



# Lower Merion Conservancy

2024 Annual Report



# Message from the Chairman and Executive Director

Dear Friends,

As 2024 comes to a close, we reflect on a year marked by significant accomplishments and steadfast commitment to our mission. Together, we've conserved our local watershed through hands-on projects, protected vast tracts of undeveloped green space with conservation easements, and advocated for stronger preservation of our shared historic resources.

With climate change at our doorstep and shifting political landscapes influencing environmental policies, we approach 2025 with renewed determination and optimism.

In June, at our annual gala benefit, we proudly announced plans to expand our Cobbs Creek watershed conservation efforts into the neighborhoods of eastern Delaware County and West Philadelphia. These areas, which include some of the most densely developed communities, face critical environmental challenges such as flooding, loss of native pollinator habitats, and limited access to hands-on environmental programs. Our decade-long partnerships with the Cobbs Partners will enable us to reach these communities more effectively. Many of these neighborhoods are designated as Environmental Justice areas by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, underscoring the need for targeted support. Together with our partners, we aim to secure grant funding and implement impactful projects that provide meaningful benefits to these communities.

This year marked a significant milestone for the Conservancy with the announcement of the sale of the Lower Merion School District's Oakwell properties to Natural Lands. As a trusted partner and regional conservation leader, Natural Lands plans to integrate 10 of Oakwell's 13 acres into their public garden, Stoneleigh. The Conservancy, which currently holds the conservation easement for the 42-acre Stoneleigh, will collaborate with Natural Lands to extend the easement to include the additional acreage, ensuring its permanent protection. The remaining 3 acres of the property, including the Oakwell mansion, will be acquired by a separate nonprofit organization. This organization intends to restore the mansion and establish a conservation easement to safeguard the property's environmental resources for future generations.

For 25 years, our members, board, and community partners in Lower Merion and Narberth have stood alongside us, championing a more sustainable environment and advocating for greater protection of our irreplaceable historic architecture. As we look to the challenges and opportunities of 2025, we encourage you to stay involved and continue your generous support of our mission. Thank you.

**Mark E. Taylor**   **Maurine McGeehan**  
Board Chair   Executive Director

*Front cover: Conservancy staff looks for macroinvertebrates in Naylor's Run to assess stream health.*



# Snapshots of FY2024



Ms. Maria from Overbrook Presbyterian Kindergarten enjoyed her first ever roasted marshmallow at our bonfire in Rolling Hill Park.



The Philadelphia Mycology Club gathered at the Conservancy Cottage in late spring for a mushroom foray.



Michelle and Eugene Dubay, Nick Odorisio, and Deb and Tim Callahan enjoy a moment catching up at our Annual Gala in June.



Our Annual Members Picnic was held at the Barnes Arboretum at Saint Joseph's University.



Deirdre Murphy and friends viewed April's near total solar eclipse from the Conservancy Cottage.



Despite wintry conditions, over 34 species of birds were counted during our Winter Bird Count.



Volunteers from Friends Central School stand next to a tree they planted at the Conservancy Cottage.



Memories were made, immersed in a bed of leaves in the Fairy Forest at Rolling Hill Park.



Dr. Karen Snetselaar drives the "Balagator" full of natives plants down the Cynwyd Heritage Trail.



# Open Space

## Preservation Progress at Oakwell

Since 2018, the Conservancy has been working to secure a positive preservation outcome for the 13-acre properties at 1800 West Montgomery Avenue and 1835 County Line Road in Villanova, collectively known as Oakwell. The Lower Merion School District (LMSD) acquired these properties through eminent domain and planned to convert them into athletic fields for the nearby Black Rock Middle School. The proposed plan threatened to cut down hundreds of mature trees and demolish several historically significant resources, including a greenhouse complex and tea house, that were once part of the adjacent Stoneleigh estate.



*A tree line on the Oakwell property viewed from Stoneleigh.*

The Conservancy was troubled by the LMSD plan. For six years, we pressed LMSD to preserve and repurpose the historic resources and to conserve the hundreds of mature trees that shaded the property. The community was similarly distressed and petitioned the board to abandon its plan. Lower Merion Township also opposed LMSD's proposal. After years of meetings, discussions, and negotiations among Lower Merion Township, LMSD, Natural Lands and the Conservancy, efforts to find a solution gained momentum. A breakthrough occurred in January 2023 when Haverford Township, Lower Merion Township, and LMSD reached an agreement allowing the Black Rock Middle School's baseball and softball teams to practice and play games at the Polo Field in the Bryn Mawr section of Haverford. This arrangement provided partial relief from development pressures on the Oakwell properties but did not entirely eliminate the threat posed by the LMSD proposal.

The fate of the properties was unresolved until this past August, when LMSD approved the purchase of the two properties (measuring 13 acres together) by Natural Lands, the owners of Stoneleigh. Natural Lands plans to incorporate approximately 10 acres of the property into Stoneleigh. This action will reunite much of the Oakwell property with the historic estate to which it originally belonged. The remaining three-acre parcel, which contains a ca. 1920 Elizabethan Revival mansion, will be purchased by a separate, yet-to-be named nonprofit organization. This nonprofit intends to restore the mansion and to use it in a way that complements Stoneleigh's mission.

Natural Lands and the separate nonprofit organization will collaborate with the Conservancy to establish conservation easements on both of the properties. These easements, which will permanently restrict subdivision and development rights on all 13 acres, will help to conserve significant ecological features, including woodlands and streams. The Conservancy will serve as "holder" of the easements, meaning we will be responsible for enforcing the restrictions outlined in the easements. The Conservancy currently holds 21 easements (including one on Stoneleigh's 42 acres) spanning 198 acres across properties in Lower Merion, Haverford, and Radnor.

We are excited to continue our partnership with Natural Lands. We also appreciate the efforts of the Lower Merion School District and Lower Merion Township to reach a solution that safeguards the trees, wetlands, and historic resources on the Villanova properties. Ward 6 Commissioner Andy Gavrin, in particular, deserves credit for his role in helping to preserve the property. He devoted extraordinary time and energy to addressing the threat, negotiating with residents and LMSD for a better outcome for the properties. Commissioner Gavrin was aided in his efforts by Scott Zelov, the Ward 11 commissioner who helped to negotiate LMSD's use of fields in Haverford Township.

The commitment of all of these parties to balancing community priorities with environmental and historical preservation ensures that these spaces will be safeguarded and cherished for generations to come.



# Watershed Conservation

## Lower Merion Township Partnership

Lower Merion Township contracts with the Conservancy to conduct township-wide stormwater outfall inspections and provide stormwater education to the public. This work supports the Township's responsibility to meet Clean Water Act requirements, while also advancing the Conservancy's mission of conserving our local streams. Each aspect of the partnership plays a role in keeping our waterways clean and healthy.

During heavy rain, you may notice rivers of water in the street as they lap up against the curbs before disappearing beneath metal grates in the road. These grates and inlets lead to underground pipes that transport the water to a stormwater outfall, where the water drains into a stream. All of this water is untreated. Given the impact untreated water can have - and the potential for other pollutants to get dumped into the storm sewer system - municipalities are required to get permits to drain their streets into streams. To comply with one of the permit requirements, municipalities must inspect their hundreds of outfalls at least once every five years.

Conservancy staff members inspect Lower Merion outfalls to identify whether they are carrying substances other than stormwater, a condition known as illicit discharge. Inspections occur when there has been no precipitation for 48 hours or more, allowing inspectors to determine whether pollutants have been illegally or accidentally dumped into the storm sewer system. Some potential pollutants, like sewage or pool water, cause serious problems when piped into streams. All issues are reported to Lower Merion Public Works staff, who bring emergency responders to sites with signs of recent or active pollution.

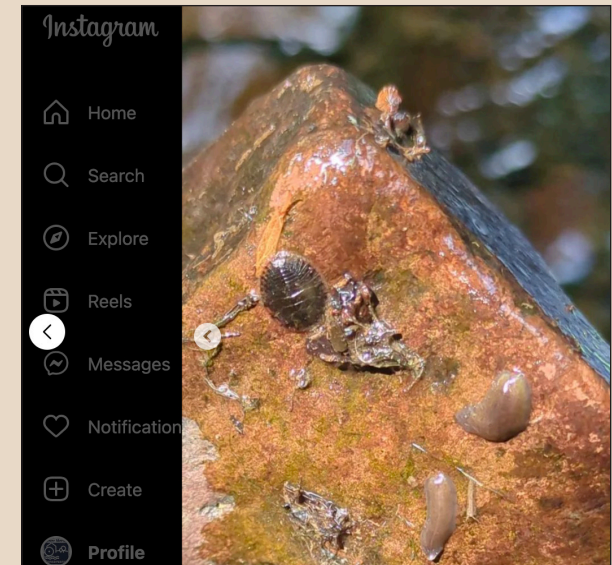
To minimize the risk of pollution, municipalities are required to develop and distribute educational materials on stormwater management for public awareness. At the Conservancy promoting waterway health and mitigating pollutants are central to our mission. Our robust knowledge and experience with stormwater management have allowed us to develop impactful educational content and programs, helping to inform residents and meet permit requirements for the Township.

The Conservancy also supports Lower Merion Township by conducting Preservation Area monitoring, as mandated by the Township's local open space ordinance. The ordinance, passed by the Township in 1990, requires subdivision plans for properties of five acres or larger to preserve at least 50% of the undeveloped land. The undeveloped area must consist of contiguous segments to preserve the maximum amount of wildlife habitat. Property owners of land that is protected under the open space ordinance are required to follow maintenance and operations plans to protect the preserved areas in perpetuity.

As an organization that holds and monitors conservation easements, the Conservancy emerged as a natural partner to help the Township monitor its Preservation Areas. Every two years, Conservancy staff walk each of the Preservation Areas, making note of changes and potential violations. The open space ordinance has protected woodlands and wetlands that would have otherwise been irreparably harmed. The Conservancy's strong relationship with Lower Merion Township has resulted in greater monitoring, education, and preservation of vital natural spaces, contributing significantly to the well-being of the community.



*An outfall that passed inspection.*



*Screenshot of an LMC Instagram campaign shows followers how to identify fresh water macroinvertebrates to discern water quality. The photo shows planaria (R), a water penny (L) and evidence of caddisfly habitat (C).*



*Scan above to view the posts!*



# Watershed Conservation

## Tracking Salt Levels in Streams

As winter approaches, we are working with our partners at Villanova University to quantify salt levels in local streams and explore ways to responsibly reduce road salt use. Road salt is one of the biggest threats to our waterways, causing fish kills and increasing sodium levels in downstream drinking water systems. Dr. Steven Goldsmith and Livia Graham from the Villanova University Department of Geography and the Environment sample seven stream sites weekly to measure salinity. The sampling will complement the two Enviro DIY monitoring stations the Conservancy already has installed – one along Vine Creek at the Cynwyd Heritage Trail and the other along the East Branch of Indian Creek at Elm Grove Park. These loggers - created by Stroud Water Research Center - record the conductivity, temperature, and depth of the streams every 15 minutes. The data is uploaded online in real time, allowing us to see conductivity rise when salt is flushed into the stream after winter storms. We plan to install loggers at additional locations, including sites along Mill Creek and the East and West Branches of Indian Creek.



*An all too familiar scene - excessive salt on a parking lot, directly next to a storm drain.*

Streams naturally contain different levels of salt due to the different makeup of the soil and rocks that sit beneath them. This variation can make it difficult to directly compare conductivity between streams. As Livia and Dr. Goldsmith accumulate water samples for the year, they will create a calibration curve to tie the salinity measurements from the water samples to conductivity readings from the Enviro DIY monitoring stations, allowing us to compare data between Enviro DIY stations. The Enviro DIY data will also be compared to salinity levels found in healthy freshwater, brackish water, and ocean water. We will share our findings on our website and in future newsletters.

While there are no short-term options that could completely eliminate the need for road salt, we are exploring paths to significantly reduce salt use without compromising public safety. As we work to encourage the switch from rock salt to brining for the treatment of public streets, we also want to motivate residential and commercial properties to reduce the salt loads they put down on their sidewalks and parking lots. With no maximum salting limits in place, private salt use can be excessive. Whether washed into pipes during the next storm or dissolved into groundwater, all leftover salt ends up in a stream. To better understand private salting practices, the project partners have developed a survey to learn about residential and commercial de-icing. The survey will be available soon. The project, which will take place over the next two years, is funded by grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.



*These Pelican boxes protect the loggers that process and transmit the data, keeping the stations safe and functional in all weather conditions.*



*Villanova master's student Livia Graham joins Dr. Steven Goldsmith and Tom Clark to program loggers for the salt study, as part of her graduate research.*



*A logger installed at Elm Grove Park receives data from Indian Creek every fifteen minutes. View the data at [monitormywatershed.org/sites/EBIC\\_shor/](http://monitormywatershed.org/sites/EBIC_shor/)*



# Watershed Conservation

## Riparian Buffer Restoration at Harriton Preserve

The planning stage of the restoration project at Harriton Preserve is moving forward. The Conservancy is excited to announce that we will be working with landscape architect, Bob Gray, of Gray Landscaping LLC. Bob is a long-time friend of the Conservancy and was integral to the design and implementation of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail Restoration project. The Conservancy will collaborate with the Friends of the Harriton Preserve to ensure that the project aligns with their goals and vision for the Preserve. The project is made possible by a Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Growing Greener grant.

One of the most straightforward ways to increase wildlife habitat and improve water quality is to establish a riparian buffer. A healthy riparian buffer features dense layers of native trees, shrubs, and perennials, extending at least 35 feet from each side of a stream. As the trees mature, they provide vital shade, keeping the water cool for fish and other aquatic organisms that are sensitive to summer heat. Meanwhile, the plants within the buffer offer food, shelter, and nesting spaces for a variety of wildlife. The diverse mix of plant roots slows soil erosion on the stream banks and filters stormwater runoff.

Much of the Harriton Preserve riparian buffer is overrun with invasive plants, particularly Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), porcelain berry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*), and multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*). The project will be focused on controlling invasive species through regular cuttings while introducing fast-growing trees to outcompete and eventually shade out the invasives. Maintenance efforts, including cutting back invasive plants, will continue even after the trees are planted to prevent porcelain berry from overtaking the new plantings. By reducing the population of invasive plants in Harriton Preserve, the project will minimize unwanted seed dispersal and slow the spread of invasives along Mill Creek.

This project is another important step towards improving habitat and water quality in the upstream watersheds. Planting and invasive removal projects rely on volunteers, so keep an eye out for opportunities to get involved as 2025 begins.



A portion of the current riparian buffer at Harriton Preserve. One side of the riparian buffer is bare, offering little protection to the stream, while the other is overwhelmed by invasive vines and shrubs that are choking out native plants.



# Watershed Conservation

## Celebrating the Award-Winning Collaboration of the Cobbs Partners

The Conservancy was honored at the Pennsylvania Environmental Council's Environmental Partnership Dinner for our Stream Smart Stormwater House Call program, also known as our Growing Greener Communities program. This recognition was shared with our valued partners – Eastern Delaware County Stormwater Collaborative, Pennsylvania Resources Council, and Darby Creek Valley Association. The Conservancy and our partners, collectively known as the Cobbs Partners, were brought together by the William Penn Foundation as part of the Delaware River Watershed Initiative. Our shared commitment and teamwork within the Cobbs Creek Watershed naturally fostered collaboration on this community greening and stormwater mitigation program.

The neighborhoods that drain into Cobbs Creek – beginning near Bryn Mawr Hospital and flowing along Philadelphia's western border before joining Darby Creek near the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum – are densely developed. As a result, small-scale restoration projects have proven to be the most efficient method for improving water quality.

To identify new project sites, the Cobbs Partners revamped the Stream Smart program, evolving it into the Growing Greener Communities (GGC) program. Through GGC, the Partners empower homeowners to reduce stormwater runoff and enhance wildlife habitat. The program also advances the Cobbs Partners' ongoing mission to educate the public and challenge traditional views on residential stormwater management and landscaping practices. The Cobbs Partners have engaged directly with over 250 people, installing rain gardens, downspout planters, and rain barrels. The Partners have also conserved outdoor spaces by reducing lawn areas and enhancing gardens with native plants and trees on a variety of residential and public properties.

As Growing Greener Communities continues to expand with the help of grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Department of Environmental Protection, the Cobbs Partners actively build new relationships to bridge efforts between upstream and downstream communities, creating opportunities for greater collaboration and impact. The reach and continued growth of the program are a testament to the value of partnership.



*Our Stream Smart partners, Darren Spielman, Diana Andrejczak, and Aurora Dizel, accept the Pennsylvania Environmental Council's Excellence in Community Education Award.*



*A rain garden, created through partnerships, helps support pollinators and manage storm water.*



# Watershed Conservation

## Growing Greener Communities

Green communities full of native plants are vital to a sustainable future. In suburban neighborhoods, residential properties make up much of the land. In Lower Merion, residential properties represent close to 70% of the land. To make a meaningful impact, greening efforts must take place on residential properties. Through the William Penn Foundation's Delaware River Watershed Initiative, the Conservancy joined forces with other watershed conservation organizations in Philadelphia's western suburbs. Working closely with the Eastern Delaware County Stormwater Collaborative, Pennsylvania Resources Council, and Darby Creek Valley Association, we have shifted perspectives on residential landscaping and have successfully "greened" hundreds of residential properties, enhancing the local environment.

Together, as the Cobbs Partners, we spearheaded the Stream Smart Program, which began with planting native trees, shrubs, and perennials on Delmont Avenue before expanding to other areas in Ardmore, Narberth and eastern Delaware County. Building on this foundation, the Cobbs Partners have developed the Growing Greener Communities (GGC) program, creating a framework of educational resources and community outreach to further support stormwater management and sustainable landscaping practices.

GGC looks to address large-scale issues, like runoff, flooding, habitat loss and the overall health of freshwater ecosystems, by empowering individuals to make improvements on their own properties. GGC has supported the installation of more than 100 rain gardens, 40 downspout planters, and 200 rain barrels. The partners have provided hundreds of native trees and shrubs and thousands of native perennials to help residents create more sustainable outdoor spaces. To broaden the project's impact, the GGC partners launched a dedicated website at [growinggreenercommunities.org](http://growinggreenercommunities.org), offering comprehensive resources for individuals interested in implementing small-scale environmental improvements on private and shared lands.

The GGC partners are also creating a series of how-to videos to complement the website content. The first video - produced in partnership with the Hava-Rain-Garden and Upper Darby Rain Garden programs - takes viewers through a rain garden installation at a home in Haverford Township. The video covers the entire process, from accessing the property to designing, installing, and maintaining the rain garden. Rain gardens capture stormwater that would have otherwise ended up in the storm sewer system, helping to reduce flooding and pollution. When planted with native plants, rain gardens also increase wildlife habitat. Our goal for the website and videos is to give more people the knowledge and confidence to take action.



Conservancy board member Bruce Ludwig and Conservancy Director Maurine McGeehan haul a potted tree for planting at the Polo Field.



Cobbs Partners come together at the Conservancy Cottage to assemble downspout planters.



# Growing Greener Communities

**Growing Greener Communities** is about taking small, collective actions to create change — cleaner water and healthier, more climate resilient ecosystems. Take a look at the photos to learn more about the process.



Lawn removal in action at a Growing Greener Communities site.



Lawn grass has been removed and the area mulched, ready for plants.

## Lawn Removal

Lawns provide minimal ecological benefit and contribute to stormwater runoff. By replacing lawn grass with native plants, we significantly increase wildlife habitat.



Lawn removal can be done manually with shovels and hand tools.



Helpers plant a rain garden where turf has been removed.

## Planting Native

Native plants require less maintenance than traditional lawns. Many native plants are naturally drought-resistant, making them appropriate for gardeners of all experience levels.



Native plugs are strategically arranged before planting.



Native plugs are dropped off at a project site and sorted by Conservancy staff.



Hundreds of native plugs are placed and await planting.



Plugs start small but will grow larger and stronger as the years pass.



A shipment of native trees cared for at the Conservancy Cottage.



# Growing Greener Communities



The basin shape of a rain garden forces rain to seep into the ground, keeping it out the storm sewer that leads to a creek.

## Rain Gardens At Work

Rain gardens slow the flow of water by holding it in place and allowing it to seep slowly into the ground. Slowing the flow of water reduces flooding in our streets and our streams.



A gutter pipe diverts rain from a roof, reducing the amount of water that reaches the storm sewer system.



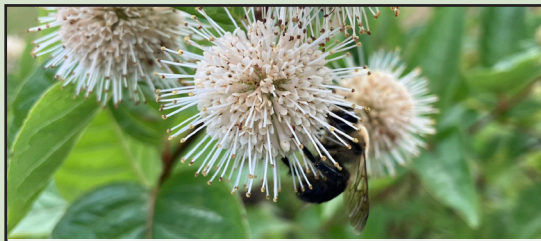
GGC rain garden during a storm. The garden captures runoff from the roof and from the lawn.

## Creating habitat

By planting native plants, we restore habitat for our local wildlife. There are native plants for every condition: sunny or shady, wet or dry.



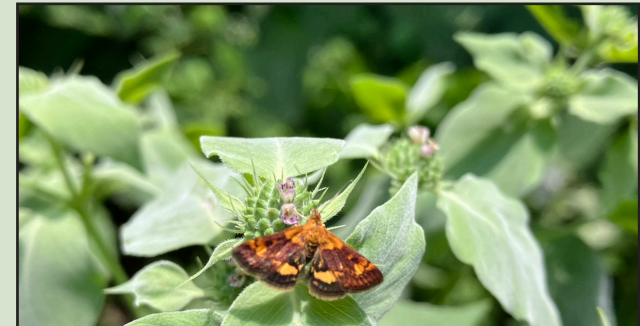
A monarch butterfly rests on a common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) planted last year.



A bumblebee on buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) in Preston Park.



A skipper butterfly on a brown-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia triloba*) at Preston Park. GGC projects enhance habitat and provide a variety of nectar sources.



An orange mint moth on mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*) at a GGC property. Mountain mint serves as a host plant and a nectar source for this moth.



A tiny bee visits blue cardinal flower (*Lobelia siphilitica*) at a GGC rain garden.



# Historic Preservation

## Traditional Neighborhoods

Philadelphia has rightly been called a “City of Neighborhoods.” Each of its many pockets of development has its own history and character. The same can be said about Lower Merion and Narberth, inner-ring suburbs of Philadelphia that contain multiple distinctive “traditional neighborhoods.” This past fall on its social media platforms, the Conservancy shined a spotlight on several of these neighborhoods. Take a look at our Instagram and Facebook posts to learn about these special places and the history behind their development! We will explore additional neighborhoods in the coming months.

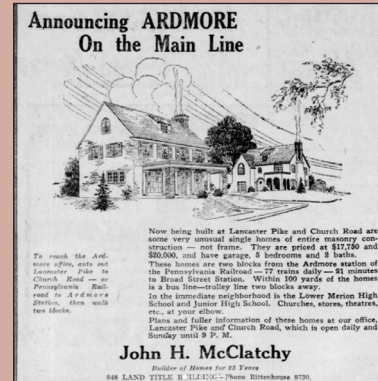
## Programming

Speaking of traditional neighborhoods, the Conservancy featured the historic “Toland Farm” neighborhood in one of its fall lectures. The lecture, which attracted 100 people, traced the development history of this early-twentieth-century neighborhood near the Wynnewood Train Station. We are grateful to our co-sponsors, the Wynnewood Civic Association, for promoting the event and to All Saints Church for hosting it. Images and descriptive information from the lecture can be accessed on the Conservancy’s website.

In addition to this lecture, the Conservancy’s programming in 2023-2024 also included a lecture about the work of Minerva Parker Nichols, America’s first independently-practicing female architect. Co-sponsored by the Narberth Historical Architectural Review Board and the Lower Merion Historical Society, the lecture was led by Molly Lester and Bill Whitaker, the author of a new book about Parker Nichols. A walking tour following the event introduced audience members to several houses in Narberth designed by Parker Nichols.

This past year, the Conservancy continued to benefit from the knowledge and expertise of the noted preservationist, trail planner, cyclist, architect, and sustainability advocate, Bob Thomas. In late summer 2023, Bob, who for several years has delivered preservation-related lectures for the Conservancy, spoke about the history of the “Great Schuylkill and Susquehanna Passage” to an audience of 80 people. In early November of this year, he guided us on a cycling tour of the “Great Minquas Trail and Early Swedish and Dutch Sites in Philadelphia & Tinicum.” We look forward to welcoming Bob, an extraordinary friend to the Conservancy, back for more programming in the spring.

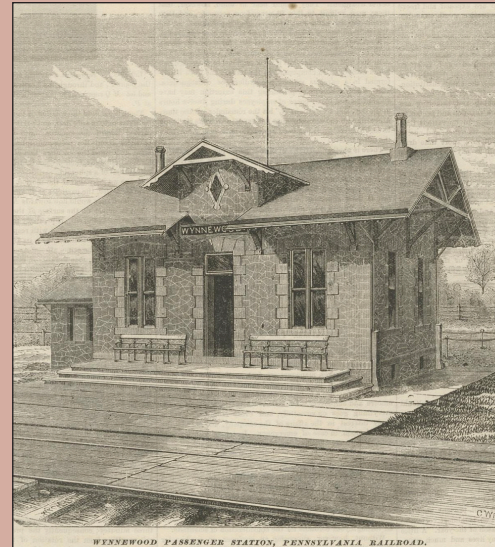
(R) Riders pause as Bob Thomas points out sites of interest during the historic bike



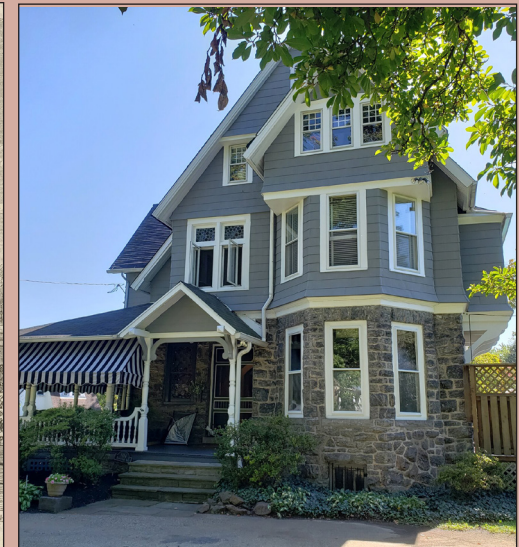
Ad for the “Ardmore Pocket.”  
*Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1925.



Atlas of Properties on the Main Line Pennsylvania Railroad from Overbrook to Paoli, 1926



“Wynnewood Train Station,” from the  
*Railroad Gazette*, January 1873.



A home in Narberth designed by Minerva Parker Nichols in 1889.





## National Register Grant for Historic Black Churches

We wrap up the annual report of historic preservation activity in 2023-2024 with an expression of genuine appreciation to Lower Merion Township. In June, the municipality awarded the Conservancy with an American Rescue Plan grant to fund the creation of National Register nominations for the historic Black churches in Ardmore and Bryn Mawr. The nominations will make the churches, which are significant community landmarks, eligible for both preservation-related funding and for financial resources to sustain their critical community programming.



Zion Baptist Church, 1981. Courtesy of Bryn Mawr College.

## Cottage Restoration Fundraising Event

Last October, the Conservancy launched an effort to restore and maintain its historic office – the Cottage – in Rolling Hill Park, thanks to a generous donation from Conservancy Board Vice Chair Tom Duncan and his wife, Megan Duncan. Their contribution kickstarted a campaign aimed at preserving the architecturally significant building, built in 1896 and attributed to Minerva Parker Nichols, the first woman in the United States to practice architecture independently.

The event was held at the Barnes Arboretum at St. Joseph's University and raised an impressive \$23,000 to support restoration efforts. While Lower Merion Township owns the building and is responsible for maintenance and capital improvements, the Conservancy is obligated to minor interior upkeep and conservation of the surrounding landscaping. Guests at the event enjoyed a fun evening, featuring a backyard barbecue and music by Grateful Dead cover band, Four Lean Hounds.

The Conservancy's long-standing dedication to caring for the Cottage reflects its broader mission to protect and celebrate the area's natural and historic resources.



A cake featuring the Conservancy Cottage from the fundraising event.



Four Lean Hounds played to celebrate the Conservancy and Tom Duncan's birthday, which he graciously hosted on the same day.



LMC board president Mark Taylor, Dr. Emil Sfedu and board member Dr. Diane Pappas-Sfedu enjoyed the festivities.



# Education

## A Legacy of Stewardship

We are excited to announce a new collaboration with Black Rock Middle School on the Pennsylvania Trout in the Classroom (PA TIC) program, a unique initiative supported by the Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. Through the PA TIC program, students raise trout in their classrooms, gaining insights into watershed health, coldwater habitats, and the importance of clean water.

Our work with trout is deeply rooted in our history. The Lower Merion-Narberth Watershed Association - which later merged with the Lower Merion Preservation Trust to create the Conservancy - was formed in 1974 after science teacher Dr. Arthur Wolfe noticed trout populations disappearing from Mill Creek. Dr. Wolfe led stream restoration projects to improve flow and bring back native trout. Our PA TIC partnership continues Dr. Wolfe's legacy, teaching students about local stream ecology and challenges.

To give students a full-circle educational experience, we will be working with them in the classroom and in the field. We will start by teaching them about the ecology of local streams and the challenges facing freshwater habitats, including the impact of stormwater runoff. Once the trout are large enough, the students will release the trout into their natural habitat.

Recent grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and PA Department of Environmental Protection also expand our education programming. In partnership with Villanova University, these funds are supporting the installation of stream monitoring stations. The stations provide data about the impact of stormwater runoff, particularly from road salt, on our streams that the students can view and analyze in real time. To strengthen the connection from roadway to waterway, we equip students with test kits to use in streams.

In the 2023-24 school year, we worked with every fourth grader in the Lower Merion School District and continued our partnership with Shipley Lower School, tying in-class studies on watershed health to hands-on field experiences. Students visited the creek to explore water quality, using macroinvertebrates as indicator species to assess stream health and understand the impacts of stormwater runoff. These interactive sessions provided a tangible connection between classroom learning and real-world ecological challenges.

We're thrilled to have continued our nature education programming with the youngest learners too! Overbrook Presbyterian Preschool, Narberth Presbyterian Preschool, and Phoebe Anna Thorne Preschool all joined us for engaging lessons in nature, laying the groundwork for lifelong connections to the environment.

From preschoolers to grade school and beyond, our educational outreach is inspiring the next generation to care for and protect our waterways, just as Dr. Wolfe envisioned 50 years ago.



*Shipley Lower School classes test water chemistry in Asbridge Park to study stormwater runoff impacts.*



*Phoebe Anna Thorne students search for macroinvertebrates.*



*LMSD students use a microscope to study macroinvertebrates.*



*Overbrook children play "Meet a Tree" in Rolling Hill Park.*



# Artist-In-Residence



Excited Overbrook preschoolers look over a variety of animals and insects from Mill Creek.



LMSD students look for life on submerged rocks.



Citizen scientists from Shipley Lower School gather water samples to test nitrate and chloride levels.

## Conservancy Welcomes Artist-In-Residence at the Cottage

In April, the Conservancy welcomed Artist-in-Residence Deirdre Murphy to set up her studio at the Cottage in Rolling Hill Park. Deirdre, a longtime collaborator, previously partnered with the Conservancy on the Delmont Avenue Green Street project, where she transformed her own property with native trees, plants, and green stormwater features. Her focus on native plants, bird migration, climate change, and biodiversity has long been an inspiration to the Conservancy. Her recent exhibit at Chimaera Gallery in September showcased this connection, featuring works that explored the natural beauty surrounding the Cottage—highlighting birds in their habitats and native plants through the seasons. Over 400 people have visited to experience Deirdre’s artwork inspired by her time at the Cottage.

Deirdre will continue her residency at the Cottage through 2025, with the potential to extend into 2026, integrating her art and environmental expertise into the Conservancy’s programming. A contemporary visual artist, Deirdre’s work bridges art and science, using painting, printmaking, and collaborative sculpture to explore themes such as the climate crisis, avian migration, nesting structures, and ecosystems.

Deirdre is a professor at Lehigh University and lives in Ardmore. Her work has been widely exhibited at renowned institutions, including the Winterthur Museum, Zillman Art Museum, Biggs Museum of American Art, Tacoma Art Museum, and Philadelphia International Airport, among others.



Deirdre Murphy shares how found wood, later featured in her *Gradients of Growth* exhibition (pictured below), inspired her tree-dwelling animal perspectives in paintings from her Cottage residency.





# Donors

## Thank you!

We are immensely grateful for the continued support of our donors, members, and board members.

It is with deep sadness that we acknowledge the passing of long-time board member Karen R. Nagel, whose immeasurable contributions greatly advanced the Conservancy's mission.

## Donor List

The Conservancy appreciates its wide circle of generous members. Below is a list of those who gave gifts between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024.

### \$10,000 and above

Anonymous  
The Austelle Foundation  
Deborah and Tim Callahan  
Thomas and Megan Duncan  
The Estate of Jane K. Koppelman  
Lower Merion Township  
Melissa Morris and Miguel Perez  
The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation  
PA Department of Environmental Protection  
Bruce D. Reed  
William Penn Foundation

### \$5,000 to \$9,999

Anonymous  
Michael and Jill Duncan  
David F. Hoffman  
Jim and Erika Krieg  
Gail Seygal  
Shreiner Tree Care  
Connie and Sankey Williams

### \$2,500 to \$4,999

Alex J. Ettl Foundation  
Anonymous  
The Armstrong Foundation  
Laurie M. Beach  
Frederick L. Bissinger, Jr.  
Manko, Gold, Katcher and Fox, LLP  
Heather Osborne and Vincent Duane  
PECO  
John B. Ward & Co. Tree Experts

### \$1,000 to \$2,499

The Christine and Michael Angelakis Foundation  
Aqua Pennsylvania, Inc.  
Ann R. Baruch  
Anonymous  
William and Debbie Becker  
Marie Benz  
Christine and Wade Berrettini  
The Cynwyd Club  
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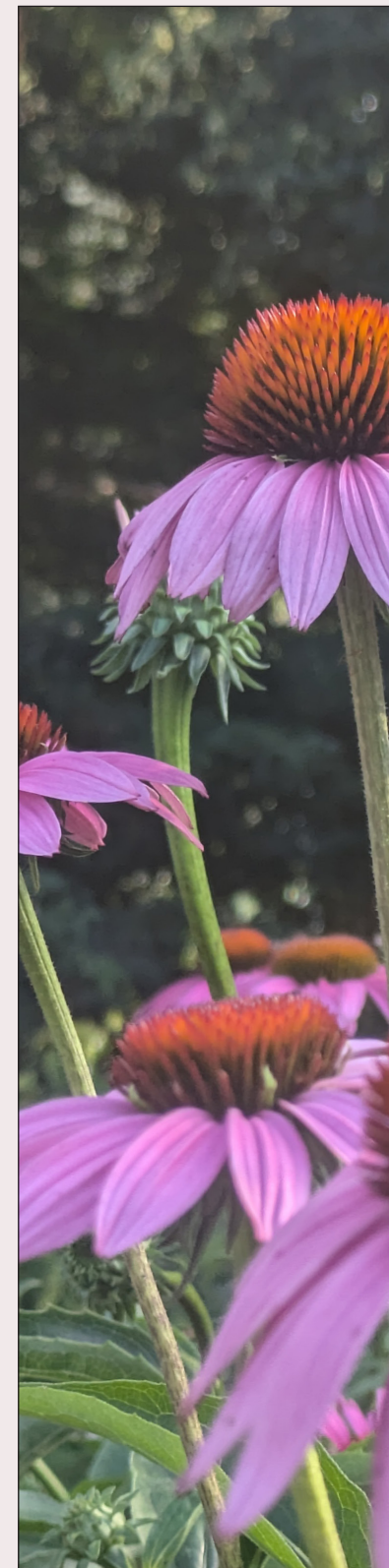
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A dense field of coneflowers (Echinacea) with vibrant pink and purple petals and prominent orange-brown centers. The flowers are set against a backdrop of lush green foliage. A semi-transparent dark green box with rounded corners is overlaid on the lower half of the image, containing white text.

*The Lower Merion Conservancy protects and enhances our community's character and quality of life, recognizing that the sustainable management of our environmental and historic resources is intertwined with both conservation and change.*