



# PENELOPE PERKINS WILSON

April 30, 1923 – February 10, 2021

## TRIBUTE

Family friends	Franny & Franny Abbott, family friends since childhood
Westtown School	Susan Temple, retired Westtown School & friend
Chester County Hospital	Michael Duncan, CEO Kevin O'Brien Esq., Senior VP Franny Abbott, Past Board Chair, Chester County Hospital Foundation/Penn Medicine
Natural Lands	Ann Hausmann, VP Development
Chester County History Center	Ellen Endsloew, Director of Collections/Curator
Historic Sugartown	Scott Hattersley, former Board Member CCCF, Historic Sugartown volunteer & CEO Sugartown Smoked Specialties Heather Reiffer, Executive Director
Uptown! Knauer Performing Arts Center	Angela Scully, Founding Executive Director Molly Morrison, Incoming Board Chair, former NLT, friend
Chester County Community Foundation	Karen Simmons, President/CEO
Chester County Community Foundation	TRIBUTE PRODUCTION LOGISTICS & DISTRIBUTION DESIGN Jamison Ludgate, Marketing/Communications Associate & Beth Krallis, Marketing/Communications Officer

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WILSON'S

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INSPIRE

### Jordan Award Honorees

The Jordan Award was created in 1999 to honor the longstanding commitment to Chester County philanthropy exemplified by Community Foundation founder Dr. Henry A. Jordan and his wife Barbara McNeil Jordan.



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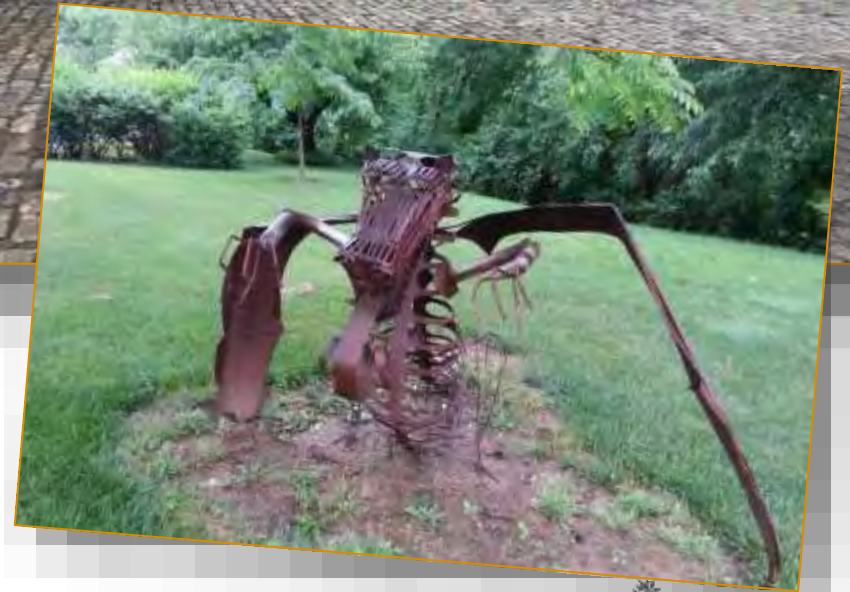
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<https://www.westtown.edu/>

 (610) 696-8211 • [chescof.org](http://chescof.org)

Touring Westtown School's renovated Arts Center, Fall 2019.

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Penn Medicine  
Chester County Hospital



<https://www.chestercountyhospital.org/>



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**Penn Medicine**  
Chester County Hospital



<https://www.chestercountyhospital.org/>

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<https://natlands.org/>

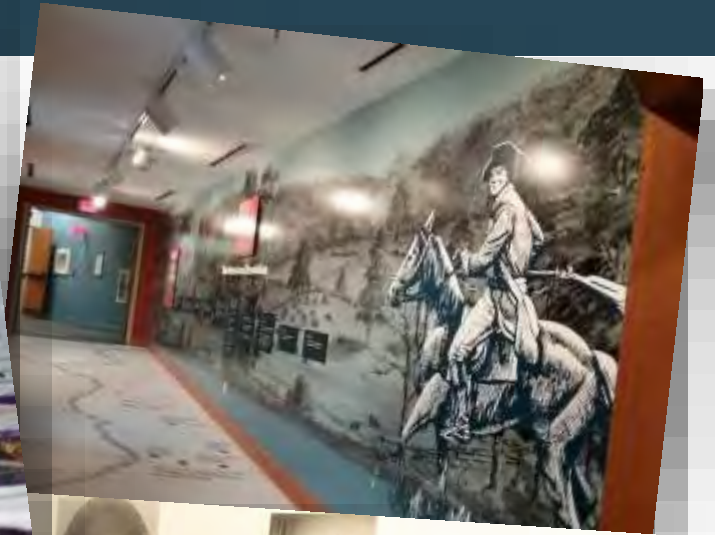
A long view of the final project for which Penny joined Natural Lands as a partner: restoration of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Ralston House, a preserve manager residence and office at the 520-acre Bryn Coed Preserve in Chester Springs. Penny thoroughly enjoyed the Ralston House ceremonial start of construction—a COVID-managed 5-person event in October 2020.

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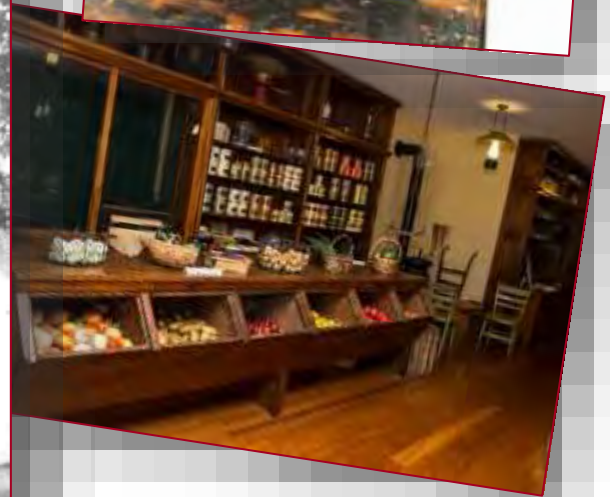
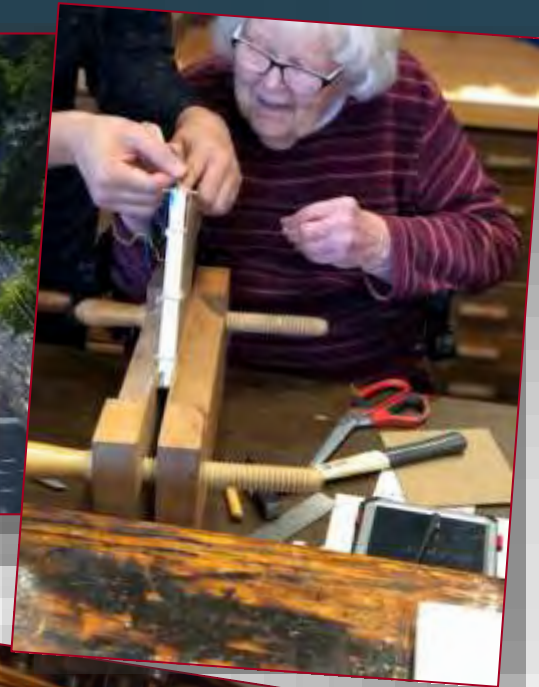
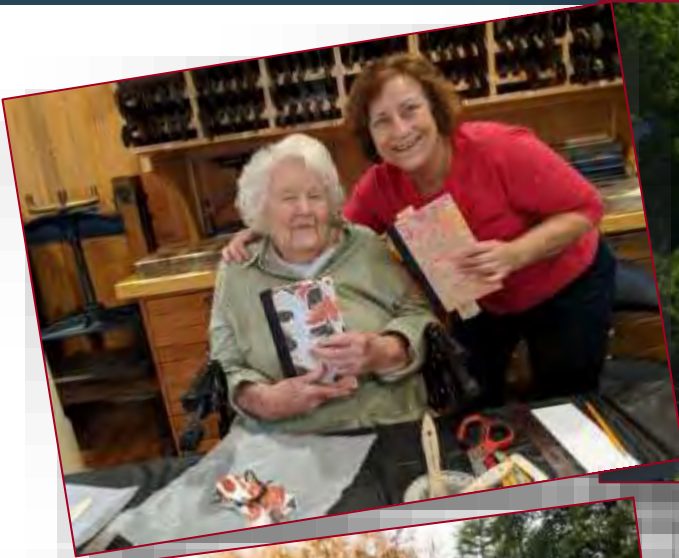
<http://www.chestercohistorical.org/>

 (610) 696-8211 • chescocf.org

# PENELOPE PERKINS WILSON

April 30, 1923 – February 10, 2021

## TRIBUTE



<https://historicsugartown.org/>

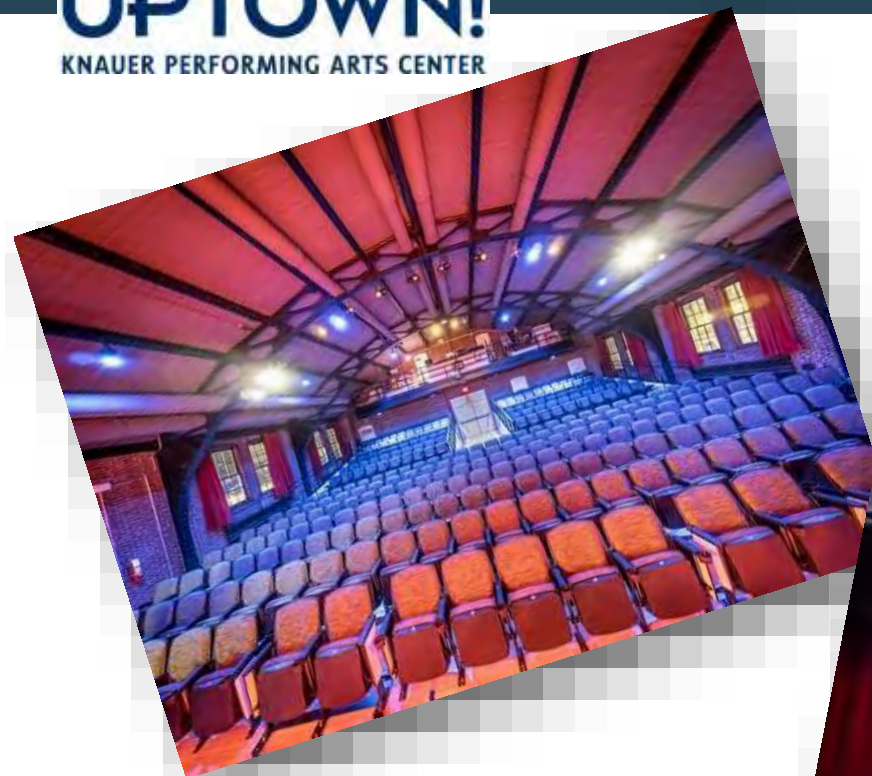
 (610) 696-8211 • chescocf.org




# PENELOPE PERKINS WILSON

April 30, 1923 – February 10, 2021

TRIBUTE



<https://uptownwestchester.org/>

 (610) 696-8211 • chescocf.org

# PENELOPE PERKINS WILSON

April 30, 1923 – February 10, 2021

## TRIBUTE



Chester County Community Foundation  
2004 Jordan Award for Chester County Philanthropy  
Longstanding, Impactful, Widespread Generosity



LINO'S



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJ92X8N2ur8>



# PENNY WILSON

April 30, 1923 - February 10, 2021

*The Chester County Community Foundation remembers  
and celebrates the life of Penelope "Penny" Perkins Wilson.*

Penny was a philanthropist  
passionate about education,  
conservation, art, history,  
horses, and architecture.

Her 97 years were filled  
with family, generosity,  
enthusiasm, and delight.

She will be greatly missed.



# Penny Wilson

LAUNCHING INITIATIVES AND INSPIRING OTHERS TO GIVE FOR MORE THAN 50 YEARS

**P**enelope "Penny" Perkins Wilson's influence in philanthropy has been long-standing and far-reaching.

Born Penelope Perkins in the Bronx, NYC in 1923, Penny was the daughter of George W. Perkins and Linn Merck Perkins. Her father was the first ambassador to NATO. She was raised on the family's farm in Cold Spring, New York and received her high school education at Chatham Hall in Virginia. While attending Bennington College in Vermont, Penny became interested in architecture, especially rehabilitating historic buildings. Because Bennington has played a deeply important role in her life, she continues to serve on Bennington's Board of Trustees, offering insight and wisdom.

In 1943, Penny Perkins married William B. Wilson, a Navy aviator and traveled throughout the United States. Her love for Chester County began on New Year's Day 1950, when her family moved into WyllPen Farm, a historic 1813 home.

Penny's passions for history, architecture, visual arts, women's education and the environment blossomed in Chester County with much opportunity at hand. In particular, it was her love for history and architecture that attracted

her to a 19th-century village in peril, known as Shugart's Town. Her interest in restoring this treasure entailed much drive, hard work and support from friends and neighbors.

"It takes a village to save a village," says Penny. A successful endeavor, Historic Sugartown, as it's presently known, is well preserved and open to the public, giving a window into 19th-century culture and architecture. Co-founder John Nagy said, "At Historic Sugartown Penny has always been a driving force with untiring devotion to our projects and strict attention to detail and authenticity."

Also on Penny's list of valuable organizations preserving our local history is Chester County Historical Society. She values the integration of collaborative projects providing a thread of continuity among the local historical sites.

Penny has a special interest in using matching gifts to inspire giving to charities. She believes that challenge gifts are wonderful tools that inspire more donors to give more. Some of the benefactors of this wisdom include the Audubon Society of PA, Bennington College, Chester County Historical Society, Chester County



Hospital, Chester County Community Foundation, Historic Sugartown, Moore College of Art & Design and Westtown School.

In 2004, Penny's enduring philanthropic commitment was recognized by the Chester County Community Foundation as they honored her with the Jordan award. Dr. Henry Jordan said, "Penny has given of her time, personal

resources and talents for more than 50 years. Her philanthropic leadership goes far beyond financial generosity and includes her willingness to share her expertise those charged with creating and sustaining fundraising initiatives. Penny has raised the bar for many in our community, inspiring us to new heights. For that, Chester County is eternally grateful."

{ PENNY HAS RAISED THE BAR  
FOR MANY IN OUR COMMUNITY,  
INSPIRING US TO NEW HEIGHTS.  
FOR THAT, CHESTER COUNTY IS  
ETERNALLY GRATEFUL. }

# Penelope Perkins Wilson

April 30, 1923 - February 10, 2021



Penelope Perkins Wilson (or was it John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt? His name was her name, too) passed away at 97 years of age on February 10, 2021.

She was born Penelope Perkins in NYC to Linn Merck Perkins and George Walbridge Perkins, Jr. on April 30, 1923, growing up in her family's homes in NYC and Glynwood Farm in Cold Spring, NY.

Penelope, aka Penny, Mother, Grummy, Aunt Penny, Teacher Penny, was a force of nature. I suspect she will continue to be for those who knew her. Tall, creative, and willful, she attacked life with enthusiasm, passion, and delight. She could be terrifying, and terrifyingly fun. A wonderful sense of humor, spontaneity, and a pragmatic approach to the exigencies of life were her emblems, and she shared them generously.

She was educated at the Brearley School in NYC, graduated from Chatham Hall in Virginia, and attended Ben-

nington College in Vermont, where she studied art and architecture. After her marriage to William B. Wilson, a Williams graduate and Naval officer, in 1943, she resided everywhere from Pownal, Vermont to Pensacola, Fla., San Diego, Ca., and Garrison, NY... and in 1950, settled at Wyllpen Farm in Chester County, PA. She taught art at the Westtown School from 1956-1962. She divorced in 1965, and in 1973, she moved for the last time to her home, 'The Wolery', in Malvern, PA. She was a big fan of A. A. Milne.

Penelope also had a home in Big Timber, Montana, whose wide open spaces were dear to her heart.

Penelope exercised her philanthropic muscles regularly and widely. She was passionate about education, art, history, horses, conservation, and architecture. Among many others, she supported the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Historic Sugartown, Westtown School, Chatham Hall, the Montana History Foundation, the Sweet Grass Community Foundation, the Forest History Society, the Cradle of American Forestry, Bennington College, Moore College of Art and Design, the Chester County Community Foundation, Chester County History Center, Chester County Hospital, the Natural Lands Trust, Wave Hill, the Glynwood Center, the Audubon Society, the National Parks Conservation

Association... She also supported the education not only of her 5 daughters, but the majority of her 14 grandchildren and 17 great grandchildren. What a gift!

She raised her family to be interested in the world and to delight in small things. She loved jigsaw puzzles, birds (OWLS!!), chocolate, art exhibits, and lobster... and she always had a silly song at the ready. The best were made up on the spot.

She is already deeply missed.

Much love and appreciation to her caregivers, Suzie Weaver, Tammi Thompson, Debbie Fianu, Miriama, Debra...

Penelope is survived by her 5 daughters, (Linn Krieg of McAllister, MT and Arizona, Suzanne Wilson of Big Timber, MT, Wendy O'Brien of Chestertown, MD and Aiken, SC, Elizabeth Gonzalez of Oley, PA, and Victoria Wilson-Charles of Veneta, Oregon, as well as 14 grandchildren, 17 great grandchildren, a host of nieces and nephews, and by her sister Anne Perkins Cabot. Her Brother George died in 2008.

A private memorial will be held by the family once we can gather again. If you would like to send a donation in her memory, we suggest the Montana History Foundation or the Sweet Grass Community Center.

She never did tell us who put the overalls in Mrs. Murphy's Chowder.

Karen,

On a personal note, it was such a privilege and honor to be able to say that I knew Penny Wilson. I've known Penny since I started working at the Hospital in 2007. If it wasn't for the communication challenges, I would have wanted to visit Penny on a weekly basis. Every time I was with her I was smiling and laughing and having the best time! She was an inspiration to me. Penny was basically deaf, was confined to a wheel chair, but loved life more than most people I know. She was one of the most positive, cheerful, and sweetest person I've ever known.

I saw Penny just a few days before she died. I was glad to be able to get her into the Hospital to get vaccinated, together with Tammi and Suzie. In her typical fashion, Penny commented on a crazy Jerry Garcia tie that I was wearing with goofy snowmen! She liked to be playful and I liked it when she teased me.

Thanks again for providing me with the opportunity to comment on a life well lived.

Kevin

P.S. Attaching a couple of personal pictures with Penny...She invited me to her 95<sup>th</sup> Birthday at her home; as you no doubt know, she loved plants and flowers so I brought her this unusual Christmas plant/flower in 2019.

**Kevin R. O'Brien, Esq.**

Senior Vice President for Development

Chester County Hospital

Tel: 610-431-5042 | Fax: 610-918-6596

Email: [Kevin.O'brien@penmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:Kevin.O'brien@penmedicine.upenn.edu)

Thanks so much to you and Franny for thinking of us. Last week we sent to Natural Lands' 30,000-plus constituents an email paying tribute to Penny. Our organizational hearts are full of gratitude, but also loss.

Penny had an extraordinary impact on our efforts to save open space, care for nature, and connect people to the outdoors ... and knew how to make our shared ventures and partnerships SO MUCH FUN!

Ann

P.S. I'm so grateful to you for sharing the YouTube link to your interview with Penny. I'll use it to end my week on an inspirational high note!

I knew Penny from Teacher Penny days in the 50s and 60s when she was Lower School art teacher in the basement of the Meeting House. Then years later, I met Penny again shortly after I became the Lower School principal. I had on my calendar that the Head of School was bringing a “maybe donor” to talk about Lower School renovations and expansion. When they entered the lobby and I recognized Teacher Penny and happily greeted her, she simultaneously said, “Susie!” It was a delightful moment and the beginning of our adult relationship.

Penny was one of a kind. Her generosity was enormous, but she was not an easy sell. She had high standards and expectations. Before she would listen to plans and visions for something new, she wanted to be sure we were on top of taking care of what we had! No deferred maintenance! I remember walking with her to the new Science Building she was instrumental in building and as we passed the end of the school’s main building, built in 1850, all brick, she glanced up at a doorway high on the 3rd floor and correctly noted it needed attention. I reassured her that portion of the building would be pointed in the coming summer.

Her engagement with the students was keen. She was interested in all the interesting new stuff they were doing and learning. All of the other adults in the room fell away and she was completely engaged with the kids.

Although Penny was instrumental in numerous projects on campus, she could not be convinced to have anything named for her. She not only didn’t want or need the recognition, she quite logically knew in her experience it would likely need to be changed again in years to come. “Let’s save us all the trouble.”

Penny truly made a difference in significant and important ways for many students and faculty now and long into the future.

Susan Temple  
610 306-7100



## Remembering Penelope P. Wilson, Co-Founder & Friend 1923 – 2021

**Our hearts are broken.** It's with great sadness that we share the passing of **Penelope P. Wilson**, co-founder and constant guardian of Historic Sugartown. "Penny," as we all knew her, co-founded Historic Sugartown with John C. and Peg Nagy in 1982. It all began when Penny and John met at a cocktail party, where, upon learning where the Nagys lived, she commented, "you live across from that crumbling, sad mess!"

From there, a friendship kindled that would result in the rescue of the seemingly forgotten and forlorn village of Sugartown. Penny recounted how she spent that first summer of Sugartown's restoration sorting through the china that seemed to fill the buildings of the General Store Complex. She explained that the John family's idea of security for their antique store was to spread the individual plates, cups and bowls throughout the building. She spent hours reuniting the sets to ready them for sale at the auction that Historic Sugartown held that year.

She also shared that she and John Nagy didn't always agree on aspects of the restoration project. When it was suggested that they would gut the second floor of what we affectionately call "Building B," which features a c. 1890 bathroom, Penny protested. She felt that few historic sites preserved such spaces, and that it was important to keep so people could understand the evolution of this part of daily life. Penny prevailed and the "Victorian Bathroom" remains a highlight for Historic Sugartown's visitors.

Dale Frens, of Frens & Frens, LLC, who served as architect for Historic Sugartown's restoration, shared that "Penny was generous with her time, her smile, and her ideas. Our first major project at Historic Sugartown, about 1990, was a master plan for the general store complex. As part of that project we prepared a rendering of the Sugartown Road facade of the row. The rendering was well received, so much so that John and Penny decided to auction it at the annual gala, then held at Radnor Hunt. No doubt as planned, Penny was the high bidder at \$1500, and she promptly gave it back to Historic Sugartown, another act of her generosity."

Above all else, Penny was passionate about making the preservation of Sugartown **mean something**. She wanted children to make connections between the past and today's world. She wanted the community to discover Sugartown's authentic historic setting and value the village in ways special to them. Penny was always in the background cheering our staff and Board on, offering her keen wisdom and perspective as we explored new ideas and planned new programs. Penny attended nearly every event. In 2019, Penny signed up to take Historic Sugartown's bookbinding and paper marbling workshops. Ramon Townsend, our Bookbinder, described Penny as a quick study, with a voracious appetite for learning, and all the while offering thoughts and suggestions on how Bindery space could be improved for future programs!

Penny will always be remembered as Historic Sugartown's angel – founder, benefactor and friend. Her bright shining light of philanthropy and sincere caring for Historic Sugartown, and for so many non-profit organizations in this and other regions of the country, will be sorely missed. Penny will forever occupy an important place in our hearts.

Our thoughts, prayers and deepest condolences go out to her entire family and dearest friends.

-The Board of Directors & Staff of Historic Sugartown

**"By standing at this crossroads of this wonderful village, you can feel the significance of how the lives documented by Historic Sugartown have impacted lives and learning into our present day . . . it gives a wonderful feeling just being there."** – Penelope P. Wilson, 2020



## transformational support.

"When I think about Penny Wilson's decades-long philanthropic investment in Natural Lands, two words come to the fore: inspired and transformational," said Natural Lands president Oliver Bass. "She is one-of-a-kind."

Over the last 15 years, Penny has provided leadership gifts that have anchored campaigns to expand our headquarters, build endowment for un-



dowed and under-endowed preserves, and extend organizational capacity for stewarding natural resources and connecting people to the outdoors—all transformational.

But just as importantly, Penny's leadership—sometimes in the form of outright challenges and other times as distinguished example—has inspired others. "It is hard to overstate the impact that Penny has had on our fundraising," shared Ann Hausmann,

vice president of development. "She has helped lay foundations—both literally and figuratively—that will safeguard our mission into the future."

Penny's most recent act of generosity has made it possible for us to restore the Ralston House at Bryn Coed Preserve, including endowment to guarantee its ongoing maintenance. "I have a passion for the natural and built historic world," said Penny. "It has been gratifying for me to partner with Natural Lands over the years to ensure the preservation of both. I couldn't be more excited about the Ralston House restoration, but I've seen the project list and there is much more to do at Bryn Coed Preserve. I hope my commitment to this special property will encourage others to share their support as well."

If you would like to learn more about preserve infrastructure gift opportunities at Bryn Coed, please contact Ann Hausmann at [hausmann@naturalands.org](mailto:hausmann@naturalands.org).



## Penelope P. Wilson: a lifetime and legacy of impact.

Our Natural Lands hearts experienced a collective tug of sadness last week when longtime friend, supporter, and advocate Penny Wilson passed away.

"When I think about Penny's decades-long philanthropic investment in our work, two words come to the fore: inspired and transformational," said president Oliver Bass. "Penny helped lay foundations—both literally and figuratively—that are safeguarding our mission now and into the future."

Her personal example and carefully constructed challenges contributed to a series of Natural Lands fundraising successes: our Headquarters Expansion Campaign, the Wilson Challenge for Unfunded and Underfunded Preserves, the Campaign for Humans and Nature, and most

recently the [Ralston House Restoration](#) and associated Wilson Challenge for Bryn Coed Preserve.

"Many of us at Natural Lands had the privilege of spending time and crafting partnerships—as she preferred to call them—with Penny," shared Ann Hausmann, vice president of development. "But if you never had the chance to meet Penny in person, I hope you will take a walk at a preserve, participate in one of our engagement programs, catch a glimpse of the Ralston House restoration in progress, or visit us at our Main Office when it is safe to do so. Penny's impact is everywhere!"

Natural Lands Fall/Winter 2020 magazine, celebrating Penny's transformational support over decades.



The Chester County History Center remembers the incredible life of Penny Wilson. Penny will always be remembered for her lasting legacy and impact she had on Education, The Arts, and Historical Conservation. We will miss her humor and the kind twinkle of her eyes.

Anyone who met Penny Wilson counted themselves lucky. Penny inspired us all to strive for a greater purpose. She was wise, thoughtful and a guide as we envisioned the History Center's future.

Her generosity planted the trees for countless generations. Like the poem she loved by, Edward Lear, we know she will dance by the light of the moon. We will miss her but always feel her grace as her legacy shines.

“Penny lived in a remarkably compassionate and altruistic way. Penny's was a life well lived. We all will miss Penny greatly but we will never forget.”

James Sargent Esq.  
President of the Board of Trustees  
Chester County History Center

## ALUMNI NEWS, FROM THE PRESIDENT, IN MEMORIAM

Dear Bennington Community,

It is with great sadness that I write to share the news that Bennington trustee, alumna, benefactor and friend Penny Wilson died on February 10, 2021. She was surrounded by her loving family, to whom we send our deepest sympathies.

Penelope “Penny” Perkins Wilson ‘45 G’22 was born in 1923 in Bronx, NY. After graduating from Chatham Hall, she came to Bennington College in 1941 to pursue art and architecture, passions that followed her throughout her life. After Bennington, she taught art at Westtown Friends School in Pennsylvania and Union Settlement in New York.

The preservation of artful buildings and landscapes was a motivating force behind so much of what Penny dedicated her significant energies to. She played an integral role in the renovations of several historic buildings around the country; notably, she gifted the The Grand Hotel in Timber, Montana to the Montana History Foundation, where she also served on the Board and was named Philanthropist of the Year.

Penny’s architectural and cultural contributions to Bennington College are unsurpassed, as not only a generous donor but also a driver of bold ideas and a vision for the future. She joined the Board of Trustees in 1986, but she had been engaged as a supporter and advisor long before that. Penny was especially passionate about creating a campus that would inspire and elevate the student experience through thoughtful design. She told *Bennington Magazine* in 2006, “The campus is the first manifestation of Bennington’s mission. It provides the visual impression of this special place.”

Penny was a chief visionary and benefactor of the restoration of Commons, the most ambitious architectural project in the College’s history and a physical embodiment of the dynamic, collaborative, and forward-thinking philosophy that Bennington College was founded on. In 2017, under a bright sky and surrounded by friends, the Commons Wolery Terrace was named in her honor.

In 2005, Penny was awarded the Hudas Schwartz Liff ‘47 Award for her extraordinary service to the College, but her tireless volunteerism extended far beyond the Bennington campus. Over several decades, she served as a chairperson of the board of trustees for Moore College of Art & Design in Philadelphia; as vice chairman of the board of the Glynwood Center in New York; as a board member at Chatham Hall in Virginia; and in her home state of Philadelphia, she served on the boards of the Chester County Hospital, Chester County Art Association, and Natural Lands.

Penelope Perkins Wilson was mother to five daughters, grandmother to fourteen, and great-grandmother to seventeen. The reach of her creativity, wit, and perseverance is incalculable. Bennington College is forever changed by her presence in our community. Her memory lives on in the beautiful places she helped build and the model she set for a life well lived.

We will miss you, Penny.  
Laura Walker, President

