



TOP
Photo Credit: Julie Betts Testwuide

ABOVE
Photo Credit: Peter Nager

A plaque on a granite pillar in “Simpson’s Meadow” reads: “This pillar honors the memory of Marilyn M. Simpson whose foresight and generous spirit led her to participate in the 1969 foundation and endowment of this Beaver Dam Sanctuary so that these woods, fields and trails which she loved and beside which she lived could be preserved forever.”

Almost fifty years ago, **Marilyn Simpson** and Jan Montgomery, both accomplished horsewomen, purchased a 14-acre property in Katonah in northern Westchester County, NY. The property at the confluence of the Broad Brook and Beaver Dam River is known as the “Sheep Dip”.

Husbands Parker Montgomery and **Kelly Simpson** joined them in forming the nature sanctuary and setting up a charitable corporation — the **Beaver Dam Sanctuary**. This was the seed from which today’s preserve would evolve. Since then, acquisitions and gifts by other generous and conservation-minded Bedford residents have increased the size of the Beaver Dam Sanctuary. Of the almost 200 acres of fields, woods and streams in the Sanctuary, more than half were donated by Marilyn Simpson. Her dedication to, love of, and support for the Sanctuary (a local gem that is thoroughly enjoyed by hikers, horseback riders, fishermen, nature lovers and cross country skiers), is shared by Kelly Simpson, her husband, who has been a long-standing member of the Board; and by her daughters **Abby Simpson** and **Laura Thorn** (until

her passing).

Today, the Sanctuary's historic ties to the Simpson family are maintained through Marilyn's granddaughter **Eliza Sommerville**, a current Board member who is actively involved in annual activities and shares responsibilities, while the Sanctuary benefits from her astute insights and much valued feedback: "The Beaver Dam Sanctuary will always hold a special place in my heart. The Sanctuary holds the memories of riding ponies with my siblings, of testing the bravery of my husband against a large snapping turtle and of hiking to tire out my energetic children. Its unique location brings you from the rumble of main roads to the beauty of open meadows, the tranquility of flowing streams and the protection of a forest canopy. Along with the wonderful members of the BDS Board, I will continue to work toward the preservation of the Sanctuary in the spirit of its founders."

The Simpson's ties to the Sanctuary are further maintained every year through the generous annual gift by the Marilyn M. Simpson Charitable Trust (administered by Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors) to help preserve the Sanctuary through property maintenance, native plant restoration, invasive control, mowing, vine cutting

and trail maintenance.

The Sanctuary's mission statement, which reflects Marilyn Simpson and Jan Montgomery's original vision, says: "To preserve the Sanctuary's natural beauty and peaceful surroundings in perpetuity for the quiet contemplation and appreciation of nature, allowing for activities such as hiking, horseback riding, bird watching, cross-country skiing and fishing, and for scientific and educational purposes including ecological research and environmental studies."

Board President Peter Nager lives in the area, as do most Board members: "The Sanctuary is one of the highlights of the Town of Bedford. Every year it hosts visits by people from around the region who seek its natural beauty to hike, horseback ride, fish, or cross country ski. We are grateful to the Simpson family for the establishment of the Sanctuary and for their ongoing active support."

Among the many challenges the Board is actively working on: restoring the under-story of shrubs and tree saplings destroyed by the large deer population, controlling invasive species of nonnative plants and vines that could ruin the habitat by forcing out native plants and wildlife, property maintenance of the meadows (rebuilding bridges and

repairing steps) and mowing the fields.

Through an ongoing partnership with the Town of Bedford, and funding from New York City and New York State, the Sanctuary is engaged in a major project that has established a special catch basin drainage system to mitigate phosphate runoff into the New York City reservoirs that are fed by the Beaver Dam River as well as limiting future runoff and removing tons of gravel and sediment that had washed into the Sanctuary over many years. As part of that project the area around the catch basin and underground filtration was cleared of invasives and replanted with many native trees and vegetation.

Beaver Dam Sanctuary is one of the jewels among the many preserves and parks established by the Rockefeller family. ♦

To learn more about the Sanctuary, please contact Eliza Sommerville at elizasommerville@gmail.com, or Peter Nager at pnager@ftml.net.

BELOW

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