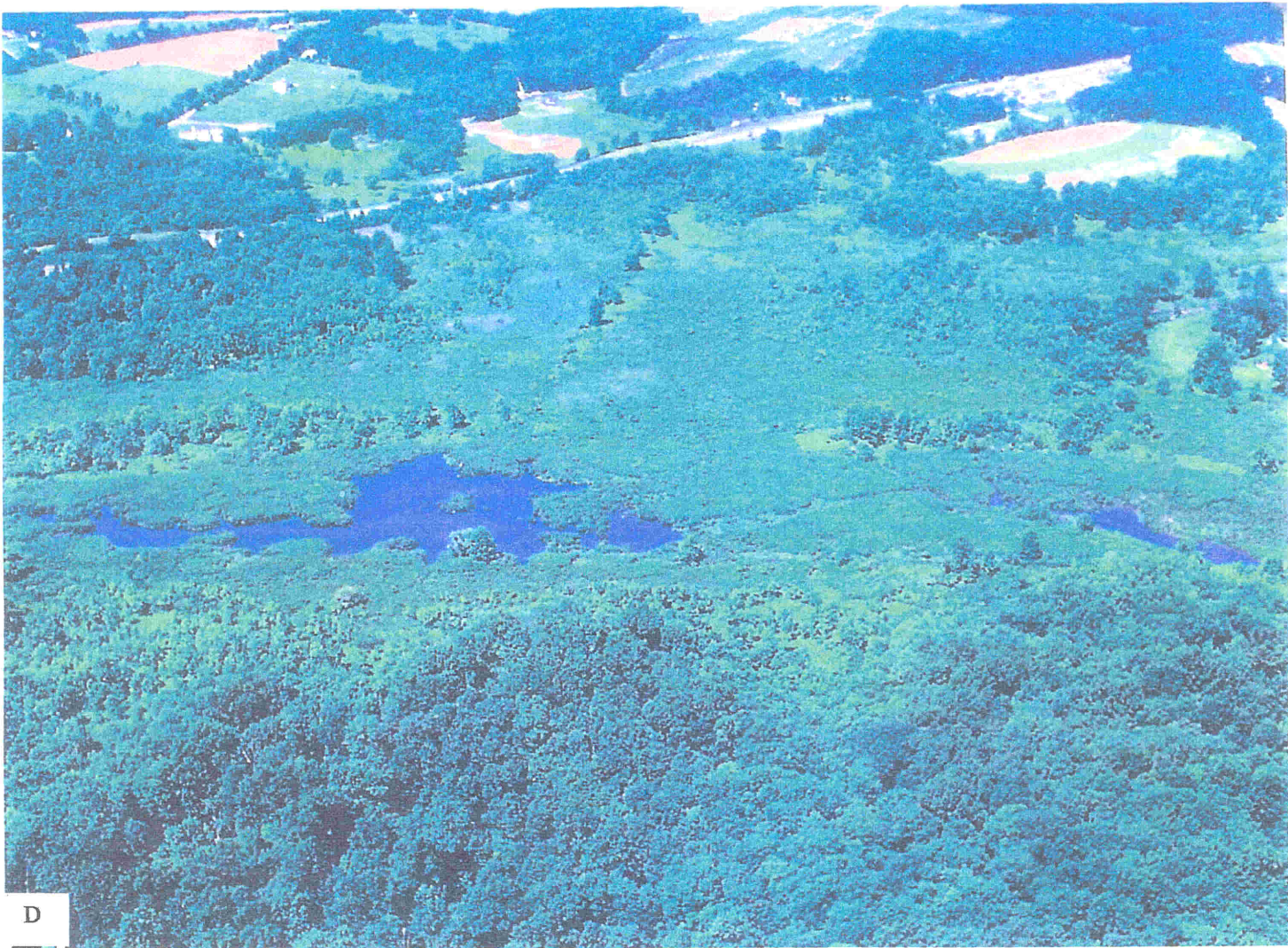


# The Great Marsh in East Nantmeal



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## Basic Facts

The Marsh contains 2,500 acres of marshland complex which is situated within a broader 5,000 acre (8.5 *square mile*) watershed.

More than 200 species of flowering plants and 155 species of birds find this sanctuary a special place.

Chester County has identified the site for protection as a Unique Natural Area, and it is classified as a Focus Area under the Atlantic Joint Venture of Northern American Waterfowl Management Plan.

It is important to note that this natural phenomenon is not limited to just the Great Marsh which is simply a unique part of a total interconnected ecosystem. The woodlands and fields that surround the Marsh are critical to its health and survival and to the diversity of natural phenomena. They are all linked together as a whole. Polluted streams, clear-cut hillsides, impervious surfaces, drainage of the aquifer, etc. all impact other aspects of the whole package. Every person who lives in Southern East Nantmeal effects, to a greater or lesser degree the life of a bird, tortoise or plant, unseen, miles away. (The same, of course, is true of the French Creek system in Northern East Nantmeal.) A very obvious example, directly above the Marsh, is the Turnpike service area whose sewage system, occasional fuel spill and runoff have nowhere else to go.

We are only the latest in a long line of humans who have lived near and impacted this treasure. There is significant archeological evidence that Native Americans were on the site, possibly thousands of years ago. At least one local collection of Indian artifacts is based on items found on the periphery of the Marsh. In the early 1700s Thomas Wynn was granted 400 acres near today's Moore's Lane. Later, in the 19th Century the Pennypackers, among others, farmed in the area. During that time occasional efforts were made to dredge parts of the swamp so that fields could be planted or, ecologically worse, cows

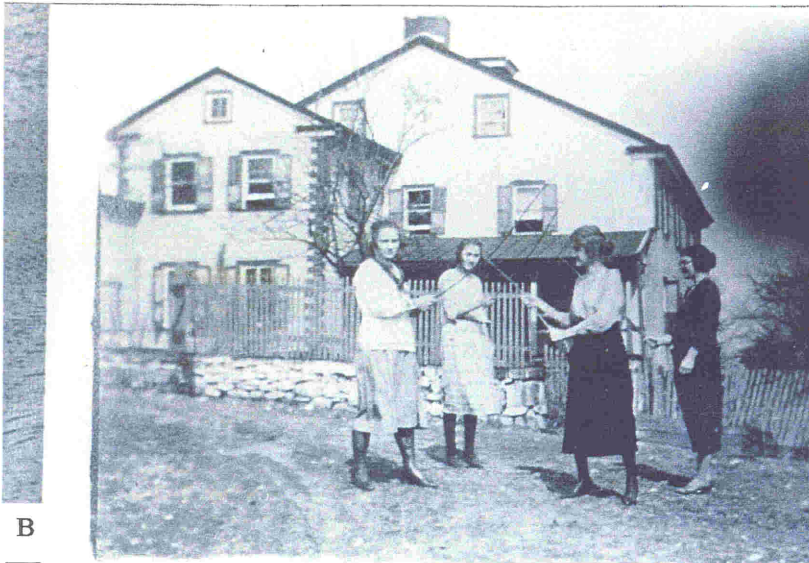
pastured. Today, the Marsh again seems to be growing as old fields revert more and more to natural wetlands.

In the 20th Century two men who were to have a significant impact upon the Marsh and on the future of the area arrived on the scene, Edward Woolman and C. B. Moore. In the 1920s and 30s Mr. Woolman, already a well known conservationist, acquired several thousand acres which included the Northern and Eastern portions of the Great Marsh and land on both sides of the Conestoga Pike, Rte 401. From time to time the land was selectively logged but it also served as a site for Mr. Woolman's fox hunting avocation. In the 1950s Mr. Moore purchased about 600 acres, at about \$125 per acre since it was useless swampland. For Moore, the property was a site for hunting and fishing and he practiced a form of tough love conservation which, among other things, involved using dynamite to create new duck ponds.

It is reported that, on one occasion Mr. Woolman called on Mr. Moore. Moore who drove a high mileage never washed Oldsmobile, was in hip boots and a tattered white dress shirt which appeared to be an escapee from the rag bag. Mr. Woolman, properly dressed, arrived in a chauffeur driven Jeep. What these farsighted men started, other generations and families have carried on. Lydia Wright, Mr. Woolman's daughter and the first recipient of the East Nantmeal Conservation Award, formalized her father's project with direct conservancy gifts and additional easements on her land. The



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The Great Marsh is one of the most important natural sites in Eastern Pennsylvania. It consists of approximately 3,464 acres most of which are on the North side of the Pennsylvania Turnpike in East Nantmeal. It is interesting to note that since township lines were created long before settlers were much aware of marshes as anything other than poor land for farming, and since the Turnpike was built in the 1950s with no concern for marshes or for township lines, some of the Marsh is in Wallace Township, completely isolated from the rest of that community. The Marsh extends far enough West that a small portion is in West Nantmeal.

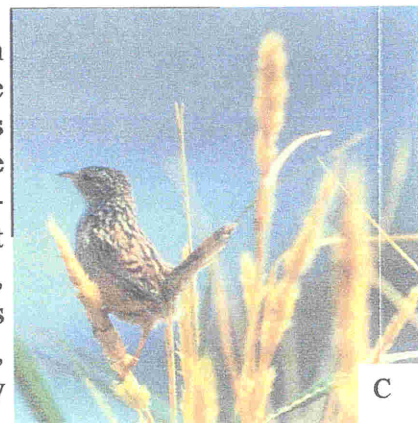
Physically, the Great Marsh is within the *Piedmont Upland Section of the Piedmont Physiographic Province in Pennsylvania*. Among other things, it is the headwaters of the aptly named Marsh Creek. Most of the rills, streams and runs in Southern East Nantmeal originate as springs, flow into Marsh Creek and eventually become the Brandywine Creek which, as the Christiana River, empties into Delaware Bay. (Streams in Northern East Nantmeal are part of the French Creek system which runs to the Schuylkill River.)

For geologists who measure time in millions and billions of years, the Great Marsh is very new. For the rest of us it is ancient. Classified as a *periglacial landform* it was created during the last glacial period, perhaps 30,000 years ago. Since *peri* means near, we have a marsh which was near the last glacier. When the marsh was formed the land was probably a treeless tundra with long winters, poorly developed soils and low, scrubby vegetation. For some period the land was frozen as a tundra. As the climate changed with the retreat of the glaciers so did the land, the soils, the drainage patterns and the vegetation in the area. Over a long period of time erosion created clay soils which inhibit the drainage of water. This combined with the fact that the marsh area is very flat produced the phenomena we have today. To be technical, the Great Marsh is now a *large habitat complex containing two important natural communities of graminoid marsh and circum-neutral shrub swamp as well as successional wet meadow and swamp forest habitats and open water areas.*



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Because of its size and location the Great Marsh provides unique opportunities for large number of species of birds, animals, reptiles, butterflies and plants to survive and flourish. 155 bird species have been reported by the West Chester Bird Club. These include species classified as endangered, threatened and rare. To name just a few, a person in the vicinity of the Marsh might be lucky enough to encounter American Woodcock, Red-headed Woodpecker, Golden-winged Warbler, Henslow's Sparrow, Bay-breasted Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Willow Flycatcher or Worm-eating Warbler; waterfowl including Wood Duck, American Black Duck, Northern Shoveler or American Wigeon; birds of prey like Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Great Horned Owl or long Eared Owl. There are also gulls and shorebirds, woodland birds and songbirds. A similar diversity of plants and butterflies occupy the area.



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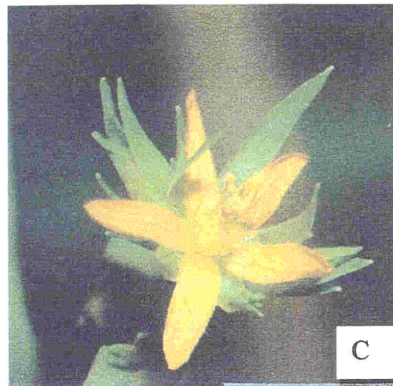


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Moore property was also formally eased. Additionally, Joan and Bill Gross, second recipients of the Conservation Award, eased large tracts of land that straddle both the Marsh and French Creek aquifers and greatly enhance the protection of the invaluable Great Marsh and its surrounding environment.

*The Great Marsh. A natural treasure tucked into our township. A treasure which has been protected by far-sighted conservationists. A treasure which, because much of it is conserved, will be here for our grandchildren and our great grandchildren.*



*Photographic Credits go to:*

(A) Michelle Cherbavaz's photographs taken May 19, 1990; (B) Hilda P. Leighton (Pennypacker) photograph of building taken about 1918-1920; (C) Brochures and Flyers by the Nature Conservancy; and (D) photographs which were part of the Testimony of Thomas L. Smith, Pennsylvania Science Office of the Nature Conservancy before the East Nantmeal Township Supervisors, July 19, 1990.



This brochure was prepared by the East Nantmeal Land Trust to help individuals learn about the wonders of the Great Marsh.

**East Nantmeal  
Land Trust**

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**Save Our Open Space**