

History of the Wilma Quinlan Nature Preserve



The Wilma Quinlan Nature Preserve was established in 1971, after the 23.76 acre property then known as the Sidebotham Tract came up for sale. At the time, the Sidebotham Tract was the largest piece of undeveloped land left in New Britain Borough. To prevent the property from being developed for planned industrial or commercial use, a group of borough residents led by Mrs. Wilma Quinlan, then a member of the borough council,

succeeded in raising the \$60,400 needed to purchase the parcel. Almost the entire purchase price came from state and federal government grants and private donations; less than \$3,000 was paid by the Borough itself. In honor of Mrs. Quinlan's tireless efforts, the preserve established on the tract was named in her honor.

In 2005, the Nature Preserve was expanded by three acres, when Dr. Miriam Groner, a botany professor at Bucknell and Penn State Universities, who lived across the road from the Preserve, left her house, three acres, and much of her estate to New Britain Borough for the benefit of the Preserve. Her historic home, the Matthews-Groner house at the corner of Aarons and Landis Mill Roads, has been fully restored and is now rented out by the Borough. "Miriam's Meadow," a 2.7 acre wildflower meadow, has been established on Dr. Groner's former property in her honor.



Dr. Groner had a vision that the Nature Preserve could be much more than it had been in the past and her generous donation has allowed for substantial improvements to the Preserve. Dr. Groner's desire to facilitate the public's appreciation of nature and nurture the Preserve's habitat has energized community efforts to improve and expand the Preserve. The income from Dr. Groner's endowment, leveraged where possible with matching funds, has enabled the Borough to pursue Dr. Groner's dream without impacting the Borough's budget.



Recently, the Nature Preserve was expanded once again. Carol and Ken Miller, the wife and son of Larry Miller, a longtime and passionate supporter of the Preserve, made possible the acquisition of conservation easements and a right of way on nearly two acres of their property next to the Preserve. This acquisition allows the Preserve to extend across Cook's Run Creek, allowing public access to Miller's

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Point at the confluence of the Neshaminy Creek and Cook's Run. This land crosses the remnants of the old mill race from Landis Mill, reputed to be the first saw mill in Bucks County. A few yards beyond the Miller property is a former site of a Lenni-Lenape Indian village and a former site of a tent encampment for the homeless that existed during the Great Depression.

In 2007, the Natural Lands Trust was commissioned by the Borough to provide a natural resource assessment and stewardship plan for the Nature Preserve. This Stewardship Plan, along with a 2014 Addendum to that plan, catalogs the existing environmental and ecological conditions and current management issues of the Preserve and serves as a guide for the future use and management goals set by the Borough's Nature Preserve Committee.

In 2012 the Borough received a 50% matching grant from PECO, allowing it to leverage Dr. Groner's bequest and add signs, benches, and birdhouses throughout the Preserve.

