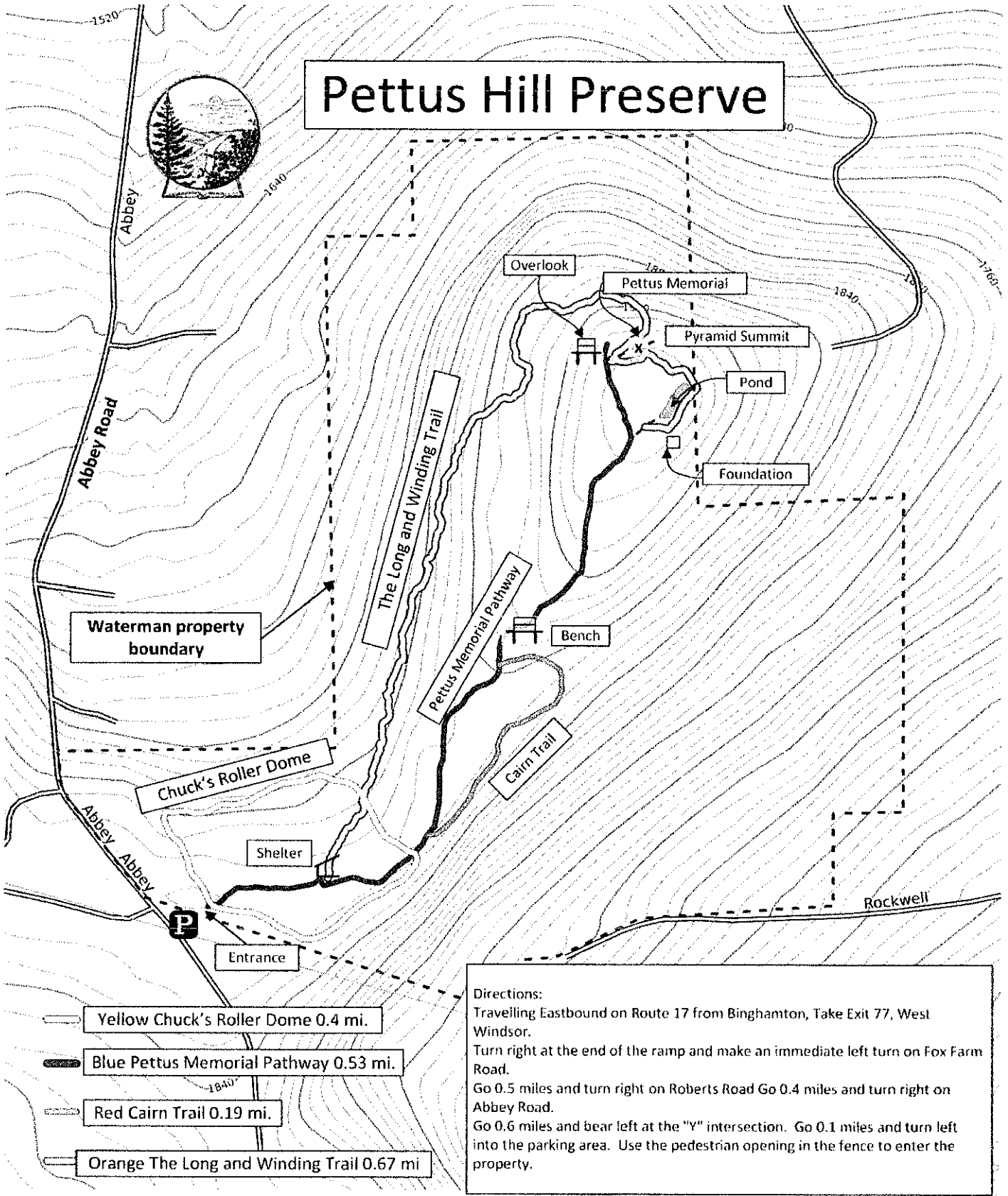


# Pettus Hill Preserve

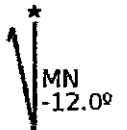


**Directions:**  
 Travelling Eastbound on Route 17 from Binghamton, Take Exit 77, West Windsor.  
 Turn right at the end of the ramp and make an immediate left turn on Fox Farm Road.  
 Go 0.5 miles and turn right on Roberts Road Go 0.4 miles and turn right on Abbey Road.  
 Go 0.6 miles and bear left at the "Y" intersection. Go 0.1 miles and turn left into the parking area. Use the pedestrian opening in the fence to enter the property.

Waterman Conservation Education Center  
 403 Hilton Road  
 Apalachin, NY 13732

607-625-2221  
[www.watermancenter.org](http://www.watermancenter.org)

Mercator Projection  
 WGS84  
 UTM Zone 18T



# **Pettus Hill Preserve**

In Memory of

**Charles 'Chuck' Pettus**

May 7, 1933 - November 15, 2013

• Age 80 •

## **Biographical Information**

Prior to his death, Charles 'Chuck' Pettus arranged to have his beloved property, over 105 acres in Windsor, New York, donated to the Waterman Conservation Education Center, in the form of a *Conservancy*. It was to be known as the *Pettus Hill Preserve*. It was Charles' wish to be laid to rest at the base of a unique earthen pyramid on the property, in a titanium casket. The pyramid was Chuck's attempt to make his burial site the highest point in Broome County. Although he came up slightly short of his goal, no one who knew him was surprised that he chose to forgo a traditional interment at a cemetery to become 'one with the land', a true naturalist's dream. Charles could be described as a very generous soul, caring for, and giving to others throughout his life, despite many personal challenges.

The family home was located in Homestead, Pennsylvania. Charles' father was a steel worker; his mother was a school teacher who taught English. Tragedy struck when, at the young age of only 12 years old, Charles lost his father. This event had a major impact on his life as, now the oldest male in the family, he willingly became 'head of the household'. As a result, he took on various odd jobs, including a paper route for the *Pittsburg Sun-Telegraph*. Always helping others, he also acquired odd jobs for his younger siblings, John and Mary. As the eldest sibling, Chuck took his role very seriously, especially when he was called upon, at one point, to save his brother's life.

Growing up, the Pettus children spent a lot of time exploring the woods behind their home. They had a special spot where they crossed a creek by balancing on an old fallen tree. One summer day, Charles' younger brother, John, was alone when he lost his footing on the log and fell into a pool of muddy water...or so he thought! As it turned out, it was quicksand! His cries for help first brought his mother, who in turn screamed for Chuck's assistance. Thinking on his feet, Chuck quickly cut down a sapling, and, with a neighbor's help, used the young tree to reach his brother and pull him to safety, who, by now, was up to his shoulders in quicksand! The dramatic rescue only added to the already strong bond between the two brothers. As John expressed, with gratitude, later in life, "I lived in my brother's shadow. He broke down barriers and led the way!"

Music was a part of life in the Pettus family. Mrs Pettus, a pianist with a beautiful voice, shared her love of music with her children. She taught Chuck how to play the piano, but it was the clarinet that became his favorite instrument, which he played later in life in various ensembles, including the IBM Band, the Southern Tier Concert Band, and the Maine Community Band. Chuck was also proficient on the oboe, saxophone, and keyboard.

After graduating from high school in 1951, Charles saved up enough money, working as a janitor in a steel mill, to pay for his education at the University of Pittsburgh, earning a Bachelor's Degree in Liberal Arts. This was followed by a Masters Degree in Physics/Civil Engineering from Binghamton University. After his studies were completed, he worked briefly for the Rome Air Development Corporation (RADC), with Griffiths Air Force Base, at the Strategic Air Force Base Center. The Center focused on radar development at the beginning of the Cold War. In 1955, after working for six months at RADC, Pettus became aware that IBM was seeking qualified candidates in physics/engineering. He applied for a job there and subsequently became one of the first African-American employees at IBM. He worked for the company until he retired in 1990.

In 1992, Charles decided to offer something to the young people in the area by acquiring the *New Image Rollerdom*e, in Endwell, NY. The *Rollerdome* was a very popular hangout. "It's for the children," he would say. His intent was to use the facility as a youth development program. The building included an arcade and a snack bar. Comments by 'regulars' reflected how much the place meant to them: "The *Rollerdome* was not really a business, it was more like a charitable gathering place - for the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, BOCES, and other organizations." "It's where I discovered who I was and what I wanted to be - a teacher." "Chuck ran a tight ship (business)", noted another frequent visitor. If someone misbehaved, that person would lose the privilege of going to the rink. In order to be allowed back in, a handwritten letter of apology was in order. Unfortunately, some heavy winter snows, compounded by the fact that the building existed in a flood zone eventually led to the closing of the facility, in spite of Chuck's persistent efforts to keep the community center open.

In the early 1960's, Pettus purchased land in Windsor, New York, where he had a modular home installed at the end of *Rockwell Road Extension*. He constructed three greenhouses nearby in which he grew most of his own food. One might say that he took the terms, 'vegetarian' and 'vegan', to another level, creating his own unique diet that defied description. He would send for unusual plants from all over the world, searching for ones that provided the best nutrition, including ginseng and other exotic plants. A trenching system he developed provided water for the greenhouses. He also collected ground water from a spring in a 1,500 gallon cistern, as well as in a quarter-acre pond on the property. He eventually stocked the pond with fish, caught by his brother, John, from the the Niagara River, and also from local ponds, which Chuck shared with others. On another note, Chuck racked up an amazing 375,000 miles on his Chevy truck, which he drove on many camping trips to one of his favorite locations, the Adirondack Mountains! A neighbor who had helped him on numerous occasions eventually inherited the vehicle.

Charles Pettus earned enough money in his lifetime that he could have built a mansion on his property if he wanted to, but instead he chose to devote himself to pursuits beyond self-aggrandizement. His brother, John, recently said. "While there's a lot of self-centeredness in the world today, Chuck was truly focused on others. He was extreme in his degree of optimism. His intent was always the betterment and enjoyment of others." Chuck was one of two black men to enter the inaugural Vestal 20 Kilometer run. Moses Mayfield, the other black gentleman in the competition, happened to finish in first place, but Chuck, being the modest man he was, let everyone else finish ahead of him.

Although Chuck wore many hats, as a physicist, engineer, musician, naturalist, hiker, runner, and vegan, he was, above all, “one of the nicest people you could ever meet!” When Charles’ brother, John, was asked how he thought his older brother would like to be remembered: as a black man, black American, African-American, or some other designation, John answered, “In the 1950’s, ’60’s and ’70’s it was assumed that my brother and I would check the box labeled “African-American” on an application. However, our neighborhood in Homestead, Pennsylvania, included Catholic, Methodist, Jewish and Lutheran faiths - in other words, a very ethnic and diversified area. There were even gypsies among us! We saw everyone, not only as neighbors, but as friends...people...homo sapiens...and that is how our community saw us. I think Chuck would want to be remembered simply as a fellow human being.”

Chuck’s philosophy in life was: “Appreciate what you have, give generously to others, and strive to make the world a better place - *for everyone!*”

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A *Topographical Trail Map* is posted at the entrance to the *Pettus Hill Preserve*. Along the *Memorial Ridge Trail* (blue) is an attractive shelter, as well as three benches, constructed by Eagle Scout, Phillip Card, and Boy Scout Troop #68. At the end of the trail is a vernal pool, a stone foundation that is over one hundred years old, as well as an earthen pyramid with the *Pettus Memorial* at its base. Three other paths available for hiking are: *Chuck’s Rollerdomo Trail* (yellow), the *Cairn Trail* (red), and *The Long and Winding Trail* (orange). Another special feature of the *Preserve* is a virgin timber stand, which means that there has never been a tree removed from the site!

The beauty and wonder of nature is available for all to experience at the *Pettus Hill Preserve*, 135 Abbey Road, Windsor, NY 13865. At the peak of the earthen pyramid, the elevation is 1,985.5’. When the trees are bare, a hiker can see as far away as the *Broome County Airport*, and beyond!

Waterman Conservation Education Center (WCEC)  
[watermancenter.org](http://watermancenter.org)  
607-625-2221

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Information compiled by Scott Clarke