



Hunterdon Land Trust

Protecting the places you love

111 Mine Street • Flemington, New Jersey 08822
Phone: (908) 237-4582 • Fax: (908) 237-2225

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Dave Harding
(908) 237-4582

Dave@hunterdonlandtrust.org

Hunterdon Land Trust Preserves Kingwood Farm That Offered Sanctuary to WWII Orphan and Served as Church Retreat

By the time the four-year-old girl arrived at the Kingwood farm in 1941, she had faced more horrors than most people endure in a lifetime.

The piercing screams of air-raid sirens. The angry buzz of German Luftwaffe bombers droning over London. The groans of buildings collapsing from the plummeting bombs.

One bomb whistling out of the inky night sky destroyed this girl's secure little world, killing her parents and reducing her home to rubble.

A short time later, renowned journalist William Lindsay White was crossing the Atlantic Ocean on a destroyer to cover the Battle of Britain. Within his lifebelt, he carried a note in cablese English that read "Uplook kids," a reminder from his wife to adopt a child if one needed a good home. Thus, the wheels were set in motion to give this girl, Barbara, a new life.

That new life began on a 100-acre farm off Horseshoe Bend Road, a property now preserved by the Hunterdon Land Trust.



The Whites owned the farm and two-story white clapboard house before selling it to the United Reformed Church in Somerville, who for several decades used the property as a nondenominational retreat center. But through the years, the dirt road winding up to the farm house became less traveled, while costs to maintain the property continued to climb.

“It was our passion to keep the property’s use similar to what it’s been, so one of our members reached out to the Hunterdon Land Trust because we knew they had been involved in preserving other properties along Horseshoe Bend Road,” said John Lane, an elder with the United Reformed Church.

The Land Trust, with vital assistance from several partner organizations, preserved this large tract, adjacent to Horseshoe Bend Park and the Copper Creek Preserve, and bordered on the north, south and east by preserved farms.

“This beautiful property offered sanctuary and comfort to a young girl at a time when the world was at war, and provided a lifetime of happy memories to churchgoers of all faiths,” said Patricia Ruby, Executive Director of the Hunterdon Land Trust “We’re honored to have helped preserve this land and its legacy.”

HLT and Kingwood sought to protect this land because it bridged other preserved properties. Protecting contiguous parcels over time creates greenways that support critical wildlife habitat corridors, recreational activities and water purification. The Copper Creek and its tributaries flow through this richly forested land that harbors opportunities for miles of hiking trails.

An aerial photograph from 1930 shows how the property has changed. Back then, much of the land was cleared for farming, and the road that snaked past the house swung north before meeting what is now Route 12.

“My parents were living in Washington, D.C. when they bought the farm, and spent weekends there restoring it, and cleaning out chicken manure from the big chicken house,” noted Barbara White Walker, now in her 70s and living in Arizona. “They planted the 100 acres with pine trees.”

Bill White first saw his daughter in a Rest Center for bombed-out children, founded in London by Anna Freud, daughter of Sigmund Freud. He documented his experiences in London and the struggle to secure passage for his daughter to the U.S. in his book *Journey for Margaret*, which later became a major motion picture starring Robert Young. (Barbara’s name was altered for the book.)

She arrived at the Port of New York with two possessions – a teddy bear and a 2-lb. magnesium incendiary bomb case – and met her mother, Kathrine Klinkenberg White. The bomb had dropped from the sky, and an air raid warden dumped out the thermite before giving the case to the girl. The case brought her comfort: She played with it during the day and sometimes slept with it at night.

When the Whites brought her to the Kingwood farm, Barbara peered suspiciously at the grass – which she evidently saw little of in London – and thought it too soft to walk on. Barbara adjusted to her new life on the farm, growing tense only when hearing planes flying overhead. The family visited Kingwood a number of times through the years.

“My father wrote several of his books at the farm, and when he was writing *Report on the Russians* the house was broken into, and several things were destroyed,” Barbara noted. The 1945 bestseller detailed the Katyn Forest Massacres, slave labor and the Russian retreat from Moscow. “They think the culprits were American communists.”

Barbara grew up in New York City and on the Kingwood Farm, attended Stanford University and married. She later became editor of the *Emporia Gazette*, the Kansas-based newspaper her family has now owned for more than 120 years.

In February 1964, the Whites sold the property to the United Reformed Church of Somerville (then known as the First Reformed Church) for \$1. The church used the property and home for a host of events: picnics, pot lucks, and retreats for youth and women’s groups. Eagle Scout candidates built benches for outdoor worship services or marked hiking trails. Families rented the home to host Thanksgiving dinners or for vacations. Young couples married there.

“It was a special place,” recalled Lynda Van Gorder, of the United Reformed Church who visited the farm as a teenager. “Going to a retreat was very different; there was a period of silence which was such a shock to some of us teenagers. But it was a good experience getting away from our normal lives and having the time to think about things you don’t usually focus on.”

Different denominations from Pennsylvania, Connecticut and New Jersey worshipped on the property. “It’s a gorgeous space, and we wanted to make it available to other outreach ministries,” Lane said.

Kingwood Mayor Richard Dodds said the town intends to use the land for passive recreation. “At this point, the historic farm house is being evaluated for needed repairs and possible uses,” Dodds said. “It is clear that we will need to seek grants or other monies to make it as usable as possible. One possible idea is to create an environmental center that is open to the public for education and meeting space.”

Kingwood is planning to hold a ceremony celebrating the preservation on Saturday, May 21.

Dodds noted other organizations and individuals who played key roles in the preservation were the New Jersey Conservation Foundation – who first showed Kingwood officials the property and submitted a grant application to Hunterdon County – the state Department of Environmental Protection’s Green Acres Staff, the Hunterdon County Freeholders, the Kingwood Township Committee and Department of Public Works, and several church property neighbors Lary Aasheim, Mark Blecher and Michael and Lisa Overington. Kingwood owns the property.

Because the Copper Creek and its tributaries flow through this land before heading into the Delaware River, this preservation also helps forward the goals of the National Park Service’s Lower Delaware Wild & Scenic Program, which aims to protect the remarkable natural, historic and recreational resources that earned this stretch of the river the Wild and Scenic designation.

Image Credits to Come.

