

### Historic Farming Community Moving Forward

#### An Uncertain Future for Ancram's Historic Farming Community

By Susan Arterian Chang

We often take the charm of Ancram's rural vistas of rolling hills, hedgerows, and crop fields for granted, but trends in land eligible for an agricultural tax exemption suggest an uncertain future for our historic farming community. According to data provided by the Columbia County Real Property Records, only 8,916 acres of our land were awarded agricultural exemptions in 2023, down from 9,933 acres in 2015. That's a loss of 1,017 acres or 10.2 percent of ag-exempt land.<sup>1</sup> For those unfamiliar with agricultural tax exemptions, New York's Agricultural Districts Law provides a locally initiated mechanism for creating agricultural districts, a measure intended to counteract the impact that nonfarm development can have upon the

#### In this issue

Ancram's Uncertain Future pg. 1  
Invasive Species pg. 3  
What's Next for Bob Caccamise pg. 4  
Solar Fight pg. 6  
Ancram Center for the Arts p. 8  
No Mow May pg. 9  
Fulton & Forbes in Ancram pg. 10

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*When Herondale Farm sheep came to graze on farmland leased by Stuart Farr of Hudson Valley Hops & Grains, everyone benefitted. The sheep recycled nutrients as they grazed Farr's cover crop, Herondale secured more grazing land, and the farmland owner's family enjoyed watching their new animal friends.*

continuation of farm businesses. Owners whose land satisfies the eligibility requirements qualify for reduced property tax bills for land in agricultural production.

Beyond the loss of agricultural exempted land, who owns our farmland may be a surprise to many. Although comparable figures were not available for 2015, the latest data provided by Ancram's Assessor's office indicates that the overwhelming majority of Ancram's ag-exempted farmland —72.5 percent— was owned by non-operating farmland owners (NOLs) and leased to farmers. As Tim Biello, an advisor to American Farmland Trust points out, those farmers who lease land from NOLs are assuming considerable risk as their lessors often have little or no farming experience. Those farmers are consequently "bearing the weight of the landowner's learning curve," Biello notes. Even landowners with the best of intentions can create considerable emotion-

al, mental and economic stress for their farmer lessees, especially when the latter want to make investments in long-term improvements to the land, soil and infrastructure, but are bound by the insecurity of short-term leases that make such investments problematic. (Leases tend to be 5 years, which is the minimum for ag-exemption purposes.)

#### Non-Operating Farmland Owners (NOLs) Benefit by Collaborating with Their Lessee Farmers in the Stewardship of Their Land

In 2022, after undertaking a nationwide study that revealed a similar shift in farmland ownership across the country, American Farmland Trust, together with Glynwood Center for Regional Food and Farming, inaugurated a workshop series for a small group of nonoperating farmland owners in the Hudson Valley. The goal of "Fostering Equitable Farmland Connections" was to help NOLs define a

*(Continued on page 2)*

# SHRINKING AG

(Continued from page 1)

vision for their land, be better informed about the dynamics of leasing land to farmers, and to work more effectively and in a more supportive capacity with their lessee farmers. This author was fortunate to be part of that first cohort. We are currently eager to recruit more NOLs to our group as we work together to foster more productive relationships with our farmers. (Contact Tim Biello, [tbiello@farmland.org](mailto:tbiello@farmland.org), at American Farmland Trust for more information.)

One of the objectives of “Fostering Equitable Farmland Connections” has been to encourage NOLs to have conversations with their farmers on a more consistent basis. As a result of a recent conversation with Stuart Farr of Hudson Valley Hops & Grains, who leases this author’s land, Farr arranged with Herondale Farm to bring sheep to graze on the land last fall. It was a win/win/win for all—the sheep recycled nutrients as they grazed Farr’s cover crop; Herondale secured access to more grazing land; and the author’s family got to enjoy the pastoral beauty of it all.

## A Revived Agricultural Advisory Council to Take a Fresh Look at Ancram’s Farmland Protection Plan

Working with our American Farmland Trust advisors, many in our NOLs affinity group have also been moved to think more broadly about how we can contribute more actively to our larger farming community. Ancram was fortunate to have created a robust Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan in 2011 that articulated a number of worthy goals and specific actions to support our existing farmers and to keep land in farming by attracting new farming ventures. While some of these goals have been advanced, not all have been, since the Ancram Agricultural Advisory Council that crafted the plan became inactive shortly after the plan was released.

The good news is that at February’s Town Board meeting, board members approved the creation of a committee to review the 2011 plan and to survey local farmers for ideas on how it could be updated under a revived Agricultural Advisory Committee. These activities might include help with marketing, promotion, and direct sales, identifying grant and loan programs, organizing farm tours, accessing technical

assistance, providing opportunities for knowledge and tool sharing, and policy advocacy.

“The ideas in the 2011 plan are still valid today,” says Nan Stolzenburg, Principal Consultant at Community Planning & Environmental Associates, who served as the plan’s consultant, “but there are also new programs created to support farming since it was written. I think what is needed today is the coordination and energy of people who can help farmers take advantage of them.”

If you own farmland or lease farmland, or both, please respond to this survey at <https://arcg.is/D4GyS> so that we can better understand our farming community. If you would like to communicate with the revived Ancram Agriculture Advisory Council, please email [ancramny.agcouncil@gmail.com](mailto:ancramny.agcouncil@gmail.com).

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>This may not reflect all the land that is currently farmed in Ancram. Some farms are too small to qualify because they can be viable operating in niche markets of less than seven acres. In other cases, revenues may not be sufficient to qualify the farm for the exemption. Additionally, some eligible farmers and landowners may not, for a variety of reasons, have applied for the exemption.



*Non-operating farmland owners benefit by collaborating with their lessee farmers in the stewardship of their land.*



# Invasive Species Are a Problem

## Thanks to a \$12.5K+ Grant, Ancram Is Now Part of the Solution

By Suzan Flamm

In January of this year, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) awarded \$2.9 million for multiple projects across the state, each designed to reduce the negative impacts of invasive species. Ancram is one of the grantees, the only town in Columbia County with that distinction.

The primary focus of Ancram's project is education and outreach. The grant funds will be used by the town's Conservation Advisory Council (CAC), in collaboration with the Columbia Land Conservancy, to install boot-brush stations at the trail-heads of two properties in Ancram that are owned and managed by the Conservancy: Drowned Lands Swamp at 654 County Route 3 and Overmountain at 503 Carson Road. By using the brushes to clean shoes upon entering the properties, and when leaving, visitors will be removing foreign materials, including any troublesome seeds looking for a free ride to a new location. The stations will include educational material, so while swiping their feet people will learn about invasive species and what they can do to slow their spread.

Researchers at NAISMA, an organization based in Wisconsin that addresses the threat of invasive species, studied the mounds of dirt found under boot brushes installed in Southern Illinois to see if, in fact, the brushes had removed any seeds from shoes. Among the forty species they found in the dirt were fourteen exotic ones, plants which had been introduced into the area outside of their normal area of distribution. Two of those species were top invasive targets – garlic mustard and Japanese stiltgrass. The conclusion: the brushes were removing a lot of seeds and playing a part in preventing spread.

According to Ancram Town Board and CAC member Colleen Lutz, the author of the successful grant application, invasives such as garlic mustard and Japanese barberry are a threat because they disturb forest regeneration. Lutz, who is currently pursuing a master's



*Japanese Barberry (left) and Garlic Mustard (right) are two local invasives that disturb forest regeneration*

degree at SUNY Albany in Conservation Biology and Biodiversity, explains that some invasives secrete chemicals into the soil that prevent the growth of many native plants. Local herbivores, like deer, would have eaten the native plants, but will often not eat the invasives, opting instead for tree seedlings. This prevents the development of new trees for the forest. With the native plants and seedlings gone, the invasives take over. The result: the mix of saplings and herbaceous growth at the bottom layer of a forest is replaced with large patches of garlic weed or barberry, and forest renewal is disrupted.

Lutz is excited about the boot-brush project. "Unlike other species, we as humans have the ability to make decisions that directly impact our environment. We know that invasive species threaten native and rare species. This is a low cost, low resource way to help protect what we love in our region."

The boot-brush stations will display a map that highlights various species to be found at the properties. An educational pamphlet will also be available,

to be written and produced by the Columbia Land Conservancy. The Conservancy, a non-profit organization based in Chatham, is dedicated to conserving land. Its Drowned Lands Swamp property, 114 acres within the Harlem Valley wetlands, was possibly home to illegal stills during prohibition. The stills are gone, but it now has 1.5 miles of trails and a great view from a prominent knoll known locally as Old Croken. Overmountain has more than ten miles of trails on 1,700 acres, and one of the best views in Columbia County from the Kite Hill gazebo. Both properties are open to the public.

Other DEC-funded projects focus on watercraft inspection and decontamination to prevent the spread of invasive aquatic species. Funding was also provided for the early detection and rapid response to both terrestrial and aquatic invasives to facilitate their removal.

Besides bringing boot-brush stations to Ancram, the town's CAC conducts research, disseminates information and advises the town on the management and conservation of its natural resources.

# “I Just Want to Keep Creating”

## Ancramdale Videographer Bob Caccamise Talks about an Eventful Career and What Comes Next

By Suzan Flamm

**B**ob Caccamise, a native of Niagara Falls, New York, and an Ancramdale resident since 2016, retired in February from his job as the videographer for CBS’ *On the Road with Steve Hartman*. Bob and Steve worked together on and off for almost thirty years, travelling the country to chronicle acts of generosity, compassion and emotional transformation: high school athletes sacrificing individual glory for a disabled teammate, a bride mistaken for Cinderella by an autistic child and the fairytale friendship that followed, a seventh grader taking control of a school bus and averting catastrophe. The segments continue to run every week, airing on Fridays and Sundays, with a new videographer now that Bob is no longer behind the camera.

I met with Bob at his home shortly after he retired to discuss his long career, his years with *On the Road*, his friendship with Steve, and his plans for the future. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

### What made you want to become a videographer?

I was at Buffalo State College not knowing what I wanted to do. I went to the cafeteria, which was crowded, so I sat across from two people I didn’t know and eavesdropped. They were talking television production. I got up and went directly to the broadcasting department and signed up. Years later I’m working in Buffalo and one of those two guys, Bob Horowitz, was working at WKBW and I told him, “You’re the reason I got into television!”

### How did your career get started after college?

I got my first job at Niagara Frontier Cable around 1981. From that little cable station I applied to broadcast stations all over the country. I was staying with my dad and he got upset that I wanted to make a long-distance phone call to check on an application. He asked me: “Can’t



*Bob Caccamise, recently retired videographer for CBS’s “On the Road with Steve Hartman,” spent close to thirty years visually chronicling heartwarming human-interest stories from around the nation.*

you just follow-up with a letter?” I got a job at WUTR in Utica, an ABC affiliate. They had two cameramen to edit and shoot everything for a half-hour newscast. The first week I’m there the guy who had the morning shift flipped the van over, so I had to shoot and edit the whole thing. I was filming like crazy and getting everything on the air.

### Eventually you got to WABC in New York City?

I got lucky there. I was at WABC covering editors who were on vacation. They started a 5:00 pm show and needed people. That turned into thirteen years of news. And I met Steve Hartman at that station. He had gotten a job as a feature reporter and started trying out photographers. There was a Christmas party, around 1989, and I had a couple of drinks and I tell him, “If you’re looking for a cameraman you can stop now ‘cause I’m your guy.” I said something real cocky like that. And we did one story together and he went to the bosses and said this is the guy. We worked together for three years, then he left for Los Angeles and I

stayed. I met my wife Seung [Suh] at that station. She started out as a desk assistant and worked her way up to producing political stories.

### What was shooting news like at WABC in those years?

The Gulf War broke out [in 1990] and I got sent to Israel to cover the scud missiles. It was the first time I ever left the country except to go to Canada. When the sirens went off everybody would take their gas masks and go to the safe room in the hotel. I’d run to my balcony where my tripod was, hook it up and wait to catch the moment when a Patriot missile would intercept a scud missile and a big ball of flame would come down on the ground. A car would pick me up and we would go to where the damage was. This was Tel Aviv. I did that for a month.

I also went to Sarajevo during that conflict. The day I was scheduled to fly, a journalist there got killed by a sniper. Our goal was to get to Sarajevo but we couldn’t get any further than Mostar. The windows were blown out on the bus I took from Split to Mostar. It was a lot scarier than the first war I covered.



There were snipers and I could hear gunfire. I had to wear a flak jacket. We went to a hospital operating room where the wall was blown out and you could see the outside. The doctors were operating without anesthetics, people were screaming. The war felt very up close.

### **Tell us about your transition from news to feature segments and your years working with Steve Hartman for *On the Road***

I started shooting feature segments for Steve at CBS several years before he became the correspondent for *On the Road*. During those years I also filmed several documentaries and that was interesting. I was living in New York City. In about 2011 Steve became the correspondent for *On the Road*. Seung and I moved up here in 2016 and by then I only worked on that show. Seung bought the Copake General Store and started to run that.

*On the Road* was the most impactful work I did in my career. I felt I was part of something important. It was what I wanted to do from the beginning, feature stories. There's not that much good news so it's a very unusual job. We would go anywhere the story was. I walked into peoples' lives, rich and poor, Republican and Democrat, religious and atheist, I saw we all have way more in common than you would believe. We all want the same things. I feel like I've been faced with the good in people all this time. We tell stories with life lessons and with acts of kindness.

Some things are sad. A woman knows she's dying and she's trying to get her kids adopted. That would be one of our stories. This young girl, a basketball player, senior in high school has brain cancer and is dying. She had a scholarship to play basketball in college. They moved the season up so she could play one game. And she scores.

I had a job for over twenty years where I saw the good in people. I really liked this work. It was a beautiful thing to see. I've done hundreds and hundreds of stories. It makes your day to see how something can change somebody's life. Steve and I used to say everyone we do a story on is a better person than either of us.

This guy was a country guy, didn't know how to use a computer. He gets a sandwich board that says "my wife needs a kidney" and he walks around town. This woman who doesn't know him sees our story and gives him a kidney.

### **What was involved in putting each of these *On the Road* segments together?**

I could be working 37 hours in two days. We would fly almost every week. I would get up at 2:30 in the morning to catch a 6am flight. After a two-hour flight I'd drive for an hour and a half and start shooting then catch a late flight back to New York. I didn't get enough sleep and the equipment was heavy. It's hard work.

### **What did you bring to your craft?**

You don't have to be the greatest at your craft. You just have to be somebody people want to work with. I made life easy for people. Nobody tells me what to shoot. I just shoot, nothing's scripted. But you have to know what video the correspondent needs, be able to anticipate it. A lot of cameramen will set up a beautiful interview but they won't listen to it. I listened. Steve would turn to me at the end of an interview and ask if I had any questions. A lot of times the story unfolds in front of you. The emotion of the story is right there. But not always.

### **How do you tell a great feature story?**

Great composition. You have to tell the story with images. The reporter "writes

to the video." Then it has to be edited. Editing is pasting. Certain people paste things quickly and some let it breathe. Network news is letting it breathe. Story telling is a team thing.

### **You and Steve were recently interviewed on the CBS Evening News about your work together and your friendship. Speaking of you, Steve said: "His wit and dear friendship have made my work feel like anything but." What was the work relationship like for you?**

Steve and I started as work friends and we became best friends. So all this time I was working with my best friend. We worked together a total of almost thirty years. We worked all that time together and never raised our voices. He's younger but it seemed like he was my big brother.

### **Now that you're retired, will we see you behind the counter at your wife's shop, The Copake General Store?**

I told Seung not to put me on the schedule.

### **So what's next for you?**

Here's what's next for me. I love still photography. I want to go back to it, shoot just for myself and for my own development. I want to approach it like people practice Tai Chi. You do it every day and you get better at it. It's easier said than done because nobody's pushing me out the door. I just want to keep creating.



*Caccamise looks forward to perfecting his craft as a still photographer now that the hectic pace of TV journalism is behind him.*

# Copake's Solar-Farm Fight: Lessons to Be Learned

By Bobbie Slonevsky

To have a real impact on climate change, the Department of Energy estimates that more than 10 million acres of U.S. solar development will be required. New York State has been doing its part. In the context of a large-scale, renewable energy initiative, it has been offering generous financial incentives to developers. And they have been aggressively taking advantage of this funding, exploring rural areas in which to build solar farms.

The truth is that most Americans—including the residents of Copake—acknowledge our desperate need for non-fossil sources of energy and are staunchly supportive of the move to renewables. Yet, as happened in Copake, hostility to the specifics of the proposed solar project often poisons the relationship between developer and the community, ultimately hindering or even torpedoing the project altogether. But it doesn't have to be that way.

What exactly happened in Copake? And if a solar site is ever proposed for Ancram, how might things be handled differently?

## An Unwelcome Surprise

For 31 years, Bill and Nancy Rasweiler have been leasing their Sir William Angus Family Farm in Copake to tenant farmers. The rent paid, it turns out, just isn't enough these days to cover taxes, insurance and other expenses. So, after being approached by Chicago-based Hecate Energy, the couple decided to enhance their income by leasing some of their farmland for a solar installation. They knew it would deprive their tenants of some land they had been using for grazing cattle, but there was more acreage the tenants could still continue to farm. And, after all, the project was going to generate beneficial clean energy.

Hecate drew up plans for a 60-megawatt solar farm they called Shepherd's Run. Occupying 267 acres (comparable to 202 football fields), the site stretched south of Route 23 along the east side of Route 7 as far as Cambridge Road, and on the west side, occupied a large field adjacent to the Taconic Hills School campus reaching as far south as Birch Hill Road. The installation itself was projected to consist of almost 200,000 solar panels that would produce enough energy yearly to fuel 15,000 households. The site would also encompass inverters (devices that convert direct current into alternating current), transmission lines, other equipment, access roads and laydown yards. Without ever having a preliminary discussion with the town leadership or the



townspeople, Hecate presented their proposal at a town meeting in April 2017.

They were met with icy hostility.

Immediate reactions were: the project is too big; it takes over prime farmland; it will negatively affect the environment and the vistas of nearby homeowners; it will change the "land of rural charm" character of the community; and it's in the wrong place. Let's fight.

In a town of fewer than 3,500 people, hundreds vocally objected to the development. Hecate was described as caring nothing about Copake, interested only in profits. Some volunteer fire fighters said that, if there were a fire, they wouldn't show up to put it out. Coincidentally, Copake had been proactively considering solar, and a zoning law regulating any potential solar project was on the agenda of that very meeting. And so, the Copake Town Board immediately passed its new zoning law, which banned any solar project larger than 10 acres (sufficient to generate one to two megawatts of utility scale power vs. Shepherd's Run's hundreds of acres and 60 megawatt capacity). This law emulated other similar laws adopted by other Hudson Valley towns confronting industrial-sized solar de-

velopments and it threatened to scrap the project outright.

At the time, large-scale solar projects were meeting pushback and being blocked all around New York State. State officials, including Andrew Cuomo, were concerned that rural resistance would interfere with their climate goals. And so, in April 2020, New York passed a law and created a special agency designed to override local laws (like Copake's) and accelerate the permitting process. In essence, the targeted towns now had no say in the matter whatsoever.

## A Divided Community Tries to Come Together

In the wake of the new legal environment, Hecate returned to Copake. They insisted they had already contracted with the Rasweilers to lease their land and intended to move forward, ignoring any town concerns. In response, furious Copakeans formed the Sensible Solar for Rural New York group, supported by the vast majority of residents. In addition, Copake soon became the lead plaintiff in a suit to overturn the new State regulation. The considerably smaller number of supporters of the project formed their own organization, Friends of Columbia Solar, to highlight the



project's benefits and counter misinformation (for example, that solar panels cause cancer and generate heat that exacerbates climate change). The rivalry that emerged played out in competing lawn signs, dueling public displays and bitter personal animosities.

Despite the dug-in divisiveness, many of the development's opponents wanted to do their part in advancing renewable energy. They were not categorically against the notion of some sort of solar installation in Copake—just not this one. And that's when, in the summer of 2021, there was a movement to bring all the stakeholders together to rethink the project in a way that would make it acceptable to everyone.

By February 2022, the Copake Working Group, as it was called, had hammered out a number of specific changes it hoped Hecate would adopt:

1. Greater environmental protection: inclusion of hiking/biking trails and community green spaces as part of the site and a commitment NOT to clear-cut trees
2. Integration of farming among the solar panels and investment in educational programs that would teach local students about these techniques
3. Some sort of compensation to nearby homeowners for the certain decrease in their property values and landscaping to mitigate their view of the solar panels
4. More benefits for the community at large, for example: reduced electricity costs, solar energy for the high school, and a promise to eschew any tax abatement, instead paying the company's full share of property taxes to the town, county and school district

Everyone on the committee was excited that, with Hecate's prospective commitment to these recommendations, this might turn the tide, get the townspeople's backing, and also serve as a model for other community-solar developer arrangements. Hecate claimed it had made some adjustments to the original proposal. But when the company filed its application, none of the suggestions were in it. Hecate insisted that some of the requests were outside its control (e.g., asking landowners to put a hiking trail through their property, getting utilities to reduce electric bills). The rest, the company said, were considerations for a later [non-binding] conversation. It suddenly became crystal clear. Solar development is a business; the more the company spends on community concerns, the lower its profits and the harder it may be to sell the completed project to an operator.

### An Unforeseen Development

At this point, many Copake residents were utterly disgusted with the whole thing, but had no avenue for stopping the project.

Indeed, in October 2023, the State's Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES) granted Hecate a conditional permit to start construction, pending a series of hearings for public comment to be held this past January at Town Hall. And then something totally unexpected happened.

The town learned that a 60-acre parcel of the originally proposed site—an important component of the overall project—had been sold off. Apparently Hecate's option to lease the land had expired and the company had failed to disclose in its application that it no longer had control of that property. Copake immediately filed a motion with ORES to dismiss Hecate's application and cancel the hearings. Clearly the application and draft permit were now inaccurate and residents could not comment on the impact of a project that no longer existed as described. Initially the motion was rejected; but on appeal, the hearings were dramatically canceled just three and a half hours before the first one was scheduled to begin. Subsequently ORES agreed that the required redesign of the development would constitute a prohibited amendment to an application deemed complete, and thus invalidated the application.

Needless to say, Copake rejoiced. But the victory was short-lived. As of February, Hecate was already reapplying for a somewhat smaller 42 megawatt development. Copake Supervisor Richard Wolf has expressed the hope that "...this time Hecate will work with Copake to address our well-documented concerns about its proposal." However, given Hecate's previous unwillingness to communicate with and heed the town's objections, there is a good chance that this second attempt may be as contentious as the first.

### An Alternative Script

An actual investigation by Michigan State University into why locales either block or support these large-scale solar developments reinforces the obvious: community input and influence are key. Locals are willing to do their bit if the site and size of the development are appropriate to the town; if proximate neighbors don't have to look out on acres of glass; if, instead of trying to steamroll the community into acceptance, the developer shows some respect for local concerns and—in addition to the promise of jobs and tax revenue—builds in community benefits. Direct engagement with people in their homes is also a powerful tool. And on the townspeople's side, it is important to identify specific concerns that are addressable.

In recognition of the importance of fomenting cooperation on both sides, New

York State Assembly Member Didi Barrett recently helped pass a law that instructs towns how to proactively select land that would be suitable for extensive solar development, while keeping existing quality farmland in agricultural use. (Some policy groups are recommending incentivizing developers to build in non-farming areas such as marginal land, brownfields, trash dumps and former mines.) In Ithaca, NY, the American Solar Grazing Association is demonstrating how farmers can graze their sheep under solar panels, taking advantage of the needed shade and wind protection they provide.

Other states have also contributed to practices that make farming and solar more compatible. In Colorado, crops such as vegetables, berries and herbs are being grown under several thousand solar panels. As the growers point out, the sun does double duty, both providing energy and nourishing the vegetation. At the same time, the panels protect the plant life from wind and hail. And where farmland is already being used to grow corn for conversion to the "green" biofuel ethanol, solar installations have proven extraordinarily more productive. One acre of solar development can yield 70 to 100 times more energy than one acre of corn grown for ethanol. That either means many, many multiples of clean energy production, or 69 to 99 acres that can be returned to growing food.

In short, the current objections to solar can be overcome. Should solar production ever be a consideration in Ancram, intelligent collaboration can ease its implementation and strike a significant blow against climate change.

### Sources

This article is largely based on Reveal News' "*Sunblocked: Resistance to Solar in Farm Country*," <https://revealnews.org/podcast/sunblocked-resistance-to-solar-in-farm-country/>.

### Other Sources

Copake Connection, October 2023  
Copake Connection, November 2023  
Copake Connection, January 2024  
Copake Connection, February 2024

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# 2024

## SUMMER SEASON



Where new theater is born

SUNDAY, JUNE 16, 4pm



A new work by a local artist  
at Ancram Center  
for the Arts

SUNDAY, JULY 7, 4pm  
**Centuries**



**Kate Douglas,  
Matthew Dean Marsh &  
Raina Sokolov-Gonzalez**

An immersive concert to bolster  
our capacity for resilience  
in turbulent times.

at Ancram Center  
for the Arts

SUNDAY, AUG. 4th, 4pm  
**Conversations**



**Martha Redbone & Aaron Whitby**  
in collaboration with  
**The Civilians, NYC**

New songs based upon interviews  
with Native Americans from  
across the country.

at Ancram Center  
for the Arts

SATURDAY, JUNE 29, 7:30pm



Everyone has a story to tell.  
Residents share stories  
with the community.

at The Hilltop Barn at  
Roeliff Jansen Park

SATURDAY, JULY 13, 7:30pm



Actors bring to life short stories in this  
series curated by Hudson Valley writer  
Ashley Mayne.

at Ancram Center  
for the Arts

SATURDAY, JULY 20, 7:30pm



**Rizo: In Concert!**

Rizo dazzles with her "barce but kindhearted  
fusion of comedy, burlesque, performance art  
and rock 'n' roll!" —*New York Times*

at The Circa 1799 Barn

AUG 16-18 & 22-25  
THURS., FRI., SAT., 7:30pm  
SUNDAY, 3pm

**Constellations**



**Nick Payne**

This idiosyncratic play reveals the  
infinite possibilities to be found  
in any given moment.

"A singular astonishment!" —*The New Yorker*  
at Ancram Center  
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**Council on  
the Arts**

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**For tickets and information**  
[www.ancramcenter.org](http://www.ancramcenter.org)



# No Mow May: Rethinking Your Lawn

By Jonathan Meigs

It's the middle of March. I'm looking out my window at my lawn. It gives the impression of being green, but that's really an illusion. On closer inspection I can see patches of brown and gray. By the end of May it will be all green. Mowers and weedwackers will be out in force. But if we are struggling with drought in July or August, parts of my lawn will turn brown again. Should I be concerned? Is my goal to surround my house with a thick carpet of green for as much of the year as possible?



There is more and more evidence suggesting that it is time to rethink the lawn. “Lawns cover 40 million acres, or 2%, of land in the US, making them the single largest irrigated crop we grow. Lawns are mowed, raked, fertilized, weeded, chemically treated, and watered—sucking up time, money, and other resources. Lawns provide little benefit to wildlife, and are often harmful. Grass-only lawns lack floral resources and nesting sites for bees and are often treated with pesticides that harm bees and other invertebrates.”<sup>1</sup>

“According to the Utah Department of Environmental Quality, Americans use 800 million gallons of gas per year mowing their lawns. Additionally, using a gas-powered mower for one hour produces the same amount of emissions as 11 new cars running for an hour.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2019 an interesting idea emerged in the United Kingdom. No Mow May. The idea was to minimize mowing in May to promote biodiversity and protect pollinators. The idea has become a global movement highlighting the need to change the way we manage our lawns.



Unfortunately, fixing the problem is not as easy as stopping or limiting mowing for the month of May. Some lawns will become unmanageable, and the species that benefit from the longer grass may need more than a temporary safe haven.

However, **there are practical measures that you can take.** Consider the following:

- Mow less. Let the grass grow longer between each cutting.
- Set the mower blade at 3". The grass will be stronger and more drought resistant.
- Mow only when needed, not on a schedule.
- Plant native, low mow grasses (fescues) that are drought resistant.
- Reduce the size of your lawn. Dedicate part of it to beautiful native flowers and shrubs.
- Plant a wildflower meadow instead of a lawn.
- Rake/leaf blow less. Mowed leaves will act as a natural fertilizer, protect root structure, and preserve soil moisture.

If you are interested in making the transition to a more ecologically friendly lawn, there are many resources to help you. I've listed a few helpful articles in the bibliography below. A simple search on the internet will yield many more. Also, look up “Homegrown National Park” and join a movement to reduce lawns and to plant native plants, trees, and shrubs. Like many of us, I am often overwhelmed by the sheer number of seemingly intractable environmental problems that we face. In contrast, the problem of too many manicured lawns is one we can fix—easily! And it's hard to argue with the benefits of less noise, better air, fewer fossil fuels, cleaner water and more biodiversity.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup>[beecityusa.org/no-mow-may/](https://beecityusa.org/no-mow-may/).

A good introduction to the benefits of No Mow with links.

<sup>2</sup>[abc27.com/pennsylvania/pennsylvania-lawmaker-proposes-plan-to-phase-out-gas-powered-lawn-equipment/](https://abc27.com/pennsylvania/pennsylvania-lawmaker-proposes-plan-to-phase-out-gas-powered-lawn-equipment/).

A short piece about a bill to phase out gas-powered lawn equipment.

## Resources:

[nytimes.com/2023/05/03/realestate/no-mow-may-lawn-meadow.html](https://nytimes.com/2023/05/03/realestate/no-mow-may-lawn-meadow.html).

A quick review of two books that describe replacing lawns with meadows and shrubs.

[extension.umaine.edu/gardening/2023/05/03/is-no-mow-may-beneficial/](https://extension.umaine.edu/gardening/2023/05/03/is-no-mow-may-beneficial/).

A very short Q & A about No Mow vs. Low Mow.

[bostonglobe.com/2023/05/08/science/no-mow-may-pollinators-bees/?](https://bostonglobe.com/2023/05/08/science/no-mow-may-pollinators-bees/?p1=BGSearch_Advanced_Results)

[p1=BGSearch\\_Advanced\\_Results](#)

Another good introduction describing the benefits of the No Mow movement.

[beelab.umn.edu/bee-lawn](https://beelab.umn.edu/bee-lawn).

A piece describing a “bee lawn” with planting resources.

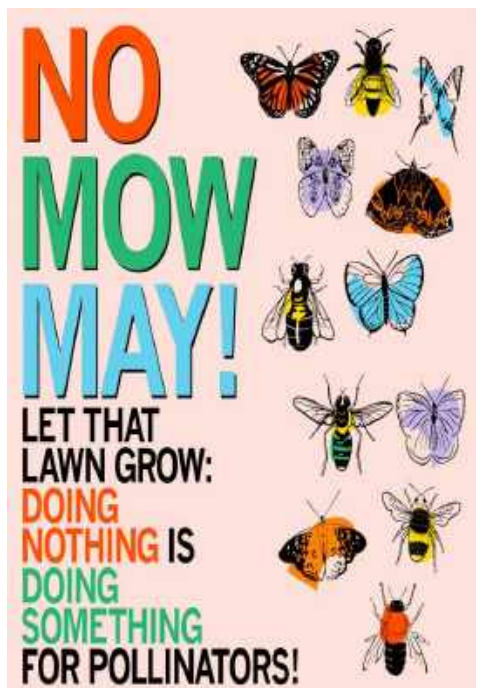
[blogs.oregonstate.edu/gardenecologylab/2023/09/20/the-controversy-surrounding-no-mow-may/](https://blogs.oregonstate.edu/gardenecologylab/2023/09/20/the-controversy-surrounding-no-mow-may/).

Some of the science of No (Low) Mow.

[sustainablecampus.cornell.edu/news/let-grass-grow/](https://sustainablecampus.cornell.edu/news/let-grass-grow/).

A description of the Cornell “Meadows” and practical tips for mowing.

[homegrownnationalpark.org/](https://homegrownnationalpark.org/). A guide on how to regenerate biodiversity by planting native plants and restoring ecological networks.



# Fulton & Forbes Brings Wine, Spirits, and Wares to Ancram

By Cathy Redlich



*Rachel Merriam, owner of Fulton & Forbes, is currently a one-woman operation. She is behind the counter of her newly renovated and recently opened store six days a week, eager to share her knowledge of wines and spirits with customers who stop by.*

**W**ith the opening of Fulton & Forbes, Rachel Merriam is realizing her dream of owning and operating a retail establishment, one she built—in this case, literally—from the ground up. The cozy structure across from Town Hall, sometimes referred to by long-time residents as the Bottle Tree for its former occupant, had been vacant for years when Merriam spotted a real estate listing for the building on Zillow. Up to that point, her search for a commercial building had met with no success, but this location seemed to check many of her boxes.

As Merriam explains, getting a state liquor license is not guaranteed, and she could not risk investing in a building without being confident that the location would meet NYS's legal requirements, including not being within a specified range of a house of

worship or other locations currently operating with liquor licenses. A rural setting was her preference. When she saw what she calls the “little jewel box” on Route 7, backing up to a creek and in the historic town of Ancram, she was sold. She purchased the building in March 2022, and began the costly two-year process of renovation, including the unanticipated finding that the entire foundation needed to be replaced due to water damage.

## **A Background in Food and Wine**

Growing up with Italian and Russian grandparents, all of whom were, as she puts it, “venerable in the kitchen”, as well as a mother who is a skilled cook, Merriam was steeped in culinary skills and cuisines at an early age. She recalls coming home from school and switching to her go-to channel, The Food Network, to watch Rachel Ray and other TV chefs share their cooking

know-how. By the time she was thinking about college, Merriam knew she wanted to apply to the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY. “CIA is an intense experience,” she explains, “one which mimics the real world as much as possible. We are in school the entire year except for five weeks. There is no summer vacation for chefs! And when you are taking a baking class, you are in the kitchen at 3 a.m., exactly as in a real bakery.”

At CIA, Merriam completed a three-week intensive wine program, and later received a Level 2 certification from the Court of Master Sommeliers. Merriam's deep dive into beverage service took place at Casa Mono & Bar Jamon, a Michelin Star restaurant recently named among the 100 best restaurants in NYC for 2024 by the New York Times. Merriam served as the restaurant's wine director and sommelier.



### What's in a Name?

The name Fulton & Forbes was inspired by the cross streets in New Haven, Connecticut where Merriam's paternal grandfather opened his first business, a car dealership, over seventy years ago. She hopes his success will be replicated in her debut store.

To that end, she is open six days a week (despite being the sole employee) to provide generous hours for her customers. The store's concept is to focus on small producers that make wine with holistic practices—no pesticides, herbicides, or excessive sulphur or chemicals in the bottling process. Her wines come from iconic wine-making regions such as Tuscany, Piedmont, and Napa Valley, while her spirits showcase distilleries of the Northeast. "Our current selection is very succinct because of the slower season," Merriam notes, "but as we head into summer the shop will have a broader range."

On Fridays, around 4 p.m., or as customers trickle in, Merriam opens a few bottles for customers to taste. "I am eager to meet the community and learn what people are interested in having me stock."

### Vision for the Future

Merriam plans on hosting a grand opening sometime around Memorial Day to welcome Ancram residents into her new space. She has also renovated the building's former attic to create a community space where she envisions inviting winemakers and distillers to share their products, as well as opening it up to local artists and others for workshops or classes. "I am imagining a "Paint and Sip" gathering, or maybe a workshop on building a beautiful charcuterie board with wine pairings," Merriam muses. "I want the space to be used for purposes that benefit the community and bring people together."

*Fulton & Forbes is located at 1415 County Route 7 in Ancram.*



*The shop's "Spirits Wall" features spirits from select distilleries of the Northeast.*



*The "Wine Wall" displays a curated selection of wines from holistic producers that come from iconic wine regions such as Tuscany, Piedmont, and Napa.*



## Ancram Summer Camp 2024

The Ancram summer camp's mission is to provide a safe, fun-filled summer. The 6 week summer camp will run July 8th to August 16th from 9am-3pm. We look forward to seeing you!

Campers of all ages can look forward to swimming lessons on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays (weather permitting); Town Hall Tuesday; Field Trip Thursday; Pizza Friday; library program, sports, games, free swim, gardening, and crafts!

Thanks to Ancramdale Neighbors Helping Neighbors Association and the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern NY, again this year all children attending the camp and pool will receive a free nutritional lunch and snack.

**\*Campers may not use electronic devices (cell phones, etc) at camp or pool.**

For more information, contact:

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