

**Bedford Farmers Club**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of May 9, 2018**

**Bluestone Farm and Living Arts Center**  
**Brewster, New York**

**Sister Catherine Grace** of Bluestone Farm welcomed members and guests of the Bedford Farmers Club. She introduced **Sharon Bodenschutz**, who serves as farm manager and later would take the group on a tour of the farm. Sister Catherine Grace offered the friendly advice to check for ticks after the tour.

President **Mary Farley** called the meeting to order after the Sister's kind introduction. Mary related that her plan to be adopted by Jim and Twink Wood had not come to fruition, but that she nonetheless had parental roots in farming. Her father's family owned a farm in Northern Ireland that was farmed by tenants farm[ers], and her mother grew up on a dairy farm in Chatham, New York.

**Sheila Crespi**, filling in for Club Secretary **Elin Peterson**, read from the April 2018 minutes.

**Roger Vincent**, Treasurer, noted that after 30 days in office, he was able to report that the Bedford Farmers Club was still solvent. He also noted that he would be pleased to accept \$10 in payment of dues for new and renewing members.

Club Historian **John Stockbridge** delved into the archives to discuss previous BFC visits and meetings that looked at connections between farming and religious life, and explored the practices of organic farming and animal husbandry. John's complete comments are appended to these minutes.

**Pam Sorkin**, in her discussion of Timely Tips, noted that with Mother's Day approaching, one of her favorite ways to celebrate was to go to a nursery and have free rein to shop. She is especially fond of a plant called meadow rue (*thalictrum*), native to Japan but very hardy in our zone. Meadow rue grows to heights of six to nine feet, with green-blue foliage and flowers of pink or lavender accented by yellow stamens. Meadow rue blooms in early July and, with deadheading, can be coaxed to blossom through October. While meadow rue favors partial shade and humus soil, Pam has also had success planting it near an asphalt driveway in full sun. Meadow rue self-seeds and will spread, but it is not invasive.

Pam then segued into a discussion of cleaning supplies. Some cleansers emit volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which can have adverse health impacts. Concentration of VOCs can be ten times higher indoors than outside. Since moving into her new home, Pam has discovered a product without VOCs called Benefect, which is available in spray bottles and wipes. With thyme as one of the main ingredients, Benefect is generally recognized as safe (GRAS under

FDA guidelines), has a neutral Ph, and is anti-bacterial, non-corrosive and non-reactive; Benefect is also effective on mold and mildew. Pam contacted the company in Canada and received samples for everyone to take home. The party favors were a big hit.

Hospitality Chair **Julie Henken** thanked members for their food contributions and noted that in Twink's absence, Sylvia had provided the asparagus sandwiches. Julie put out a sign-up sheet for people interested in bringing sweet and savory snacks for future meetings.

**Mary** asked guests to identify themselves. Those who had attended two or more meetings of the BFC were voted in as members. She announced that the June meeting would be held at Phillis Warden's home and garden, featuring a presentation on native plants by Barbara Fischer.

**Sister Catherine Grace** returned to the front of the room to discuss the work and philosophy of Bluestone Farm and Living Arts Center. The Center brings together monastic life [the Episcopal order of the Community of the Holy Spirit] with organic farming and animal husbandry and contemplates their interrelationships. Sister Catherine Grace felt that one of the most serious problems facing the world is the loss of the sense of connection, both spiritually and physically. This disconnection fosters a lack of respect, e.g., I am disconnected from the land and therefore I can abuse it.

Sister Catherine Grace felt that people place such importance on power that they are always striving for more – more money, more land, more possessions. She acknowledged that this is part of human nature and it won't disappear; however, she urged people to be aware of these impulses and to strive to work toward different goals.

Contemplating religious life, Sister Catherine Grace noted that religious orders are dying out. There are only eight remaining members of her own order, and only three of them live at the Farm / Center. The challenge lies in building something that will continue into the future. She noted that what we eat forms one of our most intimate acts and is deeply important. At Bluestone, everything is safe to eat and is free from chemicals and GMOs.

There is satisfaction in raising animals and in experiencing the healing power of land. Sister Catherine Grace related the story of one woman who came to Bluestone after surviving the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and losing everything she possessed in that disaster. This woman said that the land had nearly killed her; now she would let the land heal her. She found that healing power at Bluestone and in the friendships and connections she formed here. Among children who have volunteered at the Center, Sister Catherine Grace recalled one girl who learned to milk the cow and had forged a deep connection with the animal, so much so that this girl sat with the cow as the cow was dying.

Sister Catherine Grace sees the farm as a legacy – a place where people to come to heal, a place that can welcome volunteers from all different backgrounds. For example, the Center hopes to build a program to work with women coming out of prison. The Center also wants

to further develop its traditional arts components such as weaving and spinning – activities that can be spiritually healing as well as produce beautiful woven arts.

Sister Catherine Grace turned the meeting over to **Sharon Bodenschatz**, Bluestone’s farm manager and an organic horticulturalist and landscape designer who trained at the New York Botanical Garden. Sharon moved the group outside to begin a tour of the facilities.

The Community was founded in the 1950s, but the property itself has a long history. The oldest building on the property has a basement foundation that dates back to 1743, with shooter windows that were utilized in the Revolutionary War. The building now standing on that foundation is from a much later period. The Melrose School for K-8<sup>th</sup> grades was formerly located on the grounds, but closed its doors in 2012. The bells in the bell tower come from Scotland. Itinerant bell ringers used to come and BFC member Julie, whose son attended The Melrose School, recalled buying a “full peal” in honor of his graduation. The building housing the bells is now unsafe. Other buildings on the property include a convent and St. Cuthbert’s Guest House and Retreat. Guests and volunteers are welcome. One way to get involved is to become a summer Farm Companion, a program that enables participants to learn about organic farming during the height of the growing season and to experience monastic life by sharing in the prayers, meals and devotions of the order.

Sharon views the biodynamic farming of the Center as being in sync with the cosmos. She noted that this year’s stretch of unusual weather, including four Nor’easters in March, had lost about a month of farming. She is the only full-time farm staffer working the property.

There are various sections of the farm – the upper pasture, the pasture across the street, the beehives, the chicken coops, the orchard, etc. Currently there are no cows. The pasture across the street is devoted to brassicas and other crops that deer do not eat, e.g., cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, kale, potatoes, onions and rutabaga. The orchards were planted in 2004 by Sister Helena Marie, who provided much of the vision for the farm. The orchard has apple trees and also Asian pear trees, which can thrive with little in the way of care. Goumi berries have been grown in the past; however, the crop proved to be very time-consuming and unprofitable.

Maple trees that line the road along the stone wall are tapped for sap. The maple syrup is sold at the Bluestone’s farm stand, which also sells any excess crops that are not eaten by the community. Beehives are located near the soccer field facing south where they can benefit from the winter sun, and a roof overhang provides respite from the summer sun. In the soccer field itself, Sharon would like to plant bamboo to create a natural animal shelter.

Expanding on the desire expressed by Sister Catherine Grace to work with women coming out of prison, Bluestone Farm is partnering with Putnam County in a program called Alternatives to Incarceration. Currently the farm is working with people convicted on DUI and DWI charges.

Sharon then led the group through some of the indoor workrooms where, for example, plant seedlings are nurtured and traditional crafts are practiced.

Bluestone's website offers rich detail of the goals, activities and volunteer opportunities at the Center, as well as profiles of the sisters and a number of beautiful photo galleries devoted to its work. You can find the website at [www.chssisters.org/melrose-bluestone-farm/](http://www.chssisters.org/melrose-bluestone-farm/).

Minutes respectfully submitted by **Sheila Crespi**

*Additional note from Sheila:*

*As the group walked the grounds, there were numerous times when I could not hear Sharon's commentary. Therefore, the minutes here reflect what I was able to hear, and not necessarily the complete richness of Sharon's discussion of the Farm's ongoing work and goals.*

**Addendum**  
**Complete Comments of Club Historian John Stockbridge**  
**May 2018 Bedford Farmers Club Meeting**

Just over 100 years ago, on February 17, 1917, the Bedford Farmer's Club were guests of the Lincoln Agricultural School in Somers.

Then school was the outgrowth of the Lincoln Hall Boys' Haven which proudly traced its history of caring for civil war orphans back to 1863. Originally under the auspices of the Christian Brothers and a lay board of managers, this tradition was established with the opening of a residence in New York City to aid destitute children.

In 1907, with the purchase of several farms in the hamlet of Somers, the Westchester campus was opened as an annex to the New York City operation. Known as the "Lincoln Agricultural School", the youth from the Protectors were trained in farming and agricultural skills. Once a boy learned those skills, the goal was to have him "placed out" for further on-the-job training with one of the many farming families throughout New York State or the Midwest.

For the Farmer's Club, this meeting was the seventh time that the Club had met at the school. At the entrance to the assembly hall was an exhibit of the products of the farm...milk, vegetables, grain, alfalfa, apples, etc. all of the very best. On the stage was a portrait of Lincoln, draped with a flag. The Club members praised the splendid training of the boys and the devotion of the Christian Brothers who ran the school.

Two years later at a meeting on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1919 (in the heart of the first World War) the topic of our Club's meeting was "What the Lincolndale graduates are doing." In the discussion it was stated that "all reports show the boys were doing well where they had been placed on other dairy farms...letters from the boys themselves expressed appreciation what the school had done for them. Charles Haines, speaking for the Club stated that he wanted to express his appreciation also for what the Women's Land Army had accomplished (the Farmerettes). It was a meeting of compliments and appreciation held at a time of War.

Relating to our subjects for today Organic Farming and Animal Husbandry, I would offer several entries from our minutes.

On the topic of Organic Farming, in October of 1950 (only 68 years ago! Ouch!!) the Farmer's Club met at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas M. Waller at Tanrackin Farm. Mr. Hollingsworth Wood opened the meeting, expressing the gratitude of all present to the hosts "for again opening the doors of their beautiful home so wide."

Mrs. Waller (that's Wilhemine...known to many as Willie) told a most interesting story of their success at organic farming. "No chemical fertilizers are used" (she said), and they find the colts from their prize broodmares are strong of bone and most healthy." She went on to say that..."a heavy manure mulched orchard brought forth prize apples." Mrs. Waller said "organic farming was not new, as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson had practiced it."

On the subject of animal husbandry, a meeting of the Club on December 29, 1915 discussed sheep raising. Mr. James Wood prefaced his remarks by observing that "agriculture as we formerly knew it, with its two market days a week, with one to five cars of produce, and one or more cars of milk daily from each station was a thing of the past. It is an enormous change. City people have bought much of the land: a home and an estate are what newcomers want, a luxury that they are willing to pay for. Three quarters of the land formerly productive, is now idle, growing only useless bushes and noxious weeds." But getting back to the topic of husbandry...Mr. Wood said..."nothing on the farm costs so little for labor as keeping sheep. One man can care for several hundred." There are however negative views expressed by the newcomers that "they can run over our stone walls, so that stakes and riders over them are required to keep them in the field, or wire which is cheaper." But Mr. Wood felt that the objections were minor when compared to, the benefits of having and taking care of sheep. "in their favor much could be said. The excrement of sheep far exceeded in value that of any other animal in producing soil fertility. They enjoyed eating bushes and noxious weeds as much as grass, and they will make a cleaner field than any high priced labor of man can make. Have a well fenced lot to keep them in at night, they may be let out to pasture early in the morning, and if given a small grain ration in the evening they will be on hand to the minute for it, and no going out to drive them in. It is very seldom they are troubled by dogs in the daytime." From the money side of things, "There is always a market for sheep and for lambs. The profit here would be for producing early lambs...the earlier the lamb, the higher the price. As to wool, there would be no great profit from the wool, still it brings in enough towards paying expenses."

In much more recent times, animal husbandry is still practiced amongst Farmer's Club members.

On a lighter side, and in conclusion, with no special topic to discuss, I thought I would like to read a poem written and offered to Farmer's Club members in June of 1920 by Henry Marquand, a philanthropist and owner of Whitegates Farm (off Broad brook and West Patent Roads). He spoke about the value of farm life. Mr. Marquand, it should be noted was recognized as a regular generous host to the Club, and an indefatigable poet. As part of his lengthy poem that day, he said...

"I used to think a city life  
Was only noise and fuss and strife,  
A youngster's only chance to play  
Was dodging ice-carts on old Broadway.

And so I dreamed a lovely dream  
Of life beside a placid stream  
That filtered through a flowery mead  
In acres very broad indeed.

The land fulfilled one's every wish  
The stream was full of friendly fish  
All yearning to be caught  
And none available to be bought.

The trees were laden down with fruit  
Of lusciousness beyond dispute  
And each delicious kind of berry  
Was eager there to make us merry.

Come thither and be introduced to ter  
Jolly chap—the barnyard rooster  
Who flaps his wings and brags and jokes  
And leaves all work to women folks.

Oh such a dream, in which they lurk,  
No disillusion and no work  
Precedes a flow of milk and honey'  
Without a care or thought of money.

Oh beautiful vision, blessed dream  
Of things that are not as they seem  
That pictures as supremest charm

The simple idyll of the farm.

We plant potatoes in a row  
That's not enough to make them grow  
We think perfection's in our reach  
But find a separate bug for each.

The fish we thought were sure to bite  
Refuse to, but mosquitoes might  
The apples that our hopes have nursed  
Well—worms have got there first.

The cows however much we need 'em  
Who eat all day and chew the cud...  
Gosh! What bills it takes to feed 'em.

And so whatever be the cause  
It isn't as it used to was.

I love to gaze at dawn  
Upon the silken, tassled corn  
And count impossibly rich yields  
Upon some other fellow's fields.

I love to hear the lowing kine  
And thank the Lord they are not mine  
Another watches o'er their hills  
Another pays their doctor's bills

And when I hear a rooster crow  
I want to reach him with my toe.  
For why should he our notice beg  
Because a hen has laid an egg!?

Even then the eggs cost vastly more  
Than these you buy at any store.

Oh farming is a wondrous game  
If all conditions were the same.  
This is what you must keep your eye on  
That one man's meat is another man's prison.