

NORRISTOWN FARM PARK

Norristown Farm Park is a working farm in continuous use since colonial times. This 690 acre park is home to a wide range of plant and animal species. Within this bucolic setting you will find hiking trails, a cooperative trout nursery, picnic areas, forests, flood plains, fallow and working farm fields, wetlands and two stocked trout streams along with a number of historic structures the oldest of which, dates back to 1764.

History

The Farm Park was once part of a larger tract of land owned by William Penn. Known as the Manor of Williamstadt it encompassed some 7,000 acres. While Penn was away in England, Penn's son, William Penn Jr., sold the land a gift from his father, to Isaac Norris and William Trent, after whom present day Norristown and Trenton New Jersey were named. The land was further subdivided and in 1744, a portion was sold to James Shannon, who built the Shannon Mansion and a nearby springhouse in 1764. The Getty Cottage, located directly behind the Shannon Mansion was built in 1802.

In 1777, the British army marched through this area burning at least one gunpowder mill and several homes along the way.

The Castner House another historic structure was built in 1802, by John Castner a cordwainer (shoemaker). In addition to its date stone, the house features a boot symbol made of stone, it is located on the south facing gable of the house.

In 1876, the Pennsylvania legislature passed a law giving the state permission to buy land on which to build hospitals. Norristown State Hospital was built as one of the mandated facilities. The institution was nearly 1,000 acres in size and included much of the present day Farm Park. The facility was used by the state for both agricultural and therapeutic purposes. Patients worked on the farm growing crops and raising animals as part of their treatment program. Further, the hospital farm served to train would be farm managers, and also as an "Alternative Service Program" for

conscientious objectors who, because of their religious beliefs could not participate in armed military conflicts.

It was commonly believed that patients who worked the farm recovered more quickly. In 1975, the state changed its policy, stating that farm work in fact, did not help patients recover more quickly. They also found that it was less expensive and more practical to buy food than to grow it themselves. So while the hospital continues to operate to this day, the farm that once supported it, was eventually phased out.

The Department of Agriculture took responsibility for the land when the farming operations ceased. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Bureau of State Parks, took over the property in 1987 thanks to the legislative efforts of Senator Edwin G. Holl. In 1992, Montgomery County leased 690 acres from the DCNR and created the Norristown Farm Park. The park was officially dedicated in 1995. Montgomery County continues to maintain and operate the park as a passive recreation facility in partnership with the DCNR. Today, some 400 acres are actively being farmed by a tenant farmer, allowing visitors to see an unusual site in the midst of this urban environment, a working farm.

Interpretive Nature Trail

Adjacent to the park office is the Millennium Grove, one of two sites in Pennsylvania selected by the American Forest Foundation and the White House Millennium Grove Council to promote the planting of historic tree groves in each state. These trees have been propagated to continue the lineage of trees touched by important figures in our nation's history. The American Forest Foundation provided the initial 100 seedlings to SmithKline Beecham for donation to the Millennium Grove project at the park. Planted in the year 2000 by park staff, these seedlings are from 21 parent trees of historic significance. Representative trees have a plaque at their base which identifies the species and its history.

Activities

Popular activities include, walking, jogging, hiking, dog walking, bicycling, roller blading, picnicking, birdwatching, fishing, photography, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and sledding.

Trails

The park has nearly 8 miles of paved trails and several miles of marked nature trails. The paved trails are primarily used for walking, roller blading and bicycling. The nature trails are restricted to foot traffic only. There are no roads or trails open to equestrian use. Many of the paved trails are accessible by wheelchair. With the exception of a small portion of Upper Farm Road (between the main entrance and Lot 3), the internal park roads are closed to vehicular traffic with the exception of park vehicles and farm equipment. All of the paved trails are designated as "shared use". Bicyclists in particular are reminded to observe the posted speed limit of 15mph and are to provide advanced notice when attempting to pass others. Dog walkers are reminded to keep their pets on a 6' leash and under their control at all times.

Picnic Areas

There are several small picnic shelters scattered about the park and two accessible picnic pavilions, both of which are located in the main day use area on Upper Farm Road. Each pavilion can accommodate 84 people. Restrooms, charcoal grills, volleyball nets and horseshoe pits are available for public use. Those interested in using the pavilions must first contact the park office to confirm their availability and complete the necessary paperwork. Note: Certain rules apply to the use of the pavilions and are prominently posted on the structures themselves.

Fishing

Two stock trout streams Stony and Kepner Creek meander through the park, eventually making their way to the Schuylkill River in Norristown. In addition to trout, anglers may catch a variety of panfish as well as the occasional bass, catfish, or

eel. All Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission rules and regulations apply and are strictly enforced. A Pennsylvania fishing license and trout stamp are required for persons 16 years of age and older. Fishing is restricted to the parks hours of operation (sunrise to sunset). Camping, camp fires and overnight fishing are not permitted.

Birdwatching

Due in part to the park's diverse habitat, over 170 species of birds have been recorded here. Area birdwatchers are continually drawn to the park in hopes of catching sight of a new species, or rare bird to add to their own personal life list. In conjunction with park staff, volunteers monitor and maintain a number of song bird nesting boxes scattered about the park. Data collected by the monitors is reported to Nest Watch. The statistics provided are used to track the diversity of species, nesting success rates, and population trends. The park also participates in the Christmas Bird Count and Project Feeder Watch.

A one-acre farm pond sits at the top of the Hay Barn Hill. While not stocked, or suitable for fishing due to its limited depth, the site is popular with both resident and migratory species. The enclosed viewing blind allows for close up observation and photography.

Please note that while much of the park is open to exploration, the agricultural fields are off limits during the growing season (April through October).

Environmental Education

The park's naturalist offers a wide range of educational classes and activities throughout the year. Information related to upcoming programs and events can be found on the Norristown Farm Park's webpage <https://www.montcopa.org/874/Norristown-Farm-Park> social media sites, or by visiting the park office. Registration is limited, pre-registration is required. Most of the programs are free however; some carry a nominal fee to help cover the cost of materials or supplies used for a particular project, or craft.

Contact Information for

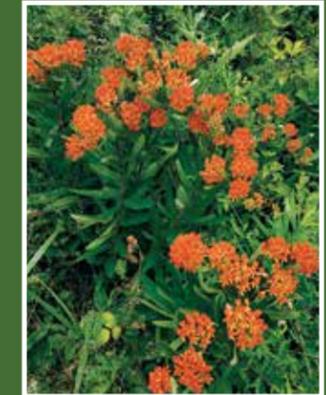
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