

# Neighbors

## Imagine music, a boardwalk, a carousel

Preservation group spreads the word about Brandywine Springs and the way it was

By **CAROL CHILD**  
Special to The News Journal

"In the early 1920s we'd ride the open-air trolley to Brandywine Springs Park," says Ann Hedrick, 87, a member of Friends of Brandywine Springs (FOBS), a group dedicated to the preservation of the Brandywine Springs Amusement Park and celebrating their 10th anniversary this year.

"We'd ride under the arch into the park, then walk on the boardwalk to the merry-go-round. Up high, across the park, was the Scenic Railway.

"I especially remember lots of concessions selling big jugs of orange juice - gallons. I remember the dance hall in the middle of the lake. We'd walk down the concrete steps into the lake and get into a boat and go under the arch of the bridge over the lake - that was the greatest thing, going under the arch - 10 cents a ride."

"For our 10th anniversary, we'd like to heighten public awareness of the history of the park and our efforts to preserve it," says Sandi Ciosek, FOBS secretary.

"We're planning a slide show and park tour on Saturday. The slide show will ... tell the history of the park and highlights of FOBS' first 10 years. After the slide show, the Wilmington & Western Railroad's "Doodlebug" will take people from the Mill to Brandywine Springs for guided walking tours of the old amusement park area."

The Brandywine Springs property began as a posh resort in 1826 to which people traveled from up and down the East Coast to escape the city heat and drink the mineral water of the chalybeate springs. The resort came and went through the 1840s economic depression and the Civil War until in 1886 entrepreneur Richard Crook built amusements and a trolley line to bring people to the park.

Now, Washington Lake is swampy, the legendary Council Oak collapsed suddenly in 1987, and the buildings are gone, their foundations buried beneath years of neglect. Recently, The Friends of Brandywine Springs during their monthly archeological digs have unearthed diverse artifacts and uncovered foundations of the entrance arch and other amusements, identifying them by matching them to an amusement park map.

"The ultimate dream of FOBS is the



From left: Ann Hedrick, Sandi Ciosek and Bob McGovern, members of Friends of Brandywine Springs, walk along a trail that in the 1920s led visitors to a merry amusement park.

restoration of Lake Washington," says Mike Ciosek, president of FOBS. "We plan to install more historical signs and to continue our archeological digs. The

New Castle County Special Services Department has always been most supportive, cooperative, and helpful in all of our endeavors. For that we're most grateful."

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### IF YOU GO

#### Friends of Brandywine Springs 10th Anniversary Slide Show and Park Tour

**When:** Slide show at 1 p.m. Saturday. Wilmington & Western Railroad will provide transportation to the park from Greenbank Mill at 2 and 2:30 p.m. for guided walking tours of the old amusement park area.

**Where:** Greenbank Mill, 500 Greenbank Road, Mill Creek

**Admission:** Free

**Information:** 994-0536 or 731-2502; [www.fobsde.qib.net](http://www.fobsde.qib.net)

"The park was a happy place," says Hedrick. "After the park closed at the end of 1923 my friends and I would go in and slide on the big Katzenjammer slide. One day we went and somebody had cut the middle section out."

Joyce Harris, a member of the FOBS Board of Directors, says that when she and her friend Susan Sellers Smith were about 10 in the late 1960s, each day after school they would examine "all the strange ruins at Brandywine Springs Park. When we discovered an amusement park foundation," says Harris, "one of our fathers would drive us into downtown Wilmington to do our research at the Wilmington Public Library or the newspaper office. Susan and I began to interview people who actually attended the park and those who worked there. We gave park tours to our classmates and drew maps of the site."

"Where previous generations went for relaxation is an important part of our Delaware history," says Harris. "One of my favorite locations in the park is the spot where the beautiful hand-carved Dentzel carousel was located. As a youngster I could almost hear the band organ music playing gleefully as the carousel figures twirled in my imagination."

"I hope our guests on tour day will be drawn into some of that magic. As the entrance archway motto proclaimed, 'Let all who enter here, leave care behind.' In these times, our hope is to make that statement true for each of our guests, for a short time anyway. My favorite artifact? A large beautiful tortoiseshell hair comb. I always wonder how it was lost."

Recently, Hedrick sat on the steps to the lake with her 10- and 13-year-old grandchildren and told them, "This is where Gammy sat when she was a little girl."



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