

*Irreverent Dreamers:*

*The Legacy of Tom and Jane  
Dustin*

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## *Preface*

An archive was created for this project that was carried to and from the ACRES Land Trust office and my house – only a half-mile apart. The archive consisted of a notebook, a stack of sticky notes, and file folders. It served as a transect of the Dustins’ work – a glimpse of environmental journalism; photos, maps, slides, Tom and Jane’s letters; publications; and legislative advocacy and lobbying. And, it helped to see the big picture of the Dustins’ work and to select their five most significant achievements – or failures – for the body of the project.

To tackle the immense collection of crumpled documents that had the potential to be useful for the project, a research method was created with help from an external environmental expert, Karen Griggs, a long time friend of Jane and Tom’s. First, a rough sort guided initial research questions mainly concerning Tom Dustin. Eventually, the answers to these questions were found sprawled across various reports, letters, notes, essays, and articles.

In searching for the answers to the research questions, boxes of files were scanned and material was deemed helpful or unhelpful. Finally, personal interviews were held with Karen Griggs, Mary Gustafson, and James Barrett III.

## *Introduction*

Northern Allen County residents Tom and Jane Dustin were very well known as two of the best environmental advocates in northeast Indiana. They experienced huge successes and failures throughout their environmental endeavors, including the fight for the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, Fox Island County Park, Big Walnut Creek, the Maumee River, and ACRES, Inc. But it was their strategy that should be inscribed in the history books. Furthermore, both Dustins possessed a “personal magnetism” (Griggs, 5 Jan.) that drew people toward one unified goal.

The Dustins were articulate, savvy, and tenacious people. They were initially not the most experienced environmental advocates but they had passion and determination. These two characteristics drove them to a level of advocacy that few people have reached. They would often organize an eclectic group of people to get a job done. Once, Tom collaborated with the local railroad industry to impede a Wabash River barge canal. They had an influence on young people because the way they worked was exciting as they shared their fabulous connections and called spontaneous meetings. Due to their grassroots organizing, public relations, and charisma, Tom and Jane were two of Indiana’s most ardent environmentalists, and the state will be forever indebted to their lasting legacy.

If they had not been so humble, they would have made a motto for themselves: “Just make it up and get it done;” but they never told a lie, and they didn’t win every environmental battle they fought. It was their passion and camaraderie with others that resulted in the unforgettable work they accomplished. Tom and Jane never planned for

the work they did; rather, their lives were timed to coincide with the “heyday of the environmental movement” (Neimark).

In the late 1950s, the Dustins settled into a simple life on 1802 Chapman Road, Huntertown, Indiana. It was a life of migratory bird sightings and the occasional, but magical, hooting of the great-horned owl somewhere hidden below in Cedar Canyon. Some would say fate brought Tom and Jane to Huntertown, or perhaps it was merely accidental that the young couple ran out of money in Elkhart, Indiana, in 1951 where Tom was interviewed for a job opening. Either way, they took root in Indiana when Tom was offered the job. So, Jane enrolled in classes to complete her agriculture degree from Iowa State. After a series of short-lived jobs, Tom was offered the position of business manager for the Fort Wayne Philharmonic. His love for classical music and his background in writing were a perfect match for the position.

Eventually he began his own business in 1953 called Engineering Writers which created brochures, catalogues, and publicity releases for technical industrial products. In the 1970s, the Dustins moved to their home in the woods which gave them more time for environmental work and handling the Engineering Writers business. Tom’s photography skills aided his business and he used his own dark room to create his products. They did not use computers, but were very supportive of early fax technology and satellite cell phones. From then on, he and Jane, who handled the billings, were self-employed (Higgs, “Tom” 59). Their paper-cluttered basement served as their office and their backyard served as inspiration.

The Dustin house – now the ACRES Land Trust office – is perched on a ridge high above the twisting and churning Cedar Creek. At the highest point in Allen County, the

low-roofed house and magnificent surrounding hardwood forest and wetlands were ideal for Tom and Jane. The house reflects the Arts and Crafts Movement in architecture and emphasizes traditional craftsmanship and anti-industrialization. Their property provided an expansive outlet to nature for the three Dustin children, and it satisfied Tom's love for rivers. Cedar Creek is one of only three designated state scenic rivers in Indiana (Higgs, "Tom" 47), and the creek offered a means of escape and a tranquil background for Tom and Jane's often chaotic work.

*Sehnsucht* was the name Tom and Jane bestowed upon their seventy-eight acres of land. A German noun, *Sehnsucht* is translated as "yearning" or "longing" – the inexplicable longing from the heart for perhaps a place or an object or a person. In other senses of the word, it could mean a deep nostalgia. C.S Lewis used the concept of *Sehnsucht* in his writings maintaining that it is a universal experience ("Sehnsucht"). Any attempt to describe the effect the parcel of land had on the Dustins would be feeble. Their farm and forest had a strong effect on them, and they felt "longing" for being home and working there. Their land, now called the ACRES Land Trust Jane and Tom Dustin Preserve, has a powerful effect on a hiker. With a rolling pasture on one side and a deep canyon on the other, the long gravel drive to the Dustin home is a path to a different world – secluded, halcyon, and peaceful.

Living in such a setting also provided a template for the unusual childhoods the Dustins' children had. Mary, their daughter, and John and Steven, their sons, were more likely to be taken to a nearby creek than to be driven to friends' houses. One day, Tom surprised his children by bringing home a little fluff ball of an owl that became the children's responsibility for the next few weeks until the owl was strong enough to be

released again. Another day, Jane carted the kids in the back of her beat-up red station wagon to an Allen County creek where they would wade into the murky water to sample for “God knows what” in the stream (Gustafson, Letter).

Mary described her parents: they “taught us to get on our bellies to see the world at our feet. They taught us to look high overhead to see the hawks and to know the owl’s songs” (Gustafson, Letter). Mary called her childhood experiences “extremely important” because they showed how they were placed in the world not to serve themselves but to be part of the bigger picture. While their friends felt as though they *were* the bigger picture, Mary, John, and Steven learned as children that being a part of the world was more important. (Gustafson, Interview).

It must have been easy to feel the power of nature growing up with Jane and Tom. They spent summers in the Bridger Wilderness and the Red Desert in Wyoming – their favorite place in the world – just outside of Grand Teton National Park. The Dustins’ family adventures took them to “magical places” that others didn’t know about. “The things that we knew, a lot of our friends didn’t know,” said Mary. Often, the three children would hear, “Oh my, I really like your parents. I wish I had parents like that.”

Mary considered herself unusual, too, because she loved her parents. Of course, the love was reciprocal but Jane and Tom occasionally were consumed by what their daughter called the “Dustin Effect” (Gustafson, Interview). Apparent to all who worked with the Dustins, their work occasionally acted as an all-consuming force in their lives. Spontaneous meetings, house calls, and public lobbying sometimes threatened the chance of Tom and Jane appearing at their children’s horse shows or school events. “They were sparse in their existence,” said Mary (Gustafson, Interview). Their daughter cites their

“irrepressible mission” and hopes that people will use the “Dustin Effect” and “get cracking” (Gustafson, Letter).

Inevitably, Tom and Jane had their own personal goals which drove them to continue what they began. They were effective environmental advocates because they organized at a grassroots level, they supported their claims with the truth, and they had effervescent personalities that attracted supporters. The environmental endeavors that exemplify the Dustins’ strategy are the fight for the Indiana Dunes, the Big Walnut Creek controversy, the acquisition of Fox Island, the founding of ACRES Land Trust, and the Maumee River widening project.

## *Establishment of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore*

Tom and Jane were at the forefront of the largest environmental undertaking in Indiana history, which was the establishment and protection of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. They were very active members of both prominent organizations involved in the struggle – the Indiana Division of the Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA) and the Save the Dunes Council. Beginning in 1952, the campaign for Indiana’s only national park has persisted to this day and is called the “prototypical environmental battle” (Higgs, “Herb” 186). The Dustins worked closely with Herb and Charlotte Read – Indiana Dunes residents – and used avant-garde tactics to ward off the creation of an “industrial crescent” (Higgs, “Herb” 194) on Lake Michigan’s lower tip. Today, the 14,000 acres of national park stand “as a legacy to the future” (Dustin, *Izaak*) and as a representation of how the Dustins and two determined organizations worked at a local, regional, and national level to “save the birthplace of ecology in North America” (Dustin, “Indiana”).

The Indiana lakeshore first came under state attention in 1821 when John Tipton surveyed the land and naively proclaimed that it would be of no use to the state. As a result, there were no settlers in the wind-swept sand dunes and marshes until fifty years later when John Coulter led the first scientific exploration. Another twenty years and Henry Cowles deemed the lakeshore as the birthplace of ecology (Higgs, “Herb” 188-189). The sparkling water of Lake Michigan reflects the dunes’ ancient biological diversity that ranks just behind the Grand Canyon and the Great Smoky Mountains. It is the “centerpiece” in the “green necklace” that stretches from California to Massachusetts (Dustin, “Indiana”).

It took the first half of the twentieth century to garner national recognition of the lakeshore. At first, there was a lack of political support to secure a park. Tom Taggart, a Democratic senator from Indiana, made the first attempt and proposed a Sand Dunes National Park in 1916. However, once Taggart was out of office, conservationists were hard pressed to find a politician who would step up to be the political face of the plan. In 1923, a state park bill was eventually signed by Indiana governor Warren T. McCray and conservationists took a thirty-year respite. When the propositions of steel and oil companies woke conservationists up, Dorothy Buell responded to the request for a more aggressive campaign for an expanded state park and created the Save the Dunes Council (SDC) (Higgs, “Herb” 190-193).

The SDC, along with the newly involved Indiana Division of the IWLA, strove to preserve the original natural beauty of the region, prevent the construction of a port, and create a park. By 1954, the SDC was alone in its opposition to the port proposal, and it faced politicians, industrialists, and all who viewed the port as beneficial. At this point, the SDC began grassroots organizing: it started public awareness and educated itself (Higgs, “Herb” 194-195). Additionally, the Dustins’ fellow environmental activists Herb and Charlotte Read joined the fight.

Herb had been involved with the Indiana Dunes since his youth, and Charlotte became involved after the establishment of the initial national park (Higgs, “Herb” 183). Like their cohorts the Dustins, the Reads won multiple environmental awards including the 1990 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Hoosier Environmental Council (HEC) and the 1991 Gold Cup Award from the Hoosier Sierra Club (Higgs, “Herb” 200). The Dustins found personal friends and excellent comrades in the Reads. Tom said, “I have

never known more fearless people. Resolute determination, exceptional expertise, the ability to endure combat and to strike two blows for every one received are among their characteristics. If I had to go to war in any major environmental battle, the two people I would want back to back over armies of other worthies would be Herb and Charlotte Read” (Higgs, “Herb” 200). The Reads were instrumental in the SDC, but the person who forever altered the campaign was Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois.

Senator Douglas was called an “interloping carpetbagger” by industrialists in Indiana (Dustin, *Izaak*). He was unceremoniously inducted into the Dunes fight by a frantic phone call to Mrs. Douglas from Dorothy Buell in search of political support (Higgs, “Herb” 195). As a result, Senator Douglas became the public face of the campaign, and the Indiana Ikes – members of the IWLA – renewed their rallying of other politicians. A tour of the Central Dunes – the most biologically diverse area of the park – was conducted for Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, National Park Service Director Conrad Wirth, and other high-ranking officials who backed the efforts for the national park (Higgs, “Herb” 196). With the bill for securing a port on the lakeshore ominously looming, Douglas, the Indiana Ikes, and the SDC took a daring approach to the issue – they became the first groups to challenge the US Army Corps of Engineers.

The ensuing months were some of the finest examples of the way the Dustins and their fellow conservationists worked – diligently and spontaneously. Senator Douglas, Herb Read, Tom Dustin, and engineer/economist George Anderson ventured to Washington, D.C, to face off against the Corps of Engineers. They challenged the cost-benefit analysis the Corps had drawn up in justification for using public funds for the port. Not only had the Corps doubled and, in some cases, even tripled the benefits of the

port, but members of the SDC identified the Corps' mistakes on an overnight train to D.C and forcefully presented them the next day. In the meantime, Douglas took a walk with young President Kennedy and convinced him of the fallacy of the Corps' port proposal. The SDC and Indiana Ikes were successful in preventing the passage of the faulty port bill, but in 1965 a new proposal was introduced to build the port, and it became law. One year later, a "mere ghost" of the original park bill was signed into law (Higgs, "Herb" 196-198).

Much of the most magnificent dunes system was replaced with a deep water port and steel mills (Dustin, *Izaak*), but the SDC and the Ikes didn't give up the fight after the passage of the initial bill (Griggs, 9 Mar.). Fifty-two miles of park shoreline were populated, so the SDC set out to improve the environmental atmosphere for Dunes residents. The council lobbied for clean air and water, with Jane Dustin at the vanguard of the clean-water initiative. She held press conferences and, along with SDC members, encouraged Dunes residents to make personal contracts with the National Park Service that would ensure their residential land would be sold to the SDC after a period of time (Griggs, 9 Mar.). By 1990, the park had reached 14,000 acres – a 1,000 acre leap from its size in 1966 (Higgs, "Herb" 199).

The park's conservationists also kept in touch with the politics of the issue. The SDC persisted in lobbying congressmen, which caused Charlotte Read to not "have a whole lot of admiration for Indiana politicians" (Higgs, "Herb" 200). The SDC and Tom Dustin, in particular, held government officials accountable ("Jane") for their opinions and promises, and, in doing so, they succeeded in convincing the House of Representatives to authorize more land to the growing park (Griggs, 9 Mar.). In addition, the SDC

performed its activism by using foolproof strategies such as becoming familiar with the opposition's political stance, always telling the truth using researched facts, and working with other groups even if they were not always in agreement on other issues (Higgs, "Herb" 201). Tom once said, "The important thing for the conservation and environmental movements in the state is not to focus on the differences but on the common ground. If they do that, they're going to be okay" (Higgs, "Tom" 63).

The economics of the issue also required regional and national cooperation. Since the Indiana Dunes lie at the "crossroads of America," visitors come from everywhere. Contrary to what the U.S. House and Senate believed after breaking a promise to appropriate land purchase funds, the Dunes produced an annual regional cash flow of nearly \$128 million in the 1970s. The Indiana Ikes and Tom Dustin, through political lobbying and environmental journalism, proved that failing to enlarge the "national and global village" of the Dunes would be a mistake on Congress' part. Tom's essay, "Indiana Dunes: Ecological Treasure House, Global Money Magnet – Is Congress Blind to These Twin Values," argued the exact point of its title. Tom pointed out the merit of preserving the Dunes' unique biological diversity; in addition, he mentioned the contribution the Dunes made to the U.S international balance of trade equation (Dustin, "Indiana"). He felt conservationists "needed to do more than protest; they had to argue in the language and context of government agencies that controlled decisions on land use" (Caylor, "environmental"). This stance and the "full partnerships" (Higgs, "Irreplaceable") between Tom and Jane, Herb and Charlotte Read, and the SDC made them pioneers in environmental activism.

Like many of Indiana's environmental fights, the activists' numbers were small while the battles were very important. The campaigns required a time commitment – usually unknown prior to the project – and doggedness in the activist. Charlotte Read said, “If you knew what you were getting into, you'd never do it. If you were told, ‘You've got something you want to save, figure on forty to fifty years,’ you'd say, ‘Forget it, I'm not interested.’ You get hooked on the little victories, and the little defeats, and then pretty soon you find, at least in our case, that it becomes the central part of your life” (Higgs, “Herb” 203). Today, the lakeshore stands as a monument of advocacy – the SDC's and Indiana Ikes' efforts and also the persistent efforts of Tom up until the time of his death in 2004.

One issue Tom fought for regarding clean air and water at the Dunes was the ban on personal watercrafts, jet-skis, or as he and conservationists liked to call them, “thrill-machines.” In the spring of 2002, a ban was placed on personal watercrafts in the national park for a variety of reasons: danger to water users, pollution of water and air from engine fuel and oil, and noise pollution claimed by Tom to be “louder than chain saws or jackhammers.” Despite ninety-seven percent local public support for the ban, along with the IWLA's and SDC's support, Washington bureaucrats including then Secretary of the Interior, Gale Norton, repealed the ban just a few weeks after the passage (Dustin, “Local”). Speaking of the Secretary, Tom said, “Norton makes James Watt [anti-environmental Secretary of the Interior under Reagan] look like St. Francis of Assisi,” and he called her the “axis of evil” (Dustin, Letter to Rodger). However, in a poetic twist, the ban was restored on the anniversary of Earth Day later that month. Tom's disgust at

the repeal, though, demonstrated his commitment to upholding local views and challenging environmentally abusive intrusions such as jet-skis.

The grassroots organization in the case of the Indiana Dunes was the vital step toward success. The Dustins, the SDC, and the IWLA devoted decades to the Dunes. They not only listened to local views but they embodied the views and used them to present evidence in support of a claim. The *New York Times* summarized the significance of the Dunes in 1963 when it wrote, “If the remarkable scenic, scientific, and recreational resources of the Indiana Dunes are preserved for public use, millions of citizens in the crowded industrial areas of northern Illinois and Indiana will be particularly benefited and the whole nation will be grateful” (Higgs, “Herb” 187). Thanks to local activism and love for the region, the Dustins’ work to protect the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore is a legacy for all environmental battles and a display of “passionate, controversial, American-style advocacy” (Higgs, “Irreplaceable”).

## *The Big Walnut Creek Controversy\**

*“Any science may be linked to a river. It has its obscure and unpretentious beginning; its quiet stretches as well as its rapids; its periods of drought as well as of fullness. It gathers momentum with the work of many investigators and as it is fed by other streams of thought; it is deepened and broadened by the concepts and generalizations that are gradually evolved.”*

*~ Professor Carl P. Swanson, Johns Hopkins  
biologist*

Jane Dustin’s letters revealed that as the morning or evening sun illuminated the Cedar Creek valley floor, she would often sit on her wrap-around deck and write about the secluded and majestic beauty of “her” creek. Her scrawling slanted handwriting described Tom, who watched for soaring Great Blue Herons, and the occasional fox that was spotted slinking into the valley. The Dustins’ love for rivers transcended the location of their home and the environmental battles they led. Jane’s most impressive contribution to Indiana environmentalism was her work for clean water. And Tom once said, “This instinct that I have, if you will, for maintaining rivers was simply a driving force in my life” (Higgs, “Tom” 47). He credits the struggle over Big Walnut Creek, a tributary of the Wabash River, as one of his shining moments as an activist (Higgs, “Tom” 43).

Many consider the Wabash River as Indiana’s crown jewel – plunging south to meet the Ohio River, and ultimately, joining forces with the Mississippi. The Wabash supports dozens of tributaries which are all part of the state’s natural, scenic, and recreational rivers system (Dustin, *Izaak*). The river has been a force of nature – literally and figuratively – as it formed the Wabash Valley draining 33,000 square miles (Wabash) and as it fought brutal plans for a barge canal proposed by the U.S Army Corps of Engineers. From 1920 to 1970, the Wabash endured industrial and agricultural exploitation, and much of the great deciduous hardwood forest vanished as settlers built communities

\*Big Walnut Creek is a southwest Indiana stream with ecologically unique natural areas.

(Wabash). Luckily, the river had the full-time support of the IWLA in its battles with the Corps of Engineers (Dustin, *Izaak*).

Big Walnut Creek is one of only a few Wabash tributaries that hosts remnants of the original forests. Its valley houses some of the largest eastern hemlock trees in Indiana (Dustin, *Izaak*) and its unique habitat is more suited for a northern climate than thirty-five miles west of Indianapolis (Higgs, “Tom” 47-48). In the mid-1960s, after hearing about the Corps’ plan to build a dam and turn Big Walnut Creek Valley into a reservoir as part of a larger project to make the Wabash into a barge canal, Tom brought a group of fellow conservationists down to the Valley to show off the biological beauty. Karen Griggs remembered camping on a very hot day with Tom, and later, taking a trip to the neighboring town of Greencastle to organize a local group of opponents of the Corps’ plan (Griggs, 9 Mar.). From then on, Tom and the IWLA made it their goal to save the Valley and acquire the area as a protected site (Higgs, “Tom” 49).

Big Walnut Creek Valley was privately owned, and most of the owners were opposed to the dam planned for the valley (Higgs, “Tom” 49); however, similar to the situation at the Indiana Dunes, the Corps paid no attention to local views. Therefore, Tom became an excellent public advocate as he worked tirelessly to shine political attention on the creek and explain its biological significance. He argued that the flooding of eight hundred to a thousand acres of the valley would not only ruin the unusual flora, but would also change the whole microclimate of the region (Higgs, “Tom” 48).

Thanks to the dunes fight in which Tom had established impressive media contacts, he soon catapulted the Big Walnut Creek issue into the national spotlight. When an editorial of his was published in the local newspaper, it would also be published in the

*Indianapolis Star* within days. Soon, the issue was being covered in the *New York Times*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and *Reader's Digest* (Higgs, "Tom" 50). Tom's position as editor of the Indiana Ikes' newspaper, the *Hoosier Waltonian*, also helped him in his advocacy. Furthermore, Tom had a knack for persuasion. The Dustins' friend, Paul McAfee, said, "He had such a logical and impassioned way of presenting it, people listened" (Kilbane, "Nature"). Tom's daughter, Mary, said, "I so envy my father. You just couldn't argue with dad," (Gustafson, Interview). Even though Tom gained a lot of support and publicity through his publications, the Corps continued drafting its economic justification for the dam proposal.

In order to justify the project, just as it had to do for the port proposal at the Indiana Dunes, the Corps listed three reasons for damming the valley: the dam would keep control over floods for the town of Greencastle; it would provide a substantial water supply; and it would offer recreational benefits (Higgs, "Tom" 50). Within weeks, the IWLA disproved the effectiveness of all three reasons and amiably proposed an alternate solution which the Corps promptly rejected in a show of its usual "bureaucratic rigidity" (Higgs, "Tom" 51).

By this time, Tom and the conservationists, as a result of their public lobbying, were unexpectedly allied with the railroad industries in Louisville and Nashville and with local farmers. The railroads opposed the idea of the Wabash River as a barge canal because it would pose as a competitor of the trains system. Farmers would lose land as a consequence of the barge canal, so they, too, sided with the Corps' opponents (Higgs, "Tom" 56-57). Tom and the IWLA defended their "unholy alliances" with the thought: "Allies don't need to agree to everything; if they can agree on one cause, that's enough

for a partnership.” They also learned not to shun people attracted to an issue for the sole purpose of protecting their property. This type of person is called a NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard), but Tom respected their support. He said, “Don’t worry about being a NIMBY. Your back yard is a lot bigger than you think it is,” (Caylor, “environmental”).

With an optimistic attitude and strong partnerships, it was no wonder the tide began to turn in the direction of the conservationists. The Indiana Academy of Science put its support behind the preservation of Big Walnut Creek, the U.S Department of the Interior declared the valley “worthy of designation as a national natural landmark,” and the Nature Conservancy announced plans to buy 127 acres of the valley. On top of this, the Corps’ economic justifications were found to be faulty, and the U.S Senate Public Works Committee refused approval of the project funding. According to Tom, the fight for funding was the “only one that mattered.” Thus the IWLA won the battle for Big Walnut Creek (Higgs, “Tom” 51-52).

After the success of saving Big Walnut Creek’s natural splendors, the IWLA and Tom caught wind of the Corps’ grander scheme for the Wabash River. To Tom, the plan for a “450-mile long transbasin barge canal to transport bulk commodities” was absurd, and he proclaimed his opinion in the months following the Big Walnut Creek battle. He proved the plan wouldn’t work because it would be too difficult to make a long enough navigation season in order for the canal to be worth the taxpayers’ dollars designated for the project (Higgs, “Tom” 53). Once again, Tom’s profession in public relations helped save an ecologically valuable portion of Indiana’s environment.

Public relations skill was not the only characteristic of Tom that made his name “synonymous with environmentalism in Indiana” (Higgs, “Tom” 43). Often, he and Jane

extemporaneously defended natural areas because of legal, monetary, or time constraints. They frequently had time constraints and if they didn't take action at the time they did, it would have been too late to save this creek, or that sand dune. This aspect of their work was true in nearly all of their battles. Because of this, they made their voices loud and clear. Tom and Jane – the latter, even more so – were tenacious in their opinions. Ed Rousseau, Allen County Commissioner and a common opponent of the Dustins, said, “You couldn't ignore them” (Kilbane, “Nature”).

The couple made a “formidable team” which caused many people to have a “love-hate relationship” with them (Gray). On one hand, their bold style of getting a point across was inspiring, and they gained many fellow activists. On the other hand, it was an undeniable risk facing the Dustins in any environmental battle. Even if the side with the most money won (typically, not the conservationists), the Dustins usually presented the most passionate front; for example, Jane “cared about preserving natural blessings before she could see the problem from her front porch” (Caylor, “One Less”). The Dustin team was, like the Wabash River, “an entire entity unto itself” (“Wabash”).

## *Fox Island Acquisition*

Most environmental endeavors seem to be perpetrated solely for the protection of ecologically significant areas; however, some natural areas are taken under the wings of dedicated conservationists because they have historical significance worth preserving. This is the case with Fox Island in Allen County. As pioneers portaged across the rivers separating the East and West, they took grateful refuge on Fox Island, the only dry place within what is now the Little River Wetlands area (Griggs, 9 Mar.). The acquisition of Fox Island for what is today a nature preserve where educational and recreational activities take place began with the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act passed under President Kennedy (Dustin, Interview).

The 1960s and 70s brought a tide of environmental policies that worked toward preserving natural lands, and, at the same time, public support of preservation steadily increased (Neimark). More people saw the value of environmental protection after ecologically destructive events including the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill, and following the publication of the three most environmentally influential books – Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb*, and Barry Commoner’s *The Closing Circle*. And finally, the first Earth Day was April 22, 1970, which also raised awareness of environmental protection (Kubasek 127). However, it was in 1964 that individual communities were given special attention through the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCFA) (Dustin, Interview).

In 1962, the Kennedy administration recommended the installation of more outdoor recreational opportunities in communities, and from this recommendation, the LWCFA was born to fund the acquisition of state and local park and recreation lands. Allen

County soon reacted to the chance to create its own park system. Unsurprisingly, the new Allen County Park Board was headed by Tom Dustin from 1965 to 1973 (Dustin, Interview). He was one of “the enthusiastic and knowledgeable experts who were shepherding the Park into existence” (Fox Island), and who had to face severe local opposition.

In order to finalize the creation of Allen County’s first park and nature preserve, Tom and fellow activists were required to scientifically describe the geological and biological significance of the area (Fox Island), much like conservationists did in the fight for the Indiana Dunes and Big Walnut Creek. Tom admitted to being an “amateur” and not knowing how to go about creating the park in the face of mostly political resistance (Dustin, Interview). However, as in many of the Dustins’ endeavors, they were fighting a time constraint. In a matter of days, funding for the park would return to the state and no longer be available to use to purchase land (Dustin, Interview). Therefore, Tom was forced to take action or it would be too late.

First, a public hearing was held in a county council chamber where more than three hundred people packed together to express their satisfaction with the potential park. Very few people testified against the park because much of the activists’ opposition was in the form of legal requirements, such as the necessity of having three land appraisers and the requirement of expending \$205,000 of the county’s money. However, because of the public’s strong support behind the park, an original purchase of 382 acres was made (Dustin, Interview).

It was a long process to clean up and expand the park area. To establish protection, a large portion of the park was dedicated under the Nature Preserves Act (Dustin,

Interview). Then, Tom and the park council had to tackle the mess left behind in the park. According to Tom, certain areas of the preserve where junk cars had been disposed of looked like piles of trash, and the National Guard had used the area for field practice (Dustin, Interview). During this time, the preserve became known as “Dustin’s snake pit” (Dustin, Interview). However, many of the best natural areas were saved from developers with the help of Bob Weber, the then president of ACRES, Inc (Dustin, Interview).

Since the initial purchase of Fox Island, the best of the natural areas has been added to the park, more recreational activities have been made available, and the area has flourished into an educational center for adults and children. Some popular recreational activities include swimming, boating, fishing, bird-watching, and biking (Dustin, Interview). Tom spoke of the park: “I don’t think that I have ever seen any kind of resource such as this that has been as stoutly defended and as widely appreciated for its central purpose – a nature preserve to be enjoyed for its self-contained qualities” (Dustin, Interview).

The acquisition of Fox Island County Park was truly a local team effort with the participation of the Allen County Park Board, ACRES, Inc., the IWLA, and several dedicated activists in Aboite Township and Allen County. Tom Dustin rallied the support of the Allen County Park Board when he served as its president. He demonstrated one of his and Jane’s most trusted methods of winning an environmental battle – collaboration and grassroots organization. It was a Dustin strength to be able to create a network of people who shared similar values and who worked toward a cause with zeal and determination that equaled that of the Dustins. However, they did not only establish a web of supporters – they formed personal relationships, too.

Their “personal magnetism” (Griggs, 5 Jan.) attracted volunteers and turned trying times into fun and dynamic meetings. Jane “was fearless when it came to influencing people” (Griggs, 5 Jan.) and her embodiment of local activism (Marshall) set a good example for adults and children on how to be activists (Griggs, 5 Jan.). Both Jane and Tom’s unrelenting campaigns were livened up by frequent informal get-togethers.

The Dustins warmly welcomed people into their home for ACRES Quarterly mailings, morale-raising dinner parties, and envelope stuffing “parties” (Griggs, 5 Jan.). Their son, John, said, “You have no idea how many envelopes we stuffed. Us kids, mom and dad and our friends, we’d set out a dozen card tables with people at every station and we’d get the mailings done. Later when we went to bed, we could still hear the tapping and clanging of that old Remington typewriter...,” (Blewer, “Farewell”). And, the Dustins’ Christmas were special, too. On countless sub-zero Christmas Eves, they gathered their closest friends around their fireplace and read “A Child’s Christmas in Wales.”

Steven Higgs described “Jane’s laughter, soft words and loving nature combined with Tom’s equally loving nature but slightly drier political commentaries” (Higgs, “Irreplaceable”) as an essential part of participating in their projects. Their dining room table became a workshop where busy work was accomplished and friendships grew. Karen Griggs explained how enjoyable it was for her to work in their office in her years as their apprentice. Events like these were what incited the enthusiasm and perseverance with which the Dustins and their friends faced intense opposition. The acquisition of Fox Island represents a quintessential battle in which the Dustins used both their personalities and grassroots organizing skills to ultimately succeed.

## *The Founding of ACRES Land Trust*

The number of natural areas in the Midwest has been on the decline as new subdivisions crop up and urban sprawl reaches farther into once pristine ecological habitats. Prompted by this loss of natural lands, Jane got a group of interested people together in her living room and they discussed how to identify and preserve natural areas in northeast Indiana, southern Michigan, and northwest Ohio (Van Gilder, Interview). From this initial meeting in 1960 sprouted the foundation of ACRES Land Trust.

James Barrett III was one of the co-founders of ACRES, and he handled the legal side of the organization because of his background in real estate and law (Barrett). His first mission was to find state laws throughout the country that designated and protected natural areas (Van Gilder, Interview). He found “very little literature” – only one law in Illinois and one in Iowa, to which he would add a public policy statement to form the Indiana Nature Preserves Act (Barrett). This act was passed in 1967 by the Indiana General Assembly, and its purpose was to “provide permanent protection for significant natural areas within the state” (Indiana DNR). The public policy portion of the act outlines the process and requirements of designating a nature preserve and its importance in the development of the state (Barrett).

The Nature Preserves Act enabled ACRES and other private conservation organizations to make valuable contributions to the nature preserves system (Indiana DNR). ACRES was established in 1960 (ACRES, “ACRES”), but it really took off after the passage of the Nature Preserves Act because the act could designate natural land and give it the “highest level of protection possible” (Van Gilder, Interview) and the “best use” (Barrett). Furthermore, the Nature Conservancy helped ACRES in its early days by

donating land to the organization. ACRES was founded in part because the Nature Conservancy was inactive in Fort Wayne in the early 1960s; however, once ACRES garnered support, both organizations became very active (Barrett).

The co-founders of ACRES were the instrumental people who gave the organization momentum and publicity. Jane and Tom Dustin spread the word and recruited people, including Jim Barrett, on a trip to Chicago. Barrett eventually took over the legal side of the organization while Bob Weber – Concordia Theology Seminary biology professor – and John Klotz – a scientist and the first president of ACRES – publicized ACRES through photography and press releases (Barrett).

“We all tried to work together as much as possible; we were all on the board of directors; all in on the discussions,” said Barrett (Barrett). The co-founders had a reputation to maintain, so they would be completely open with potential donors (Barrett). Eventually, the organization received its “seed land” (Barrett), the Edna W. Spurgeon Woodland Reserve (ACRES, *Guide*) – its first preserve which, according to Barrett, is “premier land.”

With the passing of the decades came very successful developments in ACRES Land Trust. Barrett said the biggest event was David Van Gilder becoming president of the organization and Jason Kissel becoming executive director. Before these additions, ACRES was volunteer-based. Barrett said, “We were just a bunch of people running an organization with no technical background” (Barrett). He is one of three of the original founders who are still living today, and he called the success of ACRES “amazing” (Barrett). The other two living founders are Bob Weber and Ethyle Bloch, a civic leader.

Since Jane and Tom Dustin have passed away in 2003 and 2004 respectively, ACRES has received one of its most important donations – the Dustins’ land and their home above Cedar Creek. Today, the house is used as the ACRES headquarters and office, and part of the land has been converted into the Tom and Jane Dustin Nature Preserve (“Adding”). The bequest “further solidifies the Dustins’ legacy of environmental stewardship” (“Adding”), and lends a “spiritual feel about the place,” according to Mary Ann Feitler, an ACRES member secretary (Rhodebeck). The ACRES staff agrees that it feels as though the Dustins are still with them as they continue their work on the land where it all began (Rhodebeck).

## *The Maumee River Widening Project*

*“We teach our children to color water blue. Most children are strapped into car seats crossing rivers and streams where even adults can’t see the water under the bridge sides, never seeing or playing in (God forbid) a real creek, stream, or river...[They] believe the color of water is blue – Generations have failed to note this error. Do Chinese children color the Yangtze blue? – Do Iowa kids color water black; Georgia kids red; Indiana kids brown?”*

*On Earth Day we are such irreverent dreamers.”*

*~Jane Dustin, her notes*

The 1982 flood in Fort Wayne was the start of the Dustins’ hardest fought environmental battle – the Maumee River widening project. As a result of the flood, Fort Wayne officials urged the Indiana General Assembly to create the Maumee River Basin Commission (MRBC), an agency whose sole purpose was to develop a “basin-wide flood control plan with full public participation” (Dustin, “Maumee”). Almost a decade after the MRBC was established, Tom Dustin stood on an eroding bank of the Maumee River and looked upon one of the most massive environmental failures Indiana officials have ever enacted.

Tom and Jane were known for their ability to draw up solutions to environmental problems that did not include construction. For example, in the case of Maumee River flood control, they argued for reforestation of the flood plain, wetlands preservation, and planting grass in farm fields before bulldozers were sent to destroy river banks and the ecosystems they supported (Creek). In the mid-80s, Tom took a group of people hiking on the Maumee River floodplain to familiarize them with the natural beauty of the area. By doing this, he achieved a supportive backbone of people who loved the area and were steadily involved in the oppositional front (Griggs, 9 Mar.).

Tom and fellow IWLA member and engineer, William Bloch, logically reasoned that Fort Wayne had flooded itself (Griggs, 9 Mar.). The Corps of Engineers' project to widen and dredge the Maumee River sent floodwaters downstream more rapidly and demolished trees and wildlife living on the river banks ("Incomparable"). To the immense dismay of environmentalists, the MRBC and the Army Corps of Engineers began the dredging and widening of the river in 1986.

The Dustins' main concerns about the river widening project were the destruction of the "once lovely forested riverway," and the \$8 million price tag coming straight from the pockets of tax payers (Dustin, "Maumee"). Evident from his angry editorials and impassioned articles, Dustin was clearly vexed by the fact that Fort Wayne residents were paying for a useless project that resulted in a "fiscal and environmental tragedy" (Dustin, "Maumee"). The even more significant consequence of the project, however, was the wreckage caused by the Corps of Engineers and the MRBC, headed by Tim Ehlerding (Dustin, "Maumee").

The Dustins and local environmentalists were backed by the Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Dustin, "Maumee"). Together they pressured the MRBC and tried to pass requirements that would offset the loss of forests, vegetation, and wetlands along the river. Erosion control was a huge issue because, as the Corps of Engineers bulldozed sandbars, logged away trees, and decimated river banks, sediment rushed downstream causing clogging and more destruction of banks. The DNR served as the inspector of the deteriorated condition of the Maumee River, while the FWS helped prevent Ehlerding from beginning a "restoration" plan for many of the river's channels (Dustin, "Maumee").

Ehlerding's plan to "restore" the river was not in congruence with the definition of "restoration." His idea of restoration was to continue bulldozing. Luckily, the FWS "spectacularly uninvited" Ehlerding's bulldozers to various Maumee River streams and therefore, prevented injuries to several endangered species. However, plastic netting placed to protect artificially planted vegetation and slow erosion was torn away by ice during the winter. This caused greater soil erosion and another DNR inspection (Dustin, "Maumee").

The results of the Maumee River widening project were environmentally and economically horrific. Tom's photos of the damage done to the river banks show how great lengths of biologically significant areas were devastated by construction. In 1992, after becoming very concerned regarding the Maumee River, the Indiana General Assembly passed a law prohibiting the MRBC from utilizing any of its powers on Cedar Creek and any other state dedicated nature preserve (Dustin, "Maumee"). And finally, the enormous amount of tax dollars that flooded into the project have never be compensated.

For the Dustins, many of their foolproof methods of work proved futile in the face of such a determined and stubborn political front. Their public relations during the fight were influential, but not strong enough to win against politics. This is not to say that the Dustins gave up after the initial losses in the project. Tom and Jane employed their usual grassroots organizational skills and still managed to reach the public.

Jane used the knowledge she gained regarding the intricacies of water regulation during the Indiana Dunes fight to continue her "unrelenting campaign" for clean water in Indiana's rivers. Before the Maumee River widening project, Jane had canoed Fort Wayne's three rivers to find illegal discharges of sewage (Caylor, "One less"). She also

led the IWLA's Water Quality Committee (Creek). During the Maumee River fiasco, she, along with colleague Karen Griggs, held a press conference about clean water. She emphasized the consequences of erosion in the Maumee River and explained the importance of clean water in the Maumee as it provides drinking water for Ohio residents (Griggs, 9 Mar.).

Tom and Jane thought of the failure to stop the widening and dredging of the Maumee River as a "great personal tragedy" (Griggs, 9 Mar.). As their daughter Mary alluded to in referencing the "Dustin Effect," Tom and Jane were personally tied to their environmental endeavors. They cared about the effects and lasting impact of environmental projects for the sake of future generations and for their children. Tom and Jane were constantly encouraging youth participation in local projects because they were very concerned with the increasing lethargy of communities in the preservation of natural areas. Tom once said, "It's not the left-wingers who worry me. It's not the right-wingers who worry me. It's the *no-wingers* who are going to ruin this country" (Caylor, "environmental").

The Dustins' – especially Tom's – pessimism can be attributed to their frustration with America's government and the personal tragedies they endured throughout their lives together. A true political activist, Tom spent much of his time worrying, according to Joe Beck in his written memorial for Tom Dustin (Beck). It is clear from their methods of grassroots organizing that Tom and Jane firmly believed in fighting for good public policy, for the greater good. Mary Gustafson, their daughter, said "both their research and their hearts told them that it was the right thing to do" (Gustafson, Interview). She added that there were many personal events that contributed to their commitment, too.

Jim Barrett, one of the co-founders of ACRES, Inc. and friend of the Dustins, once said in an *Outdoor Indiana* magazine article that he had never met people who suffered as much and kept going (Griggs, 9 Mar.). In the early '70s, the Dustins lost their son, Steven, in a Grand Canyon fall. Mary said, "It nearly destroyed them but knowing the mission hadn't disappeared in their grief they rose above with a different yet renewed passion" (Gustafson, Letter). Then, in 1995, while on vacation in the Southwest, the Dustins' home above Cedar Creek was burned down. Despite these great personal tragedies, Jane and Tom had an unflagging sense of purpose that impelled them to continue their work on behalf of the environment.

## *Conclusion*

The Dustins were trailblazers in all areas of their lives. According to their daughter Mary, nothing stopped them, and it was their passion that made them unique. They softened their losses with compromises; they argued for what they believed in; they were relentless in their beliefs (Gustafson, Letter). Most importantly, they passed on vital lessons to their children, friends, and fellow environmental advocates.

In all of the environmental issues they tackled, they exemplified the value of grassroots organization. Their camaraderie with people proved beneficial in the most trying of times. As they stood up against the Maumee River widening project, they gained local friends. As they prevented Big Walnut Creek from becoming a reservoir, they made acquaintances with the residents of Greencastle. “Those associations really sustained them,” said Mary (Gustafson, Interview).

The Dustins’ charisma also enabled them to make a point eloquently and passionately. Mary called her mother “compelling” and her father “intimidating” (Gustafson, Interview). Their claims were backed up by piles of evidence obtained not by searching the Internet, but by continual persuasive letter writing, phone calls, and research.

Their advocacy fell under certain legal and time constraints in nearly every one of their endeavors. However, they still managed to take a vacation – usually out west – every August. Jim Barrett remembered the three-family camping trips as “marvelous experiences” and occasions that “cemented” the friendships between the Dustins and their friends (Barrett).

Karen Griggs was also influenced by her friends. She said, “I didn’t even know how to use a credit card at the gas pump or how to use the metro in D.C.” This was before the Dustins acted as mentors during the Indiana Dunes battle. She added, “I cannot begin to tell you how much I miss them,” (Griggs, 9 Mar.).

Environmental activists today could learn from the way the Dustins neither cheapened the facts nor lied to gain the upper hand in an argument. Instead, they practiced *advocacy*. They took advantage of the technology that was available to them, and they worked zealously. Activists today should follow the Dustins’ example of passion and embracing innovative ways to accomplish a job. Social networking is an effective way grassroots organization is being performed, and it could become very advantageous for major environmental endeavors in the future.

But perhaps most importantly, Tom and Jane left a legacy for their children. Mary said, “Their activism influenced me both positively and negatively. They gave me the tools to accomplish things. Negatively, I wanted to be a little bit more there for my family” (Gustafson, Interview). Mary added that it is important to live one’s own life and not follow in the footsteps of others. People like Tom and Jane Dustin can be overwhelming, but it is their example of passion that should be followed. Their way of life was exemplary as one of beauty, thrift, harmony, and nature. Fortunately for those who knew them and for the greater community, it is the Dustins’ passion that most strongly endures. Their legacy serves as a reminder to appreciate the spring peepers as they emerge from the wetlands in March and to praise life as a hawk flies overhead.

## *Reflections*

If I had known about the amount of dust I would inhale, I might not have chosen Jane and Tom Dustin as my research subjects. Although they worked on multiple complex projects from their home, now the ACRES Land Trust office, Jane and Tom were not the most organized people. In fact, after the third trip to the Dustin basement, I started to think that the two environmental advocates didn't believe in filing. However, I soon realized that the dusty, unsorted boxes of letters, photos, and brochures tell the story of Jane and Tom's life as two important people in Indiana's environmental history.

What originally seemed like an insurmountable task slowly but surely became manageable as long as I didn't fall into my instinctual habit of organizing whatever was in front of me. After sacrificing complete organization, I decided to embrace the carbon copies, the scrawling cursive letters, the fire and water damaged photos and letters, and the cigarette infused files. In doing so, I learned that the Dustins had an invaluable way of doing their work which must have included an innate sense of where a certain file was at any given time. Luckily, the cardboard box that served as my archive gave me a necessary sense of personal control.

I am so grateful for Bonnie Niemann, Mary Gustafson, and Karen Griggs. Mrs. Niemann was a great source of encouragement throughout the process of writing the project. She took a refreshingly modern approach to the project by challenging me to relate the way the Dustins worked to how activists work today, and she read through the paper countless times to help me finish the process. To Mary, I found my interview with her fascinating and emotional. The interview gave my project a sense of relevance and poignancy in revealing that the Dustins' legacy lives on through their children's activism.

And to Karen Griggs, I would have lost so many important and personal details without her help and advice. She shared with me information and stories that only a person who was close friends with Tom and Jane could have told. It was a great advantage to be able to speak with her and with Jim Barrett who was also a close friend of the Dustins. They showed that the “Dustin Effect” still lives on today.

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