting indeed had historical value: “Myrtle was the wife of Connetquot River Club member Miles F. York, and her painting of the Billiard Room is very surprising and a rare discovery indeed, as women were only allowed in that room one day a year on New Year’s Day. They had their own area for socializing and could not co-mingle with the men.”

Terry wondered whether the gentleman in the painting was someone with a connection to the Club or merely a fictional portrayal. By now Craig Kessler, who once worked at the Club, was in on the email thread and chimed in with the identity of the bartender. “The employee is Bill Spadaro, House Manager and bartender, as pictured here. Bill was responsible for servicing the members’ requests, not only bartending, but things like keeping the fireplace going, fetching cigarettes or other requests. It may sound strange, but the closet under the stairs had a complete selection of cigarette brands. He also controlled the shotshell inventory, dispensed as requested from this same closet.

“An average day might find 3-4 members in the Billiard Room who required his attention, but on the big occasions like the Opening Day Duck Season Dinner, he would play an integral role keeping everyone happy.”



Terry’s exchanges with Keith reveal why she possesses the painting: “What a pleasant surprise to hear more information regarding the painting by Myrtle York! I have always thought that there is something special about this work of art. In my mind, I never considered it a piece of ‘fine art’ but rather a wonderful piece of ‘outsider art’ or ‘American folk art.’ I always thought it would look great hanging in a bar or tavern. The painting has so much character and just pops with color and intrigue. I love it.”

Terry doesn’t recall exactly where she purchased the painting, but Club Member Miles F. York was a Californian who came to New York in 1942. He became President of the Atlantic Companies, marine insurance underwriters, in 1953 and retired as Chairman in 1969. Since he passed away in 1973 in Berkeley, California, one might assume the Yorks brought the painting with them, which is how “Billiard Room at the Connetquot Club” ended up across the country.

As an aside, the Atlantic insured some famous shipwrecks, including the gold-laden *S.S. Central America*, the “ghost ship *Mary Celeste*, and *R.M.S. Titanic*.

Photo left: A cropped portion of the photo Keith sent to Terry.

## *What’s Happening in the Park*

Assistant Park Manager Patrick Hein reports that the January 14 Winter Celebration was a big hit and much enjoyed by the public. Park staff continues maintenance work to remove hazardous trees along trails and fill in large holes and ruts.

At the hatchery the Wednesday Trout Crew has been removing and cleaning inside and around Pond 9. The brook trout eggs have shed their egg sacs and graduated to fry! Warm weather has allowed stocking to continue regularly throughout the winter. Some of Connetquot’s trout will be used to stock Caleb Smith State Park Preserve in time for their Flyfishing Clinic on Saturday, March 25, with Connetquot’s own Clinic slated for April 8.

The Friends of Connetquot thanks Parks and Trails New York and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation for their support of our efforts.



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COME JOIN THE FRIENDS



From our History Team: Bronco Charlie at his cabin on Montauk Highway in Oakdale.

**Give Us Your Best Shot:** As always, we encourage you to share your photos of the Preserve with us. Send us up to four photos in .jpeg or .png digital format for a chance to receive a year's subscription to the FOC newsletter. Photos must be current (within a year of submission) and shot within the park. Please give the approximate location of the scene, if possible. DEADLINE for next issue: **June 5, 2023**. Send your files to Tom Casey at: [2caseys@optonline.net](mailto:2caseys@optonline.net).

This issue's winning photo, by **Patti Grasso**, appears on the cover.

Entries will be judged by the Friends of Connetquot, Inc., and their decision is final. Each image submitted must be the original and unpublished work of the participant, who must also be its copyright owner. The participant shall retain copyright to the image entered for the competition. By submitting an image for the competition, the participant will be regarded as having granted the organizer the right to use the image in print, broadcast and/or electronic media without any fee payment, for the purposes of promoting the competition or promoting the Friends of Connetquot, Inc. Where any image is so used by the organizer, the participant will be credited accordingly.

**Please check the date on your mailing label and renew your membership if it has expired. Together you and the Friends of Connetquot can have a powerful impact on revitalizing the Connetquot Preserve for future generations.**