

The Marsh: Rev. Ainsworth's Community Legacy

PHILIP F. ALLAN



A PAIR of wood ducks squeak protests as we leave the woods road and climb the dam. On a magnificent May morning we scan the marsh where tree swallows swirl, dip, and sweep across last year's cattails. Mount Monadnock, which gives its name to geological counterparts throughout the world, towers to the north. The "Parade Ground," where the local militiamen once drilled, lies on the left. And on the rise to the right sit "The Manse" and the old church where the Reverend Laban Ainsworth had lived and preached 175 years ago. In between lies the marsh. The town is Jaffrey, N.H.

The work of a private enterprise, the F. W. Greene Estate, Inc., has created in this historic and beautiful landscape a community asset that cannot be measured in dollars. You will see why.

Although all the land now occupied by the marsh was once owned by the Reverend Mr. Ainsworth, it was sold at auction when he died in 1858. Later known as the Ethan Cutter Meadow, the land was reacquired in 1886 by Mary Ainsworth Greene and Rear Admiral Greene, her husband. It is now a part of the Greene Estate. There are five heirs who share and share alike, Theodore P. Greene of Amherst, Mass., Mrs. W. Ainsworth Greene of West Hartford, Conn., and Walter F. Greene and Norman and William Torrey, all of Jaffrey, N.H.

The story of this marsh really starts with the Reverend Mr. Ainsworth. In his day it was the custom of New Hampshire towns to provide for the livelihood

of the ministry by furnishing land. The best farmland was not to be wasted on the minister by the thrifty Yankees, but there was plenty of rocky forest land; and that is mostly what the Reverend Mr. Ainsworth got. He made the best of it, however, and rented out the farmable areas during his lifetime. Some of this land changed hands in subsequent years before being pulled together again by the minister's descendants.

By 1905, farming became unprofitable. The meadow grew up to bluejoint, willows, alders, and red maples. A dry spell in the early fifties exposed the meadow streambed. Then, in 1959, some beavers moved in. They dammed the brook and, thus, set marsh development going.

I met Walter Greene and the Torreys in a fine old colonial house in Jaffrey. Together they told me the story of how a community marsh was built by the Greene Estate heirs. I judge that this is not a wealthy estate; and that conservation interests and community spirit, as well as financial contributions from the five families, played the major role in development of the marsh.

Norman Torrey—the Torrey brothers married Greene sisters—is a family his-



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torian. He produced photos, maps, and news items that told something of family and marsh history. Walter Greene, a former professor of biology at Syracuse, Springfield, and Beirut Universities, filled me in on wildlife of the area. William Torrey, appraiser and selectman of the town of Jaffrey, described details of construction and arrangements with neighbors whose land was somewhat involved. He, too, led us on a guided tour of the marsh in a huge, old mud-slogging Plymouth car.

As we rode up the hill to "The Manse," Walter Greene told how the beaver dam gave way, but set them thinking of a permanent pond and marsh. As a start, the area was cleared of brush and trees. Next, the heirs got in touch with Walt Nelson and Ken French of the USDA Soil Conservation Service office at Keene, who assist the Cheshire County Soil Conservation District.

Plans were prepared by the SCS men and OK'd by the estate for construction of a dam. The plans called for a large water control structure of corrugated pipe to handle normal flow through the dam.

Flashboards on the upstream side were to be installed to permit regulating the water level, and thus aid in growing food plants for waterfowl.

Island for Waterfowl

The plans also provided for seedings to cover exposed soil on the dam and in the emergency spillway; plantings of Tatarian honeysuckle and autumn olive in the marsh environs for wildlife food and for ornamentation; an island, to provide a safe resting spot for visiting ducks and geese and, perhaps, for nesting. Nature trails, too, were planned.

"It was all very well to plan," commented William Torrey, "but there were complications. Before we could proceed, we had to enlist the cooperation as well as the legal agreement of neighbors, for a part of the dam would go on the properties of Elmer Ford and Agnes O'Hare. And, then, some land belonging to other neighbors would be flooded."

In June 1963, the dam was finally built. "Luckyly," notes Norman Torrey, "we

found a bed of clay within a few feet of the damsite. And this made a good, tight, core wall for the dam. Another drought in that summer postponed the filling of the pond, but heavy rains fell on November 8 and soon water covered 20 acres. In almost no time there were lots of horned-pout and pickerel and townspeople started fishing." These old-time favorites of New Hampshire fishermen lag in popularity only behind the native speckled trout.

"We allow hunting, too," Norman told me, "and the local boys can trap muskrats and other furbearers."

Not only the pond and marsh but also most of the rest of the 220-acre estate is open to considerate use by the 3,200 residents of Jaffrey. For the bird watchers walking the trails, there is a host of migrant warblers, with a modicum of the resident species; and thrushes and flycatchers; finches, sparrows, and grosbeaks; swallows; and many other interesting species of birds.

I talked over with Walter Greene the possibilities for use of the tract by schools for nature study. He assured me that there were almost unlimited opportunities, not only for schools but also Boy Scouts and similar organizations.

Although little such use has been made during the short span of its existence, the men all hoped for the estate to serve this purpose. Here, the town lad can see wood duck nest boxes in operation; visit beaver dams to see how those animals step the water down into the marsh; and find in the pine woods the scarlet, juvenile newts whose olive-colored parents loaf in the pond and steal worms from the hook of the horned-pout fisherman.

And for the girls there are ladyslippers, marsh marigold, and trout lilies. If they but will, the Scouts here can learn the wintergreen flavor of sweet birch sap; the feel of mud between the toes and of pine needles under foot; the delicious smell of the Mayflower or the not-so-nice skunk cabbage—both should be known! Down by the water's edge they will find what the New Hampshire oldtimers called the "stripéd adder," the harmless garter snake; in the ruin of Laban Ainsworth's barn, the "spotted adder" or milk snake

and, alongside an old stone wall, the racy black snake.

We reached a point in our tour where even William Torrey's durable Plymouth could not go because of the spring thaws. So we walked on over to the "Parade Ground." It has been plowed recently. The young seminarians from Ireland, learning to be missionaries at the nearby Queen of Peace Seminary, are growing potatoes there. In return for this community benefit, the Greeses and Torreys have willing workers when trails need clearing or shrubs need planting.

As an addition to his January 20, 1966, news story published in the *Monadnock*

Ledger, Norman Torrey described the quick response of wildlife to the building of the pond, marsh, and adjoining lands.

"To the west of the pond," he noted, "lie a few large fields and several hundred acres of wilderness, an ideal area for recreation and for wildlife conservation. Beavers, muskrats, mink, and an occasional otter have taken over the pond, along with black and wood ducks, blue herons, occasional egrets, bittern, kingfishers, woodcock and snipe, pheasant, grouse, and numerous other birds. . . . The marsh is thus a boon not only to the Greene heirs, but to the whole community." I think he has a point.

Fields and Ponds for Wild Ducks

WILLIAM W. NEELY



YOU CAN HAVE a place to hunt wild ducks—on your own land or by forming a hunting group and leasing some land.

If you own land which can be managed for ducks, not only can you have hunting for yourself and your friends, but you can also get income through the sale of shooting privileges.

But whether you own or lease land, techniques to attract ducks are the same.

In some sections of our country, the wild ducks will come into dry crop fields to feed. But since there is lots of cropland, you can't count on them coming to yours. The surest way of having ducks come to your land every year is to provide their food in the feeding condition they like best—in water. This is true anywhere.

You can provide the combination of food and water for ducks in several ways. One is to construct and manage a "duck-

pond." Another way is to impound water for only a part of the time.

A duckpond is a permanent impoundment. The water depth varies from a few inches on the edges to perhaps 6 feet or more in the deepest places. The duck foods that you grow are aquatic plants—the kinds of plants which live in water.

One good example is sago potamogeton (*Potamogeton pectinatus*). Many kinds of ducks like both the seeds and the vegetative parts of this plant. Sago will grow anywhere you have a pond with "hard" water, alkaline water, or water which is a little salty.



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