



# GROWING WITH THE KNOLL

**TWENTY YEARS IN THE GARDEN**

**EDITED BY ARIA BOWDEN**







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# Contents

## **GROUNDING IN PLACE 1**

Introduction  
Land Acknowledgment  
Envisioning the Garden  
Editor's Retrospective  
Inflection Points

## **SOWING SEEDS 11**

Right Place, Right Time  
Gratitude  
Finding the Land  
Memories from the Knoll  
The Knoll Turns Twenty  
The Hole Truth  
Recollections  
Our Great Hope  
In the Garden

## **GROWING ROOTS 27**

Learning Beans at Middlebury  
Rooted  
And So It Began  
My Path through the Knoll  
Memories  
The Knoll as an "Immersive" Experience  
Garden Memories  
Spring Seeps  
Knoll as Solace  
Spring Buds  
One Teacher's Recollections

## **FLOWERING 45**

A Brief Reflection  
Four Transient Moments  
Learning from a Summer at the Knoll  
How I Remember the Knoll  
The Knoll Provideth  
Loving the Knoll  
Midsummer Swell  
Knoll July Spiral Shirts  
Expanding the Pollination Neighborhood  
A Special Place  
The Pizza Oven Story  
About the Longhouse  
Placemaking, 2023  
Sparked, Nurtured, and Shaped

## **HARVESTING 67**

Marking the Seasons  
Memories of the Knoll  
Summer 2022 Reflections  
Lessons from the Knoll  
An Ode to John Derick  
A Peaceful Place  
The Knoll: Inside and Beyond Me  
Honey and Harvest at the Knoll  
Fall Phantoms  
Some Scattered Thoughts and Memories

## **REST AND RENEWAL 81**

Spiralic Garden Gifts  
The Labyrinth  
The Knoll as Sacred Center  
Winter Weaving  
Experiencing All the Seasons  
Seasons and Songs

## **IN CLOSING 95**

Knoll Mission Statement  
Afterword  
Acknowledgments  
Contributor Biographies





# Grounding in Place



# Introduction

This book has been sculpted by the voices of so many. It began with an email in the fall of 2022 to all the past Knoll interns we could find, garden friends old and new, and the current campus community. More than 50 people have contributed to this collection, sharing their memories, wisdom, joy, and so much more.

Thank you.

Thank you for contributing, for reading, and for making the walk to the Knoll time and again.

This book speaks for itself, illuminating how the Knoll has been breathed into being through hard work, dedicated time, and an abundance of love from countless hands. How fortunate we are to share in this! We lament not being able to include everything that was submitted. There are so many snippets of writing and photos and representations of the Knoll that capturing all of them is a task beyond what this book can hope to include. We have ordered these submissions in a structure that made sense to us, and hope to

honor how all of these experiences and stories are interconnected by a beautiful web of being; the Knoll.

We thought it would be fun to start with the first email that Bennett Konesni '04.5 sent as production manager in the spring of 2003, titled "Envisioning the Garden." The community-sourced submissions will then begin with the first section Sowing Seeds. In this current section, Grounding in Place, we hope to situate you, and ourselves, in place by honoring the history of the land the Knoll now exists on, the position of the Knoll as part of Middlebury College, and to remember the community (both human and non-human) who make up these intersections. As we tend a garden, how does it enable us to tend to one another?

We hope you enjoy exploring these 20 years as much as we do. How wonderful it is to learn from it all and to dream about and into everything that is to come.

With gratitude,

Aria Bowden '23, Megan Brakeley '06, Sophia (Esser) Calvi '03.5, and Jay Leshinsky

# Land Acknowledgment

We pause to acknowledge that Middlebury College sits on land which has served as a site of meeting and exchange among indigenous peoples since time immemorial. The Western Abenaki [A-ben-A-kee] are the traditional caretakers of these Vermont lands and waters, which they call Ndakinna [in-DAH-kee-NAH], or "homeland." We remember their connection to this region and the hardships they continue to endure. Let us take a moment of silence to pay respect to the Abenaki Elders and to the indigenous inhabitants of Turtle Island, past and present...

We give thanks for the opportunity to share in the bounty of this place and to protect it. We are all one in the sacred web of life that connects people, animals, plants, air, water, and earth.<sup>1</sup>

1. For more information, please see:  
[go.middlebury.edu/acknowledgment](https://go.middlebury.edu/acknowledgment)



Bennett Konesni leading a group of students to the Knoll to see the future site for the garden. *Submitted by Susannah Gebhart '06.*



# Envisioning the Garden

BENNETT KONESNI '04.5

*The email message sent by the Knoll's inaugural garden manager as a follow-up to a meeting with students interested in volunteering for the 2003 growing season.*

Hey guys,

Here is the first-ever garden manager's email. So even though Jean and I had no charisma at that meeting today, I thought it went really well. The Garden has gotten big enough that just Jean, Chris, and I can't handle it. We need everyone's help, so we really wanted to broach three topics: Leadership positions, Workgroups, and Projects. And we did! We've got a start. I have put together a rough draft plan of what our management structure will look like.

So, the way I see it we have two major objectives in the garden. 1) To have fun. 2) To keep it going. And #1 will take care of itself if we take care of #2.

Let's start off with what we volunteered for.

Akong and Jon volunteered to be our Facilities Boys. That means they will generally oversee the construction and maintenance of our infrastructure. That includes Shed, Greenhouse, Water System, Compost Bins, Root Cellar, Tools, Chairs, etc.—anything that helps us do what we do out there. Your job is to make sure everything works. This means You:

- Take some of it on yourself (compost bins, water system).
- Help “project gurus” do what they do

(Chris Ahern on Chairs and Rich Root on Root Cellar) without taking the projects over (I think that mainly means answering questions about how to do this or that).

Harvest Manager for the rest of the fall is Jean. Amber volunteered to take that on in the spring for next year (I think that's what she meant). The Harvest Manager's duties include:

- Keeping the Garden Growing and Nice to Be in.
- Also, s/he takes orders from customers and prods them to buy what we have ripening.
- Delivery, invoices, etc.

Volunteer Coordinator is Susannah Patty! This will be a constantly evolving job, but the way I envision it, the duties include:

- Cataloging and maintaining a Rolodex of Garden Friends.
- Contacting specific volunteers when we need them.
- Generally overseeing the Workgroup system (very low maintenance at best) this means just getting it set up in fall and spring. It will run on its own.
- Coordinating Large Volunteer sessions that we need beyond regular workgroups.

General Manager is me. I do things like send this email. I make sure all our bases are covered.

- Making sure the “organization” works smoothly and tweaking it when it needs it.

- Pitching in wherever and whenever it's needed.
- Major Student Liaison between College Administrators and the Garden as an Organization. Teams up with Farmer Advisor on this count.
- Making sure all projects follow the vision as outlined in our Constitution.
- Keeper of Constitution and Vision.
- Keeps the Grand To-Do list.
- Recruits people for management positions and makes sure they're filled.

Positions we need but haven't filled:

Public Relations

- Website maintenance.
- Press releases.
- Makes us visible.
- In charge of invitations and thank-yous.

Business Manager

- Manages our accounts and makes projections for future costs/incomes.
- Records and maintains hours-worked count at Garden.
- Collects receipts and submits them.
- Manages payments of other Garden Managers jointly with SGA-FC and CCAL.
- Consults on garden investments.

Capital Campaign Manager

- Charged with creating and growing our endowment to pay for wages for a farmer advisor and student managers and growth of Garden that isn't covered by the SGA Finance Committee.

Spiritual Liaison

- Communicates with Spirits who make our garden grow.
- Keeps, prepares, and conducts spiritual matters at Garden, i.e., initiates circles at meetings, says general prayers for Garden at meetings, sings.

Don't forget the Farmer Advisor

- Helps out in the Garden, giving opinions on everything from how to plant garlic to greenhouse construction.
- Advises on all matters in and out of Garden.
- Acts as a Liaison between Garden and College administration.
- Ultimately a Paid Gig.

So that's what I see our management structure looking like. Ultimately, we will function as a flexible ring of folks who know how to get stuff done and just do it. We will get paid for our time. We lean on each other heavily but come up big when it's needed. We create something amazing together. We talk.

Beyond these positions, we have lower-obligation, unpaid positions, below:

Workgroup Captains

- Organize groups of 2 to 200 people to work in Garden on their day. Mainly that means emailing the management team (us!) with requests for work, relaying that to their workgroup a day or two before they go out via email or phone or snail mail, and keeping them pumped. Could include team name (i.e., the gazelles) and song, T-shirts, nudity, mud, double digging competitions vs. other workgroups, etc. Will definitely be fun. Tell harvest manager how many people to expect.



## Workgroup Members

- Make a loose commitment to come to the garden on a regular basis with a group of folks (generally once a week, could be biweekly, could be more).
- Receive emails from their workgroup captain the day before going out, with jobs in the garden to be done.
- Get pumped to be a part of the Coolest Club on Campus.
- Involves lots of the stated above ruckus.
- Tell the manager if they can make it.

The Workgroups are how we understand organizing 50 to 100 people who want to pitch in regularly. We are all a part of it because we all work out there. In addition to this simple organization of labor, we have Project Gurus who are in the workgroups but have a specialty they want to work on. Anyone can be a Project Guru.

## Project Gurus

- Take on a project that thrills them.
- Make it happen with help of garden managers.
- Get friends to help out or talk with the volunteer coordinator to get people to help with the project.

## General notes:

CSA management seems like a lot to take on, and I don't know who will want to do it. So why don't we just make a very specific arrangement with each commons when we sign contracts that outline the responsibilities of both parties?

For example, the Cook Commons pumpkin arrangement was a step in the right direction but still too vague. How many pumpkins and on what date? If possible, we should specifically say: you must contact us two weeks before your event to check on the availability of produce and to allow us to prepare and plan. That will keep it simple. Then they only need to contact the harvest manager, and it's mediated that way. Not with us running around catering to them or in the dark about what they want. Then if they don't call us, it's their fault. Just another donation for us.

- Should we have an events coordinator? Or will we all pitch in on that?
- We don't have to get stuck in our own management cubbies. I expect we will all end up helping in each other's projects as we go along. It will be fun! We're a real team!
- It seems like we've got a lot of spaces to fill, but I'm confident that we have the people power to fill them. People love the GARDEN!

Well, Rock on. This is a draft. Positions will become more clear as we continue. Email me suggestions.

Peace! Excitement! I'm off to Saugerties. I'll bring back some garlic.

# Editor's Retrospective

## ARIA BOWDEN '23

It's hard to express just how fortunate I feel to have been entrusted with this work. What a beautiful thing this community has breathed so much life into! It has been such a gift to walk through 20 years of love of this place and community through these submissions, to have had this past year to reflect on what 20 years means, and what 20 more could mean. The Knoll is something that exists beyond all of us, and this collection is living proof. The Knoll means different things to so many: deep dark soil, sunrises, sunsets, fresh veggies, holding hands, picnics, picking flowers, pizza parties, herbs drying, dancing on a moonlit night, shoveling compost, pulling weeds. It is Weybridge meals and feasts; the landscape as a mosaic in a bowl shared with friends. It is hot and sweaty, windy and wet, meditative and solitary, far and close, old and young. It is teaching and learning, grieving and hoping, gathering and nourishing. It is the sweet, slow meander on through.

It is incredible to see how much a place like the Knoll matters in a time like ours, especially for those of us students transitioning from our adolescence into a turbulent world. Through the Knoll, we are given the chance to ask the questions: What is radical? What is rebellious? What does it look like to nourish the present, the details, the immediate landscape and community? What does it mean to slow down, to cherish abundance, and to share it? I have so much gratitude for those who asked those questions 20 years ago, for those who do today, and for those who will. Living in Weybridge House

for almost two years taught me so much about the power of localized food and community care. Grown right under our feet by friends, prepared by our hands, Knoll food can teach infinite lessons about love through just a single bite.

During the pandemic, the Knoll was a haven for many on this campus, providing sanctuary and joy amid instability. For me, it has been a place of return. It comes to me in some of my most sacred moments, or maybe I come to it. I firmly believe that spaces remember. Places like the Knoll remember the energy they have been given, and they continue to echo it through time, reverberating and whispering. That is the beauty of a college campus like this one. It has such a deep concentration of memory—of sadness and joy, of stress and excitement, of growth and renewal. It is a palpable haunting, as well as a physical manifestation—in cobwebs, paintings on walls, signs on trails, pictures, essays, banners, sculptures, scrapbooks, and traditions.

I find myself returning to the question: How do we remember? Both intentionally through record keeping, and unintentionally through the things that get left behind? This collection grapples with that question and exemplifies it. This is a version of intentional remembrance of 20 years at the Knoll; yet, through it we are also asked to notice all the left-behind bounty that ripples through the present, blessing us with sweet, joyous bites.



# Inflection Points

MEGAN BRAKELEY '06

To stand at the 20-year arc of this garden and admire the dreaming and action of beginnings is also to dream 20 years into the future. In so many ways, the brilliant questions and urges have not changed: students still long to understand their connection to this place and each other, to experience the bliss and acts of love in harvesting that which they have sown, to act in reciprocity with the land and stand in amazement of its gifts. The land and its aliveness are still the most generous teachers; Jay Leshinsky and John Derick still anchor and humanly embody the generosity of the place.

In other ways, things have notably changed: unpredictability in our growing season, global and campus demographics, the way hand-held technology and the internet have embedded themselves in our daily lives, national attention to the state-sanctioned terror of the summer of 2020 (which persists), wealth inequality beyond imagination, a global pandemic that served to further disembody our ideas of knowing and knowledge.

Importantly, we also have new permissions, vocabularies, and cultural awareness that enable us to raise forth the questions that have been with us all along. Who belongs on campus and in the garden? How do we center diverse experiences and perspectives, and best celebrate and honor this *mélange*? What does consent entail, and how do we keep on asking—and abiding by the answers? If we approach soil and land as teachers, even as kin, how do we act in reciprocity and serve as actors of regeneration? When we talk about connected human histories on the land, how far back do we go—and whose stories count? Who will lead the way? If strict “production”

outcomes, measured in dollar-volume sales of produce or yields per acre aren’t our aim, then how do we measure success? If our default modes of dominant culture-making no longer serve the needs of our student body and communities, then what will?

Students, and those at the refocused center, of course. What a gift to receive and hold up the years of experience of being critically engaged in antiracist, anti-oppression work that bends us again toward connection, toward repair, toward a future that includes all of us.

As ever, the garden’s cycles have much to teach us. By spiraling inward to remember and reassess our starting points, we can recenter and flourish anew to meaningfully widen the work.

On the ground, this shows up in several ways. We approach the garden from a spirit of abundance, of welcome and generosity, held in awe and humbled by the garden and this place. We intend to offer infinite starting points for people to engage with the Knoll. Yes, it’s a place to learn about geology, environmental justice, and scything (while knocking out a physical education graduation requirement)—and it is also a place to gather a handful of flowers for a beloved, to lose oneself in the labyrinth, to remember to lie in the grass and be held by the earth, listening to the rustle of poplar leaves overhead. All these points of engagement are equally valid, significant, worthy, and honored.

We also seek to engage some of the intentions of the College’s Land Acknowledgment in the ongoing, sometimes sticky and beautifully complex, relational way that chooses to stay open to each other and to generative challenges as we humbly reckon with the role of the power

the College has held in this area. This means growing food to contribute to the Nulhegan Food Security Project and to others who seek to open relationship. It also means partnering with the community of Abenaki language learners through the School of Abenaki to explore what it could look like to re-indigenize parts of campus to allow for more ways of being. There is brilliance in the early student intentions of the garden seeking a place for connection—to the soil in our hands, to each other, to our communities, and to this place. We have so much room to grow here, but fundamentally, seeking to stay connected guides us like a north star.

If we take seriously our interconnected kinship and the will to learn, then we open ourselves to seeing as Nanabozho did, as described by Robin Wall Kimmerer, that [our] “role was not to control or change the world as human, but to learn from the world how to be human.”<sup>2</sup>

As of about 2015, the garden no longer relied solely on revenues generated by produce sales and a small student organization budget to operate. This is an extraordinary privilege in its own right; especially given how challenging it is to be farming right now. We seek to frame this privilege as a responsibility to stay curious. Free from strict single-year production-output pressures, we continue to explore experimental growing practices. These are rooted in the concept of “two-eyed seeing” that merges traditional ecological knowledge and scientific ecological knowledge. Tending to learning the names and life cycles and origins and habits of “weeds” and “beneficial insects” (because, who, among us, is purely beneficent—and what is a weed but a plant you haven’t learned to appreciate and cultivate

yet?) brings depth to our understanding of the complexity of soil ecosystems and thus their care. And our reverence.

Can we learn its language, the way that soil speaks to us, the way it speaks through the billions of organisms and lives that cohabitate therein? What does it look like to take a liberal arts perspective, the “yes, and”? In addition to observing the soil texture, cation-exchange capacity, levels of soil organic carbon and soil organic matter, and porosity—can we also measure the number of blooms; the vibrancy of their colors; the etymology of our names for things; the ways in which it calls us to feel and move and love, expressed through movement and dance and song; the number of gravid praying mantids spotted amongst the *kkaennip* also going to seed at the fall equinox signaling next year’s abundance; the diversity of friends, winged, legged, or otherwise who come to admire and check in?

There are always more questions than answers in the garden, and the Knoll is more than big enough to hold them. The Knoll and its friends. As we stand to admire all that the first 20 years of the Knoll hold, we give thanks for the ones who came before and the ones who come next. Here’s to the celebration, the cycling, the lifting up, and the digging down, to seeds maturing and lying in wait for just the right conditions to germinate, to bloom.

2. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, p. 208



# Sowing Seeds



# Right Place, Right Time

JEAN HAMILTON '04.5

The cosmic mystery of vision turned creation. Each season, a new garden.

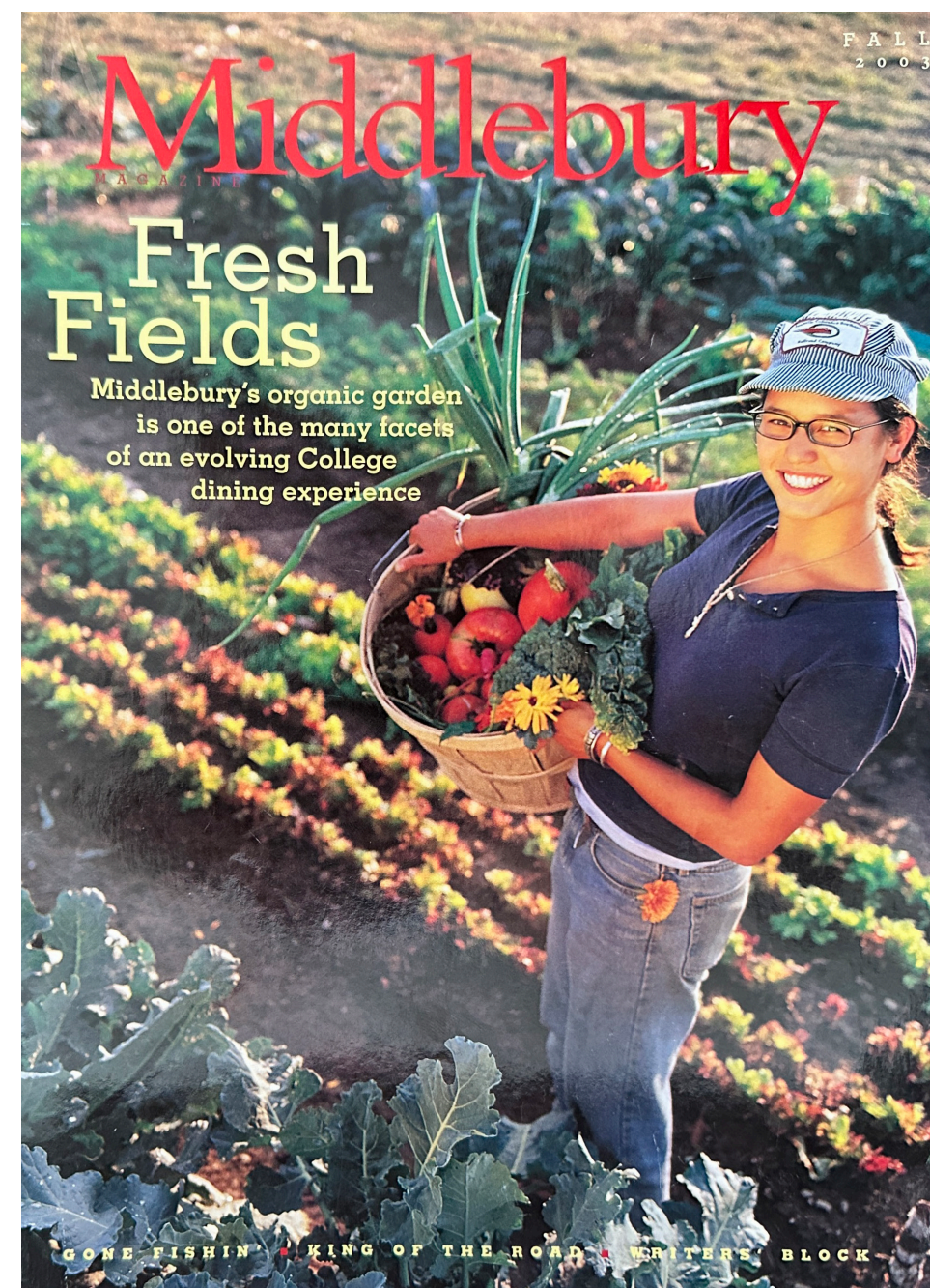
Now, 20 years later, I continue to look back on the Knoll (what we used to know as the Middlebury College Organic Garden) with wonder. After spending my Feb semester working on a vegetable farm, I arrived at Middlebury, a food-growing evangelist: How can any of us truly live without knowing the assurance, the magic, the healing of planting seeds, nurturing life, and harvesting and sharing food?

Times were different then. That was before *Omnivore's Dilemma*, before the Locavore Challenge, before the Real Food Challenge, before the Good Food Movement, and before organic and local were mainstream. The Middlebury Food Co-op was one-third the size it is now. In the offseason, the only local food you could readily purchase was Vermont's commodities: dairy, apples, maple syrup, and a couple of specialty items—bread, honey, and pesto. It's hard to imagine, but I promise, we have come so far!

In 2003, I spent the summer as the first garden intern. Mostly, Jay and I tended the garden through the summer months. But as is true today, what was visible in the garden was only possible because of the invisible hands, minds,

hearts, and relationships that surrounded the garden's birth and flourishing. Oh, how I wish I could share every memory. Name every individual who showed up to lend their energy. There were those moments when someone did something obviously transformational (like when Dane found the location for the Knoll via GIS analysis), and there were so many transformational moments that seemed rather ordinary (like all the times that people showed up for planning meetings and garden events, contributing their spirit to the garden's growing life). Many times, when I thought we had come to the final dead-end and the garden just wouldn't be possible, it was the handful of co-conspirators showing up for a planning meeting that breathed new life of hope and possibility into the garden dream. Each one of us, in our right place, at the right time.

Many seasons later, there are so many gardeners who have dreamed and manifested far, far beyond what we first imagined possible. Visiting the garden makes me weep every time. As I look around, I see glimmers of what and who stand behind the beautiful soil, beds, plants, buildings, tools, signs, bees, trees, and resting spots. Can you believe what we have created together? I love you all!



**FROM LEFT:** Jean Hamilton on the cover of *Middlebury Magazine* from fall 2003. Submitted by Chris Howell '04.5. Jean Hamilton with some pumpkins and tending the garden in the early days of the Knoll. Submitted by Jean Hamilton '04.5.





# Gratitude

JAY LESHINSKY

Twenty years ago, my friend and organic farmer in southern Vermont, Scout Proft, called me to say I should contact Jean Hamilton, a student at Middlebury College who wanted to start an organic garden at the College. Scout hoped that I could find a way to help Jean get the garden started. That call started a series of events that continue to this day and have enriched my life beyond anything I could have known at the time. Jean introduced me to Bennett Konesni, her “co-conspirator” and after my first meeting with these two garden founders, I knew their vision for a garden was to be much more than a place for growing vegetables.

As garden manager/educator for 15 years and volunteer for the past five years, I received the gift of working with the more than 100 student interns who each season transformed the Knoll with their caring and creative relationship to all the living entities touching the site. Adding to the contributions of the interns were student and community volunteers, Middlebury College staff, faculty, parents of the students, and the many visitors who shared their insights and labor. All were part of the ongoing learning process at the Knoll. All were my teachers. Many have become friends.

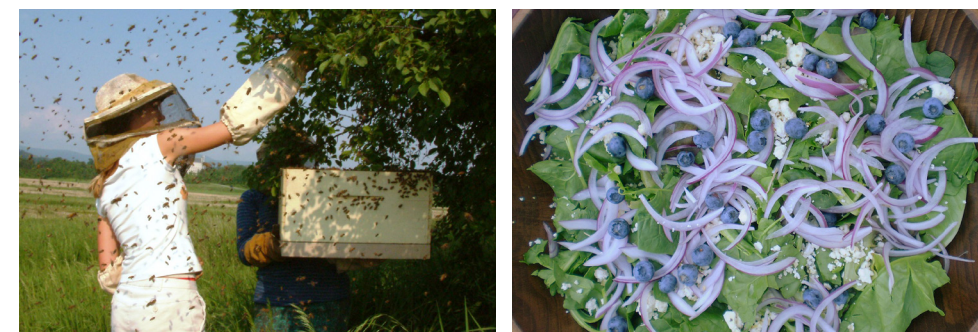
Some have been mentioned by name in other pieces in this book. There are others I want to

mention for their ongoing support to me as well as to the Knoll. John Derick, a friend and community-wide volunteer who has helped us since year two. John had a hand in every part of the infrastructure, from the largest to the smallest project. All of us have benefited from John’s skill, teaching ability, and generosity of spirit and time. Ben and Sarah Wood of Otter Creek Bakery; Charlie Sargent, former head of purchasing at Midd Dining; Ian Martin and all the staff at Atwater; and the HOPE food shelf for getting our produce into the college dining halls and the community. Renee Shepherd of Renee’s Garden Seeds for her long-time donation of seeds and collaboration on seed trials. Spencer and Jennifer of Elmer Farm; Will, Judy, and Pauline Stevens of Golden Russet Farm; and Paul Horton of Foggy Meadow Produce for making their farms and themselves available for so many years to help us learn about how to farm organically. Kirk Webster and Ross Conrad for enabling us to have beehives, honey, and superb pollination at the Knoll and for teaching us about the complex world of bees. Many donors contributed to the Knoll in our early years and allowed us to grow before we became part of the college budget. Thank you all for your generosity and for believing in us.

What wonderful memories I have. Who could be more fortunate? Thanks, Scout.



**FROM LEFT:** Jay Leshinsky in front of the garden shed at the start of the day in September 2016. Submitted by Mike Pallozi '18.5. Susannah Gebhart '06 and Kayla Preece catching a swarm at the Knoll. Submitted by Jay Leshinsky. Htar Htar's Spinach salad from 2008. Submitted by Jay Leshinsky.





# Finding the Land

DANE SPRINGMEYER '02

Thank you for creating the Knoll book! The last several weeks of my time at Middlebury in 2002 were some of the most meaningful of my entire time in Vermont because of the community that came together around the inception of the Knoll. It is therefore a great honor to contribute my memories to the compilation.

It all started for me one evening during my senior spring at an event in the Gifford Gamut room, organized by Jean Hamilton and Bennett Konesni, where they shared an ambitious idea of starting a student-led garden on campus. Having attended the Mountain School in Vershire, Vermont, during high school, I had a sense of the hard work and planning that farming takes. Jean and Bennett immediately struck me as the right people to inspire such an effort to bloom, despite the possible challenges it would face. I learned that night that they had yet to identify potential sites, so I volunteered to lead that effort.

I studied geography and environment at Middlebury. Inspired by the teachings of John Elder and Andrea Olsen, I had become increasingly curious about small-scale, sustainable farming. Because I worked as a mountaineering guide each summer between academic years, spending nearly the entire growing season on snow and ice, back at Middlebury each fall I longed to be connected to soil, growing things, and the community around them.

With only weeks before graduation, I quickly set off to turn that longing into action for the effort. Fortunate to have received a Watson Fellowship, I would be away the entire next year, so I was determined to help Jean and Bennett get as far as I could before I was gone. I quickly

created a list of potential sites for the garden by making maps overlaying soil data with college-owned properties near the campus. Then I started talking with everyone I could to refine the search and find inspiration.

One conversation led to another as I found support across campus for the effort. Bill Hegman in the Geography Department supported me to craft the work as a final senior project. Bill McKibben had recently arrived at Middlebury, and from his office in the attic of Farrell House, he helped me dream big. John Elder provided a powerful statement of support, saying that if we found a site, he would want to teach classes and maybe even move his office there. Invaluable practical help came from Jay Leshinsky, whom I had met previously as part of a geography project, inventorying the tree species across campus. He helped me become aware of the numerous past student efforts in trying to create a garden and the potential roadblocks we might face in choosing a site and getting approval.

One immediate roadblock was that several of our potential sites were located on land leased to a specific farmer, Roger, whose blessing we would need. This was not the first time I was able to interact with local farmers through my Middlebury experience, so I jumped at the opportunity to talk to Roger. At first, I was met with the many reservations he had about the notion of a student-led garden on his land, but over the course of several conversations, he warmed up to our ideas. In those conversations, I also grew a new appreciation of what his farming life was like, and the challenges of the clay-rich soil on the college properties where he farmed.

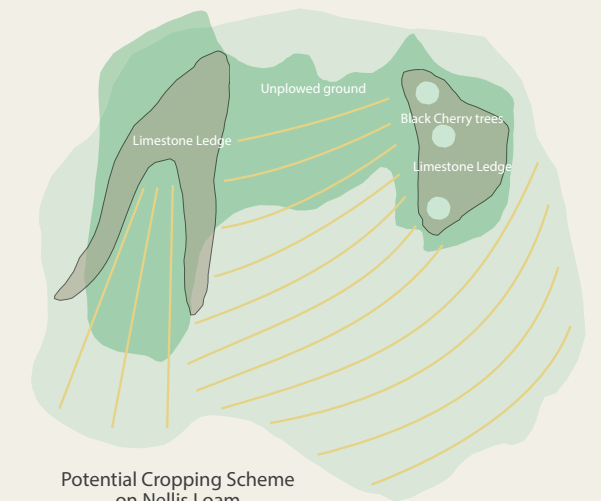
I recall many late nights (including the night

## Proposal for Kestrel Knoll

### Lease Arrangement Planning



### Garden Design Planning



after graduation!) working with Bennett on maps and the presentation of the site-selection criteria, hoping they would help make a compelling case for the creation of the garden. Both Bill Hegman and I kept copies, which I've shared for the Knoll book. The Knoll consistently stood out, both in the objective criteria but also in our imaginations—back then it was a dry patch of earth and rock, engulfed in a cornfield, but from the upper stories of Bicentennial Hall, we could see it rising from the corn, calling out to be transformed. We knew approval was going to be difficult, so through our maps, we tried to tell a story of our commitment to rigor in our search for a location.

The story the maps don't tell is how it felt to first set foot on the Knoll—that moment is still so joyous and vivid in my mind. The weekend before graduation, Bennett and I recruited Bill McKibben and Will Stevens of Golden Russet Farm to visit the Knoll. We were hopeful the Knoll would have adequate soil, but needed Will's expertise to confirm, and when we reached out over the phone to share our dreams for the

garden, he immediately shared in our excitement. I'll never forget the moment we emerged from the cornfield and started ascending the south slope of the Knoll. Will crouched down to touch the soil and immediately stood up with a big grin; we could see that he was happy with the soil the glaciers had bestowed on the Knoll. He exclaimed that we'd found the perfect match in the land, shouting, "You've got the love, you've got the land, and now you've got the loam!!!" We all let out a huge sigh of relief at once, elated that we'd found a spot that Will thought would grow something! And it was beautiful: a garden on a hill just far enough from campus to feel the sweeping calm of the Champlain Valley, and just close enough to hopefully be viable as a student-led project ... or so I hoped.

Then I departed Middlebury. For someone from times before the Knoll garden existed, you can imagine how moved I felt when I first returned to Middlebury in 2010 for John Elder's retirement celebration. The Knoll had become a thriving and special place already, with the mark of love I could have only dreamed of.

# Memories from the Knoll

CHRIS HOWELL '04.5

We started the Middlebury College Organic Garden in the summer of 2003. For me, it was about building something tangible and following a passion for growing food. We wanted to show the world how agriculture—hands-in-the-dirt learning—could be part of even the fanciest liberal arts education.

The garden is a space to work physically, create, connect, and watch sunsets. It let me build things that would last and grow food I could share. It became a space where I could bring friends and learn from farmers and college staff.

Walking the Knoll recently, it was fun to see the new growing with the old:

- The lilacs around the well are from my mom's garden in Sutton, New Hampshire—they were only a couple feet tall when we planted them.
- The door handles for the shed are from a silver maple tree where I grew up in Arlington, Massachusetts.
- I planted the pear tree as thanks to my dad for helping design and build the shed in the summer of 2003.
- We used to have a hot tub on top of the knoll—an old cast iron clawfoot tub with a pit to build a fire underneath. It was the best spot to bring a date on campus.



**FROM LEFT:** Louisa and Nick enjoying an air bath amidst the pastoral beauty of the Knoll's northwest corner. Submitted by Dan Beaupré. The garden shed frame being built in 2003. Submitted by Chris Howell '04.5.



# The Knoll Turns Twenty

JOHN MCCARDELL, 15TH PRESIDENT OF MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

Can it be that 20 years have passed since a group of us gathered on a chilly October day to dedicate an acre of ground for a new, challenging, inspiring purpose? The calendar does not lie. It was indeed in 2002 that what has now become known as “The Knoll” began.

Those present may or may not remember the event vividly. I will confess to only fragmentary recollections. But I distinctly remember the enthusiasm, which became commitment, to making this new undertaking successful. And I also distinctly remember our walking the ground and talking in great anticipation of things to come. Finally, I remember saying to the group at that time that I looked forward to celebrating the anniversary of that date many years in the future.

And now here we are. I regret that I cannot be present in person, but I am wholly with you in spirit. Your leadership, and the leadership of the “founders” of the Knoll, have brought into being an exemplary, utterly Middlebury, enterprise. In setting forth a vision for the College many

years ago, I identified “peaks of conspicuous excellence” and also called for the nurture of “carefully chosen emerging strengths.” I would like to claim prescience for the success of the Knoll; but all I knew for certain that October day was that anything our students, faculty, and staff set their minds to doing, they would get it done and done well.

There is a well-known proverb in the Gullah community on the South Carolina sea islands: “*mus tyek cyear a de root fa heal de tree.*” You must take care of the roots in order to heal the tree. At Middlebury College, place has always mattered; it has shaped; it has defined; and the roots of the College are planted deep in the Vermont soil. As you look ahead to another 20 years—and more—in your sustaining commitment to the Knoll and all it represents, be assured that you are indeed taking care of the roots and providing things that nourish, and educate, and inform—and heal.

Congratulations.



# The Hole Truth

REMI WELBEL '23.5

*You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world.  
And you have to do it all the time.* —Angela Davis

here lies a whole hole in the soil  
here will live the seed resting in my palm  
here lives my existential truth:  
“what does it mean to do good?”  
here in this hole rests the whole truth  
but, now this hole is home to the seed  
the seed who i am to fiercely protect  
the seed who laughs as she knows she is the one protecting me  
in the soil, her emerging roots tangle my existential truth  
she hides it from me, revealing only delicate clues:  
“who are you to decide?”  
i want to give in  
i want to wrap my arms around her tiny growing frame  
and concede that i do not know  
i do not know who or what i am to decide  
i want to rest my head next to her feet and let my tears water her  
“no,” she admonishes  
her body arches as she grows taller, now towering over me  
“go,” she tells me,  
but my existential truth she keeps

# Recollections

BILL EICHNER

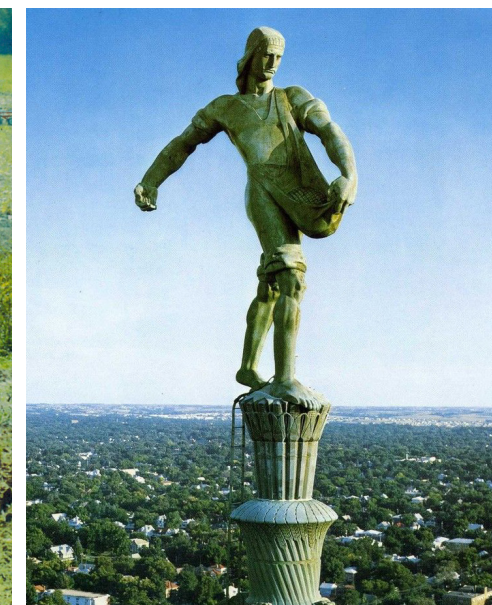
When Bennett Konesni and Jean Hamilton contacted me in the fall of 2002, asking for my help with the Middlebury Organic Garden project, I was eager to assist. They’d been given the opportunity to develop a knoll overlooking a large hay meadow, but they were on their own in terms of financing for this new garden space. Somehow, they had learned that Professor Alvarez was married to a “farmer,” or at least to someone with a tractor and a love for the land. They had no professional advisor, so they came to me for advice about transforming part of a hayfield into a productive vegetable garden.

I was impressed by their devotion to the project. Plans were already underway for a well with a solar-powered pump. The immediate need was to prepare the soil for a winter cover crop, ready for planting in the spring.

Fortunately, I was able to drive my tractor and tiller from Sheep Farm Road, where we lived

on 10 acres, through the dairy farm on Rt. 23, to the Knoll. Tilling open land with a tractor is easy. I suggested a cover crop of winter rye, with a contest for “best sower.” Coincidentally, the capitol building in my home state of Nebraska is topped with a bronze “sower,” a pioneer farmer with a seed bag over one shoulder and a right arm outstretched to spread seed. When spring arrived, we forgot to claim a single winner, so several prizes (copies of Julia’s *A Cafecito Story*) were distributed. By then more student workers were joining in. Another trip with the tractor/tiller turned the growing rye into “green manure,” with friable soil ready for planting.

The crew was diverse in terms of gardening skills, but the garden flourished from that first season onward. Now, Julia and I take walks to the Knoll, marveling at what imagination, determination, stewardship, and hard work have achieved, a nourishing gift to us all.



**FROM LEFT:** Bill Eichner tilling the Knoll at its birth, preparing for sowing winter cover. Submitted by Bill Eichner and Julia Alvarez. “The Bronze Sower,” atop the capitol building in Lincoln, Nebraska, where Bill grew up, an inspiration for the contest at the Knoll to see who could sow the most uniform strip of winter rye. Everyone was a winner. Submitted by Bill Eichner and Julia Alvarez.



# Our Great Hope

BILL MCKIBBEN

I can remember, with great pleasure, the J-term course on Local Food Production in early 2002. This was before Michael Pollan or Barbara Kingsolver had taken on the locavore idea, and so we had very little to read: some Wendell Berry essays, of course. But as a result, we had to improvise: everyone in the class was responsible for making a snack for us all once during the course, and they could only use local ingredients. We took a field trip across the state to a new restaurant that sourced everything close to home, at the time a novel concept. And we watched happily as Jean Hamilton and Bennet Konesni, with some help from others, plotted a college garden for Middlebury.

When I say “plot,” I mean it fairly literally: they were laying out the rows and thinking about seed varieties. But there was a deeper question: if this thing was ever going to be real, it needed a home, which was not as easy as it sounds. The College owns a good deal of land, much of it leased to farmers—but almost all of that is clay, useful for growing corn but not really appropriate for the mixed vegetable operation they had in mind. Happily, Middlebury has an excellent GIS program: eventually, overlaying College holdings with soil maps, they identified four or five possible locations. Most of them, however, were a distance from campus—the kind of distance that would have meant kids driving to work on the project. And that would have meant that it didn’t develop into something more than a garden—it

couldn’t have come to play the key role in the life of the campus that it does today.

The exception was the Knoll, which we trooped out to look at in the bitter January cold. It took a bit of imagination to see, but it felt kind of perfect; just far enough away to be its own world, but close enough to be part of the rhythm of campus. A farmer was leasing the whole field to grow corn, but it seemed possible this hill was not crucial to his operation. And so they set out to see. Colleges, necessarily, have administrators, and administrators, necessarily, are cautious: there were contracts to be looked at, insurance to be considered, and all the other things that could easily derail a project. And there was perhaps a little sense that farming wasn’t quite the thing Middlebury was designed to teach—I remember telling someone that I thought it was odd you could take courses in every kind of culture except agriculture. But the students were cheerful and intent, and so we progressed (I was, at least in name, the required “faculty advisor,” but that was not a very important part of the process). Eventually, we’d reached a point where no one was precisely saying no, and so in conjunction with a meeting of the Board of Trustees, we invited its chair and President McCardell out to turn over the first spadefuls of soil. And they did—and they seemed cheered and happy at the prospect.

For me, it was a lovely reminder of what a special place Middlebury is. Its location—



Spring and fall 2022 interns Claire, Phoenix, Ayusha, and Olivia being trained by Bryn, Tashi, and Andrés on the pizza oven on a cold, wet April morning. Submitted by Claire Contreras '23.

between forest and farm—reliably draws certain types of student, and each in turn shapes the feel of this place. Nothing ever illustrated that better than the Knoll; what a pleasure to watch generations of its graduates go on to farm and to build co-ops and do other things that aren’t investment banking. And what a pleasure to occasionally come by for a pizza night, or to listen to a reading. I wrote a book once about walking from Ripton to the Adirondacks with a pack on my back, a trek of several weeks, and one of the

places where I knew I wanted to sleep was the Knoll; I remember its beauty at dawn.

A lot has gone wrong in the world in the last 20 years. Among other things, it’s a good deal hotter than it used to be—the Knoll has moved at least one hardiness zone in those decades. We are not going to avoid dramatic damage. But I have enormous faith that the young people the Knoll has been teaching all that time are seeds that will nurture rebirths of many kinds. They are its great harvest and our great hope.



# In the Garden

CHRISTINE NABUNG '22.5

There are lessons here, lessons  
I feel like you would've taught me—  
If you were still around.  
In some ways you still are.

I followed the origins of your labor and love recalling the farm.  
I recollect your daily walks checking in with the orchards.  
I mirror this as I walk through the garden,  
Singing to the beds and squealing over new blooms.

Maybe this is me finding you;  
Maybe this is you finding me.

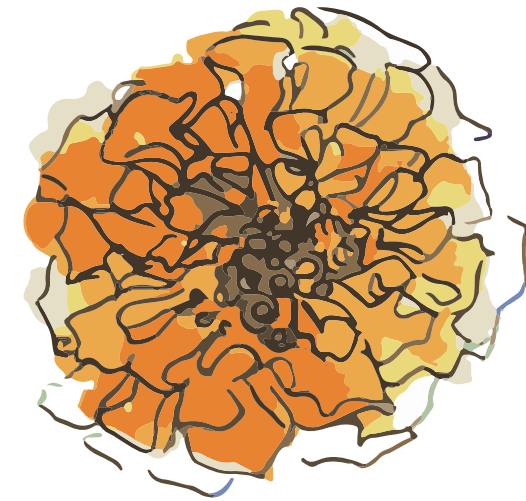
Our reconnection gifted by this land,  
I am constantly learning from and in awe of.  
My favorite spot is by the poplar.  
There is a picnic table to its side.

Every day before  
Work begins, I sit here.  
I've noticed the way it bends,  
Directed by the south winds.  
I've taken note of its melody.  
Rustling leaves tuned to a subtle hiss,  
Sometimes like moving water,  
It sings to me.

I can't help but to remember:  
Our daily ritual, sitting  
On the hammock, swaying  
To the breeze, underneath  
Your banana trees, you  
Humming lullabies,  
Singing me to sleep.



Zinnias. Submitted by Jay Leshinsky



# Growing Roots



# Learning Beans at Middlebury

BENNETT KONESNI '04.5

The early days of the Knoll weren't, of course, actually spent on the knoll. They were spent in gatherings in various places around campus trying to figure out how to start a farm out there: sometimes on a cozy night in Coffrin Annex Lounge surrounded by Sabra Field prints or gazing out at the Knoll through the big windows in McCardell Bicentennial Hall. It took a sustained and lengthy push by a large cross-section of students, faculty, neighbors, and a few folks who didn't even know they were helping.

It was by coming together regularly that we unearthed the path that would allow us to birth a garden where folks had tried and failed before.

Here is what we learned:

## **EMBRACE YOUR CONSTRAINTS CREATIVELY.**

Everywhere we looked were limitations. There was the question of the right patch of ground. On campus or off? Loam or clay? Be a part of the college administration or separate from it? Each option presented a constraint: on campus was convenient but risked getting entangled with administrative priorities and campus life, but if we put it off campus, would anyone show up? How would we get supplies out there?

We chose the rich loam that the glacier plopped just far enough from campus that we had to get creative about our irrigation, our structures, and our gatherings. We thought it was easier to change our approach to challenges than it was to grow vegetables in heavy clay. In the end, this constraint generated the sort of culture that has created a community to sustain it. If we had planted our veggies on campus, then we probably wouldn't have been forced to be so creative, and

thus would be less attached to the Knoll as an entity in the long term.

Three-hole binders were another sort of structure, a constraint that supported creativity. I'll never forget Chris Howell and his binders. He was ready. He knew that good organization would be the thing that helped us succeed. I'd never seen anybody my age embracing order so thoroughly, instead of railing against it. This mindset gave us a sense that we were legitimate, helped us maintain our momentum, and collected our thoughts in one spot. It also helped us develop the binder that we used for many years to keep track of what was growing in each section of the garden, to make order of the chaos. These binders were another limitation that bred creativity, and from that came the remarkable sustainability that the Knoll represents.

**SUSTAINABILITY NEEDS TO BE FUN.** At those early meetings there was always this sense that we were having fun. In fact, I think it was the fun that kept people coming back. Charles Mahal was our court jester, always ready with a clever turn of phrase, a quip, or a simple story to get us chortling. We needed to laugh, what with all the pressure of schoolwork on top of our chosen work of starting a garden and the challenge of making something out of nothing.

Sometimes we'd have 20 or 30 people there, laughing away, and in the end, the decisions got made and people agreed to shoulder some of the burden, but they went away having had fun. This was the food before we even grew any food, the idea of pleasure embedded within our sustainability efforts. It was not a sacrifice to do this work; it was a pleasure—one that only grew



Bright Lights chard, always a crowd favorite. Submitted by Megan Brakeley '06.

once we were outside with our hands in the soil and gathering for our potlucks on the Knoll itself. It was a pleasure. And that was its secret to success.

**SAY IT STRAIGHT AND WITH A SMILE.** Jean Hamilton was a master at this. She likes to tell this story of how I was giving one of the first tours of the newly planted garden. We had an incredible bed of colorful Swiss chard, and I made a disparaging remark about it, something like, "Who even eats this stuff?" I wasn't yet a fan of Swiss chard, but it was the most obviously beautiful thing in the garden at the time.

Everyone was standing there looking at it, and I think we had school officials there that we

wanted to impress, and here I was badmouthing our most beautiful product. Jean was so good about calling me out for this. She would tell me I was being ridiculous (I was often being ridiculous) but with a smile and a laugh that let me know she was speaking the truth without holding it against me. I think that let me feel safe to keep going and also to watch myself and what I was saying and doing. She was teaching how to be a great leader and simply a great person—she was able to tell you the truth and make you feel good in receiving it so that it wasn't rejected out of hand. This is how she became the soul of our group: she brought the truth, with a smile.

Until we started the garden, I'd never internalized these three lessons—embrace



your constraints, let fun sustain you, and say it straight and with a smile. This kind of experiential education is one of the strengths of the Knoll.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the place, however, is the way it sits comfortably in the liminal space between campus and local life. Its existence in “the ecotone,” as John Elder taught us, made it powerful, because it contained qualities of both campus life and the energy of the surrounding community while maintaining a key remove from both.

Our liminal state allowed us to have Jay Leshinsky working with us—someone who was connected enough with administrators to win their trust, but obviously a part of the community, which won the friendship of the neighbors—the John Dericks and the Roger Scholtens. Jay’s genius is his deep love and understanding of people and plants. He was able to marshal this to help us put the puzzle pieces together. He could see what the intellectual and even emotional needs of the people we were working with were. He showed us that each of our perceived limitations could become win-win-win situations when people’s various needs were met—by each other.

This was, of course, on top of his decades of experience growing vegetables, something we students didn’t have. But though we probably could have found someone with vegetable-growing experience, we almost certainly could not have found someone with the emotional intelligence to deal with the various personalities that were needed to turn the dream into reality. It was Jay who allowed us to knit together an

overconfident, ever-changing gang of college kids with the substance and power of the adults who lent us their support, their money, their houses, their vehicles, their approval, their patience.

Some of those names are Bill McKibben, John Elder, Anne Knowles, Bill Eichner, Nan Jenks-Jay, John McCardell, Churchill Franklin, Ron Liebowitz, John Derick, Roger Scholten, Missy Hopkins, Betsy Etchells, Matthew Biette, and countless others. Jay helped the adults in the room feel like “it was going to work.” His continued, dedicated, and selfless presence over the decades might be the real reason it actually has worked. If there is a fourth lesson I’ve learned from the experience, it is from Jay: learn to love people enough that you understand their needs and use that knowledge to look for the *win-win-win*.

When Jean and I got together at the NOFA Summer Conference in the summer of 2000, we looked at each other and said in unison, “Middlebury needs a farm.” Soon after that, we discovered a motivational quote from Thoreau: “What shall I learn of beans, or beans of me?”

I’m so grateful that the farm has been willed into existence on the energy of generations of philosopher-farmers and that Thoreau’s question remains as vivid and valid as ever. I wonder what folks will learn, and eat, in the next 20 or 200 years? Beans, I hope.

Congratulations on the first 20 years. And thank you for all your hard work. Here’s to many more years of learning beans out at the Knoll.

# Rooted

HANNAH LAGA ABRAM ’23

i. orientation week kombucha  
the pink n yellow bandana lad i  
shared a bottle of yellow and pink vitea with is  
still my best friend

ii. hot pizza oven  
peeing in the sumac (before the outhouse was there)  
the kind of fire  
that makes food.

iii. we lay out squash on roly-risk tables to cure  
following the smooth curvature with our hands  
catching the months of dark storage  
and nourishment to come. so many softnesses  
and so much gold at the center.

iv. we lick sun from our fingers  
then sanitize and sanitize again.

v. clearing beds in the freezing  
the way cover crops sprout overnight  
megan behind the scythe  
to lay low the ground, to lay low the green,  
to touch the tenderness of dying.

vi. garlic grows when you tuck it in with lullabies, i promise.

vii. jay and i dig potatoes, our bodies made of dirt and laughter.

viii. the center of things is small.  
tomato ripe and ever changing  
a season has never not caught me by surprise or  
when the waterflow responds  
sluggishly to the shade and so the harvest wash is a little less  
or a little late: gratitude. transformation tastes tangible here  
muck-stuck gloves, wide-sung bellies, corn still growin’.

# And So It Began

HELEN YOUNG

My career at Middlebury was bracketed by the organic garden (as it was known when it started). It saw its origin in my first years as a biology faculty member, and my retirement party was held there in 2020. I visited the garden often with my Plant Biology class and my Plant-Animal Interactions class; many of my students did their research there. Some of my student advising meetings took place out there; many important conversations with students took place on the path between Bi Hall and the garden. Though I must admit, I also went there to get away from the campus (it was a 15-minute walk from my office in Bi Hall), to wander among the vegetables and flowers and grape vines, to chat with Jay about pests and pollinators and plant secondary compounds, to sit in the outdoor classroom to watch the sunset. It filled so many needs for me that I find it difficult to imagine what my time at Middlebury College would have been like without it.

My first memory of the garden was its first public opening. Bennett Konesni and Jean Hamilton had organized a field-clearing event during which participants would remove rocks from a plowed field. As people arrived at the clearing, we mingled and talked until Bennett directed us to one end of the field. We all lined up along that edge and were directed to walk, slowly and quietly, to the other end of the field, picking up rocks that had been unearthed by the plow along the way. President John McCardell was there, Bill McKibben was there, Jay Leshinsky (the farm manager and all-around plant guru) was there, along with about 20 others. We moved quietly across the field, bending to collect rocks,

attempting to stay in our straight line. It was a beautiful experience to move together as one, to be together almost shoulder to shoulder, to pick up the warm rocks, to arrive at the other end together, the only sounds being the moving of bodies and the clunk of rocks being tossed to the side. We gathered in a circle where I recall several people reading poems (but I may have made that up—it WAS 20 years ago!). And then we ate soup that Bennett and Jean had prepared. Much more than field clearing had just taken place; it was the first of many community events that took place there.

And so it began: people gathered there to work, to talk, to enjoy the fresh air, to taste fresh tomatoes and basil and mint and kale and grapes, to BE together. I had never seen a community grow so organically, so naturally, so lovingly. I realized very early that this wasn't going to be a place to just grow crops; it was going to be a place to begin and nurture relationships, to grow community.

I remember having so much admiration and respect for the founders of the garden, for their far-reaching ideals and the foresight to see what this patch of land could become. I've heard students say that spending time at the Knoll changed their lives, some saying that they don't know how they would have survived four years at Middlebury without it. It is so much more than an organic garden—it's a garden of spiritual growth and affirmation, a garden that connects people to the earth and soil, a garden of dreams and solace. I don't have the words to thank all the wonderful people who have built it and supported it and expanded it.

# My Path through the Knoll

DAN KANE '09

The Knoll is a place that was and is an anchor point in my life. I interned there in the summer of 2007 after submitting an application, somewhat on a whim. I had been a pre-med student for the previous several semesters but had begun to realize that medicine wasn't what I wanted to do. I was burned out and looking for direction. The Knoll had interested me and had always felt welcoming, so spending a summer there seemed better than all the other options I was considering.

What I got that summer was healing. Under Jay Leshinsky's guidance and alongside the other interns, I learned deeply about stewardship and care. I fell in love with tending plants, animals, and soil. I discovered a deep curiosity that has led me to where I am today and continues to lead me. Pushed on by my experience at the Knoll, I farmed for a few years after school and then went on to study agronomy, soil science, and the

intersection of agriculture and climate. I can say that I truly love the work I do now 15 years later, and the path from where I was to where I am extends through the Knoll.

To me, the Knoll is a place for learning and community. A place that is gentle and open. A place where so many ideas and passions took shape for me. It has also fostered my most important relationship. My then-girlfriend, now partner, and I spent hours together at the Knoll as students, exploring and developing our shared interests and passions. We now live just a few minutes away and find ourselves taking our young son there often, sharing with him the love we have for that place and all the things we learned there.

It's my sincere hope that the Knoll continues to be a place that endures, that gives, that teaches. For another 20 years, and hopefully many more.





**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Wilting Gold and Orange Morning Glory with swirling noodle or bean sprout-like stem. Submitted by Lily (Lingxi) Chen '22.5. Kernza seedlings overnighed as a gift from the Land Institute in fall 2019. Submitted by Megan Brakeley '06. Sophie Johnson '22 holds two different types of soil—Vergennes clay on the left and Nellis loam on the right—that exist only a few meters away from each other at the Knoll. Submitted by Mary Nagy-Benson '24.5.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** The pizza oven from afar on a solitary afternoon, summer 2022. Submitted by Courtney Crawford '22.5. A delicious welcome to campus for the annual First@Midd Knoll Night. Submitted by Megan Brakeley '06. An interspecies dance performance at the Knoll with artistic direction from Dance Department faculty member Kari Wolfe Borni. Performers included two horses, one dog, one rider, and five Middlebury student dancers. Submitted by Kari Wolfe Borni.



# Memories

KAI VELAZQUEZ '23

how do you say thank you to a land and all its  
scents?  
from the smell of cow manure  
to the brisk vermont air,  
i wish to whisper my gratitude  
to the winds that carry  
everything we need reminding of.

how can i say thank you to the warm  
summer sunset  
that melted our hardened wax skin one night.  
three years of grief  
compounded into our bodies.  
that summer night, we sang goodbye to a friend  
whom we had gone a year without.  
he was gone,  
but we sang and rejoiced in memory  
on the red picnic table at the knoll.  
the table was filled with plates  
de pan dulce, focaccia, y arroz con leche.  
we baked all summer sunday long.  
trays of our treats were carried from the white porch  
to the back seat of the navy van.  
we drove slowly down the sloping hill,  
unsure of how our griefs would unfold in the  
evening blades of grass.

friend by friend arrived  
and sat beside us and the  
hot trays of bread and drinks.  
silence overcame us  
as we wondered what else to do.  
friend by friend spoke,  
sharing what memories we had yet to share.

he was gone, but that night  
he was there.  
story after story,  
i heard him in the melodic memories we  
sang to each other.

the summer sunset blazed across  
the sky and i couldn't believe  
i was smiling once again  
i've lost friends before,  
but those three years took away what  
little space we have to grieve  
and believe.

the knoll gave us that night  
to soften ourselves and leave the  
protection from  
the tears we so desperately wanted to shed.  
i've cried at the knoll more times than i can  
count and i believe it's here  
where i can breathe in the scents  
that remind me of everything i  
need reminding of.

# The Knoll as an “Immersive” Experience

JACK BYRNE

I like to fish. Catching fish is the motivator, but  
not what keeps me going back again and again.  
If I had to put a number on it, my ratio of time  
catching to time fishing would start with .0  
something. What makes that an OK return on  
effort is all the time immersed knee-deep in a  
stream believing there's a fish somewhere to be  
caught if I can read the water and align a bunch of  
variables just right: fly imitation, on top or under  
the surface, dead drift or jiggly, this lane of flow or  
that, casting to the intended target and not a low  
hanging branch, differentiating a vibration on the  
line between a fish nibble or a rock bump...

Fishing is an immersive experience that brings  
me into an intimate, deep relationship with a

certain place and a vivid and indelible sense of  
being part of a bigger living system. Sometimes  
this happens in community shared with other  
fishing companions. This is how I see the Knoll,  
as well. It is a place, a short walk from the main  
campus, where one can immerse in a living,  
evolving system, with others, to learn from  
soil, weather, topography, seeds, water, cycles,  
seasons, and tools; to cultivate not only food,  
but humility, patience, grace, well-being, and  
companionship. With some effort and patience,  
it's a perfect place to catch new perspectives and  
skills that will last a lifetime.



# Garden Memories

KATIE MICHELS '14.5

I remember sitting in Bicentennial Hall during my junior year, talking in a class discussion session about my summer internship at the college garden. We were in one of the seating areas at the end of a hall, with large windows with views facing west towards the Adirondacks. Below them were the Scholtens' farm fields and the garden. I had learned so much that summer, and I was excited to share some of those lessons with fellow students.

I think the discussion section was for Food Geographies, one of the few food-systems classes offered when I was a student. I shared my great appreciation for farmers, which had grown that summer through conversations with Will and Judy at Golden Russet, Spencer and Jennifer at Elmer Farm, Corie at Bread and Butter, and Pete from Pete's Greens. At the end of my reflection, I said something like, maybe I'd like to have a farm myself someday. Someone asked me, in response, "Why would anyone go to Middlebury just to farm?"

This question stuck with me, for all it held. Its assumption that farming is not "worthy" of a Middlebury education. Its assumption that farming is not intellectual.

...

When I was in college, we were going through fits and starts about the identity of the garden. In my first semester, we renamed ourselves from the Middlebury College Organic Garden to the Middlebury College Organic Farm to attract more students. We thought having a more commercially oriented operation, a "farm" rather than a garden, would be more appealing to our peers—especially our male peers. But, with time, we started re-examining this decision: was our goal to teach commercial-scale crop production? Was it to train

students to be farmers? Was it about what it means to grow food? Or simply, to nurture a plant?

Shortly after I graduated, the farm became "The Knoll." This change made so much sense to me, and I am glad for it. With the new name, an increased appreciation for and focus of the garden as a space of rest and rejuvenation also seemed to come. Of learning what it means to grow a plant, from seed, with just your hands and simple tools. Of what it means to get to know a place through interacting with it.

...

I remember Jay teaching us how to double-dig beds, break up the subsoil, and bring soil nutrients up. I remember pulling quack grass and feeling so much satisfaction when I got the full root out. I remember learning how to use a scythe, and what it felt like to get into a rhythm and cut grass by swaying. I remember thinking, this might not be the most efficient way to cut grass, but it is certainly the most peaceful (and quiet).

I remember the fall of 2012 when the Dalai Lama came to visit. We installed the meditation bench, and it manifested a sense of peace and focus on what the garden had to offer. I remember visiting that bench many times, either pausing there while on a run along the TAM, or simply walking out to the bench when I found a free moment. I remember looking west towards the apple orchard, appreciating beautiful sunsets from that bench. I remember looking at Bi Hall, such an epicenter of stress, and appreciating



Sophia (Esser) Calvi '03.5 beside the Dalai Lama when he visited the Knoll in 2012. Submitted by Sophia Calvi '03.5.

how easy it was to step away. I remember, most of all, the expanded perspective the garden offered. What was I doing? In those moments, just breathing.

...

When I was a prospective student, I walked into Hillcrest and told a kind-looking student that I had just been admitted to Middlebury and asked if he had any suggestions for how I should spend a free afternoon. He said, "Well, you should walk down to the college garden and explore a bit, and then you should come back up the hill and join my friends and me for dinner." I walked from Hillcrest down through the solar orchard and eventually into the garden. I walked through the beds, just starting to green up on a cold April day, new shoots of grass between remnants of the prior year's crops. I remember walking up to the hazelnut bushes, wondering what they were, and looking at the big tank of water. I remember falling in love with the outdoor classroom and the views through the horizontal slats. I remember thinking, yes, I'd like to spend my next four years here.

Little did I know that "here" meant not just Middlebury College, but also the garden,

specifically. I learned how to grow food, of course. I also learned what it meant to prepare food in ways that celebrate the stories and flavors of individual vegetables. I still remember Sophia making a shaved zucchini salad, using zucchini that we had planted earlier that season with just olive oil and salt on top. I also learned about the power of open space, and how much I appreciate (and gain strength from) quiet time in natural areas. I learned how gardening is a relationship with place—my actions can impact the land, just as much as the land can impact me.

I still make regular trips back to Middlebury. Whenever I can, I bookend those trips with walks or skis out to the garden. It has been wonderful to see how the garden has developed with time. How I wish we had a pizza oven when I was there! I love how its mission and community have expanded through time, and how Megan is using the garden as a space to promote healing and repair. But mostly, I am grateful that the garden continues to exist. I am glad that it will continue to be a place for future generations of students to be in relation with, to care for, and to learn from.

# Spring Seeps

ARIA BOWDEN '23

into skin, spilling spit as it gnaws on winter's bones.  
I am waiting, waiting for sunlight and  
the eager blossom's unfurling  
waiting for sap to drip  
slowly slip  
for the sweet tree to nourish me  
as the muddy, misty, vapor steam rises  
from the hill.  
a bluebird flutters low  
landing in the shivering golden tree  
that glows bright against the sopping gray and green  
beside our haven our refuge our shelter  
our solace

# Knoll as Solace

CORRINE (ALMQUIST) REEVES '09

Separated by three thousand miles now, the Knoll is always one of the first places I come to when I visit Vermont. It is the place that taught me how to be fully present, how to notice the small but profound changes that occur overnight in the garden, how to breathe and let the stress of the world melt away. It has been 15 years since I was an intern there, and I still think fondly of my time there as the best job I've ever had. This fall, I brought my 10-month-old back to Vermont for her first plane ride, and as I watched her crawling through the grass on the Knoll, I could only hope that she is able to find a place in this world that fosters the same feelings of peace, possibility, and connection that the Knoll has gifted to me.



# Spring Buds

AMI FURGANG '20



A lockdown-era video tribute to the Vermont mud seasons at the Knoll that taught me to wait, breathe, and feel what I can:

[vimeo.com/amifurgang/springbuds](https://vimeo.com/amifurgang/springbuds)

by ami furgang  
featuring Tucker Knight  
and vocals by Megan Brakeley

# One Teacher's Recollections

JOHN ELDER

The development of Middlebury's organic garden at the Knoll was one of the most delightful aspects of my final decade of teaching at Middlebury. Though I was neither an instigator nor a leader in the garden myself, I felt a keen interest in many of those who did take those roles. Jean Hamilton, Bennett Konesni, Sophia (Esser) Calvi, and Corinne (Almquist) Reeves were among the students I knew well who threw themselves into this ambitious undertaking, right from the beginning of their time at the College. It was wonderful to see them persist in their efforts over several years, and thus succeed in overcoming the predictable resistance to any such transformative vision. One thrilling outcome in fact turned out to be an exhilarating degree of cooperation with members of the administration.

The initial student-leaders' dedication continues to be reflected in generations of Middlebury students who find themselves refreshed and inspired at the Knoll. Another crucial source of such continuity has been Jay Leshinsky. With his expertise in gardening and his humane wisdom, Jay was a beloved figure for those who found themselves grounded and strengthened by their time at the Knoll. It's highly satisfying now to see one of the early student-leaders, Sophia (Esser) Calvi, continue in Jay's footsteps through her own efforts to foster the project's flourishing.

Two images especially capture the meaning of the Knoll for me, as a teacher who often taught classes there. One is of strolling away from the main campus and its sidewalks and onto the

narrow dirt path meandering up to the garden. Very often I found myself walking with a student or two. By the time we arrived, that quarter of an hour on foot and those enlivening breezes swirling around our ears had stimulated our senses and opened our minds. The other image is of sitting in the simple, elegant shelter designed and built by Hubert d'Autremont for the use of seminars and discussion sections. It was such an inviting contrast to the looming behemoth of Bicentennial Hall, and helped the participants in our classes see each other as companions—as if we were on an impromptu camping trip! Anything might happen now.

Building the outdoor classroom in the summer of 2007. Submitted by Dan Kane '09.





# Flowering



# A Brief Reflection

RY HEMOND '19.5

In looking through old pictures, trying to decide what to submit for this book, I was struck by the deep, expansive joy that I found in every image; from re-creating Monty Python sketches while pulling cover crop to arranging massive bundles of freshly harvested flowers, each moment seemed to radiate the warmth and sunshine of my summer as a Knoll intern. I have countless photos of Ami dancing with plants on their head, of Abby laughing next to the pizza oven, of Tara beaming with bouquets upon bouquets of flowers, of Megan walking with her arms full of amaranth.

Every time I pass through Middlebury, I find myself out on that little grassy knoll, wondering at the changes (a new bed! crop rotation!) and feeling simultaneously delighted by the rooted sameness of the trees, lilacs, and the land itself. Anyone who has spent time at the Knoll understands the feeling: that deep warmth and comfort that comes from land well-loved. It is a gift, and an honor, to be part of this community.



**FROM THE TOP:** Creating the Grazing Garden in the summer of 2019. Megan Brakeley '06 (left) and Ry Hemond '20.5 (right) measure out and start building the beds for the Grazing Garden. *Submitted by Ry Hemond '20.5.* Hard days on the farm. Sam Brakeley, Rae Zeller '22, Jordan Rowell, Abby Dennis '21, Megan Brakeley '06, Ry Hemond '20.5, Ami Furgang '20, and Tara Santi '20 building the stone steps down to the pizza oven, in the summer of 2019. *Submitted by Ry Hemond '20.5.*



**FROM THE TOP:** Abby Dennis '21 (summer intern, 2019) making truly excellent use of the pizza oven. *Submitted by Ry Hemond '20.5.* Olivia Pintair '23 (left) and Hannah Ennis '23.5 (right) enjoying the sunset and Sabai Sabai on a sweet summer evening. *Submitted by Ry Hemond '19.5.* And to think, before I worked at the Knoll, I thought flowers were a waste of garden space! Now there's nothing in the world that brings me quite as much happiness as my little plot of zinnias, dahlias, and nasturtiums. *Submitted by Ry Hemond '20.5.*





# Four Transient Moments

CAROLINE (XIAOYUAN) JIAO '24.5

1.

轻车上原丘，颠簸绕碎石  
围坐青炉右，柴火烟气嘶

Swift bike  
up to the Knoll,  
Bumping against  
gritted gravel.  
Around the darkened stone oven  
by its side, sitting down.  
Enshrouding smoke, sizzles.  
whispering night over gentle firewood.

2.

广野人罕至，人至鸟也语  
鸟语隐叶声，叶声定人思

The wide wilderness beyond,  
humans rarely tread.  
Regardless if they do,  
hidden birds chirp and whisper.  
Hidden  
behind lush leaves—  
Rustling,  
quieting distant human thoughts.

3.

新雨积浅洼，薄雾湿罍粟  
浅浅熟泥下，尖尖幼芽住

Fresh rain gathered  
into small puddles;  
Light mist weighs down  
wetted poppy petals.  
Beneath shallow layers  
of soaking rich soil,  
Dwells tips and buds  
newborn sprouts coil.

4.

丘上白杨树，木末藏鸣蝉  
浓叶无人顾，迎风渐渐翻

On top of the Knoll  
the white poplar stands,  
Tips of its branch  
is where singing cicadas hide.  
Lush leaves,  
no one lends a look,  
Gently, softly, pleasantly flutter  
Against the wind, wherever it blows.

# Learning from a Summer at the Knoll

LAUREN GEMERY '23

## Wind at the Knoll

On any visit to the Knoll, there is a good chance it will be windy. I am used to the wind on campus, whipping strands of hair across my eyes and rustling the leaves overhead. The wind at the Knoll has a different character; sometimes you can see her coming, the tall grass in the field below the Knoll undulating in waves as it travels up towards the crest of the hill; sometimes the wind is barely a whisper, gently swaying the newly planted peppers and corralling insects near flowers. The wind carries the sweet scent of blooming peonies or pulls at the strands of hay as we try to mulch the fields, scattering golden pieces across the grassy paths. Far above, the wind pushes the clouds across the sky, granting temporary shade or brief rainstorms. On the day we tried to winnow beans there was little wind. But on the day we tried to roll up a tarp, the wind laughed and turned our tarp into a parachute. The wind at the Knoll has a good sense of humor. She joins us each day at lunch in the outdoor classroom, lulling some of us to sleep or drying the sweat of the morning's work. On days when the wind is gone and the air is stagnant, we miss the cool breeze at our backs, but we know the wind is never gone from the Knoll for long.

## To Crystal, Caroline, and CJ

I started volunteering at the Knoll regularly in the spring of my junior year. The bitter 40-degree days slowly melted into the warm summer and the dull brown of winter grass blossomed into vibrant greens. However, since starting the summer internship at the Knoll, I have noticed a change not only in the garden but also in the people. I did not know my fellow interns before

this summer. Now, I greet them every morning in Weybridge House, spend hours weeding next to them in the sun, and drive them to swimming holes after work! I've watched us become more comfortable in our environment, learning the names of plants, insects, and tools. The garden shed was once a daunting labyrinth, but now we all know each tool has its home: the watering cans hang at the back next to the dried flowers, the dandelion diggers live on the left as you enter the shed, and the spading forks are hung on a high rack to the right. We have helped each other learn to water, mow, and weed whack. When someone starts the mower on the first pull, we all squeal with joy, and when someone nails the form of scything, we holler support. Our timid uncertainty at the start of the summer has given way to confidence in the garden, and I can't wait to see how we continue to grow throughout the season!

A re-creation of our first selfie on the job, summer 2022 interns and Megan Brakeley. Taken the last day of our summer experience, September 9, 2022. *Submitted by Crystal Zhou '23.5.*





# How I Remember the Knoll

P.V.

There's a stretch of road along Route 125, between Blinn Lane and the solar panels, where I still flinch at every passing semi. I suppose the way to the Knoll is not an entirely bad way to go, although each time I return to Vermont, there's a small hope that a sidewalk will be there to greet me. But if I close my eyes now, it's March again and the texture of that ground feels stitched with the same cloth, only a few degrees colder. Esteban is walking in front of me and Vanessa, behind. They are discussing the endless panini possibilities that await in Proctor, should one have the patience not to settle with a second helping of MorningStar nuggets. This is another single-file conversation for the books, but I have my headphones in. Emmylou Harris's "Where Will I Be" drifts in and out of a moment I will want to hold onto when I look back on these months.

When I think of the Knoll, I think of the garden as a celebration of new loves, refuge after lost ones, and everything in between. I think of running through the fog with Ethan, dramatically quoting our favorite movie: "This Is My Age!!! I'm in the prime of my youth and I'll only be young once!!!" I hear the sound of a black-capped chickadee, smell a winter evening bonfire we didn't bring enough layers for, and see Jonah rest his hand in mine. I hear Jay tell me about years in New York and the latest book on his brain, as we mulch new beds. I remember camping with Jocelyn and Zale pretending to play real-life Fruit Ninja with less-than-ideal machetes. I feel the sting of a bee in summer and the wet soil under my nails after a fresh spring rain. I think of time standing still with Bi Hall and the Adirondacks on either horizon. That's how I remember the Knoll—most days, having to look down at my watch to

make sure time was still moving.

Esteban, Vanessa, and I would soon be scattered across the world, as would the other people I had come to know and love in those—sometimes short, sometimes long—four years. Now, I look ahead at the next few months in medical school knowing that they will be spent coming up against the machinations of global systems and the concerns of people who have shifting priorities. These days, I'm trying to figure out how to hold the weight of what it means to feel unworthy in the throes of chronic illness, and how someone's only concern in the world is not their failing liver, but that their beets might turn woody if not harvested in time. But I don't carry the Knoll with me solely in conversations with patients about autumnal produce. The Knoll lives on in other daily reminders—that people are worth knowing, that community is worth building, that our worlds each have their own rhythm, and that time never really has to move that fast.

Revisiting the Knoll, 2021. Submitted by P.V.



# The Knoll Provideth

MIKEY AZZARA '02.5

I remember when I first got hooked on food and farming it was beautiful to combine what I was learning with the satisfaction of hard physical work what we were studying made real. That's what the Knoll provides. The intersection of many things. Connectedness to the land around the college connectedness to the earth to the changing seasons in a way that few other activities can provide. It provides inspiration and decompression from the hill. Providing the college community with food... and life lessons of Service. Hospitality. Teamwork. Responsibility. Follow through. Patience. Discipline. All within view and within reach... of Bicentennial Hall.

The Knoll provideth opportunities... for departmental connections. I can see food and farming in art and landscapes, in music and dance in economics and politics. It's biological and ecological (the right kind of agriculture anyway!) and I see it in literature and religion, in philosophy, psychology, sociology and anthropology.

Honored to have played a small role helping Bennett Konesni and Jean Hamilton plan and plant the seeds of what was to become the Knoll.

Grateful to Middlebury for seeing the potential and continuing to nurture not only the land but the programming around it.

Looking forward to seeing all to come!

# Loving the Knoll

TIM AND NANCY PARSONS

Agriculture is such an integral part of our existence that it's easy to make connections. Two of these that have always stood out at the Knoll, seen in all the best of farms, are the concepts of continuity and community, and at the start of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, both were threatened.

The early stages of the pandemic were all about the unknown. Fortunately, that's familiar ground in agriculture. Who knows what the season will bring? What are we facing tomorrow? But the unknowable can be knowable. We can take refuge in the unknown, secure in thinking that there is always next season, and surprises are all part of the game.

Continuity at a college can be elusive; students attend for four years and then leave. Seems like a long time when young, but it's only four growing seasons, four harvests, four winters anticipating the next season. A four-year-old farm is a toddler, just learning to walk straight and speak whole sentences. The Knoll at 20 is in the prime of life, peak fertility under wise and knowledgeable management. And Middlebury College itself has been a 200-plus-year presence in the Champlain Valley, and that continuity has become reassurance. We've weathered other pandemics, along with wars, recessions, and depressions.

Farming at the Knoll would continue, we learned. Talking with Megan in the early spring we discovered she was already thinking cover crops. There are worse things than to have a fallow year, but what will that do to the second connection, that of community? What Knoll would the students return to?

Its continual presence west of campus proper is not only a refuge for weary students, but a

place to return when visiting, a living laboratory for professors, and a communal gathering location for all. The Knoll is an integral part of the Middlebury landscape and experience. It is infrastructure, as vital as the steam lines connecting buildings or the tree canopy overhead.

The Covid pandemic was an oxymoron. It drove people apart, while at Middlebury in some ways, it brought the community together. Behind the scenes, skipping the usual bureaucratic structures that most weren't paying much attention to anyway, staff began advocating for each other. Dining Services, with very few students left on campus to feed during the spring and summer, had people willing to work elsewhere. It seems so simple and obvious now, but then it was radical; crossing the boundaries of the classic educational departmental silos rampant in higher ed. Some dining staff went to work in the landscape department, and, thankfully, four people (and a couple of goats) went to farm the Knoll. Crops were planted, beds were weeded, plants were watered, and most importantly, the tradition of a small summer community continued.

It was hard, sweaty work, during a hot, dry summer. I (Nancy) loved every moment of it, riding my bike to work every day, and then home again. I didn't even mind the 16-mile round trip on Saturdays to water the crops. I felt, if I can help the plants to grow, all will be well. Any sense of "cheating" the pandemic was welcome and felt good.

We kept the six-foot required distance at the Knoll, the hardest part of the summer, eschewing hugs, indeed all physical contact. All the while, though, we grew closer to one another, not aware at the time that we were creating relationships

that continue these few years later. We easily reconnect when crossing paths on campus, first with a hug, then with an "I miss you! Was it all a dream?"; then quickly catching up before going our separate ways again.

The four of us felt so fortunate to be chosen to work with Megan that summer in a beautiful spot, an oasis of sorts. Carrying on the work normally done by summer interns, caring for the gardens until the students, the true stewards of the space, could return. We reveled in being a part of keeping and creating a safe space for students to walk towards, for refuge from campus life. With the help of the landscape department (and

hydraulics), we left behind a new garden bed with several BFRs (Big F\*\*\*ing Rock) for students to sit amongst the plants and rest.

And now, looking back, that thin bridge of community had its work multiplied a thousand-fold. Returning students deep in the fall of 2020 were encouraged to gather safely outside, rather than in the small, confined spaces found inside. The Knoll became an essential and inclusive part of this new pandemic family, a gathering space of farming and community, safe and essential. This is true agriculture, working with tough conditions to grow something unimaginably splendid.



**FROM LEFT:** Jess Crossman with bunches of gomphrena, scabiosa stellata, and strawflower to dry for students' return to campus in the pandemic summer of 2020. Jess joined us from Atwater Dining Hall as part of our pandemic Knoll summer crew. *Submitted by Megan Brakeley '06.* Nancy in blooms! *Submitted by Megan Brakeley '06.*



# Midsummer Swell

ARIA BOWDEN '23

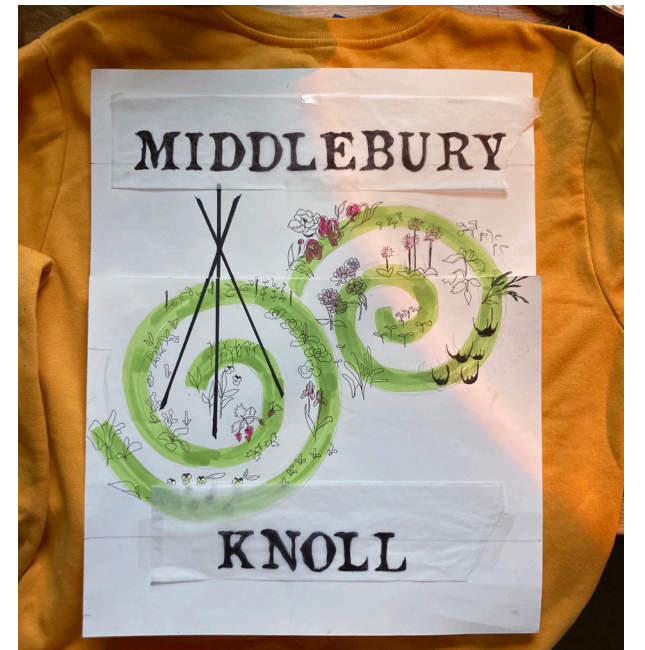
is it the heat the beat the  
expanding of time?  
bare feet on grass the thump thump  
or your hand in mine?  
the sun is big and bright and overwhelming  
the flower beds are overflowing, pooling, dripping  
the world shimmers and glimmers pastel green and blue  
clouds stretch past you and everything oozes  
sweet sweat  
a clean kind of sticky.  
what grounds you?  
what brings you joy?  
is it the dark, deep soil  
the midsummer swell  
the heave, the yell  
of late august's sigh?

# Knoll July Spiral Shirts: Artist Statement

CRYSTAL ZHOU '23.5

The Knoll July Spiral shirts are student-designed, silk screened by hand, and heat set for maximum wear. Each screen is hand painted through a process of stenciling using screen filler and drawing fluid. The six individual screens are then overlayed to create the final product. This series of 50 shirts took 15 hours in total to complete.

The design takes inspiration from the curves of the Grazing and Gazing garden, the ever-constant wind at the Knoll, and intersections of seasonality and conviviality. This is the second print of a June series that shows the gardens in full bloom, with peonies, irises, strawberries, garlic flowers, lettuce, and arugula, and reflects the vegetation at this snapshot in time. You will find sunflowers, cosmos, poppies, dill, basil, cucumbers, and perilla as we harvest and plant anew in July and beyond.



July 2022 shirt. Design by Knoll  
intern Crystal Zhou '23.5.

# Expanding the Pollination Neighborhood

MAISIE ANROD '19

For my thesis, I hoped to explore whether the decline of flowering endangered plant populations due to habitat fragmentation could be mitigated with the help of eusocial bees (which live in a hive, rather than solitarily). I hypothesized that if pollen was collected from one plant population, then moved to another plant population and distributed by bees exiting their hive through a pollen dispenser, it might help re-establish the flow of genes between two or more formerly connected plant populations that had since been separated by habitat fragmentation. Although the experiment didn't yield statistically significant data, I learned so much from Megan Brakeley, Jay Leshinsky, the 2018 summer interns, my professors, and numerous community partners. The experience was a gift. Here are short excerpts from the abstract and methods sections of my thesis.

"In this study, I asked whether *Apis mellifera* (European honeybee) would assist in the pollination of a rare plant species in its environment by dispersing pollen from a dispenser. To do this, pollen was hand collected, stored, and then added to the pollen dispenser. I later measured non-parthenocarpic fruit (requires fertilization and develops from floral parts of a plant) set on a model plant species, *Physalis ixocarpa* (tomatillo), and visits by *A. mellifera* foragers. I predicted that *A. mellifera* would assist in pollination, resulting in significantly higher rates of non-parthenocarpic fruit set in blooms open to pollination when pollen was in the dispenser (experimental treatment) than in blooms inaccessible to pollinators, or blooms open to pollination when pollen was not in the dispenser. [...] The experimental blooms did not fruit

significantly more than the negative controls, yet alterations to the dispenser and plot size in future experiments could prove assisted pollination to be a useful conservation tool."

"The experiment was carried out at the Middlebury College Knoll, an educational farm in the town of Cornwall, Addison County, Vermont. The Knoll itself is three acres and owned by Middlebury College, while the surrounding fields are leased by the College to the Scholten Family Farm for growing hay. Five out of six plots fell within the Knoll, and the sixth was on the Scholtens' land (with permission), adjacent to the Knoll access road. *A. mellifera*-pollinated flowers are abundant both on the Knoll and on the Scholtens' land; the Knoll's vegetation consists of a diversity of fruit and vegetable species (no *Physalis* spp.), while *Trifolium repens* and *Trifolium pratense* (white and red clover, respectively) are plentiful in the Scholtens' fields. The Knoll, which has been a vegetable farm for 16 years, hosts one *A. mellifera* hive."

Honeybees exiting the hive at the Knoll through a pollen-dispensing trough, summer 2018. Submitted by Maisie Anrod '19.



# A Special Place

NAN JENKS-JAY

students  
growing food—food to eat and food to share  
hands in the soil  
many cultures  
community partners  
respite—education—research  
Dalai Lama's blessings on a stone bench  
place of calm and reflection, friendships and comradery  
a place of and for students—the knoll



# The Pizza Oven Story

MIKE PALLOZI '18.5

My involvement with the project started in the late spring of 2016 when Jay needed help disassembling the original cob oven that two former students had built by hand. That original oven had been repaired a number of times, and it was finally time to scrap it. One of the students and his father built the post-and-beam shed roof structure, along with a simple countertop, as the first iteration of the outdoor kitchen. Grant funding was secured to purchase a new pizza oven, so it was time to make way for it. The intern crew that year was Asher Brown, Kate Porterfield, and Emma Patch. It was a full, summer-long project, in addition to tending to all the other garden tasks we were responsible for. We had lots of help from others along the way, too. Asher led construction work as he had the most experience. We all contributed ideas to the design of the space and had long conversations about how we'd like it to be used. We knew it would become a special gathering place and wanted to build it in a way that would facilitate gatherings of all kinds in the best way.

At the start of the summer season, we helped a mason lay a proper concrete foundation for the metal pizza-oven stand to rest on. In mid-June, the pizza oven arrived on a semi-truck that drove down the Knoll road to deliver it. Paul Gurney, a facilities employee and forklift operator extraordinaire, worked with us to place the oven on the stand. Next, we leveled and packed a gravel foundation to lay the floor of stone pavers. Then we took down the old countertop and built a new one—longer and wider. We borrowed our power tools from the College, which were in a

big warehouse on Sheep Farm Road (they had originally been purchased for the Solar Decathlon House team). Sometimes we wore pants and boots when operating the power saw and other such tools. Mostly we were in shorts and Tevas because it was summer at the Knoll. If the College had known...

Asher went away for about two weeks in August to surf in Morocco, we think. When he returned, we got right back to work because it was late August and the first day of classes was fast approaching. We knew if we didn't get it done then it might never get done. Up went the walls of shiplap pine. Three windows—two facing east and one west. The western one, we always pictured, would serve as a take-out window, where you would place your order with the pizza-peel person and then pick it up at the countertop.

Mostly Asher and I spent all day working those last few weeks of summer. I had never done anything like that before, and so Asher taught me everything. By the end, I felt quite competent and grateful for having learned so many new skills. The last construction step was staining the exterior of the structure.

And, of course, we cooked and ate and cooked and ate and cooked and ate. Peach cobbler and melty cheesy veggie sandwiches and ratatouille and bread and pizza and even a cake! We had a tremendous amount of fun breaking the oven in and experimenting with all the wonderful things you could make in it. As it did then, as it does now, it brought folks together over food and conversation on the most beautiful little grassy knoll in the whole world.



**FROM TOP:** Jay Leshinsky, Paul Gurney, and Kate Porterfield '18.5. Placing a pizza oven on a stand is a challenge when the tractor keeps rolling downhill, June 2016. *Submitted by Mike Pallozi '18.5.* Thomas Wentworth '18, Asher Brown '19.5, Dan Cho '19.5 showing off a prototype pulley system for the windows, August 2016. Cutting: Emma Patch '19.5, Emma Hampsten '18.5, Kate Porterfield '18.5. *Submitted by Mike Pallozi '18.5.* Cooking: blissed out, August 2016. *Submitted by Mike Pallozi '18.5.*



# About the Longhouse

JESSE BRUCHAC, SHELLY POTTORF, AND MEGAN BRAKELEY '06



“Rooted and Reindiginized with the Knoll and the School of Abenaki” seeks to honor the Indigenous peoples of the region and offer a unique opportunity for hands-on learning by constructing an Abenaki-style longhouse. The project has received financial support from a grant through the Provost’s Office and is led by the School of Abenaki, the Knoll, and Shelly Pottorf’s spring Architecture and the Environment class.

The project commenced with a series of workshops held at the Knoll, with the first taking place in March. Since then, significant progress has been made, including the completion of the initial stages involving the creation of cordage, the harvesting of maple saplings, their meticulous peeling, and the assembly of the frame. Guided by James Bruchac, a Nulhegan Abenaki citizen and the director of the Ndakinna Education Center in upstate New York, the endeavor has been a collaborative effort of the Ndakinna Education Center, Professor Shelly Pottorf’s students, Megan Brakeley, the Knoll staff, and

several Abenaki citizens who are also serving as faculty at Middlebury’s Language School of Abenaki. With the frame now complete, the focus has shifted to tasks of gathering birch bark in June and creating cattail mats in October to cover the structure. With proper upkeep and care, the Abenaki longhouse could stand for decades.

The frame of the longhouse, resembling an extended wigwam, pays homage to the historical spirit of sharing and cooperation mostly overlooked by historians between Algonquian- and Iroquoian-speaking peoples in the region. It draws inspiration from the Haudenosaunee (Iroquoian) style of constructing longhouses, characterized by their extended rafters. The tradition of extending the rafters to accommodate a growing family holds profound metaphorical significance, reflecting the collective effort required to create space for one another in our shared landscape. Aligned with the Abenaki creation story, the frame stands firmly rooted in the earth, with each sapling deeply planted



**FROM LEFT:** Harvested and peeled poles lie in waiting for frame building in May. Peeling white ash bark from mature ash trees that have been thinned in anticipation of Emerald Ash Borer damage. Submitted by Megan Brakeley '06.

in the fertile soil and clay deposits of the Knoll. This earthen foundation can withstand the immense tension necessary to support the entire frame, simultaneously lending strength to the structure while allowing it to settle gracefully into its distinctive bowed shape. The construction process itself has already fostered a sense of community, transforming the space from the moment the first saplings were placed in the ground. It has begun the process of reindigenization, going beyond the inclusion of a Land Acknowledgment at Middlebury College, this project creates an actionable space that inspires all who encounter it to inquire further about the past, present, and future of the region’s indigenous peoples, which has been referred to as Wnegigwtegw (the Portaging Flow or the Otter Creek).

Over the past two summers, the School of Abenaki has begun cultivating a relationship with the Knoll. Their endeavors have included visits, while under the Language Pledge, and the

planting of sweetgrass last summer. The addition of the extended wigwam to this space has facilitated true inclusion for the school, providing a gathering place that serves as a reminder of the power of sharing and its enriching influence on not only language but also on personal and collective growth. It is the sincere aspiration of the project’s participants that this space becomes a harmonious space, fostering inclusivity and harmony with the earth and one another.

Our wonderful team eagerly looks forward to the upcoming stages of the project. Gathering birch bark and crafting cattail mats to cover the frame hold immense promise, not only for the project itself but also for the beauty of its construction, and the inspiration this new space on the Knoll offers the School of Abenaki and far beyond. As each step is taken, the seeds of tradition and cultural revitalization continue to take root, beckoning all to embrace a shared heritage and embark on a collective path toward understanding, inclusion, and unity.



# Placemaking, 2023

CRYSTAL ZHOU '23.5

The Knoll is more than 125 Vermont Rd  
thousands of stories impressed upon the winds  
We return to the roots

It grows in the personal touches  
a rosy mojito the first night in Weybridge.  
feeling no different than the fresh starts we began in soil brownie blocks  
liminal, rootless  
as ever struggling, adaptive spirits of our ancestors making landfall on this strange soil overseas.  
Lightning bugs. Red clover tea.  
Boots kicked off during lunch  
arugula flowers dressed in pumpkin seed oil  
waterfalls and relentless heat  
Dirt under my nails. Soil stains on my knees. Mud in my hair.  
Falling asleep in the shade of the blue spruce tree to the sounds of crashing poplar waves

Everything that is preserved takes new form  
the path where my lover and I walked the dog  
sixteen different ways I learned to process basil  
gift bundles of dried herbs tied to doorknobs  
embalmed in CJ's calendula salve  
laps in the mint, bee balm, lemongrass tea I won at a hot sauce contest  
Tinctures and blends that provide nourishment and sustenance  
take back power and dignity  
bridging alienation and dissonance.

All meaningful work takes time  
seed to culture  
seed to table  
seed to the future.  
Inviting radical imagination, grassroots organizing, and communal care into my practice  
land is the basis of all independence  
How are we to live without understanding the means to cultivate life?  
How are we to reconcile with all that has come to bring about this life?  
daikon slices floating languidly in turmeric, vinegar, and sugar

half moon circles of scallions frozen and eaten five months later  
gasps at the Chinese chives thousands of miles from home  
Intergenerational memory connecting ancestral mark making  
deep within dried daylilies stocks I comb as if my mother's hair

Seasonality spirals into itself and outwards  
sunday brunch cinnamon rolls  
the twin gazing and grazing gardens  
84 hand printed shirts worn by people who love the knoll as much as me  
Sophia's forehead tattoo.  
same summer position, other side of answers and questions  
Bouncing from branches to branches of the same tree  
Humility  
that the complexities of this earth will never be revealed to me even in hundreds of lifetimes  
Reciprocity  
from miles of quackgrass rhizomes, pregnant praying mantis among perilla, lawnmowers,  
middlebury students, to the expansive mycelial, interwoven, buried network that is all things  
Vermont food ways

Every once in a while, I'm still haunted by the asparagus forest, Lauren's endless supply of games,  
the memory of squash springing from within the compost, Caroline's blanched purslane, Megan's  
gentleness and wisdom, CJ's summer bops. As I step into newer versions of myself in a similar body, I  
remind myself that without presence, the spiral doesn't wind. We work hard to crack open jars of liquid  
sunshine in Vermont's bitter winter nights. We sweat to put deep roots so that we may flourish that  
much more in the Summer.

Hear the morning bell that signaled the end to my reverie  
a place where I return again and again.  
The Knoll is also me.



# Sparked, Nurtured, and Shaped

ALI SURDOVAL '17

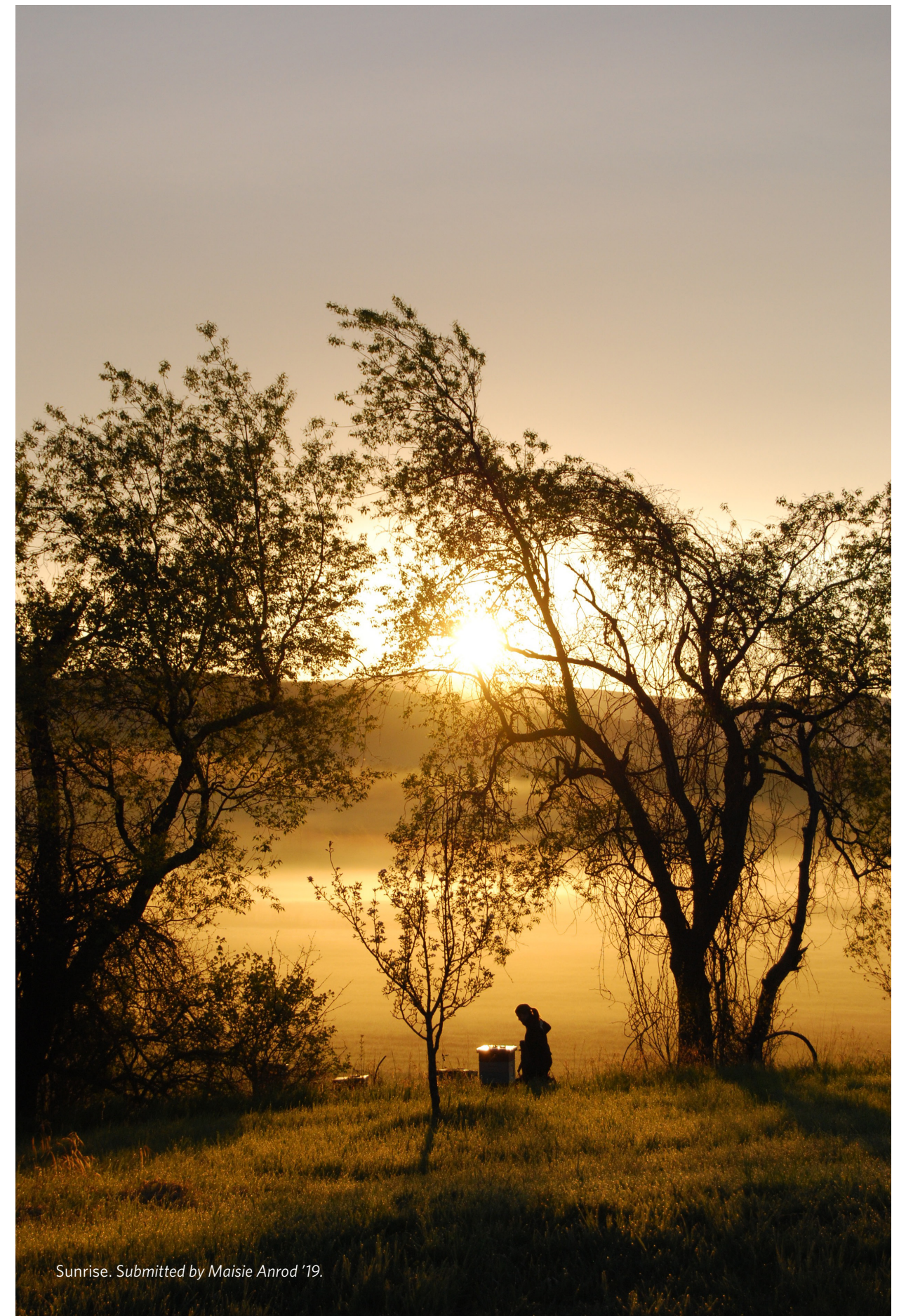
I first came across the Knoll on my orientation trip in August of 2013. There was something about the essence of the place that I knew immediately I wanted to be part of. I interned at the farm in the summer of 2014, after my first year at Middlebury. Working with the other interns and Jay that summer was a time of immense growth. I learned foundational skills for growing vegetables in a diversified farming system. I learned about soil, irrigation, crop rotations, plant nutrients, organic pest removal techniques (i.e., hand-picking beetles off the raspberries and grapes every morning), etc. I learned how to collectively manage a space with a team, juggling competing

needs and never having enough time to do it all. I learned that death is part of life on a farm; that not everything you plant will survive. I learned how to take it slow on rainy days and double down on clear days. I learned to take lunchtime naps.

The Knoll has undoubtedly shaped who I am today. I now work as an agriculture scientist, an interest sparked and nurtured by my time at the Knoll. I married someone I met squishing clay between my toes to build the pizza oven. I come back to visit often, and every year the space feels different, which is beautiful because it is uniquely shaped by those who call it home, as I once did.



**FROM LEFT:** Our structure for growing beans and flowering vines, Ali Surdoval '17 and Katie Weatherseed '16, June 2014. *Submitted by Ali Surdoval '17.* The morning glories have taken over! Ali Surdoval '17 and Katie Weatherseed '16, August 2014. *Submitted by Ali Surdoval '17.*



Sunrise. *Submitted by Maisie Anrod '19.*





# Harvesting

# Marking the Seasons

TASHA DEEN '25

Some kind of change,  
Some kind of spinning around

This is how you mark the seasons.

You lay things down,  
one on top of the other  
layer, once, twice, over 'n over

And maybe, if you're feelin' it  
You spin around two times

Multiple hands, grasping, holding, working  
That feels better

Multiple voices, weaving, listening, caring, sharing  
This is closer

Can you reach it, feel it, touch it, believe it?

# Memories of the Knoll

DR. KATHLEEN DOYLE

Visiting the Knoll with students was a highlight of my teaching at Middlebury College. I appreciate everything the Knoll cultivates.

Learning is cultivated at the Knoll. Each year, the ENVS 112 lab profs designed an experiment for our environmental science students in collaboration with the Knoll staff, Jay and then Megan, and always supported by enthusiastic interns. Then, on a beautiful fall day (all the visits were beautiful days in my memory), students would arrive and be welcomed. They would learn about the natural and human history of the place. They would observe closely, and then they would harvest the crop, broccoli or carrots, and collect data—getting the mass and dimensions to analyze and interpret, making connections that yielded understanding of how cropping practices influence crop growth. New agronomic practices are frequently being tested, making our experiments relevant.

Making connections is cultivated at the Knoll. Students see connections between soil, weather, plants and insects, farming practices, and the larger community. I remember the joy of bringing a load of carrots students had harvested to the HOPE food shelf. I love the connection between those students who envisioned the Knoll 20 years ago and what it is today. The founders designed the layout of the beds to facilitate communication between those working further down the row in the same bed.

Paying attention and curiosity are cultivated at the Knoll. There is always something new to pay attention to and ponder—like noticing the



Dr. Kathleen Doyle sowing and tucking in carrots for the ES 112 fall lab experiment in the summer of 2020. *Submitted by Megan Brakeley '06.*

beautiful insect predators, the lacewings, or the fact that in 2019 many of the purple haze variety of carrot, typically a biennial, were flowering in their first growing season.

Gratitude is cultivated at the Knoll. I am grateful for the gifts of the Knoll and all the care extended to the place and to those who come and feel welcomed to come again.



# Summer 2022 Reflection

CHRISTINE NABUNG '22.5

Our very first tasks in the garden were to prune the tomato transplants. By doing so, we were training the plant to develop two main stems. Once in the ground, the tomatoes continued to grow, prompting another trimming. We were instructed to cut out any of the suckers in addition to any other stems that weren't the chosen leads. The plants began to fruit in July. The top rows of Derick were now filled with all sorts of yellows, oranges, and reds peeking through the vines. While the tomatoes were ready to be harvested, another session of cutting was due. Blight, a fungal infection that turned the plants' leaves a spotted yellow-brown color, was overtaking the crop. Trimming did not make the blight go away; it only tamed it.

It is a moment like this, that I have learned to be in conversation with the garden. I am attentive, actively listening, and accepting the present. Timing is everything, but not in a transactional way.

At the Knoll, I learn to befriend time and recognize it through its seasons. I get to know the generations of past caretakers, interns, students, friends, and visitors. Familiar faces constantly return and share stories of how this garden made them feel. These conversations are some of my core memories from working here. Jay shows us photo albums and the space almost becomes unrecognizable. However, the mysteries of the garden are finally uncovered—the old chicken coop I discover to be a cage filled with

wildflowers and tall grass, tucked away near a collection of trees. Time is also quick and sudden. After returning to work from a hot weekend, the grass that sits on top of bedrock burns a sandy orange, scorched by the summer sun. And now thinking about these memories, I try to process that summer is ending.

When people ask me about my work this summer, I often find myself lost for words. It is difficult to communicate the abundance that the Knoll offers. The space teaches me that earth work is not only about growing different plants or identifying the right tools to use. The real work is getting to know the place.

In these 15 weeks, the garden has changed so much. Caroline recalls the beginning of the season—pounding away at the tomato cages, assembling each post in different beds, and collectively building the garden anew. Crystal delights in the peaks of sweet grass, green and vibrant, against other wild grasses; Lauren in shock of the growing sunflowers, ascending taller than her.

This newfound comfort with the land cultivates a sense of belonging and community—this place becomes a home. When I am in the garden, there is ease in not knowing. There is no overwhelm over what is to come. I plant the seeds and trust they will grow. I check in, share a song, listen, and observe. In constant communication even at the plant's last stages. The end of a season, giving way to a new one.

# Lessons from the Knoll

EMMA MCDONAGH '19

I went to work at the Knoll to learn more about the land and left learning more about myself. When I think back to the summer of 2017, I remember less about what we planted or harvested but am flooded with happy memories of what I consider the best summer of my life. Together with Jay, Will, Helene, Julia, Maisie, Sam, Vanessa, and other guests, we navigated agricultural cycles, the Vermont summer heat, and the challenges of just plain growing up.

Working in the dirt feels really good. Sophia once told me that digging stirs up microbes in the soil and inhaling them stimulates serotonin production. There were enough weeds in the Knoll's garden beds to keep us busy. I felt calm and safe enough to open up to the other summer interns, passing the time by getting to know one another. Jay is a quiet leader who taught us to take initiative and ownership, connect with others, and have an appreciation for the Earth without ever directly saying it.

We, of course, were still kids at heart and a few days without supervision led to vegetable

olympics, early creemee runs, and dips in the gorge. We had an ice-cream-fund jar that was supplied by our individual rules—mine being to stop making dad jokes or puns. This kept us well-fed, to say the least. There are too many stories from that summer, the fall, and the spring days to share. So instead, I will leave you with some of the lessons the Knoll gave me:

1. Every meal is a gift.
2. Seek to work your mind and your body every day.
3. Be friends with people that let you be your true, weird self.
4. Be guided by your values, not your goals.
5. Sunrises and sunsets help feed the soul.
6. You will have many chapters in your life.
7. Your friends don't need to be your age.
8. Listen more than you speak.
9. Eat the extra slice.

# An Ode to John Derick

MEGAN BRAKELEY '06

Who's that?  
At dawn?  
Rumbling up  
the knoll?  
Of course it's John.  
Lids off, hood open,  
changer of filters, fixer of engines, invisible hand  
tending, mending, making do,  
the shape of your care the act of the Knoll still  
standing  
pristine.  
Your emails are my favorite emails  
straight  
to  
the  
point



John Derick lending hands and implements, the latest research updates, sage advice, time, and love. *Submitted by Megan Brakeley '06.*

# A Peaceful Place

CHRISTINE NABUNG '22.5

The tall grass at the edge of the garden  
Rolls with the wind.  
Like a green ocean,  
Fields ripple into waves.

Above, clouds shapeshift  
Against the blue,  
A temporary relief  
From the summer heat.

There is solace here—  
Feel that in time  
It will be just the way it should be.



# The Knoll: Inside and Beyond Me

SJ O'CONNOR '24

In a time when I felt like I did not have a place or a sense of community, the Knoll was there. As a freshman in the fall of 2020, it felt as though all we did was walk to the Knoll and back. It was a way to pass the time, socialize safely, and explore what Middlebury had to offer. The people I walked with are still my best friends. There is something about the connections you make outdoors, watching the sunset and the sunflowers sway in the breeze. They do not compare to those inside a classroom or party, let alone on Zoom.

At 17, after spending months backpacking and living in off-the-grid cabins at the High Mountain Institute, I felt I knew myself. At 18, in the midst of the pandemic and arriving at college, I wasn't so sure anymore. I felt kind of like those sunflowers swaying in the breeze. I made a decision early on that the Knoll would be a place for me. It would be somewhere I would go, even alone. It made me feel at peace and full of joy. I knew I had to be a part of it. Volunteering at the Knoll rejuvenated me. The conversations I had there, in the dirt planting onions, pumped energy and passion into my world. They made me think rather than regurgitate. I felt alive in the nuance of each task—and humbled by the sweeping power of the natural world.

As I have matured, I also see the beauty of putting your time and energy into helping

something else grow. Helping to cultivate this land that has been nurtured by so many other hands—and will continue to be—feels much bigger than myself and my small, four years at Middlebury. At the Knoll, abundance is not just of the land, but of the heart. The Knoll gave me community at a time when it was lacking on campus. I am forever grateful for the way it shaped my trajectory.

Those whom I met at the Knoll are some of the most wonderful people in my life and some of the most genuine on Middlebury's campus. I feel wholly me when working at the Knoll. There, I am allowed creativity and pause. The Knoll is healing. The Knoll healed me.



**THIS PAGE:** SJ O'Connor and Aria's bountiful harvest of dried flowers, herbs, and plants for the Knoll's custom tea blend with Stone Leaf Teahouse. Submitted by Megan Brakeley '06.

**FACING PAGE:** Herbs drying on their way to being made into tea. Submitted by Aria Bowden '23.





# Honey and Harvest at the Knoll

FLORENCE WU '22

Excerpt from “Honey and Harvest at the Knoll,” a *Middlebury Campus* article from 2021.

In the afternoon, Chief Don Stevens of the Nulhegan band of the Coosuk Abenaki nation visited to share his wisdom on agriculture and food. The Chief has visited and maintained a sustained relationship with the farm since 2019. Before the event, he sang a “calling in song” and played the frame drum, which is used to release spirits for guardianship and guidance.

We shucked beans as he told us stories of the “Corn Mother.” The farm was quiet except for the sound of beans falling in plastic buckets and Chief Stevens’s booming voice between the rustling crops.

According to the “Corn Mother” story, the first mother had to watch her children go hungry daily as food was scarce and they sustained themselves through a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Finally, unable to bear watching her children go hungry anymore, the mother decided to go to the Creator and offered her life in exchange for food. The Creator accepted, and she was transformed into corn, the crop that still feeds her children today.

“We are all related, including these beans,” said Chief Stevens. “Some people say well then you are eating your relatives, but didn’t you feed from your mother’s breasts? Isn’t the Earth mother also a mother? Our ancestors made themselves into food to feed us. That is why I have a deep respect for the thousands of people before me that passed [the seeds] on to feed me, and I will pass it on so it can feed people after me.”

These stories connect ancestral lineage with the land and the food. To eat is to be intertwined physically with the land, and to till the land is to

pass on the lineage and custody to your children. As the sun began to make its way towards distant hills, Knoll interns Andrés, Isabela, and Tashi prepared the pizzas, and a student band arrived to play their guitars by the firepit. The sky was once again a mixture of purple-ish pink and blue characteristic of Middlebury’s sunsets and in the distance, a few figures were making their way over for evening events or finishing up their afternoon run.

Sitting across from me, Megan compared the farm on which the students harvest, garden, or relax to a “palimpsest,” a manuscript from which the original writings are erased to make room for later ones but whose effaced print nevertheless remains in traces. At times, our individual efforts and traces also remain with the land and thread us together to people that came before us and those who will come after.

“The farm sites the students to the land, and all the history and relations that come with it,” Megan said. She picked several flowers from the garden for her friend and offered one to me.

The pizza oven. *Courtesy of the Middlebury Campus.*



# Fall Phantoms

ARIA BOWDEN '23

geese high above me streak black, bliss  
yelling, shouting, in perfect lines  
the leaves shake red  
the world rustles, bustles, shivers  
the crows call, longing  
a monarch butterfly sweeps ahead, dancing orange  
healing my bones.  
we are walking, meandering, ambling down this shattered path  
lost in the vivid translation of ghostly fall  
the nostalgia red willows, the flaming bittersweet leaves of skeletal trees  
the sun is setting red and lavender slow, slow, slowly  
I am told by something, someplace, sometime:

*“you should root where  
you are now and stand  
and your branches  
will hold up time  
and become the reflection of reverence:  
Remembrance”*



# Some Scattered Thoughts and Memories

WILL O'NEAL '20

A few working definitions of the Knoll: an experiment you can eat; an art piece built and cultivated and worked with and dreamed up by anyone who wants to; a place to plan and plant and harvest or fail and try again (we grow food and vice versa); a workshop for how to live well in this world; a thoughtful resistance to the various forces that seek to convince us that our actions don't matter; a celebration in flowers or snow, of wonderful people and a fantastic patch of earth.

Jon shows us the undercut, preliminary to the main cut, that will fell the poplar right where he wants it to go. It's only 15 years old, but it was planted as a temporary placeholder until the surrounding trees could get a bit larger and mature—strategic plant obsolescence. The tree falls with a shimmering whoosh; the tree is cut into small and large pieces; the tree pieces are stacked messily behind the compost piles, where the hügelkultur mounds will go. A few days and many shovelfuls of dirt and manure later, the long mounds are nearly gleaming in the sun. Underneath the dirt façade, the poplar logs and branches have been placed vertically and horizontally so that, Jon tells us, they can draw moisture up from below, creating self-irrigating beds for veggies, once they've decomposed a bit. He's sprinkled some of his secret mushroom sauce around to really get things going.

A few years later. Walking on the path below, I notice cucumber vines crawling all over the mounds. The poplars, which were planted at the garden's conception, are watering vegetables that might end up in Atwater. If I traced all the hands that went into making that crop of cucumbers, I

might start to feel a bit reverent toward the salads I scarf down between classes.

Of all the events in the Farm Olympics, during late summer's high point, rotten tomato baseball is by far the most competitive. There is a fine art to exploding mushy produce with a stick, and only the best can spatter all the outfielders with one little overripe tomato. Somebody hits a home run, and the crowd (some crickets in the field nearby) goes wild.

Squash harvest. After months of waiting and weeding, the delicatas ripen all at once. It's like finding gold among a mess of prickly vines and leaves, almost unbelievable, despite the hard-vegetable fact of their existence. We lay them to cure in the big hoop house, after which we take them up to HOPE. It's just a tiny drop of the College's resources, enough to plant some seeds on a small loamy knoll, transmuted by sun and hands into a little fresh food to share.

A foggy morning in the kale bed. The farmer who cultivates the surrounding fields rolls by on his tractor, the crickets are chirping, and a slight breeze rustles the squeaky leaves around us as we pluck the weeds that seem to appear out of thin air. A scent rolls in—cow manure, the sweet perfume of Addison County. We feel a slight mist on our skin, and it is pleasant and cool, like a temperate rainforest or a sauna. "What's he spraying?" somebody asks. We look up at the tractor: it is pulling along a white tank on wheels. A delicate brown spray shoots out the back. It is manure. Somebody shrieks, we sniff our shirts and burst out laughing. It's just a bit of poo, just some concentrated cowpie. So, we go on weeding

between the kale, enjoying the classic Vermont morning—peaceful and still and just a teeny bit stinky.

Machete day for the compost. There's no frustration you can't get out with a three-foot knife and a big pile of plant debris. Swinging furiously, chopping through lettuce gone to seed and crotchety September green bean plants and tough woody sunflower stalks, the rest of the world fades away and everything is swinging, chopping, cutting everything smaller and smaller to make little plant bits to make soil to make big plants to make little plant bits to make soil... you pause to look up, and a bobolink stares at you from the pear sapling across the grass, singing its ecstatic song, as if nymphs and spirits still exist, at least here.

The coyotes start yipping and howling during morning meditation, presumably having caught some poor turkey or deer. The sound fades away into the constant cricket humming that fills the summer air. Later, in the small hoop house, plucking hornworms off our luscious tall tomato plants, we step on the juicy green caterpillars who've been feasting all week on our crops. One hornworm, particularly plump, responds to being stepped on by shooting its neon green innards all the way up to our eyes, in slow motion, like a big, long alien booger. Eat or be eaten, squish or be squished, as they say.

A very partial list of some of the beautiful things you may encounter at the Knoll: beets, lettuce, chard, radish, sunflowers (big and small and red and yellow and orange), zinnias, calendula, bark mulch, squash patches, plum trees, apple trees, pear trees, horseflies and

mosquitoes, tomatoes in the hoop house, tomatoes outside, hardy Vermont grape vines, hazelnut bushes, honeybees, robins, goldfinches, raptors and crows, garden spades, scuffle hoes, regular hoes, shovels, student interns, Megan, John Derick, Jay, John Derick's tractor, some stacked-up piles of hay, the Dalai Lama rock, a pizza in the pizza oven, someone walking, someone running, a cross-country skier, a couple canoodling in the dark.

Oh, and daylilies, irises, johnny-jump-ups, love-lies-bleeding, lilacs, that kiwi vine, the chair statue that looks like a strong breeze will blow it over (though it doesn't), the stained glass window, the calcium in the water tank, and the shed at the top of the hill bustling with volunteers or maybe quiet except for a spider or two, the door hanging shut, the day's toils and joys all done.



# Rest and Renewal



# Spiralic Garden Gifts

SOPHIA CALVI '03.5

Twenty years ago, the Knoll became a sacred space I'd return to again and again.  
If I've learned anything in life, it's that life is not linear at all.  
The Knoll embodies this spiralic path.  
Days under different light, nights under changing skies.  
Season after season, a place to ground, to root, to nourish and explore the mind, body, soul.  
Year after year, a place that deepens sense of self, of connection, of community and purpose.  
Decades of life's lessons planted, tended, harvested, shared and composted to begin again.  
Seeds of hope, placed with care in the soil and in the community.  
Generations of children getting dirty, laughing in the garden, including my own two.

Moments in meditation. Moments in prayer.  
Holding the warm hand of the Dalai Lama,  
blessing this land, this community, this world we are dreaming into being.  
Walking the labyrinth by morning light, by candlelight.  
Tender words of new and old friends, and the wise words of those we lost.  
Endless lessons from the elements, the plants, the insects, the soil...  
And the people, the next generation—the reason season after season we return.  
Eternal Gratitude for the Knoll and the gifts it continues to give



Jay Leshinsky and Sophia (Esser) Calvi '03.5 at the labyrinth on the day of its creation celebration in 2018. Submitted by Sophia (Esser) Calvi '03.5.

# The Labyrinth

CHARLES P. SCOTT CENTER FOR SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

Dozens of volunteers worked with renowned master labyrinth designer and builder Lars Howlett to construct a seven-circuit labyrinth modeled on one found beneath Chartres Cathedral in France. The labyrinth joins a circular marble bench, dedicated by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama during his 2012 visit to the College, and serves as an anchor to what will become a serenity garden in the coming years. Maddie Tango '21.5 wrote a paper on the Knoll and labyrinth for her first-year seminar; we credit Maddie for the following description:

"The labyrinth takes ten to twenty minutes to walk, depending on one's speed, and is designed to shut off one's left brain and create a meditative space to de-stress and contemplate. The labyrinth, nonsectarian and open to everyone, creates a space for anyone to fuel their soul. As opposed to a maze, a labyrinth requires no

decision-making; rather, it guides the walker toward the center. One can walk with or without a set intention or goal; often, however, it is found that when one reaches the center of the labyrinth, the center of one's thoughts has also been reached. The walker then returns from the center, retracing his or her steps. In the labyrinth at the Knoll, four rocks ground the walker in the four cardinal directions, and the Knoll itself is oriented along the sun's path and is also aligned with the center of Middlebury's college campus, connecting it further to its surroundings."

All are welcome to come walk the labyrinth at any time and enjoy the peace and beauty to be found at the Knoll.

*This is an excerpt about the Knoll Labyrinth from the Charles P. Scott Center for Spiritual and Religious Life website. Please go to [go.middlebury.edu/labyrinth](http://go.middlebury.edu/labyrinth) for a video about its creation.*



Evening celebration on the 15th anniversary of the Knoll in 2018. Submitted by Sophia (Esser) Calvi '03.5.



# The Knoll as Sacred Center

LAURIE L. PATTON, 17TH PRESIDENT OF MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

It's hard to find words to describe how the Knoll takes its central place in our Middlebury lives. You can think of the usual descriptions—peaceful, fertile, a place for hands-on learning about food, a place for community. And all of those would absolutely be true. But there is more to the Knoll—a feeling of sacredness, which is why on its 15th anniversary people felt it appropriate to build a labyrinth where students, faculty, staff, and visitors could walk contemplatively through. A labyrinth helps people take perspective on their lives.

The Knoll does indeed feel like a sacred center. Historians of religion have a name for it; they call it an axis mundi—the axis, or center, of the world. Often times such things are grand—like a mountain, or a waterfall, or a temple tower. I think the Knoll is a kind of axis mundi for Middlebury.

The Knoll is a kind of center that has more inner power than outer drama. It is different than the chapel, which stands high on the hill and can be seen from all around the town. The gardens and buildings of the Knoll are not on a dramatic mountaintop, nor is it in a deeply hidden valley where gems of nature reside. The Knoll is on a slight rise, but not a precipitous one. It is, in fact, in the middle of everything, right near Route 125 (it even has a postal address!). You can see much of the campus all around it. And you can see all the mountains, both the Greens and the Adirondacks, if you sit and turn your head all around.

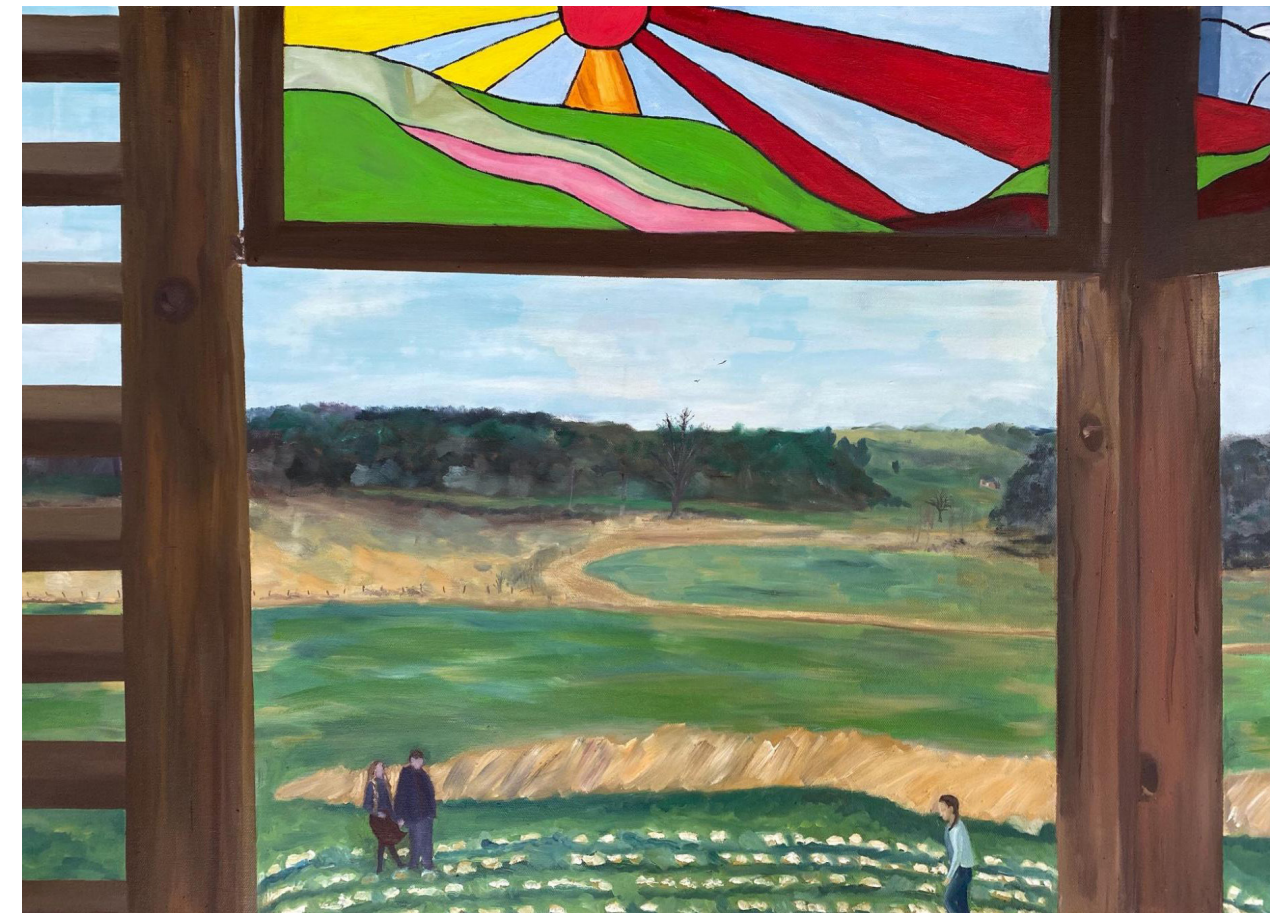
Sacred spaces are not just central spaces. They are also points of entry into a community. That was certainly true for me. The Knoll was

one of the first places I visited in Middlebury. It was in September of 2015, and the students who welcomed my husband and me wanted to show us the new shelter that they had just built and the brick oven they were planning. They also wanted to show us the rows of vegetables that were still growing, almost ready for harvest.

That afternoon, we sat together in that shelter in a wonderful community that was both permanent and temporary. Permanent—because I knew as we sat together that the conversation we were having about food and learning and the harvest was a conversation that would continue long after any of us were at Middlebury. Our dogs, who had accompanied us, were comfortable there, too, and they settled right into watching and protecting—the natural stance of the Great Pyrenees in the middle of the fields. Temporary—because we could only sit there for as long as the sun was out, and we knew that our conversation, like the crops themselves, was dependent upon the weather around us.

Sacred spaces are also places of memory and connection, as when a large bunch of flowers arrives in my office in August. It is usually delivered by several students and lands in my office quite dramatically—a huge bundle of color that lasts for weeks. I think of this as a testimony to the fruits of summer learning. But that bouquet from the Knoll is also a gesture to memory—the fact that we are all thinking of each other, even as we move about in our summer travels.

Finally, axes mundi are places of transformation. Year after year, I hear stories



"Labyrinth" Ashley Tietz '20.5. Oil on canvas. From the class Landscape Painting Outdoors in the fall semester of 2020, this piece is a rendition of the stained-glass windows in the outdoor classroom and the view of the labyrinth at the Knoll. Submitted by Ashley Tietz '20.5.

about the transformational power of the Knoll for summer interns, as well as students in the fall and spring semesters. Like all sacred spaces, it literally grounds students, faculty, and staff alike, and gives them a sense of purpose. More than one student with whom I have spoken since graduation has gone into food systems directly as a result of working and learning at the Knoll. For many people at Middlebury, the Knoll is a place to re-center themselves, to develop calm and clarity of mind when the pressure gets to be intense.

For all these reasons, the Knoll is indeed a sacred space—a memorable place of gathering and calm that changes you as soon as you enter it. That garden in the middle of everything is inviting, unpretentious, and open. A lot like Middlebury College itself.



# Winter Weaving

ARIA BOWDEN '23

snowflakes on eyelashes crystallize the sky  
crows shine under moonlight, swaying in time  
smoke spills from lips, steam rises from skin  
I want to soak in the way you weave and wind  
the saunter, the skip, the scamper, of silver limbs  
across a white field.

here it is:

the gentle spiderweb tether  
of memory making, keeping, releasing  
snowflake's fractal, smoke's spiral  
the grasping the yearning  
of thin ligaments under skin  
for a word spoken then hushed  
by the ash heap  
that will scatter to feed  
fertile ground



"Overwintering" by Crystal Zhou '23.5.

# Experiencing All the Seasons at Middlebury

CRYSTAL ZHOU '23.5

As we welcome reslife, health and wellness educators, international and MiddView orientations this week, interns also finish up their last harvest, last lunch break nap, last delivery to Proctor, and last piece of weed whacking spool for the summer. I struggle to summarize all that this summer has meant to us in an instagram post... We have made our place within the sacred web that connects both the micro organizations (clover nitrogen fixers, soil fungus that spread by dirty boot soles, parasitic wasps laying their eggs in hornbill caterpillars) and the macro systems (land theft, environmental injustice, racist food systems). Growing our own food is more complicated than I can ever begin to comprehend. Despite the intricate balance at stake, at the end of the day, love and care will take root and grow.

As we struggle to find meaning in our lives, I am reminded, again and again, that plants don't ask for permission to grow. We all exist beautifully, with or without the gardener's ever-

so-watchful eye. You need only to see the squash poking its head out of the compost pile to giggle.

We can only transplant and cultivate our love in the best conditions we know, and let nature do her thing. Plants change inconspicuously with grace and purpose. They blossom, pass, and come again. On top of everything, the garden is one place where the past, present, and future intersect. We have built upon eons of glacial movements, thirteen thousand years of indigenous stewardship, 20 of student sweat, blood, and tears, and one summer of Tender Loving Care for you, yes! YOU! to arrive and leave it better for the folks who come next after. We welcome the new first years as they begin their college life at Middlebury, comfort the folks who return and feel the absence of their graduated friends, and celebrate all that has come and all that will come in the new semester.

*Excerpt from an Instagram post from @middknoll the summer of 2022.*



"Lover Knoll" by Masrur Chowdhury '24.

# Seasons and Songs

MEGAN BRAKELEY '06

What happens when you start spending time in a place—  
I mean really spending time?  
I mean hours wind whipped, sun crisped,  
weed wrenched and at a safe distance  
from the bicentennial behemoth  
of a building born not of these hills,  
but ivory tower couched in innovative power.  
Retelling the story of the legendary beekeeper  
who kept his back at all times to the beast, refused to regard  
the scar, big box blocking the signs of seasons creeping  
up and down, valley clay plain up to ridge,  
autumnal red celebration climbing in elevation  
then release.

You begin to notice everything. I mean every. Thing.  
The way the light falls,  
the way the light changes,  
where the light falls, in the late fall afternoons  
how it casts golden and we bask long and it burns  
through the next morning's fog without fail.  
The estimated time to potable water  
a prayer on your tongue,  
sunrays on solar arrays,  
but the skin feels it first.

And when the changes happen,  
seasons punctuated by birdsongs:

Bobolinks, bold and brazen  
singers unfazed by the miles  
stout-winged fliers ushering in our season,  
generosity beyond reason.  
They arrive in time for Commencement  
the unmistakable trill simply  
stops me dead still every time  
they stop time,  
in reverence for the migrants  
making their way against all odds  
and indignities. To sing. To nest. To bring forth the next.

Height of summer  
kildeer road running,  
song sparrow atop a blue spruce,  
osprey all business and interest,  
fishers of fertilizing Creek-bellied suckers  
offered to the earth, a blessing  
to summer gardens in stories made here.  
The dip and dive of barn swallows  
awestruck aerial acrobats just silly  
with how free from gravity in tiny thermals  
wafting from the sun-warmed compost,  
their defiant beauty  
not a pattern to predict  
but a wonder to behold,  
Queens of the hill.  
Yellow-eyed and greedy gulls follow tractors,  
rake in the roar, the spoils of mowing.

Summer and her shoulders bring  
speech and breath arrested at the  
long line of low soar of northern harrier:  
rump bands and wing tips  
all contrast and controlled cruise,  
sensing and scouring low over the drainage ditch.



Year-round occupants,  
great blue herons like great brush wing-stroked  
pterodactyls from an ancient time.

The day the robinettes fledge first thing in fall:  
one year on the first day of school for my youngest, moving me to tears,  
another year, plunk, into the dish wash water of our pizza party  
ushering in the First at Midd, fledglings, flurry of  
foundering, flight, then fwooooshhh soaring higher, more finesse than most.

Murmurations of starlings reflecting in semaphore  
a code beyond us all, a blessing.  
Bluebirds in October every year return in multiples,  
perfect cubes of scandal blue, flirting and agile,  
flitting, modest-bodied puffs  
on cue for the week of intro-level lab experiments.

The deafening honk-me-home  
of geese cutting the sky in drunken  
decentralized swaths, swapping steering.  
The crows, just as much cacophony but keyed  
higher and straighter fliers.

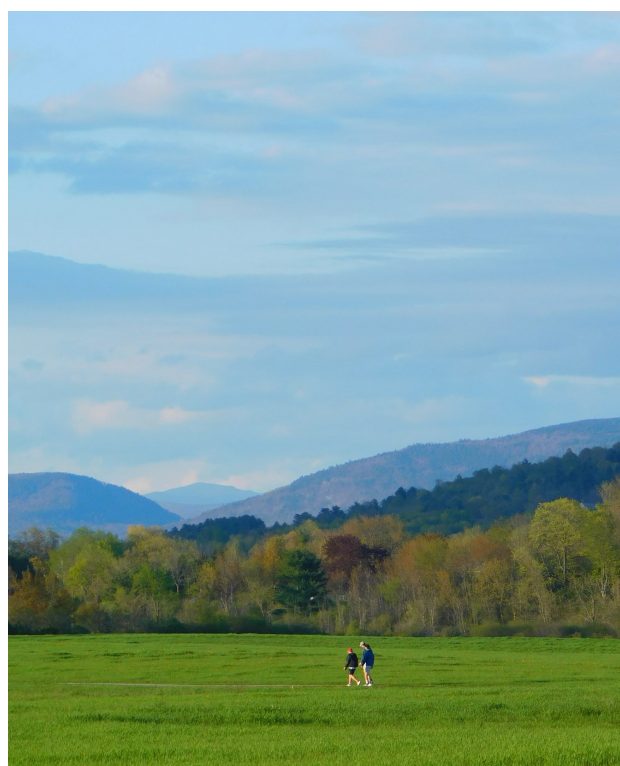
The unfamiliar cut of vagrant hawk in fall  
like shooting stars, don't blink before they're gone  
but evidenced afterwards in  
the sudden falling silent,  
the rustle of leaves,  
the trees otherwise without comment.

You can call it phenology,  
but I say marking time, or  
making meaning, or  
being a neighbor, or  
staying  
alight  
attuned  
alive  
to what comes around again.

Perspective,  
changing over time but also  
spiral diving winding  
loop-de-loop and back again.

I can't help but wonder  
who else has taken this in  
has savored this sense of sun  
on skin, the whole world as kin,  
the comings and goings announced,  
marks made, paths laid,  
the ones we're made to remember,  
and those made to forget.  
And for the ones who come next,  
may their days be more just, robust and brimming  
with the life within, at once beholden to and soaring through  
these stories of selves, songs of  
reverence, remembering, retelling  
into an eternity larger  
and more entwined, defined by the  
witness we bear  
in mirth, in grief, in song,  
together,  
all day long.





**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Drone image of the Knoll by Teddy Smyth '15. Submitted by Bill Hegman. Two friends walking on the path to the Knoll before sunset in spring 2019. Photo by Courtney Crawford '23.5. Kkaennip (perilla) and two styles of gochu peppers grown at the garden. Growing Korean heirloom plants as an exploration of diasporic traditions, honoring ancestors, ambiguous loss, and nurturing seeds to carry us forward. Submitted by Megan Brakeley '06.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Morning walk to harvest herbs from the grazing garden with Cassia Park '24 during mid August, 2022. Submitted by Tashi Sherpa '24. Asher Brown '19.5. Celebrating the last splash of stain to finish off the pizza oven project! September, 2016. Submitted by Mike Pallozi '18.5. "Joy-Strong." A seedling carrying a harvest of abundance, surrounded by collected Vermont leaves. Submitted by Cassia Park '24.5.





# In Closing

# Knoll Mission Statement

At the Knoll, our mission is to explore food as a medium to cultivate well-being in people, place, and the planet. And if this is our true aim, our work must start with understanding and dismantling oppression, specifically the racism, land theft, enslavement, cultural erasure, and colonial supremacy that built our food system and our national economy from this country's outset and remain at the fore, albeit sometimes in more subtle ways. We commit to creating access for people who have been barred access from the freedom to choose whether, and how, to engage with agriculture and the land. We aim to broaden understanding of the political, historical, and cultural frameworks and hegemonies, including white supremacy, that have built our predominant narratives and understandings of the food system and our landscape.

Systemic racism is entwined in every level of our lives and our human systems, ranging from policing, education, housing, healthcare, land tenure, and the conditions present (or absent) for self-determination that shape the very meals on our plates. We commit to creating access for people who have been not only underrepresented in, but barred access from the freedom to choose

whether, and how, to engage with agriculture and the land. This requires expanding and deepening our outreach and engagement, as well as active attention to create space for more voices. We commit to holding space for student-led initiatives and to rallying staff and faculty support behind them, when called to do so. We commit to utilizing the Knoll as a space for people to have nuanced and intentional conversations about food justice and how it intersects with systems of oppression, culture, and ideas of food sovereignty. This requires skilled facilitation and thoughtful framing, as so much of our relationship with food is rooted in deeply personal concepts of identity, culture, and memory.

We commit to centering the intersectional scholarship, leadership, and grassroots activism of food, land, and climate justice work. We commit to lifting up organizations that serve as national models for this urgent work, to grounding our understanding of our work in theirs, and to creating opportunities here at the Knoll for further meaningful connection and engagement. These commitments are the soil in which the seeds of student interest can grow.

# Afterword

MEGAN BRAKELEY '06

For anyone who has spent time at the Knoll, you know the prevailing southerly winds, at times gentle and at other times scouring. The northward lilt of the poplar tree next to the firepit is a windsock made of cellulose and lignin. We have all been shaped by that wind, whether it has sculpted our vascular network, ushered in a giant soaking thunderstorm, or offered a moment of respite from the summer heat.

Anemochory is the dispersal of seeds or spores by the wind. We invite you, dear readers and lovers of the Knoll (and thus, embodied forms of the Knoll itself) to carry forward the seeds of

love represented in this anthology (and from so, so, so many other stories not included at this time).

Spread them on your winds. These seeds have grown many gardens of abundance far and wide, in the field, and in our hearts and minds. They will continue to do so with your support. As we honor some of the voices, memories, and stories of the first 20 years, we look forward to what the next 20 bring.

As we hope and dream, we cherish the chance to root in this community with gratitude for all the changes new seasons and cycles bring.



# Acknowledgments

We would like to express immense gratitude for all those who have made the Knoll what it is today. There are countless people to thank, but here is an incomplete list naming those who have been instrumental in the Knoll's continuity over these 20 years, providing an abundance of wisdom and care.

All the students who have brought their magic to this space: the Knoll was founded by you and is for you.

Bill Vitek and New Perennials: thank you, Bill, for always being willing to drop by with listening ears and for conversation. Your mirth and belief in this anthology project from the very beginning have been anchors in its creation. Thank you, also, to Regan Eberhart and Paul Dahm, our attentive and skilled editors, without whose time and care this book would not have become what it is.

For support with the Knoll's day-to-day operations behind the scenes, we are grateful for the Janet Halstead Franklin '72 and Churchill G. Franklin '71 Environmental Center at Hillcrest Team: director and dean of environmental affairs and sustainability Jack Byrne, director of programs Sophia (Esser) Calvi '03, associate director Janet Wiseman, Climate Action Program director Minna Brown '07, sustainability specialist Tara Federoff, and former Knoll intern and CAP coordinator Andrés Oyaga. To former Environmental Affairs staff, including dean emerita Nan Jenks-Jay and sustainability

specialists Natalia Schwein and Eva Fillion. Without the continuous advocacy, belief, and support of the FECH and EA teams, the Knoll would not be where it is today.

The Winter Term '23 team and other incredible students who have helped with editing this compilation over the past six months: SJ O'Connor '24, Lauren Gemery '23, Crystal Zhou '23.5, Cassia Park '24.5, and Tasha Deen '25.

For support with the Knoll's day-to-day operations behind the scenes, we are grateful for our colleagues in Facilities; Dining Services; Midd Catering; Events Management; Student Activities and Orientation; the Anderson Freeman Center; the Scott Center for Spiritual and Religious Life; Student Employment; the Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Public Safety; Office of Advancement; Alumni and Parent Programs; and the Office of Communications. Special thanks to Kevin McAteer in Advancement, whose support made early garden internships possible. To JJ Boggs, former associate dean of student activities. To Kim Bickham and everyone at the Recycling Facility. To all who keep the Knoll grounds kempt, on the ground and beyond: Clinton (Buzz) Snyder, Dave Oberle, Steve Santor, Mike Moser, Tim Parsons, Jenn Pottinger, and Kara Mitchell. To our 2020 Covid summer crew: Jessica Crossman, Nick LaDuke, Jeff Emerson, and Nancy Parsons.

All the faculty who have brought classes to the Knoll, engaged it in their educational

process, and provided ongoing support. Thank you to Helen Young, John Elder, Andrea Olson, Gregg Humphrey, Bill McKibben, Marc Lapin, Jesse Bruchac, Kerry Wood, Shelly Pottorf, Kathy Doyle, Tracy Weston, Michelle McCauley, Molly Anderson, Peter Ryan, Nadine Canter, Laurel Jenkins, Lida Winfield, Greg Pask, Alexis Mychajliw, Rebecca Gould, and many others.

All the donors, small and large, who make it possible for the Knoll to function and allow the students' dreams to come into being time after time. Namely, we wish to thank Harry and Beth Drucker, Erika Lederman, Sara Goldman Arno '14 and her family, Betsy Taylor and Denny May, as well as our anonymous donors. Thank you for your support and generosity.

All the friends and visitors who have continuously stopped by the Knoll on strolls through the TAM, to help volunteer, sign the guest books, and say hello—and to marvel at the shared joy of gardening and being here together.

Thanks to Wendy Johnson and Scott Russell Sanders.

All our friends at local farms who have graciously offered time, advice, and support over 20 years: Renee Shepherd of Renee's Garden Seeds; Spencer and Jennifer Blackwell of Elmer Farm; Will, Judy, and Pauline Stevens of Golden Russet Farm; and Paul Horton of Foggy Meadow Produce. To Anna Hurlburt Freund and HOPE staff through the years for their collaborations.

Thanks also for the support of John McCardell,

College president at the time of the Knoll's founding, who imagined the tenth year of the Knoll but could not have known that it would see the Dalai Lama greeting this place. Thanks to President Leibowitz for his support during his years and Middlebury. To President Patton for her continuous support, kindness, and wisdom. And to Provost Michelle McCauley.

Jay Leshinsky, whose 20-plus years of compassion, story and memory-keeping, and never-ending support have made the Knoll what is.

John Derick, our dear garden friend and advocate.

Lastly, thank you, for reading and for being a part of this community and this celebration of nourishment and growth. Here's to another 20 years at the Knoll.

# Contributor Biographies

**Maisie Anrod '19** is from Chicago, Illinois. Maisie was an intern at the Knoll during the summer of 2017 and then had the great fortune of getting to do her ecology thesis work there during 2018. The Knoll has taught Maisie lessons on belonging, gratitude, acceptance, and so much more. Maisie met and learned from and with some of the most wonderful humans there.

**Mikey Azzara '02.5** majored in psychology (environmental studies minor) and after farming in Italy, New Jersey, and Vermont, returned home to the Garden State to strengthen the local and regional food system. In 2008, he founded Zone 7 local food hub and still runs it today!

**Dan Beaupré** and family made frequent trips to the Knoll from their home in Chipman Park in its early years to witness the wonderfully tended gardens and beautiful westward views.

**Kari Wolfe Borni** is on the faculty of the Dance Department. Her artistic project and scholarly research are focused on human-animal physical communication, improvisation, and choreography for performance. She lives on a small farm with her human and animal family in Addison County.

**Aria Bowden '23** is from Taos, New Mexico, majoring in environmental studies and architecture with a minor in Spanish. Aria is endlessly grateful to have been part of this project as lead editor of this compilation as an SSL/Knoll intern and to have connected with this wonderful community that orbits the Knoll.

**Megan (Osterhout) Brakeley '06**, associate director of the Knoll, can't believe her luck to support students and the Knoll every day. She began as food and garden educator in 2018, having previously worked at the Center for Community Engagement and as a Posse mentor.

**Jack Byrne** is the dean of Sustainability and Environmental Affairs at Middlebury. He is a biologist, loves a good story, is especially fond of rivers, lives in Moretown, Vermont, and grew up in Cleveland, Ohio.

**Sophia (Esser) Calvi '03.5** stayed the summer of 2004 to run a children's garden at the Knoll and then came back full circle to Middlebury College in 2012 as the food and garden educator. She is grateful to be deeply rooted in this community and serves as the director of Programs for Sustainability and Environmental Affairs at the Franklin Environmental Center.

**Lingxi (Lily) Chen '22.5** is a Middlebury student who took a photography class where she captured the vibrant colors in the Knoll in the fall of 2022; she is majoring in studio art and economics and is from Beijing, China.

**Masrur Chowdhury '24** is a physics major at Middlebury who enjoys the Knoll as a place of sanctuary. He is reminded of gardening as a child every time he visits.

**Courtney Crawford '22.5** graduated with a psychology major and a political science minor. She's from Jacksonville, Florida, and will be road-tripping out West and back this spring.

**Tasha Deen '25** finds herself at the Knoll in many forms, as a student, a volunteer, a friend, and so on.

**Kathleen Doyle** was a visiting laboratory professor in the Environmental Studies Program between February 2015 to September 2021 and in 2022 transitioned to the role of visiting research scholar in environmental studies.

**Bill Eichner** is a Nebraska farm boy who chose ophthalmology as a career but was eager to return to his roots when there was a call (via his wife, Julia Alvarez, who was then a writer-in-residence at the College) to till this new "Middlebury Organic Garden."

**John Elder** taught English and environmental studies at Middlebury from 1973 to 2010. Following the establishment of the garden, he greatly enjoyed the opportunity to teach classes and hold office hours there.

**Ami Furgang '20** worked at the Knoll during the summer of 2019. Based in Pittsburgh today, they continue to work farm jobs during the growing season.

**Susannah Gebhart '06** co-managed the garden in 2004. She lives in Asheville, North Carolina, where she founded OWL Bakery.

**Lauren Gemery '23** is from Norwich, Vermont, and majored in conservation biology. Lauren was a summer Knoll intern in 2022 and helped edit this book during the January term of 2023 as part of ENV5 500: the Knoll independent study.

**Jean Hamilton '04.5** was part of the student organizing team that founded the Knoll (formerly known as Middlebury College Organic Garden, formerly affectionately known as "Slow the Plough" Garden).

**Bill Hegman** has been a GIS specialist in the Geography Department since 1999. "I knew many of the original students that started the Knoll, and I still keep in touch with several of them on a regular basis. It's been fun to see the evolution of the Knoll and how it creates community here at Middlebury. I love having the pizza oven out there!"

**Ry Hemond '19.5** was a Knoll intern in 2019, their last summer at Middlebury before graduating as a Feb that winter. "To me, the beauty of the Knoll lies in what it cultivates— community, connection, laughter, and some absolutely delicious purple asparagus."

**Chris Howell '04.5** lives in Vermont and was part of the crew that started the farm.

**Nan Jenks-Jay**, dean of Environmental Affairs emeritus and a longtime supporter of the Knoll, advocated for this student initiative with the administration who thought it was the worst possible location. The students persevered! Along with Jay, students, and Student Activities, she helped shift the organization to Environmental Affairs for greater financial stability and longevity.

**Caroline Jiao '24.5** worked as a summer Knoll intern in 2022, is majoring in literary studies, and is from Beijing, China. The Knoll peonies and perillas always fill her with joy.

**Dan Kane '09** is a soil and environmental scientist living in Cornwall, Vermont, and was a Knoll intern in the summer of 2007.

**Bennett Konesni '04.5** (environmental studies/music) is a singing garlic farmer in Belfast, Maine, and a cofounder of what has become the Knoll. His Mighty Worksongs Project has led him to collect musical labor around the world as a Watson Fellow and to share songs from New England as a special envoy in traditional music for the U.S. State Department. In addition to farming and touring, he is cofounder of Sylvester Manor Educational Farm on Shelter Island, New York, and executive director of Bagaduce Music in Blue Hill, Maine, overseeing its collection of more than 3 million pieces of printed music.

**Hannah Laga Abram '23** interned at the Knoll from fall 2020 to fall 2022 and volunteered the rest of the time. From Santa Fe, New Mexico, she studied dance and anthropology and is perpetually in awe of beets.

**Jay Leshinsky** has been garden/farm manager, educator, and volunteer at the Knoll from its beginning in 2003 to the present. He lives in Middlebury, Vermont, where he tends many gardens.

**John McCardell** was a member of the Middlebury faculty from 1976–2010 and served as president of the College from 1991–2004. From 2010–2020 he served as vice-chancellor and president of the University of the South in Seawee, Tennessee. He participated in the dedication of the Knoll in 2003 and remembers enjoying the first fruits (or, more accurately, vegetables) from those early growing seasons.

**Emma McDonagh '19** was a Knoll intern in the summer of 2017 and majored in architecture and environmental studies. She grew up in Reading, Massachusetts, and now lives in San Francisco, California, and is working as a climate-tech investor.

**Bill McKibben** is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar in Environmental Studies at Middlebury, where he's worked for more than two decades; he was an early cheerleader of the Knoll and occasionally stops by to pick a snap bean or two

**Katie Michels '14.5** was a garden intern in the summer of 2012 and was the student co-director of the Middlebury College Organic Farm (as it was then known) for two years.



**Christine Nabung (CJ) '22.5** holds close to her heart working as a summer Knoll intern with the summer 2022 cohort of Caroline, Crystal, and Lauren. As an environmental justice major, CJ is often curious about the relationships between people and place and channeling this into writing, cooking, music, and building community. At the Knoll, she indulged in the power of waiting and listening, spending most of her mornings before work sitting by the poplar tree.

**Mary Nagy-Benson '24.5** is a food studies independent scholar, minoring in education studies, and is from Weybridge, Vermont. Mary volunteers at the Knoll, where she made her first deep friendships during her first semester during the pandemic. It is a place where she can connect her love of farming and food with community.

**SJ O'Connor '24** was an editor of this compilation and has worked as an SSL intern since June 2022. She is studying environmental justice and global health. Much of her early Middlebury time was spent volunteering at the Knoll, shaping her interests and relationships.

**Will O'Neal '20** majored in comparative literature and was a full-season intern in 2017.

**Mike Pallozzi '18.5** was a 2016 Knoll summer intern, majoring in environmental studies and geography, and hails from South Jersey. He helped build the outdoor kitchen surrounding the pizza oven, and his fondest memory of the Knoll is the daily morning meditation before starting the workday. He lives in Goshen, Vermont.

**Cassia Park '24.5** is a Knoll volunteer who explores intersections of food, early education, and playful expression and appreciates the Knoll's offerings that refresh the senses and join enthusiasts together, invigorating the soul.

**Nancy Parsons** is a former staff member at Middlebury—she was a cook and seasonal landscaper—and **Tim Parsons** is the landscape horticulturist/arborist in Facilities Services. “Our connection to the Knoll is sporadic but we are grateful.”

**Laurie Patton** currently serves as the 17th president and professor of religion at Middlebury. She is an avid fan of all things Knoll. Her dogs are, too.

**Corinne (Almquist) Reeves '09** is a certified nurse midwife in a freestanding birth center on the Oregon coast. She graduated from Middlebury in 2009 and volunteered at the Knoll throughout her years at Middlebury, working as an intern in the summer of 2008.

**Tashi Sherpa '24** was a Knoll academic-year intern in 2021 and was the Knoll events intern in the fall of 2022. “I am an IGS global environmental change major from Queens, New York. I love that the Knoll has such a special way of facilitating deep conversations and relationships. The space itself offers a unique and peaceful environment that transports you to another time and place.”

**Dane Springmeyer '02** studied geography and environmental studies at Middlebury and enjoys growing strawberries—most of which his toddler eats—in the raised beds of his Bellingham, Washington yard. In the months before graduating from Middlebury, he worked tirelessly to provide a vision for where the Knoll could exist and is deeply moved by how amazing both the place and the community have become.

**Ali Surdoval '17** was an intern at the Knoll in the summer of 2014. She still visits the Knoll often.

**Ashley Tietz Tonini '20.5** enjoyed spending time at the Knoll during her years at Middlebury and painted the view from the stained-glass window for her final project in the class Landscape Painting Outdoors. She is from Sunnyvale, California.

**P.V.** is a student of history and medicine who was a former Garden/Weybridge Preservation intern and continues to believe that people are worth knowing.

**Helen Vaughan '24.5** is a volunteer and general Knoll enthusiast, majoring in biology and minoring in food studies and global health. She is from Cape Elizabeth, Maine.

**Kai Velazquez '23** loves to walk to the Knoll with friends, especially during the warmer months, is majoring in English and creative writing, and is from Queens, New York.

**Remi Welbel '22.5** volunteered at the Knoll throughout their time at Middlebury and took part in the winter term 2023 Knoll independent study. Remi studied neuroscience and dance and currently works as a farmer and community organizer at Zumwalt Acres on the traditional unceded homelands of Kiikaapoi, Peoria, Kaskaskia, Bodéwadmikiwen, Myaamia, and Očhéthi Šakówin peoples in Sheldon, Illinois.

**Florence Wu '22** was a reporter and editor for the *Middlebury Campus*. She is from Auckland, New Zealand, and majored in international relations and economics. After graduating, she is continuing her studies in journalism at Columbia University.

**Helen Young** is a professor emeritus from the Biology Department, where she taught for 20 years. Her research on pollination biology and her love of plants drew her to the Knoll, again and again, over those 20 years. She lives in Bristol, Vermont, where she continues to walk the forests and paddle the rivers and photograph the plants.

**Crystal Zhou '23.5** had the most magical experience working as a summer Knoll Intern in the summer of 2022 alongside Caroline, CJ, and Lauren. In the semesters since, Crystal has served as the Knoll Friends coordinator, helped as an editor on this compilation, and taken part in the organizational and logistical scenes behind the Knoll. They are studying Black studies, with a focus on Black geography, and are interested in documenting stories of place, change, belonging, and joy through photos, recipes, paintings, and soundscapes





Photograph by Chris Spencer.











In the spring of 2002, a small group of Middlebury College students held an interest-meeting to discuss starting a campus garden. A year of research, geological surveys, help from community volunteers, and presentations to skeptical administrators later, a knoll of land just beyond campus became the Knoll: an organic garden, outdoor classroom, and sacred space for joyful gatherings, good work, harvesting, and healing.

Growing the Knoll is a celebration of the commitments of creative and tireless students, staff, faculty, and experienced community volunteers who saw the value and potential in creating a garden that would become much, much more than a garden. It is a story that can serve as a resource—and inspiration—for any group interested in creating a similar community space.



Every time I pass through Middlebury, I find myself out on that little grassy knoll, wondering at the changes (a new bed! crop rotation!) and feeling simultaneously delighted by the rooted sameness of the trees, lilacs, and the land itself. Anyone who has spent time at the Knoll understands the feeling: that deep warmth and comfort that comes from land well-loved.

—Ry Hemond '19.5

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