

Schuylkill River Heritage Center

Phoenix Columns

Winter 2021

Despite the Pandemic, Boy Scout Troop 78 Visits the Schuylkill River Heritage Center and takes a ride on the Schuylkill River Trail

The Schuylkill River Heritage Center (SRHC) was closed from mid-March through August. All local school visits were cancelled last year and the number of visitors allowed to enter at one time is still limited. Despite this situation, the Willistown Boy Scout Troop 78 came to the SRHC on a beautiful Saturday morning in October. This troop was organized over 90 years ago, and it is one of the oldest continuing Boy Scout troops in Chester County. This trip was arranged by SRHC member, Phoenixville resident and Troop 78 leader, **Jack Bilson**. His son, **Ethan Bilson**, was a member of the SRHC Board of Directors when he was a student at the Renaissance Academy, and helped to lead the effort to "Bring Back the Mural" in 2016.

Before their bicycle ride on the Schuylkill River Trail, **Barbara Cohen**, SRHC Pres. had them gather in the Symbols of Steel Sculpture Garden outside the Foundry Building. She gave them a presentation about the Phoenix Iron and Steel Company's history, Phoenix bridges and the story of the Phoenix Column that made the company famous. This related to where they were all standing in the sculpture garden. Several scouts were given photo card images of Phoenix bridges, and they shared these images with their fathers, scout leaders, and the other scouts who were participating in the special tour. After their ride, several families visited the SRHC as well.



There were over 40 fathers, sons and troop leaders who participated in the tour and bike ride. They are shown here in the Symbols of Steel Sculpture Garden.

AN OUTDOOR LESSON ABOUT PHOENIX BRIDGES



Here are some of the students showing images of Phoenix bridges



The two bridges pictured here were shared by the scouts. They are exactly the same and were both manufactured by the Phoenix Bridge Company in **1912**. On the left is a bridge that was sent to **India** and on the right is a bridge in **North Carolina** that is still being used by the **Norfolk Southern Railroad**.

Shown here are SRHC members **Jack** and **Ethan Bilson**. Jack was a member of Troop 78 since his childhood. He served as a Senior Patrol Leader while still in high school. Ethan served as a Senior Patrol Leader of the troop at the same time he served on our SRHC Board. He is now a senior at Susquehanna University and completing his honors program studies to receive a degree in History and Secondary Education.

Both Jack and Ethan earned the top honor of becoming Eagle Scouts when they were Troop 78 members.



PARKS AND TRAILS ACROSS THE USA

Thanks to the recommendation made by SRHC members **Art and Marge Miller**, their longtime friend, **Steve Elkinton**, gave a Zoom presentation in November. Steve worked at the National Park Service (NPS) for 36 years and for much of that time he served as the NPS program leader for the trail system overseeing the coordination of mapping, signage and interstate participation. He has also written two books. One is **The Grand Experiment** which celebrates the NPS 50th anniversary, and the other is the **National Trail System – An Illustrated History**.

Steve began his tenure at the NPS in 1989. During that time the trail system doubled in size from 16 to 30 national trails. The National Trails system was approved in 1968 and helped foster the growth of the trail system. All across the US there are now trails that highlight history as well as geography. He noted the Appalachian Trail that extends from Maine through the eastern states all the way to Georgia. Another example is the Lewis and Clark Trail that extends from St. Louis Missouri to the northwest Pacific coast.

At this time there are 19 “national historic trails”. These historic trails cover hundreds of years of history from the settlement of Hawaii to the 1960’s struggle for voting and civil and rights. This struggle is commemorated by the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail.

There are also National Recreation Trails that are generally more localized and regionally maintained. Examples of these trails include the Schuylkill River Trail, Pennsylvania’s Mason Dixon Trail and the Delaware and Lehigh Canal Towpath. At this time there are more than 1,350 of these national recreation trails.



Here is a map that illustrates the length of the Appalachian Trail from Maine to Georgia



Shown here is an image from the 50 year anniversary celebration of the National History Freedom Trail. It honors the march to the state capital led by Martin Luther King and John Lewis in 1965. President Obama attended and spoke at this special event.

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE HERITAGE CENTER

Tuesday, March 9th at 7:30 PM

Barbara Cohen will give a **Zoom presentation** about **Phoenixville's Renaissance** and introduce a new SRHC project for 2021.

Tuesday, April 13th at 7:30 PM

Mary Ellen Heisey, an SRHC member who serves on the Environmental Advisory Council in Schuylkill Township, and leads Bird Walks in Valley Forge National Park will give a **Zoom Presentation** about **Birds Along the Schuylkill River**.

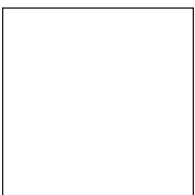
Tuesday, May 11th at 7:30 PM

The Schuylkill River Heritage Center will host a special program that celebrates **Phoenixville's Multi-Cultural and Multi-Color Historic Legacy**. We hope that this will be able to be an in-person event.

The SRHC has been open since September and continues to welcome visitors. No groups larger than 6 people at a time can enter, and everyone needs to be wearing a mask.

SRHC hours are Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM

We hope everyone is staying safe and HEALTHY!



Schuylkill River Heritage Center
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