

# Laurel Leaves

Laurel Hill Association ❁ Fall 2025



Laurel Hill Legacy: Stewardship, Sustainability, and Community

# Reaffirming and Refining Our Role as Stewards of Stockbridge

By Robert Flower

## The First Meeting

On August 22, 1853, a notice was posted throughout the village of Stockbridge inviting all citizens to gather on Laurel Hill two days later “to take measures for the improvement of the burying ground, the streets, walks, public grounds, and Laurel Hill.” That meeting marked the founding of the Laurel Hill Association, America’s oldest civic improvement organization.

Nearly 172 years later, we continue to honor that original calling: to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural and built beauty of Stockbridge. Our commitment to town beautification remains as steadfast as it was in 1853, but our vision continues to grow.

## Expanding Our Efforts

In the coming months, the Laurel Hill Association will engage with town committees and groups to explore new opportunities to strengthen our shared stewardship. Whether it’s improving public spaces, restoring trails, enhanced plantings, or supporting thoughtful community projects, our goal is to collaborate in ways that sustain Stockbridge’s timeless charm.



PHOTO BY ROBERT FLOWER

Jonathan Edwards Memorial

## A Village Worth Preserving

There's a reason people flock to Stockbridge. It's not only due to the world class cultural attractions that surround us, it's the sheer beauty of the village itself. From its historic architecture and tree-lined streets to its meadows, hills, and trails, Stockbridge embodies the harmony between nature and community that our founders envisioned.

As we reaffirm and refine our role,

we invite our neighbors to join us. Together, we can ensure that the legacy of civic pride that began on Laurel Hill continues to flourish for generations to come. 



PHOTO BY ROBERT FLOWER

War Memorial Monument

## Did you know?

The Laurel Hill Association maintains over 460 acres throughout the town of Stockbridge available for public recreation. Visit online to learn more about our trails and properties: [www.laurelhillassociation.org](http://www.laurelhillassociation.org)

ABOUT

TRAILS & PROPERTIES

NATURE GALLERY



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## TRAILS & PROPERTIES

# Meet Our Newest Trustee: Jackie Harris

After joining our Board this summer, Jackie delivered the keynote speech "Small Town: Big Vision" at our 172nd year Laurel Hill Day Celebration held on August 30th in which she compared the mission of Laurel Hill and planning initiatives associated with green spaces in New York City ( here is the link to the complete speech: [laurelhillassociation.org/keynote](http://laurelhillassociation.org/keynote)).

Jackie is an avid gardener whose passion emerged when tending to her father's gardens in the hot summers of her hometown of Atlanta. She has carried this love of growing things to the cooler temperatures of New York City and the bucolic Berkshires, where sharing garden tips and stories is a way of life. When not touching the earth at home, she loves

to travel, photographing many beautiful natural and built environments, including the cherry blossoms of Japan, the stone terraces of Machu Picchu, the pyramids of Egypt, Alaska's Inner Passage, and South Africa's wine country.

Jackie retired from the New York City Planning Department as the Deputy Executive Director of Land Use, Technical and Environment Review, after over 35 years in public service. She represented the Department at public forums, encouraging and educating neighborhood constituents about their roles and responsibilities in land-use decision making. She was appointed as a Loeb Fellow in Advanced Environmental Studies at Harvard's Graduate School of Design and has degrees from Vassar



PHOTO COURTESY OF JACKIE HARRIS

and Baruch. She loves to read historical biographies, where she is encouraged by human resilience in the face of obstacles. Jackie is a practicing Buddhist with two grown daughters and spends her days with her partner in New York City and Stockbridge. ☙

## In Memoriam

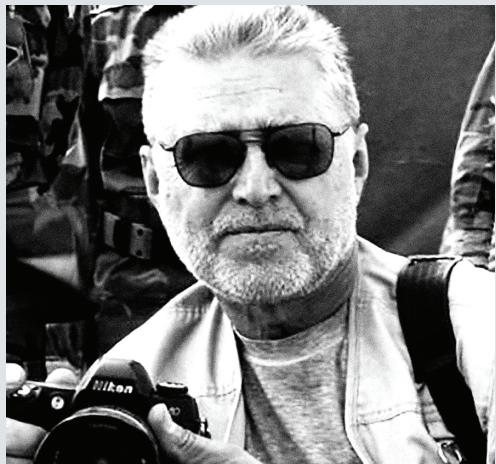


PHOTO COURTESY OF BERKSHIRE EDGE

### Jonas Dovydenas

In memory of Jonas Dovydenas, a generous philanthropist and acclaimed photographer. Jonas dedicated countless hours to Berkshire nonprofits and supported numerous cultural and conservation causes, including the Laurel Hill Association. His quiet generosity and lasting impact will be deeply missed.

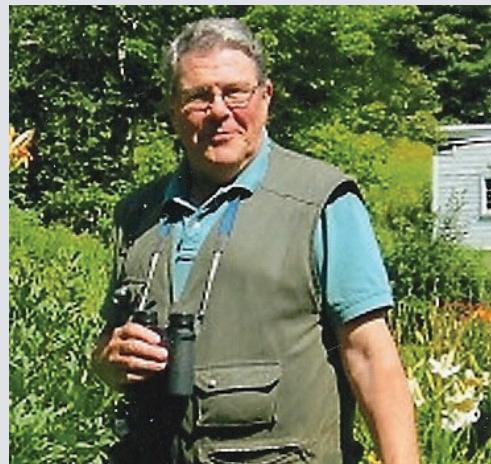


PHOTO COURTESY OF LEGACY.COM

### Shep Evans

The Laurel Hill Association is grateful for the leadership of Shep, who served as LHA President from 2003 to 2005, a period that marked the inception of the chestnut breeding program at the Chestnut Preserve. This important conservation effort took root on a property jointly acquired by the Laurel Hill Association and the Stockbridge

Land Trust in 2002 with the goal of protecting the southern entrance to Stockbridge.

Shep's enduring commitment to preservation was also vital to the 2012 collaborative purchase by LHA and SLT of the property at the intersection of Routes 102 and 183, commonly known as the Four Corners, safeguarding the town's western gateway. As part of this initiative, the southeast corner of the site was later transferred to the Berkshire Botanical Garden, protected in perpetuity by a no building restriction.



# Laurel Hill Day 2025

## Speech from LHA President, Hilary Somers Deely

Welcome to Laurel Hill Association's 172nd Laurel Hill Day!

Before we begin, a few thank-yous are in order:

- Kate Fletcher and her merry band of bakers for the delicious refreshments
- The Arcadian Shop for its much-appreciated gift of bug spray
- Ben Nickley, who stepped in at the last minute to present a lively discussion of bird calls

This year, LHA has achieved two major accomplishments:

1. **Major restoration of the Mary Flynn Trail:** The Property Committee and its volunteers have repaired bridges, railings, and culverts. This important work ensures that our visitors' experience remains smooth and safe.
2. **Publication of a new book:** We are proud to announce the release of *Improving the Village: Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and the Laurel Hill Association*. The lead author, **Kirin Makker**, a faculty member at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, will be speaking at a book signing this spring to benefit Laurel Hill Association. A reviewer remarked that her book "explores narratives of the association and its members, who expressed their love for their community through organizing, engineering, beautification, and social programs. In doing so, they created an organization that inspired like-minded citizens across the nation to establish hundreds of Village Improvement associations."

Laurel Hill Day—our Anniversary Day—offers us a special opportunity to celebrate our beloved town. I am amazed by the number of long-time residents who have never seen this glorious Rostrum—please help us spread the word!

In facing today's challenges, it's easy to become overwhelmed. Last year, I quoted a 1960s green mantra: "Think globally, act locally." Jane Goodall encourages us to turn this idea around. She suggests that we "think locally, and then we'll have the courage to think globally." She warns that "if we only think globally at the start, we won't have the energy to act."

We all know that we face monumental challenges today—climate change causing extreme weather, violent storms, and erosion; air and water pollution threatening our health; and plastic waste polluting oceans, landfills, and drinking water. Deforestation worsens climate change and destroys vital habitats. On Laurel Hill, we've seen the impact of invasive species—emerald ash borers attacking old-growth ash trees and Oriental bittersweet vines choking our forests.

Recently, changes in federal policy have rolled back certain environmental protections, including regulations affecting national forests and efforts to combat haze. These shifts underscore the importance of community-level stewardship and advocacy. Whether through volunteering or financial support, your efforts help ensure that Laurel Hill's mission is secure for generations to come.

Our keynote speaker today is **Jackie Harris**. Newly elected to the board, Jackie is a lifelong advocate for the natural world. From her father's garden in Atlanta to Harvard as a Loeb Fellow, and ultimately to her appointment as Deputy Executive Director of New York City's Planning Department, Jackie has demonstrated a sustained dedication to the environment. Please join me in welcoming her.

Hilary Somers Deely

President, Laurel Hill Association



Hilary Somers Deely, President  
Laurel Hill Association

PHOTO BY WHINNY WALSH

# The Nature of Our Natures

By Cheryl Resetarits

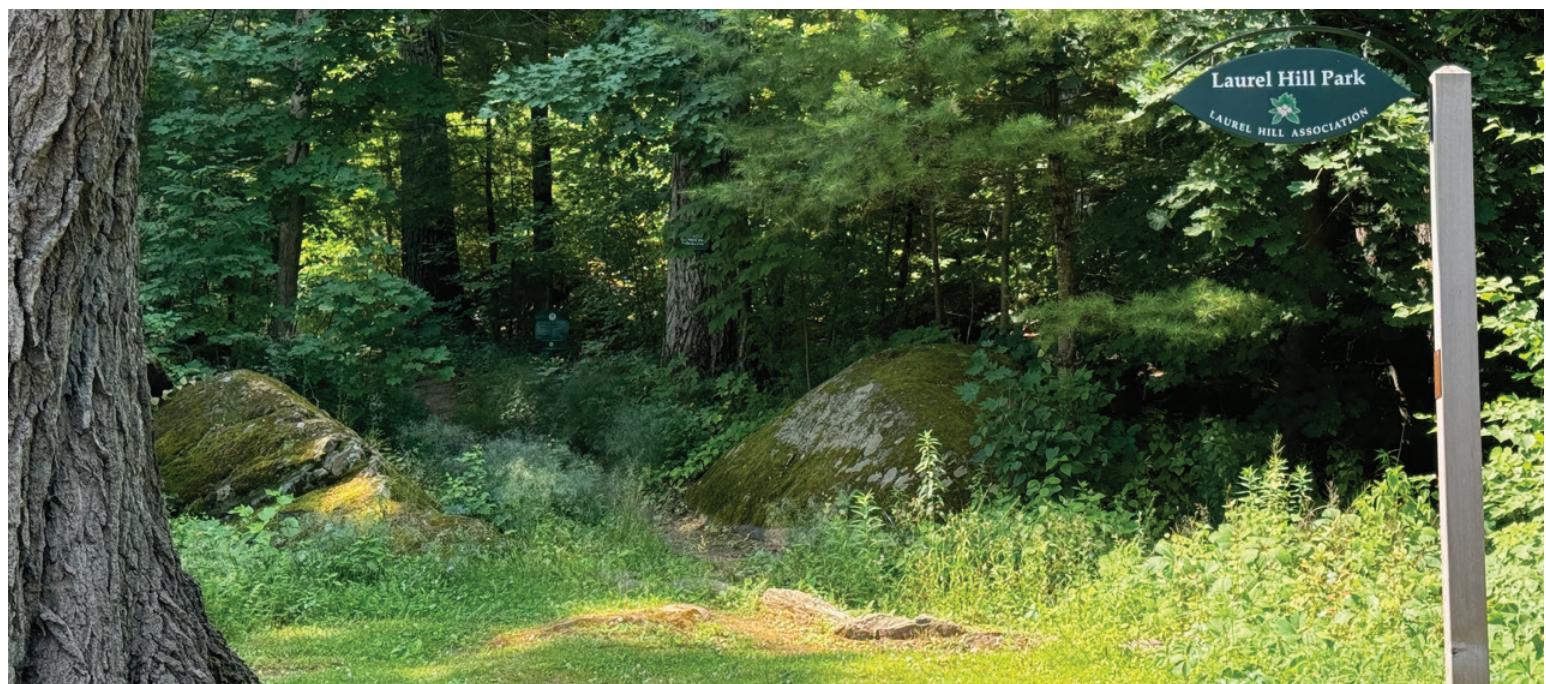
LHA maintains 17 distinct natural areas across approximately 473 acres in and around Stockbridge. Just over 90% of these properties have been acquired through gift, will, trust, or transfer, starting, of course, with the gift of Laurel Hill Park by the heirs of Judge Theodore Sedgwick in 1878. There were only three, small acquisitions in the first forty years but each sits at the heart of Stockbridge history: Railroad Station Park (1.7 acres) in 1882; Goodrich Park (0.45 acres), which is the trailhead for three of our most popular trails and the site of the old Berkshire Street Railway trolley, in 1885; and Pagenstecher Mill Park (0.85 acres), the site of the first successful wood pulp mill in the U.S., in 1917. From 1917 until 2002 all acquisitions to LHA were a result of wills, gifts, or trusts. In 2002 we began our relationship with Stockbridge Land Trust and transfers of land or partnership. When you look at the acquisitions of land over our history, the names attached to these



Pagenstecher Mill Wheel, Interlaken

properties are a who's who of Stockbridge and Massachusetts. Community created us and keeps us going. Beginning with the planting of nearly 270 trees along Main Street and the cemetery in 1854 by LHA mem-

bers and an additional 150 trees by inspired Stockbridge villagers, working together we get so much more accomplished. It is, ultimately, the real nature of our Natures. ~



Entrance to Laurel Hill Park from the town offices

# Thank you to our donors! —

*Laurel Hill Association gratefully acknowledges the following donors for their contributions between Oct. 1, 2024 and Sept. 30, 2025.*

*If your name has been misspelled or inadvertently omitted, please contact us at [info@laurelhillassociation.org](mailto:info@laurelhillassociation.org)*

## Planned giving

*"The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit."*

Over the past 171 years Laurel Hill Association has benefited from the generosity of our friends and neighbors. Planned gifts enable us to preserve the legacy bequeathed to us by generous supporters. You can help ensure that generations to come will know the pleasure of hiking our trails, strolling along the Housatonic, or relaxing in our glens.

**Bequests:** Often the easiest. Simply designate Laurel Hill Association as a beneficiary in your will or living trust.

**Life Insurance Policies:** If you name LHA as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy, you can convert a modest investment into a significant gift.

**Retirement Plans:** Designate LHA as a beneficiary of your IRA, 401(k), or other retirement plan, and enjoy estate tax benefits.

**Charitable Gift Annuities:** Create a charitable gift annuity that provides you with a steady income during your lifetime, while supporting LHA with remaining funds.

To learn more, please contact:  
Tim O'Brien Laurel Hill Association  
PO Box 24 Stockbridge, MA 01262  
[treasurer@laurelhillassociation.org](mailto:treasurer@laurelhillassociation.org)

*Considering a bequest or other gift? Please consult your attorney/tax advisor.*

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Laurel Hill Association  
P.O. Box 24  
Stockbridge, MA 01262



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*In the course of a year, Laurel Hill Association receives donations of goods and services which help our budget and are appreciated deeply. Our thanks go to:*

*For those who have donated services or funding throughout the year:*

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The Stockbridge Library | Stockbridge Tea and Coffee | Patricia Flinn  
Mike and Mary Cavanaugh, Brian Estabrook, Ben Northrup, and Bill Resetarits  
for volunteer trail work on the Mary Flynn Trail and beyond  
John Graziano for his legal counsel  
Brian Cruey and Naumkeag for their donation of tulip bulbs at the Post Office

*For those who donated services or assistance on Laurel Hill Day:*

Tune Street/Luke Germaine | Guido's Fresh Marketplace  
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Lower Bowker's Woods from the Butler Bridge  
*Cover photo:* Main Street Stockbridge  
by Robert Flower