

THE KING FARM

A Community Conversation on the Future of this Property



Introduction

In 1986, Francisca King Thomas bequeathed the King Farm in Woodstock to the Vermont Land Trust. For a time, the King Farm served as the headquarters for VLT's expanding land conservation program throughout Vermont. In 1990, VLT relocated its headquarters to Montpelier, but continued to house its conservation stewardship program in Woodstock. Eventually, as easement stewardship became an ever-larger part of VLT's work, the stewardship program was also moved to Montpelier. The question this raised for VLT was: **What is the best future use of the King Farm that will (1) fulfill the wishes of Francisca King Thomas as expressed in her Will, (2) further the mission of the Vermont Land Trust, (3) preserve the historic buildings of the 19th century hill farm, and (4) ensure that the King Farm will be an enduring asset to the community of Woodstock?**

Because of the difficulties of managing this historic property from Montpelier, VLT decided to find a new occupant of the King Farm. In 2006, it issued a Request For Proposals (RFP), inviting proposals for the future use of the King Farm. If it could find a reliable organization or individual who would be able to meet the four goals stated above, VLT was prepared to lease the King Farm on a long term basis. One of the practical hurdles facing any potential user of the property was that the historic buildings needed an investment of at least \$265,000 to stabilize and preserve their historic character. VLT received two proposals in response to its RFP. Although both proposals had considerable merit, neither would have satisfied all four of the stated goals.

Not finding a solution in the RFP process, VLT approached the National Park Service (NPS) at the adjacent Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park to discuss the possibility of the national park assuming ownership and management of the King Farm. NPS occupied offices at the King Farm on a temporary basis, when the Park was first being established. The national park currently uses a small portion of the King Farm land to support youth service programs including a "High School Youth Conservation Leadership Corps," an innovative collaboration between NPS, Vermont Youth Conservation Corps and Woodstock Union High School, and a "leave no trace" camp for the Student Conservation Association summer trail crew. Public hiking and skiing trails on the King Farm also tie

directly into those on the Park lands and provide a critical linkage between the High School and the national park, part of the larger Woodstock Trails Partnership initiative to build a comprehensive, integrated community trails system.

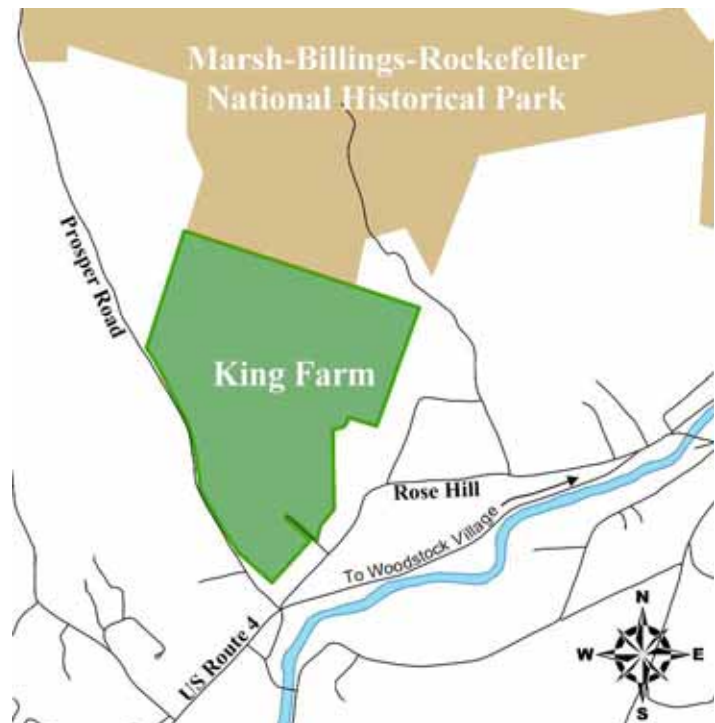
The national park is willing to explore the idea of ownership, if it would strengthen the park's educational and youth programs, serve a larger set of compatible community objectives, and is viewed as a positive step for the future of King Farm.

For this purpose, VLT is proposing a community dialogue about the future of King Farm and the potential role of the national park. VLT hopes to build upon Woodstock's recent work with the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD), Sustainable Woodstock and other similar efforts.

The timeline and process for this conversation is described at the end of this document. The purpose of this document is to provide the background information that the community will need about the King Farm, including its history, a description of its current occupants and uses, the natural resources on the land, excerpts from Francisca's bequest to VLT, and so forth. In addition to this narrative, there are three attachments, including VLT's application to place the King Farm on the National Register of Historic Places (which was approved in 1997); a recently revised forest management plan, and the 2005 Conditions Assessment and Treatment Recommendations for the historic buildings, which has now been updated.

Setting & Historical Usage

Facing southwest with a panoramic view of the Ottauquechee River Valley, the 154-acre King Farm is an excellent example of an early, self-sustaining Vermont hill farm. Located at the end of a town maintained road, the property is quiet and serene, yet it is only one and a half miles west of the Woodstock Green and a quarter mile north of US Route 4. The King Farm abuts the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park and is approximately two miles from the Billings Farm & Museum entrance. The King Farm is linked to the national park by skiing and hiking trails.



The King Farm occupies a special place in the Vermont Land Trust's history. Not only is the Woodstock region VLT's birthplace, but the King Farm became its first real home when Francisca King Thomas bequeathed the Farm to VLT in 1986. Under the provisions of Francisca's will, the

King Farm must be (1) used for agricultural and forestry purposes; 2) preserved substantially in its present state with the fields kept in an open and unforested condition; and 3) used for agriculture, forestry, conservation and history. Existing buildings may be repaired, improved or replaced. However, with very limited exceptions, no new buildings or structures may be erected. Francisca's will also provides that the Land Trust may never sell the property. Because of this provision, VLT could transfer the ownership to the national park or other entity, only if the probate court approves a modification to the terms of her will.

Francisca King Thomas's family arrived on the farm in 1807 when Jabez King moved from east of Woodstock. The farmhouse was remodeled and enlarged in 1862 and 1906, and many farm buildings were added as needed. With adaptations through the decades, the property has been able to stay in continuous diversified agricultural use from 1793 to the present. Idled from active dairy use in 1964, the farm has continued to produce hay crops and has pastured a succession of sheep to beef cows to the present day horses that graze the lower pastures. Today, the King Farm is one of Vermont's best examples of a 19th century Vermont hill farm, and is on the National Registry of Historic Sites.

The King Farm was the Vermont Land Trust's headquarters from 1987 until 1990, and later served as its Stewardship Office. VLT still occupies a small office as part of its regional stewardship program. The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission currently occupies most of the main building. Recently, the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps leased a small office as part of a continuing program with the national park and the Woodstock High School to give students practical experience in on-the-ground conservation projects. The living quarters attached to the north end of the farmhouse were converted to a caretaker's apartment.

Natural Features of the King Farm

Maples form a beautiful canopy over the King Farm Road as it leads up to the farmstead. The original portion of the King farmhouse faces a tree-lined lane that was once a through road to the Prosper Road. There are 10 additional structures, built from 1793 to 1940, within the two acre farmstead. This site is surrounded by pastures and hayfields and is shaded by several very large and mature maples.

The farm has 154 acres which range from gently to steeply pitched hillsides on the south side of Mt. Tom. Pastures and hayfields, separated by hedgerows and stone walls, cover approximately 55 acres of that land. A small pond occupies the corner of the upper meadow. A large mowing with lovely views to the southwest covers 13.5 acres between the King Farm Road and the Prosper Road. In the northeast corner of the woodland, a spring supplies water to the buildings.

A study by Steven D. Faccio of the Vermont Institute of Natural Science, dated April 24, 2000, identified three vernal pools on the King Farm property. Two are located in a northern hardwood/hemlock forest stand near the northeastern boundary of the property. The third is located to the southwest of the other two pools, also in a hardwood/hemlock stand.

Farmhouse and Farm Buildings

A December 6, 1993 letter from Nancy Boone, Architecture Section Chief, State of Vermont, Division for Historic Preservation, describes the King farmstead:

The house grew from a typical late 18th century Cape, to a “modern” farmhouse of the third quarter of the 19th century, and then became a summer home in the early 20th century. The physical imprints of each of these episodes can still be clearly read in the physical fabric of the house, like chapters in a book. Likewise, the agricultural barns and outbuildings tell the story of the use of the land over 200 years. The sheep barn, ice house, and ash house were common elements of the 19th century farm landscape, but today they are rare. Joining freestanding barns for dairy operations is another historic trend exemplified by the King barns. The barn’s internal silo and re-framed gambrel roof show the efforts of the owners to keep up with the latest in farm building technology and design. The “Tent” and Club house offer a real glimpse of 20th century summer leisure in the Vermont hills....The Land Trust faces an exciting challenge in charting the future course of the King Farm. Its resources and location pose possibilities that do not exist in other places....Whatever the future use, the outbuildings could contribute greatly to the setting and interpretation of the property, and I encourage you to include them all in your stewardship plans. The historic value of the property lies in the collection of buildings and land as a whole. Loss of a part of the collection would diminish the value of the whole.

A National Register Application of 1995 prepared by Jack Anderson, Heritage Link Consultants resulted in the listing of the King Farm on the National Register of Historic Places in 1997. His description of the farmhouse and outbuildings is summarized below. The full application appears on VLT’s website at <http://www.vlt.org/KingFarm/KingFarmNatlRegNom.pdf>.

The main block of the farmhouse was built in 1793 and remodeled in 1862. The rectangular ell was constructed in 1906 to replace an earlier ell. The ell is taller and more massive than the main block. There are many fine details on the house such as 6 over 6 windows, clapboards, and a Greek revival style door entablature and surround. On the inside of the house, beautiful woodworking details such as wainscoting, wall paneling and built-in cupboards have been maintained. The larger rooms on the first floor are suitable for meetings and conferences. The smaller rooms upstairs have been converted to offices.

Farm Buildings

- 1) Main Barn – c. 1793, with c. 1908 additions. This structure is a combination of the original 30’ X 40’ one and a half story English barn that exists within a newer gambrel roof barn built in 1906. The additions include: a) stable barn – 34’ X 64’ one and a half story, clapboarded, gable-roofed addition on a poured concrete slab built about 1908; b) to the northwest of the stable barn is a one story, clapboarded, shed-roofed addition; c) a large 28’ X 34’ carriage house ell, made from another original building on the farm, the horse barn, built c. 1793, was moved to its present location in about 1906 to 1908; d) another shed roofed, one and a half story addition built about 1906 to 1908.
- 2) Sheep Barn – c. 1840, addition 1930s - 20’ X 30’, one and a half story, gable-roofed, post and beam, bank barn sheathed with board and batten siding. It has an 18’ X 30’ “Ford Shed” addition that used to house the Model T.

- 3) Corn House/Granary - c. 1800 – 15' X 18', gable-roofed, post and beam structure close to the sheep barn. It is set on wooden posts and stones.
- 4) Milk House - c. 1930 - formerly the farm's original carriage house, c. 1795 and moved to its present location about 1908. Converted to a milk house and storage shed in the 1930s, it is a 19' X 26' one and a half story, post and beam, gable-roofed building set on a stone foundation.
- 5) Ice House - c. 1908 – 12' X 14' gable-roofed, clapboarded building on a poured concrete foundation.
- 6) Ash House - c. 1795 - 4' X 6' brick, gable-roofed building set on grade.
- 7) Workshop - c. 1940, enlarged 1940s – first half was built about 1940 to house farm equipment – 12' X 24', shed roofed with board and batten siding. The other half was added as a workshop for the resident farmer.
- 8) Horse Shed - c. 1940, remodeled c. 1980 – originally for farm equipment, remodeled to be a shed for draft horses: 18' X 19' one-story, gable-roofed framed structure set on grade with 6' X 7' gable-roofed entry wing with horizontal board siding.
- 9) The Club House or Summer Guest House – c. 1906, 1912, 1914– originally a play house for Francisca King Thomas but moved in 1912 and expanded to add another room and a fieldstone chimney in 1914. It is a 10' X 26' single-story, gable roofed structure set on stone piers and blocks and sided with cedar shingles. It has a 10' X 20' shed-roofed addition sided with felt paper and stick battens.
- 10) The Tent or Summer House - c. 1906 – one-story frame, used as a porch, with no exterior sheathing on a 12' X 18' wooden platform set on posts.

Forest Stewardship

There are approximately 94 acres of mixed hardwoods and softwoods at the King Farm, including stands of red pine and sugar maple. A network of woods roads provides reasonable access to most of the tract.

The King Farm woodlands were enrolled in the Vermont Use Value Appraisal Program in 1987. In addition, VLT joined the Tree Farm Program in 1990. The mission of the Tree Farm System is: "to promote the growing of renewable forest resources on private lands while protecting environmental benefits and increasing public understanding of all benefits of productive forestry." VLT's stewardship forester Pieter van Loon recently updated the Forest Management Plan for the King Farm. The primary goal of the plan is to "maintain a healthy and productive forest ecosystem." This includes protection of soils and water quality, native biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and recreational and aesthetic values. Timber management will be based on the productive of large diameter, high quality forest products, primarily utilizing all-aged silvicultural techniques.

The King Farm woodlands were thinned in 1992 and in 2003. The 2003 thinning occurred in the red pine stand and along the western side of the property. The updated management plan calls for additional thinnings in 2011 and 2013. In addition, attention must be paid to invasive species and an increasing deer population, which are degrading native plant species and making natural regeneration more difficult.

Historic and Conservation Easements and Will Conditions

There are no formal conservation or preservation easements on the King Farm. However, the buildings are on the National Register of Historic Sites, a designation which VLT wants to retain. Therefore, any changes or additions to the structures must be consistent with those requirements. In addition, in any future alternative for the King Farm, VLT must ensure that the uses of the property will be consistent with the restrictions in Francisca King Thomas' Last Will and Testament. Her Will reads in part:

"ARTICLE THIRD: All of my rights, titles and interests, if any, in or to any real estate situated in said Woodstock, including both the land and all improvements thereon, I give and devise to the Ottauquechee Regional [now, Vermont] Land Trust, Inc., a Vermont non-profit corporation having a principal office in said Woodstock, but in trust, nevertheless, to be retained by said corporation in perpetuity under the designation "King Farm", to be used exclusively for the following purposes, and only in such manner as shall constitute use for charitable purposes under applicable rules of law relating to charitable trusts, to wit: (a) agricultural and forestry purposes, including, without limitation, the growing of crops and trees, animal husbandry and other farming operations customary in Vermont, (b) conservation consistent with preservation of the property in substantially its present state, and, in particular, the preservation of existing open fields which shall not be allowed to become reforested, and (c) educational purposes in relation to such farming and conservation activities, including, without limitation, the study of natural history, provided, however, that, except for repair, improvement and replacement of existing buildings and structures or erection of such other buildings and structures as may be determined by a duly authorized representative of said corporation to be of substantially the same kind as existing buildings and structures and necessary, appropriate or incidental to the foregoing purposes, no new buildings or structures shall be erected, placed or allowed to stand on the property."

Woodstock Trails

The King Farm occupies a strategic location near the Village of Woodstock, midway between the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park and Woodstock High School and provides a critical trail linkage between the school and national park. The King Farm trails are also part of the Woodstock Trails Partnership, a coalition of community organizations working together to enhance the awareness, use and stewardship of over 30 miles of trails that connect the village, town parks, national park, and the Appalachian Trail.

Financial Considerations

During its on-site presence, VLT was able to carry out a basic annual maintenance program, but undertook only modest capital improvements. Consequently, in 2006 VLT contracted for a thorough "Conditions Assessment and Treatment Recommendation." This report provides a comprehensive picture of the condition of the eleven buildings that comprise the Farmstead and a prioritized list of recommendations. These recommendations totaled approximately \$265,000, as follows:

Farm House	129,947
Main Barn	47,594
Sheep Barn	12,314
Corn House/Granary	11,956
Milk House	13,700
Ice House	1,418
Ash House	3,981
Workshop	11,459
Club House	21,161
Tent	<u>11,019</u>
Total	\$264,549

Since 2006, VLT has completed a number of the highest priority improvements, including drainage and re-grading. However, managing the cost of on-going maintenance and capital investment is a significant factor in the future management of the King Farm. A revised estimate completed in June 2009 put the cost of completing the stabilization at \$303,000.

Francisca King Thomas did leave a modest endowment fund to VLT to help defray some of the annual operating and capital expenses. As of April 30, 2009, that fund was valued at \$105,700. In the event the King Farm is transferred to the National Park, VLT intends to maintain the endowment fund and use the income for education and conservation programs at the King Farm.

Future of the King Farm

As outlined above, the King Farm has significant natural and historical resources. Any future use of the farm should highlight and enhance these resources and be consistent with the intent of Francisca King Thomas' Last Will and Testament, such as:

- Operation of the farm as a working farm
- Management of woodlands according to the forest management plan
- Maintenance and improvement of the farmhouse and buildings in a manner that is consistent with its listing on the National Register of Historic Sites
- Use of the buildings and land for educational and demonstration purposes.
- Continued maintenance of the trail network for the benefit of community residents and the general public.

Engaging the Woodstock Community on the Future of the King Farm

On **Tuesday, June 30, from 4:00 to 6:30 pm** VLT will hold an **Open House** at the King Farm, so that members of the community can visit the property, see the facilities, walk the land and talk with members of the VLT and NPS staff. Following the Open House, a **Community Conversation** is scheduled at the **Woodstock Town Hall, 31 The Green at 7:00 pm** where VLT and the national park hope to hear residents' thoughts about how the King Farm might serve community goals. All are invited.

In the months following the Open House, VLT and national park staff will meet with interested organizations and Town officials to continue the discussion about the future of the King Farm.

VLT has asked Brian Shupe, a community planner with the Vermont Natural Resources Council, to help lead the community outreach effort. Brian will be coordinating the Open House and follow-up meetings.

If you have ideas to share about the future of the King Farm or questions about this process, we encourage you to contact Brian Shupe or VLT's staff. The contact information is:

Brian Shupe, Vermont Natural Resources Council, 9 Bailey Avenue, Montpelier, VT 05602, bshupe@vlt.org.

Darby Bradley, Vermont Land Trust, 8 Bailey Avenue, Montpelier, VT 05602, darby@vlt.org; 802-262-1202.