



Chestnut Hill Local

(/)

Thursday, June 6, 2024

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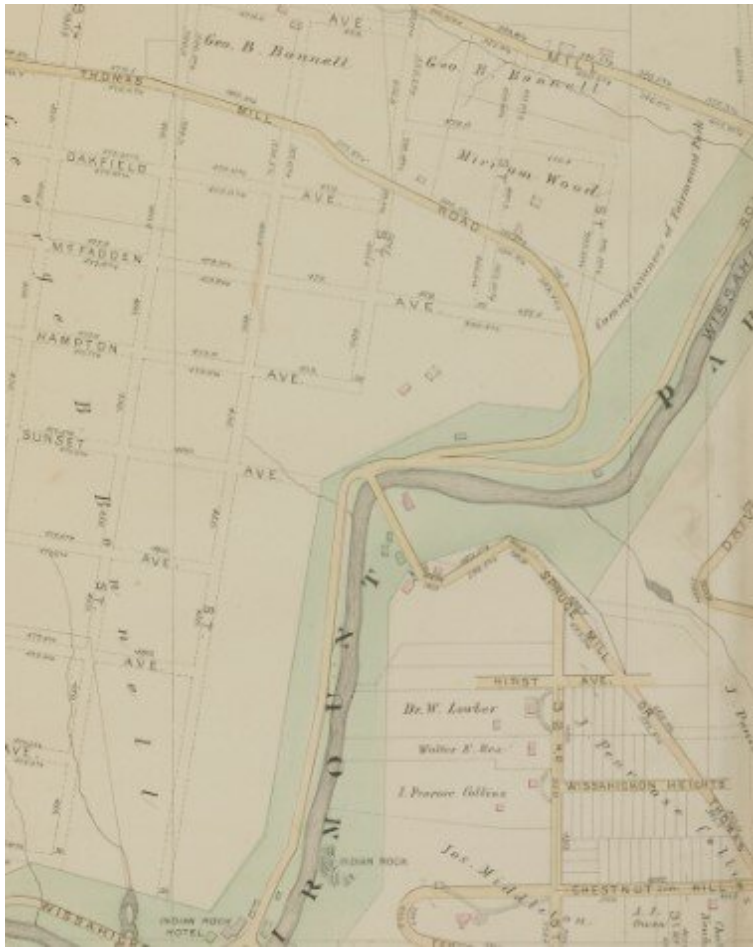
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Taking note of the trails of the Wissahickon



(<https://alpha.creativecirclecdn.com/chestnuthilllocal/original/20240605-165542-8a1-National%20Trails%20Day1.jpg>)

Thomas Mill Road is shown running from upper left to lower right, as published in an 1885 atlas by G. M. Hopkins.

CHESTNUT HILL CONSERVANCY ARCHIVES

Posted Thursday, June 6, 2024 12:00 am

by Alex Bartlett, Chrissy Clawson and Krista Gebbia of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy

With the arrival of National Trails Day on June 1, it is fitting to reflect on the rich history of the Wissahickon Valley's trails. Traversing the Wissahickon Valley, many of its trails echo a history dating back over 200 years. These paths served as vital arteries, providing access to the numerous mills that once lined the banks of the Wissahickon Creek and its tributaries, connecting them with farms, businesses, and residences. The Leni Lenape may have even established some of these paths. Today, these trails serve a different purpose – recreation and contemplation of the beauty of the Wissahickon.

The paths began transitioning to the trails we know today as efforts were made to safeguard the city's water supply. Beginning in the 1870s, in response to urbanization pressures, the city of Philadelphia initiated a program to acquire and demolish mills.

This initiative, coupled with subsequent donations of land from families like the Houstons and Woodwards beginning around the turn of the 20th century, led to the creation of Wissahickon Valley Park.

As a result of these donations, the park's boundaries expanded significantly. Farmers abandoned farms, and roads fell into disuse, eventually becoming overgrown and obsolete. As the 20th century progressed, many of these roads were repurposed into trails, integrating them into the park's trail system, and now Friends of the Wissahickon (FOW) maintains them. FOW also donated and continues to support the Wissahickon collection in the Chestnut Hill Conservancy archives. The collection includes historical information and photographs of the trails; use the link below to learn more.

One of those roads, later transformed into a trail, is Thomas Mill Road/Spruce Mill Road. It once linked Germantown Avenue in Chestnut Hill with Township Line Road (now Old Line Road) in Andorra. Originating before 1808, it persisted in use until the early 20th century. A segment of the road served as access to a farmhouse until around 1950 when developers cleared the area to build houses along Manatawna Avenue, Caledonia Street, and Clyde Lane. The FOW's Yellow Trail now partially follows its path in Andorra, while the White Trail in Chestnut Hill runs along the right-of-way between Chestnut Hill Avenue and Forbidden Drive.

The conversion of these roads into trails mirrors the dynamic evolution of the Wissahickon landscape. From its agricultural origins to its current status as a recreational sanctuary, the Wissahickon continuously adapts to shifting societal needs and ecological considerations. As the seasons turn and usage patterns shift, the Wissahickon continues to be a hub for athletic pursuits, artistic inspiration, and moments of tranquility. Efforts to preserve this area for everyone must also address the evolving ecology.

In its centennial year, FOW remains dedicated to stewarding these trails. Reflecting on the trails' transformation as National Trails Day approaches, it is essential to recognize that stewardship demands significant time, effort, and funding. FOW, the city of Philadelphia, Wissahickon Trails, and other organizations play a crucial role in preserving these trails. However, all users share the responsibility to ensure their preservation for future generations.

OTHER ITEMS THAT MAY INTEREST YOU

[Bells Mill Road bridge and pedestrians \(/stories/bells-mill-road-bridge-and-pedestrians,32467\)](#)

Humans aren't the only species on Earth (/stories/humans-arent-the-only-species-on-earth,32186)

More choice, more turnout (/stories/more-choice-more-turnout,32187)

Thanks to a good Samaritan (/stories/thanks-to-a-good-samaritan,32102)



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LOCAL CALENDAR

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>Sat, Jun 08 @6:00pm Sponsored (</p> <p>Stronger Brothers Stronger Fathers</p> <p>The Union League Golf Club at Torresdale
Thu, Jun 06</p> <p>Helium Presents: Uncle Lazer</p> <p>Helium Comedy Club Philadelphia
Thu, Jun 06</p> <p>A Royal Round</p> <p>The Royal, Where Music Lives
Thu, Jun 06 @7:30am</p> <p>Celebrate Father's Day with The Night Kitchen Bakery</p> <p>The Night Kitchen Bakery</p> | <p>Wed, Jun 12 Sponsored (</p> <p>Infant and Toddler Storytime and Playgroup - Fumo Family Library</p> <p>Fumo Family Branch</p> |
|--|---|

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THE LATEST



In 'King Kong,' love will destroy you (/stories/in-king-kong-love-will-destroy-you,32488)

RKO's 1933 classic, "King Kong," opens with a fake Arabian proverb and famously ends with another unforgettable quote: "It was beauty that killed the beast."

[\(/stories/in-king-kong-love-will-destroy-you,32488\)](/stories/in-king-kong-love-will-destroy-you,32488)



Talented designers return to Hill's PhilaMRKT pop-up (/stories/talented-designers-return-to-hills-philamrkt-pop-up,32487)

PhilaMRKT, a one-day pop-up featuring some of the area's best artists, is returning to Chestnut Hill on June 7 at Kismet Cowork, 12 W. Willow Grove Ave.

[\(/stories/talented-designers-return-to-hills-philamrkt-pop-up,32487\)](/stories/talented-designers-return-to-hills-philamrkt-pop-up,32487)



Songs of the Dust Bowl at Historic Germantown (/stories/songs-of-the-dust-bowl-at-historic-germantown,32486)

Folk musician Saul Broudy, who specializes in bluegrass, country, blues, rockabilly and roots music, will highlight the songs of Woody Guthrie on June 8.

[\(/stories/songs-of-the-dust-bowl-at-historic-germantown,32486\)](/stories/songs-of-the-dust-bowl-at-historic-germantown,32486)



Mt. Airy's Supper Sessions return for a culinary extravaganza (/stories/mt-airys-supper-sessions-return-for-a-culinary-extravaganza,32485)

Mt. Airy is gearing up to host its signature outdoor event, Go Mt. Airy Supper Sessions, a monthly festival.

(/stories/mt-airys-supper-sessions-return-for-a-culinary-extravaganza,32485)



Stay or go: A Hero's dilemma in 'Father Comes Home' (/stories/stay-or-go-a-heros-dilemma-in-father-comes-home,32484)

Just in time for "Juneteenth," Quintessence Theatre presents "Father Comes Home from the Wars, (Parts 1, 2 and 3)" by Suzan-Lori Parks.

(/stories/stay-or-go-a-heros-dilemma-in-father-comes-home,32484)



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The Chestnut Hill Local
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about a month ago

With rain predicted to deluge Chestnut Hill this weekend, the Home & Garden Festival has been rescheduled for May 19. "In light of the worsening weather outlook for Sunday, May 5, we are going to postpone the festival until the advertised rain date of Sunday, May 19," said Courtney O'Neill, executive director of the Chestnut Hill Business District. "We appreciate your understanding and hope for a gorgeous, sunny day on May 19."

18 Comment 4



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