

*Schuylkill River Heritage Center*

# Phoenix Columns

Summer 2021

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## The New Chester County Interactive Exhibit is Now Live

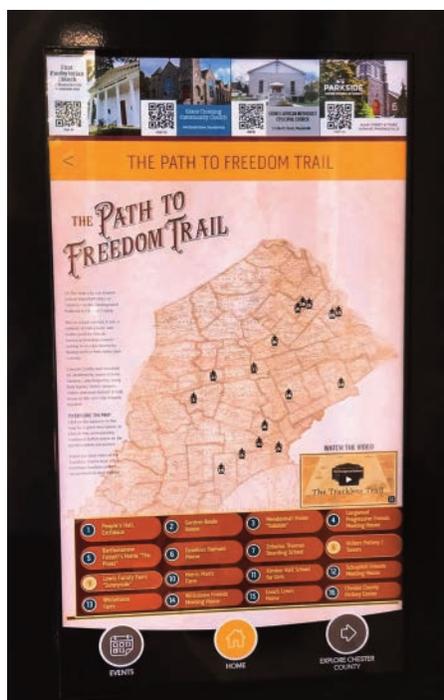
We are so excited to let everyone know that the new version of the Chester County Interactive Exhibit has now been completed and installed. Last year, all three of our interactive units failed since their 2008 technology was no longer functioning. The Schuylkill River Industrial Legacy and Schuylkill River Trail units were reinvented, thanks to grants received from **Aqua, PECO, Phoenixville Federal Bank, and Schuylkill Highlands**. Now, thanks to grants received from the **Chester County Community Fdn.** and the **Huston Fdn.** our new and reinvented Chester County unit has also been completed. The mouse is gone. The new unit features four touch screen choices for visitors. These include the **Phoenix Iron & Steel Legacy**, which has images that illustrate the company's history and the restoration of The Foundry Building. The second choice, **Nearby Places To Visit**, provides a list, images, and descriptions of many places throughout Chester County for visitors to explore. The third choice, **Phoenixville Walking Tours**, gives visitors the opportunity to walk around Phoenixville and gain a greater understanding and appreciation about the history of the places along their walk.

A new fourth choice is **The Path to Freedom Trail**. It tells the story of the Underground Railroad in Chester County and the incredible bravery of the county residents who helped, protected, and led the slaves on their dangerous journey to freedom from the Delaware and Maryland slave state lines all the way north to safe places in Montgomery County.

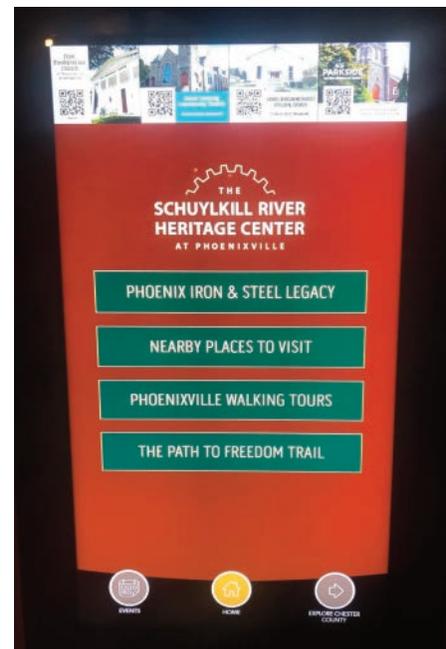
One example of courage and commitment is **Graceanna Lewis**. She and her sisters ran the large family farm in **West Vincent**, and it became a major stop on the Underground Railroad. Not only did they provide food, medical care and shelter; they also provided jobs for the former slaves. Their farm had a large deposit of hematite iron ore. The Lewis sisters formed an agreement with **David Reeves** to mine the ore. Many former slaves not only mined the ore, but they were able to settle in Phoenixville and were given jobs at the iron company. By the 1850's, 2,000 tons of iron ore were being produced each year and the Grimes AME church had been established in Phoenixville.

Although the narrative was written by Barbara Cohen, it would not have been possible without the many photos, information and support that were provided by SRHC members **Jack Ertell** and **Barbara & Dennis Ray**. Those helping from other Chester County places include: **Mary Brooks – Westtown, Lisa Doan Harley - Coatesville, Sara Schick – West Vincent, Beverly Sheppard – West Chester, and Jim Sundman - Downingtown.**

Most of all, the SRHC is so grateful for the technology, creativity and expertise that **Miller Designworks (MDW)** provided to make all three of our interactive exhibits come alive again for all to experience and enjoy.

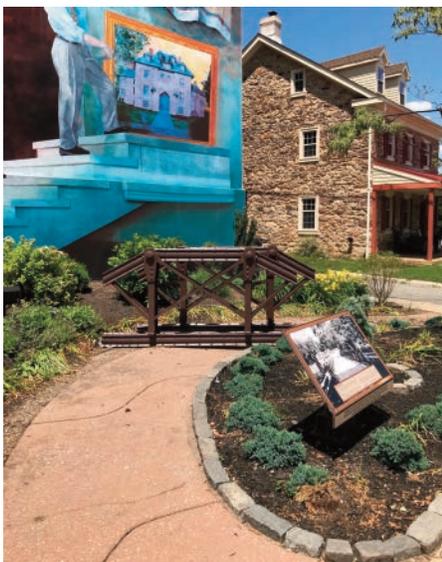


This is a map of the many places in Chester County that are part of our interactive exhibit that were part of the Underground Railroad (URR). MDW marked all of the URR sites with a lantern since this symbolizes the transporting of the escaped slaves at night. Visitors can click on a lantern and the image of the URR place will appear with a narrative about that person and that site.



This is the list of choices that visitors will see on the Chester County Interactive exhibit when they enter the museum.

## Renaissance Park Improvements Are Now Completed



Thanks to **Gern Jaeger** and his team at **Specialty Metals**. They used a conceptual plan drawn by SRHC member **Jeff Amerine** to create and install the Doty Road bridge sculpture. The cost for both the creation and installation of the sculpture was donated to the SRHC by Specialty Metals! It is with profound gratitude that the SRHC recognizes this extraordinary gift to benefit the entire Phoenixville community.



This is the sign that interprets the historic bridge that was produced by the Phoenix Bridge Company in 1891. It once crossed the Ramapo River, just 28 miles from New York City. It was decommissioned in 2001 and awarded to PAEDCO because of the work being done at the Foundry. Because it was never used by Phoenixville it was sold to the SRHC for \$1.00. Since it is no longer useable as a bridge, parts of it will be used as a unique fence surrounding the restored Phoenix Wheel.

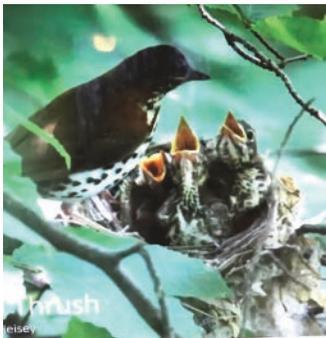
## Birds Along the River – Our April Zoom Event



*Peregrine Falcon*



*Blue Jay*



*A Thrush with babies*



*Eagle*

In April, with almost 80 participants, **Mary Ellen Heisey** was flying high as she gave a stellar Zoom presentation about the avian population along the Schuylkill River! She shared a wonderful overview of the large variety of birds that populate the Southeastern PA region.

Using beautiful photos of all the birds she described, she explained extraordinary details about each of the species, as well as their finding a safe habitat and nesting places that provide food, shelter and water. For example, the Peregrine Falcon, now a threatened species, was nesting under a bridge on Route 422 near Valley Forge. Because this bird is endangered, PADOT halted its bridge improvement project so the nest would remain safe. Work wasn't continued until the baby birds could fly off.

She discussed many other featured species as well. The Bald Eagle, which was endangered in the 1970's, has made a great comeback due to laws passed that banned DDT as an insect deterrent. Instead of only 3 nests statewide in the 1970's, there are now 300 in PA! Despite this success, one in four birds were lost in the last 50 years in North America; a loss of 2.9 billion in the US and Canada! In the US, one billion are lost each year by hitting windows. Mary Ellen suggested homeowners use clear plastic ultra-violet stickers to help prevent this from happening. Since 2.6 billion birds a year are killed by cats, she suggested homeowners keep their cats indoors.

Every month, on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays, at 7:30 AM, Mary Ellen gives a guided bird walk in Valle Forge National Park. Tours begin at the Artillery Park parking lot, located within VF Park. By participating, everyone can enjoy the outdoors and nature, while learning about all the birds flying by!

## Special Events in March and May

In March, **Barbara Cohen** gave a special presentation, via Zoom, about Phoenixville's Renaissance. This program was recorded and is now on our web site. Those who missed it can go to [www.phoenixvillefoundry.org](http://www.phoenixvillefoundry.org) to see and hear this story.



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In May, the SRHC installed a new unique exhibit that celebrates **Phoenixville's Legacy**. A Zoom presentation video introduced everyone to the many varied places of worship in the Phoenixville area that are on display and exemplify the community's history of welcoming everyone, no matter where they came from, what color they were, or where they went to pray. A framed portrait of **Debbie Mitchell**, who passed away, is featured in this exhibit since she was an inspirational community leader and also played a major leadership role at the **Bethel Baptist Church**. It is still currently on display at the SRHC. The portrait is being donated to the church. When it reopens in the fall, Debbie Mitchell's portrait will be permanently displayed there.



*Pictured here are (l. to r.) Bethel Baptist's Pastor Rev. Nathan Coleman, Debbie's husband Ken Mitchell, Rev. Marlene Wood, Barbara Cohen and Phoenixville's Mayor Peter Urscheler.*

# Spring Scenes at the Heritage Center & Renaissance Park



Shown here are Zoe Cohen, Barbara Cohen and Senator Carolyn Comitta, who graciously came to visit the SRHC in May.



Pictured here are Gern Jaeger's Specialty Metals team installing the bridge sculpture in Renaissance Park.



The Barkley School 4th graders visited in June. It was wonderful to have the students safely visit in person. They were also the first group to see the new sculpture in Renaissance Park.

# UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE HERITAGE CENTER

## Wednesday, September 8th at 7:30 PM

**Michael Korb** will be coming from Hazelton, PA to give an in-person presentation about the Coal Industry along the Schuylkill River.

## Thursday, October 7th Joint Heritage Award Celebration

**Tom Carnevale & Lauren Eustis**, our 2020 award recipients, and **Sue Marshall**, our 2021 award recipient, will be honored at an in-person event.

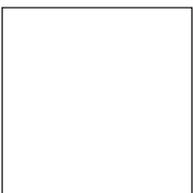
## Tuesday, November 9th at 7:30 PM

**Chari Towne**, a leader of the PA Riverkeeper's Network, will be giving an in-person presentation about the major Clean up of the Schuylkill River.

We respectfully ask that everyone attending an in-person event be fully vaccinated. Masks are preferred so that everyone is protected.

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

We have been open since last September and continue to welcome visitors. The size of groups visiting inside is still limited and everyone needs to be wearing a mask. Please come to see the special **Phoenixville Legacy** exhibit and explore the new **Interactive Kiosks**.



Schuylkill River Heritage Center  
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