



A Family's Heritage *of Conservation*



A remarkable long-term commitment to conservation reached a milestone this winter when the last unprotected portion of Hill Girt Farm in Chester County, Pennsylvania, was permanently preserved by its owners, the Honorable and Mrs. Harry G. Haskell, Jr.

The Haskells were among the first easement donors to the Brandywine Conservancy in 1969 when they protected 194 acres of Hill Girt. That year, along with three neighbors (Ford B. Draper, George A. "Frolic" Weymouth, and Phyllis M. Wyeth), they helped preserve four miles of Brandywine River frontage between the Delaware State line and Chadds

Ford, Pennsylvania. Those first easements were part of the foundation of the Conservancy's environmental programs which are now responsible for protecting more than 40,000 acres in southeastern Pennsylvania and northern Delaware.

Over the years, the Haskells have placed 19 conservation easements on the farm, reserving only a few building rights. They have protected over 1,000 acres of arable farmland, deciduous forests, emergent wetlands, biologically-diverse floodplains, and important habitat for wildlife.

Hal Haskell's father purchased Hill Girt in 1912. Then, as now, it was a working farm. "There were several families with children on the farm, and we all had jobs," recalls Mr. Haskell. "The really little kids got a nickel per hour. The bigger ones got a dime. We had to hoe every row of corn to keep the weeds down. The older children pitched hay for the 12 horses. There were no tractors until the mid 1930s."

"We had a dog kennel with about 50 schnauzers and a big water wheel to generate electricity. To turn the wheel, there was a surface viaduct that brought water down from the pond. There was no fire department back then, so we pumped water to two big tanks for a huge fire control system. The water pressure from those tanks was tremendous. You could fill the swimming pool in two hours."

Hal and Mimi Haskell were married on Kentucky Derby Day in 1947. In addition to several positions in private business, including president of Abercrombie and Fitch, Mr. Haskell had a distinguished career in politics. He served as secretary of the Departmental Council of the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare in 1953 and 1954, consultant to the special assistant to President Eisenhower in 1955, Delaware's representative in Congress from 1956 to 1958, and Mayor of Wilmington, Delaware from 1968 to 1972.





Mr. Haskell had learned the importance of water for irrigating crops and controlling fires at Hill Girt. As mayor, he learned the importance of the Brandywine River to the city’s water supply. “I was startled to find out that at any given time the city had only a 28-day supply of fresh water, most of which came from the Brandywine,” he says. “That was something that kept me awake at night.” As a result, Mr. Haskell embarked on a successful crusade to stop paper mills from dumping refuse in the river, and he orchestrated an agreement with Pennsylvania Governor William W. Scranton to safeguard Wilmington’s water supply.

Before the couples’ eight children, 19 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren were born, Mrs. Haskell taught at Episcopal Academy. For many years, she has been an active supporter and organizer of activities to benefit underprivileged children.

Today, the entire Haskell family’s connection to the land remains strong. The Haskell’s son, H.G., continues the farming tradition on Hill Girt with S.I.W. Vegetables, a popular roadside farm stand. Their daughter, Bettina, has a horse boarding operation in the stables. Another daughter, Laurie, owns Wild Thyme, a flower shop in Centerville, Delaware, and the Haskell’s two oldest sons, Jamie and Kim, own and manage a farm in Australia.

When asked about his motivation for placing conservation easements on the property, Mr. Haskell says, “It’s just common sense. You have to preserve land before it gets developed. Mimi and all of my kids feel that way too. Permanently protecting Hill Girt with the Brandywine Conservancy is as much their desire as it is mine. It’s just unthinkable to have a development here.”

Save the Brandywine Battlefield

Diane Cook lives 2,700 miles from the Brandywine Battlefield, but the California resident is passionate about saving this major landmark in American history from suburban sprawl.

“I grew up going to Birmingham Friends Meeting, and my father and I go together whenever I am in the area,” says Ms. Cook. “I’ve always looked out across those fields and thought, ‘Isn’t it lovely that the area is still open and green and there are no houses.’”

Ms. Cook is one of many people who have rallied to preserve the battleground where thousands of American patriots died in 1777. To date, the Conservancy has raised \$8 million towards a goal of \$10 million to purchase and endow one of the few remaining unprotected parcels within the Brandywine Battlefield National Landmark. Although Landmark status recognizes a site’s historical importance, it does not prevent landowners from altering or developing their properties.

Four of the five most important properties within the Landmark have been permanently protected through conservation easements and other measures. The fifth property — the hole in the donut — is the focus of current efforts. In order to protect this important property in the middle of preserved lands, we need your help. Please donate now online at www.savethebattlefield.org or send a contribution for the battlefield to the Brandywine Conservancy at P.O. Box 141, Chadds Ford, PA 19317.

