



## **A Recent History of the Benedictine Conservation Park**

By Jayne Spaulding, Trustee

Just outside Bedford's Historic District on Wallace Road lies a remarkably beautiful piece of land dominated by a large expanse of open fields and panoramic views. Surrounding these approximately 19 acres of sloping fields are about 8 acres of woods that offer a rich variety of trees and shrubs. How the Bedford Land Trust and the Town of Bedford came to acquire this treasure may be unknown to those who have recently moved to Bedford, so herewith is a brief history.

In October 1998, the property suddenly came on the market. It had been home to several Benedictine nuns since 1957. The Lithuanian sisters had fled Europe in 1944 and eventually settled in Bedford, farming the land and running a small preschool. The asking price for the property was over \$800,000. The Bedford Land Trust, with its small treasury, was not in a financial position to bid on it until an anonymous 'angel' donated \$30,000. With this amount and with a pledge of \$475,000 from the Town of Bedford's Conservation Fund, the Land Trust's offer prevailed over 12 other bidders. Within a few short months of the bidding process, the Land Trust was able to raise the necessary balance of funds. We closed on the land in May 1999. In all, more than 600 individuals, families and businesses contributed to the purchase.

Once we closed on the property, the Land Trust immediately transferred ownership of the property to the Town of Bedford. This was a pre-negotiated condition in exchange for receiving the Town's Conservation Funds for the purchase price. In return, the Bedford Land Trust holds a conservation easement on the property. A conservation easement is a mutually agreed upon contract, a legal

document, that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. It also means the Bedford Land Trust has the responsibility to regularly monitor the property to see that the terms of the easement are being met, and to report any problems to the Town. It is then the responsibility of the Town (who owns the property) to remedy the problem.

Since 1999, several improvements have been made to the property. Most notably, a paved entrance and gravel parking area have greatly improved the accessibility. A large wooden information kiosk was funded by the Bedford Land Trust and constructed by Ken Hawkins, John Graham and others from the Bedford Men's Club. Friends of Linda Moore Hockman, founder of the Bedford Land Trust, placed a granite bench on the hill in her memory. A plaque honoring our contributors can be found near the entrance to the fields. A path through the woods and down to Riddle Brook was constructed, allowing a closer look at the more than 66 species of trees, shrubs, and woody plants, and more than 3 dozen varieties of wildflowers. The Town regularly mows the open space, and in the winter, the slopes are the best around for sledding.

Many individuals from the Bedford Land Trust and the Town worked very hard to ensure the success of the purchase of the Benedictine Conservation Park, and most certainly we could not have done it without our generous contributors.