

The Story of the Creation of the Ivy Creek Natural Area

From the Ivy Creek Foundation Chronicles on ICF website at www.ivycreekfoundation.org/

The story of Ivy Creek Natural Area starts in the fall of 1975 when Elizabeth (Babs) Conant was canoeing along a familiar stretch of Ivy Creek and saw red surveyor tape along the shoreline. Over the years, Babs had come to know Ivy Creek as an oasis of peace and wild creatures. She recognized the tranquil beauty of its mix of low floodplain and high bluffs and reveled in the diversity of wildlife she would encounter as she paddled its winding course.



Fearing the worst, Babs sprung into action and persuaded David Morine from The Nature Conservancy to come see the property. It didn't take long for Morine to recognize the ecological importance of this threatened land – with its 80 acres of mixed forest and wetland, adjacent to 38 acres owned by the city with nearly 2 miles of shoreline. The reservoir, barely 10 years old, was already experiencing marked pollution, and the land surrounding it was zoned for high-density residential development. On the basis of this threat and a hope

that its preservation would stimulate protection of a larger area of the watershed through easements and gifts, TNC purchased the 80 acre farm for \$175,000 using a Revolving Fund and named it the Rann Preserve (in a letter Babs Conant wrote to ICF on the 20th anniversary of ICF, she revealed that her mother gave \$150,000 to TNC to buy the land, on the faith that the city and county would buy it as a park. Her grandchildren called her Ranny, thus the name – Rann Preserve)

With the deal sealed by December of that same year, Babs Conant did not lose any time in rallying local citizens to help clean up the property; organizing regular work days to pull out fences, tear down an old cabin, dig out the spring, clean out the barn and plant more than 100 trees.

Dusty Gardner and the Charlottesville High School Ecology Club organized several fundraising events centered on tearing down the old cabin and cleaning up dumps on the land. Raising funds was a central theme in the clean up effort. The Citizen Committee sold the bricks and wood from the old house, they charged \$5.00 a load for the pig manure shoveled out of the barn, sold the haying rights, and peddled old equipment they found around the farm. All the funds raised went to the TNC Rann Preserve fund to be used to help the city and county purchase the property.

Local naturalists chipped in as well. The Charlottesville Ornithological Society started a bird count, Tom Wieboldt took on the inventory of the plants, Dave Tice from the Department of Forestry advised the group on trail building and the local chapter of the Sierra Club took on the Rann Preserve as their conservation project.

Jane and Bedford Moore of Shack Mountain, whose property abuts ICNA, played a pivotal role during this phase of the project. TNC was concerned that Rann Preserve would in short time become an island among an urban jungle. The Moore's assurance that their land would remain undeveloped was a key moment in the decision of TNC to proceed with the deal. Jane Moore went on to work steadfastly for the project as a key link to other conservation groups, with local garden clubs, and as a link to the Greer family with whom she had shared a neighborly friendship.

The Carr and Greer story was recognized early on as an important community history. Volunteers carefully saved paperwork they found pertaining to the family and sought out and interviewed community members who knew the Greers. So important was this connection that on July 11, 1976, the Committee sponsored an Open House for Friends and Family of the Greers.

Meanwhile TNC was working tirelessly with the City and County to obtain a federal grant

from the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation for the funds to buy the land for a public park. Frustrations at the slow pace of progress didn't deter the determination to make it work. On October 10, 1978 ----- nearly three years to the day that Area was born.

When Babs Conant left Charlottesville for New York State in March of 1978, she expressed her hope that the citizen group she organized and sustained would serve as an advisory committee to the city and county after the land transfer occurred. On October 30, 1978 title to the Preserve was passed to the city and county, and it became the Ivy Creek Natural Area.

There was much to do in those early years – status as a non-profit, by-laws and Articles of Incorporation, and negotiations with the city and county on how best to balance natural preservation, education and passive recreation. The establishment of a rudimentary system of trails was next. Old farm roads became walking paths with additional trails built. A parking lot, renovation of the barn, and the installation of the kiosk and composting toilet represented much hard work.

The Natural Area Grows

In the midst of a very busy year, the Board received an opportunity that was too good to pass up. As the Ivy Creek Natural Area took shape, there remained a threat of development all along its western border (see Conservation Battleground below) As early as 1977, TNC had considered acquisition of the 80C acre “Fleming property” that adjoined ICNA, but legal complications blocked the purchase. As the legal problems cleared in early 1980, Bill Cole of TNC negotiated a 60 day option to buy the land, with the ultimate purchase contingent on the ability of the city and county to secure funds to buy the land back to add to the new natural area. The approval proceeded slowly, and when the option was due to expire, TNC was reluctant to invest further option money without more guarantees from the city and county.

The newly incorporated Ivy Creek Foundation stepped in, taking on the role of intermediary between TNC and local government. Using the special gifts fund, in May of 1980 ICF extended the option with Fleming, and then worked closely with the city and county to write a grant to the Commission on Outdoor Recreation for the funds to purchase the land from TNC. When the application process stalled, ICF once again extended the option. About this time the city offered 38-acres to add to the natural area (the Peninsula Trail) as part of a matching fund agreement.

As the negotiations for the Fleming land proceeded TNC and ICF saw the opportunity to add even more acreage with the addition of the adjoining Flemenco property. ICF president, Paul Saunier negotiated with the owners to divide the land in half allowing the owners to

develop the land along Lambs Rd. while selling the less developable land to TNC and thus creating a natural barrier for the park boundaries. As a result, by February 1981, TNC purchased the 97-acre tract next to ICNA. On May 1, title was transferred to the city and county and the Ivy Creek Natural Area became the 215---acre property it is today.

Creation of the Ivy Creek Natural Area is a textbook case for active citizen participation in the design of a conservation area. Involving public and private sectors – as well as city, county, state and federal proposals and funding – it represents a major success for our local conservation community.



James Fleming and Paul Saunier, Jr.

celebrate the expansion of the natural area

A Conservation Battle Ground

While the relatively smooth purchase and subsequent transfer of the 80 acre Riverview Farm was proceeding, there was in Albemarle County a battle raging over development rights around the reservoir. With the creation of the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir in 1966, creating both a new source of public water and a viewscape, development pressure rose precipitously in the area with a subsequent rezoning of much of the land surrounding it. However, when evidence of eutrophication of the reservoir became apparent in the early 70s, citizen groups, such as Citizens for Albemarle, spoke out urging restrictions on development within the reservoir watershed. Caught in the middle of this controversy was one development proposal that was to play a significant role in the natural area history.

When Mary Carr Greer died in December of 1973, Riverview Farm still held 160 acres. However, as part of a life estate agreement, family friend James Fleming inherited 80 of those acres. In October 1974, Fleming came before the AC Planning Commission along with two neighboring landholders with a proposal to build a Planned Unit Development (PUD) of 804 units on a 127 acre lot, 80 of which was formerly Greer land. At the time, the land was still zoned as agricultural allowing only 1 unit per 2.5 acres, but according to the Master Plan for the County the land fell within the "urban area" that allowed 2.5 units per acre and other nearby developments had been rezoned for higher densities, most notably Four Seasons.

In January 1975, the Planning Commission rejected Fleming's proposal of 6.7 units per acre and suggested that he submit a revised plan of 2.5 units per acre they felt was acceptable to the Master Plan. In February, the Board of Supervisors rejected the proposal as well. This did not sit well with the developers, and turmoil ensued including multiple lawsuits and much negative publicity. When Fleming and his partners returned in January of 1976 with a revised plan of lower density, the plan now conflicted with new ordinances instituted in the previous year and shortly afterward the Board of Supervisors imposed a moratorium on all building within a 5 mile radius of the intake pipe for the reservoir.

About this time, at Babs Conant's urging, The Nature Conservancy met with Fleming about the possibility of buying the land to add to the future natural area. The land itself would lend a critical component to the ecological integrity of the Ivy Creek Natural Area and would have the added benefit of making the former Riverview Farm intact again. While these meetings were fruitful, it wasn't until 1981, with the help of the newly formed Ivy Creek Foundation, that the idea would come to fruition with the addition of 97 ecologically valuable acres to the Ivy Creek Natural Area.