



Hunterdon Land Trust

Protecting the places you love

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Come Sit for A Spell

New Bench at Hunterdon Land Trust's Dvoor Farm Honors Robert, Marie Decker

The sturdy wooden bench behind the Hunterdon Land Trust's Dvoor farm house headquarters offers a charming view of the Mine Brook snaking alongside a small patch of woods and open fields. A shiny engraved plate recently attached to it commemorates Robert (Bob) J. and Marie C. Decker, two longtime Kingwood residents whose preserved farm is a testament to the county's agricultural past.

Perhaps someone resting on the bench will look across the fields and consider the Decker's story: How a young man survived the Great Depression and, through hard work and determination, built a successful life in the fertile fields of Hunterdon County.

"Dad was born to extreme poverty in Elizabeth, New Jersey," said his daughter, Karen (Decker) Pelkey. "He told me about how he would walk along the railroad tracks carrying a burlap bag that he would fill with coal."



As the hardships of the Great Depression persisted, Bob attended Thomas Jefferson High School in Elizabeth, where William Hann taught. Hann lived in the city during the school year, and headed out to the country and his Kingwood farm every summer. He must have seen promise in the teenager, because he invited Bob to work on the farm. By his junior year, Bob transferred to Frenchtown High School so he could work Mr. Hann's farm full time.

"Before giving up life in Elizabeth and moving away from home, he discussed it with his parents," said his eldest son, Scott Decker. "They all agreed that living in urban Elizabeth offered no future, no work and just trouble on the horizon."

A New Life Filled With Hope for the Future

The promise of a better life beckoned in Hunterdon County. While attending Frenchtown High, Bob met his future wife, Marie (Schlott), who grew up on the biggest egg farm in town. The couple married in the early 1950s and purchased Mr. Hann's farm, bordering County Route 519, in the 1960s.

Robert Fulper was Bob Decker's best friend for more than 50 years; the two were born only days apart. They met at a recreation center/bowling alley where dances were held on weekend nights. "He was quite a guy," Mr. Fulper recalled. "He could look into the future, get an idea about something, and then figure out what he needed to do to make it happen."

Bob and Marie Decker cared for their land, and leased it to a local farmer who grew corn and hay. Bob also worked as a salesman for Babcock Hatchery representing the Babcock Bessie strain of baby chicks and later for Sylvan Pools.

"Dad had many memories of farming and had many friends in the area," Scott said. "He loved the pond on the property and would recall jumping in it to wash off the dust after a hot day throwing up hay bales. Later, he'd spend summer evenings fishing for largemouth bass."

The Decker children would inherit a deep appreciation for the land from their parents. Scott hunted with his father and uncle along the Lockatong Creek, and loved looking for Lenni Lenape arrowheads in the plowed fields. Karen could tell you where every apple tree grew.

"I would be out in those woods or up in the hayloft, and my mother could never find us," Karen said. "I had blond, curly hair and my mother was always picking stuff out of it."



Robert passed away in December of 1984, and is buried in Rosemont Cemetery across from the man who first brought him out to the farm, Mr. Hann.

Five years ago, a solar panel company approached Marie about purchasing the 59-acre farm. “The farmland has hundreds of feet of open road frontage along Route 519, and Mom and I couldn’t bear the thought of covering the land with concrete footings and head-high solar panels,” Scott said. “We both knew that Dad would have felt the same way – not a nice legacy to leave behind.”

A realtor told the family about the Hunterdon Land Trust, which helped facilitate a deal in which the state of New Jersey purchased the land for preservation through the Green Acres program. New Jersey took title of the property on April 24, 2014. Sadly, Marie, who had moved to Florida, passed away a few months before the transaction was completed. She now rests peacefully in Rosemont bedside her beloved Bob.

“We are very grateful for the Decker family’s support of the Hunterdon Land Trust and our mission to preserve the rural heritage of Hunterdon County,” remarked Patti Ruby, executive director of the Hunterdon Land Trust. “Overlooking the meadow at Dvoor Farm, the commemorative bench reminds visitors of their legacy.”

