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Richfield HERITAGE PRESERVE

MAY/JUNE eNEWSLETTER

Photograph taken by
Michelle Merolla

A Message from Anita Gantner

*Richfield Heritage Preserve
Joint Recreation District Board Chairperson*

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RHP's TRAILS & PROGRAMS A Look Back and A Vision Forward

By Andrea Irland

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By Karen Smik

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KIRBY'S MILL RESTORATION

Looking Forward to The Return of The Mill Wheel



The water wheel's return has been delayed by the harsh winter weather. Although it has been ready for reinstallation since September, its position would have blocked cement trucks from bringing in materials for the dam reconstruction. Now that the dam is nearing completion, it is just a matter of scheduling the millwright's return for the installation. We will keep you posted!

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NON-MOTORIZED
BOATING SEASON



OPEN HOUSE



OVIATT HOUSE
Full Steam Ahead



WILDFLOWER HIKE



PARK PROGRAMMING



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THE LODGE

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A Message from Anita Gantner

Richfield Heritage Preserve Joint Recreation District Board Chairperson

Finally! A new season is upon us and the signs of spring have been turning up everywhere at the park (in spite of the occasional flurries)! In spite of the cold weather, a lot has been accomplished this winter. We are most excited about the progress that has been made on the Lower Lake Phase II Dam Project. This follows completion of the work on the Upper Lake Phase I Dam Project completed last year. All the work should be completed by the time of the release of this newsletter. We will be having a ribbon cutting ceremony in June.

The Lower Lake dam is a critical piece of park infrastructure. Without it, there would be no Lower Lake, a feature that adds to the unique design and pristine beauty of the park. The Lower Lake also possesses an important historical association. James Kirby designed and built the lake around 1920, and in the process obtained a patent for clarifying stream water. The lake is possibly one of only two patented lakes in the world. In his patent, he designed a solution to managing the silt that inevitably collects in lakes. After the lake was formed, Kirby built a mill which became the first hydroelectric generator in the area.

The first phase of the Lower Lake Dam Project began in 2019. Phase I included the incorporation of articulated concrete block, designed to absorb water if it should breach the dam. That was the first time such a design had been used anywhere in Ohio. The second and final phase of this work began last summer. The project suffered from many weather-related delays but the wait will soon be over!

Richfield Heritage Preserve also features a larger, Upper Lake also built by Kirby located east of the lower lake. The existing dam at the upper lake was also not up to code and had suffered erosion of the concrete over the 100+ years of its life. The dam was reengineered in the fall and early winter and now can be classified as a Class 1 dam. Because of the work on both dams, we will be able to preserve both the upper and lower lakes for the public to enjoy.

Completion of the dam repair projects is a significant milestone and achievement for us, as the lakes are a signature feature of the park's unique design and beauty. These repairs were identified as critical projects early on in the park's strategic plan, and consequently were financed by our capital fund.

We like to think of Richfield Heritage Preserve as a unique park in that it offers a historical perspective on the early life of Richfield starting with the Oviatt house and its association to the Underground Railroad. The Oviatt's sold their property to Kirby followed by the property coming into the hands of the Kirby and Neil families who put their own stamp on the property and finally to the 70+ year history of serving as a girl scout camp. It is now open to all to celebrate the past and enjoy the natural features. With the Clean Ohio grant that was used to purchase much of the property, we can be assured that RHP will be around for generations to come.



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The Friends are continuing to raise funds to complete the mill restoration. Priority projects are stabilization and painting of the mill house. After

that, we will begin work on the "passageway" an access trail from the park road to the wheel deck; refurbishing the wheel deck, rebuilding the exterior wooden stairs; and lastly, the swinging bridge. The total cost was originally estimated at approximately \$150,000. We will complete each project segment as funds are raised. Your contribution really does make a difference! If you would like to donate, click here: <https://www.friendsofrhp.org/donate.html>

Meanwhile, the Friends are recruiting and training a cadre of docents who can be stationed at the mill to explain its history to visitors. Our goal is to be available at least every Sunday, May through October, from 2-5 p.m. We are looking forward to the opportunity to share the story of Kirby's Mill. If you are interested in becoming a docent, contact Lynn Richardson at lynndragonwing@gmail.com.

RHP's TRAILS & PROGRAMS

A Look Back and A Vision Forward

Richfield Heritage Preserve has an extensive network of trails amongst its 336-acres taking visitors to the special places, both historical and natural. However, some who have visited have been confused by the connections, stumped by the signage, or unsure of the uses?

Thousands of people have participated in a plethora of programs over the years which have been informative, rich, interesting, and fun while covering a wide range of topics and formats. But how many have you attended? Are there programs you wish were offered to learn more about this special place or provide opportunities for recreation?

Is Ohio's Hidden Treasure such a well-kept secret that even your friends and neighbors don't know what is hidden "inside the fence"? Are there other ways to invite people to discover the resources here in their own backyard? Could the beauty and benefits of Richfield Heritage Preserve be shared more widely so it is recognized not only locally but regionally, as the valuable asset that it is?

Several working groups have been exploring these issues and attempting to answer these questions and more over the past year through a grant of assistance from the Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program of the National Park Service. Although the Grant was awarded in the Fall of 2019, Covid delayed the work until the summer of 2021 when RHP's first park director, David Green, and Andrea Irland, an Outdoor Recreation Planner, revisited the grant to strategize and focus on assessing RHP's trails, programming and how to leverage those areas to engage the community in all that RHP has to offer.

Last summer, a group of people was assembled to delve into those themes and take a closer look at the trails of the preserve. They met several times to look at maps, and discuss issues and opportunities. They split into groups to do the necessary field assessments by hiking the trails and making notes of current conditions, signage, hazards, features to be highlighted, map comparisons and possible re-routes. All of these comments and notes gathered during these assessments have been put into a spreadsheet. The result will be a report on existing conditions and recommendations for future changes, and work to be done.

The next undertaking is to gather the multitude of maps that exist and make some clarifying changes to routes, including naming and use. The current trail system is the result of many uses over the years, some serving purposes



that no longer exist. An improved map that clearly highlights places with coordinating signage and markers will provide visitors with a better user experience. Discussions about ways to engage volunteers to maintain the trails and support programs that utilize the trails is another goal.

While the Trails Group has been tackling their task, another group has been looking at programming by developing an extensive list of all past programs, presenters, and how these opportunities were promoted. Brainstorming sessions included: what future programming should look like, how to identify areas that are lacking, how to engage new partners, and how to develop a better-coordinated approach to program planning in the future. So many good ideas have come up and collaboration with other committees and efforts will result in a more robust and well-planned schedule of programs to better serve the visitors of RHP.

All these efforts hope to better engage the community and consider ways to make RHP more relevant and inviting. It will mean continued collaboration with many partners to share the rich natural, historical and recreational resources of this special place.

Many thanks to the teams of knowledgeable and enthusiastic volunteers that have gathered information, assessed conditions, and creatively thought about future opportunities for your Richfield Heritage Preserve.

- *Andrea Irland*

Outdoor Recreation Planner for the Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service

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By Karen Smik

While spring is budding all around us, our ongoing park projects are starting to pick back up. In April/May, the RHP Invasive Species Management Plan (RHP ISMP) team has once again been focusing on managing woody species and other invasive plants outlined by the plan we established for the park several years ago. The RHP ISMP Team is composed of volunteers who are active members of the Friends of RHP and trained for this role.

One of our major projects is to help manage invasive plants at the park. This helps keep the high-quality natural areas thriving with native plants, which ultimately helps our environment. The ISMP team is persistently on the hunt for barberry, privet, bush honeysuckle, Japanese barberry, and buckthorn. These invasive species are spread throughout the park and thrive anywhere that disturbance to the soil has been.

For the most part, our trained volunteers can pretty easily identify woody species. Other species can be tricky until they leaf out---and sometimes a piece of the plant needs to be cut off to see what it looks like on the inside to properly identify it. For instance---bush honeysuckle is hollow in the middle, Japanese barberry has an unusually bright yellowish-green color inside its stem, and common buckthorn has spotted bark. Invasive plant species have characteristics that make them seem indestructible. They are the first plants to leaf out in the spring and the last to die in the fall---which is one of the many reasons they persist and are able to take over.

If you happen to see some of our volunteers working on a project, feel free to come up and ask them what they are doing. They are a friendly crew and can be easily spotted in their bright Day-Glo yellow vests with the Friend's logo on the back. They may also have a sign displayed nearby that reads "Habitat Restoration in Progress"!



Barberry



Honeysuckle

One of our many park partners is Jennifer Windus, the Ohio Invasive Plant Council president. She was instrumental in assisting us to create an Invasive Species Plan tailor-made for our park. The crew's job is to implement the plan so we can maintain high-quality natural areas in RHP. We are grateful for our park partners as they make seemingly overwhelming projects possible. Hard to believe all the wonderful progress that is made at this park by so many volunteers!

Please check the Friends website at <https://www.friendsofrhp.org/> for a listing of the garlic mustard pulls coming up this season. This plant has hundreds of tiny seeds as well as a long-lived seed bank that remains viable for up to 10 years and takes diligence to get it under control and eventually eradicate it.

If you would like to identify invasive plant species in your own yard, please look them up through the link below. Happy trails to you and happy hunting!

INVASIVE PLANTS OF OHIO - <https://www.oipc.info/invasive-plants-of-ohio.html>

NON MOTORIZED BOAT SEASON Begins May 30th!

Beginning Memorial Day and extending through Labor Day, non-motorized watercrafts are permitted in the Upper Lake at Richfield Heritage Preserve during normal park hours.

- **UNLOADING YOUR WATERCRAFT**

Vehicles may be driven down to the beach area by the Boat House. The access road is to the left of The LODGE. Watercraft can be unloaded and placed in the water by hand from the boat launching area designated by pea gravel. Cars **MUST** be taken back up to the parking lot directly after depositing your canoe, kayak or paddle board.

- **PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES are REQUIRED** & Proper personal flotation devices must be worn at all times.

- **NO SWIMMING ALLOWED**

& Swimming from the watercraft and alcohol are strictly prohibited.

- **IT's THE LAW** When using the lake, State of Ohio boating and fishing regulations apply. All watercraft must be licensed by the State of Ohio. Refer to this link for details so you're not caught unaware. <https://www.richfieldheritagepreserve.com/watercraft-rules-and-regulation.html>



RIBBON CUTTING & OPEN HOUSE

June 12th

1:00 - 5:00p.m.

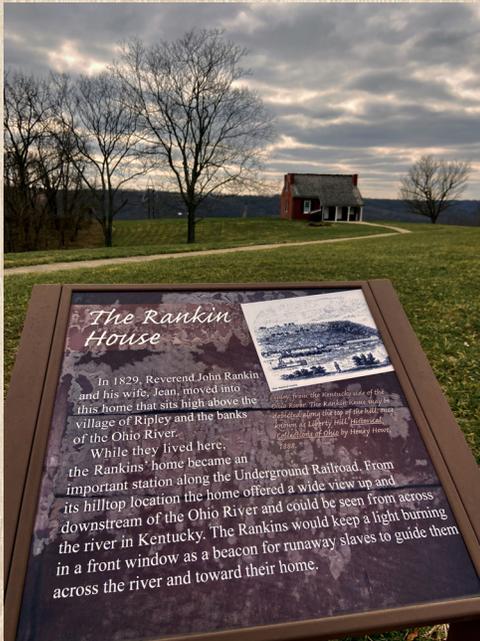
Richfield Heritage Preserve is planning an Open House on Sunday, June 12th to commemorate the completion of Phase II of the dam rehabilitation project. A reception will take place in The LODGE afterward with activities for children, as well as an opportunity to step inside a number of the buildings throughout the park. Come and learn about all of the accomplishments at the park since it opened to the public. Stay tuned for more information



FULL STEAM AHEAD!

Oviatt House Preservation UPDATE

By Judy Bowman



With winter subsiding and warmer weather approaching, Oviatt House Inc. (OHI) is back at work! Our primary goal this year is to complete the exterior renovation including a new roof, and restoration of the siding and trim. These improvements will not only go a long way in preserving the Oviatt House but will enhance and beautify the entrance to the Park as well.

Temporary electric service is being installed which will enable us to complete our work. Volunteers continue to remove the non-original fabric from the home, including: the side addition, drywall, insulation, nails, screws, ductwork, wires, and flooring.

As a result, OHI has been able to save thousands of dollars thanks to the efforts and skills of our volunteers. We try our best to keep our volunteers happy, safe and well-fed. One volunteer exclaimed that if he knew there was going to be lunch he would have started volunteering long ago!

OHI board members are seeking inspiration from other historic homes and museums and recently toured the Gibbs House at Stearns Homestead in Parma as well as the Cozad-Bates house (pictured) in University Circle. Judy Bowman, OHI President, and her husband Ken recently traveled through Ohio, Georgia, and Tennessee visiting

historic homes and Underground Railroad sites, including the Rankin House (also pictured). John Rankin is estimated to have assisted 2,000 Freedom Seekers as they traveled northward across the Ohio River. OHI plans future visits to the John Brown House in Akron and the Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati. Through these visits we hope to gain insight and inspiration, and develop valuable partnerships as we move from restoration into museum development.

OHI continues to receive donations from individuals, and recently conducted a mail campaign to local area businesses asking for their support. In addition to pursuing private and corporate donations, OHI is applying for grants and state funding with the goal of raising sufficient funds to complete the restoration by 2024.

Judy Makowski is busy making the second in a series of beautiful quilt design Christmas ornaments which will be available later this year with all proceeds once again going directly to the restoration fund.

Stay tuned for announcements of additional fundraising efforts, hopefully including a joint event with the Friends of Richfield Heritage Preserve!



SPRING WILDFLOWER HIKES

Spring wildflowers will be blooming throughout the Preserve in May. Jennifer Windus, an ecologist, and Ohio Invasive Plant Council (OIPC) president will be leading a two-mile hike on Saturday, May 14, from 1:00-3:30 p.m. She will offer insight into our native spring ephemerals and the impact invasive plants have on their habitat. The hike follows the Buckeye Trail through one of the most scenic sections of the park. While free, participants are asked to register for the hike at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/wildflower-hike-tickets-264331822597>.

Meet shortly before 1:00 p.m. at Waterfront Shelter---just south of The Lodge---dress for the weather, and wear sturdy shoes.

If unable to attend the in-person hike, a do-it-yourself version---which can be followed on your smartphone---is offered. The field guide may be downloaded from <https://www.friendsofrhp.org/wildflower-walk-spring-2022.html>.

PARK PROGRAMMING

for May & June

FITNESS IN THE FOREST

Saturdays

**May 7th, May 14th, June 4th,
and June 18th**

9-10:30a.m.

Outdoor fitness class on the trails, incorporating conditioning and cardio using braided tubing (provided) and mats (bring your own). Limit 10 per class. Age 14 and up. Appropriate footwear and clothing for hiking surfaces. \$10 per class, donated to RJRD to preserve and maintain RHP. Contact (216) 952-6508 or <https://www.cravenaturecleveland.com/>

NON MOTORIZED BOATING SEASON OPENS

Monday, May 30th

Memorial Day is the official opening of the boating season at Richfield Heritage Preserve. We allow ONLY non-motorized watercraft.

HIKE YOGADVENTURE

Sunday, May 15th

12:30p.m.

OneTreeLove invites you to take a hike and practice yoga outdoor in the fresh air. Enjoy some Vitamin N and nature therapy connecting with self, others, and nature. Yoga pose, breathing, and mindfulness practices will be done throughout the hike. Guide: Laura Tecca

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/hike-yogadventure-sunday-series-tickets-277266761347>

STAY UP TO DATE!

Check out current programming at Richfield Heritage Preserve by visiting our calendar on our website. Go to: <https://www.richfieldheritagepreserve.com/calendar-of-events.html>

RICHFIELD LIBRARY STORY HOUR

Thursdays

June 9th and June 23rd

11-12:00p.m.

Join the fun for an outdoor story hour with Miss Diane at the Richfield Heritage Preserve. Come along and enjoy an hour of stories, rhymes, music, movement, and more. Each session we will explore a different nature theme. This program will take place on the lawn outside of the Lodge; available seating is limited so bring a blanket. Please keep in mind that this program is held outdoors so dress accordingly, sunscreen, bug spray, water bottle, and closed-toe shoes are recommended. In the event of inclement weather, this event will be moved to the Lodge. Pack a picnic lunch and plan to stay and explore the park with friends.

HISTORY OF THE PRESERVE HIKE

Sunday, June 19th

2-4:40p.m.

The Friends of Richfield Heritage Preserve (Friends), will present a "History of the Preserve" Hike---led by Friends historian Lynn Scholle Richardson---on Sunday, June 19, from 2-4:30 p.m. It will begin by the Oviatt House---which can be accessed at the 3771 Oviatt Road park entrance. Participants will learn about the early history of the property and its various owners over the years during this 2-mile hike.

This event, held rain or shine, is free and open to the public. Wear hiking boots, bring a water bottle and dress for the weather. For more information, go to friendsofrhp.org.

Help Us Complete The Lodge



As we finish the final renovations for upcoming weddings and gatherings at Richfield's newest venue, please consider donating a gift item from our Lodge Warming Wishlist. To participate, go to the Richfield Heritage Preserve website or The Lodge wishlist/registry at <https://tinyurl.com/Registry-Lodge>. Your gift selections will be sent directly to Richfield Heritage Preserve. No gift is too small!

The registry will close May 15th. The Lodge warming upgrades will be showcased at our August Open House. Thank you for your support!



Richfield
HERITAGE
 PRESERVE
THE LODGE