

Zen Bow

A PUBLICATION OF
THE ROCHESTER ZEN CENTER

VOLUME XXXIV • NUMBERS 1 & 2 • 2011



CHAPIN MILL:
A CELEBRATION

Zen Bow: Chapin Mill: A Celebration

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Poetry

Chapin Mill Pond *by Richard von Sturmer*



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Tom Kowal

Chapin Mill Dedication Verse

ROSHI BODHIN KJOLHEDE

*The pure waters of Chapin Pond
flow in and out, never stirring.
Flowers bloom, leaves fall, geese soar.
All follow their own course,
leaving no trace.
The three cedar pillars,
having endured the cold of many winters,
only sigh in the wind.*



Stephanie Albanese

Retreat Center Built? Check!

ROSHI BODHIN KJOLHEDE

On a May day in 1996 the Center's receptionist reached me in my office—'Ralph Chapin on the line for you.' I was surprised. Not just because he'd never called me before, but because I'd never even seen him at the Center in my twenty-five years on staff. That is, not until a few days before, when he'd come for our 30th Anniversary celebration. What a pleasure, after all those years, to have this charter member return to the center he had helped seed. After all, this was the very man who in 1966 had discovered the galley proofs of *The Three Pillars of Zen* at the Kapleau's apartment in Kamakura, Japan. Moved by what he read, he had ordered ten copies of the book, which would then be distributed among members of a Rochester group that invited Philip Kapleau to come here.

On that same festive weekend in 1996, the trustees met to decide whether to budget the

funds to build a new zendo at Arnold Park. This new zendo would be located near our back property line, at farther reach from the burgeoning street noise heard from the current zendo. Over the years the various sources of noise had multiplied and were especially pressing in the warmer months, with the windows wide open. In earlier years there had been just the passing roar of the occasional car using Arnold Park as a speedway, or the braying of teenage boys in packs on their way to and from school, or the racket of the Thursday trash collection, proceeding down the street like Sherman's march—and invariably during teisho. But these infrequent disturbances (which could turn amusing when heard from the potentized stillness of the zendo) eventually grew into the tumult of lawn mowers, leaf blowers, boom boxes, heavy street repair equipment, and neighborhood festivals and par-

ties. Even all this was not so bad during sittings outside sesshin—we just folded it into our practice for those one or two hours. But in sesshin, where it began to fill the silence almost around the clock, it occurred to me that by constructing a free-standing zendo in the Center's back garden, protected by the existing buildings, we'd have not only quieter sittings, but a large new room (where the zendo had been) available to relieve the constant crowding at the Center. Noise is not a deal breaker in Zen, and we even have a saying: 'the true sage is not the

sage of the forest but the sage of the marketplace.' Still, most of us, and especially beginners, have enough tumult to contend with just on the inside.

The trustees' approval of funding for the \$400,000 project came only after their thorough deliberation, for this was to be the Center's largest building project in some twenty years.

Little did we imagine what would be coming in three days with Ralph's call.

Ever urbane, Ralph opened with some small talk, saying how rewarding it had been for him to participate in the weekend's anniversary celebration. Then I heard him say, 'I'd like to donate Chapin Mill to the Center. Would you like it?'

It may have been only my many years of practice that kept me from fainting. Never had I imagined such a gift. Ralph had graciously hosted the Center's annual summer picnic for many years, but I, at least, had never dreamed it could be ours one day, especially since Ralph had three children. The remarkable secondary cause behind this gift was his daughter Andris, the sole family member to whom Ralph might have given his property. She had settled in Portland, Oregon, and completely concurred with her father that Chapin Mill should go to the Center.

While I was still reeling, Ralph was waiting for my answer. As stunning an offer as it was, I knew that accepting it had enormous implica-

tions for the Center's future. A 'yes' would carry with it a commitment to build the retreat center we'd dreamed of for so long.

'Yes!' I blurted out. 'Of course! I mean, it will have to be ratified by the trustees and the rest of the Sangha, but I can't imagine them saying no!' And sure enough, when the local Sangha heard of Ralph's offer in a standing-room-only meeting that I hastily called, the response came in thunderous applause.

So now, thirty years after his discovery and delivery of *The Three Pillars of*

Zen, Ralph bestows on the Center the staggering gift that would vastly increase our capacity for Zen training and community activities, the complement to our city center. His unique role in the genesis of the Rochester Zen Center long since proven, he had now brought forth the harvest we never saw coming, completing a great arc of beneficence.

Fifteen years have passed since that stunning phone call from Ralph. I don't remember any of us on the Building Committee thinking, as we embarked on the project, that it would take so long to build the complex. How did those years fly by so quickly? And how did we do it?

It was, of course, a great cooperative effort, starting with the fundraising. In 2003 the Zen teachers who attended the American Zen Teachers' Association meetings held at Chapin Mill expressed astonishment at how much money our community had raised in accomplishing our goal. For this we owe thanks not only to the many donors in the Sangha itself, but to the generosity of several others as well. Our other debt is to the legions of volunteers who supplemented the hired labor and still today continue to maintain the facility. All in all, the project represents a chronicle of sustained *dana* that has exceeded our expectations.

What a rare privilege to join with others to build a major Dharma center that will provide a place of practice and training for generations

'What a rare privilege to join with others to build a major Dharma center that will provide a place of practice and training for generations to come!'

to come! Ralph once said that his own vision for Chapin Mill was that it become a center of Western Zen culture that offered not only traditional Zen training but programs supportive of it—lectures, courses, and conferences on human understanding and responsible living—‘a kind of Tassajara of the Northeast,’ he suggested (referring to the mountain branch of the San Francisco Zen Center).

My heart would soar to see Chapin Mill grow into a bustling center of serious Zen training with dozens of year-round residents. But we’re nothing like that yet. The nucleus of our daily training remains at Arnold Park, and so far Chapin Mill is used primarily for sesshin, except for its small daily sittings, the annual four-day Ralph Chapin Memorial Work Retreat, and the occasional wedding and special event.

Although we’ve hardly begun to draw from the potential of Chapin Mill as a Sangha asset, that could soon change now that the building phase is behind us (‘Retreat center built? Check!’). The place abounds with possibilities beyond formal Zen training. Tucked away at a site of vibrant rural privacy that is situated midway between two urban centers, already it has become a welcome harbor for like-minded groups without retreat centers of their own. The additional revenue that comes to us from these rentals has become vital to our ability to maintain it, but as a bonus there’s the satisfaction for us of sharing this marvelous resource with others at a time when retreat centers are still scarce. Our sympathies toward rental groups come from firsthand experience; before hatching those plans for a new zendo building at Arnold Park we had looked into renting a country retreat center ourselves for summer sesshins, but could find nothing that was both suitable and available.

It has also been gratifying to see Sangha members and their families and friends begin to discover the many ways in which Chapin Mill can expand our life of community. So far its pond, creek, and waterfall, its meadows and woods have provided space for play and recreation, rituals and work together, and over time parents and children will find new ways to draw from the natural riches of the property. With the retreat center now finished, we’ll also be able to turn more attention to other uses of Chapin Mill for which there is interest, such as individual retreats, ways to memorialize deceased members, and who knows, someday maybe even housing for the elderly. With so much prime acreage and floor space, we’re limited by little more than our imagination.

As we were beginning the design process for the retreat center, one of the first questions our architects asked us was, ‘How long do you want this complex designed to last?’ Because of the construction cost implications, it wasn’t an easy question to answer. Finally we said, ‘Let’s say 500 years’—knowing, though, that the future of Chapin Mill is not entirely within our control. As Roshi Kapleau wryly noted, ‘Man proposes, karma disposes.’ But whatever may be our collective karma in the coming decades, Chapin Mill has taken its place as a Dharma center of unusual promise. It offers an ideal milieu in which our children and grandchildren and their grandchildren can become beneficiaries of a system of human development designed to relieve the suffering of all beings. Through this radical teaching of no-teaching we can keep our balance in a world of what seems to be spiraling turmoil. Indeed, we can practice the ultimate practice—adapting to change itself.



Richard von Sturmer

A Short History of Chapin Mill

The following historical account of Chapin Mill was told to Andris Chapin by Avis Sundown Sky, a clan mother of the Tonawanda tribe.

There is a place in western New York State that has been special to many peoples for several hundred years. Prior to 1809, this area was a crossroads, a stopping place for rest and replenishment, for peoples of the Iroquois Nation—Mohawk, Seneca and Tonawanda—a place of peace. It was called ‘The Place of Clear Running Waters’ because of the numerous springs that fed the stream which flowed into ponds that sustained fish, flora and fauna. While in this area, tribal disputes, animosities and rivalries were set aside, as no blood was to be shed. The waters were to remain clear. Dutch fur traders settled in the area and towns flourished, the woodland paths that the native Americans walked became roads. The Place of Clear Running Waters was sighted as ideal for the first grist mill in the county, and so it was. In 1809 the stream was diverted and diked to create a pond, using surrounding trees as the foundation. The

grist mill with its undershot wheel was built in 1811 from the resources of the land, stone and timber. Grist was ground there for eighty years before the water wheel was disengaged from the millstones. A house had been built; a Parson lived there for a time. A man named Gardner bought the property, building a barn and out buildings. It was now called Gardners Pond. The native Americans had gone or had been sent elsewhere. In the first quarter of the 20th century the place was purchased by the Gubb family, who were respectful and honored the land. It was used as a riding camp and stables in the warm summer months, with bridle paths throughout the woods, swimming in the pond, children laughing. Happy energy pervaded the property. In 1948 the Chapin family bought the land from their Gubb cousins and lived there for over fifty years, cherishing and nurturing its intrinsic peace and sacredness. To honor and preserve the sacredness of this land the family has given it to a Buddhist community to build a retreat facility and training center for Zen Buddhist practice.



Sensei Lawson Sachter

A Letter from Ralph Chapin

The following letter was originally published in Zen Bow, Volume XVIII, Number 3, Summer 1996.

The question has been asked, ‘Who is this Chapin person?’ Ha! A good question ...

Ralph Baldwin Chapin, born July 3, 1915, in Batavia, New York, graduated from MIT in 1937 with a degree in Business Administration and Mechanical Engineering. He worked for seven years with the National Carbon Corporation; in Cleveland; in Hong Kong manufacturing flashlights in a Chinese factory; and in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, manufacturing flashlight and military batteries. He returned to Batavia in 1945 and joined the R.E. Chapin Manufacturing Works, Inc., where he presently holds the position of Chairman and Treasurer.

Founded by his grandfather R.E. Chapin in 1884, the company originally started in the back

of a hardware store in Oakfield, New York, producing kerosene oil storage containers for oil lamps. Early in this century, after relocating to Batavia, the company began producing hand-operated garden sprayers, and today builds industrial and professional sprayers for worldwide distribution.

The challenge and satisfaction has been not in ‘making sprayers,’ but rather in working with people, developing trust, and trying always for better communication; for today we exist in an environment not unlike a desert sandstorm, where survival depends on every individual’s knowing how to act at every instant, and always in the community interest—or he dies of thirst!

Other compelling interests have been, in addition to participation in the formation of the Rochester Zen Center: many years as a supporter and board member of Planned Parenthood

in Rochester and Batavia; co-founding and volunteering with Citizens for Ecological Action; serving on the Founding Committee and volunteering for the Regional Action Phone Crisis Line; acting as a trustee for the Batavia YMCA; serving as secretary of the Batavia City Planning Board; and past presidencies of the Batavia Chamber of Commerce, and the National Sprayer and Duster Association.

Returning to Batavia was strongly driven by the hope of somehow acquiring what is now Chapin Mill, owned since 1934 by Helen and Larry Gubb, who used it as a vacation home. It was not on the market, but my wife Sanna and I convinced the Gubbs to sell it, and we prayed we would be able to get the mortgage we needed! ...

What now follows is a brief chronology of what has led up to the Rochester Zen Center’s imminent ownership of the Chapin Mill property in the town of Stafford, New York, on the auspicious occasion of the Zen Center’s 30th anniversary. This transition has an element of compulsion much like that compulsion back in 1965, which drove me to seek out names of persons in Japan who could find some illumination as to what Zen Buddhism was about. Thanks to Huston Smith, then teaching philosophy at MIT, we received the names of two persons just as our ship touched at Yokohama. We first sought out a Japanese monk in Kyoto. The second name belonged to an American, Philip Kapleau—but who would want to talk with another American in Japan?! The Japanese monk was desperately ill, so I wrote a hurried note to Kapleau in Kamakura, and received back a telegram dated July 3, 1965, reading ‘Please call me at 2-8817. Kapleau.’ A wonderful adventure followed as we were warmly received by Philip, his wife Delancey, and their daughter Rama. *The Three Pillars of Zen* was then, as I recall, in the publisher’s dummy format for final review and approval for printing. Roshi graciously asked for our suggestions for what seemed to us a perfect work, and we ordered the first ten copies on the spot. Dorris and Chester Carlson received the first copy, and a beautiful letter from Dorris to

us (and important part of this history) led to their inviting Philip Kapleau to visit Rochester—and out of that initial meeting the Center was born.

The Buckingham Street house in Rochester was rented, zazen commenced, and the roar when the furnace came on was a challenge to our meditation. The Center’s first sesshin was held at Painted Post, New York. I will never forget sitting next to Audrey Fernandez in the inspiring zendo created from a rather ordinary room with its fireplace debris of apple cores and cigarette butts! And the *makyo* level to be penetrated! My daughter Andris recalls, as a very young teenager, sitting at Buckingham Street with Dorris, H. Gratwick, Audrey, Jean Rindge, her mother and me, under the guidance of Sensei Kapleau.

On occasion, I say that the most meaningful event of my life has been my meeting with Roshi Kapleau those many years ago, and the resulting development of the Rochester Zen Center. Recently, I related this to Ms. Carol Kociela, our banker, who stood by us at R.E. Chapin Manufacturing through the crisis years of the early nineties and assured our family business the opportunity to continue and to grow. That connection, too, has contributed to the decision to give Chapin Mill to the Center, as I gradually reduce my active company involvement. My family and advisors, and the few friends who know, are enthusiastic about and support my decision.

The 30th Anniversary was so inspiring and reflected both the strength of our Rochester Zen Center and, as well, the opening of a new chapter, ensured by a serene and special country place.

One immediately thinks of the San Francisco Zen Center with its City Center, Green Gulch Farm, Tassajara Mountain Center, and now a hospice. In spite of differences in terrain and climate, one can easily visualize an equally comprehensive and uniquely spiritual center of activity at Chapin Mill that would draw a large and diverse group of individuals into the membership. My personal hope is to see the

property preserved, with its profound spiritual atmosphere ...

Looking back, the critical moment of interaction was the morning of June 28 of this year when I called Bodhin and interrupted him and Casey Frank as they were drafting a letter to me on this very matter! This is all an accumulation of years of thinking about how Chapin Mill could be used by the Center to continue building a strong and active Sangha, a strengthened transmission of Zen teaching, and the poten-

tial for a larger community to benefit from the many levels of Zen practice.

The decision of the Rochester Zen Center trustees and Sangha to take on the challenging task of developing a long-awaited country location will make this (my hope) a reality. It is both humbling and wonderful that this person can be a part of this never-ending Dharma process.

Gassho,
Ralph B. Chapin

An Interview with Andris Chapin

Andris Chapin is Ralph's daughter. She grew up at Chapin Mill and retains life use of an apartment on the upper floor of the Mill House. A piano tuner technician, Reiki practitioner, and Chair of the Board of Directors of Chapin International, Andris lives in Oregon and visits Chapin Mill several times a year. We asked her to reflect on her father's gift to the Center.

When I was in my early teens my parents became two of the founding members of the Rochester Zen Center. I was in boarding school and would accompany my folks to the Center when I was home on vacations. There were no other kids then. I heard Roshi Kapleau's first instructions to the new members. It was all new to him, and to us. I remember the curtains and the wall paper, and the L-shape of the rooms in the Buckingham Street house. Lee Gratwick's mother, H. Gratwick, and my mother prodded me to behave in kinhin.

After boarding school I was away at college in Oregon, and I decided to move there to live. My relationship with Roshi Kapleau continued, although at the periphery of my life. Dad and I would visit him periodically through the years. With Roshi's permission, I sent him Reiki heal-

ings every Wednesday night for the last three years of his life.

My relationship with the Center has not been as an ongoing practicing member. Now when I visit Chapin Mill (which I do regularly as I continue to oversee business matters at Chapin International in Batavia), I watch the developments from my perch in the Mill House. Of course, now that the cedars at the turn in the road have grown taller, and a pine tree that had been a Christmas tree planted just near the Mill House slightly obscures the view of the Retreat Center, I see a bit less of the view. When I am here during a sesshin, the sesshin energy permeates the whole space. I don't know the words to describe it—it is so wonderful. Perhaps 'Gassho' says it best.

What do you think our occupying Chapin Mill meant to Ralph?

When Dad came to his illumination (Ralph's word) of how he could solve the problem of what to do with the Mill, we were all relieved. He knew that I could not maintain it, and the whole family wanted the property maintained and respected. I had asked Dad about his plans

a few years prior, and I had gone so far as to suggest that he give the property to the Zen Center. Dad declined then, saying it was not time yet. Years later I realized that what he meant was that the Zen Center was not ready. Dad had a terrific sense of timing, in business and in many other areas of his life. When he learned that the Zen Center had serious plans to expand at Arnold Park, Dad felt that you were ready. So he took the risk and gave it to you.

As time passed, people began to live at the Farm House. He had some assumptions about how things would go that did not prove accurate, but Dad let those things go. It was hard for Dad to see the construction. Some trees needed to be cut down; the landscape managed and massaged. It was hard to watch. Dad always had a good idea of how things should be done—he was an engineer—I had to have a stern conversation with him to get him to back off. Dad did come to terms with the way things developed, and it brought him so much joy. It became a dream for him that was coming true. He lived long enough to know that it was the right thing for Chapin Mill and that he had made the right decision. Dad's ultimate dream is that Chapin Mill become a monastery.

I think the seeds of Dad's gift were sown in the first trip to China in 1980. Dad and I were on that trip with Roshi Kapleau. Traveling with Bodhin Kjolhede, Casey Frank, and others gave Dad a chance to see sangha members up close and personal. It gave him confidence about who the people were, and their capabilities. The seed was planted then I believe.

What does Chapin Mill mean to you?

I grew up here, and while I attended boarding schools and later college in Oregon, returning to the Mill has always been a restorative for a sense of gentle peace and harmony. I have vivid childhood memories of time spent at Chapin Mill, in the woods particularly.

My older siblings were often away, and I spent many, many hours playing alone in the woods. My mother was a botanist and she shared much with me about the plants that grow there. A woman named Avis Sundown Sky worked for my family at Chapin Mill. Avis was from the Tonawanda Tribe, and she told me that Native Americans always knew this place as a convergence of water sources, of natural springs. It was an unspoken place of peace, a place to get water and then move through the area. According to Avis, it had been a common gathering point for a long time.

Chapin Mill has always intrinsically been designed for nourishment. As an actual grist mill, the first in Genesee County, the grinding of grain, of corn, provided food for the community. Now the Zen Center has constructed buildings and has activities designed for nourishing on a different level. The zazen that you do here adds to the vital qualities that have been here for a long time. The Center upholds, revitalizes and maintains the healing and nourishing energy that people have always felt when they come to this place. It is a mutual growing into you. My family grew into it and the space grew into us. I am thrilled and grateful to see it happening to you, too.



Bob Leverich, Bero Associates

Seven Views of Chapin Mill

BOB LEVERICH

One

I would turn onto the long narrow road back to the property, through the gates and along the millpond, going slowly, the vista opening up ahead—the mill house, the farm house, the barn, and the little place in the middle of it. Laimons would be there, laconic, but genial, and sometimes Ralph. They'd be doing something with rakes, or a wheelbarrow. We'd talk some, Ralph would chuckle about something, Laimons would smile, and then I'd walk back beyond the buildings and the pond and into the landscape.

Two

This was a job, Chapin Mill, but I think I knew that there was a deeper convergence of ener-

gies. This was a trust, from John Bero to me, from the Sangha to him, and from Ralph to the Sangha. So, we were all conjoined. I walked over the land and down the boundaries to get to know the place because my charge was to envision the building, and all good building is tied into the land. I set out to get to know the spaces and prospects of the place, the landforms and watercourses and walls and canopies of trees, how they related to one another and to the roads and buildings already there. How the new building might fit in. What architects provide, I believe, when they're doing their best work, is a profound spatial and temporal experience—the shaping and ordering of spaces to make meaning over time for the people who use them. This experience starts before you see the building and extends into it and outward again into the landscape. You come around the trees or over the

rise and there's the place. 'I'm here,' you say, and smile.

Three

I went looking for the place on Ralph's land for what would happen in the place to sit. I went looking—as we all did at the time—and found the site we all would, the ridge north of the orchard with the mill creek running along at its foot. This was the site we all walked up to, turning to survey where we had come, and smiling. Each of us probably knew at once that this was where the building would sit, and where we would sit, although we had to let our dogged rationales run to investigate the rises and woods of the whole place for other likely spots. Finally, our reasons came trotting along peaceably, and sat beside us, too, on the present site, confirming our good sense.

Four

We had so many meetings up in the library at Arnold Park! Hot days, cold days, rainy days, looking out to gray-black branches, branches with a haze of pale green buds, then industrious masses of green, then refulgent orange and gold swathes, and back to bare branches. So many personalities—Sensei (now Roshi), Charlotte (now Amala-sensei), Alan Temple, Casey Frank and Gerardo (now Gerardo-sensei), in person or on the speaker phone. John Pulleyn, LouAnne Jaeger, Lou Kubicka (now Wayman), and more—they all came together to critique, deliberate, decide, argue, celebrate, move ahead. John Bero steered those early meetings; I prepared the drawings. I drew hundreds of drawings for all those meetings. Afterward, we'd get in John's car and head back to the office, discussing how it went and what to do next. Everyone in the office had an interest in Chapin Mill and brought things to it.

Eventually, I'd get back to my own desk, and then it was just me and a roll of tracing paper and a pen again—my practice. 'Back to the

drawing board' is like 'back to the mat.' Assemble all you know and feel, sit still, search inside, and begin drawing out what's there. It's tentative and nerve-wracking at first. Sometimes it leaves you hopeless. Then it falls into order and sureness. I make something people don't always realize they've asked for—a place that they've never been. I was back in Rochester when the first phase of construction of Chapin Mill was nearly closed in. I walked through the building with the committee one day. Going from the chair zendo to the dining hall, John Pulleyn said to me, 'You know, I thought I understood what you were thinking from the drawings, but I never *really* understood until we started putting up the sheet rock!' He laughed, and I smiled. Yes, I said to myself. Here's a place that's never been.

Five

The design holds together I think, and has accommodated changes, even disagreements. Axes tie together the principle spaces and the land. Zendo, courtyard, chair zendo (now piano room), and a future Buddha Hall site above the orchard all align north to south, and Kannon and dokusan rooms east to west. The cemetery lies on a diagonal with the zendo. The palette of materials is simple, the detailing is consistent, and the bands of trim tie together each space and set the scale to the body. There were long debates, and sometimes big changes. The hipped ceiling in the entry hall and the tie-rod trusses in the dining room and chair zendo were argued over at length. We studied no fewer than sixteen schemes for the zendo and its roof. In the end, it came down to a gabled scheme or a hipped-roof scheme, and everyone favored the former.

Even in the office, people wanted to just settle on the gable scheme and move on but I *knew* that would be the wrong choice, the wrong feel for the space. There were only my drawings to judge from, and they weren't telling the whole story. I figured models would tell more of it. Jukai was coming, everybody would be there,

and the drawings would be on display for the Sangha. So, I started two big models of the zendo schemes on my own time, and I took pains to craft and finish them equally so no one could claim I had made one look better than the other. John Bero was skeptical, I think, that we'd change any minds, and I worried a little that maybe I was just being petulant.

In three days I put just over forty hours into those two models. We delivered them to the Zen Center and the committee studied them, took off the removable roofs, shone flashlights into them, and at last decided that the hipped-roofed scheme with its center light monitor would indeed be the better zendo. The model went on display with the drawings at Jukai, and it was great fun to see the delighted smiles of Sangha members as they got their first 3D sense of what was to come.

Six

I never sat at Chapin Mill during the designing phase; I only walked the land and came for meetings when they were held in the Mill House. I knew little about Zen at the start of the project. John Bero and I came for a workshop at Arnold Park one Sunday afternoon. I began attending more sittings, and I asked to take part in a short sesshin in order to get a sense of the experience I was designing for. I remember the spot where I sat and the wall I faced, and the two women who sat on either side of me, whose combined energy seemed to bolster me like bookends. And I remember the sense of oneness afterward when we all had tea together before departing. When the construction began on the first phase of Chapin Mill, I was already gone, moved to the west coast for a teaching job. I'm a fitful practitioner, more of a grub than a grasshopper, and shy about it. I sit sometimes with a small local group, or at home next to a flat piece of limestone from Chapin Mill. Sometimes the bell fades, and I think for a second of sitters there and smile.

Seven

When I left Rochester eleven years ago, it was late on a sullen gray day in August. I locked up the little house on Caroline Street for the last time and left the keys for Sheila, the new owner. I decided to stop at Chapin Mill one more time. It was past six and I should have had a destination planned beyond that, but I didn't. As I drove down the two-lane highway toward Stafford, a thunderstorm surged over me, the car, the road, the hills, all the green—and I lost it. I wept.

I feel too much, maybe, or maybe I'm never really clear about my destination. I drove into Chapin Mill as the storm moved off east, and I parked by the big willow and the barn. I knocked at the farmhouse door and Jeff Scott, the caretaker, came out on the porch. I said I was on my way out of town and I'd come to see the site one more time before I left. I must have looked awful. 'Sure' he said, and together we walked back, and up into the thick, wet grass on the empty site, the light fading more as we went. We stood and looked without saying much. The west woods rose up beside us dark and still, and water dripped from everything. I looked back toward the silent buildings beyond the orchard.

We walked back as it got dark and Jeff said, 'You should stop and see Ralph.' The Mill House was dark. 'He's there,' Jeff said. He went on and I crossed the little bridge over the noisy race to the door and knocked. Ralph smiled, welcomed me in, and ushered me into the kitchen. He was wearing old clothes—a cardigan, baggy pants, and a shirt buttoned funny. The lights were off. He was eating his dinner, a chicken breast and some vegetables, I think, with a glass of wine and he had three candles burning in front of him. He must have been almost ninety.

We had a long conversation about moving, life, karma, Chapin Mill, the project, stewardship. He talked about what a hard thing it had been to leave his wife of thirty years, how un-

imaginable it seemed before, and how good it proved to be for both of them in the long run. How, speaking of karma, they had both just run out of karma. I was on that path, too, I see now, without much awareness. He talked about a place he had out west, in the Columbia Gorge, I think, which would make sense—it's another evocative landscape there. 'It's the right thing,' he said, as I got ready to leave finally. 'You have to do this, and find out what's there for you.'

If I have a Zen teacher, it was Ralph. 'You'll be back,' he assured me that night, with no temporal specificity—for there is none, for any of us. But I *do* come back to Chapin Mill, to the center, along some personalized meridian, and I *am* there, in what I was entrusted to envision. I went looking for it on the land, I saw the spaces, saw them all arrayed on that ridge, walked around them and sat in them, felt how it would all feel, must feel—and I drew it, and that was what I could bring. You all carried it into being. We are all there in what we could bring, and Ralph smiles whenever we can stop by.

Bob Leverich is an architect and artist on the faculty of The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, where he teaches sustainable design and sculpture. He worked with Bero Architecture as the principal designer of Chapin Mill.

CHAPIN MILL POND

I.

*Distant thunder
the green-gray pond
smooth as a field
stippled with
millions of whitish bubbles
and splashes of rain.*

*Standing immersed
our eyes and ears
just above the surface
we absorb
the ceaseless
rising and falling
of water.*

*So simple, the trees
hold the pond in their circle
as we disappear
in small bursts
with skin and clouds and leaves
intermingled
in the dense afternoon light.*

—RICHARD VON STURMER



Richard von Sturmer

Wild Treasure

SENSEI AMALA WRIGHTSON

The first time I went to Chapin Mill was for the Center's annual picnic in 1989. I remember coming down through a tunnel of trees then turning a corner, seeing the pond, and being immediately enchanted by it. The cascading green of the willows reflected in the mirror-still water; the three bronze cranes on their tiny island at the centre of the stillness; the old barn and other buildings so much a part of the pondscape, as if they too had emerged out of the ground like the trees.

I didn't know then that the crane island was in fact a floating raft, tethered to the bottom of the pond, on which Ralph Chapin carefully cultivated grass and other plants to create a naturalistic platform for his cranes, brought all the way from Japan. So much of Chapin Mill's ap-

parently artless beauty was due to Ralph's loving artifice, in which he allowed the forest, pond, meadows, rambling weeds (including 'incorrect' species such as honeysuckle and wild rose), and gardens to merge seamlessly, punctuating them here and there with split rail fences, rustic bird feeders and rough-hewn shrines.

On that initial visit I also saw my first ever snake in the wild—a large charcoal-grey water snake coiled in the sun on the rocks below the waterfall, which slithered into the water at lightning speed when it sensed my presence on the bridge—an electrifying experience for one from a land with no serpents. I also attempted to go out on the pond in one of the 'Thai riverboats' (another of Ralph's exotic purchases) that were moored at the water's edge. The boats were very

picturesque but almost completely unseaworthy in spite of Ralph's efforts to keep them watertight with an annual coat of tar.

I had no idea of the extent of the property in those early years, venturing only around the pond, into the mosquito-filled woods behind the barn and to the meadow in the north along the path freshly mowed for the picnic by Laimons, Ralph's gardener. One early picnic, on the edge of the woods, Richard and I discovered scores of tiny frogs the size of a fingernail, which years later I learned are called 'penny toads.' We saw deer, too, on the far side of a wide rolling meadow, grazing, heads down, until their leader caught our scent and raised the alarm. In a second they were gone. At picnics we'd also go out onto the pond in the rowboat, watching for the bubbles that betrayed the presence of a snapping turtle below. To get a glimpse of one hovering in its waterworld was to slip, for a few moments, into an altogether ancient and coldblooded realm.

We entered the houses only to use the bathrooms, but one year someone ushered me into the Mill House to peek reverently into the Japanese room built in fragrant red cedar by Casey Frank and with sliding screens painted by Marsha Smith. Casey wrote a short obituary for Ralph in *Zen Bow* and said that Ralph had inspired him to do his best work, and reported that Marsha said the same thing. Ralph's love of beauty was unflashy, quiet even, but intense and contagious.

Filled with strange and elusive creatures and Ralph's treasures from faraway lands, Chapin Mill had an aura of mystery about it that was captivating. It embodied the Japanese aesthetic principles of *shibui* (subtle and unobtrusive beauty) and *wabi-sabi* while at the same time not looking Japanese at all, but quintessentially Western New York. *Shibui* and *wabi-sabi* were deeply influenced by Buddhism and Zen, and Ralph captured their essence at Chapin Mill.

After Ralph donated the property to the Center in 1996, soon after the Center's 30th Anniversary celebrations, Richard and I took every opportunity we could to visit the property and explore it. We would go for the afternoon or stay overnight in the Guest House, walking the trails through and beyond the considerable amount of land Ralph had acquired over the years, from Route 5 in the south to the precipitous border with the deepening hole of Seven Springs Gravel Pit in the north (a border Ralph guarded anxiously, concerned that his land was being undermined by the digging). Chapin Mill is exquisite in all seasons. In summer we gathered wild raspberries and cherries along the road that was once a railroad bed, in the fall climbed the ruined railroad bridges nearby to view the autumn leaves, in winter we crossed the frozen pond and scrunched through the snow under silent skeletal trees, and in Spring watched everything come back to life, a procession of delicate births accompanied by the music of the spring peepers and later the harsher notes of returning Canada Geese. It surprised us that so few of the Centre's members took advantage of this deva realm that was now theirs.

Behind Ralph's gift was a desire to see Chapin Mill preserved for future generations, but he also had a vision of how it could be in his lifetime. He had been to the San Francisco Zen Center's Green Gulch and Tassajara in California, and he imagined Chapin Mill growing into something akin to them, attracting people from all walks of life who would be inspired by its unique atmosphere. On our trips to Chapin Mill we would often sit with Ralph by the pond or on the bench outside his front door, listening to the rushing of the waterfall, and he would ask us when the residential training was going to start. In those first few years the Center had just a single caretaker there most of the time, except on workdays. Almost all of our energy at

Mammals: Beaver, Coyote, Eastern Chipmunk, Eastern Cottontail Rabbit, Eastern Grey Squirrel, Groundhog, Little Brown Bat, Muskrat, Raccoon, Red Fox, Red Squirrel, Star-nosed Mole, White-tailed Deer. *Amphibians:* Bullfrog, Eastern American Toad, Leopard Frog, Northern Pickerel Frog, Northern Spring Peeper, Salamanders (Northern Redback, Blue-spotted), Green Frog. *Snakes:* Eastern Milk Snake, Common Garter Snake, Northern Water Snake. *Turtles:* Common Snapping Turtle,

Painted Turtle. *Birds:* American Bittern, American Crow, American Robin, Black-capped Chickadee, Blue Jay, Brown-headed Cowbird, Canada Goose, Cedar Waxwing, Common Flicker, Common Grackle, Common Starling, Dark-Eyed Junco, Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Kingbird, European Sparrow, European Starling, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Green Heron, Grey Catbird, Hairy Woodpecker, House Wren, Killdeer, Mourning Dove, Northern Cardinal, Northern Flicker, Northern Oriole,

that stage was going into picking an architect, forming a building committee, choosing a site and then designing the Retreat Center, a massive constellation of tasks, and also into raising the funds to build it, also a major undertaking.

The throngs of fired-up young trainees he envisioned animating Chapin Mill did not manifest in Ralph's lifetime. On August 18, 2000, Ralph died in Batavia Hospital, suffering a heart attack after treatment for a blocked artery. On that very same day Lou Kubicka arrived from Madison with a carload of tools to head up the team of Center members who were to carry on the construction where the contractor Joe Condidorio had left off. Sadly Ralph departed this world right when the first residential community began to coalesce at Chapin Mill.

One October, not long before Ralph died, we took an old friend, David Mahon, to see Ralph. We thought they would hit it off as they had both worked and travelled widely in Asia and were both men of affairs with a strong spiritual bent. They did get on well; exchanging stories of adventures and encounters in places they had both visited, 40 or 50 years apart. The afternoon passed in a flash and by the time we left it was dusk. The light getting murky as we drove out, we glimpsed a stag a short distance into the woods on the left side of the driveway. It was a fleeting but magic moment, ending a wonderful afternoon, and David wrote a poem about the day, and the stag, which he dedicated to Ralph. On a subsequent walk we saw the stag again—in the exact same attitude and the exact same spot! Ah, it was a plastic stag ... one of several decoy animals, including a bear, set up for target practice by the residents of the Seven Springs Country Club. When we told Ralph, he said (of David), 'He must never know!'

Just as Nature loves to hide, Chapin Mill conceals as much as she reveals. That is one of

the things that makes her into a sanctuary for so many species. The overgrown creek provides a safe flyway for small birds, which zip happily in primary colors between the water and overhanging branches—cardinal, bluebird, goldfinch. In the forest even a dead tree is like a multi-storey apartment, housing hosts of insects, as well as the woodpeckers that eat them; each flat rock a roof for spiders and salamanders. Besides its regular inhabitants above and below, the pond is also a rest-stop for migrants, including on at least one occasion a dazzling white flock of Great Egrets. During one early sesshin Roshi and I, coming back to the zendo after the end of afternoon dokusan, caught sight of a gaunt-looking dog by the creek—a single coyote passing through.

Coming from an island country with a quite narrow (if unusual) range of native species, I was fascinated by the extraordinary biodiversity to be found at Chapin Mill, and made a list of all the animals we'd seen and been able to identify—by no means an exhaustive or learned survey but still containing almost 80 species (see below). What an extraordinary treasure, and responsibility, Ralph bequeathed to us. The Buddha led his followers into the forest to practice, and for a reason. Nature will always be our primary Dharma teacher. I pray that with all beings our Sangha will take great care of Chapin Mill, that it will be enjoyed by many generations of Zen practitioners and that Ralph's dream of many people living and training at Chapin Mill will one day be realized.

Sensei Amala Wrightson is the Director of the Auckland Zen Centre. She lives in New Zealand with her husband Richard von Sturmer and makes pilgrimages to Chapin Mill when she can.

Pileated Woodpecker, Red-tailed Hawk, Redwing Blackbird, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Song Thrush, Turkey Vulture, White-breasted Nuthatch, White-throated Sparrow, Wild Turkey, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. *Fish:* Carp, Crawfish, Minnow, Spotted Trout. *Other:* Bumble Bee, Carpenter Ant, Deer Fly, Ground Bee. Honey Bee, Ladybugs (several kinds), Leeches (at least two kinds), Numerous species of Dragonfly and Damselfly, Paperwasp, Red Ant, Water Striders, Yellow Jacket.

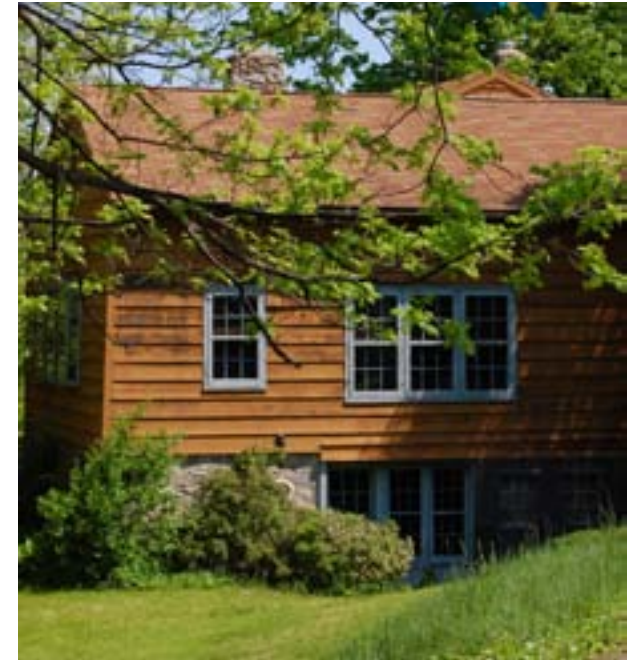
The Last Founding Member: Audrey Fernandez

Audrey Fernandez has been a member of the Zen Center for fifty-five years and lives in Rochester, NY. We invited her to reflect on Ralph's legacy.

I'm the last founding member of the Zen Center. I was a younger member of the meditation group that met at the home of Doris and Chester Carlson in Perinton, NY. They had a large piece of land and a lovely home. In addition to having sittings at their home, they would often have different spiritual leaders and researchers come to speak to us. Ralph Chapin and his wife Sanna were also part of that group.

Our group first heard about Philip Kapleau and his book *The Three Pillars of Zen* through Ralph, who read it when he met Kapleau during a trip to Japan. We read *Three Pillars* in November of 1965, and we all were just amazed that ordinary people could come to enlightenment. So, we were quite thrilled when Philip Kapleau decided to come to Rochester for his book tour on March 1, 1966, and agreed to come to the Carlsons' home to sit with us. That was really the spiritual beginning of the Zen Center.

Little by little the Zen Center developed out of our meditation group. The first formal meeting of the Rochester Zen Center was held in August of 1966 at a house on Buckingham Street, a few blocks away from Arnold Park. We did everything in the beginning. We had day-long work parties, and for lunch we'd sit on a tablecloth on the floor in the dining room and chat. Ralph and Sanna were very generous right from the start. Their support was especially valuable when many of the early members had decided they didn't want to follow Buddhism and felt the little sitting group at the Carlsons' was enough for them. The Chapins, Harriet Gratwick, George Lennon, me, and I think there was one other person, were the only ones that continued. Through that period of change, with



The Mill House—built 200 years ago in 1811.

more than half the group dropping away, it was very valuable that the Chapins would drive in from Batavia and bring gifts of food and other support to then-Sensei Kapleau. The Chapins also invited us to their home for swimming and for the yearly picnic. Held at Chapin Mill since 1967, it became a Zen Center tradition.

Ralph had traveled all around the world, and what he hoped for was to have a living Buddhist culture here in Rochester. He was the kind of person who did not want to draw attention to himself; he lived courteously, peacefully, gently. One of the lovely things about both Ralph and his wife Sanna was their graciousness. I'll never forget the night my husband and I were invited to dinner at their home in Batavia. On the second floor of the Mill House, where their living room was, there by the stairwell, was a huge container of delphinium, of every shade of blue, from their garden. It was simply beautiful, as was the whole Chapin place.



Chapin Mill Dedication & Celebration

MAY 29, 2011

On May 29, 2011 a dedication ceremony was held to celebrate the completion of the Chapin Mill Retreat Center. The retreat center sits on a beautiful 135-acre property donated by one of the Zen Center's founding members, Ralph Chapin. The completed facility is a monument to the generosity of Ralph as well as sangha and friends, the talents of our architects and contractors, and countless hours of volunteer help over the past 15 years.

Built in three stages, the initial groundbreaking ceremony took place in April 2000. Phase One consisted of construction of the south building. Completed at the end of 2002, it includes the kitchen, dining room, piano room and dormitory. Phase Two lasted from approximately 2006 to 2008. The zendo, Kannon room, and east and west wing bedrooms were

completed during this phase. The first sesshin in the new zendo was held in June 2007. Phase Three lasted from 2010 to 2011 and consisted of the dokusan room, teacher's quarters, and additional bedrooms.

Over two hundred sangha, friends, and family members gathered for the May 29th dedication ceremony. The procession led by Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede began at the pond and continued through the property to the Mill House, Roshi Kapleau's grave, and into the Retreat Center. In the zendo, chanting and offerings were made along with a circumambulation of the interior of the retreat center. After the zendo ceremony, several people who played a significant role in planning and fundraising spoke about their participation in the building of Chapin Mill. Lunch, music and a self-guided tour followed.







Richard von Sturmer

During the construction of Phase One, before there was a zendo, staff and sangha members sat by the pond during volunteer work days at Chapin Mill.

Serving the Wider Sangha: Eryl & Wayman Kubicka

Longtime members of the Center, Eryl and Wayman Kubicka have been involved in significant ways in the construction, maintenance, and rental of Chapin Mill. We asked them to share their experience training and living at the retreat center.

W: We came to Zen through the Madison Zen Center, an affiliate of the Rochester Zen Center, in about 1981. We started sesshins in 1983 and have been coming ever since. When Ralph donated Chapin Mill, Roshi asked me to head up the volunteer aspect of the building project. I arrived in 2000 on the very day that Ralph Chapin died, August 18. And that's when we began the volunteer work.

E: I stayed in Madison for another 2 1/3 years and Wayman came back and forth during that time. I was working as a physical therapy man-

ager in Madison. I kept my affiliation with the Madison Center and came to Rochester for sesshin. A year-and-a-half after Wayman returned to Madison we put our house up for sale, I took early retirement, and we moved to Chapin Mill.

What drew you to training at Chapin Mill?

E: For one thing, it's the most beautiful land, and to be able to live here and enjoy it is really wonderful. To see the whole thing grow and know its long history—prior to 1811 the springs here were a meeting ground for the native Americans, then the gristmill, and later the land became a farm with horses and sheep and other animals—all the many predecessors to Ralph and then Ralph himself. There's something about this land and the springs that has a really great feel to it.

W: I came here with the hope that this building would be a step towards mainstreaming Zen Buddhism—that we would build something here that would last for hundreds of years and would provide the opportunity to practice for a lot of people: that was my affinity with Chapin Mill from the start. I also do have some kind of karma with construction and wood, but my deepest reason was not to come to do woodwork or carpentry—it was to help to sustain the Zen Buddhist tradition—to give back a bit of the enormous—really, life-saving—help we got from Zen practice.

Now when visitors come for the first time they see a long low building which isn't all that imposing from the front entrance. But after they tour the inside and experience the full dimension of the building, and see the extent of what has been contributed and the care that so many of us have tried to embody in the construction, people are very impressed. They will often say something like 'I had no idea of the extent and beauty of this place.' I always hope that they see that what we have here now is based on the whole Sangha's gratitude to the tradition.

What is a typical day like in your life today?

E: I do a lot of cooking, housekeeping, and gardening, but my main function is rental coordinator, which involves regular contact with various groups and planning rental arrangements. Depending on the group, some are self-sufficient, while others are newcomers to mediation, like medical doctors and psychologists—they require a little more help to feel comfortable. One of the most wonderful things about this place is that it has opened up the possibility for a lot of Buddhist groups and others to use a space that was designed specifically for meditation. It's great to have these people come here and see them blown away by the space and the quiet.

'One of the most wonderful things about this place is that it has opened up the possibility for a lot of Buddhist groups and others to use a space that was designed specifically for meditation.'

Whatever else needs to be done, we all pitch in—including Wayman, Ed and even Laimons Klava who stops by about once a week. He worked closely with the Chapin family as a gardener and general assistant for over 40 years—

his knowledge about the land and what happened here will keep you enthralled for hours. He's very helpful and he has a fabulous memory. For example, if a pipe or pump is leaking in the Mill House or Farm House and we're not sure why, he can tell you how the system was set up originally, where parts are located and

how they work. When the Center took responsibility for the land here, Laimons went around with Jeff Scott, the first caretaker, and explained everything, all the intricacies. Laimons has been just a joy to have around and we rely on his extensive knowledge and memory to fix many problems. When Andris Chapin is here periodically, she's also a great resource.

W: A lot of my time is spent responding to problems. For instance, just recently a simple failure of a compressor motor caused the sprinkler system to flood a small portion of the basement of retreat center. Even though no water was discharged upstairs the system automatically called the Fire Department. And then I needed to arrange to have sprinkler system technicians make corrections to the system—things like this take up a lot of my time.

So there's coordinating repair and maintenance work that must be contracted out to specialists. A modern building that attempts to use energy efficiently has many complex systems each of which require occasional repair and maintenance. It's like this: the heating system goes down during a rental retreat: we need to replace a circulation pump. The emergency generator has a problem: it knocks out the heating system control computer. A leak develops in the roof and ruins the ceiling in the cold room.

A fan motor in the cold room fails and needs to be replaced. A furnace igniter fails and we have no heat for a time in the western half of the building ... All of the above, including the sprinkler system problem, happened in the last two months!

And then for me there are some projects I do physically myself, for instance, planning and installing the new beams for the dokusan room. Also, depending on the time of year, Ed Kademán and I do plowing, mowing, brush hogging, cutting fallen trees, fixing and maintaining machinery ... and even chasing geese away when the amount of poop on the road gets intolerable. Last year we got lucky and the foxes chased the geese and this year we were hoping our dog Mishka will be a deterrent for them, but as long as she's on a leash the geese are quite comfortable.

Another part of the job, for both Eryl and me, is to maintain good rapport with our neighbors. It's very important to stay welcoming and connected with the community, so this year we attended a local peace conference at Genesee Community College. And we called Max and Jane Mason, who live just up our road, to ask them about an unusual small duck-like bird with 13 babies behind her. (It turned out to be a fairly rare sort of merganser.) There's always the need to talk with neighbors, and relate to them as ordinary neighbors, so to truly represent Zen Buddhism. Our new dog helps a lot with this.

What are the rewards and challenges of maintaining a center that is intended for both Zen Center sesshins as well as rental group retreats?

E: To make those connections, to have this space available, is so positive. It's more rewarding than if it were just for sesshin.

W: We serve the greater meditation community, and this seems very important. Not all people are the same—it's great that we can support other Buddhists like Vispassana practitioners and Tibetans, not to mention Korean Catholics.

E: There are challenges though. We have to move out of the building during rental periods and sometimes there's not much time between a rental and sesshin.

W: One of the challenges is to keep cool in crises ...

E: And they always seem to happen when we have a rental! Other examples—people lock themselves out of their room at 2:00 AM, or someone gets sick or injured and we have to help them get medical attention.

As longtime Sangha and staff members who have witnessed the Center mature and evolve over the years, what do you think about the future potential of Chapin Mill as a Sangha resource?

E: There are lots of possibilities for people to grow food, and it's a great place for the youth program where children can run around, swim, and build campfires. The kids also love the retreat building because you can go round and round. It's been important for kids and their parents. People come for picnics and weddings—it's Sangha land. We have 135 acres to play in. Most recently, we've begun to talk about creating a memorial garden or place for cremains.

W: This is a place for sesshin. We had the largest sesshin to-date with 65 people this past April, absolutely full to the brim. We could not have had it at the Rochester Center as it was years ago. There's a possibility of reigniting enthusiasm about big sesshins and holding more sesshins. It's so exciting to have a big sesshin and very meaningful because what we hoped would catch fire seems to be happening. We hoped this building would ignite enthusiasm for sesshin and suddenly it seems to be working.

How do you compare sesshin at Arnold Park versus Chapin Mill?

W: When sesshin was held at Arnold Park we got sick all the time in sesshin because we sat check to jowl. The air circulation wasn't adequate, so if one person caught a cold, you could see it march around the zendo.

E: There was intensity at Arnold Park, because you'd have four people in your bedroom getting up through the night, so it inspired you to make a big effort. Now we have the luxury of more people having single or double rooms and we can accommodate many more snorers. But the space and light at Chapin Mill, and especially the zendo are equally motivating.

W: The zendo functions supremely well. There's almost nothing we'd change about it. It works just right: air, light, ability to open to the summer and spring weather, the carpet for kinhin, and chairs in the dining room.

Recently a few younger members of our Sangha commented on how much giving there had to have been in this relatively small Sangha in order to do this—enormous contributions from ordinary people and the volunteer effort. A young person comes here and they think 'Wow, people have really put into this, they've really given in away that shows how they feel about what Zen practice has given to them.'

If Ralph were alive today, what would you say to him?

E: I'd just bow. I'd say, 'See Ralph, your vision is now bringing people here from all over.' I think he'd be deeply pleased.

W: We've been able to accomplish what he hoped was possible with respect to Zen Buddhism. It's an incredible gift that he gave us.

CHAPIN MILL POND
II.

*With a sudden wind
the pond races forward
carrying on its back
chopped up pieces of sky.*

*In the rush
waves break against waves
finally hurling small
fragments of blue
onto the muddy bank.*

*We have known each other
for a long, long time.
Clouds have passed in foreign skies.
Horizons have changed
like plates placed on a table.
And still
you are with me in the water.
And the willows surge
with the wind.
Now green, now silver,
now green again.*

—RICHARD VON STURMER

Wood, Stone, Fire, Water: Impermanence

CHRIS PULLEYN

When the Zen Center's building committee first sat down with the architects 15 years ago, the key question John Bero posed was this: 'Are you building for 50, 500, or 5,000 years?' 50 seemed ridiculously short and 5,000 unimaginably long, so the committee settled on a facility that was designed to last 500 years. Now that Chapin Mill is complete, the new question becomes, 'How will we make sure it endures for 500 years?'

500 years: how daunting to contemplate! Musing on the elusiveness of the future led me directly back into the past. Much of my childhood and adolescence was spent in a stately brick home on the Fox River in Illinois, built by a Civil War general after the war. My siblings and I delighted in its history, which included a rumor that there was a secret passageway in the basement leading to a tunnel under the river that was part of the Underground Railway. We never found it, but we loved the story. My mother furnished the home with large, solid pieces of furniture in the dusty roses and greens and off-whites of the 1950s. It was a wonderful place to grow up.

And then there was High House. When my first husband and I came to Rochester in 1969 to join the Zen Center we rented a huge cobblestone house on High Street in Victor, a small town on the outskirts of Rochester. Cobblestone houses are unique to upstate New York, and this one was a beauty with four fireplaces, stone walls that were three feet thick, and a rambling frame addition that included a ballroom and a dumbwaiter. High House was built in 1864 and we collected tidbits about its past from historically minded neighbors. The last surviving member of the family that built it was a Rosicrucian, and we were convinced that she haunted the house.

We often hosted friends from the Zen Center, and I will never forget Audrey Fernandez walking through the house attentively, then turning to me and saying, 'I think stone holds vibrations better than anything else, don't you?'

After we moved out, High House was never again a family home. It morphed into an arts center and then a dance studio. Today, inevitably, it is a Starbucks. I found it to be a surreal experience walking through what was once my kitchen door and being greeted by a friendly barista. The fireplaces in what had once been our living room and den had been restored and many of the architectural details had been either refinished or tastefully replicated. High House has been nicely preserved.

Of course, for examples of careful preservation we need look no further than to 5 and 7 Arnold Park, built in 1881 and 1912 respectively. I never run my hand down the ornate carved banister in 5 AP without thinking of the countless hours volunteers spent stripping the old paint out of the crevices with dental tools. The fires in both buildings galvanized our need to become experts in construction and rehabilitation, skills that served us well when we were blessed with the gift of Chapin Mill.



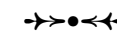
My Civil War-era childhood home, the cobblestone, and the buildings on Arnold Park are, at the most, about 150 years old ... relative newcomers in the history of architecture. To look 500 years into the future, I looked 500 years back to see what buildings from the year 1500 are still standing. A little Web sleuthing turned up a nifty architectural timeline that revealed dozens of examples of extant buildings from the 1500s.



John Pulleyn

Not surprisingly, most of them were funded by either royalty or religion. They include St. Peter's of Rome, the Chateau de Fontainebleu in France, the Suleyman Mosque in Istanbul, Florence's Ponte Vecchio, and the City of Quito, Ecuador.

Stone. All stone. My heart sank. Chapin Mill is largely wood with a little concrete thrown in. What does that mean for 500 years into the future? Is it fanciful to expect that there will be anything left? As I was thinking these gloomy thoughts, I idly clicked on the link that would take me one century back, into the 1400s. And there, staring me in the face, was a potential answer: Ryoanji, the beautiful temple complex in Kyoto with the world-famous rock garden, was built in 1499. And it's wood. All wood. Except for the rocks in the garden, of course.



It was time to get help from a pro. I had gone as far as I could with my amateur musings on the future of Chapin Mill, so I emailed my friend

Jeff Cody. Jeff lives an Indiana Jones kind of life, minus the bullwhips and violence. He is a senior project specialist for the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles and travels the world helping governments preserve their historic buildings and city centers. He has a PhD in historic preservation from Cornell, speaks fluent Mandarin as well as several other languages, and specializes in the architectural history of Asia. In short, he was the perfect person to ask the following question: 'What's more important in the long run for preserving a building: the building material, the architecture design, or the people charged with its care?'

This was a question that evidently interested Jeff because he replied with a detailed, thorough response. He began by stating the obvious: that all building materials are ephemeral. 'Most architects would probably not hesitate in saying that stone usually lasts longer than wood ... however, most would also probably say that the architecture plays an important role. For example, if an architect leaves wooden elements too exposed to moisture, then those ele-

ments will deteriorate faster...’ He then quoted at length from the Nara Document on Authenticity, which was drafted in 1994 by 45 experts in historic preservation from 28 countries. This is a seminal document in Jeff’s field that sets forth basic principles of respect for architectural heritage including the importance of evaluating heritage properties within the cultural contexts to which they belong.

As Japanese temples are largely built of wood, and Upstate New York has a strong tradition of wood frame Arts and Crafts architecture, the style of Chapin Mill, as Jeff put it, ‘fits gently and appropriately within its cultural context.’ The Nara Document also points out that design and materials are not the only criteria on which to judge a building; one must also consider ‘use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors.’ Jeff continued, ‘So what does all this suggest, especially regarding Chapin Mill?’

(1) Chapin Mill seems to take inspiration—in its wooden nature and in the way that the wood conveys a connection to Zen and to Japan—from age-old traditions which take on new life in both the main Rochester Zen Center and its offshoot, the retreat. Some of the most significant wooden structures in Japan—many on the World Heritage List (such as Todai-ji in Nara, Ryoan-ji in Kyoto, the Shinto shrine in Ise, the Itsukushima shrine on Miyajima Island, the Amida Hall at Byodo-in south of Kyoto, etc.)—contain very little *original* wood fabric at their majestic sites. However, that doesn’t diminish their significance or appeal. In fact, I’d hazard a guess that most visitors have no idea that that’s the case. At all the sites I’ve just mentioned (which I’ve been exceedingly privileged to have experienced firsthand) there is phenomenal care in monitoring the condition of the wood and replacing members/elements when necessary. However, it

is done using traditional tools, methods, time and care. Chapin Mill, true to this tradition, should have a maintenance plan, with consistent monitoring, so that the Center can be ‘rejuvenated’ with appropriate materials when necessary.

(2) Ideally, in its physical manifestation, Chapin Mill should be respecting the roots of its inspiration (Zen from Japan, but of course from China originally) but should not be handcuffed by universal criteria associated with temporal longevity. Instead, I would argue for Chapin Mill’s significance as a place where serenity, contemplation and balance are the values that override the limited life span of any materials. The building is a shell encasing spaces where these crucial values find life and meaning for those individuals who choose to go there. Take inspiration from Japan and, if you do, then Chapin Mill will be true to its calling.



Recently my husband and I visited Borobudur in Central Java, a UNESCO World Heritage site that is often described as the largest Buddhist temple complex in the world. Borobudur was built between 750 and 842 A.D. and, yes, it is made of stone. It was subsequently abandoned in the 14th century as Buddhism declined and the majority of Javanese converted to Islam. Rediscovered in the 19th century, the complex was fully restored in the 1970s by the Indonesian government and UNESCO.

As we walked around the complex marveling at the 2,672 relief panels illustrating the story of the Buddha’s life it was hard not to notice that some of the more than 500 Buddha figures at the site were missing their heads, which no doubt currently reside in the collections of some of the world’s major museums. Others had visible signs of repair where their heads had been restored. Curiously, these figures were even

more powerful for their losses: the loss of a head, the loss of perfection. The headless Buddhas sat quietly, void contemplating Void. Those with their heads restored served as witnesses to the energy, the dedication, the persistence of those who cared enough about this site to track their heads down and painstakingly match them back up with their bodies. Who were these unsung heroes? And who were the workers dotted throughout the complex, scaling walls and perched in niches, carefully sweeping away the ash from the recent eruption of Mount Merapi, a nearby volcano? Were they paid professionals or volunteers? We never found out, but what I do know is *this* is what it takes to make a temple last more than 1,400 years.

Whether a structure is wood or stone, whether it has to withstand fire, hurricanes, volcanoes, or floods, attention means attention means attention. What Chapin Mill can’t withstand is neglect. Having built this wonderful facility, we need to turn our attention now to making sure that it endures in a form that makes sense for whomever inherits it. As my friend Jeff so poignantly puts it, ‘The building is a shell encasing spaces where these crucial values find life and meaning for those individuals who choose to go there.’ We have already demonstrated how highly we value Zen practice by building Chapin Mill. Now we need to place equal emphasis on maintaining what we have built.

In our RZC development committee meetings we have often moaned about the difficulty

of raising money through planned giving (hey, even though we’re Buddhists it’s still hard to think about death) and for our operating fund, which supports capital projects. As one committee member put it, ‘maintaining our facilities has a quasi-janitorial ring, which is nowhere as glamorous as building a retreat center.’ And yet that’s what we need to do now: the un-sexy janitorial stuff. That’s where we need to put our attention. Before enlightenment: chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment: chop wood, carry water. The commitment continues.

Our dedication, our constancy of attention to what we have built is an acknowledgement of impermanence: we are impermanent and so is the brand-spanking-new shininess of Chapin Mill. Inevitably shingles will fall, roofs will leak, carpets will need to be replaced. (In fact, if you ask Wayman, he will point out that parts of the building are already ten years old and in need of repair.) So as we celebrate our fantastic accomplishment in building Chapin Mill, let’s keep the future in mind. We may not be able to match the longevity of Borobudur, but gosh darn it, we can try.

Chris Pulleyn is a psychotherapist in Rochester whose home, built in 1906, requires continuous attention. As chair of the Center’s development committee, she will be forever grateful to all the donors and volunteers who helped make the Chapin Mill Retreat Center a reality.

Countless Good Deeds.

If you’re thinking about financial planning, estate planning, or both, please remember that there are myriad ways you can help the Rochester Zen Center through planned giving. The right kind of plan can help you reduce your taxes significantly while providing for a larger, longer-lasting gift to the Zen Center. Because there is a wide array of bequests, annuities, trusts, and other financial vehicles to consider, you’ll want to work with your financial advisor to decide what’s best for you. Long-time Zen Center member David Kernan, an attorney who concentrates his practice in tax law, has generously offered to help point you in the right direction at no charge. For more information about planned giving and David’s offer, please contact the Center’s receptionist.

Twelve Years, Three Phases, One Contractor: Joe Condidorio

Joe Condidorio is the owner of Whitney East, Inc., the general contracting firm that oversaw the construction of Chapin Mill Retreat Center. We asked him to reflect on his experience coordinating the three phases of construction.

Whitney East, Inc. is truly a general contracting firm in that we have built many different types of projects, including water filtration plants, historical restoration, fire houses and new multi-million dollar residences. Our involvement with the Chapin Mill project began by being the successful bidder on Phase One. It is hard to believe it was twelve years ago! Phase One had some challenges in the beginning, with all the parties getting to know each other, along with dealing with many different personalities and ideas. As I look back, I feel the project was very successful because all parties had the same goal of creating a building that everybody involved could be proud of. Usually it is the contractor and the subcontractors that share this goal, but because of the participation of the Zen Center's dedicated volunteers, this goal was felt by all those involved.

What were the challenges and rewards of working on the construction of Chapin Mill?

Each phase had different challenges to overcome and different rewards at completion. The Phase One earthwork was challenging because of the soil conditions and knowing that the basement would have to be comfortable because it included sleeping rooms and it would be used as a temporary zendo. When all was complete, I was pleasantly surprised at how things worked out.

Phase Two challenges were the complexity of the zendo roof system, along with phasing the project so the courtyard access was not blocked by the east wing. The soil challenges were there again but we knew how to deal with them from our experience of working on Phase One. There was a lot of excitement about Phase Two because of the amount of work that went into creating the new zendo. I was glad that the leadership recognized the need to balance the amount of work to be completed by the volunteers versus the contractors. (We all need our backs as we get older and drywall is a young man's work.)

By Phase Three, we were on autopilot. We had enough experience with the other phases that this phase went smoothly. I was glad to see that there were changes made to render the building a little bit greener. I thought the change that was made in the insulation system was definitely a move in the right direction. Also, having Wayman full-time on the construction site made both Phase Two and Three easier.

Did the experience of building Chapin Mill Retreat Center enrich you personally?

From the start of Phase One until the completion of Phase Three, I have taken away many great experiences, having met a lot of wonderful people, and I have grown as a managing owner of my construction business through my interactions with all the key people and volunteers. Like all successful relationships, it takes understanding people to realize that things are not always perfect. If you work together you can solve the problems and maintain a friendly relationship. I think we achieved this.



Zendo construction during Phase Two.

Renter Perspectives

We invited representatives from two groups that rent Chapin Mill Retreat Center to tell us about their experience.

Randy Baker

Spring Rain Sangha was founded about 12 years ago by Philip Starkman. About 5 years ago, Philip asked Jim Bedard to join him in the teaching activities, and later Philip and Jim asked me to join in as well. Our main modes of practice are Vipassana and Metta (usually translated as ‘lovingkindness’), as derived from the Theravada tradition of Buddhism. I was a member of the RZC for many years, and remain a Friend of the Center. I was on staff in Rochester from 1978–1989.

We currently run retreats dedicated to the two types of practice mentioned above. Eight-day retreats are dedicated to Vipassana, and four-day retreats to Metta. For a number of years we used various retreat centers here in Canada; however, once Chapin Mill was available, we decided to check it out. In spite of the relatively minor hassle of having to cross the border to get there, it’s been well worth it. The natural setting—the grounds and the care with which they’re kept up—provides an incomparable container for Dharma practice. And the intelligence, attention, and care with which the retreat facility itself was created instill it with a profound resonance and grounded energy. It has often been said that at the Center in Rochester (and in other ‘seasoned’ practice places), one feels as though the walls themselves have absorbed, and now radiate, the silent power of deep practice. At Chapin Mill, it seems those qualities were present from the get-go, and the excellent support provided by the hardworking RZC staff on-site is very inspiring.

If Ralph were alive today, what would you say to him about his gift of Chapin Mill?

I recently re-read a note from Bodhin-roshi addressed to those who had contributed to the Chapin Mill building project. Though his specific words escape me, the spirit of what he said perfectly captures what I, or we, would say to Ralph: To have so freely given the land (and so much other support, no doubt) upon which a retreat center has been built is an inconceivable and incalculable benefit for the present and for many future generations. The fact that it is such a wonderful property only increases the benefit. So many beings have been and will be aided by this gift, in ways both direct and indirect. Thank you so much, Ralph!

*‘an incomparable container
for Dharma practice’*



Mick Krasner

Part of my work over the past dozen years has involved teaching a mindfulness-based stress reduction program, which is based on the model that Jon Kabat-Zinn developed at the University of Massachusetts Medical School about 30 years ago. I started the program with patients in my own practice, and it has grown to include a variety of different groups, including healthcare professionals and the general public. The program is usually an 6 or 8 week session with 2 to 3 hour classes held each week in which we practice a meditative period and then discuss, debrief, and share what’s going on for people. In addition to the weekly classes, the course includes an all-day silent retreat when we integrate a lot of the practices we’ve been working on and step out of the speaking and conversation way of learning. A couple of research studies I’ve

been working on have examined stress reduction intervention. One is an intervention that we completed involving elderly folks, examining how the immune system and brain function may change when patients engage in contemplative practices. My current research project involves patients with psoriasis as a model of stress-related illness. We are looking very closely at the pathological level of the skin and the effects of contemplative practice on what’s happening at the level of the cells. We’re really connecting mind and body in a very big way through this kind of work.

I feel very lucky to be able to rent Chapin Mill Retreat Center for our silent retreats. The aesthetics are just perfect in that there is a balance between the natural setting and human-made architecture. People feel comfortable there and their comfort facilitates their turning inward to their own contemplative experience. For some of the participants, the Buddhist iconography, statuary, and art work in the building serve as an object of inquiry and attention—something they can react to and look deeply into as part of their practice. We use everything that’s available at Chapin Mill—and there’s so much available in that it’s beautiful, restful, peaceful, very much designed to promote contemplative practice, but also to allow people to reflect on their surroundings and consider what their reactions to their surroundings have to do with their own self awareness.

The Zen Center staff members who support the retreat days are helpful and make the retreat center feel like our home for that one day—so much so that my colleagues and I decided to hold two more lengthier retreats lasting three days each. Both of these involved medical educators from around the world who came to Chapin Mill to study the applications of mindfulness-based stress reduction to medical educa-

*‘the aesthetics are
just perfect’*

tion, professionalism, and faculty development. This has been really exciting work and we’re planning on two more of these longer retreats, one in fall 2011 and the other in 2012.

There’s always a course evaluation at the conclusion of the stress-reduction program, and I ask the participants questions that lead to substantive narrative answers rather than just a numerical rating. I ask them about the setting for the retreat and the response is almost universal in terms of just how touched they were by the experience of doing a retreat at Chapin Mill, how the place itself fits with the work we’re doing together. I have rented a few other places but Chapin Mill is always my first choice—and I must say I do get disappointed when it’s not available! At the other places I’ve rented, I’ve had to do a lot of adjustments to allow the retreat day to work the way I’d like it to, whereas Chapin Mill is built just for this purpose. It makes everything go so smoothly.

If Ralph were alive today, what would you say to him about his gift of Chapin Mill?

I would share my gratitude for his generosity in giving his beautiful home and property to the Rochester Zen Center for the purpose of building a retreat center. It just strikes me as such a mystery how these things play out—the mystery of Ralph’s connection to Roshi Kapleau, Roshi Kapleau’s connection to the RZC, and then what has unfolded since. And now Chapin Mill has become a center not only for the RZC and all its connections worldwide, but for the work I’m doing that in a significant way connects meditation practice to healthcare and medical education—not just in Rochester and New York state, but throughout the country and beyond its borders.

Sangha Reflections

The Seamless Monument

The country land. From the time I first came to the Center in the early 1970s, there had always been the search for ‘the country land.’ This was one of Roshi Kapleau’s dreams. It was quite a search: Honeoye Falls, Colorado, Santa Fe. Each location seemed promising for a time, none ever quite working out. In the end, through the incredible kindness and generosity of Ralph Chapin and the tireless work and contributions of hundreds of others, Chapin Mill has come into being.

After lunch at sesshin, I often walk over the little wooden bridge, up the gentle rise, and take a left, hands palm-to-palm, down the path to Roshi’s grave. A millstone. How appropriate. Strong. Simple. Looking out over the temple complex—flowers in spring, heat of summer, glorious colors of autumn, white blanket of winter. The words come quietly, ‘It’s so beautiful here today, Roshi ... thank you.’ Leaving, bowing to this seamless monument.

Back into the zendo for the afternoon sitting. How do we most deeply express our gratitude to Roshi Kapleau and all of our teachers, past and present? ‘From the very beginning, all beings are Buddha.’ Realize this. Live this.

—Philip Swanson

Philip lives in Gloucester, MA. He joined the Zen Center in 1972.



A New Setting for Practice

During the first stages of the design process of Chapin Mill there was an argument about squeaky floors in the zendo. As you all know, at Arnold Park the floors are squeaky includ-

ing the zendo. On one side there was the proposal to have floors as quiet as possible. On the other hand, the proposal was a floor built to be squeaky. The argument for squeaky floors was that it helped practitioners to hear the monitors walk around and know where they were by hearing the different sounds of the moving boards of the floor. Proponents of the quiet floors pointed out that following the steps of the monitors was not part of the practice. Noiseless floors also allow participants that had to exit the zendo to do so without disturbing others. Yet, we were accustomed to the pattern of squeaky so it was difficult to imagine sitting in a quiet zendo. What did we get in the end? A wooden non-squeaky floor where you can still hear the steps.

Today the argument may seem irrelevant but it did not seem so during those first meetings of the building committee. The squeaky floor debate points out the effort to define what was genuine practice and what was a learned pattern built into the practice by the building we were using. Any changes and proposals to change these building patterns would create new patterns that would then become part of the practice. Some sesshin participants might get the idea that the patterns are an integral part of Zen and not just the result of how this particular building works.

Having attended sesshin in different places and buildings, combined with my training as an architect made me aware of how every little design decision would alter a sesshin participant’s perceptions of what was practice. Let me give you another example: the size of bedrooms and the number of people sleeping in each room. Did the crowded feeling we had in Arnold Park enhance our practice or was it even desirable? Did larger rooms give an added sense of spaciousness that would help practice? Were we overreacting to the closeness we felt at Arnold Park? Would the added space strengthen the

ego by giving it the chance of calling this extra space My Space? Our model from Japan didn’t help because the monks actually live in the zendo and there are no bedrooms for sesshin.

Many hours were spent arguing with a clear sense of direction but not how to achieve a specific vision. An added difficulty of the decision process was working with two dimensional drawings. Very few people, even among architects, can take a plan and an elevation and convert it into a three dimensional image of how the space will look, feel, and work. At the end we had only intuitions, no certainties of how a new building would enlighten practice.

Working with uncertain results made the whole process an ideal setting for practice. Opening for new possibilities and taking chances which are now built deepened our collective understanding of what practice is. Now that this final stage is finished, an open mind to new patterns in response to the building will deepen the practice of all of us, the whole Sangha. After all, no Sangha, no Chapin Mill.

—Sensei Gerardo Gally

Sensei Gerardo Gally teaches at Casa Zen, Mexico.



To Get to Dokusan

To get to dokusan at Chapin Mill, run from your seat to the zendo door, make a hard left, and then run pell-mell straight to Roshi seated in the dokusan room. If you are first, as I was once in the April sesshin this past spring, run a clear straight shot to the student mat. It is like flying. I kid you not. If you are not first, run part way down the hallway, dodge quickly to the right and take a seat in the dokusan waiting line. When the bell calls, answer it and rise from the line, dodge the out-going student, and flip the doors closed as you enter the room.

This is how dokusan was settled, architecturally, after a decade of peripatetic existence

at Chapin Mill. The space, completed in the final building phase, is not make-shift. It was designed specifically for the running, the waiting, and the bells that characterize dokusan. The route and the waiting line are straight lines. The waiting line, secluded from the hallway by a wall, is always waiting. The first seat is always ready for the bell. Large windows bring the outside environment to the waiting line. The whole set-up magnificently supports practice.

I did not instantly appreciate the Retreat Center at Chapin Mill. I helped build it. I gave money to support it. However, this participation did not imbue my affection when we initially located sesshin there. At my first Chapin Mill sesshin, held in the basement of the first phase of construction, I longed for Arnold Park. My knees missed the tan. I missed the Japanese bath. The temporary basement zendo lacked focus. The red EXIT lights were distracting. The bathrooms felt institutional. 7 Arnold Park may have been cramped, but this new place felt monotonous and tedious. I would lose track of my bedroom and bath, because the two narrow floors looked the same. And on and on went my critical mind. I was homesick for Arnold Park.

I have recovered from my homesickness. Chapin Mill, the property as a whole and the Retreat Center specifically, feels like home now. We’ve had weddings and a burial there, medical emergencies, fires, and really good food. The ground cover looks like it has been there a long time. We’ve held countless sesshins.

As we completed each building phase, the Retreat Center revealed a little more potential. We could use the inner courtyard when we finished the second phase. Inner courtyards are a fixture of monasteries. I had no idea how functional they are until I used it in sesshin. I was stunned to feel how exquisitely it met my need to be outside in late sesshin, when the body is physically fragile. The wood plank floor makes kinhin effortless. How had we lived without it?

The end of the second construction phase also gave us the final footprint of the Retreat Center. It is a square, not the single corridor we had after the first building phase. The zendo doors are

in the center of the back of the square, which makes doors to the zendo work like a funnel. Entering the zendo gathers us like a funnel, and it gathers our energy. Arnold Park can't do this, with the zendo off to the side of the property. Most monasteries have a square footprint. And now I understand why, from my own experience. I can feel how monastic architecture supports practice.

At the Work Retreat this year, Eryl asked me to weed the flower bed along the stone wall near the Mill House. A short-hand conversation ensued between us. I already knew where the tools were located. I knew what defined the Zen Center standard of weeding, as that is an ambiguous activity. I knew exactly which bed she meant—I had planted tulip bulbs there a few years ago. In the early years of the Work Retreat, such a conversation as Eryl and I had would have taken twenty minutes and require minute detailed explanation. Now, we dispatched with it in about three minutes, to both our satisfaction. The property is an arena where words and decisions are necessary. There is a time for zazen, and there is a time to discuss weeding. And there is time to just weed! I find it invigorating and deeply satisfying to practice at Chapin Mill and to participate in its upkeep. Thank you, Ralph!

—Brenda Reeb

Brenda works as a librarian in Rochester and she is one of the editors of Zen Bow. She has been a member since 1987.



In the Beginning

Although I was not involved with the actual building of the Chapin Mill Retreat Center, I do have memories of its inception, groundbreaking, and certainly its meditation retreats. Initially, is an image from our first dedication ceremony: Roshi Kapleau and Bodhin-sensei were stand-

ing along with Ralph Chapin at the forefront as many of us laid our stones in the side yard of the Mill House, confirming the buzz about Ralph Chapin giving us his property. Wonder all around at the prospect of finally seeing the Rochester Zen Center's 'country place' decided. This, after several abandoned attempts in the West. Here, right in New York, the dream comes true!

Over the years, fundraisers, funerals, foundations, and gardens transpired. Even before the open, airy zendo existed, sesshin (the glue that holds us all together and brings us back time and again) began as soon as there was a floor upon which to sit. And so the legacy continued.

I have witnessed in wonder the evolution of Chapin Mill. In earlier times, my friend David and I waded the stream for days, clearing debris, weeds, and fallen trees. Soaked, sweating, and immersed in potential, we dreamed, imagined, and hauled. Even now I stand on the bridge imagining the various possibilities of the stream. But the stream, like all life, changes from year to year of its own accord.

During sesshin, I often walk the property. I have grown quite close to several of the trees along the further boundaries of the land. Though there are residences and the Center itself, the land remains wild, feels ancient and strong. These qualities influence sesshin, and the spaciousness of the new zendo works paradoxically in concert with the density of the natural surroundings.

I guess the old man knew what was up with having a country place! Ralph, too, when buying the land in the first place. Both men provided us with a deeply established, tangible foundation for Buddhism in the West and a home for Zen in America.

—Gretchen Targee

Gretchen is a resident of Rochester. She is an artist and works at the Little Theatre.



The Piercing Black Eyes of a Devil

In late spring of 1997, Jeff Scott and I were performing land-surveying work at Chapin Mill's upper field. The upper field is located behind the retreat center beyond the tree line at the top of the hill and is not visible from the building. It's a large field, and I was stationed over a survey control point with an electronic instrument along the northerly edge. Jeff was struggling to accurately position a tripod with reflector over another control point, more than 400 feet southeast of me. As I was waiting, a fox appeared out from the underbrush to my southwest, also at least 400 feet from me. The three of us formed a perfect equilateral triangle. I peered through the telescope of my instrument at the fox who had a freshly killed full-grown groundhog tightly gripped in his jaws. The fox hadn't noticed me, but had immediately seen Jeff when he popped out of the heavy brush. The fox stopped dead in his tracks. I didn't dare make a sound or hasty move lest I scare off the fox. Jeff, who was still struggling with the tripod, was completely unaware of the drama. It was clear that Jeff was situated in the fox's presumptive path. The fox wasn't the least intimidated by Jeff's presence, but rather was coldly gauging him as a potential adversary and sizing him up. Having the advantage of being able to view the fox magnified 23x, I momentarily shuddered as I looked into his face and saw the *piercing black eyes of a devil!* After a solid minute, the fox decided the better of it, and with a turn of his head, disappeared back into the underbrush.

—Peter Greulich

Peter is a long time Center member who when not being stared down by wild foxes, occasionally stares at the wall.



CHAPIN MILL POND III.

*Autumn leaves overlap
on the surface of the pond.*

*Minnows gather
beneath an empty boat.*

*Their world is
apparently seamless
while I am like that cosmonaut
in Tarkovsky's film
who returns to his father's house
and to the stillness
of a sleeping lake.*

*A momentary lapse
of concentration
(the slightest breeze will do)
and he knows that he will lose
the vine-covered pillars
the cracked steps
the golden light.*

*He knows that he will find himself
back in the depths of space.*

—RICHARD VON STURMER

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Hundreds of people participated in the planning, construction, and funding of the Chapin Mill Retreat Center over the past 15 years. The efforts of all of these people are woven into the corners and spaces of the buildings and grounds. Two core committees provided leadership and worked tirelessly through all of the planning and construction phases:

*Fundraising
Committee*

Cecily Fuhr
Lou Anne Jaeger
Scott Jennings
Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede
Victoria Korth
Lenore Kotranza
Donna Kowal
Katie McDonald
Chris Pulleyn
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Sensei Lawson Sachter
Alan Temple
Sensei Amala Wrightson

Zen Bow

NUMBER 4 · 2011

Sesshin

Sesshin is a core component of Zen training. In *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Roshi Philip Kapleau describes the purpose of sesshin as, ‘... to enable one to collect and unify one’s normally scattered mind in order to focus it like a powerful telescope inward in order to discover one’s true Self-nature.’ For those who have participated in sesshin, it can be one of the most indescribable experiences. One sesshin can forge a practice. Decades of regular sesshin can deepen and renew one’s practice continually.

Readers are invited to submit articles or images on the theme of ‘Sesshin’ to zenbow@rzc.org or mail to the Rochester Zen Center. Deadline: October 31, 2011.