



THE ARCHWAY

Newsletter of the Friends of Brandywine Springs

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Sandi Ciosek, Editor

Summer 2019

*Editor's Note: On the evening of May 29 the Milltown area was hit by a brief but savage storm. Heavy rain, hail, and high winds did a lot of damage. Countless trees were down in neighborhoods with many roads blocked. The National Weather Service said it was straight line winds, but several residents reported seeing funnel clouds. Most of the area lost power for a few hours up to three days. Delcastle Recreation Area and Golf Course lost numerous trees. As the cleanup was being done, the area smelled like Christmas with all the evergreen trees being cut up. **Ray Harrington** happened to be down in Brandywine Springs when the storm hit with no warning. Here's his story.*

SURVIVING BRANDYWINE SPRINGS

by Raymond Harrington

I grew up in Brandywine Springs Park, as my father did before me, his mother, and her parents, too. The tradition continues as the next generation of Harringtons, my two daughters, are growing up there as well. My father was a great teacher and instilled in me a love for the area and its history. Dad often told me that when he died, he wanted his ashes mixed with his Doberman's ashes and spread there "because if there is a heaven, I'll be able to walk that dog through that park forever". After my father's death in 2013, I asked artist **Larry Anderson** to paint a picture of my father and Dragon, his Doberman, walking down the hill from the old New Castle County Workhouse prison tower to the train tracks to capture their last and forever walk down the Valley.

I've been doing research in the park since I was 14. I don't think there is an inch of it I don't know. I've been working with my best friend, **Tom Gears**, for the past five years digging up as much new information as we could on the area. While searching, we discovered that in 1903 there were nine motion pictures filmed by the Edison Co. in the park. Six more months of research later, we found out that the movies were buried, mislabeled in the Library of Congress. They are the oldest existing films ever made in Delaware and we were the only people who knew where they were. As a result, we made a half-hour documentary titled "The Lost Motion Pictures of Brandywine Springs". My true heartbreak was that I didn't find the movies until after my father had passed away. Knowing I could never share them with my father, I have been trying to share them with as many other people as I can. Realizing that people may not be as familiar with the park as myself and the locals are, I've also been working on a ten-minute video telling the history of the park so people will have a better understanding of why these historic films are so important. Brandywine Springs is home to me; it has always been my safe place. All of that was about to change.



On May 29, 2019, I was at home working on the ten-minute film when I realized I needed some shots from where the old entrance archway for the park was located. Around 6:00 p.m. I checked the weather on my phone. The forecast called for rain after 7:00 p.m. I was in luck! There was just enough time to drive to Faulkland Road, walk down the tracks to the arch, film what I needed, and get back before the rain. I asked my daughters if they wanted to come with me. They both declined, so off I drove alone to the park for a quick picture. I parked my car on Faulkland Road near the railroad crossing of the Wilmington & Western Railroad and took a leisurely walk down the tracks into the park. It was slightly overcast, and there was almost no wind at all.

I finished taking my first shot where the B&O Railroad station had been long ago. It didn't turn out how I'd hoped and I was thinking of just heading home but convinced myself to persist. I figured while I was there, I should try and get a shot where the archway was, just for the heck of it. I was walking around trying to line up my camera with an old picture of the arch so I could compare the two and was about to film when I heard a quiet clap of thunder in the distance, my obvious cue to head back to the car. I put away my camera. I heard a second clap and started to walk out of the park knowing that surrounded by trees is not where you want to be during a thunderstorm. Suddenly I heard a low hum in the distance followed by a crashing sound. It was far away but still too close for comfort.

The humming sound grew quickly. It dawned on me that this was a sound I had never heard before. All at once the woods around me started to shake and rumble. The wind started to howl like a freight train was passing right by me. I've often heard that tornadoes sound just like a freight train, but I've really never given that any credence. One drop, two drops of rain, and then, without warning, a deluge of water started to lash me with a fierceness I had never felt before. I heard another crash, this time much closer. It was coming from The Cedars, the neighborhood that borders the park. I instinctively turned toward it and, to my amazement and horror, I could make out through the woods the sight of several trees collapsing to the ground about 200 yards from me. It was as if they were being smacked down by some invisible force. I started running away when a deafening sound hit right in front of me. My first thought was, "What are the odds of this happening right where I'm standing?" As I looked up, I saw the tops of the trees on the hillside before me explode! I was instantly in shock.

It looked like someone was grabbing the tree tops and pulling them off like they were tufts of unwanted grass. The tree tops were twisting around and suddenly they started to drop straight down. In that split second before, the branches looked like they were floating — then, suddenly, they remembered that gravity existed. It reminded me of how Wile E. Coyote looked as he ran off a cliff and hovered in midair for a few seconds before he looked down, realized where he was, and then fell. I didn't have time to run as they fell fast and hit inches away from my left. I was almost blown off my feet from the impact. Okay, time to panic! I started to run away from the downed trees and toward Faulkland Road. Before I could take three steps, I felt another



burst of wind and heard an even louder crack. Wondering "What fresh Hell is this?", I snapped my head around in time to see a giant tree on the hillside start to fall straight toward me. If you have ever played football, you know it's possible to see the ball thrown and calculate the trajectory and speed of the ball, then run to where it's going to land and make a blind catch over your shoulder. My mind made a similar calculation and told me the tree was going to land directly on me. I thought, "Well, this is it; this is how I'm going to die."

I ran with all my might toward the train tracks. I was bracing for the impact on my back when the tree came crashing down just to my right. It was just like an action movie! I reached the railroad tracks not knowing where to run next as I watched another tree fall across the rails about 20 feet to my right toward Greenbank. "Okay", I thought, "I'm not going that way; Faulkland Road it is!" Changing direction, I reached the steps leading to the grove where I used to run the WWRR Train Robbery. I slid down the steps and crouched down in a ditch. I was pelted by rain and wind for another couple of minutes as I lay there shaking and out of breath. Finally, as quickly as it had begun, the storm let up.

Adrenaline was racing through my veins and I knew I was quite literally not out of the woods yet. It's hard to explain the complete feeling of helplessness I was experiencing. My mind was spinning. I had no idea which way to go. I just knew that I needed to get out of the area. I asked myself if I should go back up the tracks the way I came in or instead go through the path in the woods. The woods meant another chance for a tree to fall on me, but the tracks meant I would have to cross a trestle and risk the wind coming back and blowing me off into the creek. Weighing the odds, I figured the tracks would give me less of a chance to escape if things turned bad, so I went through the woods walking out on the old trolley path of the Peoples Railway which is now the maintenance road for the park. I tread carefully all the way fearing a tree would fall on me or I could be struck by lightning at any moment. On my way down the path, I passed the area we have always called "the bear cave". It's a small cave in the hillside. I thought this might be a good place to hide, but I looked at it and it was wet and muddy. Instead I thought it would be better to keep going toward my car. Climbing over one downed tree on the path, I eventually hiked out of the woods and back to Faulkland Road.

To my relief, my car was untouched; but there was a tree lying just uphill stopping me from escaping the way I had come in via Faulkland Road. At first I thought I might be able to drive through the downed tree as the top of the tree was just barely crossing the road; then I figured how much damage it could do to my car. With my heart still racing, I made a U-turn and tried to go up the other side toward Route 41. Nope! As I drove up the hill, I saw trees were solidly blocking the way, so I headed back down the hill toward Faulkland Heights not really sure what my exit strategy was going to be. When I got to the train tracks, I realized I was now trapped in the Valley.

While I was sitting at the railroad crossing trying to figure out my next move, the storm hit yet again so I parked at the entrance to

Spice Mill Run. As I sat there helpless, an even larger tree fell across the road, then another, blocking the entrance to that neighborhood. There was nowhere to go. After another five minutes of chaos, the storm slacked off. I called my daughters and made sure they were safe. Then I called my friend, **Don Richard**, whose home borders the WWRR tracks not far away. I headed for Don's house. I started to smell gas. The tree blocking the road had broken a gas line and it knocked down a power line! As I raced to Don's house, the storm kicked up once more. I could hear trees falling near me as I climbed the stairs to his back door.. Once inside, I gradually realized I was safe and didn't have as much as a scratch.



The next morning I was able to retrieve my car and decided to walk down into the park and see firsthand what damage had been inflicted. Along Route 41 there was a huge circular grouping of trees with their tops snapped off and thrown around the area. I was expecting the entire park to be destroyed but, in all, there wasn't that much damage, a tree down here and there. Then I met Don Richard at the entrance archway and saw all the downed trees which were snapped off at their bases and the amount of damage lying tangled there. Don gasped, "Were you here when this happened? How are you still alive?" I began to realize how lucky I was. One misstep, one stumble, if I'd zigged instead of zagged....it could have been a completely different outcome. But, after surveying all the damage, my near misses and possible escape routes, I came to an amazing realization: If I'd just stayed where I was when I first heard the thunder clap instead of running all over, all I would have gotten was wet — not even a small branch fell on the spot where I was initially standing when I heard the first thunder clap.

Enough time has now passed that I don't get flashbacks whenever a train passes behind my house. I'm thankful **Sandi Ciosek** asked me to write my experience for the FOBS newsletter because my memory of the incident is fading. Several spiritual friends and family members have suggested that someone was looking over me that day. I have no idea if they were or not. My first thought is: If anyone was looking over me, they might have just said, "Don't go down to the park!" I also think that at any time during my ordeal I could have turned to my side and seen the Grim Reaper with his scythe looking at me and saying, "So far, so good!" I still love the park and its history. I want to share it with as many people as I can. But, I have a newfound respect for how fast things can turn bad in this new age of extreme weather!

(Editor's Note: The DVD "The Lost Motion Pictures of Brandywine Springs" is available in the Wilmington & Western Railroad Gift Shop for \$20.)

UPCOMING MEETINGS

7:00 p.m., The Cedars Methodist Church

SEPTEMBER 8

DEEMERS BEACH PHOTOS

by Richard Gillis

OCTOBER 13

NOVEMBER 10

DECEMBER 8 - CHRISTMAS PARTY

LAKE WORK by Mark Lawlor

For the first time that I can remember, people from a water management firm, **Solitude Lake Management**, treated the lake with a type of liquid that dissolves the green surface scum. They had just gotten a contract to treat the lake monthly from May to October. I showed them photos and gave them a brief tour. They thought the lake was much more interesting than most of the ponds they work on. They said they will highly recommend that the pump be turned on and that a solar fountain be installed.



David Doody gave an interesting presentation on "Art Deco Bottles" at our June 9 meeting. He promises to do another bottle talk next year. Who knew there were so many different kinds of bottles! **(Mike Ciosek Photo)**

Wouldn't it be great if we could put ourselves in the dryer for 10 minutes and come out wrinkle free and three sizes smaller. ~ Unknown

This & That... Our thanks to **Ray Harrington** for sharing his storm story with us. What an experience! We're so happy that he's alive and well! Thanks to the County crew for cleaning up the storm damage.... Don't forget our picnic coming up on **September 28!** See the enclosed flyer with all the details. Sign up now!... We haven't been having too much luck trying to locate what we think is the actual site of the carousel. We found a cinder layer but don't know what that's indicative of. We've been probing and probing the

area with no success. We'll be continuing our efforts on **September 7, October 12, and November 2.** Come out and see if you can bring us some luck! Meet in the parking lot at 9:00 a.m. or come down at your convenience. Bring work gloves and a lunch if you plan to spend the day.... **Mark Lawlor** has been repainting all of the marker posts in the park.... While the lake level was low, Mark took down about 18 of the 20 swamp willows between the hot dog islands and the dance hall and weed whacked all of the lake edges and six island edges.... \$400 has been appropriated for trees and bushes on the lake islands. **Mark Lawlor** and **Eileen Boyle** will head up this effort.... Some people have reported herons living on the lake.... **Richard Gillis** has found some photos of the old Deemers Beach that was on the Delaware River and will show them at the **September 8** meeting. He plans to do more research and do a presentation on Deemers at a future FOBS meeting.... Have had no updates from the County about our outstanding projects, the dam repair and bridge and the Council Oak Stage. Nor have we heard anything about the video highlighting County parks including Brandywine Springs.... **Mark Lawlor** will do a park tour as part of the **O'Rourke Family** reunion on September 22... We're still looking for greeters at the **Red Clay Valley Visitors Center** at the **Wilmington & Western Greenbank Station**. It's just a couple of hours on a Saturday or Sunday when the trains are running. Basically you just have to be a smiling face and keep an eye on things. If you can help, please contact **Mary Simons** at **mhsimons21@comcast.net** or **(610) 274-8949**... A few of you still have not renewed your membership dues. If you have not yet paid, a reminder will be enclosed with this newsletter. Remember, dues must be current to attend the September 28 picnic!.... *Questions, comments, suggestions, contact **Sandi** at **MikeCiosek@comcast.net** or **(302) 994-0536**.*

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SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 28
ANNUAL PICNIC
SEE ENCLOSED FLYER FOR DETAILS!

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