

A Pleasant Encounter with May Brawley Hill

May Brawley Hill, one of the “founding mothers” of the Warren Land Trust has been an integral part of the growth, preservation, and vision for the town of Warren. May moved to Warren in 1975, and with her family purchased and developed 80 acres on Brick School road while raising 30 sheep! May grew up and was schooled in Salem, North Carolina. She graduated from Salem College in Winston Salem where she majored in History of American Art. As well as museum catalogue essays in her field, she has written three books on American gardens.

As with so many citizens of Warren, her family was attracted by the town’s rural simplicity, openness, and quality of life while bringing up her children. The specter of the Iroquois Pipeline threatened the Northwest Corner in the middle 1980s and the Town of Warren was not exempt. The potential damage that callous development with negligible concern for the environment would cause spurred many residents to organize and create organizations such as the Warren Land Trust. May joined her neighbor Nancy Binns and - others including Land Trust founder Dorothy Maier - to forge ahead, and soon the Land Trust became a reality!

This enthusiastic group sought to preserve, protect, and maintain a quality of life that had become synonymous with the Northwest Corner. May relates that at first the Land Trust board meetings were informal. For the first decade, when she served as secretary, she would take notes, type them on a manual typewriter, and send the minutes of each meeting out to the members. Hard as it is to believe, these were pre-computer days, but as May related, “things got done, and done with passion.”

Together with Dorothy Maier, May serves as an invaluable bridge between the Land Trust’s origins and a present-day situation which finds us with substantial eased and fee properties and robust financial health. May related that she has felt “re-energized” by the Trust’s activity of the past few years and that “there is a really impressive group of new people on the Board.”

At the conclusion of the interview, May mused about the future as she discussed the feelings we have for the whole town. “So much is happening in the country right now which is not good, but rather polarizing and spiteful, why not keep our own local situation in order with good values and decency?” Why not, indeed? Thank you May Brawley Hill for doing just that!

Ted Morse