



# SUPERIOR LAND PRESERVATION SOCIETY NEWS

SPRING-SUMMER  
2014  
P.O. BOX 130041  
ANN ARBOR, MI  
48113-0041



## *Why do I live in and want to preserve Superior Township?*

by Sandi Lopez, illustration by John Copley

I moved out here in 1992. It had been a joke with my friends that every year they had to help me move. Some friends of friends had a farm house divided in two that they wanted me share. I looked at it and it was pretty run down, but something made me take another look a few days later, and the irises in the front yard had opened. They were so beautiful that I decided I would live there. I never thought I would put down a taproot, but as I watched and met the farmers who were working the land around me, I realized there was something more going on here, and that I wanted to stay. The land is so beautiful, and the people are amazingly warm and nice. I met many of them as I walked my three-legged dog, Oscoda. The wonderful couple who lived in the house I now own became ill and moved to a care facility in 2000. That was a sad event. Their son was working in the front yard when I walked my dog by the house. I had never been in it, but I knew this was where I wanted to be – my taproot had grown here. I asked him what he was going to do with the house and if I could buy it, and here I am, on my one acre of heaven. The air

is clean, the skies are clear, and the farms around me grow the food we need to live. I can get the best corn in the world from one neighbor who sells it on Geddes Road. Other fresh food comes from the

Preserve, continued on p.3

### **Superior Township's New Preserve!**

Thanks to all of our wonderful supporters, SLPS is happy to have been able to make a substantial contribution to facilitate Washtenaw County's acquisition of property for the new Weatherbee Woods Preserve! This exceptional acreage is adjacent to Superior Township's Schroeter Park at Berry and Warren Roads. It is named in honor of Ellen Elliott Weatherbee, who is an extraordinary naturalist, and who conducted an extensive natural features survey of Superior Township. While doing the survey, she identified this particular spot to be one of the most striking areas of the Township, so it is only fitting that it hold her name. We will continue to cooperate with Washtenaw County and Superior Township Parks in making this new preserve accessible for enjoyment by all!

# In A Nutshell

by Marion Morris

What plants do well in the vicinity of a black walnut tree?

The roots of black walnut produce the chemical juglone, which suppresses the growth of other plants – even kills some species. Juglone can even leach into the soil from decaying black walnut leaves, bark, roots, and nuts. This toxic effect is called allelopathy. The most susceptible plants are tomatoes, potatoes, rhododendrons, azaleas, piperis, mountain ash, lilac, burning bush, white pine, potentilla, and blueberry.

Here are some plants that should thrive under black walnuts:

**Shrubs, vines, and trees:** arborvitae, barberry, beech, bittersweet, black cherry, blackhaw, clematis, dogwood, elderberry, oak (white and red), red cedar, and witch hazel.

**Perennials:** aster, bee balm, bellwort, Christmas fern, coral bells, ginger, geranium, goldenrod, hosta, St. John's wort, impatiens, ironweed, lobelia, rudbeckia, sedum, violet, and yarrow.

Hopefully, those of you who have a black walnut tree in your yard will find this information useful and helpful in avoiding plant loss.

Black walnut trees grow throughout this region and the wood is prized for use in gunstocks, furniture, and cabinets. The pioneers made brown dye from the nut husk. The nut itself is hard to crack, but the sweet, edible kernel makes the effort worthwhile.

## ***Congratulations!!!***

Alicia Estrada, Mary Krause, and Mary Emmett of Superior Township's own Plymouth Orchard and Cider Mill won first place in the 17<sup>th</sup> annual Michigan Apple Cider Contest. The competition, featuring 34 cider makers, was held in Grand Rapids.



Illustration by John Copley

## **Black Walnut Refrigerator Cookies**

1 2/3 C flour  
1/2 tsp baking soda  
1/4 tsp salt  
1/2 C butter, softened  
1 tsp vanilla  
1/3 C granulated sugar  
2/3 C firmly packed brown sugar  
1 egg slightly beaten  
1 C coarsely chopped black walnuts

1. Sift the flour and baking soda twice. Mix in the salt.
2. Cream the butter and vanilla; gradually add the sugars. Beat well. Blend in the egg and beat well. Mix in flour, add nuts.
3. Shape into rolls; wrap in waxed paper. Refrigerate overnight.
4. Slice; bake at 350° for about 10 minutes.

# Growing Jack-In-The-Pulpit (and some others)

by Ellen Kurath

Jack-in-the-Pulpit makes a large cluster of orange red seeds, conspicuous after the stem and leaves have quit for the year and fallen over. New plants come easily from seed. Small, three-leaved plants the first year will gain size in following years. Partial shade and clay soil with some topsoil suits these plants well. They're not choosy, but they don't like very dry soil. Perennials, they are not long-lived ones, although new seedlings, easily transplanted, are soon to follow.

Jack-in-the-Pulpit's relative, the Dragon Arum (green dragon) is interesting but finicky, and needs good soil and shade. It can grow in places which are not very wet, but may remain underground and not sprout again until conditions are suitable....but that doesn't mean it has quit. It may live for twenty years or more, and makes seeds which may take years to sprout.

The large white trillium and nodding trillium can grow in garden conditions. They do best in partial shade in clay soil with topsoil that isn't too dry. A plant may live for fifty years. It may be that they only seriously decide to make seeds toward the end of their life span. Little three-leaved plants show up here and there, and need time to become big enough to start blooming. Seeds should not be allowed to dry out, or they may take years to sprout. Trillium is protected, and should not be dug up or picked.

These three arums transplant easily (although, as mentioned above, trillium that you transplant should not be from the wild). A large knob is found a short distance underground, with small roots growing out of it. There is no tap root.

Solomon's Seal grows in gravelly soil in open shade, such as alongside a road. It can also grow in clay soil with some topsoil. A horizontal root stock is just below the surface of the ground, with small roots at each joint. It's also easy to move. Some years it may decide to stay underground, but that doesn't mean it has quit. The plants can last many years, although some may be new seedlings.

There has been a very large variety of Solomon's Seal – 5 or 6 feet high, with rhizomes one inch in diameter -- that has grown next to Gale Road in the gravelly side wall of a ditch near a cross culvert. At the base of each leaf there are three flowers. Solomon's seal can be readily grown from seeds, but need to be protected from animals, who find them delicious.



Illustration by John Copley

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Preserve, continued from p.1

food comes from the Dixboro Farmers Market. One neighbor provides me with fresh eggs. I also grow and preserve some of my own food.

I sit, listen and watch the birds – orioles, bluebirds, robins, cardinals, indigo buntings, red-winged black birds, egrets, cranes, geese, ducks, swallows, hummingbirds, wrens, owls, juncos and many others. Most right in my yard. Others are within walking distance. This township is special because the people in it know what they have and they have been working to protect it. About 10 % of our 36 square miles have at least one layer of protection on them. For this fact we can thank the SLPS, Washtenaw County, our Parks Department, the SMLC, the City of Ann Arbor, the State and some private land owners. I thank all of you, from the bottom of my heart. We are the green heaven between Ann Arbor, Wayne County and Ypsilanti, serving as a model for what we have and what can be. The zoning ordinances for our township and our Master Plan have served us well, laying out a spectacular vision. I am honored to be part of the SLPS and to be able to say I had a hand in protecting some of our wonderful land. I hope you share my feelings.

# DONATIONS

We thank all the folks who have given so generously to Superior Land Preservation Society during the last year.

Eric & Pat Appleberry  
Cathy Bach and Brian Hazlett  
Thomas and Sylvia Barnabei  
Carla Bisaro  
John Brinley and Anne Schott  
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Ellen Elliott Weatherbee  
Judith Wysocki  
Karl and Ann Zinn

## OUR MISSION

- To maintain and protect open spaces in Superior Township, Washtenaw County, Michigan. These areas include, but are not limited to, nature sanctuaries, nature preserves, natural areas, many of which contain or contribute to habitat for wildlife and plants.
- To help residents of Superior Township obtain conservation easements on their properties to prevent them from being developed.
- And, overall, to preserve land resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

### If you share our goal...

.... of preserving the rural character and natural habitat of Superior Township, please become a member

Great Horned Owl	Red-tailed Hawk
\$1000	\$500
Cooper's Hawk	Screech Owl
\$100	\$50
Goldfinch	Other
\$25	

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Please send to SLPS, P.O. Box 130041  
Ann Arbor, MI 48113-0041

# Superior Township Tax Base

by Ellen Kurath

Questions have arisen about Superior Township's future financial condition and ability to meet expenses, such as maintenance and fire and police services. Exempt properties, such as parks and other preserved lands don't pay property taxes, as is dictated by policy.

Such questions are understandable, considering the major impact experienced by the City of Ann Arbor in its relationship with the University of Michigan, which owns a lot of property that is tax-exempt. However, the situation in Superior Township is different, in that most of the property that has become tax-exempt is vacant, and it is typically vacant because it is of a character or location that has limitations for development and construction. Besides hills and valleys and steep slopes, there is clay with severe limitations, wet conditions and high water table, all of which can make building on this land impossible or impractical.

Some of the land used in agriculture has been protected from development, which lowers the taxes. Conservation easements have been placed on some agricultural land and other private property, which also reduces the taxes. It should be noted that some of the parcels that have become parks and preserves were not bringing in much property tax revenue before becoming tax-exempt.

Meanwhile, new and expensive homes have added an amount to the tax base that has exceeded any reductions for exemptions or other reasons. Total taxable value for Superior Township was \$301 million in 2001, and \$549 million in 2011, which proportionally exceeded the rate of increase of population. The property in the west part of the Township, in the Ann Arbor School district, amounts to 41% of the Township's total taxable value.

In Superior Township, about 80% of property tax is school tax, and the remainder is Township and County tax. The Township millage is significantly lower than in the other Charter Townships nearby. City tax millages are higher, since maintenance and services are more expensive when the population is more concentrated. When considering the tax base,

total taxable value is only part of the equation; expenses are the other part.

The County Road Commission is funded entirely on a state basis of fuel tax and license plate fees, and not at all by property tax. However, the state funding has been inadequate for a long time, so to alleviate deteriorating conditions the Township has spent some of its general funds for road maintenance here for the last 25 years or so.

Over the years, new single family homes have added to the total taxable value for the Township. For a while, the number of building permits for new single family homes was 120 or 130 per year, mostly mid-priced. Lately the number is much fewer, but they are more expensive. For the years 2009, 2010, and 2011, the total number of building permits for new single family homes was 43, with an average stated cost per house of \$460,000. (thanks to Superior Township Administration for information for this story)

## News from the Chair

by Marion Morris

"Be careful what you wish for...it might come true." Growing up in northern Michigan, when winter arrived the snow and cold stayed until spring. In my 40+ years of living in Superior Township, I've said many times, "I wish when winter arrives the snow and cold would stay, not all the rain, slush, and mud!" After this past winter, I will never say that again! Climate change? We may have to get used to more severe weather patterns.

We can be grateful for what's being done by our group and others in Superior Township and the region to affect our local climate. A big factor is the wide abundance of trees and plants that absorb carbon dioxide, provide shade, generate oxygen, filter water, and give us lovely peaceful landscapes and places to reconnect with nature. Our conservancy, working in collaboration with like-minded groups, continues to promote, preserve, and protect land in Superior Township for our enjoyment and that of future generations.

Your support in this endeavor is so vital to our continued success. Thank you!

# THE HISTORY OF WILLOW RUN

by Ellen Kurath

The Willow Run bomber plant was well known in its time for its remarkable size, the innovative methods used, and the rate of production accomplished. Its effect on the surroundings continued long after the last bomber was built.

The plant and the airport were located far west of existing industrial facilities, in an area that had previously been rural. No one could have predicted the huge impact of the plant. To get an idea of the magnitude of change, the 1940 census showed a population of 12,121 in Ypsilanti and 1321 in Superior Township. In contrast, the number of workers at the plant was over 40,000 at its maximum capacity in 1943, declining to about half that by the end of the war due to improved efficiency. With such a huge increase in population there was an acute-housing shortage, especially since the shortages of gasoline and tires made commuting difficult. As a result, some people lived in trailers and shanties in dismal conditions.

The focus of the plant was on productivity rather than worker comfort, and temporary housing for the Willow Run project wasn't done until 1943. The north portion of this housing was in Superior Township, and the rest was in Ypsilanti Township. Water wells were in what is now Harvest Moon Park, and a water tower was located in a high spot near Geddes and Prospect Roads.

Description of this housing mentioned a lot of mud. An old-time member of the Sheriff Department said that some dwellings were full of cockroaches. The buildings were wooden, and heating and cooking were done with stoves that burned wood or coal. If a building caught fire, putting it out with water caused a smell that pervaded the area, which was recalled by another resident who said he lived there as a boy.

When the war ended, the airport became the property of the University of Michigan. Willow Run Labs were on the east side of the airport, and passenger airline service for Detroit was in Hangar 1 on the west side. The temporary worker housing



remained for some staff and for students attending college under the G.I. Bill, until it was demolished in the late 1950s. After the demolition, a pattern of rectangular areas of pavement remained which were mostly removed when other housing came in, however some of those paved pads are still there, overgrown with shrubbery.

The housing project came and went, and Superior Township was again mostly agricultural with some private homes, but it was a blank slate with different possibilities than before the war. Wartime construction brought not only the bomber plant and airport, but also road, highway, and railroad connections. With those present, industry arrived. Kaiser-Fraser built automobiles in the former bomber plant, and, later, GM Hydramatic moved into the plant after a fire at their previous location. More factories came. Trailer parks and tract houses increased. The effect can be seen in the US census figures:

Year	Superior Twp	Ypsilanti Twp	Ypsilanti City
1940	1,321	4,153	12,121
1950*	7,181	14,630	18,302
1960**	3,600	25,930	20,967
1970	5,562	33,194	29,538
1980	8,060	44,511	24,031
1990	8,720	45,307	24,845
2000	10,740	49,182	22,362
2010	13,058	53,362	19,435

\* Housing Project built

\*\* Housing Project demolished

The factories caused a surge in local population, along with an increase in residential subdivisions and a decrease in agricultural land use where the former Housing Project had been. By the late 1970s, the population in that part of the Township was equal to the population in the remaining rural section.

Technology has changed, with outsourcing and automatic manufacturing, and fewer people employed in assembly. Plants have closed, trailer parks have declined, and houses are vacant. A change in technology leads to other changes. Agriculture continues in Superior Township, now with the idea that it has a future instead of vanishing, however farming these days uses large machines and not a lot of field hands. Future employment in agriculture here is still unknown.

(references used for this article include "Willow Run, Colossus of American Industry", by Warren Benjamin Kidder, and SEMCOG data)



### ***A Weed - In Defense of Nature's Unwanted Plant***

by Marion Morris

Lamb's Quarters is also known as "Fat Hen". The seed head can be ground into flour. The leaves when cooked taste very much like spinach.

## ***Gardening For The Birds***

by Marion Morris

Non-migratory songbirds had a tough time this past very harsh winter. Suitable habitat for these beautiful, interesting creatures is in increasingly short supply, as urban areas are constantly expanding.

With a little effort, you can easily turn your yard into a haven for songbirds. Areas of dense thickets can be used for nesting, perching, or as a cover for escape. Try to create lush, wild growth in a few places for a natural environment. Leave dead limbs and even entire dead trees where they are (unless they are dangerous). The insects under the bark or in the wood are an important food source for birds such as chickadees, woodpeckers, and nuthatches. Hollow trees, important for cavity-nesting birds such as bluebirds and woodpeckers, are becoming increasingly scarce. Use dead branches that fall from your trees to start a brush pile. It affords birds protection from harsh weather and predators. You can turn your yard into a welcome haven for local and migrant songbirds.

Here is a list of bird-friendly plants used for food, nesting, and cover:

<b>Deciduous Trees</b>	<b>Coniferous Trees</b>
Dogwoods Crab Apples Serviceberries	Red Cedar Spruce
<b>Shrubs and Vines</b> Northern Bayberry Staghorn Sumac Viburnum Wild Grape	



Illustration by John Copley

## Patterns of Water

by Ellen Kurath

Hills, valleys, streams, ponds, swamps and other features make up the scenery of this Township. They are its character, created by forces of nature.

The watershed, as it came to be known after the glaciers melted, includes ponds and wetlands which accommodate the flow of water, acting as natural detention areas. The water courses join as they approach the river, each in its valley. Even the smaller runs have ponds or wetland areas that moderate the flow by spreading it out, ensuring that the river doesn't receive a huge rush of water from a sudden rain or a big melt.

The patterns of water flow can be interesting to examine, but also present a pragmatic reason to avoid disturbing a system that has been working pretty well for a long time. It is easy, but not always wise, to make changes that concentrate the movement of water, which may lead to flooding and erosion with expensive consequences. For example, making cuts in the ground so that water will run away quickly from a rainstorm or melting snow causes a sudden increase in the amount of water going downstream

and entering the river. A steep sided channel does nothing to moderate the flow.

More than half of Superior Township drains into the Huron River, while a substantial area toward the north and east drains into the Rouge River. South of Plymouth Road, Frains Lake and Murray Lake drain eastward toward the Rouge along a valley that continues beyond Berry Road. Some property along this watercourse is County parkland or is otherwise protected. Because of its history of pollution, the Rouge watershed is subject to Federal requirements for clean-up of previous problems and to avoid new ones. A short distance north of Plymouth Road, north of Frains Lake, water flows in the other direction, toward Fleming Creek and the Huron River. Some of this distance is subject to regulations.

The concerns about limitations on river impact and how they are implemented extend to the very beginning and edges of each watershed, and include safety as well as aesthetics.



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