

# The Friends

VOL XIV ISSUE 1

SPRING/ SUMMER 2022



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

PARK HISTORY .....	1
50 <sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY DATES AND EVENTS .....	3
YELLOW TRAIL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT .....	4
MEMORIAL TO KAY FERRARI .....	5
SUSQUEHANNOCK STATE PARK .....	6

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### MONTHLY TRAIL WORK

First Saturday of each month, 9AM.

### 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Wednesday, October 5 at 7 pm at the Mansion, and Saturday, October 8 starting at 9 am at Area 17.

Rain date: Sunday, October 9

### FRIENDS OF RIDLEY CREEK STATE PARK NEWSLETTER

Editor..... Joan Nikelsky

Design.....Mark Dougherty

## ANNOUNCING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF RIDLEY CREEK STATE PARK

A free celebration to be held October 5th and 8th

*see article on page 3.*

## The Path to Becoming the Park We Love

*by Friends member Lauren Bacigalupi*

If you're a Ridley Creek State Park enthusiast, you may have heard the name Jeffords tossed about in the historical musings of the park. However, the history is much deeper, and the stories are so worth sharing. To begin the story, we must take you back to 1773 when Abel Green came to the area and found a large body of water named Ridley Creek. Yes, it was given that name nearly 100 years earlier by another English settler, John Simcote, who named the property in honor of his old-country home in Ridley, Cheshire, England in 1682. At the time, the area was home to the Okehoking tribe of the Leni Lenape Nation.

Green originally thought he would set up a mill on the property, and when it didn't work out, he ended up farming the land. And what is a farm without a farmhouse? Green built the largest stone farmhouse in the township. Remember, "big" back then was a lot smaller than big now. The house was 45' x 18', two stories high and along with his 300 acres was valued at \$580. Abel Green's property was passed to his son George, then grandson Isaac before changing hands in the late 1800s when an additional 300 acres was added.

One hundred years of farming later, along comes Samuel Riddle, a millionaire socialite and businessman most well-known for raising and racing thoroughbred horses. On May 10, 1913 the now 600 acres and farmhouse was sold in auction to Samuel Riddle for \$70,000. Riddle's most famous horses were Man o'War, his sire War Admiral, and grandsire Seabiscuit; he sired many other champion horses as well. Riddle gave

*continued page 2*

A photo of the Mansion from a 1921 magazine "American Homes of Today."



WILSON EYRE & McILVAINE, Architects

### RESIDENCE OF MR. WALTER M. JEFFORDS

Mr. Jeffords' home near Media, Pennsylvania, is situated on the slope of a hill which looks out on the broad meadows and colorful rolling land characteristic of the best hunting country in Pennsylvania. The estate consists of more than a thousand acres. Note how well it has been tied to the ground through its terraces

his niece Sarah Dobson-Fisk and her husband Walter Jeffords the "old farm" as a wedding gift. The couple decided to build out the country house and hired Wilson Eyre, a Philadelphia architect, to create what we now know as the Hunting Hill Mansion in our park. The mansion was constructed surrounding the old farm house between 1915 and 1918 with much grandeur.

The ceiling in the large ballroom is made of hand-molded plaster and the oak paneling near the grand staircase was made from trees that grew on the land. The English Tudor style manor house has 38 rooms, 13 fireplaces and 11 bathrooms. The landscape around the house was done by the Olmstead Brothers, the same group that did the landscape design for Central Park in New York and the Vanderbilt estate in North Carolina as well as some of our nation's early national parks. The Jeffords used the house as their country home, one of many properties they owned. Walter Jeffords also bought many adjacent farms, culminating in about 2,000 acres of woods and meadows.

The Jeffords threw many elaborate parties over several decades until Walter's death in the 1950s. In 1966, the Commonwealth identified the property as a prime park candidate and paid the family \$5.6 million for the entire parcel of land. That, plus 600 additional acres from other owners, is now our beloved Ridley Creek State Park. Why

was the Commonwealth interested in this property? At the time, the state was beginning to expand its park systems into more populated areas. The civil unrest which sparked major urban conflicts during the 1960s spurred the acquisition of recreation areas to encourage residents to relieve their tensions through outdoor recreation. Investing an additional \$5 million to purchase surrounding farmland, the park began to take shape with new roads and additional infrastructure. Park facilities were officially dedicated to public use in August of 1972.

On November 11, 1976, the Mansion and surrounding land was placed on the National Register of Historic Sites and Landmarks. Ridley Creek State Park contains the largest concentration of colonial farm buildings, still standing on their original sites, in the United States. Colonial Pennsylvania Plantation, which has been restored to late-18th century operation, can be visited April to November. The Plantation office is located upstairs in the mansion. The office of the Pennsylvania Resources Council, which had been housed in the mansion, now continues their important conservation work from an offsite location.

*You can experience some of this history by attending the 50th Anniversary Celebration! See page 3.*





*Sycamore Mills Rd Entrance - Then and now.*

## The Friends of Ridley to hold 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration in October

The Friends are planning multiple activities to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the founding of Ridley Creek State Park: On Wednesday evening, October 5th in the Mansion, and on Saturday, October 8th at Area 17 in the park. **All events are free.**

The events are in the planning stages. So far, for Wednesday evening, October 5, at the Mansion starting at 7 pm, we expect to have a display of pictures and documents showing the history of the park and surrounding area. President Jack Miller will welcome people, introduce the Friends of Ridley, and review the interesting history of the property. A commemorative booklet is being prepared for distribution to attendees, including “then” and “now” photographs. Refreshments will be available. We hope to have docent-led tours of the Mansion that evening.

For Saturday, October 8, starting at 9 am, we will convene at Area 17 in the park. A 5- to 7-mile hike on wooded trails will be led by Trails Co-chair Gary Sawyer, while our other Gary (Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Naturalist Gary Stolz) will lead a shorter nature walk, as well as host a nature display. A hayride on the park’s roads is being planned by Jack Miller. In addition, Tim Higgins will lead a short history walk on the Multi-Use Trail. Snacks and beverages will be offered and we are investigating the possibility of having one or two food trucks. Another potential activity is a 5K run coordinated by David Case.

Sunday, October 9 is the rain date for events scheduled for Saturday. It is also the date of an additional activity, a volunteer maintenance project led by Gary Sawyer, details to be determined.

Online registration for most of the events mentioned will be required to ensure we have adequate guides and appropriate number of times each event will be offered. We will limit the number of participants for each activity for each available time slot to maintain a safe event and ensure participants can see and hear the guides. We will send out instructions for registering during the summer so watch out for an email from the Friends of Ridley.

***To make all this happen, we need volunteers to help out.*** Some areas for involvement are: publicity (distributing flyers), registration, set-up, staffing membership table, refreshments, clean-up, docent leaders, sign-making, and sign-posting. Let us know what you can do by sending an email to [members@friendsofrcsp.org](mailto:members@friendsofrcsp.org). ***Please also write if you have questions you want to be covered during the history presentations.***



# A Turnpike in Ridley Creek State Park?

by Gary Sawyer, Trails Co-chair

Everyone thinks of a turnpike as a toll road for cars. In fact, this is pretty much the only definition you'll find in Merriam-Webster. But it's also a trail maintenance feature recognized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for trail construction in wet areas.

If you follow the Yellow Trail from the Mansion parking lot up and over a hill, you cross Big Run on a footbridge and walk along a flat and often muddy section before approaching the Multi-Use Trail (MUT). It doesn't take much rain to turn sections to muck, which hikers and dogs try to avoid by skirting around. Eventually, the trail widens and destroys wetland plants, while making matters worse for hikers.

A preferred solution is to install a turnpike, constructed of natural logs spaced about 2 feet apart and partially sunk in the ground, then filled in between with crushed stone gravel and compacted. The longevity of this solution outlasts the perimeter logs, which eventually decay and leave behind a solid crushed gravel foundation for hikers.

April's monthly trail work attracted 19 eager volunteers who constructed over 30 feet of turnpike in affected areas on the Yellow Trail behind the mansion. We divided into teams:



- **The Draw Knife Team** used an old-fashioned tool designed for debarking logs. Eight-foot sections of logs from blowdowns in the area were already pre-cut. The bark rots rather quickly, and removing it keeps the logs from shifting and decaying too quickly. This skill was taught to yours truly by former Park Manager Roger McChesney.
- **The Digging Crew** cleared away the organic top layer to expose the underlying soil and dug trenches for the logs.
- **The Mule Team** hauled 40 bags of crushed stone (over 50 lb. bags!) with a wheelbarrow, from the pallets of stone placed along the MUT to the work site a hundred yards away.
- **The Rock Collectors** gathered stones from around the area to place on the ends of the turnpike and support crushed stone.

Everyone pitched in to set the logs, place the crushed stone, and tamp everything in place. With this amazing team effort, we were done before 11 am! Now hikers can keep their feet dry along the Yellow Trail without damaging flora along the way.



## Memorial to Kay Ferrari

We recently learned of the passing of Kay Ferrari (March 16), who was a lifetime member of the Friends of Ridley Creek State Park. We are saddened and extend our deepest condolences to her family.

We remember and greatly appreciated Kay for her extensive knowledge of the history of the park area and of the previous owners of the “Hunting Hill” estate, Walter and Sarah Jeffords – a knowledge she imparted on many occasions during events at the Mansion, notably the annual holiday parties in December. She volunteered her time to give lively tours to attendees through the halls and rooms of the Mansion, including showing photos of how the rooms looked back in the early years of the 20th century.

Kay was an avid animal lover and became “hooked” on horses at an early age. She was fascinated with the greatest racehorse ever to live, Man o’War, and researched its owner, Sam Riddle, and Sarah and Walter Jeffords, who also became involved in the breeding and racing of horses. The rich history of the Jeffords and Riddles was in Kay’s repertoire that she shared with people on her tours.

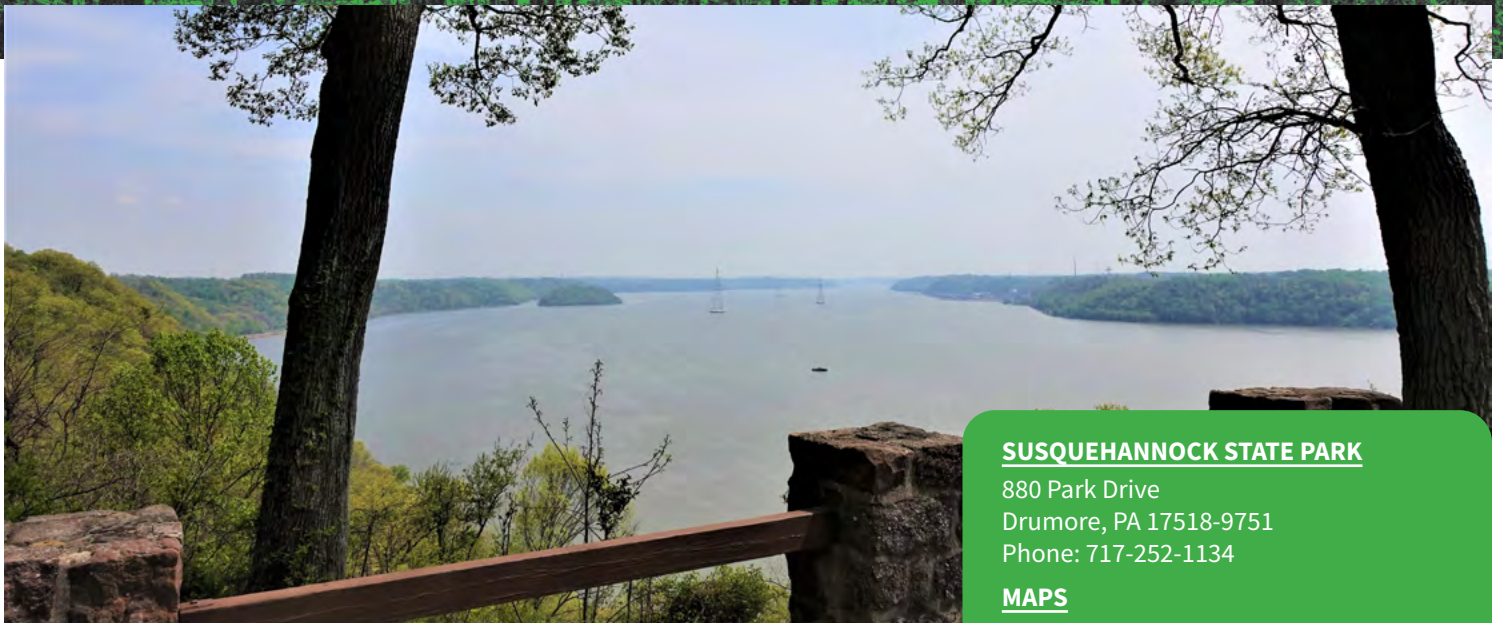
Kay graduated from Widener University and worked as a registered nurse until retirement. She resided in Media. She is survived by 3 children, 7 grandchildren, and 9 great-grandchildren.



*Kay Ferrari leading a tour in the hallway of the second floor of the Mansion.*







### **SUSQUEHANNOCK STATE PARK**

880 Park Drive  
Drumore, PA 17518-9751  
Phone: 717-252-1134

### **MAPS**

### **HISTORY**

### **NEARBY ATTRACTIONS**

## **Exploring Pennsylvania's Parks: Susquehannock State Park**

*This article is tenth in a series about other state parks in Pennsylvania, contributed by Friends Board member, the much-traveled Paul Mickle.*

In this edition of our tour around the state we will be traveling west to southern Pennsylvania to the banks of the Susquehanna River to Susquehannock State Park.

As water flows south in the currents of the Susquehanna River it passes Harrisburg and then Lancaster before heading into farm country for the remainder of its time in Pennsylvania. Before hitting the Maryland border, however, it passes under a final bridge crossing near the town of Holtwood. Susquehannock State Park is just south of Holtwood and the bridge crossing can be seen from its vistas. Speaking of the vistas, the long-distance views up and down the river are arguably the highlight of what Susquehannock State Park has to offer.

This dramatic landscape contributed to the park's origin. The name Susquehannock came from the name Sasquesahanough, which was given to an early American explorer by the Iroquoian Native American tribe in the region. The explorer was Captain John Smith, who was venturing up the Susquehanna River in 1608.

The park itself is 224 acres. The main section has a very dramatic overlook called Hawk Point. It stands tall about 380 feet above the valley floor and visitors can look up and down the Susquehanna River. When looking south you can see the Conowingo Reservoir at the Maryland border. You can also see a small island called Mount Johnson, which is known for being the world's first Bald Eagle Sanctuary. Due



to the positioning of the observation area along the water, the park is quite popular with birdwatchers.

There are also two satellite properties that are a part of Susquehannock State Park. Both are upstream from the main facility and both offer unique vistas. One is called Osprey Overlook and the other is called Pinnacle Overlook and each provide a unique perspective to the region.

Aside from taking in the expansive views, visitors can also enjoy many of the standard state park amenities like camping, hiking, and picnicking. When visiting it is hard to remember that one is only about 50 miles from Ridley Creek, as the landscape is dramatically different.

So if a day trip and dramatic views are of interest to you, a trip to Susquehannock State Park may make a fun outing!