



PROPERTY INFORMATION
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ecga.org/Donibristle



**HAVE A CONSERVATION VISION FOR YOUR PROPERTY?
 GREENBELT CAN HELP.**



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Protecting land and nature for you, our communities and the future.



GREENBELT CONSERVATION CHRONICLE Donibristle Reservation | TOPSFIELD

44 ACRES WITH WIDE TRAILS, TOWERING TREES Conserving the Land, Preserving the Past

When a grassroots community effort was launched in Topsfield to protect Donibristle Farm, Greenbelt worked with local citizens and the landowners to create an opportunity for land conservation.

HISTORY OF THE LAND

Donibristle Farm was the country estate of renowned historian James Duncan Phillips. Built by Phillips in 1911, Donibristle was one of several comfortable “country seats” built in Topsfield by wealthy Salem shipping magnates. Like the “gentleman farmers” before him, Phillips was a member of the Essex Agricultural Society and his wife, Nannie Borden Phillips (of the well-known Borden milk family), helped develop a model dairy farm on the land with registered Guernseys.

After more than a century of change, the original 110-acre estate has become smaller, but the scale and feel of what remains intact is very much a part of the rural character of scenic southern Topsfield.





JERRY MONKMAN/ECOPHOTOGRAPHY.COM (4)

Evolution of the Project

When the owners of Donibristle Farm decided to sell the property in 2015, they explored the range of options available to them, including conservation and sale for development. Initially, the property was under agreement to a developer and substantial progress had been made in the permitting of as many as 20 homes along the ridgeline.

As the permitting got underway, neighbor Martha Sanders realized what was at stake if the remaining intact woods of Donibristle were lost to development. Sanders took action and organized a group of neighbors and community members to come together to protect the property in order to retain its scenic beauty, allow public trail access, and preserve the important wetlands that ensure clean water in Nichols Brook and the Ipswich River.

Sanders and other concerned citizens asked Greenbelt to craft a solution that would satisfy the needs of both the landowners and the community. In the summer of 2016, Greenbelt secured an agreement with the landowners to purchase 44 acres outright and to protect another 2 acres of agricultural fields with a conservation restriction for \$900,000. The fundraising goal was ambitious, but citizens petitioned Town Meeting for a municipal appropriation for the project, while Greenbelt initiated a community fundraising effort and applied for a state grant.



"We all have more of an ability to make a difference in our town than we realize."

Martha Sanders

Meaningful Milestone

Ultimately, Greenbelt exceeded its campaign goal and raised \$410,000 for the project, and Topsfield citizens voted (both at Town Meeting and by ballot) to approve spending up to \$500,000 in municipal funds to protect the land. In early 2018, a state LAND grant was awarded for \$400,000, reducing the town's investment to \$90,000.

The protection of the Donibristle Reservation marked a meaningful milestone in Topsfield, as it represented the first time in the town's history that residents voted to allocate municipal funds to purchase land for conservation.

"I think that what we all realize is that it's a one-time payment...and it really is a gift for the town now and for the future generations," remarked Martha Sanders.

Permanently Protected for Public Enjoyment

Greenbelt now owns and manages the property and Topsfield holds a conservation restriction – an added layer of protection that is permanent. Today, there is public access to this lovely forested landscape with a network of trails connecting to adjoining land for walking, trail running, biking, horseback riding, snow shoeing and cross-country skiing.

According to Nathalie and George Meyfarth, long-time Greenbelt supporters and neighbors to the Donibristle Reservation, "It feels great to know that along with many in the Topsfield community, we, in our small way, were able to help Greenbelt conserve this land forever."

GOALS

- Conserve heritage landscape for public enjoyment
- Protect wildlife habitat
- Preserve wetlands

TOOLS

- Community collaboration
- Private, municipal, and state funding
- Conservation restriction

BENEFITS

- Public access
- Connection with abutting trail system
- Topsfield's rural character preserved
- Landowner goals met
- Clean water ensured for Nichols Brook & Ipswich River

PROJECT FUNDING

State LAND Grant	\$400,000
Town of Topsfield	\$ 90,000
Community Fundraising	\$410,000
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	\$900,000