

# Friends of the Great Swamp



FrOGS

PO Box 373, Pawling NY 12564

Phone: (845) 855-1917

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## PINE ISLAND PRESERVED

**Saving a Little of the Great Swamp**



*The Hemlocks of Pine Island rise like a great, dark, whale's back above the surrounding sea of Red Maples.*

**FrOGS and The Nature Conservancy  
Worked with Landowners Steve and Rebecca Kessman  
To Preserve Pine Island.**

**Thanks to the shared vision of Steve and Rebecca Kessman  
Pine Island has been acquired with NACWA Grant funds  
And takes its place as a center piece of the  
"Heart of the Great Swamp"**

# The HEART of THE GREAT SWAMP

Written by Judy Kelley-Moberg

Pine Island rises like a great, dark, whale's back out of a sea of Red Maples that flow across the widest portion of the Great Swamp in the town of Patterson. It has served as a hideaway and a haven for wildlife and its human inhabitants. A visual focal point from all sides of the valley it represents "the heart" of the Great Swamp.

Steve Kessman and his wife Rebecca acquired Pine Island for their children. They hoped to continue to hunt, fish, and camp under the stars among the tall hemlocks. Local scout groups were also invited to share in this wilderness experience. The family "Sweet Corn" farm on Cornwall Hill, overlooking the Swamp and Pine Island, stopped operating last year. It was the last commercial farm in Putnam County. Both Steve and his wife have a strong attachment to the land and hope to continue farming on a much smaller scale.

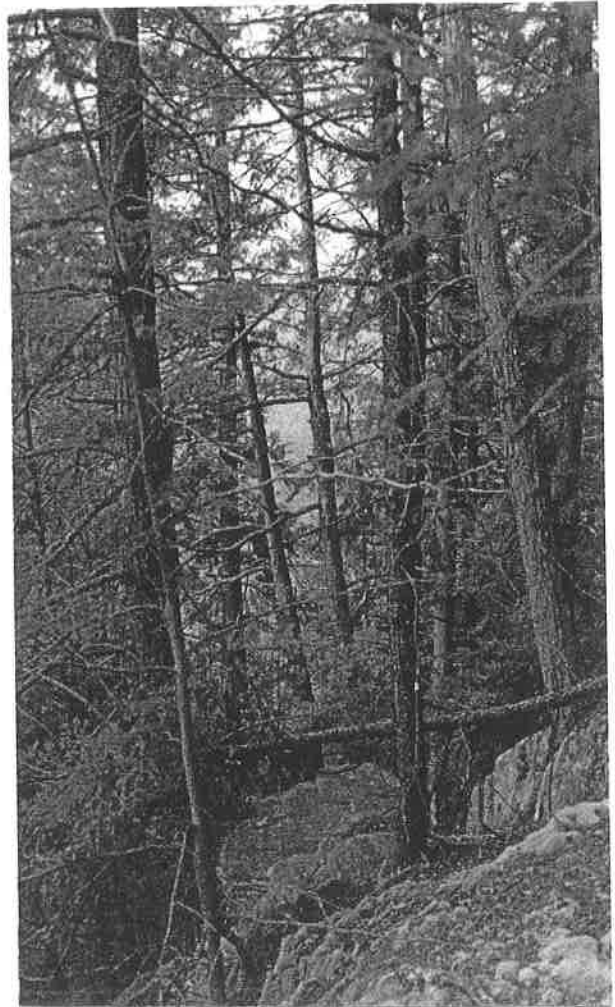
They felt that Pine Island should be preserved as a wilderness experience for future generations. Thanks to this shared vision Pine Island has been acquired with NAWCA Grant funds and takes its place in the center or "heart" of the future Great Swamp Reserve.

## PINE ISLAND

William Blake, in his *History of Putnam County*, (1849) describes Pine Island: "this rocky ledge or eminence lies in the middle of the GREAT SWAMP about 15 rods west of the Croton River. The island covers about 30 acres.... This ledge of rock rises about 200 feet above the level of the swamp. It abounds in pines and hence its appellation."

The "island" is a large, tumbled, outcrop of metamorphic rock, much harder than the limestone base of the swamp. It may have, at one time, supported a forest of pine, or all evergreens were simply labeled pine, because today it is covered with a dense stand of sizeable hemlocks.

After the last great ice sheets melted back to Canada about 10,000 years ago Pine Island must have been surrounded by a shallow lake from Quaker Hill to Cornwall Hill. The swamp and river were filled with fish, beaver, otter, and wildfowl of all kinds.



*Cliffs and Hemlocks of Pine Island*

## Early History

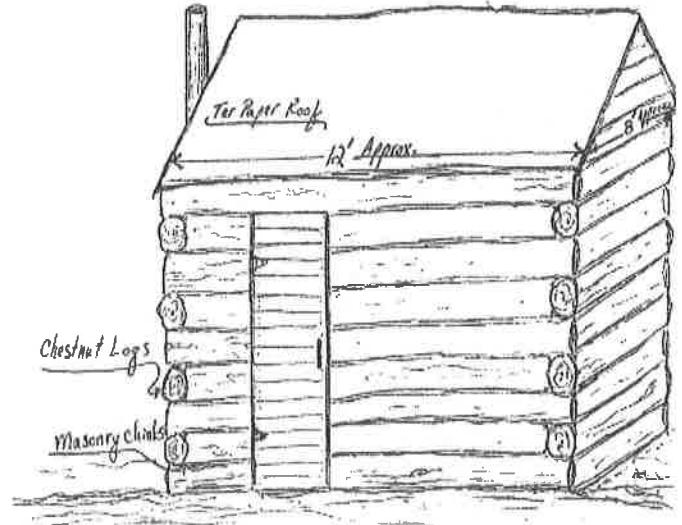
The first people left stone tools and pottery shards along ridgeline travel routes and the remains of the village sites on the long, glacial hills of the Patterson valley. On display in the Putnam County Historian's office is a graceful, 24-foot dugout canoe donated in 1985 by Charles Zurhorst, who found the canoe in an old shed in Patterson. Zurhorst noted "the owner was quite sketchy beyond the fact that the canoe had been found a long time ago along the shores of the Great Pine Swamp near Patterson."

The design of the 2 to 3 person canoe suggests a Native American builder and a sign nearby says it was Carbon dated to about 1620.

## Counterfeiters.. "The Oblong Gang"

From 1740 to the 1750's an infamous band of counterfeiters called the "Oblong Gang" or the "Dover Money Club" used the Piney Swamp as a hide out when hounded by officials from over the border in Connecticut. They passed fake New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island currency back and forth between the various states. In 1775 Rhode Island posted a 400-pound reward for the capture of one gang member named Sullivan who was at the Oblong under the alias of John Pierson. In his book, Counterfeiting in Colonial America, Kenneth Scott writes, "the impenetrable swamps were the favorite haunts of counterfeiters.. and the communities sympathetic.. such for example was a section of the Oblong in Dutchess County. " Putnam was still part of Dutchess at this early date.

Scott quotes a 1756 NY newspaper, "tis said a large gang of villains have harbored there for a considerable time past, few of which have had a crop or brand-mark upon them." Tales of a counterfeiters hideout on Pine Island undoubtedly originated with the activities of this gang. After countless captures and amazing escapes, these members, who were related to some of the areas earliest settlers, broke up the gang in 1756 and Sullivan, the talented engraver, was hanged.



*Watkins Cabin - Pine Island - "1957"*

*Drawing by Bob Folberth*



*Drawing from the "Cabin Chronicles" Roy Geetz, Blackie*

## Hawks Rest

In 1935 Leroy Smith, Willis Watkins and Walt Denton built an 8 by 11 foot log cabin in a notch on the north end of the island. They called it "Hawks Rest". Built from chestnut logs and chinked with Swamp mud, it had two bunks, a wood stove and a skylight that opened for shooting crows. Water was carried up from a spring at the bottom of the hill. A group of "swampers" from Patterson: Willis and Bernard Watkins, George Pfhal Sr., Joseph Sina (Geetz), Leroy Smith and many of their friends spent weekends there throughout the year.

*Continued on Page 4*

# Pine Island Wilderness



Roy Smith after Hunting in the Swamp 1937

## Hawk Rest *continued from page 3*

Roy Smith's daughter, Roberta Smith Morse and his granddaughter, Sariena Masiero let FrOGS borrow the "Cabin Chronicles" written by visitors from 1941 to 1947. It is a record of the men and their beloved dogs that explored, fished, and hunted throughout the surrounding swamp and its waterways. These men fished "stony hole", paddled Muddy Brook and Mill Brook. They enjoyed the simplicity and quiet peacefulness of the place. They sunned themselves on the ledges and even wrote a bit of poetry.

John Seeger captured his feelings in this stanza:

"We came to the cabin in the evening  
dreaming in our talking, courting the  
deaf ears of the swamp with our  
bitterness and hope, camped the night  
when the shad blow's smoke was  
white beneath the stars, and slept  
in the silence of the cold."

Roberta Smith Morse reminisces,

"Whenever I smell the fresh, sweet, scent of pine trees mingled with the damp odor of leaves on a forest floor, memories rush back of a special place that each child should have. My special place had a name, "Hawk's Rest". The island, river and swamp became our playground and schoolroom. We learned the names of wildflowers, plants and trees. We learned stillness so a family of deer could pass by without knowing we were there. We learned patience as we fished the river knowing that the succulent native trout were very wise but could be caught."

*Continued on Page 5*



*Drawing from the 'Cabin Chronicles'*

## Hawks Rest *continued*

In the WWII years covered by the journals Hawks Rest remained a haven where nature moved in its predictable pace outside of time and world events.

In 1958 the cabin was still in use. Bob Folberth and some friends had permission from Bernie Watkins to use the cabin. Bob recalled several experiences there, "One time we were in the cabin and the door swung open and a guy stood there pointing a silver plated revolver screaming at us, "you guys are trespassing!" We finally calmed him down but it gave us quite a scare."

Time inevitably took its toll and few traces of the cabin remain today. The hum of traffic along busy Route 22 filters through the hemlocks and over the rocky cliffs of Pine Island. "Hawks Rest" lives on in the memories of all the old timers in Patterson who still like to reminisce about their experiences in one of the last wild spots in the County.



Unless conditions have been extremely dry, Pine Island can only be reached by water in the summer or over the ice in the winter. It still retains its sense of wild isolation with crags and cliffs covered with fern and towering hemlock. Bobcat, fox, and coyote find good den sites while hawks and owls roost in the evergreens. One lone pine tree can be found on the entire island. The swamp still abounds with fish, turtles, beaver, otter, migratory birds and waterfowl of all kinds.



*Steve and Rebecca Kessman with their children Eli and Caleb*



*A drawing from the "Cabin Chronicles"*



*A River Otter*

**A Special Thank You To:**  
Roberta Smith Morse and Sariena Masiero for loaning FroGS the "Cabin Chronicles"

# Great Swamp Celebration and Art Exhibit

Students from 12 schools in the Great Swamp Watershed, including Dover, Pawling, Patterson, Southeast and Carmel, exhibited their masterpieces next to the works of 57 adult artists. There were paintings, pastels, photographs, woodcarvings and pottery on display.



*A River Otter by a student from Dover Middle School*



*Daniella Steward, a student from the Mizzentop School, with her turtle*

A highlight of the exhibit was over one hundred painted and fired clay turtles created by the Mizzentop School children under the direction of art teacher Amy Farrell. Each student painted and exhibited their own turtle. All of the school students who participated in the show based their art on plants and animals found in the Great Swamp.

The celebration also featured Jim Eyring, Master Falconer, and his falcons. Jim brought the falcons' outdoors to exhibit their flying and hunting techniques. When one of the falcons soared to the top of the steeple of Christ Church and seemed determined to stay there, the crowd held its breath. Would the falcon return to Jim or remain on the new found steeple perch? A chance for dinner finally brought him down.



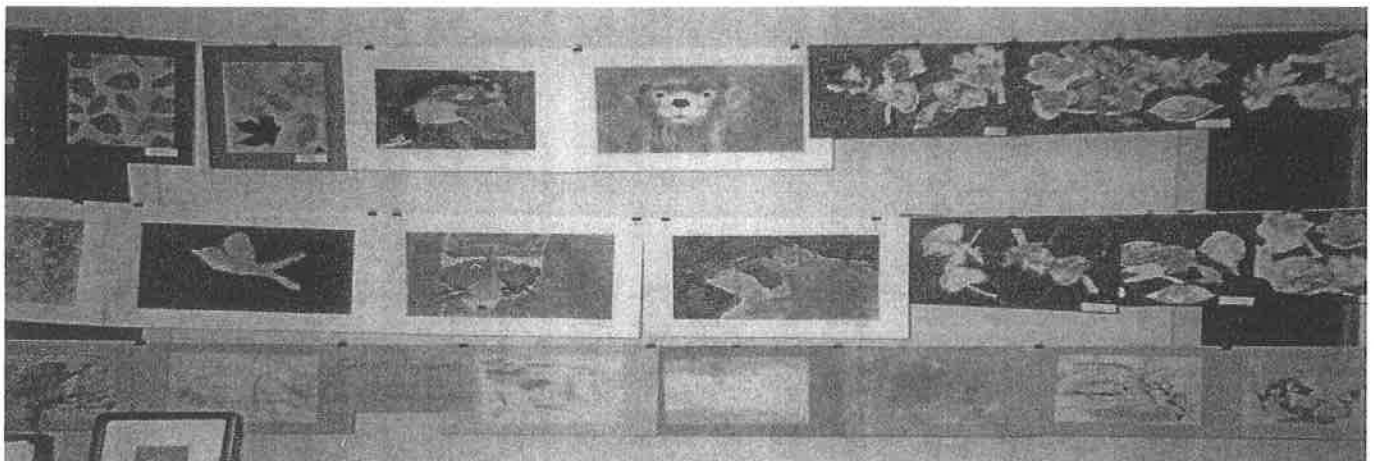
*Jim Eyring talks about his owls*

# Art Exhibit

The Nature of Things returned both Friday and Saturday to give presentations on the smaller animals of the SWAMP. Teacher, Carie Taro displayed animals similar to those that live in the SWAMP because the animals that live in the SWAMP cannot live in captivity. It was a great opportunity for children to learn about the small mammals, snakes, turtles, and frogs that live in wetland areas.



*Hal Weisel and his Snowy Owl*



*A Display of Children's Art*

## ***FrOGS Would Like To Thank:***

*All the children that exhibited in our Celebration this year as well as their teachers.*

*We also extend special thanks to Mae Greene, founder and helper, Nancy Clark, Rosemary Decatur, Manuel Greer, Jane Greer, Geneva Clare Hamilton, Sheila and Bill Hamilton, Cindy Hess, Tom Keascey, Molly McGrath, Norman McGrath, Lauri Taylor, Paul Theising of NYC DEP, Jan Melichar Utter, Nancy Lyon, and Susan Johnson*

*Thank You to our Set Up Crew; Richard Carr, Joseph Chiareto, Jeff Green, Charles Olsen, and Rick Saracelli.*