



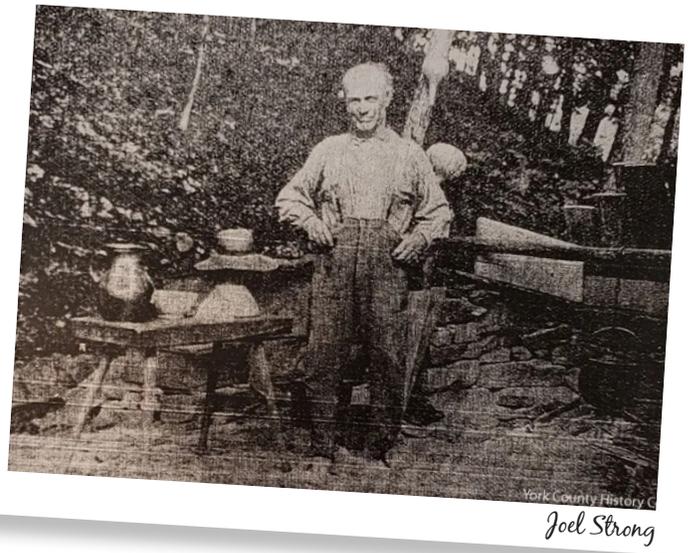
## THE HERMIT OF HELLAM HILLS

It's hard to believe the bizarre history behind this halcyon corner of Hellam Hills. You may think this was always a pristine sylvan glade graced by the crystal clear wanderings of Wildcat Run. Right now you think that hikers' quiet boots are the only ones imprinting the soft dirt along with the random deer and raccoon. But you are dead wrong.

Long long ago, the Susquehannock Indians traversed what is now Accomac Road (you will cross it on the MDT after you leave Wrightsville) For them, it was a fine hunting trail and a major route west. Later, hard-working German farmers settled this part of York County. Back then, the whole of the county was loosely known as Hellam Township.

Passing through the area to cross the Susquehanna River came Lafayette, as well as General Gage after his victory at Saratoga, which was pivotal in the Revolutionary War. They may have lodged at the Accomac Inn before boarding the ferry to Lancaster County. The Civil War brought a mysterious body of a rebel soldier washed up along the banks; his grave was discovered some years ago...not far from where you will hike along River Drive.

But none of this is more strange than the Hermit of Hellam Hills. If you have made it through Lancaster Conservancy's Hellam Hills Nature Preserve, you have walked right through his primitive lair. Did you see this reclusive character? Perhaps you sensed his presence since you are now a hundred years too late to set down at his plank table and visit with him. This unusual man was born in 1829 just over the ridge in Druck Valley. Rumor was, that he was avoiding the Civil War as he hid in the woods you can trek right through. Others posit that he lived in grief after his young bride died childless. As a thirty year old he had married her; she was in her late teens. Nine years later, he was alone. After living with a widowed sister for ten years, he secreted himself into the woods on his thirteen acres. A simple setting it was, with an elevated bed of boards and a hanging iron kettle. They say he bathed in the stream (Wildcat Run I imagine) and sheltered in a shallow cave during storms. His own vegetable plantings sustained him.



However, he was known to walk eight miles each way to Ebner's Café to stock up on his winter stash of tobacco.

But was Joel Strong really a recluse? Let's look at the flavor of the area in the 1890's. The western shore of the Susquehanna was a destination for pleasure seekers who ferried across the Susky from Lancaster County. Many stayed at the Accomac Inn. (1200 of them in the summer of 1892!) Folks rented four-horse wagons from the local liveryies to carry them in droves up to Wildcat Falls and Strong's Park. Local churches, parties of summer adventurers, gaggles of young girls joined in on the festivities. Incredibly, this enterprising "hermit" had created a lively outdoor recreational venue on his property. He welcomed the happy masses for outdoor games, music bands, fashionable picnics. Someone even brought in an ice cream freezer so they could make ice cream right there! One news report stated that 56 girls from Hellam consumed "eleven gallons of ice cream, a barrel of lemonade, and ate more cakes and sandwiches than is polite to mention!"

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**Mason-Dixon Trail Quarterly Hike and Meeting**

**Sunday, November 8, 2020** See page 2 for more details

## The Hermit of Hellam Hills *continued*

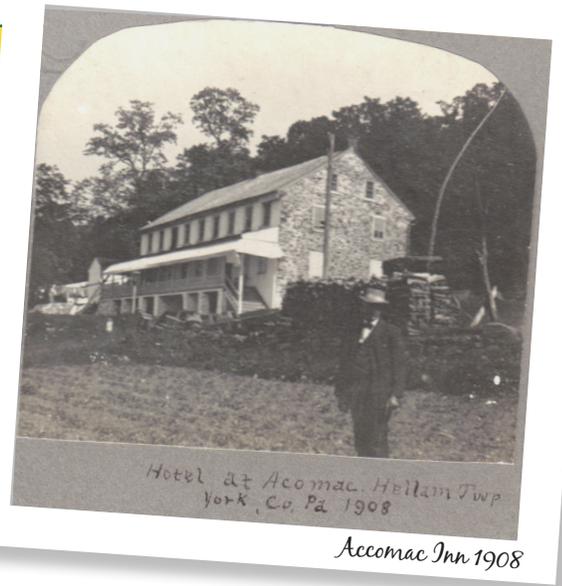
Indeed, Joel Strong's life in his 50's, 60's, and 70's was a bizarre clash of loneliness and boisterous partying. Through it all, he never actually had a house. He would occasionally lodge with relatives in very cold weather. He eventually died in 1905. His property was sold; the new owner kept up the tradition of partying for a while. Years passed and somehow, time slipped away and forgot the gaiety, the music, the dancing of Hellam Hills. Mother Nature spread her verdant hands over the hills and wilderness took over.

Now you are wondering if that shallow cave is to be found, or remnants of his simple bed, table, firepit. I doubt it's all there. But go ahead and look for it. Then....

Go ahead and wander back east down along River Drive to the Accomac Inn. Look to the south side of this historic building...look about fifty feet away from it's beautiful 200 year old stone walls. There's a gravestone. There's another story there, too, for John Coyle Jr was hanged at the age of 29 as a murderer. On Memorial Day 1881 he went into the barn behind the Inn where young Emily Myers was milking cows. As he had done many

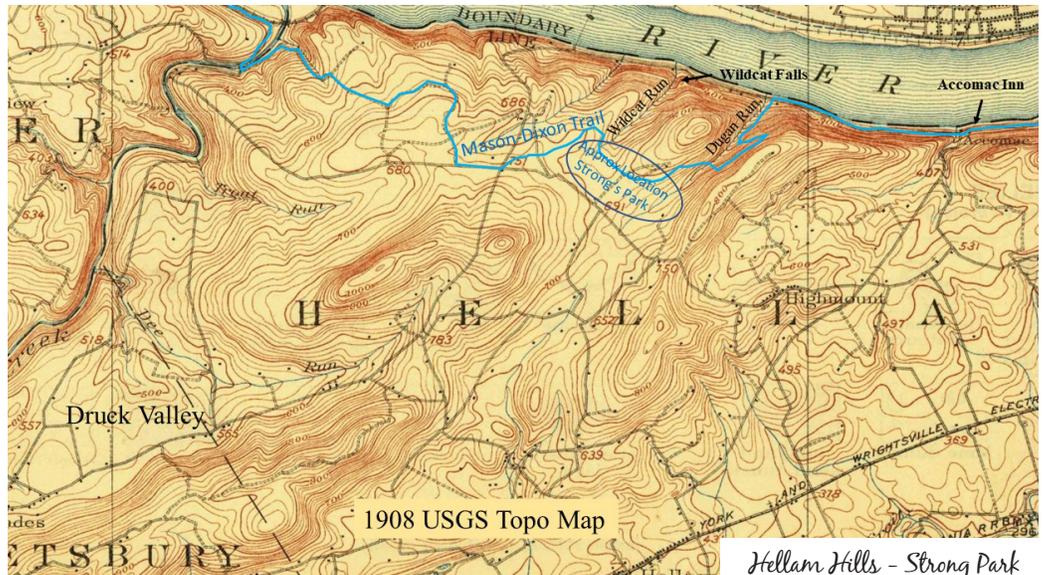
times before, he persisted in asking for her hand in marriage. Once again, she spurned him. Maybe it was because he was the inn owner's son and felt entitled, or maybe it was because he was somewhat "simple minded" as they said...but he figured that if he couldn't have her...well... no one would. So, he shot her with a pistol. He shot himself as well but survived and was arrested after ten days of pursuit.

They say both of these young people haunt the Accomac Inn. Perhaps you should just procure



lodging there and see for yourself!

Ponder these weird and wonderful stories as you traverse the Mason Dixon-Trail across York County.



## M-DT Quarterly Hike and Meeting

**Sunday, November 8, 2020**

**Hike:** 9:00 am

**Meeting:** 1:00 pm

The next hike and meeting of the Mason-Dixon Trail System (M-DTS) will be on Sunday, November 8. Parking for both the hike and the meeting will be at the York Hiking Club (YHC) cabin, 1135 Furnace Rd, Airville, PA 17302. Please bring a face mask for when we're gathered together. Once the hike starts we should be able to maintain social distancing and dispense with the masks. The hike through Otter Creek Gorge will start from the cabin at 9 am with both short (2-3 mi) and medium (4-5 mi) options. This will be the first M-DTS hike through the gorge since the devastating flooding in Sep 2018. The quarterly board meeting will follow at 1 pm in the YHC cabin which should have adequate space for social distancing. Please bring a folding chair if you have one. Everyone is welcome to both events. (Contact [president@mason-dixontrail.org](mailto:president@mason-dixontrail.org) if you need detailed directions to get to the YHC cabin.)

# Trail Maintenance Highlights

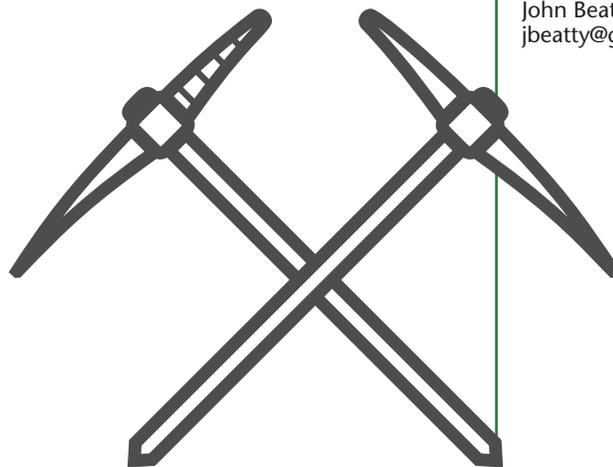
|| **October 2020**

## CENTRAL SECTION

- Overall trail conditions are exceptionally good through the Central Section. With winter fast approaching trail maintenance needs should dwindle to mostly just clearing blowdowns as they occur. This should allow us time to proceed with several needed trail improvement projects during the upcoming winter months.
- Trail improvement projects that will require volunteers to complete include;
  - Lapidum/Vulcan Quarry relocation
    - Clear and Blaze proposed route
    - Build two elevated walkways
  - Install stairs at Havre de Grace North trail connector to Quarry Road
    - Procure materials
    - Grading and installation
  - Improve trail's steep accent above Fishermen's Park at Conowingo Dam
    - Finalize planning
    - Procure materials
    - Grading and installation
- We are also seeking funding for the materials for these projects. Some grants require matching funds which can often be satisfied by volunteer labor or financial contributions. The website ([www.mason-dixontrail.org](http://www.mason-dixontrail.org)) and future emails will soon provide the status of these projects, upcoming plans and scheduled work trip outings. All contributions towards both volunteer hours and material purchases are greatly appreciated.

## WESTERN SECTION

- Still working on clearing overgrown brush from the wet spring. Although the summer was hot and dry without many storms, there have been several blowdowns that needed clearing. Replaced some of the decking on the bridge over Sawmill Run. We'll need to re-deck the rest next spring, provided we can get rough-sawn pressure treated lumber.
- Within the next month or so, the Thursday Workgroup will build steps up from Mill Creek to the switchbacks up the hill. If your available on Thursdays and interested in doing trail work on the M-DT, mostly in York County, contact Jim Hooper, [james.hooper@att.net](mailto:james.hooper@att.net).
- Since some of you may be interested in doing M-DT trail work in York County but are only available on weekends, we are considering setting up a group that would work on weekends from time to time as projects are identified. If you're interested in being on that mailing list, contact Tim Schmidt, [president@mason-dixontrail.org](mailto:president@mason-dixontrail.org).



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## MASON-DIXON TRAIL SYSTEM

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# President's Message

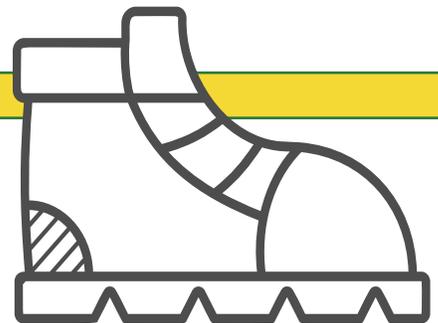
The number of people who became new members or bought map sets in the third quarter of 2020 is just under twice the third quarter of 2019 and only a little less than last quarter. Trail use is still very high as well. Hopefully, some of you new members will attend the Nov. 8 hike and/or meeting (details elsewhere in the newsletter). If you haven't yet hiked the Otter Creek Gorge, you shouldn't miss this opportunity, especially if you're from York or Lancaster Counties. Hope to meet some of you on Nov 8.

### REPORTING TRAIL ISSUES

As indicated above, trail usage has increased significantly; however, the reporting of trail issues seems to have

declined. We've encountered several spots on the M-DT with significant blowdowns that were never reported on the website. With more hikers on the trail, the most likely explanation is that those new to the M-DT aren't aware that trail issues can be reported on the website.

So if you encounter a "trail issue" like a down tree, a wash out or overgrown undergrowth that is blocking the trail, you can report it on the M-DT website, [www.mason-dixontrail.org](http://www.mason-dixontrail.org). Click on "Contact", then "Report Issues". The most important things to report are the description of the trail issue and its location. For trees or limbs blocking the trail, try to estimate their diameter.



Reporting the location can be more difficult. If you know what map it's on that helps but we'll need a lot more detail than that to find it. If you can locate it between 2 landmarks like streams or roads that would be great. If you can't provide that, you may be able to estimate how far it is from where you started, assuming you know how fast you walk and how long you've been walking. Ideally, you can just report the GPS coordinates of the trail issue.

I'd also like to hear suggestions on how we could improve the Report Trail Issues web form. Send your suggestions to [president@mason-dixontrail.org](mailto:president@mason-dixontrail.org).

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The M-DTS Newsletter is published about four weeks in advance of each of the four M-DTS board meetings held annually. Submissions are welcomed.

The Mason-Dixon Trail System, Inc. is a non-profit all-volunteer, service-oriented association of trail clubs and individual hikers that has as its purpose the use and conservation of the backcountry through the development of new trails in the mid-Atlantic states. The nucleus of M-DTS is the 199-mile Mason-Dixon Trail which passes through historic and scenic areas of Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware.

New members are welcome. To join, send \$24 (which covers initial membership as well as the M-DT maps) to:

**Mason-Dixon Trail System, Stacey Kingsbury, 535 London Tract Road, Landenberg, PA 19350**

Thereafter, the annual fee is \$7. Life membership is available for \$250.

Visit the Mason-Dixon Trail web site at: [www.mason-dixontrail.org](http://www.mason-dixontrail.org)

Visit the Mason-Dixon Trail Facebook page at: [www.facebook.com/theMDTS](http://www.facebook.com/theMDTS)

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