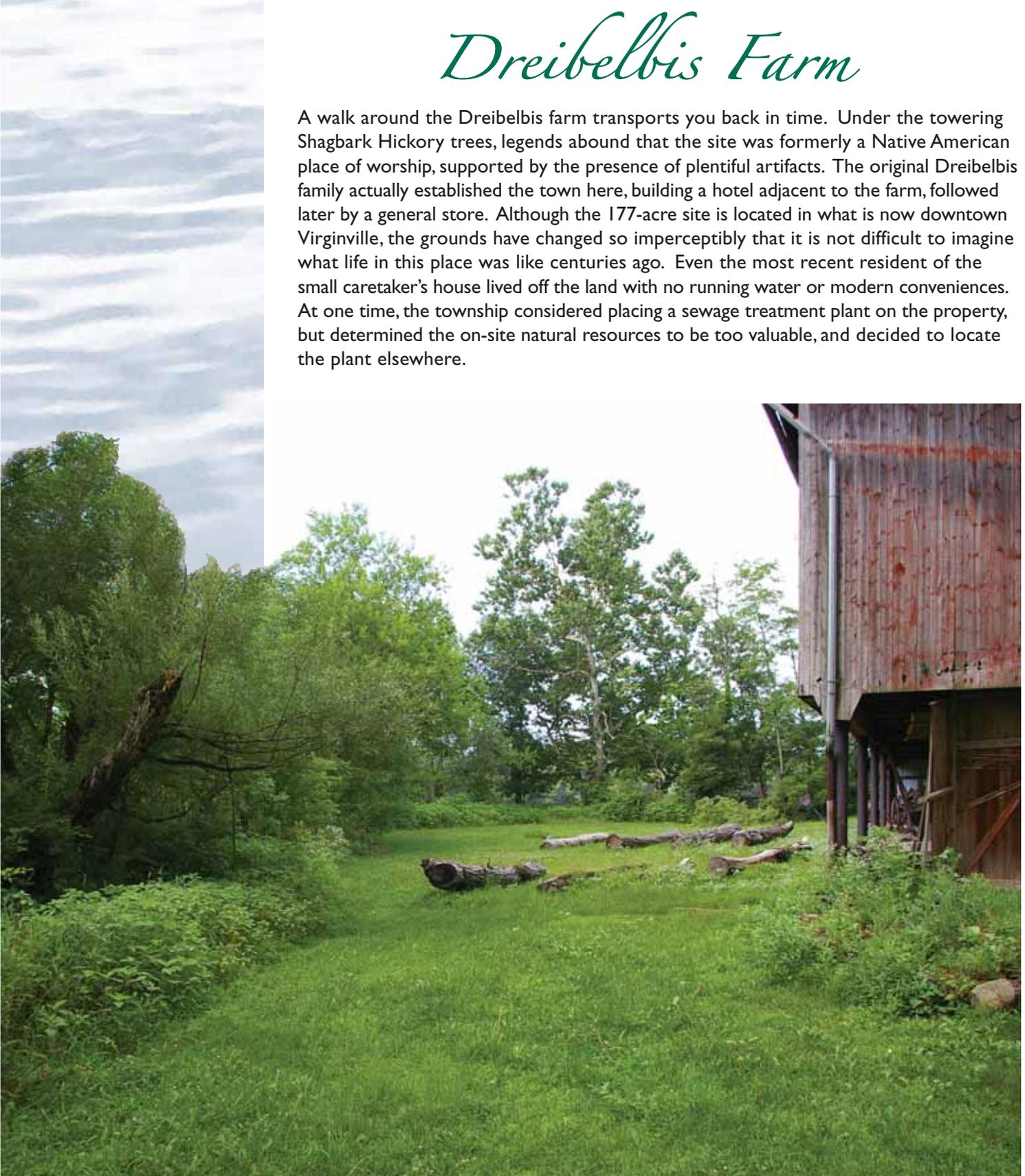
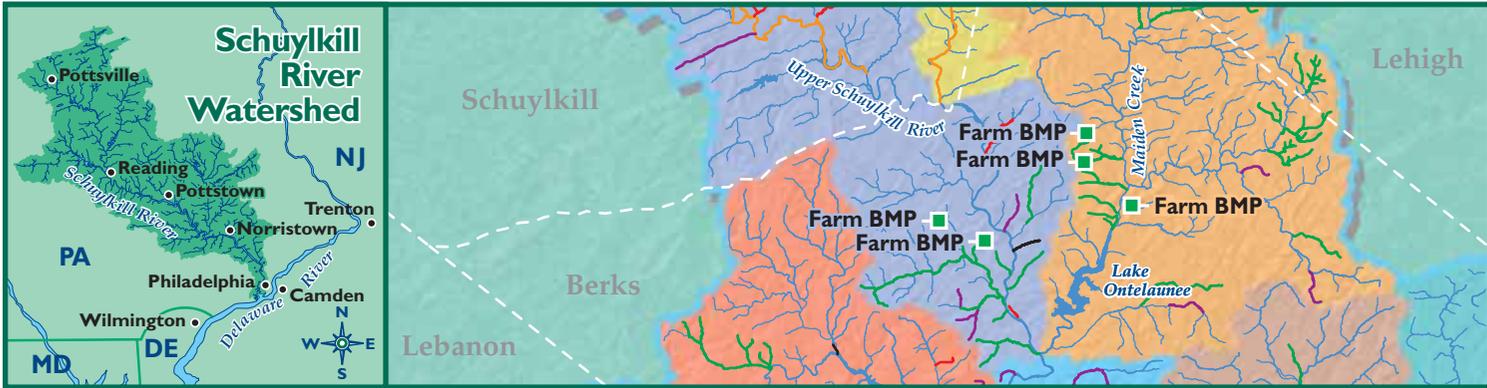


AGRICULTURE

Dreibelbis Farm

A walk around the Dreibelbis farm transports you back in time. Under the towering Shagbark Hickory trees, legends abound that the site was formerly a Native American place of worship, supported by the presence of plentiful artifacts. The original Dreibelbis family actually established the town here, building a hotel adjacent to the farm, followed later by a general store. Although the 177-acre site is located in what is now downtown Virginville, the grounds have changed so imperceptibly that it is not difficult to imagine what life in this place was like centuries ago. Even the most recent resident of the small caretaker's house lived off the land with no running water or modern conveniences. At one time, the township considered placing a sewage treatment plant on the property, but determined the on-site natural resources to be too valuable, and decided to locate the plant elsewhere.





In addition to working toward an organic farm certification, the current landowner is in the process of returning unused meadow back to livestock pasture. With 75 acres of high quality wetlands and seven stream buffer acres on-site, the nearly pristine Dreibelbis farm offers a unique opportunity to proactively protect the Maiden Creek and three smaller tributaries from future agricultural runoff. The Berks County Conservancy accomplished this by using Schuylkill Watershed Initiative Grant funds to install 1,465 feet of streambank fencing to keep livestock and manure away from the streams and wetland areas. High in nutrients and bacteria, manure in stormwater runoff contributes to excessive plant growth and algae blooms in the waterways, depleting the water of dissolved oxygen as the plants die. Fish and other aquatic creatures cannot survive if dissolved oxygen levels are too low. The presence of pathogens in source water may increase the cost of downstream drinking water treatment. Agriculture runoff can introduce cryptosporidium, which may persist through water treatment and cause illness among immuno-compromised individuals.

The identification of the Dreibelbis farm as a priority site demonstrates a proactive approach by the Schuylkill Action Network to protect water quality from agricultural runoff. Protected by a Berks County Conservancy Conservation Easement, the Dreibelbis property will remain farmland, and installed Best Management Practices will not be lost to future development.



The Schuylkill Watershed Initiative Grant is a targeted watershed grant awarded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for the completion of a suite of water quality improvement demonstration projects in the Schuylkill River Watershed. The Dreibelbis Farm project is one of more than 40 projects that received funding from this source, in addition to other funds and/or support. The grant is administered by the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary and the Philadelphia Water Department.