



**The James and Anne
Robinson Foundation**

2009 Annual Report



Message from the Director

Dear Friends and Supporters,

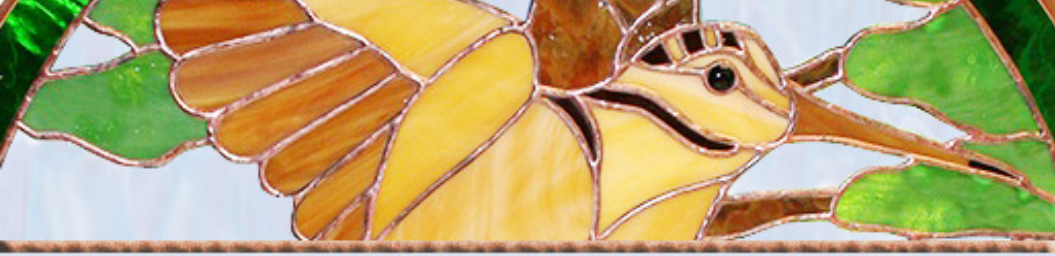
On August 29, 2009, it was my privilege to represent the Robinson Foundation at the groundbreaking ceremony for the James H. and Anne E. Robinson Nature Center. The Foundation joined Howard County Executive Ken Ulman, Recreation and Parks Director Gary Arthur, Maryland State Delegate Liz Bobo, and many other community leaders and Center supporters to celebrate the realization of Anne Robinson's dream of opening her woods for the public enjoyment of nature's beauty.

Yet the groundbreaking was only one highlight of the Foundation's year. We became a proud founding partner of an innovative volunteer training program, HoLLIE, or Howard County Legacy Leadership Institute for the Environment. We initiated a new award program for outstanding high school environmental leaders at public high schools throughout the County. We completed a detailed history of the James Robinson and Anne Short Robinson families and organized and participated in community events such as Howard County's GreenFest. In all of our efforts, we were guided by the wise and energetic counsel of our newly-formed Advisory Board, a dynamic team of local business and nonprofit leaders that will shape the Foundation's work into the future.



"I have become part of the Property, and the Property has become part of me. The memories of my late husband, James Howard Robinson; the beauty of the woods; the sounds of the creatures; and the wonders of nature; all are part of me and my Property. It is my wish and desire to maintain my Property in its natural state for all to enjoy as I have. I want the Property to serve as a source of inspiration, education and beauty for the general public."

— Excerpt from Anne Robinson's Letter of Instruction, 2005



Throughout 2009 and for the past three years, the Foundation has been nurtured and guided by Executive Director Mary O'Neill. Mary brought talents and skills as a community leader, writer, speaker, nature enthusiast, and art aficionado to the Foundation in its early days, helping it grow swiftly in scope and impact. After years of gracious and dedicated service, Mary decided to retire from the Foundation on December 31, 2009. But even as she devotes more time to travel, reading, and nature walks, Mary's vision of how to enhance nature education in Howard County and beyond will continue to inspire staff, volunteers, and friends of the Foundation and throughout our environmental community.

Thank you for your interest in and support of the Robinson Foundation in 2009. Many individuals and groups have contributed to our accomplishments in the past year, and we invite your participation as we move forward. When the Center opens in 2011, we hope that you will begin to share the connection the Robinsons felt with their land on Cedar Lane and our wider natural world.

Sincerely yours,

Marianne Pettis, Interim Director

“Mary, when we first met in 1985, how could we have known what an important direction both our professional relationship and friendship would take 21 years later? When it became apparent that the newly-formed Robinson Foundation would need its first Executive Director, I had no idea what the job would entail or how to go about filling the position. Then one day, you called . . . told me about your work with the Audubon Society . . . and I had an epiphany, right then and there! YOU were the right person – the only person – for the job.”

From the bottom of my heart, thank you. Your selfless dedication, invaluable experience and strong love of nature enabled you to mold and shape the structure and initial operations of the Robinson Foundation. You got a firm grip on the vision of Foundation and the new Nature Center and never let go. We would not be where we are today without your help. You ARE the best!”

— Jeff Ring, Chair, Board of Trustees



Mary!

Mary O'Neill joined the Robinson Foundation as Executive Director almost at its beginning. No one in the Howard County community knew quite what to expect from the fledgling organization, but Mary set out in her gracious way to make new Foundation friends and plenty of them. "When I walked into a room," says O'Neill, "I wanted people to say, 'Mary!' just like in [the television show] 'Cheers!'"

Besides friend-raising, her other accomplishments stacked up too. From choosing the woodcock as the Foundation's symbol to organizing public programs on bird photography, insect songs, and Simpsonville history, Mary focused her energies on fulfilling the Foundation's environmental education mission. Always passionate about art, Mary's special legacy will be the stunning stained glass woodcock window, commissioned from Leon Bezdikian under her guidance, which will hang permanently in the Robinson Nature Center. The window will be a colorful reminder of Mary's lasting contributions to the Center and Howard County's natural environment.

The Foundation's Board of Trustees, Advisory Board, staff, and volunteers deeply appreciate Mary's dedication over the past three years. "Mary's gentle touch and efficient management were perfect for the founding Executive Director of the Robinson Foundation," says Interim Director Marianne Pettis, "setting the tone and groundwork on which the organization's future will be built." We miss her in the office since her retirement, but she'll still be around, always ready to talk about nature books or her vision of a more sustainable society. Whenever we see her, her many friends happily cheer, "Mary!"



And Marianne!

Marianne Pettis brings almost 35 years of dedication to the natural world to her new position as the Foundation's Interim Director. A Georgia native with a master's degree from Georgia Tech, Marianne is a fisheries biologist with management experience as former Assistant Director of the Howard County Conservancy and organizational and planning consultant for the Robinson Foundation. She is also a Master Gardener and serves on the Board of Trustees for the Middle Patuxent Environmental Foundation. The Foundation is fortunate to have someone with her talents and expertise leading the organization in this crucial year as the Robinson Nature Center takes shape. Welcome, Marianne!



Howard County Legacy Leaders

An exciting new leadership training program for mature adults graduated its inaugural class in 2009. Howard County Legacy Leadership Institute on the Environment, or HoLLIE, is an innovative program, developed by the University of Maryland Center on Aging, that provides adults age 50 and over with the knowledge and skills they need to make significant contributions toward environmental protection. The Robinson Foundation joined Howard County's Office of Environmental Sustainability and other governmental and nonprofit organizations as founding partners in this important endeavor.

Participants in the research-based program benefit from 80 hours of intensive instruction in environmental and climate science as well as volunteer leadership skills, followed by supervised field experiences with local environmental organizations. According to HoLLIE organizers, trainees gain competence and confidence as our community gains a corps of scientifically-astute and committed volunteers.

HoLLIE partner organizations help shape the curriculum for the program and offer substantive volunteer opportunities for trainees. In the inaugural class, three students chose to work with the Robinson Foundation, resulting in 450 hours of dedicated service. Volunteer Al Pflugrad called his comparison study of regional nature centers for the Foundation "a dream assignment." The volunteers brought fresh knowledge, ideas, and enthusiasm to our efforts and confirmed our commitment to partnering with HoLLIE. We look forward to supporting more Legacy Leaders in 2010.



"By volunteering with the Robinson Foundation as a Legacy Leader, I've been able to build on a lifetime of experience and contribute directly to improving environmental education in Howard County. The Foundation's work helps me to create a legacy as a good steward of the environment for our children and grandchildren."

– Betsy Singer



Robinson Family History

Who were James and Anne Robinson? Where did their families come from? What brought them to Howard County, and why did they care so deeply about nature and their community? These are a few of the questions behind an investigation funded by the Foundation and conducted by Julie Dunlap into the couple's ancestry and early lives.

Through personal interviews, public documents, and historic site visitation, the research revealed the deep roots of both families' connections with people and places. James Robinson's maternal ancestors began farming in rural St. Mary's County, Maryland, before the American Revolution, and records from his paternal ancestors' plantation in Prince Georges County comprise an important resource on tobacco culture at the Smithsonian Institution (Robinson-Via Papers, 1845-2001 <http://americanhistory.si.edu/archives/d9475-1.htm>). Anne Robinson had more urban origins. Born in Baltimore, Anna Eileen Short was the granddaughter of a hero firefighter of the Great Baltimore Fire of 1904. Most of her childhood was spent in Bloomfield, New Jersey.

The study revealed many connections between the Robinsons and family, community, religion, and the natural world. Notably, both grew up near city parks created by the famed landscape architecture firm, the Olmsted Brothers. James Robinson's childhood experiences in Baltimore's Easterwood Park and young Anne Short's enjoyment of Watsessing Park in Bloomfield may have been keys to their lifelong love of wildlife and natural places.

Copies of the report are available from the Foundation, and access to historic photos of the Robinsons, their childhood communities, and their Cedar Lane property may be obtained through written request.



This Is Your Life, James and Anne Robinson

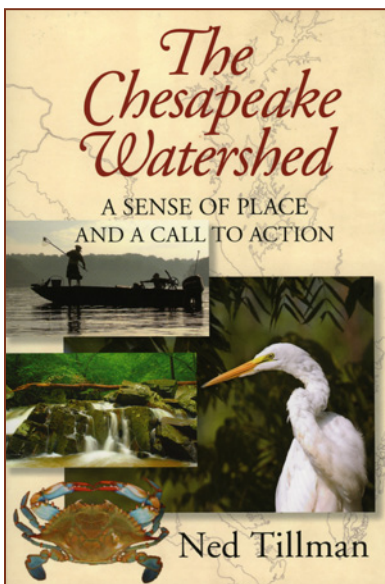
The Howard County Library collects and preserves interviews of local residents as part of an oral history archive, This Is Your Life. For the Robinson Family History Project, This Is Your Life interviews were conducted with Eileen Shields, a long-time friend of Anne Robinson, Jeff Ring, Annie's friend and accountant, and Mark Raab, Superintendent, Natural Resources Division of the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks who was involved in the acquisition of the Robinson property for the County. These lively conversations tell the story behind the creation of the Robinson Nature Center and bring to life Anne and James and their land by the Middle Patuxent River. The interviews will be available to the public in spring 2010 by podcast at <http://hclibrary.org/thisisyourlife>.



Youth Leadership Award

Motivating youth to protect the natural world is a top priority of the Robinson Foundation. One exciting way to encourage future efforts is to reward early accomplishments, and the Foundation this year initiated a new award for high school students with outstanding records as environmental leaders.

Twelve members of the Class of 2009 in Howard County public high schools received the first James and Anne Robinson Award for Student Environmental Leadership. Along with personal congratulations from a representative of the Foundation, each student received an honorarium and a signed copy of *The Chesapeake Watershed: A Sense of Place and a Call to Action*, by local writer and sustainability advocate, Ned Tillman. The book was chosen as a literary reminder of the students' vital place in the Chesapeake Bay eco-region, no matter where their promising futures take them.



In appreciation of receiving the award, one student wrote:

“Thank you so much for the James and Anne Robinson Foundation Award! . . . In college I plan on continuing in leadership positions in an environmental club. As a teacher, I’ll be a sponsor for an earth club! The award will not be wasted.”



Events



Blue Sky Puppet Theatre

Energy conservation turned fun for family audiences on November 14, 2009 at Howard County's Miller Library. The award-winning Blue Sky Puppet Theatre presented a lively, interactive puppet show, "Lights Out on the Bunny Brothers," dramatizing how little things can make a big difference in energy and water conservation. Children and adults alike were charmed by the show's clever dialog and inspired by its earth-saving message.

GreenFest

Howard County residents thronged to Howard Community College on April 4, 2009 for the second annual GreenFest, an Earth Month event sponsored by Howard County's Department of Recreation and Parks and Bureau of Environmental Services. The Robinson Foundation joined over 95 businesses and nonprofit organizations gathered to provide practical information on ecologically sound lifestyles in our area. While others handed out native plant seedlings, gave advice on solar panel construction, or signed up volunteers, the Robinson Foundation took the opportunity to show off designs for the forthcoming Robinson Nature Center. This year's GreenFest theme, "Energy and Water Conservation," was the perfect backdrop for all to admire the innovative water and energy saving features of our soon-to-be-built Center.



Volunteers Betsy Singer and Al Pflugrad pose with the Robinson Foundation's display board at "Live Green Howard County Day" held during the Howard County Fair, August 15, 2009.



Save the Planet Day

Rock music greeted visitors to Save the Planet Day, a May 30th, 2009 event co-sponsored by the Columbia Association's Teen Advisory Committee, the Youth Eco-Coalition, and Wilde Lake High School's Environmental Club. Held at Columbia's Lake Kittamaqundi, this festival of green ideas and enthusiasm gave the Foundation an opportunity to display an attractive new portable exhibit on our mission and activities, designed by Marianne Pettis. And best of all, staff and volunteers had a chance to meet young people and families in our community who will lead us toward a greener future.





Robinson Advisory Board

One of 2009's critical advances for the Foundation was the creation of an Advisory Board. Composed of leading representatives from business and nonprofit organizations, the Board will play a crucial role in determining the priorities and approaches of the Foundation in the near and long terms.

Led by attorney Jeff Agnor, currently serving as Acting Chair, the Board meets regularly to discuss Foundation policies, procedures, initiatives, and events. In 2009, their leadership has already enhanced the organization's focus on Nature Center support and outreach to other local nature organizations within our community.

The Robinson Foundation greatly appreciates the contributions of these outstanding volunteer leaders and of all our volunteers.

Thank you so much!



Congratulatory cake, sponsored by the Robinson Foundation and served at the groundbreaking of the Robinson Nature Center, August 29, 2009.



The mission of the Robinson Foundation Advisory Board is to provide non-binding advice to the Board of Trustees, to raise public awareness of and support for the Foundation and the Robinson Nature Center, and to generally support the mission of the Foundation.



Advisory Board

Jeff Agnor, Acting Chair

James Caldwell

Vanessa Deutschmann

Miriam F. Dubin

Elizabeth Singer

Board of Trustees

Jeffrey D. Ring, Chair

Mark Raab

Eileen Shields

Volunteers

Sally Ann Cooper

John Law

Al Pflugrad

Suzanne Probst



On July 14, volunteer Al Pflugrad presented the Advisory Board with the results of his detailed analysis of nonprofit groups supporting public nature centers in our area. The project examines how foundations can successfully collaborate with local government, with particular emphasis on best practices in organizing Friends support groups. Thanks to Al's thorough research and clear analysis, the Board is using his findings to guide their discussions about how the Foundation can best support the Robinson Nature Center.

Editor: Julie Dunlap

Graphic Designer: Suzanne Probst

Stained glass woodcock window created by Leon Bezdikian