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HISTORIC ATSION MANSION AT WHARTON STATE FOREST TO RE-OPEN FOR GUIDED TOURS

Batsto Mansion and Batsto Village also open to the Public

TRENTON - Atsion Mansion, the restored historic manor nestled in the Shamong Township section of Wharton State Forest, and which underwent a \$1.3 million renovation, will be open for guided tours every Saturday this summer, starting this weekend.

It complements nearby historic Batsto Mansion and Batsto Village, providing a unique destination for visitors with an interest in the history of this region of Burlington County and South Jersey.

“Expanded opportunities to visit Atsion Mansion and then to experience Batsto Village in Wharton State Forest provides a unique and enjoyable educational experience for New Jersey residents and visitors from other states,” said DEP Assistant Commissioner of Natural and Historic Resources Richard Boornazian. “This also fits perfectly into Governor Christie’s vision of a Sustainable Parks Plan, which seeks to augment programs, offerings, and amenities at our state parks, to draw more visitors and enhance revenues while maintaining the integrity of our parks and historic sites.”

“Atsion Mansion offers visitors a chance to take a step back in time to a very interesting point in New Jersey’s history,” added Rob Auermuller, Superintendent of Wharton State Forest. “It is one of many sites at the park that I encourage all visitors to experience.”

Interpretive tours of Atsion Mansion are scheduled every Saturday at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m., while guided tours of Batsto Mansion, in Batsto Village in Washington Township, are available Thursday through Sunday at 12:30 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Located in the New Jersey Pinelands, Atsion Mansion was constructed in 1826 and has been vacant since 1882, with much of its architectural integrity still intact. It was built as a summer home for Samuel Richards, a prominent ironmaster from Philadelphia who was also the operator of the Atsion furnace along the Mullica River.

After Richards’ death in 1842, the property was passed down through his heirs and finally sold to another Philadelphia merchant, Maurice Raleigh. The Raleigh family was the last to use the mansion as a residence. When Joseph Wharton purchased the property in 1892, he used the mansion for packing and storage for his cranberry production. The state acquired the property in 1955 as part of the Wharton Tract.

Today, the mansion appears as it was back in 1826. It does not contain plumbing, electricity, or heat other than fireplaces. The home, still unfurnished, is offered as an architectural setting, reflecting on the Greek Revival style of the building. Visitors to the mansion will learn about the town of Atsion's vibrant industrial past, when it was a thriving iron community and home to more than 600 people.

Nearby Batsto Village is the site of an iron and glassmaking industrial center that thrived at this site from 1766 to 1867. The current setting reflects the agricultural and commercial enterprises that existed here during the late 19th century. It consists of thirty-three historic buildings and structures including the Batsto Mansion, gristmill, sawmill general store, workers' homes and post office.

Visitors to Wharton State Forest, which is the largest state park, also will find rivers and streams for canoeing, hiking trails (including a major section of the Batona Trail), miles of unpaved roads for mountain biking and horseback riding, plus numerous lakes, ponds and fields ideal for wildlife observation.

In November 2011, Governor Chris Christie announced the state's Sustainable Parks Plan designed to keep all 39 of New Jersey's state parks and more than 50 historic sites open, to provide affordable recreation to state residents, especially during tough economic times. Components of the plan, which the Governor announced at Liberty State Park, include enhancing and expanding park programs, facilities and amenities to generate more visitors and revenues that can make the parks more financially self-sustaining.