

The 1960s | A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PRESERVING OPEN SPACE



### *A very fine offer*

**W**HEN the N.J. Highway Authority declared 24 acres along the Shark River at the intersection of Tinton Falls and Wall and Neptune Townships as surplus property left over from the Parkway, County leaders thought the site, which included part of a former Girl Scout Camp with woods and wetlands, would make a fine county park. In February, 1960, the Freeholders agreed to match a \$15,000 bid that the Highway Authority had received for the land, and in March Neptune Township Committee members offered to donate five adjacent acres to the park, which Joe Irwin called a “very fine offer.” Neptune officials ultimately donated 40 acres to Shark River Park, the first of many land donations to the Park System.

The acquisition of the Shark River site for the first county park in May, 1960 marked the beginning of the County’s park system. In 1960, Monmouth was way behind other central New Jersey counties. Ocean had 250 acres of parkland for its 96,000 people; Mercer had 623 acres for 266,000 people; Somerset had 800 acres for 143,000 people; Middlesex had 1,080 acres for 432,000 people; and Morris had 2,200 acres for 260,000 people. Monmouth County had one 24-acre park for its 334,000 residents.

Planning Director Pike developed a comprehensive plan for year-round use of Shark River Park, with a pond for fishing and skating, picnic tables and grills, a playground and playfields, a shelter building, restrooms, parking, and trails. He enlisted the Freehold Soil Conserva-

tion District to dig the pond, the County Engineer’s Office to provide the engineering, the County Road Department to provide employees and equipment, and the Corrections Department to provide prisoners for some of the labor. Crews started working on June 22, 1960, about three weeks after the County took possession of the site. With Shark River Park, Pike and other county officials established the precedent for high quality recreational facilities and for maximizing the County’s investment with additional resources.

### *The urgency of the problem cannot be overemphasized*

After getting Shark River Park underway, Pike used a grant from the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency to produce a “Recreation Study and Plan” in December, 1960, that laid out a blueprint for establishing the County’s park system on a “firm foundation” of facts and careful planning. In this remarkably prescient study, Pike wrote,

*Higher incomes, a shorter work week, paid vacations and holidays, earlier retirement, and longer life spans, are a few of the major factors which have led to the need for increased opportunities for leisure time activities. In addition to these national changes affecting recreation in all areas of the country, the need is further actuated in Monmouth County and the Monmouth Coastal Region by a rapid expansion of population and the transition in the character of the region. The outward pressure from the New York - North Jersey Metropolitan area will continue to result in a growing*



*Left: Construction of the pond at Shark River Park, 1961.*

*Right: Ice skating on the pond at Shark River Park, 1968. Shark River Park opened in 1961 and was immediately popular, with over 5,900 visitors during its first year.*

*Opposite page: Shark River Park.*

**“Recreation Study and Plan”** Monmouth County Planning Board, 1960, *Regional Facilities*

*Regional Parks should be large—100 acres or more—and should be fairly close to the population of their service area. Regional parks should take advantage of unusual natural or scenic features such as streams, lakes, ravines, views, woods and other undisturbed areas. They should be designed to serve all age groups, and should include facilities for picnicking, boating, hiking, riding, swimming, active play areas, and day camps.*

*Reservations, Preserves and Natural Areas should include large tracts of land in their natural*

*state as much as possible with a minimum of physical improvements. They may be owned publicly or may be otherwise reserved from intensive development...The main objectives of this kind of area are to prevent urban sprawl, provide watershed for urban communities, and conserve wildlife. Reservations are usually large, ranging from 500 acres up...They should be designed to serve the population of an entire urban region.*

*population and a corollary diminution in farms, open space and woodland.*

*Monmouth County has long been known as a recreational center with its beaches and waterways drawing summer visitors from great distances. The recreational opportunities in recent years have also attracted many permanent residents seeking an ideal environment. The municipalities of the region are planning for a high type of residential and industrial development. There is severe competition for this selective type of development which is extremely*

**New Jersey Green Acres** *a proper responsibility of government*

*The provision of lands for public recreation and the conservation of natural resources promote the public health, prosperity, and general welfare and are the proper responsibility of government. Lands now provided for such purposes will not be adequate to meet the needs and expanding population in years to come. Expansion of population, while increasing the need for such lands, will continually diminish the supply and tend to increase the cost of public acquisition of lands available and appropriate for such*

*purposes. The State of New Jersey must act now to acquire and to assist local governments to acquire substantial quantities of such lands. (Green Acres Bond Act Legislation, 1961)*

The Green Acres program awarded its very first grant in 1962 to Monmouth County for Holmdel Park and, thanks to the continuing efforts of Park System staff, Monmouth County has received 29 grants totaling \$31.3 million in grants and \$26.5 million in loans to help preserve 7,302 acres for 17 parks and several greenways.

*sensitive to the environment in which it locates. Superior recreation facilities are an essential component of this environment. To preserve the natural recreation advantages of the County and attract the desired type of development cannot be left to chance. It will require careful planning with foresight followed by determined action. The region and County must keep pace with growth and development by expanding recreational opportunities.*

Pike proposed creating regional county parks for current and future recreation, conservation of natural areas and wildlife, protection of water supplies, preservation of rural landscape aesthetics, and the limitation of intensive development. For a “comprehensive system of reserving open space,” he proposed both “the outright purchase of strategically located open areas” and “conservation easements...which would limit a property to agricultural and other open uses.” As he noted, “The benefits to the public are many and varied and accrue not only to the present population in surrounding developed areas but to future generations.”

Recommending that “County parks should be nature oriented and accentuate facilities which cannot be economically or efficiently developed and maintained by municipalities,” Charles Pike called for “an equitable distribution of facilities” to serve people throughout the County. Anticipating that some private recreation facilities like golf courses would be lost to development, he foresaw the need for “public replacement to guarantee well-rounded and diversified regional recreational facilities.”

Noting that acquisition opportunities east of the Parkway were rapidly fading, he stressed, “The urgency of the problem cannot be overemphasized. The key to a good County Park system for Monmouth is immediate acquisition of land in the path of continuing development taking place westward from the coast.”

Pike recommended acquiring land adjacent to Shark River Park “to realize the full potential of this site,” along the Swimming River to protect its watershed, along the Manasquan River for “the development of surface water supply,” at bayshore and ocean beaches, and in the County’s “Western Area” to meet the “growing needs” there. With the State’s Division of Water Policy and Supply considering a 3.8 billion gallon off-stream reservoir to capture Manasquan River water for public consumption, he recommended that “the Manasquan be developed for multiple uses with full utilization of its recreational potential.” His vision for fishing, hiking, and boating at the reservoir would eventually lead to one of the County’s most visited parks, the Manasquan Reservoir.

In calling for “superior recreational facilities” providing a range of activities near population centers and for preserving open space for watershed and wildlife protection and the enjoyment of nature, the “Recreation Study and Plan” provided the blueprint for developing the Monmouth County Park System.

The Freeholders appropriated \$75,000 for the Department of Parks in 1961 to finish Shark River Park and, after it opened in May, the high number of visitors quickly demonstrated the demand for year-round regional recreation facilities in Monmouth. The County’s planning efforts proved to be quite timely that year, as Governor Robert B. Meyner proposed the State’s first Green Acres Bond Act of \$60 million to double the amount of State land from 250,000 to 500,000 acres and to support local land preservation with matching grants. At their June meeting, the members of the Planning Board resolved to “develop existing recommendations for County parks to the point where the County can take advantage of funds to be supplied for the ‘Green Acres’ program if it passes the November referendum.”

### *We’ve got to live with nature*

While County leaders worked on plans to acquire land for parks, Mrs. Geraldine L. Thompson invited Freeholder Director Joseph Irwin in the fall of 1961 to discuss her interest in donating Brookdale Farm in Lincroft for a County park. Mrs. Thompson had lived on Brookdale Farm, one of New Jersey’s premier horse estates, since 1896 and she often welcomed children and families to enjoy its natural beauty. In the late 1950s, she told a reporter, “We’ve got to live with nature. The children have to feel the ground beneath them and go out in the woods and see the trees and birds.” After her meeting with Irwin, she told another reporter, “I would like nothing better than to know that Brookdale in the future would be an open place for children and for animals because they have a place here, too... I would want it to be under the control of the county and open to all.”

Irwin followed up the meeting by writing to her, “Brookdale Farm has probably the greatest potential for County Park development of any lands in the County... We are most gratified that you are giving this matter serious consideration... The Park Department and Board of Freeholders recognize a critical need for the preservation of a County Park area in the northern part of the County, which is growing more rapidly than any other. We have been investigating a number of sites, none of which have the outstanding potential of Brookdale Farm.”



Geraldine Thompson, owner of Brookdale Farm, in the 1950s. During her long lifetime, she worked to improve the early public health, welfare, and juvenile justice programs in the County and State, and was known to many of her contemporaries as the “First Lady of New Jersey.”

After New Jersey voters overwhelmingly approved the \$60 million Green Acres Bond Act in November, 1961, Joseph Irwin and Donald Sterner quickly met with Matthew Adams, Commissioner of the State’s Department of Conservation and Economic Development, to discuss the County’s park plans. Assemblyman Alfred Beadleston wrote to Commissioner Adams on December 8th that “Monmouth County is extremely anxious to share in the Green Acres program... The Monmouth County Board of Freeholders and the Planning Board have done a fine

job in planning for these recreational areas, and I sincerely believe that your Department should do everything possible to cooperate fully in making realities of their proposals.”

In a County meeting with Holmdel officials in early 1962 to discuss potential sites, William (Jay) Duncan, who was the secretary of the Holmdel Planning Board, offered to sell his farm to the County for a park. Charles Pike and his colleagues were delighted, as Duncan’s 137-acre farm—historically known as Longstreet Farm—was ideally located in a populated area and large enough for a regional park, and it was also one of the County’s most historic farms. Mary Holmes Duncan, Jay Duncan’s wife, was born on the farm and was a descendent of the

original Longstreet settlers. Since the Green Acres regulations did not permit the purchase of improvements, Pike excluded the 6-acre Longstreet homestead from the purchase, but indicated that the County would like to acquire it later on.

Planning Director Pike and his staff identified another potential park site in Freehold Township next to the State’s Turkey Swamp Public Hunting and Fishing Grounds. Containing both pinelands and upland forest, the 189-acre Bohnke Farm and the adjacent 83-acre Schnitzler property on Georgia Tavern Road offered the potential for both recreation and the conservation of important natural areas.

To take advantage of these opportunities, Monmouth officials pre-

View of Longstreet Farm in 1974. When Green Acres changed its regulations in 1965 to permit the acquisition of properties with “improvements,” park officials negotiated a purchase agreement allowing Mr. and Mrs. Duncan to live in the farmhouse at Longstreet Farm for the rest of their lives while the Park System restored the farm’s outbuildings and opened them to the public.



pared the County's first Green Acres applications in 1962 to acquire the three farms to establish Holmdel and Turkey Swamp Parks.

### *A uniformly high standard of recreational activities*

After submitting the Green Acres applications, Joseph Irwin and his fellow Freeholders created the Board of Recreation Commissioners, as provided for in State legislation, to run the County parks. In August, 1962, they appointed the three-member Board, with Victor E. Grossinger as Chairman and James Ackerson and Walter Schoellner as members, to promote "a uniformly high standard of recreational activities throughout the County."

Victor Grossinger lived in Middletown and knew the County well. He had grown up on a horse farm, was a partner in Grossinger and Heller, a real estate and insurance firm in Red Bank, and had served four terms on the Board of Freeholders. Walter Schoellner was a retired businessman who lived in Middletown and loved the outdoors. He had served on the County Planning Board's Resort and Recreation Committee since 1955, and he had worked closely with Charles Pike and Donald Sterner in examining potential park sites and in setting up Shark River Park. Jim Ackerson grew up and farmed in Holmdel and was the Mayor of Holmdel.

Green Acres awarded the County matching grants in the fall of 1962 to establish Holmdel and Turkey Swamp Parks. At the Freeholders'



Victor Grossinger (right) with Park System naturalist Tom Kellers in 1975

### **VICTOR E. GROSSINGER,** *A fine gentleman*

Victor Grossinger, or "Bud" as everyone called him, grew up in Middletown on Indian Springs Farm, which is now Tatum Park. His father ran the farm for Charles Tatum, and Bud worked closely with Tatum's daughter-in-law, Genevieve Tatum, in securing her donation of the farm to the County in 1973.

Grossinger grew up cherishing the "rolling countryside of the County," and remembered when wagons loaded with hay, corn, and potatoes from Monmouth farms lined up to be loaded onto steamers at Keyport and Red Bank for the trip to New York. As he recalled, "During that pastoral period, an open field meant work, not play...A kid's day off meant taking a horse to the blacksmith. There wasn't a place where you could stop and enjoy more than an arm's length of room."

Victor Grossinger served on the Middletown Township Committee from 1932 to 1944, when the Freeholders appointed him to fill a vacancy on their Board where he served four terms. He served



as the first Chairman of the Board of Recreation Commissioners from 1962 until his death in 1980 and oversaw the growth of the Park System to over 4,000 acres in 17 parks with 185 employees. Commissioner Grossinger was most proud of Longstreet Farm and its interpretation of turn-of-the-century farming, "When you go through the farm there it makes you appreciate how hard farmers worked." The National Association of Counties recognized his contributions with its Park and Recreation Officials Award in 1978.



*Left:* Work on Holmdel Park's roads and main pond began in 1963, and the park opened in May of the following year.

*Right:* Holmdel Park's ever-popular sledding hill opened in 1968 and is pictured here in 1977.

organizational meeting in January, 1963, Freeholder Director Irwin said that these new parks “will be a great asset to the people of Monmouth County and during the coming years will be enjoyed by hundreds of thousands.” The Recreation Commissioners appointed Walter Schoellner as Director of Parks, “to stimulate the full utilization of park and recreational facilities,” and Charles Pike provided him a desk and clerical support in the Planning Board office on Court Street in Freehold.

To maximize the County’s park efforts, Charles Pike suggested to Walter Schoellner and the Freeholders that they hire a person with parks training and experience. Pike recommended Jim Truncer, an Allentown resident who was a State Park superintendent working with the Green Acres program in the State Parks Land Office in Trenton. Jim was “born into the business” of parks and recreation, as he later said,

### WALTER SCHOELLNER

*A natural choice*

Walter Schoellner was born in Newark but had spent summers in Leonardo since he was a small child and moved there in 1925. He served as a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary in Atlantic Highlands during the Second World War and served as Chief Harbor Master there until 1960.

Over the years Schoellner hunted and fished in many parts of the County, “walking fields and woodlands and becoming quite familiar with the variety of trees, wildflowers, and wildlife in the region.” He served eight years on the County Planning Board, helped establish Shark River Park, and was a member



of the County Shade Tree Commission.

Walter was a “natural choice” to run the Board of Recreation Commissioners in 1962, and he served as Board Secretary from 1964 to 1967. He championed the preservation of Hartshorne Woods and worked to create Howell Park, the site of the County’s first golf course.

having grown up in Parvin State Park where his father, Joseph Truncer, was Superintendent. Following Freeholder Benjamin Danskin’s advice, the Freeholders appointed Jim in August of 1963 to the Recreation Commission so that he could learn about County operations and staff.

### *If and when this land is available*

As Charles Pike and Walter Schoellner worked on Holmdel Park in 1963, they were already thinking of expanding it. In 1955, the U.S. Army had installed Nike Battery 54, including a 22-acre Control Area in Holmdel Township, as part of its Cold War defenses for New York City, but it was already becoming obsolete. Schoellner wrote in December to Albert Wilson, chief of the U.S. General Services Administration’s Real Property Division, “We would appreciate hearing from you if and when this land is available, as we believe the County of Monmouth would be interested in acquiring this piece of land to add to its Park holdings which join this Base.” While Wilson responded that the Nike Base remained active, County officials had planted the seed to acquire it.

In June, 1964, Charles Pike hired Jim Truncer as the first parks professional on the County staff and he stepped down from the Board of Recreation Commissioners. As Jim recalled,

*I was hired as a principal park planner on the Planning Board payroll, after I spent just under a year on the Recreation Commission. There were probably no more than 10 employees when I got here. There were three or four at Shark River, three or four at Holmdel, and two down at Turkey Swamp. Some were on the road department payroll, as one gentleman had been a foreman with the road department. Another had worked in buildings and grounds. They were still on the other department payrolls. When I started there were three of us working in a 12 ft. by 14 ft. room on the third floor of the Hall of Records—my desk was a drafting table; Walter Schoellner, who was Secretary to the Board, had a desk, and so did Mrs. Florence Murphy, the secretary. So, we were used to being close to one another.*

Jim put together a budget for 1965 that included seventeen full-time and six summer employees, as well as a five-year outline of capital improvements, including the acquisition of at least 500 acres “to raise the County Park areas to the minimum standards required.” The Freeholders requested that Jim look for sites “eligible for Green Acre funds before the program expires,” and he proposed doubling the size of Holmdel Park to over 300 acres, primarily “to provide protection of the

existing stream courses which flow through the area." When a Holmdel official asked Charles Pike if there was a need for the additional acreage, he responded,

*There is no doubt about it. The County is somewhat behind counties of a similar character. We have tried to plan a park system so that these parks would serve an area of the County, and to make them large facilities, as opposed to local active recreation. The primary purpose of the County Park is to preserve land in its natural state. As time goes on, this will draw people outside the township and will serve the Bayshore area or the north section of the County. That will be the function of the park.*

### *Great possibilities for recreation*

In early 1965 County leaders set their sights on another Federal site destined to become surplus property. The U.S. Army was starting to decommission part of its 250-acre Highlands Army Air Defense Site (H.A.A.D.S.) that adjoined forested highlands known as Hartshorne Woods, property the Hartshorne family had owned since Richard Hartshorne first settled the area in the 1680s. Walter Schoellner wanted to preserve Hartshorne Woods, and he wrote to the U.S. General Services Administration to express the County's interest in the adjacent H.A.A.D.S. parcel as well.

Walter also wrote to Clifford P. Case, New Jersey's senior senator, seeking his help, "We are vitally interested in the acquisition of desirable land areas. This 103-acre piece not only affords historic value as the first promontory you see when approaching New York harbor from the sea, but parts of this area are still untouched and, as natural areas, could be preserved for posterity. As this land area is bordered on two sides by the Navesink and Shrewsbury Rivers, it will afford great possibilities for recreation." County officials would tenaciously work to preserve the entire H.A.A.D.S. property over the next 20 years.

With visitation growing at the County's three parks, the Recreation Commissioners adopted a County Park and Recreation Policy in 1965 "to preserve the beauty of the parks; to protect the wildlife that adds to the interest of the park; to maintain peace, quiet, and respectability so that the county parks and recreation areas can be enjoyed by those who come with the serious intent to enjoy them; and to maintain as high a standard as possible in serving the public and to protect visitors from impositions."



The Board of Recreation Commissioners in the early 1970s. Standing are Freeholder Buddy Allen, Jim Truncer, and Robert Laughlin. Seated are Ross Maghan, Victor Grossinger, and Donald McKelvey.

**JAMES J. TRUNCER**, Secretary-Director  
Monmouth County Park System

*Parvin State Park was my backyard*

*My father was born in Williamstown in Gloucester County, and he was trained as a forester at the New York State College School of Forestry at Syracuse University. He wound up working for the State of New Jersey as a land surveyor and, as the first Superintendent at Parvin State Park, he was involved in its development and then ran it.*

*My mother and dad would often take their canoe up the head waters of the lake, and we'd stop somewhere along the way and bathe or have a picnic lunch as a family activity. In summers there were lots of people boating, swimming, fishing. In winters we walked out across the frozen lake, and my dad would take a hatchet and go test the ice to see how thick it was. In terms of experiences growing up, living there, I had just a myriad of them. So, Parvin State Park was my backyard.*

*I hung around the park and the work crews and went with them, and went around with my dad. In his philosophy he was service oriented, in terms of people having worthwhile, enjoyable experi-*

*ences. One of the things I always admired about my father was his work ethic...I think we're ultimately judged by the work that we produce and how well we do it, the quality of the work. While some people may get ahead faster, in the final analysis, I learned that it's the quality of the work that stands out and separates you.*

Jim earned a bachelor's degree in park management and resource development at Michigan State University in 1961 and worked as a planner for the National Park Service's regional office in Virginia. After serving on active duty in the N.J. Air National Guard, he went to work for the State Parks Lands Office and Green Acres Land Acquisition projects. The Freeholders appointed him to the Board of Recreation Commissioners in 1963, and after he earned a master's degree in park and recreation administration from Michigan State in 1964, he left the Board and became the Director of County Parks and Recreation in 1966. In 1974 he became the Board Secretary and continues to serve in that position.



In the first of several revisions over the years, the Recreation Commissioners updated their Park and Recreation Policy in 1968 to preserve “examples of nature’s handiwork for the appreciation and enjoyment of this and future generations, while maintaining the surroundings as a naturalistic setting without obtrusive evidence of man’s interference. The natural beauty spots embraced within the Monmouth County Parks are a great natural resource belonging to the people that should be protected and preserved for all time.”

As more people moved into the County, there was a growing interest in golf, which Eatontown realtor Harold Lindemann knew well from his clients. Lindemann recommended in 1965 that the County purchase the 302-acre Windsor Stock Farm along the Manasquan River in Howell Township for a golf course, writing to Walter Schoellner,

*It is a rare property and it would be hard to find such a large tract in Monmouth County which has the combination of being on the river, having a good brook, numerous ponds in such a natural untouched setting, and a group of buildings on a knoll in such good condition. It would seem that this property would be ideal for a golf course combined with recreational areas in the wooded portions. . . At the rate developers are buying land, such places will be nonexistent for County purposes in a few years or, if available, will be priced out of reach for use as golf courses.*

The Highlands Army Air Defense Site (H.A.A.D.S.) about 1985, prior to demolition of the military structures.



*A continuing governmental responsibility*

### **County Park and Recreation Policy for Monmouth County Board of Recreation Commissioners, 1965**

*Recreation is truly the improvement process necessary for the continued refreshment of the body and mind throughout the lifetime of the individual. Recreation is a human need, contributing to human happiness, and essential to the well-being of people and, as such, the public welfare is promoted by providing opportunities for wholesome and adequate recreation.*

*The nurturing of human resources is more important to the full economic potential of this County and to the State and Nation than any materialistic ethic. The development of human resources is inescapably related to recreation and education: eliminating ignorance, preparation for the fruitful use of leisure to improve the quality of living, and providing for an advanced technology society based on pride in work and earned leisure.*

*Recreation is a legitimate, continuing governmental responsibility directly associated with the public welfare. As such, the adequacy, quality, and continuity of the Park and recreation programs and opportunities provided at all governmental levels should be supported and advanced by professional leadership through the use of public and other supplemental funds.*

Freeholders Joseph Irwin and Benjamin Danskin were very interested but concerned about the challenges of developing and operating a golf course. As Jim Truncer recalled, “Joe basically said to me, ‘What do you think? Do you think we can do this?’ And I said, ‘Yes, if that’s what the Board would like to do, I see no reason why we can’t. We would have to hire a golf course architect to look at it.’”

The Freeholders purchased the Windsor Stock Farm in 1967 with a matching Green Acres grant and an additional grant from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Open Space Fund. The Recreation Commissioners named the new site the Howell Park Golf Course, and they commissioned the noted golf course architect Francis Duane to design it. The Commissioners and Park System staff had to learn how to build and operate a golf course.

In March, 1966, the Freeholders appointed Jim Truncer as the Director of County Parks and Recreation. They also appointed Harry Larrison



Harry Larrison, right, 1981.

### HARRY LARRISON

*There's nothing more rewarding than helping people*

Harry Larrison was born in Neptune and played All State football and basketball in high school. When he graduated he moved to Ocean Grove to pick up and deliver coal for his grandfather, John Larrison, who owned Larrison Coal and Oil Company. As Harry later recalled,

*When you travel, you take note of places where there's no open space, and I just made up my mind that we had to do something in Monmouth County to be sure that we preserved as much as we can...I think we all realized we had to do something to protect the land, so we just wanted an ambitious plan to buy parks.*

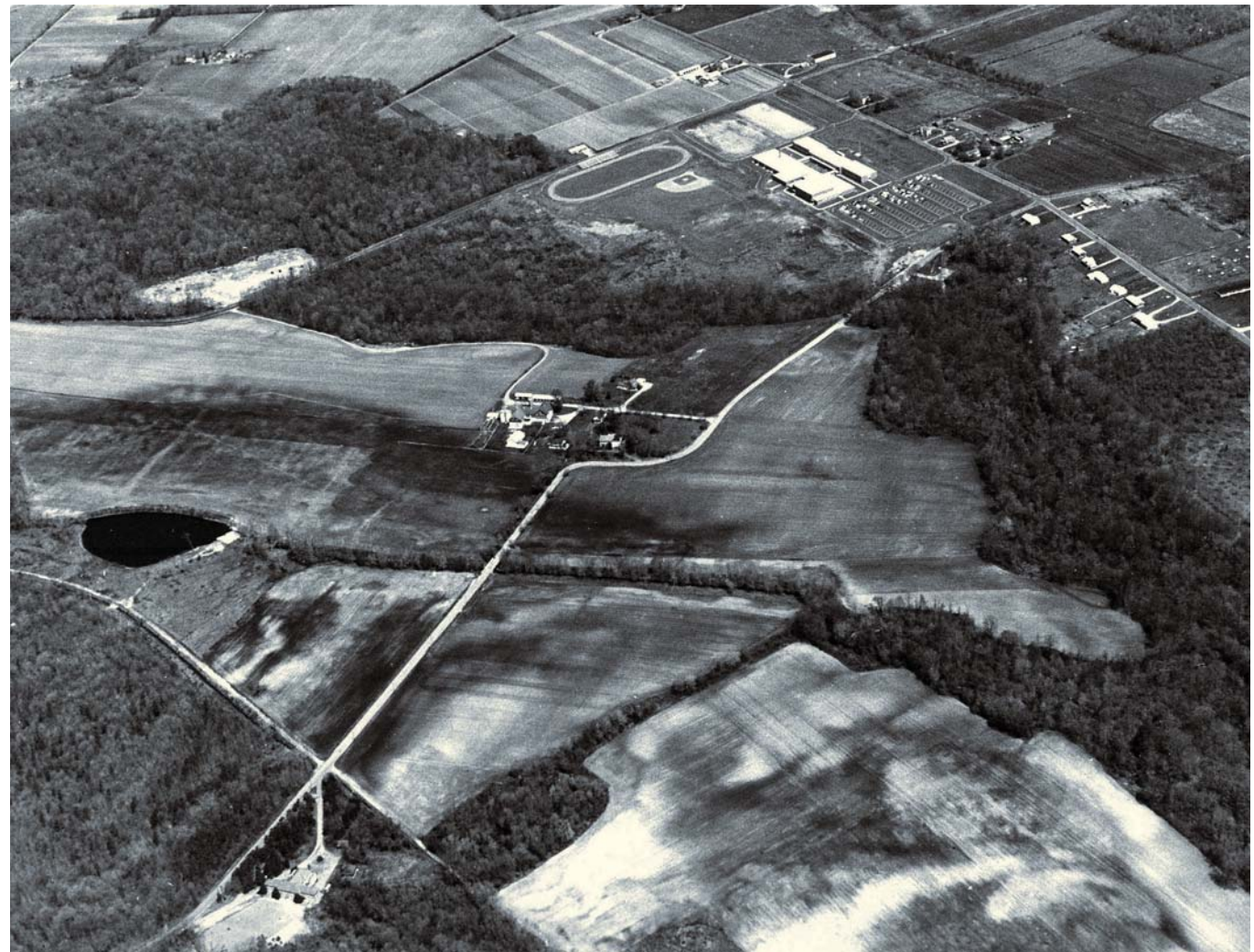
Harry joined the Eagle Hook and Ladder Fire Company, where his grandfather was a member, and the Ocean Grove First Aid Squad and served in both of these organizations for over 50 years. Harry was elected twice to the Neptune Township Committee and nine times to the Board of Freeholders, where he served as Director for 22 years. Regarding his years of public service, Larrison said, "I love the county. I really do. And I love the people in it. People are what make life worthwhile. I think there's nothing more rewarding than helping people." After he died in 2005 at the age of 79, Freeholder Director Thomas Powers, who ran with him in eight campaigns, said, "Harry was involved in everything good this county accomplished for the past 40 years."

of Ocean Grove to fill a vacant seat on the Board of Freeholders, and he quickly became a major booster of preserving open space in the County. In nearly four decades of public service as a Freeholder, Larrison always supported the Park System's efforts, and often played a key role in preserving specific parcels of land for County parks.

### *It was a great time*

As visitation in the four County parks approached 100,000 in 1965, nature walks led by Tom Kellers proved to be especially popular. Jim Truncer had hired Tom at the recommendation of Dave Moore, the Superintendent of Allaire State Park, where Tom also led nature walks.

The Windsor Stock Farm in 1967, future site of the Howell Park Golf Course.



Kellers had grown up on his family's farm in Wall Township where they bred pigs and sold corn and tomatoes from a roadside stand. He thought that he would be a farmer himself but, after graduating from Cook College at Rutgers University in 1960, he studied biochemistry and animal nutrition in graduate school and earned an education degree. Tom was teaching middle school science in 1964 when Dave asked him to lead some nature walks at Allaire State Park.

Jim hired Tom Kellers as the Park System's first full-time naturalist in 1966, and he joined the administrative staff in its cramped office on South Street in Freehold. As Tom recalled, "We were always having discussions about developing programs and activities for the parks. We thought that if people are going to see these resources as valuable, we had to get them to enjoy the parks and appreciate them. We would feed ideas off of each other. It was a great time." "We never said no," Jim recalled, "There wasn't anything we couldn't do. When someone would call and ask if we had a program, we would put one together."

Tom recalled that in the fall of 1966, "Jim thought it would be a good idea to put together a monthly newsletter about what we were doing in the parks, and I volunteered to do it. I wrote the text, Florence Murphy and Judy Zurick typed it up on an IBM and justified it, and then I put together the mechanicals." They produced the first *Green Heritage* in January of 1967, and the Park System continues to publish the popular newsletter quarterly.



Archery program at Turkey Swamp Park, 1960s.



Turkey Swamp Park opened in 1966 with a 20-acre lake, family campgrounds, and trails through the pine woods. This rustic style shelter building, still in use, was built overlooking the lake.

When the County acquired the 6-acre Longstreet farmstead at Holmdel Park in 1967, Tom Kellers and Jim Truncer consulted with members of the County's Agricultural Committee and decided to interpret the farm to the 1890s, "when agricultural technology was shifting from horses to tractors." As Tom recalled, "barn doors opened up all over the county," and farmers contributed old equipment and tools they had been saving for decades. The *Asbury Park Press* soon reported,

*An old Holmdel Farm is being transformed by the County Park System into a living replica of Monmouth County's agricultural past. The Duncan farm will be run by Park employees using authentic old farm machinery from before the age of mechanization. The farm, according to naturalist K. T. Kellers, will serve as an illustration to county residents and visitors of what farming used to be like in Monmouth County. The department is now collecting old equipment to be used on the farm. Most of the pieces acquired so far date back to the turn of the century, with some going back to 1870.*

In the summer of 1967 Jim hired the first of several young people who have played key roles in the development of the Park System and continue to do so. Bruce Gollnick became a seasonal employee for the first of two summers at Turkey Swamp Park. He had grown up in New Egypt, graduated from Allentown High School, and was study-

### **BRUCE GOLLNICK**

Assistant Director  
Monmouth County  
Park System

*Enormously  
beneficial to the  
Park System*



Bruce Gollnick was born in New Egypt but went to high school in Allentown where his father ran a family business. His mother's family had a feed mill in Cookstown and a dairy farm near Jacobstown, and he remembers "always being interested in history and archaeology."

When he went to work in Turkey Swamp Park in the summer of 1967, Bruce's assignment was "to maintain the facility and take care of the public." He returned to Turkey Swamp the following summer, and today it remains his favorite park because of its "primitiveness." In the summer of 1969 he worked as an intern at Holmdel and Shark River Parks in Special Maintenance. Bruce served an internship at the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority in the summer of 1970 as he recalled, "to benefit from some experience elsewhere." When he returned to the Park System full time in January of 1971 at the age of 22, Jim named him Assistant Superintendent of Parks, and he has served as Assistant Director since 1984.

ing forestry at Lassen College in California. As Jim recalled, "We had a conversation about careers and he was thinking of forestry. I said, 'You ought to think about parks. Forestry is not a growing profession and I think there would be more opportunities in parks.'"

Bruce took Jim's advice and finished at North Carolina State in the resource department, which included parks and recreation, and forestry and wildlife management. Bruce's decision to follow this career path has proven enormously beneficial to the Park System over the last four decades.

In the summer of 1968 Jim Truncer hired Spencer Wickham, who had just graduated as a landscape architect from Cook College at Rutgers University, to help design park improvements. Spence started surveying Brookdale Farm that fall, but he was drafted in January, 1969, for service in Vietnam. After returning for a tour of duty at Fort Dix, Jim told him, "When you get out, you have your old job back." Spence rejoined the Park System staff in 1971, and became head of the Acquisition and Design Department in 1976.

### *Solely for park purposes*

When Geraldine L. Thompson passed away at the age of 95 in September of 1967, she bequeathed 215 acres of Brookdale Farm "together with the buildings and improvements thereon... to the Board of Chosen Freeholders of Monmouth County... to be used in perpetuity solely for park purposes." Mrs. Thompson's donation included her magnificent residence, large barns and stables, paddocks, several houses and maintenance buildings. She provided a year of additional employment for her staff, giving Jim and his staff time to develop a park plan for the site. Her generous donation created Thompson Park as the centerpiece of Monmouth County's Park System.

### *A deep concern for open space*

Geraldine Thompson's donation of Brookdale Farm for Thompson Park and the growing success of the Park System inspired two other Monmouth County women to donate their farms, located within one and a half miles of each other in Freehold Township, in 1969. Like Mrs. Thompson, Jim Truncer noted, "The two donors had a deep concern for open space and wanted to see their lands preserved and not subdivided and developed."



Thompson Park in the 1970s with all the grand estate features—stately trees, expansive pastures, and handsome buildings—that made Brookdale Farm a superior setting for a County park.



### SPENCER WICKHAM

Chief of Acquisition  
and Design

*The best of both worlds*

Spence Wickham developed a love of the outdoors while visiting and working at his grandparents' potato farm on the north shore of Long Island. Spence's family had moved from Long Island to Everett, about a mile north of Brookdale Farm, when he was 11. As he recalled,

*We used to come down to Brookdale Farm in the winter and skate on a little pond behind one of the residences off the maintenance yard. There was always a bonfire going and Mrs. Thompson never had a problem. She enjoyed the company of the kids. She was very down-to-earth, very hospitable.*

Spence planned to study agricultural engineering at Cook College but switched to landscape architecture, as he recalled,

*This business of designing a landscape and then going out and actually installing it seemed to be kind of exciting and the best of both worlds; being able to do some design work and then transferring that to the ground and, hopefully, having a happy client. I enjoyed it.*

Helen Hermann of West Long Branch donated 35 acres of Baysholm, her 76-acre farm on Burlington Road in Freehold Township. Ms. Hermann first came to Monmouth County as a young girl, spending her summer vacations at her family's home in Elberon in the south part of Long Branch. She bought the William Henry Wikoff Farm in 1946, renamed it Baysholm, an old English word for 'young calves meadow,' and ran it for 24 years. The Recreation Commissioners named the site the Baysholm Conservation Area. She donated an additional 36 acres to it in 1973. Elizabeth Durand donated 90 acres of her farm on Randolph Road in Freehold Township, including fields, woods, marshes,

and a 3½-acre pond, and the Recreation Commissioners named it the Durand Conservation Area.

To highlight progress from the opening of Shark River Park in 1961 to preserving nearly 2,000 acres in five parks, Park System staff produced a 1968 Annual Report. This first Annual Report recognized the contributions of eighteen individuals and groups as "Friends of Monmouth County Parks," and highlighted the County's success in "fully utilizing" grants from Federal and State agencies "to protect open spaces that are vitally needed for the public good." In the Report the staff noted, "It is well that our land acquisitions have moved ahead in 1968. The urban sprawl has created a burgeoning population and a condition where open spaces and lands of high recreational value are being purchased and restructured at an alarmingly rapid rate."

During the 1960s the overall County population grew by 38%. From 1960 to 1969, the number of farms in the County fell 45% from 1412 to 783. In the 1969 Annual Report, Park System staff noted, "The preservation of open space is one of the most critical environmental needs of our time... Open farm lands in our county are disappearing at a rate in excess of 2,500 acres a year, with new homes and structures occupying what was once an open field and woodlot." In its first decade, the Park System had preserved, with the help of Green Acres grants and generous donations, 1,635 acres, created seven parks, and welcomed 1.2 million visitors.

*The permanent legacy we leave to our future generations*

### Monmouth County Park System Annual Report 1968

*To the Citizens of Monmouth County:*

*We have been most fortunate in being able to acquire and set aside some of Monmouth County's most valuable and scenic lands for the enjoyment of our county's citizens. The accomplishments as shown in this report could only have been realized as a result of the Board of Chosen Freeholders' interest and dedication in providing an outstanding countywide park and recreation system.*

*The goal of the Monmouth County Board of Recreation Commissioners has been and will*

*continue to be a program of providing the greatest possible benefits for the greatest number of citizens over the longest possible period of time. Members of our Board are dedicated to serving the public and are consistently guided by their realization that what is preserved today will become a part of the permanent legacy we leave to our future generations.*

*Victor E. Grossinger, Chairman  
Board of Recreation Commissioners*