



THE LAY *of* THE LAND

Extraordinary Generosity

Our newest property is a gift from a long-time Madison resident

News from the Madison Land Conservation Trust

FALL 2015

Fred (“Fritz”) Rettich didn’t want the beautiful, riverside farm that he and his family lived and worked on for over a century to be chopped up by developers.

THAT’S WHY HE LEFT IT to the Madison Land Conservation Trust (MLCT) in his will. He—and his sister-in-law, Maria Derblom, who lives nearby—were confident that we would cherish and protect the property, as they did for decades. So after his death in 2013 at the age of 97, we became the proud owners of more than 10 spectacular acres of river front, woodlands, hay fields, and orchards at 274 River Rd.

Any visitor exploring the property is immediately struck by two things. First, it is stunningly beautiful—with rolling meadows leading down to the shore of the Hammonasset River, enormous oak trees, grape arbors, fruit trees, and views across the river to the wetlands.

And second, it feels like a time capsule; its 24 structures, range from the circa 1820 farmhouse to old barns filled with antique farm equipment, corn cribs, chicken coops, and World War II-era storage buildings.

Two hundred years of history

Ben Diebold, member of the Stewardship and Rettich committees of the MLCT, pored over the historical and land records to piece together the story of the farm.

The parcel was an old Madison farm originally owned by one Amaziah Bush in the 1800s. Fred’s father and mother, Frank and Anna, purchased it in 1906, after emigrating from Germany. At that time, there was a strong, local German community in Madison, with a German language club and a preschool. And the vibrant beer-brewing industry in New Haven at that time undoubtedly made the new emigrants feel at home.

Frank worked many jobs—including a stint at one of those New Haven breweries—in addition to working on the farm. The couple had four sons, who helped raise chickens during World War II. Interestingly, this apparently entitled the sons to draft deferments.

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This old hay rake is one of several pieces of antique farm equipment that will be donated to Bauer Park.



A corn crib with a river view is one of the buildings that will be saved.

- Demolition—most of the structures are beyond salvaging and will be demolished, for safety reasons.

- Developing a long-term plan for the property's future.

“We are excited to be able to open this land up for all Madison residents to enjoy, but first want to make sure it has been cleaned up properly so we can make a great first impression,” says Mike Maloney, President of the MLCT board. “That’s not only part of the Land Trust’s mission, but also Fred’s wish. There will be a walking trail through woods and fields. It will be an amazing birding destination. And visitors will be able to go down to the river bank.”

Follow Fred's lead and leave your mark on Madison's future with a bequest

Donating land through a bequest entitles you to own, manage, and enjoy your land during your lifetime while giving you the peace of mind that it will be cared for in the future. The donor remains responsible for maintenance and real estate taxes on the property, but removing land from an estate can significantly reduce inheritance taxes.

To learn more please contact Mike Maloney at: Mike@MaloneyLLC.com

You can be a part of it.

Of course, there will be ongoing maintenance of the property—including any remaining buildings. There will be hay to mow, grapes to prune and pick, fruit trees to care for.

Interested volunteers—stay tuned—we will need your help!



Peaches and grapes, ready for picking. Scott Cole, of Cole's Farm and Greenhouses on Horse Pond Road, remembers Rosa's home-made peach pies: “She used to thank me for the ears of corn I'd bring over now and then with a delicious pie or two.”

“All of us who live in or near Madison are the lucky recipients of an incredible gift. Exploring this land is like pulling off the wrapping paper bit by bit, and discovering one treasure after another inside.”

MIKE MALONEY, PRESIDENT, MLCT

They also rented trailer parking space to visitors of Hammonasset Park during the off season. Three of those trailers remain on the property today.

Fred, the youngest of the four sons, was born in 1916. He married Rosa Buehler, who emigrated from Germany in 1956. Together, they kept a garden, fruit trees, grapes, chickens, and a few milk cows. They had a large hay field. Over the years, they added various structures, including corn cribs, a cow shed, and chicken coops.

Making the property safe for visitors and the ecosystem

If Fred Rettich hadn't donated this property, the Land Trust could never have dreamed of acquiring it. It would likely have sold to developers for millions of dollars.

But with this gift, we find ourselves with responsibilities and expenses that the Land Trust has never had before. Usually, when we acquire new land, we get to work clearing and marking

trails, posting signs, and maybe establishing parking areas—plenty of work for a volunteer organization.

The Rettich parcel, however, has catapulted us to a whole new level of property management. Without your generous support—which we have recently used to fund this new work—we could not have accepted this gift.

Here are just a few of the major tasks we've undertaken, thanks to your gifts, in order to make the property accessible to the public:

- Securing and assessing the property and everything on it.
- Mitigating environmental hazards. “The Rettichs were extremely thrifty,” says Diebold. “They were prototypical Yankee farmers. They didn't throw things away the way we do now. They also collected things that might someday be useful on the farm: old lumber, electrical equipment, tools, many gallons of used motor oil, paint, pesticides, etc. We've been making sure all this material is collected and disposed of properly.”



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ABOVE: An aerial view of the property looking east with the boundary shown in yellow. The Hammonasset River flows toward the Sound from the lower left to the top of the photo; just below the river on the right are woodlands with giant oaks; to the left of the woods is an ancient barn and hay fields; to the left of the fields are the original farm house and barn, outbuildings, garden plot, fruit trees, and grape arbor.

LEFT: Volunteers Eric Alletzhauer and Al Goldberg removing paint from the basement of the house.

RIGHT: Looking toward Clinton from the big hay field.

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Late summer rose from Rosa Rettich's garden.



Remembering Barry Haigis

On June 20, the MLCT honored the memory of Barry Haigis, a devoted steward of the Fence Creek marsh, by renaming it the **Barry Haigis Fence Creek Salt Marsh**. Barry's wife, Betsy, was joined by family and many members of the community for the ceremony on Middle Beach Road led by Joe Oslander, Stewardship Committee chair and long-time friend of Barry's. Pictured are (l-r): Barry's sons John and Brad; Betsy; Ann, Barry's daughter-in-law, and Barry's youngest son David; and David and Ann's children, Matt and Jessica.

You're invited to an Open House!

Next spring, once cleanup is complete, we look forward to welcoming you to the Rettich property for a tour. Until then the property will remain closed to visitors.

Thank You, Donors!

Your generosity keeps the MLCT going and growing!