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The ‘lost’ suburb

Wallkill Valley Land Trust offers tour of historic Kettleborough

by Mike Townshend
06.16.11 - 02:08 pm



History buffs, people who just plain love scenery and fans of working farms can expect a special treat next weekend if they come to the Wallkill Valley Land Trust’s “Houses on the Land” tour of seven houses in the Kettleborough area of Gardiner.



“Kettleborough” might not sound too familiar nowadays, but it is essentially the area of Gardiner now known as Forest Glen. Originally settled as a suburb of the original Huguenot Street village, Kettleborough was started in 1742 by members of the LeFevre family.



“It was settled by these two brothers,” explains Johanna Sokolov, of the Wallkill Valley Land Trust. “They both built these kind of lonely outposts.”



The two Kettleborough LeFevre brothers started with 1,000 acres, dividing it up among their heirs. At first, the brothers started with the traditional Huguenot stone houses that famously put neighboring New Paltz on the historical radar.

“You have two generations of stone houses,” she said. But then the building styles start to get weird. Each new generation of Kettleborough residents built houses in keeping with the times. Eventually, the small, self-contained rural outpost had become a literal timeline of American architecture. “You have something from each generation -- from each architectural style.”

While only three of those buildings are officially on the National Register of Historic Places, the area is also home to Ulster County's oldest functioning community-supported agriculture farm, a part of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail and a major stretch of land -- about 65 acres -- that the land trust now holds as permanent open space.

One of the big reasons that the land trust selected Kettleborough for its first "Houses on the Land" tour is that it represents a great example of how humans have lived with the land in harmony, still building what they needed but at the same time protecting open space and working farms.

"We just hope that people will come and just enjoy the land," Sokolov said. "We're just very lucky to have this subject to focus on for our first tour."

Forest Glen is a rarity because the open farm lands and forests were protected by default for so very long. "This has historically been protected because it's been tended by just one family," she added.

Adding to the chronological mystery of the place is the fact that the area also played a big role later in the construction of the Catskill Aqueduct. In the 20th century, as the massive drinking water supply was being built, construction crews either erected structures or commandeered them for their use.

People who buy their tickets for the tour early through the land trust's website will get a bit of a discount at \$25 per person. People who come on Saturday, June 25 -- the day of the tour itself -- should head to Gardiner Town Hall, 2340 Route 44/55. From 10:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. those day-of tickets will be available at Town Hall.

The tour itself runs a bit later, from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. The area of the tour is pretty compact, so people who are worried about trekking forever on foot shouldn't feel concerned. If people are so inclined, they can also get to the area from the rail trail itself.

For more information, or to buy your tickets early, head to www.wallkillvalleylt.org or call 255-2761.

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