



Friends of the
Rockefeller State Park
PRESERVE

The Preserve Observer

Friends of the Rockefeller State Park Preserve Magazine
Vol. XLV Spring 2021

Photo: Joe Golden



Runners starting the Ramble in Rockwood Hall in 2012.

Reflections On The Rockwood Ramble 10k

By Stella Medina

What is in a name? The Rockwood Ramble 10k. Ramble—"To walk for pleasure, typically without a defined route". The Friends of the Rockefeller State Park Preserve are elated to present the 2021 version of the Rockwood Ramble 10k. Shall we state the obvious? This year's event will be like no other. We begin to reminisce previous Rambles. The first Ramble—the realization that the mind did not adequately prepare itself for hill after hill after hill...but that somehow the views and segments of solitude fuel you to the end. The second Ramble: more of the same, but lots of grouching

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Same Time Each Year: Here Come the Cedar Waxwings

By William Golden

There are many migratory birds that visit Westchester County each spring. What is significant about the Cedar Waxwings is the regularity with which they come each June to feast on the Serviceberry Trees in the courtyard of the Visitor Center at Rockefeller State Park Preserve.

There are other birds that return to the same spot, to do the same thing, each year. One of the most famous examples are the Cliff Swallows of the San Juan Capistrano Mission in California. The swallows migrate 6,000 miles from Argentina to San Juan Capistrano to nest. Their return on March 19, St. Joseph's Day, is considered by some to be a miracle. There are also examples of migratory birds returning to the

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**See page 5 for photos
and essay re: Masks**



Rockefeller Peony by Anne Bell

Exciting 12th Annual Peony Celebration With A Twist

By Herbert Hadad

This year we will hold our Twelfth Annual Peony Celebration via Zoom on Thursday, May 20, 2021 in what we hope will be the height of our peony bloom season.

You will learn the true story of how our peonies came to be here in the Rockefeller State Park Preserve, how our master gardeners, Keith Austin, Chris Davies and JoAnn Stern, along with many other helpers, care so lovingly practically all year long for the plants. We are honored to have Former Ambassador and Consul General in New York Motoatsu Sakurai speak to us on behalf

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Rockwood Ramble, *continued from page 1*

about the horrible ending on the grass (we heard you; after that, the finish changed to a beautiful downhill straight).

In 2012, we dedicated the race to Geoff Stein, who like us, loved the Preserve, and rambled it frequently. As we gathered, we mourned the loss of a dear friend who was so much like us, but who saw the Preserve in his very own way. We raced hard that year; sweaty and spent, it was the best way we knew how to say goodbye to Geoff, and hello to new friends (*see picture below*).

In 2017, we toed the start line thinking of another friend. Bill Sherry—our business partner and friend. Bill was the head of timing company Super Race Systems. He passed away that previous December. After years of Bill’s smile, blue eyes and calm demeanor gracing our races, we gathered as one to run our best. It was a brilliant blue-sky day, and Bill’s spirit infused the day. We carried the light of his friendship with us, so our steps were lighter that year, our smiles wider—thanks Bill!

During training, we rambled the Preserve on our own. During Covid-19, rambling is a life saver. Emotionally, mentally. Some runners always have a specific route in mind; only large obstacles can impede the plan for the day (although some make that fallen log a convenient hurdle). Others like myself make up our mind as we go along. Just need to end up back at the car. It is the ramble that saves us. But we long for the communion of runners.

Over the years, so many Rambles. One is humid; another cool, another dry and sunny. We run the route every year, know it like the back of our hands, but somehow can still almost get lost during the race. Race meets Ramble. Trails lead you through winding turns, sharp corners, and the next steps are almost always just out of sight. It’s perfect!

This year, we will be at the Ramble for a host of reasons. The beauty of the Preserve, the glorious overlook of Rockwood Hall. The fact that we are being timed, that nervous pit in our stomach...no hiding, our performance is being measured. To raise money for the trails that we love. But this year we have a special reason, after running in solitude, we long to run together.

We may be socially distant that day, and the field may be smaller, but when we gather, we realize how much we need each other. How much we love looking into another person’s eyes who just ran the race and see the same feelings of elation, love, hard work. We are no longer strangers to each other. Also, we are all sweaty and no one cares. Our communion with each other; our thoughts and feelings. Our communion with the past, we feel the wind and the sun reminding us of happy times behind, happy times ahead. Our communion with our beloved Preserve as we give thanks for the trails and for each other.

This year’s 10k Ramble is dedicated to the memory of all those we have lost to Covid-19 and to our First Responders. May their souls rest in peace, like the sweet peace found in the Preserve.

All runners must be pre-registered, no race day registration. For details on the race please visit friendsrock.org.



Two friendly competitors in green t-shirts - John Nonna (left) and Ben Cheever

Photo: Joe Golden



A moment of silence in tribute to Preserve enthusiast Geoff Stein

Photo: Joe Golden

Peonies, *continued from page 1*

of the generous Japanese people who gave us this gift. Ambassador Sakurai was president of the board of directors of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New York right after these peonies were planted as well as president and CEO of Mitsubishi International Corporation at that time. Currently, he is active in the Japan Society where he is president emeritus, having been the first Japanese to be elected president of the Japan Society.

You can also enjoy a lively musical interlude from the local group Out of Isolation led by Maureen Carson, and have a down- to-earth discussion by Preserve Manager Peter Iskendarian on the nuts and bolts of what it takes to run this beautiful Preserve. And there's beautiful photography by Maureen Koeppel. Who could want for more!



Photo: Joe Golden

Rockefeller Peonies in bloom

This past year has been difficult on all of us, isolating at home, losing jobs, not being able to see grandkids. But through it all we had the opportunity to come to this calming Preserve. We could walk the historic carriage roads, use binoculars to see rare birds, watch the hatching of turtles along Swan Lake and just breathe in the tranquility for our troubled souls.

We could do that because the Preserve Manager and his staff worked tirelessly to keep everything going. The parking became a full-time weekend occupation so that other duties had to be pushed off to during the week. More education for new visitors so they didn't set up barbecues

or use bikes on the trails. People needed directions and even search parties had to be sent out for people who were missing when it was closing time and getting dark.



Photo: Keith Austin

Peonies slumbering in March getting ready for their audition in May

Now is your opportunity to show your appreciation for all that is done for all of us. Please support our event. You can sign up to attend by going to our web site, www.friendsrock.org, which has all the details. Certain ticket levels include a complimentary mini-bottle of Prosecco, generously donated by board member John Manuele and his wife Lisa, which you can enjoy while attending our event. Pick-up for the Prosecco will take place the week before May 20 at the Visitor Center. There are also sponsorship opportunities, ranging in price from \$500-\$5000. If your company is interested in participating, or if you know someone who might, please encourage them to sign up on our web site. It's for a very worthy cause!



Photo: Herbert Hadad

An early admirer of the peonies

Thank you!



**Check our website for details on buying tickets
to our peony event and for sponsorship opportunities:
www.friendsrock.org**

From the Friends President

By George Gumina

Spring is here and we're rewarded with a new beginning! We are optimistic that with more people getting vaccinated, we will be able to return to some kind of normalcy – finally.

We had a record number of new people visit the Preserve, as well as our regular visitors, and the staff were kept quite busy, especially with managing the parking. More people contributed this year to the Friends in appreciation of the beautiful jewel that the Preserve is and because it helped people's mental well-being during this difficult time. And for those many contributions, we are grateful!

And speaking of contributions, we are excited about our first fundraiser for this year, our Zoom version of the Twelfth Annual Peony Celebration! It will take place on Thursday, May 20 from 6:30 – 7:30 PM and you can sign up on our web site. There will be the history of how the peonies came to grace our courtyard, a discussion and a demonstration by our master gardeners on how they care for the peonies. We are very honored to have the former Ambassador and Consul General of Japan in New York, Ambassador Motoatsu Sakurai, join us.

There will be a musical interlude and insights into the goings-on here at the Preserve by the Preserve Manager. Maybe a joke or two, as well! (*Please see the article on page 1*).

The 12th Annual Peony Celebration Committee was composed of our vice-president Evelyn Hadad, treasurer Carol Lyden, board members Stella Medina, Donald Stever and Ron Vogl and myself.

The new project around Swan Lake will begin soon! The Friends and New York State are sharing the half-million dollar project equally.

You will see from the story on page 10 that the State purchased a one-acre parcel at the entrance to Rockwood Hall to complete the area.

A return this year to our 10k race is being greeted with enthusiasm by our running community. (*Please see the article on page 1*.)

Please continue to support our efforts to preserve the Preserve. It's been a tough year but we're getting through it with your help! And please take care of each other and stay safe.



From the cover: Rockefeller peonies as captured by Joe Golden

Board of Directors

Friends of the Rockefeller State Park Preserve

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Kimberly K. Rockefeller

Donald W. Stever

Ron Vogl

Administrative Director: Jessika Creedon

Preserve Masquerade

Story and Photos by Jonathan Cunningham



The challenge of any project of this nature is that the longer it goes on, the more ordinary and mundane the subject seems. It is no longer shocking to witness hikers, dog walkers, or families wearing face masks when in the Preserve. Even surgically masked riders on horseback rarely invite pause. Yet, as is seen with other historical events, especially ones

as traumatic as this pandemic has been, with over 500,000 souls lost in the US alone and countless thousands more dealing with the aftereffects, the world wants to move quickly beyond the distress in an attempt to return to normalcy. It is only with the benefit of time that we can truly understand the impacts of today's event. An archival record is, therefore, helpful in framing our understanding and serves as a reminder to future generations of the journey traveled.

Over the months spanning this project, folks adapted quickly to the health protocols and figured out how to do nearly everything they did before the mask mandate- just in smaller groups. [In a way they had to.] The immediate global solution to the pandemic was a forced isolation. Outdoor activity was one of the only things deemed safe enough to do in a small group, assuming all were appropriately

continued on pages 6 and 7



Masks, *continued from page 5*

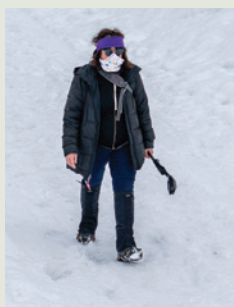


spaced out and masked. The size of the Rockefeller Preserve, with its miles of interlinking carriage roads, was quickly seized upon by those who knew it and discovered by thousands of folks who learned of it for the first time. Regardless of the visitor, the Preserve served as an escape from the pandemic and provided a vital reminder of one's humanity. Yes, people needed to wear a mask, yes, they had to be respectful of and

maintain distance from others on the trail, but people were out communing with nature, taking a walk with their family or friends, skiing, snowshoeing, jogging, horseback riding, or simply sitting on a bench communicating with a friend. In short, the Rockefeller Preserve helped visitors briefly escape the stresses of the pandemic, and that felt good in what was otherwise a fairly bleak time.



As many know, the Preserve also helps manage land that is part of a working farm and that did not stop just because of the Covid-19 virus. Like the visitors, employees and volunteers adapted. Again, masks and social distancing were required, but the work of the Preserve continued. As New York brought infection rates down to a safer more manageable level, Rockefeller Preserve restarted group events like sunset hikes, though on a smaller scale - almost all immediately selling out. Like its visitors, the Preserve adjusted and embraced the reforms necessary to remain open and safe.





A photograph has the power to not only chronicle events but also to capture the emotion of the moment. Masks may cover the face, but luckily the story is often found in the eyes. Whether it is a child who does not fully understand what is happening but senses something is not right, or adults reveling in the joy of being out while knowing it is a mere respite from a day otherwise defined by lock downs, their story can be told, despite the mask. In the end, this is the true value of Rockefeller Preserve. The look and feel may have been different, but the goal of providing people a healthy escape from the stress of life, even one defined by a pandemic, was fulfilled and that narrative is well worth documenting and preserving. A decade or two from now we will look back on these images and say "Wow, that really did happen!"

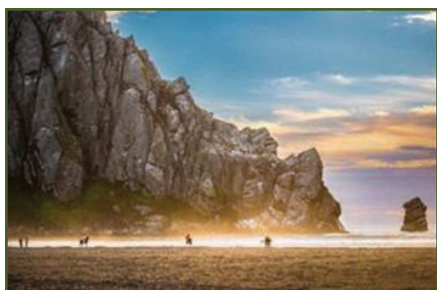


❖ Gallery Schedule at a Glance ❖

“Spacious Skies, Spacious Seas, Spacious Lands: For Generations to Protect”

March 13 – May 9, 2021

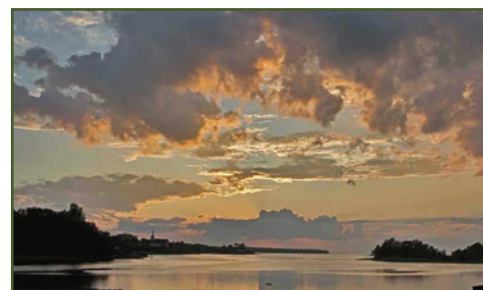
A photography exhibition representing artistic selections from five exceptional multi-talented photographers; co-curator Michael Garber, Walter LeCroy, Bobbi Lane, Lee Varis, and Dyana Van Campen. They have dedicated a major portion of their lives pursuing creative, technical, inventive paths, perfecting their skills while mastering a diversity of subjects and projects.



Lee Varis: Back-O-The-Rock at Moro Bay



Bobbi Lane:
Pocket Basin, Yellowstone



Michael Garber:
Sunset at Northumberland Strait, Nova Scotia

“Mothers and Sons”

May 16 – August 31, 2021

All the images will be nature inspired and abstract in orientation. The birth of Spring blossoms and Mother’s Day to celebrate sons artistic achievements, naturally inspired within nurturing environments; exhibiting artist mothers and sons. The artists are Anne Bell, painter and her son Jonathan Dale Bell, a cinematic director who will create mobile images and co-create a virtual exhibit. And Daniel Sakoff, painter and his mother painter/printer, Bonnie Sakoff



Painter Anne Bell and her son Jonathan Dale Bell, cinematic director



Anne Bell: Circular Bloom



Bonnie Sakoff



Daniel Sakoff

From the Preserve Manager

By Peter Iskendarian

As the manager of the Rockefeller Preserve, this is my favorite time of the year. We just came out of a long, cold winter and the sun is keeping us warmer throughout the day. The spring showers are creating some amazing sunsets at Rockwood Hall. The trees are budding and flowering, the bees are waking up from their winter slumber and the wildflowers are starting to bloom. This only means one thing to me; the Japanese Tree Peonies are about to come to life!

I have been involved with the peonies since 2004 and what's about to occur in the next few weeks never ceases to astonish me. As the peonies go from their winter sleep and start to leaf out, you can visualize what's about to occur, but if you've never witnessed it in person, you don't really know what you're in for.

The work really starts before the leaves even appear. The professionally trained, all volunteer, gardening team works throughout the year to guarantee the peonies are well taken care of, but in the spring they start the step-by-step process to make sure this year's show is better than the previous years. Pruning, fertilizing, mulching and special care for each individual peony almost ensures a spectacular display. This couldn't be done without this dedicated group of individuals.

When the huge buds appear, they are the size of large figs. Those are almost as incredible as the flowers. As the buds break open and the flowers emerge, you can't believe

the size and the variety of colors. I can literally spend the whole day in the garden. I love watching the peonies in all stages of their growth. I find myself taking hundreds of pictures, sometimes dozens of the same flower throughout its growth cycle.

The best part is seeing the guests' reactions when they see the flowers. Whether this is their first time seeing the display or their twentieth, the park visitors marvel at what they are seeing. Another special moment for me is seeing all the family photos taken in the garden. I think about how this family was brought together because of this incredible garden and how special these photos will be to them for generations to come.

This morning I saw a deer next to the garden and it reminds me not just of the peonies, but all of mother nature's creatures that we are welcoming back to the Preserve this spring.

With all the disheartening times we have endured the past year as part of this pandemic, it is still important to take a moment and pause in wonder and awe at the beauty that lays before us.



Photo: Herbert Hadad

Last year's peonies just beginning to bloom

Rockefeller State Park Preserve Staff

Peter Iskenderian, Preserve Manager
 Laurence Gill, P&R Supervisor / Director of Operations
 Jean Dolen, Office Manager
 Susan Lewenz, "Ranger Su", Conservation Communicator
 Joshua DiPaola, Natural Resource Specialist
 Devyani Mishra, Stewardship Crew Leader
 Dmitri Benzinger, P&R Supervisor / Safety & Facility Compliance Mgr.
 Maso Robinson, Head of Buildings & Grounds
 Michael Baris, Buildings / Groundskeeper
 Jack Gandolfo, Buildings / Groundskeeper

Art Gallery
 Audrey Leeds, Gallery Curator

Spotlight On 1 Acre

By Herbert Hadad

New York State recently purchased an important one-acre parcel that is being added to the Rockefeller State Park Preserve. The parcel will remedy the longstanding lack of an official entry to Rockwood Hall, a historic riverside section of the Preserve, allowing for signage and limited parking.

This one acre, in addition to the 346 acres that were donated from David Rockefeller’s estate in 2019, bring the park’s total to 1, 773 acres.

“New York is home to some of the best parks and outdoor facilities in the country,” Gov. Andrew Cuomo said, “and the protection of the land and adding access to state parks, as well as conserving valuable ecological corridors, is an important priority.”



Photo: Jessika Creedon

Rockwood Hall

Cuomo said that the mid- and lower-Hudson Valley has some of the state's most breathtaking natural resources and landscapes, and the state is committed to protecting these open spaces for generations to come.

"We've experienced record attendance at our state parks during this pandemic and these expansions will not only make these jewels shine even brighter," he said in a statement, "but will build on our work to address climate change and create a cleaner, greener and stronger New York for all."

The plan for the one-acre addition is to create the long needed more formal entrance to Rockwood Hall within two years time, now that this land has been acquired.



Attention: Lock Your Cars In Parking Lot

By Herbert Hadad

There has been a disturbing development in the Preserve’s parking lot. Several cars have been broken into and items, such as wallets and computers, have been stolen. This occurred in full daylight with many cars in the parking lot.

The thieves broke into the cars by smashing the windows and not opening the doors, which would have triggered the car’s alarm. They took things that were in view. But apparently there is an app that also shows if a car contains a laptop and thieves can become aware of this.

The Preserve Manager and staff have installed security cameras and are on the watch for any thieves. However, it pays for you, the public, to also be vigilant and conscientious about not leaving items in plain view.

It is hoped that this was an isolated occurrence and that the measures being taken will halt any further thefts. But, again, please help us by taking steps to protect your own property. Don’t leave your wallets or pocketbooks in your car and visible and please don’t bring computers in your car if you can help it.

If you notice anything suspicious, please report it to the office personnel.

Thank you for your cooperation!



Reaching the Friends
 Friends of the
 Rockefeller State Park Preserve
 P.O. Box 8444 • Sleepy Hollow, NY 10591
 (914) 762-0209

The Preserve Observer
 E-mail: Friends@friendsrock.org
 Website: www.friendsrock.org
 facebook.com/rockyspark
 instagram.com/ friendsofrpspp
 Editors: Evelyn Hadad, Herbert Hadad
 Letters and submissions are invited.
 Please contact us c/o the Friends.

Waxwings, *continued from page 1*

same area for food. For example, Red Knots feast on the eggs of horseshoe crabs during their migration north. They stop each year on the beaches of Delaware Bay to gorge on the freshly laid horseshoe eggs.



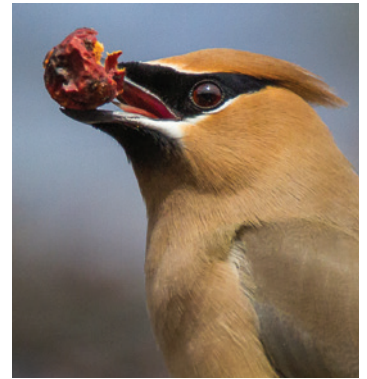
Cedar Waxwings eating from the Serviceberry Trees in the courtyard.

The Cedar Waxwings have their own short little feeding frenzy here in our park. Each year flocks of them show up for the serviceberries between the first and second week of June. They pick the trees clean in about three days. They still are around the park throughout spring and summer, but they breed and nest in southern Canada and migrate south of us in the winter. Their diet consists of fruit and insects. So, your best chance to see them is when they come to feast on a tree with berries. Some other Westchester locations where flocks of Cedar Waxwings can be seen is in shopping malls. Fortunately for us, and the birds, flowering trees that develop berries are popular choices for malls. The Cedar Waxwings are fond of crabapples, a popular tree found in shopping malls.

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Their diet consists of fruit

A great way to attract them to your yard is to plant fruit-bearing trees and plants such as strawberries, raspberries, crabapples and serviceberries. You can get close to Cedar Waxwings when they are busy eating. But don't get too close. Practice good bird etiquette and respect their space.



Photos: William Golden



Photos: Jessika Creighton

Nature also visited the Preserve in a more violent way. Please see story on page 12.



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HERE TO ENJOY...OURS TO PRESERVE

Friends to the Rescue

By Herbert Hadad

With all the bad weather and storms we had this past winter, there were multiple trees downed at the Preserve and coarse woody debris that needed removal. The Preserve Manager and his crew were able to clear the carriage roads of dead trees very fast for passage by park users but hauling away or pushing back the logs and debris is a tremendous undertaking. The Friends paid close to \$15,000 to have the Bruce Corbett Excavating Company come in and remove those fallen tree logs from roadsides and push back cut logs and fallen brush beyond the roadway side corridor.

Their work covered the following 21 carriage roads: Farm Meadow, Ash Tree Loop, Old Railroad Bed, Ride Trail, Cross Trail, Deer Run, Brook Trail, Buttermilk, Ferguson Loop, Goat Trail, Perry Road Reservoir Loop, Gory Brook, Big Tree Flying Squirrel Trail, Peggy's Way, Witch's Spring Trail, Spook Rock Trail, 13 Bridges Loop, Eagle Hill Trail, Stone Bridge Trail, Pocantico River Trail and Rockwood Foundation Loop. As you can see, the Preserve requires a great deal of maintenance!

The company also reconstructed and fortified the west end walkway approach on the Pocantico River Steele Walkway Bridge.



Photo: Jessica Crendon