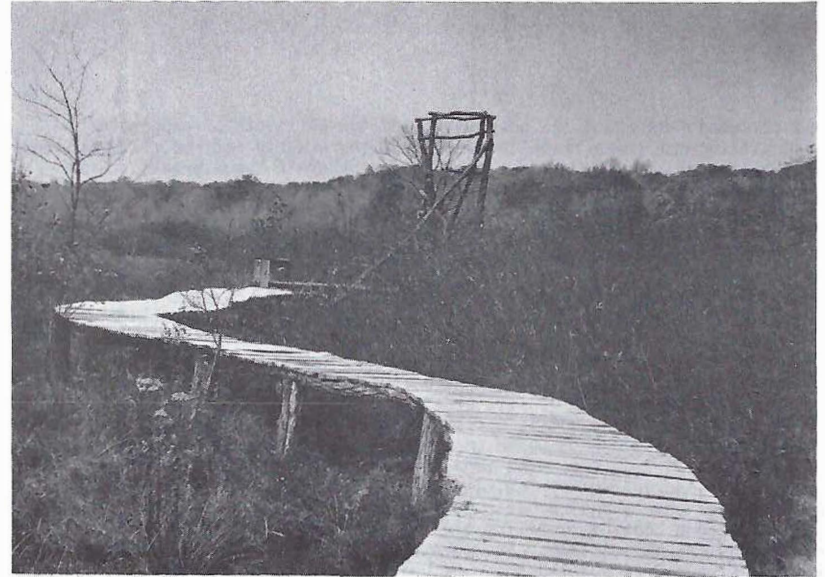


MARSH MEMORIAL SANCTUARY COMMITTEE

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A REPORT FROM THE MARSH SANCTUARY

This year many of the plans and hopes we've had for the Marsh Sanctuary have been translated from words into deeds. 1975 has been probably the most productive period in our development since the first acreage was acquired in 1956.

Early in April, as the ground was beginning to thaw, a wood sculptor from Katonah named Gerry Farrell and several volunteers waded into the marsh carrying eight-foot locust logs on their shoulders. Joseph Wallerstein, a neighbor, had generously donated the trees from his overcrowded locust grove. Three-foot cores were extracted from the muck with a gas-powered augur which took five men to operate, and the logs were beaten into the holes with sledge hammers. Locust beams were hand-hewn with an adze and laid across the logs, and rough oak planks, brought down from upstate, were nailed on top of them. Such is the consistency of locust that every nail hole had to be pre-drilled. By the end of May, the work was done, and now a snaking, two-hundred foot boardwalk leads from Sarles Street into the sedge tussockland of the marsh, ending in a platform with an observation tower.

Word traveled fast about the boardwalk, and now all sorts of people can be found sitting out there, from teen-agers to the elderly retired, from college students to businesspeople from Mount Kisco on their lunch breaks. This spring we'd like to extend the boardwalk about the same distance as it's already come until it reaches an island in the marsh where a trail leads back to Sarles Street, making a quarter-mile loop in all. To do this will take both money and manpower.

Other than this project we'd like to keep use of the more vulnerable marsh down to a minimum, emphasizing Brookside as the place for our public programs to be held. This summer, in spite of the bad weather which seemed to descend every weekend, all sorts of things managed to happen in our outdoor amphitheater: comedies like the Importance of Being Earnest and She Stoops to Conquer, a reconstruction of the landscape of one hundred years ago as part of the Mount Kisco Centennial, a convention of bellydancers, a series of concerts which ranged from music of the Renaissance to jazz, ragtime, and old-time country fiddling. The media discovered the sanctuary, and lengthy and glowing descriptions of the place appeared in both of the local papers. Two postcards (one a superb photo of a turks-cap lily taken by Virginia Weinland) and a booklet revealing the fascinating past of Brookside were added to our list of publications. It seems clear that the amphitheater can fill a significant gap in the cultural opportunities in upper Westchester by providing people with a chance to hear American music in the way that Caramoor provides them with classical music. Next summer we would like to move further in this direction: perhaps starting an annual Brookside Folk Festival and trying to attract some "big names" in the music world. The performers this summer were more than delighted to come up from the city and make their music in a natural setting. But we need funding to book top-level talent, to furnish the amphitheater with a good public address system to broadcast their voices and instruments over the traffic on nearby Route 172. We would also like to advertise in the New York media. With its proximity to the Mount Kisco train station, Brookside offers a unique opportunity for New Yorkers to come out in the country for an afternoon of pleasant entertainment, as it did in its heyday sixty years ago.

But all this activity on the cultural front doesn't mean that we're neglecting the sanctuary's original function as a nature preserve and education center. During the summer Alice Joyce and naturalist Shoumatoff spent Wednesday afternoons cataloguing the books and magazines in our museum. The result is an extensive nature reference library which is as far as we know a unique resource in upper Westchester. We challenge anyone to bring in an organism that we can't identify and tell something about its natural history. Here, too, we have needs -- for more books, magazines and exhibits, for funding and volunteers to staff the museum and keep it open longer, and to add a wing to the tiny room which we've already outgrown. A few months ago a woodstove was installed to heat the museum during the winter, adding to its rustic atmosphere.

Early in the summer the Bedford Garden Club came and helped clear a place in the lily and iris garden for an 8 x 12 greenhouse. The fieldstone foundation has been laid and a wooden gothic type frame, covered with two layers of plastic, will soon follow. For this winter the house will remain a coldframe but we'd like to equip it by next summer with a solar heating panel and to demonstrate that you could grow most of your food supply year round in that small space.

Our project for transplanting wildflowers from local construction sites was successful on a small scale, with stands of hepatica, wood betony, butterfly-weed, Canada and wood lily being re-established in the sanctuary. But with more volunteers this could become a significant contribution to monitoring the growth of the community. The birdwalks held during the May and September migrations were well attended; red bellied woodpeckers were found nesting in the same hollow in Leonard Park as the year before (the only current nesting record in the county) and all summer long a pair of indigo buntings enriched Brookside with their physical beauty and varied song. Naturalist Shoumatoff, dividing his time between tending the sanctuary and writing, is completing a social and natural history of Westchester County for Harper and Row and has just signed with the Sierra Club to do a four-hundred page book on the Amazon.

The sanctuary is pleased to announce the addition of Alice Joyce, Norma Horrace, and Bill Perron to our committee. Alice has been a volunteer from Teatown and a veteran Girl Scout instructor, Norma is a technician at the hospital and a dynamic organizer, and Bill the assistant naturalist at the Westmoreland Sanctuary with a special interest in animals.

With no endowment the sanctuary depends entirely on contributions from people who appreciate what we're doing. If you do please make out your tax-deductible check to the Marsh Memorial Sanctuary and send it to Alex Shoumatoff, RD 2, Mt. Kisco, N.Y. 10549