

■ The 1980s | THE BEST LAND IS DISAPPEARING FAST



THE MULLENS' donation of Walnford demonstrated again that preservation of open space often involves preserving historic sites as well. In 1980, Joseph Hammond, Director of the Monmouth County Historical Association in Freehold, suggested to Jim Truncer that a countywide survey of historic sites would help government agencies and private owners understand the significance of the County's historic resources and their potential impact on open space preservation. They decided to collaborate on the project and, with a matching grant from the State Historic Preservation Office, the Park System hired two architectural historians, Gail Hunton and Jim McCabe, to conduct the survey. Through their Monmouth County Historic Sites Inventory they identified and documented nearly 2,000 historic properties, and this information has become increasingly valuable both as a planning resource for the County and its municipalities and as a record of the many historic buildings that have since been lost to development or abandonment.

### *Hard work made us believe in ourselves*

The County's rich agricultural heritage includes an historic African American community along Red Hill Road in Middletown. To preserve some of that community's history and to honor her parents, Bertha Heath of Middletown was the guiding force behind her family's contribution to the Heath Wing, an expansion of the Tatum Park Activity Center that was dedicated in 1981 in honor of her parents Clinton P. and Mary E. Heath. As the youngest of thirteen children, Miss Heath fondly remembered her happy childhood growing up on her parents' farm, where "farm life and hard work made us believe in ourselves and our parents made us believe in ourselves."

Longstreet Farm in Holmdel Park epitomized the melding of open spaces and historic places. While the Park System staff had adapted historic buildings at Thompson and Tatum Parks for operational and recreational uses, their restoration of the Longstreet Farmhouse, completed in 1983, was the Park System's first authentic restoration to interpret a historic site. Howard Wikoff, the Senior Park Manager at Holmdel Park, guided the careful restoration to provide, as Jim Brown noted in the *Asbury Park Press*, "an intimate look into a farm home in the Victorian period." With the expanded 'living history' tour now including the house, Longstreet Farm became an even more popular destination for families and school groups who wanted to experience a glimpse of the County's agricultural past.

*Opposite page: Clayton Park.*



Cross Farm, preserved as open space by Holmdel Township. The documentation of this historic farmstead in the Monmouth County Historic Sites Inventory has assisted Holmdel's ongoing preservation efforts.



Bertha Heath (right) at the 1993 African American Celebration.

The Park System's expanded programming proved quite timely in 1980, as rising oil prices forced people to look for leisure time opportunities close to home. Visitor Services staff distributed 150,000 copies of its quarterly program calendar that summer and, thanks to an upgraded phone reservation system, enrolled over 300,000 County residents and visitors in programs representing "a myriad of activities for all to enjoy."

The staff offered programs and activities for residents of all ages and interests—from tots to seniors, from swimmers to sculptors. For lovers of the outdoors, Outdoor Recreation staff ran local and remote hiking trips to New York and Pennsylvania, summer camps (including the very



The Longstreet Farmhouse during restoration, 1981.



At Longstreet Farm, school children in the 1980s learn about how food was grown in the 1890s.

popular Outdoor Odyssey adventures), canoe clinics and races, white-water rafting trips, and instructional workshops in sailing, bicycling, lifesaving, racquet sports, soccer, and belly dancing. Cultural Services' staff offered programs in fine and performing arts and handicrafts, as well as musical performances in the parks and trips to regional museums and New York City cultural events. For youngsters and adults with

physical and mental disabilities, Therapeutic Recreation staff established programs in horseback riding, dancing, arts and crafts, camping, hiking, and sports.

With the Parks as their classrooms, Nature Interpretation staff conducted gardening programs, nature hikes, frog and fossil hunts, fishing and birding expeditions, Indian pottery and Longhouse programs, photo safaris, wildlife art shows, and canoe trips in the Pine Barrens. They also organized Shark River Park and Turkey Swamp Park Days with outdoor programs from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., as well as trips to the Philadelphia Zoo and the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC.

The Park System received two significant boosts in 1981 in recognition of the quality of its golf facilities and management. Will Nicholson,

### ***More than we could have hoped for***

*November 10, 1980*

*Mr. Nick Fiorillo*

*Monmouth County Park System*

*Dear Mr. Fiorillo,*

*Your new Pine Barrens program, from initial contact to pulling the last canoe out of the water, could not have been handled more professionally, sensitively, and enthusiastically than it was handled by Doug Krampert.*

*The Jonathon School is a private, nonprofit school for neurologically impaired and emotionally disturbed adolescent youngsters. The reason I chose this program was so that the students could face a new challenge, could find resources in themselves they weren't aware of, and could experience success at a difficult task. Our students are not easy to deal with. They have many problems ranging from physical to emotional.*

*Doug made our trip successful. His patience and sensitivity were essential to help these kids succeed. He was firm and clear about safety and encouraging and rewarding about their attempts. I feel we accomplished more than we could have hoped for. I look forward to more activities with the Monmouth County Park System. I hope Doug will be involved with all of them.*

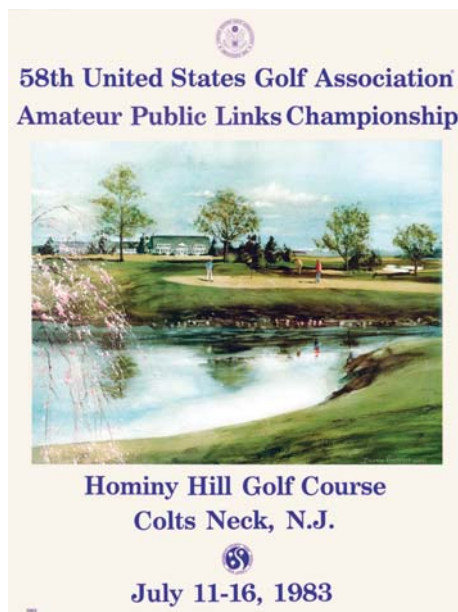
*Sincerely, Lew Gantwerk,  
Director, The Jonathon School, Marlboro, New Jersey*



Thompson Park Day, one of several family-oriented events initiated in the 1980s, offered games, music and crafts. First held in 1981 in the spring, Thompson Park Day is now a popular fall event.

President of the United States Golf Association (USGA), announced in the spring that it had selected Hominy Hill Golf Course as the site of the 58th United States Amateur Public Links Championship to be held in July, 1983. Only one other golf course in New Jersey had ever hosted this annual championship. Dave Pease, the Park System's General Manager of golf courses, called the USGA's selection of Hominy Hill "a validation of the conditioning and the other things we were able

The Park System commissioned local artist Donald Voorhees to illustrate a poster for the USGA's 58th Amateur Public Links Championship in 1983.



### Special People United to Ride

Therapeutic Riding Program at Thompson Park  
*Green Link* July-August 1981

*The objective of therapeutic riding is to relieve the rider's disability as much as is possible through a prescribed riding program. Disabled persons benefit in two ways: muscle strength, mobility, balance, coordination, and functions of the heart and lungs improve, and contracted muscles relax, improving the general physical condition of the rider. In addition, riders develop improved awareness, body image, and self-confidence.*

*Horseback riding has unique values for all. Relating with love to a large warm animal, socializing with a group of riders, and being responsible for providing basic care for the horse are beneficial experiences for anyone learning to ride. For those who are disabled, these take on even deeper meanings.*



Left to right: Jerry Coburn on Rocky, SPUR president Carol Dorward, SPUR founder Mary Alice Goss, Kim Oswald on The Cisco Kid, Carl Twitchell, and Sally Vaun. 1981.

to achieve with the resources, the flexibility, and the commitment to produce a public facility of this quality."

Also in 1981, Hovnanian Enterprises, Inc. of Red Bank, one of the nation's largest homebuilders, donated its 64-acre Pine Brook Golf Course in Manalapan Township to the County. Hovnanian had built Pine Brook within its Covered Bridge adult community in the 1970s as an 18-hole "executive course," which is shorter in length than a regular golf course for golfers who want to play shorter games. Hovnanian officials told the Freeholders that they wanted to turn the golf course over to the

Ranger Graduation Ceremony, 2005; Officer James Fay presents certificate to Ranger Kelli McDonald.



County because it would do an "excellent job" of maintaining it. Pine Brook provided a new level of play for County golfers, and it was the only public golf course in the northwestern part of the County.

In the summer of 1981 the Park System began a collaboration that has brought enormous benefit and enjoyment to a special population of Monmouth County residents. Along with other riding enthusiasts, Mary Alice Goss, a Middletown horsewoman trained in therapeutic riding, created Special People United to Ride (SPUR) to help children and adults with disabilities develop skills and confidence through horseback riding. When the non-profit organization received four donated horses to start the program, Park System staff set up space for it in a stable at Thompson Park. Since that small beginning, the collaboration between the Park System and SPUR has achieved far more than any of its initiators could have dreamed.

In January, 1982, the Park System honored the first of its rangers to graduate from a new ranger training program at the Monmouth County Police Academy. This was the first program held in the State under the New Jersey Police Training Commission's new mandate for the training of all county park rangers. Designed to enhance cooperation between the rangers and local police departments, the program included much of the same training given to regular police officers in such procedures as interviews, arrests, evidence gathering, report writing, and crowd control. With this program, the Park System's rangers reached a new level of professionalism that kept them in the forefront of county park rangers in the State and across the country.

### *Of primary importance*

To keep pace with the many changes going on around the County, Park System staff in 1983 completed the "Monmouth County Open

Space Guide," providing the first update to the land preservation goals identified in the County's 1970 "Open Space Plan." The 1983 "Open Space Guide" called for a natural resources inventory and a comprehensive mapping system for County and municipal agencies showing natural areas, existing open space and recreational areas, areas lacking open space, and proposed acquisitions. The Guide specified that the Park System should "periodically survey recreational needs and leisure activities and update the public about open space preservation needs and goals." It also noted that, "The preservation of historic sites in Monmouth County and in the Nation is essential. The history that is preserved will guide and educate the area into the future. Those historic sites which may be considered open space should be of primary importance in acquisition development and planning."

### *We are thrilled*

In October, 1983, the Park System's nearly two-decade-long effort to obtain the U.S. Army's former Highlands Army Air Defense Site (H.A.A.D.S.), now surrounded by Hartshorne Woods Park, suffered

### **"Monmouth County Open Space Guide," 1983**

*Open space preservation, whether it be for forest conservation, farmland preservation, recreational development, stream valley preservation, or protection of historic sites, is and should continue to be a major emphasis in Monmouth County. Priorities for open space designation in Monmouth County are:*

- 1. Unique environmental areas including wetlands, coastal beaches, aquifer recharge areas, stream corridors, floodplains, and areas supporting sensitive ecosystems.*
- 2. Areas with significant natural and cultural resources such as historical or archaeological sites, wildlife habitats, woodlands, and farmlands.*
- 3. Areas in an urban situation where open space and recreation deficits are apparent and population density great.*
- 4. Areas which provide access to existing open space, recreation areas, or areas of high usability potential, including abandoned railroad rights-of-way and utility rights-of-way.*
- 5. Areas which surround existing recreation or open space areas to act as an undeveloped buffer.*
- 6. Areas easily accessible by major transportation routes.*

another setback. The U.S. General Services Administration denied the Park System's request for a no-cost transfer of the site, in keeping with President Reagan's executive order to sell surplus property rather than transferring it at no cost to state or local governments.

Because of the County's long-standing interest in the site, the GSA subsequently offered to sell it to the County before offering it to the public for development. Park System Director Jim Truncer responded that the County did not have the funds to purchase the property and that its steep slopes would be unsuitable for any development other than recreation. Refusing to give up on a free transfer, County leaders turned to Congressman Jim Howard and Senator Bill Bradley for assistance. Thanks to their efforts, Interior Secretary James Watt announced a few months later that GSA would convey the site at no cost to the County. When a reporter asked Jim Truncer how County and Park System officials and staff felt after working so hard and long to preserve this key site, he replied, "We are thrilled." The GSA transfer of the 63-acre property in 1984 finally integrated the core of the former H.A.A.D.S. facility into Hartshorne Woods Park.

In November of 1983, New Jersey voters approved by a more than 2 to 1 margin the fifth Green Acres Bond Referendum for \$135 million, including a new "Green Trust" low interest loan program, for open space acquisition and development. As Jim Truncer told a reporter, "This vote speaks well for how the public feels about parks, recreation, and open space preservation, and also for what has been accomplished since the first Green Acres Bond Issue in 1961. I cannot think of



The Highlands Army Air Defense Site (H.A.A.D.S.), which housed the Missile Master control facility for the Nike missile defense of New York, seen here in the 1980s prior to demolition by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.



anything since the Civilian Conservation Corps—the CCC—in the 1930s that has had as big an impact as the Green Acres program in providing public recreation opportunities for the citizens of our State."

With the assistance of grants from Green Acres and the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Park System began extensive redevelopment of Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park. After operating the beach site since 1977 under an agreement with the City of Long Branch, the Park System acquired it as the County's first oceanfront park early in 1984.

The initial redevelopment plan for the beachfront called for clean-up of the entire site, restoration of dunes, and the construction of a pavilion with outdoor showers, parking, and a maintenance area. The City had previously used an old house near the beach as a lifeguard station, but it was slated for demolition because vandals had badly damaged it. The Monmouth County Historic Sites Inventory had identified the house as the "Navaho Lodge," the sole survivor of nine shingled cottages in "The Reservation," an exclusive enclave built around 1900 by Nate Salsbury, the principal owner of William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody's Wild West Show. Considering the history of the house and local sentiment to preserve it, Park System officials decided to move it to the northwest end of the park and renovate it for an Activity Center and park offices. Today, "Navaho Lodge" provides a glimpse of the turn-of-the-century era when seven U.S. Presidents summured in Long Branch.

Navaho Lodge at Seven Presidents Park in Long Branch during its 1983 move.



Marlu Farm and Cheeca Farm, looking northeast over the Swimming Reservoir, 1985.

*Threatening the very resources that make the watersheds so important*

Since the creation of its "Recreation Study and Plan" in 1960, the County had advocated the preservation of land along Swimming River to protect the water supply in the populous northeastern part of the County. Following up on the watershed protection reiterated in the 1983 "Open Space Guide," Park System staff identified two high-priority sites on the Swimming River Reservoir for acquisition with Green Acres funding in the 1980s: the contiguous Cheeca Farm and Marlu Farm straddling Holmdel and Middletown Townships. The two scenic historic farm properties comprised nearly 450 acres of prime farmland from the west boundary of Thompson Park to Longbridge Road, and from Newman Springs Road to the Swimming River Reservoir. Marlu Farm had once been part of Brookdale Farm, now Thompson Park, and Cheeca Farm formed a hilly peninsula extending into Swimming River Reservoir. Park

System staff appraised the properties, amicably discussed the County's interest with the owners, obtained the endorsement of the Middletown and Holmdel mayors, and submitted Green Acres applications.

County and Park System officials were stunned by news in April 1984 that both property owners had contracted to sell their farms to developers for cash. Like similar situations noted earlier, the property owners were unwilling to wait for Green Acres funding and County approvals. The Freeholders, Recreation Commissioners, and Park System staff were all determined to preserve the farms to protect the Swimming River watershed and to buffer Thompson Park from the impact of development, but their quest was now a lot harder and would be considerably more expensive.

The developers convinced Holmdel officials to change the zoning for the properties from single family homes to townhouses and presented plans to build 454 houses, a Holmdel Golf and Country Club with a 25-acre lake, and a 160,000 gallon per day septic treatment

plant. When the developers stated that their project would have little effect on traffic, a Middletown official predicted that it would “choke” Newman Springs Road.

In a study titled “Land Use in the Swimming River and Manasquan River Reservoir Watersheds,” the County Planning Board characterized the development situation in the watersheds as “urgent and pressing” and recommended prohibiting the extension of sanitary sewer service in the watersheds and the preservation of “critical and unique” tracts. The study noted that, “All of the resources the watersheds provide are part of what makes Monmouth County a desirable place to live... unfortunately, much of the development occurring in the watersheds is threatening the very resources that make the watersheds so important... These watersheds provide the County with a diversity of natural and cultural resources. The Swimming River Reservoir is a source of potable surface water for nearly one half of the County’s population.”

The Freeholders continued trying to purchase the two farms but lost their patience when the developers demolished the historic Peter Smock House, an important Greek Revival dwelling on Marlu Farm, without a permit. The developer’s rash actions and the solid support of Middletown officials and area residents, hundreds of whom came out to a public meeting to voice their opposition to the development and their support for preserving the properties, made the politically difficult decision easier for the Freeholders. In May, 1985, they unanimously approved the acquisition of both farms by eminent domain to protect the Swimming River watershed and Thompson Park. The various approvals that the developers had received from Holmdel Township for their plans more than quadrupled the acquisition cost.

One month later, the Freeholders announced another key acquisition on the Swimming River Reservoir for the Park System, the 381-acre Dorbrook Farm in Colts Neck Township. Murray M. Rosenberg, the former majority owner of the Miles Shoes Company of New York, had started amassing the acreage in 1937 with his purchase of the Atlantic Stock Farm, where he raised prize-winning cattle, and over the years he had added several adjacent farms along County Route 537. With its central location in a growing area, its expansive open fields, and its many usable buildings, the Park System designated Dorbrook Farm as a recreation area. Today, after many improvements and added recreation facilities, Dorbrook Recreation Area is the third most-visited park in the Park System.

By using Green Acres matching grants, long-term low interest loans from the new Green Trust Loan Program, and Federal Land and Water



Dorbrook Farm, looking north, 1985.

### **Monmouth County Park and Recreation Policy Additions**

December 2, 1985

*Historic and cultural sites and features of countywide significance are in need of preservation, authentic presentation, and interpretation, including elements of historical, archaeological, cultural, and paleontological significance. The County has a responsibility to survey, inventory and assist in historic preservation, restoration, reconstruction, protection, and interpretation of significant County historic and cultural sites and antiquities...for the enjoyment and benefit of existing and future generations.*

*The County has a responsibility to assist its political subdivisions in meeting the recreational needs of the disabled and other special populations by providing recreation facilities and services that complement those of local governments.*





Conservation Funds to acquire Cheeca, Marlu, and Dorbrook Farms, County officials preserved 830 acres of prime farmland and woodland and protected nearly three miles of shoreline on the Swimming River Reservoir. As Jim Truncer noted in the September-October 1985 issue of *Green Heritage*, "County conservationists have given the Freeholders high marks for their foresight and decisive action in the preservation of these open spaces for the citizens of our County." Holmdel Township's subsequent preservation of the adjacent Cross Farm and land along Willow Brook has resulted in more than four and a half miles of protected shoreline on the reservoir.

### *A place where city kids could come and learn about nature*

In another endorsement of the Park System's efforts, the Huber Family decided, 11 years after donating 119 acres of woodlands to create Huber Woods Park in Middletown, to donate the remaining 48 acres of Hans and Catherine Huber's estate, including their house, to expand the park. Mike Huber and his four siblings grew up in the Alpine-style house that his parents built in 1927, and recalled that the family's decision was unanimous. As Mike noted, "I remember getting a letter from my cousin in England saying she would love to see it used as a place where city kids could come and learn about nature and hike around. Everybody seemed to agree this was a great thing because we all loved the place and thought it would be something that the public would love too, and they do."

In their 1985 donation the Hubers specified that the land and buildings should be preserved in their present state and used for light agriculture, passive recreation, and nature study. Park System staff began to hold nature programs in the Huber house, and moved the SPUR therapeutic riding program from Thompson Park into the barns and stables at Huber. As Bruce Gollnick noted in the January-February 1986 issue of *Green Link*, "Riding program participants will have more opportunities to ride through wooded trails, and this (acquisition) will increase our pasture area and provide adequate training rings for the horses. We should all graciously thank the Huber Corporation, since this donation is one dynamite addition."

*Left above: Huber House in the 1950s.*

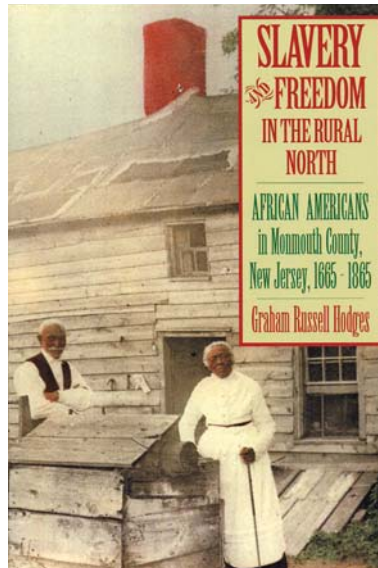
*Left below: The barns at Huber Woods Park, which became the second home of the SPUR program, pictured in 1999.*





Many school groups attend the Park System's annual African American Celebration at the Red Hill Activity Center.

*Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: A History of African Americans in Monmouth County NJ 1665–1865*, by Graham Hodges. Initiated by the Park System and published in cooperation with the Friends of the Parks, the book is used by many college history courses.



In December of 1985, the Recreation Commissioners updated their "Park and Recreation Policy" to include recreational opportunities for special populations, preservation of historic sites, and coordination of recreational programs offered throughout the County. Naturalist Gerry Savitz and other Visitor Services staff produced a "Recreation Services Guide" showing existing public recreation resources and identifying additional resources needed for a more "even distribution" of recreation in the County.

In 1986, Jane Clark of the Visitor Services staff initiated the Park System's annual African American History Celebration with performances, lectures and an exhibit on African American history at the Clinton and Mary Heath Wing of the Red Hill Activity Center in Tatum Park. Over the

next several years the program expanded and included an exhibit with artifacts, documents, and photographs of African American culture and early black communities in Monmouth County, some of which remain on display. A companion lecture series eventually led Park System staff and the Friends of the Parks to collaborate on the publication in 1997 of *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: A History of African Americans in Monmouth County NJ 1665–1865*, by Graham Hodges.

### *The County is at a crossroads*

Governor Thomas H. Kean and other officials celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Green Acres Program and introduced a sixth Green Acres Bond Act in 1986. The Park System's Annual Report for 1986 highlighted the increasing urgency of preserving open space:

*In the last few decades, Monmouth County has changed dramatically from a rustic picturesque area of truck farmers and fishermen, horse breeders and summer vacationers, to a vibrant community of high technology industry, expensive year-round homes, and heavy traffic. As the preserve of open fields, woodland, and waterfront dwindles, the race intensifies between developers and those who realize the importance of preserving scenic beauty and recreational sites for another generation to enjoy, of maintaining breathing space in one of the nation's fastest-growing counties.*

With the cyclical and uncertain nature of the Green Acres program, County leaders and private observers considered additional ways to finance land acquisitions. In January of 1987, Freeholder Director Harry Larrison proposed placing a non-binding referendum on the ballot asking voters if they would approve an open space tax—the first in the State—for an Open Space Trust Fund with \$4 million annually to preserve land. As Harry told a *Red Bank Register* reporter,

*We are fast losing our heritage of open space, forests and fields, and I support spending at least \$4 million annually, over and above moneys already raised through bonding, for current acquisitions. However, it's the taxpayer's money and I'm asking the people of Monmouth County to advise the Board of Freeholders on which way they would want us to go on this. The question before the people will essentially be, is it worth \$25 or \$50 a year to every homeowner to help put the brakes on the overdevelopment of the County and to help save our farmlands and open spaces?*

*I think the people want us to preserve as much open space as we can. Our little guys and girls 50 years from now deserve a place*

*An investment that will pay many dividends*

**“Challenges for the New Year: Open Space,”**

*Red Bank Register, Editorial, January 2, 1987*

*Since World War II, the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders, regardless of which political party was in control, consistently has acted to improve the quality of life for county residents. Primarily because of responsible leadership, the transition from rural community to modern suburb was much smoother here than it was for many counties in New Jersey.*

*Because Monmouth County leaders historically have made it a priority to preserve the character and beauty of the area, and because it is the preserved character of the county which has made it such a desirable place to live and at the same time helped improve the economy, it therefore would be in the best interests of all residents, including future generations, if the County stays its course and makes every effort to fulfill the goals set forth in its master plan.*

*The Freeholders should seek out more “creative” ways in which to finance acquisition of open spaces. In their ongoing quest for open space they should focus as well on providing recreation areas in more heavily populated, lower income communities.*

*Though open space may be costly today, it is an investment that will pay many dividends for Monmouth County in the future.*

*to play and enjoy themselves. For my part, the additional costs to the County will be more than offset by avoiding the direct and indirect costs of suburban sprawl, including traffic congestion, school, police, sewer, and related costs.*

Freeholder Theodore Narozanick told the reporter, “I will wholeheartedly support a referendum. It will give the voters an opportunity to decide whether they want the County to keep developing, or to slow down its speed.” Freeholder John Villapiano added, “We have received many questions from residents concerned about the rapid development of the County, and there is a widespread support for the County’s purchase of undeveloped areas.” Many county residents supported the proposal at a Freeholders’ meeting, and the *Asbury Park Press* endorsed it in an editorial, noting, “In a sense, the county is at a crossroads, and important decisions with long-lasting effects must be

made soon...To delay consideration of this important question would be to limit severely that County’s options, as more and more open land is irretrievably lost.”

In assessing development pressures in the “outer ring of suburban counties,” the Regional Plan Association noted in its 1987 report, “Where the Pavement Ends,” that, “The Region’s communities were caught unaware by this explosion of development. Familiar landscapes and important recreation resources—such as golf courses and Boy Scout camps—have been lost. The amount of protected land has nearly doubled in 20 years, but many crucial lands are still threatened with development—including farmlands, valuable wilderness areas, and wetlands which protect vital natural systems. What is happening to the Region’s land is clear: more open space needs to be protected throughout the Region, and it must be done quickly because the best land is disappearing fast.”

As the November, 1987, election approached, Jim Truncer noted in the September-October 1987 issue of *Green Link*, “As the bulldozer’s roar is heard throughout our County, we are not only rapidly running out of open land, but we are running out of time. We have an opportunity to preserve some of our remaining open space if we act in time. Each of us needs to be sure that our citizens understand the importance of the issues they’re being asked to decide this November.”

Seventy-one percent of Monmouth voters approved the County’s non-binding “Park Land Preservation Trust” referendum in 1987 to dedicate \$4 million in tax revenues annually to open space acquisition and development, and State voters approved the sixth Green Acres Bond Act as well. County officials subsequently won support from the New Jersey Legislature to implement a county open space tax, and in November, 1989, Monmouth County voters overwhelmingly approved the County’s Open Space Tax, the first under the State’s newly-enacted enabling legislation. Since that time, numerous counties and municipalities in New Jersey have followed Monmouth’s lead in approving local taxes dedicated to preservation of open space and farmland.

*Lush fields sandwiched in suburbia*

The Neuberger Farm in southern Middletown Township prominently illustrated the intense battle to preserve open space and historic sites in the County. The 129-acre property, flanking both sides of heavily-trafficked Middletown-Lincroft Road, included large barns and a

well-preserved farmhouse dating back to the 18th century. Harry and Katherine Neuberger had purchased the farm in 1933 and lived there until their deaths. In 1984, their heirs contracted to sell the farm to Calton Homes Inc., which soon developed a plan to demolish the historic house and build 1,250 housing units on the property.

The Middletown Landmarks Commission had designated the property as a local landmark to protect it, but a lawsuit filed on behalf of the developer resulted in the New Jersey Supreme Court declaring the Township's historic preservation ordinance invalid. Calton's plans included 268 units for low and moderate income residents and, when Middletown designated other sites for subsidized housing to meet its Mt. Laurel obligations, Calton sued the Township under the "builder's remedy" provision of the State's fair housing regulations.

As Calton Homes' lawsuit to develop Neuberger Farm and an adjacent property under the State's Mount Laurel provisions dragged

on, the Vice-President of the company told an *Asbury Park Press* reporter in October, 1989, "The resistance in Middletown is typical of the anti-growth attitude in the state. The difference in Middletown is that the fight is more intense." The reporter described the property being fought over as "one of the largest undeveloped sites remaining in the Township... a 125-acre expanse of lush fields sandwiched in suburbia." Middletown Township Attorney William Dowd told the reporter, "To permit a 1,250 unit development on Neuberger Farm would only exacerbate increasing taxes, traffic snarls, and congestion. The people of Middletown are deeply concerned—and quite rightly—with overdevelopment, which in a nutshell means too much development of any kind."

In response to Middletown's request to preserve the tract, the County began negotiations with Calton to purchase the property. In February 1990, the Freeholders voted to preserve the Neuberger Farm



The Neuberger Farm in 1989, just after a developer demolished a number of large historic barns on the property.



Bayshore Waterfront Park as it appeared in 1992.

by eminent domain, and the Recreation Commissioners named the new park Sunnyside Recreation Area, after the farm's historic name.

The frenzy of development in the mid-1980s and the success of the open space referendum led Park System staff to increase their planning efforts to identify key parcels of the County's dwindling open space for preservation. After five years of "putting out fires" and fighting overdevelopment as Middletown Township Planner, Faith Hahn wanted to focus on long-term planning. As she recalled, "I knew Spence Wickham from the Park System's numerous projects in Middletown, and one day I mentioned to him that I was ready for a change. He said, 'We're working on a new open space plan and we really could use someone with your skills.' They wanted to have a better, closer working relationship with municipalities, and I had the advantages and understanding of that perspective and Spence offered me a job."

Faith joined the Park System's Acquisition and Design staff as principal planner in early 1988 and started working on the inventory and mapping project that was underway to identify recreational and natu-

ral resources throughout the County. That spring the Acquisition and Design staff organized a countywide "Green Spaces, Livable Places" conference, with help from the Monmouth Conservation Foundation, for local officials, developers, and concerned individuals to explore ways of combining development with protection of open space and natural resources.

County Planning Director Charles Pike's goal in the 1960 "Recreation Study and Plan" to create a County park on the Bayshore came to fruition in 1988 with the start of Bayshore Waterfront Park in the Port Monmouth section of Middletown Township. Because the land in this area consisted primarily of small lots, the creation of Bayshore Waterfront Park has been unique in the Park System. Beginning with an 8.4 acre donation from the Conservation Fund in 1988, the Park System's land acquisition staff has gradually acquired more than 90 lots as they became available and has consolidated them into the 226-acre Park. The lots included disturbed urban shoreline and wetlands, and the Park System has gradually returned this environmentally-significant land

to its undeveloped condition for public park use. The growing Park quickly became a favorite spot for beachcombing, fishing and enjoying the spectacular waterfront views. In 1998, the Park System exchanged land with Middletown Township to add 12 acres of open space to the Park, including a fishing pier and the historic Seabrook-Wilson House overlooking Sandy Hook Bay.

A priority goal identified in the 1970 "Open Space Plan" to protect stream corridors got a big boost in 1988 as the Park System started a multi-year effort to preserve more land along the Crosswicks Creek in Upper Freehold Township. Thanks to Joanne and Ed Mullen's 36-acre donation of Walnford in 1979, and to the Green Acres program, County officials had already preserved over 200 acres along the stream valley to protect Walnford and its historic rural setting.

The new effort reflected a growing trend to create greenways in order protect key stream corridors from the impact of development. Through purchases, farmland preservation, and conservation easements, the County, the Green Acres Program, the Farmland Preservation Program, the Township of Upper Freehold, the N.J. Conservation Foundation, and the Monmouth Conservation Foundation have collectively preserved more than 4,000 acres along Crosswicks Creek. Of the total, the Park System has acquired 1,479 acres in the Crosswicks Creek Greenway, making it the second largest County Park after Turkey Swamp Park.

### *The preferable choice*

Another water supply initiative was realized in 1988 with the NJ Water Supply Authority's lease agreement with the County for recreational use of 1,052 acres around the Manasquan Reservoir in the Oak Glen area of Howell Township. Charles Pike had recommended in the 1960 "Recreation Study and Plan" that the Manasquan River be preserved for water supply "with full utilization of its recreational potential," and the State's Manasquan River Reservoir Land Use Task Force had concluded in the mid-1980s that fishing, boating with small motors, and hiking, riding and bicycling on a perimeter trail would be compatible with the reservoir. The Task Force recommended preserving a buffer zone of open space around the reservoir for habitat protection and nature study, and suggested consideration of a "nature center" as well. After reviewing recreational management options for the reservoir, the Task Force members unanimously concluded that the Monmouth County Park System was "the preferable choice."

The Recreation Commissioners began a new era of leadership in early 1989 by electing Adeline "Addy" Lubkert as Chairman. The Freeholders appointed Mrs. Lubkert to the Board in 1982, where she served as Vice Chairman from 1986–1989 and as Chairman until her retirement from the Board in 2007. Adeline Lubkert is the longest-serving Commissioner in Park System history, with 25 years of service.

By the end of the 1980s, the Park System had created 22 parks with 6,495 acres of open space and recreational facilities, and annual visitation had surpassed 2.5 million people.

### **ADELINE HOLMES LUBKERT**

*It's really that good*

*I was born in the house where I live and my father, John Holmes, farmed the land. He grew mostly potatoes and had a couple of milk cows. Both of my grandmothers lived in the center of Holmdel Village and I went to a one room school there that is now town hall. I went on to Red Bank High School and then to Goucher College in Baltimore.*

*When I was growing up, there was a lot more open space back then and never a thought that it would be anything but open space. Later on, a lot of people around here still thought we didn't need parks. One of the interesting things to me was that there was a group of people who were very interested in having a park system that would take care of everybody and it would be all over the County. They wanted to provide the right kind of things for the people that needed them, and I got interested in that. Later people finally got to realize that you better save land while you can or it will be gone. When people think that way, then things get accomplished.*

*As far as I'm concerned, the people in the Park System—all the employees, the Friends of the Parks, the volunteers—the way they work and see what has to be done, I think they deserve all the credit in the world. The Park System in Monmouth County is the best around, and I mean in all of the United States. It's really that good. I just hope it keeps on and I think it will.*

