

Friends of Tusculum gather for a preservation celebration

By: Courtney Gross, Staff Writer
11/24/2006

[Email to a friend](#) [Post a Comment](#) [Printer-friendly](#)



Shown from left are John Flynn of the state DEP, estate owner Tom Moore, Linda Mead of the D&R Greenway Trust, Princeton Township Mayor Phyllis Marchand, Wayne Daniels as John Witherspoon, Mercer County Executive Brian Hughes, and Avril Moore.

Much of the historic property off Cherry Hill Road is now permanent open space

As Declaration of Independence signer John Witherspoon — or at least someone who looked like him — wandered the acres of greenery off Cherry Hill Road clad in the appropriate Revolutionary War era garb, municipal, county and state officials

commemorated the preservation of his former home.

An estate dating back to the late 1760s, Tusculum was built as the summer home of Princeton University's sixth president and the property has endured Princeton's metamorphosis from a small rural town to a buzzing Ivy League hub.

Although much of the land surrounding the Witherspoon house and other buildings was officially preserved in early November, at a cost of \$2.9 million, those who worked for years to see its conservation come to fruition gathered at the estate Tuesday afternoon to celebrate its finality.

While the site's preservation ensures Princeton will continue to keep some of its remaining open space, it also is the first property to be protected since the U.S. Congress recognized the Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area in September.

The act intends to preserve and fund important Revolutionary War sites. U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (D-12) and other New Jersey legislators were key supporters of the bill, introduced in 2005.

In total, 58 acres of Tusculum will be preserved — 35 were deeded to Princeton Township to be part of the Mountain Lakes Preserve, representatives said Tuesday, while the remaining 23 acres were covered by a conservation easement. The estate's owners, Avril and Tom Moore, said Tuesday it was their goal to keep the land in its present state since acquiring it more than a decade ago.

"We wanted to make sure it was a peaceful place where everyone could gather," Ms. Moore said Tuesday as she raised a champagne glass to toast all of the individuals' accomplishments.

In order to preserve the open space, nonprofits, the D&R Greenway Land Trust, the state Green Acres Program, Mercer County and Princeton Township banded together to raise money and coordinate agendas, representatives said Tuesday.

Among them, the Friends of Princeton Open Space, which has also acquired part of the estate's management responsibilities, covered the majority of the funding for the preservation at \$1.4 million — \$300,000 of which was given through a nonprofit assistance grant from Mercer County.

The township, which will operate and maintain the property, contributed \$800,000.

Of that, the county provided \$300,000 through a municipal assistance grant.

Mercer County also contributed an additional \$300,000 and the state provided \$400,000.

Friends of Princeton Open Space President Wendy Mager said the organization is thrilled the deal has finally come to fruition — an undertaking of the Friends since the 1980s. She said members look forward to developing trails throughout the isolated parts of the property and creating warm-season grassland habitats for certain types of bird species.

"I hope people in Princeton realize what a wonderful thing the Moores have done to preserve this property," Ms. Mager said.

One Princeton Township resident, Mercer County Executive Brian Hughes, definitely appreciates the preservation. Mr. Hughes recalled Tuesday the days when he himself used the Tusculum property for outdoor activities — an area that will remain for generations to come.

"It was a difficult open-space purchase and I think it was well worth it," Mr. Hughes said. "I thank a wider New Jersey audience who believes our history is our future," he added.

And the site will not only protect land from development, it also commemorates the rich history of Princeton embodied by the house, representatives said Tuesday.

Many in the area understand the property not only represents Princeton's future, but also Princeton's past, said Cate Litvack, former Township Committee member and mayor and now the executive director of the Crossroads of the American Revolution

Association.

"It's a story of the country," Ms. Litvack said. "And it's really a story about global politics," she said in reference to the American Revolution.