

## **A TRIBUTE TO CLINTON EARL**

As the dissolution of the Earl Trust and the satisfaction of its assets moves towards the Orphan's Court for final settlement, the information to which the public has been exposed has centered on the debate over the property and the money involved. The legacy of Clinton Earl, the namesake of the Earl Trust, deserves a far broader public discussion of the underlying values and lessons from his associations and his life and times.

The court testimony, given to establish Clinton Earl's desires for the use of the trust fund, shows Clinton Earl's most important influences to be Emil Nuebling, who is mentioned specifically in his will as a consultant for the use of the fund, and the Conservation Society, a local group at that time dedicated to the "preservation of the native life, the flowers and the trees on the mountain (Mt. Penn) and the improvement for the use of the public". Emil Nuebling who died in 1926 was the water engineer for the City of Reading who locally pioneered watershed protection by the planting of trees. He has an honorable reputation for his forestry work at the Antietam Lake watershed which served as the City's main water supply from the 1880's to the mid 1930's. Clinton Earl served on the City of Reading Planning Commission from 1927 to 1934. He was known as a dynamic, vigorous, and active person with a penchant for hiking, a love of nature, and a lifetime interest in City planning. In addition to his surviving sister and the Earl Trust, Clinton Earl, in his will, provided financial support to 38 different charitable organizations in Berks County.

The Earl Trust was used both during Clinton Earl's life and after his death (1946 ) to purchase roughly 326 acres on Mt. Penn and roughly 118 acres on Neversink Mt. This acreage includes portions of the historic Neversink Mt. Railroad and the Mt. Penn Gravity Railroad railbeds; some of which serve as hiking and bicycling trails today. During Earl's tenure on the Planning Commission many more properties on Mt. Penn were procured through condemnation by the City using City of Reading and Earl Trust funds. The magnificent backdrop to our fine city, which today we refer to as the Mt. Penn Forest Reserve and the Neversink Mt Preserve was a purposeful collective action by the City of Reading's Planning Commission, Water Bureau, Administration and the Earl Trust. Prior to Lake Ontelaunee with its huge capacity becoming the primary water source of drinking water for the city, the city drew its water from numerous reservoirs on Mt Penn and from the reservoirs at City Park, Bernhardt's Dam, Antietam Lake, and Neversink Mountain. These forested watersheds were all intentionally protected; today, some of these same reservoirs with underground storage are still utilized as holding tanks.

Water has always been and will always be essential to human life and to the communities in which we live. Clean water is not an accident. Not a day goes by without newspaper coverage of some water crisis around the globe precipitated by human pressure on nature's carrying capacity. Water is a process, the living and breathing arteries of the earth organism. When nature is given enough room to operate, she will provide our necessities. Clinton Earl grasped this reality all too well. The visionary plans and actions of Clinton Earl and his associates still resonate today and they can serve as models for facing today's environmental challenges. Natural resource protection is always in vogue. Clinton Earl's life and contributions are the embodiment of conservation, they read like a guidebook for successful natural resource protection. Long before the sophisticated terminology of today, Clinton Earl was implementing conservation practices which we currently describe as: landscape scale conservation; water supply protection; watershed protection; forests as groundwater recharge; forests as source water protection; surface and ground water quality relying on functioning native forests as purifying filters and for erosion, sedimentation, and storm water prevention; conservation as a community value; water protection as economic development; water protection as investment and future tax savings; recreation as economic development (it is worth noting that the PA

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' current model for their investment is the provision of recreational opportunities as economic development to aid in the revitalization of declining cities); recreation and exercise as necessary to our health and well being and as a prerequisite to health care savings; environmental justice; healthful opportunities like clean water and recreational outlets are available to everyone; historic preservation; conservation philanthropy; partnership and collaboration; conservation is not only a word and a concept, but an action, a collective action; community involvement, community service, volunteerism, and participation democracy (democracy's most underutilized gift is the right to participate in governmental decisions and the right to assemble); conservation = land preservation (fee simple or conservation easement) + land management + municipal coordination + community support.

Clinton Earl was not only a person for his time but a person for all times; truly one of Reading's favorite sons and daughters. It would not be hyperbole to conclude with Long Live Clinton Earl, Reading and Berks' foremost conservationist, but Clinton Earl does live on everyday in the Mt Penn Forest Reserve and the Neversink Mt Preserve and anyplace where people work as a team to protect the places which are vitally important to their community's health. Thank you, Clinton Earl.

Our society's greatest tribute to Clinton Earl would be the permanent legal protection, as rendered by the Orphan's Court, of the Earl Trust properties for the purposes for which they were acquired – watershed protection and public recreation. Our Berks citizenry's greatest tribute to Clinton Earl would be community commitment to forest protection. Berks County has excellent forest resources in the Kittatiny Mountains, Hopewell Woods, and the Oley Hills. In the entire Schuylkill River Watershed, Berks County has 10 of the 12 Exceptional Value Streams, so called for water quality and functioning capabilities. Of our 10 Exceptional Value streams, 9 are conceived in the crucible of our forests which organizations like the Berks County Conservancy and our partners are working hard to protect. Conversely, we also have dead streams; nonfunctioning streams which are impaired and degraded from pollutants and excessive stormwater; and streams that routinely dry up due to lack of rainwater infiltration from hard surfaces.

Much analyses from near and far and wide has been done and many non-Berks organizations like the Philadelphia Water Company, the Schuylkill Action Network, PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Delaware River Basin Commission to name just a few, have taken notice to the quality of our water resources and are seemingly more interested, committed, and financially supportive in the protection of our forests than we are, as a community.

Hopefully, the settlement of the Earl Trust will not be the end of Clinton Earl's contributions but will serve as a catalyst for the rejuvenation of our community's will and spirit to protect our forests and water they produce. Long Live, Clinton Earl.