



A winter glimpse of the Celery Farm. photo by Ruth Skouron

Allendale Buys Celery Farm

The New Jersey Conservation Foundation (NJCF) announced last week it had sold the 60-acre Celery Farm wildlife sanctuary to Allendale, after holding it in trust for 15 months.

The private, nonprofit organization purchased the Celery Farm in December 1979 for \$170,000 from the McBride family at the Borough's request. The site was designated in the Borough's 1976 Master Plan for acquisition for public open space and conservation use.

Also involved in the transaction was a 4-acre conservation easement on adjacent land on both sides of Allendale Brook, purchased by NJCF for \$4,000 from Grassy Fork

Fisheries, Inc. to protect the farm and the stream corridor. NJCF transferred both the tract and the easement for its original purchase price plus its administrative expenses. The Borough received a \$122,500 grant from the state Green Acres Fund to help it pay for the property.

The Celery Farm, formerly known as Wolf Swamp, was a prosperous source of produce for over half a century, beginning in the late 1800s. Straddling Allendale Brook in its headwaters, it acts as a giant sponge for the Upper Saddle River watershed. Keeping it in its natural condition will help to

prevent flooding in downstream communities by maintaining the natural flood water storage capacity of the absorbent marshland which paving and construction would obliterate.

The swampland was scooped out by glacial action thousands of years ago and once formed a lake. The area was reportedly inhabited by members of the Lenni Lenape tribe and numerous Indian artifacts have been found on the site. The property provides habitat for a wide variety of plant and animal life, including 17 species of waterfowl such as the mute swan, green-winged teal and great blue heron.

The Celery Farm

60 Acres of Tranquility And Wildlife Refuge

Valerie Turer

The Celery Farm: 60 acres of woods, open fields and marshes, visited by egret, ibis, bittern and an astonishing inventory of other birds and waterfowl. Useful as well as beautiful, it is a natural flood storage area within the Passaic River basin. Located in an increasingly developed suburban region, it is a wild place that those seeking inner renewal can visit.

When Allendale took title to the Celery Farm 10 days ago, several people closely involved in the effort to acquire the property breathed a sigh of relief. Notable among these were Stiles Thomas of the Fyke Nature Association and Borough Administrator Norma Colburn, who supervised the tedious 3-year-long project of filling out forms, forms and more forms.

The time-consuming process of complying with the requirements for Green Acres funding culminated with the purchase of the property. Mrs. Colburn and Mr. Thomas then sought the assistance of wildlife refuge experts, with whom they met recently to devise a plan for improvements consistent with the goals of passive recreation and habitat preservation. They consulted with conservationist Kent Hardmeyer and biologist Dave Smart, who work for the Soil Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Also participating in the discussion were Corinne Leparik, Allendale's Recreation director, and Pat Mahoney, treasurer of the Junior Woman's Club of Allendale. The Juniors have designated the Celery Farm as their Community Improvement Project and hope to aid in raising funds needed to make the sanctuary accessible to hikers, birdwatchers and others, while keeping it as unspoiled as possible.

Mr. Thomas, who has conducted numerous tours of the Celery Farm over the years, said it would be highly desirable to have a trail going around the entire perimeter; a few bridges will be needed to span the brooks. Several proposals were considered for continuing the trail through the muddy southern section of the farm. A 3 foot wide, 200 yard long boardwalk built on piles seemed to be the most practical concept with the least negative impact on the terrain. Mr. Smart offered to provide designs for the boardwalk as well as for bridges, signs and parking areas. All the projects will be studied in greater detail with particular emphasis on determining their cost.

Presently the water level of the marsh can be regulated by a pump at its southern end. The pump was last used in June 1980, at which time the monthly electric bill was \$200. Consideration is being given to the construction of a small dam that would replace the costly pump in the attempt to keep marsh waters from flooding adjacent properties.

The Mosquito Control Commission will provide labor for the job since maintaining a proper water level is one of its objectives. Funds for the materials would have to be found elsewhere. Mr. Hardmeyer promised to have an engineer from his department look over the possible dam site and provide design plans.

There will be a dedication ceremony soon to mark the acquisition of this rich, diverse wildlife habitat. The Celery Farm will become a sanctuary not only for plants and animals but also for those human beings who know, as Henry Thoreau did, that "in wildness is the preservation of the world."