



A Century in The Making

EXPLORE NATURE  DISCOVER HISTORY

AUGUST eNEWSLETTER

A Message from Your Park Director David Green

This is an exciting month as we observe Richfield Heritage Preserve: A Century in The Making. The Kirby house, one of our historic homes dating back to 1921, is now 100 years old and is the catalyst for creating this celebration to commemorate this milestone. This event provides us with a unique opportunity to remember and reflect as we plan for the Preserve's future. I hope that you will join us as we honor our past and look towards our future during our month-long event, "RHP: A Century in The Making" which will culminate with a community gathering on Sunday, August 29th from noon - 4pm.



This property has a rich and fascinating backstory. The land, once home to encampments by Native Americans, transitioned to the Oviatt Family who were among the first pioneering families of Richfield. The land that served the Oviatts transitioned to serve the Kirby family. The land that served the Kirbys and Neal family that followed then changed to serve the Girl Scouts. All the while,

RICHFIELD HERITAGE PRESERVE A Century in the Making

Celebrating The James Kirby Estate
Established 1921

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this magnificent property we now call Richfield Heritage Preserve.

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long drives in the country from Cleveland to Akron who would sometimes come through Richfield. They would stop in Triangle park in the center of town for a spell before continuing on their way. Richfield was a friendly place with lots of civic activities and organizations, and even hosted an annual reunion for all current and former residents. It was peaceful and quaint. This was what appealed to Kirby and his wife Nellie.

Kirby selected their property in Richfield

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KIRBY HOUSE CENTENNIAL MILESTONE

Centennial Milestone: Visionary Inventor Settles & Builds Home in 1921

Over 100 years ago, inventor James Kirby married and settled in Richfield, Ohio. He and his wife Nellie planned to build their dream home, grow their family and create a property like no other in the area. They found the ideal location and broke ground in 1919 and the home was completed in 1921, making this year the 100th anniversary of Kirby House.

Kirby was a self-taught electrical engineer who focused his career on "eliminating the drudgery of housework". He is known as an American inventor mostly-known for inventing the Kirby vacuum cleaner and the wringerless



Photo Courtesy of Joan Gottschling

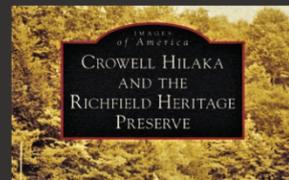
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CENTURY EVENT
Photo Contest



AUGUST 17TH
4-7 PM



NEW BOOK!
Purchase Supports
Mill Restoration



COMMUNITY GATHERING
August 29th
12 - 4PM



CENTURY EVENT
CALENDAR



VIRTUAL BACKPACK
Fun at the Park or
from Home!



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JOIN RHP'S EMAIL LIST

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This property has a rich and fascinating backstory. The land, once home to encampments by Native Americans, transitioned to the Oviatt Family who were among the first pioneering families of Richfield. The land that served the Oviatts transitioned to serve the Kirby family. The land that served the Kirbys and Neal family that followed then changed to serve the Girl Scouts. All the while, the land itself has been a place for the forest to grow and mature, where overgrazing of deer has been minimal which in turn benefited the wildflowers to flourish and a place for salamanders to be found on the forest floor. Today, there are stunning historical structures, flourishing wildlife, mature forests of beech and maple trees, and flowing streams and lakes. As we transition to the next 100 years, changes will occur once again as we focus on turning this preserve into a place for the public to enjoy.

In a sense, this land has been constantly recycled. This concept isn't new. In fact, there is a trend where properties that were once owned by private landowners are now being turned into

parks for the enjoyment of the public. So we have much to learn from others who have made this transition before us.

As the first park director of Richfield Heritage Preserve, I am eager to lead this impressive property into its next century along with the Richfield Joint Recreation District. Together we are proud stewards of this magnificent piece of land, and as we move forward we acknowledge that it is important to honor the past as we lay plans for future generations.

Revisiting what voters said yes to, back in 2014 when the bond and levy were passed to save this property, is our first step in developing a strategic plan. A plan that states who we are and where we are going three to five years from now. This Fall and Winter we will be looking for input to answer these important questions. Do we want to save all of the buildings on the property or not? What amenities do we want to offer? Should camping be opened to the general public and not just scouting groups? Are the trails sufficient to serve its users? What rental facilities do we feel are important to offer? What types of programming should we be focusing on - the natural world, historical uses and/or recreational resources?

Many important questions will be asked as we enter strategic planning of Richfield Heritage Preserve this coming Fall and Winter. I look forward to meeting with members of the community, residents and other stakeholders as we forge this path together.

My door is always open and I look forward to the discussions that are yet to be had.

David Green



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Over 100 years ago, Richfield was a rural township. There were a few new paved roads and people taking long drives in the country from Cleveland to Akron who would sometimes come through Richfield. They would stop in Triangle park in the center of town for a spell before continuing on their way. Richfield was a friendly place with lots of civic activities and organizations, and even hosted an annual reunion for all current and former residents. It was peaceful and quaint. This was what appealed to Kirby and his wife Nellie.

Kirby selected their property in Richfield because it would suit his family, his work and so many of his creative interests. In 1921, he imaginatively envisioned a home situated on a slight rise, cooled by surrounding trees and fed with cool water from a nearby spring. His plans also included a millpond which would feed water to his future mill which in turn would generate hydroelectricity for his home and serve as the location for his personal workshop.

The inventor then went to work. Knowing artificial ponds fill up with silt and would have to be dredged periodically, Kirby devised dams across the feeder creeks that would let clear water in but keep the muddy storm water out. He invented a system that would divert the storm water into huge pipes under the lake bed that could be manually cleaned out. His clarified lake design earned

him a patent, and as far as anyone knows, is still the world’s only patented lake.

While the lake was filling up, Kirby built his house just above the high water line. His mill was designed with a wheel that balanced on ball bearings and could turn with the slightest trickle of water. This was another first and the only water wheel of this type ever. The room above the generator became his workshop. When he wanted to take a break from tinkering he could pull down the hinged stairway, climb up to the loft and look out over his lake.



Photo by Joan Gottschling

The Kirbys eventually opened the lavish grounds of their home to Richfield town-folk every Monday and Friday (and by special request). Within a few years, Kirby felt he needed a bigger lake for bigger fish and more electricity from his mill. He got permission from his nearest upstream neighbor to create a shared lake.

This was Kirby’s home until he sold it in 1947 to the Girl Scouts for \$1, essentially donating his

land for a good purpose. He could never fathom the numbers of people who would come 100 years after him to enjoy his property.

Today, the home is tired and being minimally maintained. Many ideas have been discussed over the years before the property was purchased by the residents of Richfield, and since. With limited annual resources, plans need to be put into place to determine future use of Kirby’s home as the final stages of the dam repair take place this Fall and the millpond is eventually filled with water once again.

Stay tuned as we enter a new phase of Strategic Planning for Richfield Heritage Preserve as we work together with the community to carve out future goals and projects moving us into the next century.



THE KIRBY HOUSE CENTENNIAL MILESTONE

Visionary Inventor Settles & Builds Home in 1921

Over 100 years ago, inventor James Kirby married and settled in Richfield, Ohio. He and his wife Nellie planned to build their dream home, grow their family and create a property like no other in the area. They found the ideal location and broke ground in 1919 and the home was completed in 1921, making this year the 100th anniversary of Kirby House.

Kirby was a self-taught electrical engineer who focused his career on "eliminating the drudgery of housework". He is known as an American inventor mostly-known for inventing the Kirby vacuum cleaner and the wringerless washing machine. Perhaps less widely known, he was a visionary inventor who brought his creative know-how and ideas to fruition with his first home.

His Century home still stands today and is situated at the south end of Richfield Heritage Preserve. It is of the Swiss Chalet architectural style inspired by German residences in the early 19th Century with large pitched, gabled roofs, wide eaves and exposed bracket tails. Other notable features include large expansive windows, a second story balcony style porch, and constructed mostly of wood with a weatherboard exterior, stone foundation and massive fieldstone fireplace.

Utilizing timber and resources like field stone on his property, Kirby's two-story home sits on a slight rise in the landscape to take advantage of gravity for drainage and the flow of cool spring water to the house. Nes-

tled next to a beautiful White Oak for shade in the summer and buffer from the winter weather, Kirby flanked the other side of his home with a beautifully inspired English garden.

Inside, wood finishes define the home. The cozy living room is anchored by the stone fireplace and the dining room has a balcony view of the living area. Built-ins and detailing throughout give a nod to the Arts & Crafts design. In addition, the home has a kitchen off the dining room, four bedrooms upstairs and a large enclosed front porch. Perhaps one of the most notable features of the home was

having electricity which for many was a luxury in Richfield for another decade.

The main view from inside the home would eventually be the beautiful, man-made lake which would also become home to the now iconic Kirby Mill. It would be built the following year and produce electricity for Kirby's home and workshop.

For more information, please read RHP: A Century in The Making featured in this issue.

