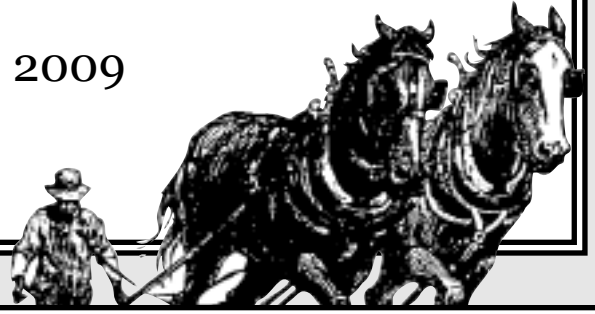


F The Furrow

April 2009



FRIENDS OF HOWELL LIVING HISTORY FARM

Howell Farm Looks Uphill

The hills surrounding Howell Farm are crisscrossed by hiking trails. These trails, part of the 1,100-acre Ted Stiles Preserve on Baldpate Mountain, wind through the woods, past the rock foundation of a historic homestead, alongside the site of an old gristmill, and to the location of an abandoned farm and Mercer County's highest point, some 470 feet above sea level.

In the years to come, many of these sites will become the location of new programs that explore the history of the Pleasant Valley, the area surrounding Howell Farm. But first, many of the trails need to be cleared of overgrown brush, and the history of these locations must be investigated by the farm's historians.

As a first step in the process, former Howell Farm intern Matt Schofield is leading a new effort to get the trails in tiptop shape. And he's not doing the work alone. He will be assisted by groups of young volunteers, many of them coming from urban areas in and around Trenton. The program will provide



Farmhouse Ruins. The rocky foundations of historic farmsteads still remain on Baldpate Mountain.

an opportunity for these youth groups to work a few hours each week in the great outdoors, as well as help with some other Howell Farm-related activities.

"Many of these kids have never held a saw in their hands," says Schofield. "And some of them have never petted a horse before. So my goal is to help develop an

educational program that gives them a really positive experience involving activities that may be new to them. And hopefully they'll have a lot of fun, too."

Some of the first groups to work with Schofield have come from the HomeFront organization, based in

continued on the back page

Baldpate History

by Bob Koppenhaver

The article below is reprinted with permission from njskylands.com.

The Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain is named in honor of the man who led a nine-year campaign to make the park a reality. Stiles, who died in 2007, was a resident of Hopewell Township and a long-time professor of biological sciences at Rutgers University.

The origin of Baldpate's name remains one of the park's mysteries. Until the mid-20th century, the mountain was known locally as Kuser Mountain, named for the family who owned it for many decades. In Henry Beck's 1939 book *Fare to Midlands*, reference is made to the top of the mountain having been cleared by one of the Kusers, perhaps for a landing strip. Possibly the bare mountaintop suggested the more recent name of Baldpate.

At the summit, the Kuser estate, called "Strawberry Hill", included a main house, lodge, and various out-buildings. For a few years in the early 1900s the family established a game farm on the mountain, raising pheasants with the assistance of an experienced gamekeeper and other local workers. In 1986 the family sold the property to Trap Rock Industries, and in 1998 Baldpate Mountain was acquired from the company by Mercer County.

Although Baldpate Preserve's present day trails pass through

continued on the next page

Upcoming Event: Friday, May 8, 7 p.m.

The Fashion Show

This spring, Howell Farm will host its second annual historical fashion show in the Charles Fish Barn.

Admission is free and all are invited to attend.

More than 20 historical figures are expected to grace the runway, representing various periods in the history of

Pleasant Valley. Among them are a turn-of-the-century newspaper reporter, a pair of newlyweds, a minister, and various farmers, teachers, students and soldiers.

Come learn about the people who shaped the history of the Pleasant Valley — and see what they were wearing as they did!



Baldpate History:



woods that seem to have always been there, that was not always the case, especially in the eastern portion of the park, known for many years as Honey Hollow. If Henry Beck had not explored Honey Hollow in the 1930s, talked to the locals, and then recorded his adventures in *Fare To Midlands*, there is little chance that anyone today would have any knowledge of the settlement that once existed here. A check of U.S. Census records shows that well over a dozen families lived in the area for many decades, some for two or three generations. Old newspaper articles give scant hints of their lives, both socially and in business. Among the trees, protected by the thorny multiflora roses that have taken over as the predominant undergrowth, are remnants of a fairly large settlement of long forgotten farmers and maybe even a bootlegger or two.

The most obvious vestiges of the former inhabitants and their labors are the prominent stone rows that run along, and sometimes cut across, the park trails. Before early farmers could plow and seed the earth they first needed to clear this very rocky hillside to make usable fields. Removing rocks was an ongoing process, as frost heaving brought a new crop to the surface each winter. Each year, the farmers dumped the rocks along the edges of their fields, defining their properties' boundaries and the lanes that ran from one farm to another.

Also scattered throughout the area are rock caches, some of them large enough and stacked neatly enough to suggest that you are looking at the ruins of a house; or maybe ancient waypoint markers for alien invaders. These collections however, like hundreds of others found throughout the northeastern U.S., were simply intended to be used for future construction of homes and barns; structures that never came to be. As the fields were abandoned and natural progression took over, corn, hay, and wheat were replaced by cedars, and then maples, elms, and other hardwoods that rise

above the prickly invasion of the multiflora rose. Scattered throughout, begging to be discovered, are the remains of more than a dozen structures, mainly ruins of houses, barns, and springhouses and the faint old lanes that once connected them. All that remain of the old houses, probably constructed by local stonemasons or even the farmers themselves, are foundations and cellar holes, or nondescript heaps of rocks where they tumbled.

Another mystery is reflected in the name of one of the park's trails, the Copper Hill Trail. Local legend hints at the existence of a long-lost copper mine, its workings attributed — probably incorrectly — to the labors of Indians. Somewhere here on the mountain the mine does, or did, exist. Beck visited the small mine, and in his book included a photo of its entrance.

Along the Copper Hill Trail, despite having an uncanny knack of remaining hidden in plain sight a few feet off the trail, hikers and bikers suddenly notice a fireplace and chimney rising in the woods. But who has taken the time to notice the strange construction of the adjacent cellar hole? Could it be that bootleggers really did change this place to make illicit Prohibition products as claimed by Beck?

Or way off the established trails, who built that old springhouse that has "DHP Aug 1845" inscribed in its mortar? The springhouse is obvious as is the large ruined cellar hole beside it, but where was the barn? Nature's progression is bent on concealing forever all that once existed here, as it has done in the rest of the Hollow.

Here at Baldpate questions arise that beg to be answered. Who were those former inhabitants of Honey Hollow? How many of them were here? Why did they leave? What happened to their homes? Possibly, as time goes by, more answers will surface, but for now, as you use the trails of Baldpate, remember that this wasn't always "just woods."

New Faces

This spring, Howell Farm welcomed a new flock of baby animals to the barnyard, including 17 lambs, 4 piglets, 30 chicks, and 6 goslings. Baby photos below.



Upcoming Event: May 29, 7:30 p.m.

On the Road with Elsie

Edith Sprague of Allentown will talk about her experience traveling the country during World War II with Elsie the Cow, the Borden Milk mascot, as they raised money for war bonds.

Sprague was one of Elsie's personal caretakers.

Her job was to help keep Elsie primped for public appearances as they traveled the United States by rail. By the time they were done touring, they had raised \$10 million.

The talk will be held in the Charles Fish Barn. It is free and open to the public.

An Ode to Manure

by Karrin Pearson
Howell Farm Intern

My mornings at Howell Farm begin with chores. Although that word may conjure up images of difficult and unpleasant tasks, I see my chores as delightful and meaningful work. One job in particular shines above the rest: shoveling manure.

I open the door to the ox barn, and am welcomed by Jake's white horns lurching around the frame of his stall and his shiny dark eyes. Chris, the younger and larger of the two oxen, vocalizes his hunger with a droning moo. I quickly scoop their "cereal" into their bowls; Jake gets a full scoop but Chris only gets a handful. Next I hoist a quarter bale of hay over the railing on either side of the divider, ensuring that Chris won't steal some of Jake's needed nutrients. The quiet grinding of their large teeth begins and won't stop for at least an hour or two. I leave them to their breakfast and turn to other tasks.

When I return to the ox barn, this time from the backside, I open the lower section of the door. The crisp morning light floods inside, brightening Chris and Jake's dark hides, the yellow straw, and the dark manure that sits on top. As I step onto the cement floor, I inhale the unique combination of sweet dried grass and the earthy, moist, digested grass. Two faces of the same coin.

I'm fascinated by the fact that the ox pies that lie on the barn floor will someday help make food. And I play a key part in that process. By shoveling their manure and adding it to the ever-growing manure pile, I make the first step in recycling their waste

into food. Actually, I shouldn't refer to the oxen manure as waste, because it really isn't — it's farmer's gold, a key ingredient for healthy soil and crops.

As I bend forward, pitchfork in hand, my muscles work to carry the heavy manure to the wheelbarrow. I deftly navigate the teeth beneath the pies, trying to leave as much dry straw behind as possible. (Bedding is a precious commodity at Howell Farm, so I must conserve.) The urine-drenched straw is equally valuable, so I slop it into the wheelbarrow. When full, I grip the handles and push the wheelbarrow to the manure pile and contribute the oxen's daily offering.

Later today, or tomorrow, or perhaps next week, this same offering will fly in the sky as it's flung out the backend of the manure spreader. It will make one victorious arch and then fall to its final resting place on the soil. With a farmer leading the way, Jake and Chris will pull the spreader back and forth across the field. Both farmer and oxen are physically active in their own food production, contracting muscles, sweating, and breathing quickly.

Farmer and oxen will team up again to sow their crops and then later to harvest them. They are linked in a symbiotic relationship. Together, with the help of the soil, man and animal work to grow food. Yet, as soon as the process is complete, the cycle begins anew, recycling the nutrients between the oxen, manure and crops.

I am grateful to be part of such an ancient and sustaining relationship.



Crop Report

by Rob Flory
Historical Farmer

Earth Day 2009

Today saw the emergence of the oats that Farmer Ian planted earlier this month. We'll be passing the finger-tine weeder over them in the near future to kill small weeds that will be coming up along with the oats. The oats are more deeply-rooted than many of the weeds, so the weeder leaves the oats behind while killing many of the weeds.

Another field of oats was planted during the recent Spring Tillage Wagon Tours program. In addition to our usual horse-drawn plowing, this program showed visitors some historical tractor farming. The field was plowed by neighbor Scott Timmins with his 1940 John Deere B and a two-bottom pull-behind plow. Scott and his tractor then harrowed with a spring-tooth harrow and planted oats with a modified horse-drawn grain drill. When making the transition from horses to tractors, many farmers merely sawed the tongue of their horse-drawn implements and put a tractor hitch on the front, and this drill is an example of such a conversion.

This latest crop of oats is a special hull-less variety which is easier to process for human consumption than the kind we grow for the horses. The horses don't mind the extra fiber from the hull, but most of us people do.

Plowing for corn has begun and next week we'll begin planting corn with the school kids.



The Furrow is Moving Online

Next month, The Furrow will begin publishing online at furrow.howellfarm.org.

The Furrow's new website will feature all the content of the print edition, plus a new "Today at Howell Farm" blog, photo galleries, video of farming activities, and more. The site will be updated every week. We encourage you to visit often!

Howell Farm Looks Uphill:

Lawrenceville, and the Pennington Middle School. The ages of the children have ranged from 10 to 16, and most of the groups have been 10 members or less, plus some adult helpers. In addition to using handsaws and brush hooks to start clearing trails, the groups have also



Trailblazing. Trails like this on Baldpate Mountain may someday be part of a Howell Farm "Heritage Trail."

helped tap maple trees, collect sap, and mulch trees in Howell Farm's woodlot.

"It's great to see kids involved like this," says farm director Pete Watson. "They're helping us build something new...from the ground up."

The Ted Stiles Preserve was purchased through the cooperative efforts of Mercer County, the state of New Jersey, Hopewell Township, and the Friends of Hopewell Open Space. It is maintained by the Mercer County Park Commission. Of the 1,100 acres it spans, 25 are managed by Howell Farm as part of the Pleasant Valley Historical Park, an interpretive area that surrounds the farm and includes a 19th century gristmill, a schoolhouse, a blacksmith shop and two mountain farms.

Plans for the management area are still being developed, but its vision involves creating a "Heritage Trail" up the mountain that will connect visitors with some of the most interesting ruins that tell the story of the Pleasant Valley community.

On the Mountain: Phillips Family Heritage

One site on Baldpate Mountain of particular interest to Howell Farm is the location of an old gristmill that the Phillips family (who first owned Howell Farm) operated on the mountain in the late-1700s until the mid-1800s.

Although the mill is long gone, visitors will still find the pit where the mill was located, and the channels by which water flowed to and from the mill. Research has been conducted on the mill by Howell Farm historian Larry Kidder, and a trail was built around it last year by Eagle Scout Eric Del Grande of Lawrenceville. Interpretive tours of the mill site are already being offered by the farm's interpretive staff.

Another site on the moun-

tain includes the woodlot from which the Phillips family once harvested trees for building projects. Because the area is now preserved (meaning no more logging), the farm plans to introduce interpretive walks to the woodlot and plant a replacement woodlot along Pleasant Valley Road. As the new woodlot matures, materials will be harvested and processed using historical methods. The plan includes re-establishing a steam-powered sawmill that once operated nearby, and using the lumber to repair and restore structures in the Pleasant Valley Historical Park.

Baldpate Mountain is also home to the rocky ruins of several late 19th and early 20th century farmsteads. These sites may one day be used to help tell the story of how residents once used Baldpate Mountain as farmland.



Friends of Howell Living History Farm

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