

# The Roebling Wire

No. 34

News From  ROEBLING MUSEUM

Spring 2021

## Help us create an exhibit with the Smithsonian about Roebling!

Roebling Museum has been selected by the Smithsonian to develop an exhibition about the local history of work in Roebling, NJ. The exhibit will explore how immigrant/migrant families in the company town lived and worked. We need your help to make it successful!

The project is a hands-on opportunity for you to get involved in building local history by helping develop the exhibit's story, choosing objects from our collections, conducting oral histories, digitizing historic work records, and more. We are seeking stories/artifacts about immigration, the black experience, women workers at the mill, young workers, and the folks who worked outside of the mill to keep the community operating. All of this research will help us learn more about the full story of life in Roebling.



If you want to get involved by volunteering, donating objects from your family's past, or contributing funds to the project, contact the museum at [Lynne.calamia@roebblingmuseum.org](mailto:Lynne.calamia@roebblingmuseum.org) or by calling (609) 499-7200.

## Tickets on sale now for Garden Tour 2021!

Join us on June 5<sup>th</sup> for a fun opportunity to celebrate the beautiful weather and brightly blooming gardens in a company town famous for building America's most iconic bridges. The Garden Tour will raise funds to support Roebling Museum as we get ready to reopen to the public in the wake of COVID-19.

When the Roebling steel plant was open and homes in the company town were owned by the company, many of



the workers and their families grew gardens with flowers as well as food. The Roebling Company would sponsor competitions to encourage residents to tend to their gardens and keep their properties looking well-cared-for. Continuing this tradition with our Garden Tour builds pride in our community and gives residents a chance to show off their green thumbs!

The Garden Tour starts at Roebling Museum to check in and get a map of the locations included on the tour as well as some historic highlights. Walk, drive, bike-- whatever you prefer! Choose between a self-guided experience or sign up for a guided tour at 1pm.

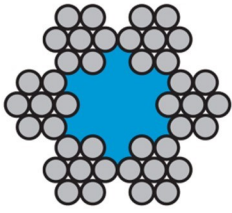
### Garden Tour details:

**When:** Saturday, June 5, 2021 (Rain or Shine), 10 am - 3:00 pm

**Where:** 100 Second Ave. Roebling, NJ 08554

**Price:** \$15 per person and the proceeds benefit the operation of Roebling Museum.

**Registration:** Tickets may be purchased at [www.roebblingmuseum.org](http://www.roebblingmuseum.org), by calling (609) 499-7200, or at Roebling Museum on the day of tour.



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**A Letter from the President**

Has spring ever been more welcome than this year? This season always means new life, even if it is just crocuses and daffodils popping up. In 2021 everyone is hoping for a new life that includes being able to go places and do things safely with our families and friends—a new life that’s a lot like the old life.

At the Roebing Museum we are looking forward to welcoming visitors back to our historic museum building and to our exhibits. But as the world works its way back from the pandemic, we continue to offer programs outdoors, with yoga classes in the Millyard and village walking tours. Since 1976, the entire village of Roebing has been designated as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places—it’s a museum in itself! Be sure to sign up for the Roebing Garden Tour on Saturday, June 5th. Cultivating a garden has a long history in Roebing, from the days when the John A. Roebing’s Sons Company awarded prizes for the nicest garden in the company town to the stewardship of the Roebing Garden Club in beautifying public spaces like the Main Street Circle. The tour this year, which the Museum is organizing in partnership with the Roebing Garden Club, will include at least nine Roebing and Florence gardens and they are always impressive.

With the warm days also comes more incentive to walk along the river in Roebing Park and on the new(ish) section of the Delaware River Heritage Trail. This path runs by the last remaining structures from the steel and wire mills, which house the Roebing company’s wire rope prestretcher. This remarkable machinery—which is largely intact almost a century after its construction—was devised in 1930 by company engineers to stretch the elasticity out of massive 3,750-foot wire ropes spun for the construction of the George Washington Bridge. A rail track carried the rope between the two buildings and huge hydraulic jacks held it with 600,000 pounds of force.

Thanks to a state heritage tourism grant, the Museum will be able to install information signs near the two prestretcher buildings to explain their significance in the history of the wire mill, the town, and the history of bridge-building. We hope these signs will enhance the experience of walkers and bikers traveling the Heritage Trail and let them know that when they are in Roebing they are visiting a very special place.

Looking forward to seeing all our members and friends at the Museum this year—

Martha Moore  
President, Board of Directors

**OUR MISSION**

The mission of the Roebing Museum is to document, preserve, and exhibit the history of the John A. Roebing’s Sons Company, the Roebing family and the village of Roebing. The focus of the museum is both the industrial and technological achievements of the company and the unique social history of its workforce and the town it created. The museum connects a storied past to the present while also serving as a valuable resource for school curriculum enhancement and academic research. It is the only museum in the world dedicated solely to the accomplishments of the Roebing family, its businesses and workers and the engineering innovations of the company in Trenton and Roebing, New Jersey.



*Membership at Roebing Museum has its privileges! Become a member and enjoy free general admission for a year while supporting all that we do, from education programs for local schoolchildren to conservation of nationally important art and artifacts.*

*Join or renew your membership at [roebingmuseum.org](http://roebingmuseum.org) today, and help keep history alive and enlightening in this unique village!*

## Volunteer Spotlight—Peg Manser

One of the most exciting moments in Peg Manser's long tenure as the Roebing Museum's volunteer archivist came when she took a screwdriver and busted open a tin strongbox.

At the time, Peg and then-executive director Pat Millen were sorting through object that had been given to the Museum and stored in the Roebing Rescue Squad Building on Hornberger Avenue while the historic mill gatehouse was restored for the Museum's use by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Too curious to resist, Peg popped open the strongbox lid and found "all the paperwork you would need as an immigrant to this country. The birth certificate, marriage, immigration papers," she says. "I thought that was really cool." The papers came from the family of former Roebing resident Milton Hershberger. "Years later, when we had the papers on display in the museum, my sister Mary brought her friend Diane Wells to see them and Diane said, "That's my grandmother's family."

Roebing's history as a company town and a melting pot of immigration is what fascinates Peg as she continues her work to catalog and safeguard the Museum's collection of artifacts and papers.

"I like seeing how people lived here in Roebing. They came over, they were immigrants, and they started new lives here. But they kept their culture alive," she says. "I still love looking through all the stuff."

Roebing's culture of multi-generational ethnic pride is very different from Peg's own upbringing. One of seven kids in a military family, she moved 13 times before arriving at Bordentown High School. She'd make friends and then realize, "I'm never going to see any of you people again," she says.

Then she met Walt Manser at the Roebing Carnival. "I say I won him," she laughs.

The couple settled on Fourth Avenue in 1980, during the last efforts to revive steelmaking at the Roebing mill, where they raised four children. When the works finally closed for good, the millsite became a dumping ground and Peg started writing furious letters to newspapers about the need for an environmental cleanup of huge mounds of tires on the site.

Donna McElrea, a local business owner who grew up in Roebing and was an early leader of the effort to preserve the town's history, recruited Peg to help with the fledgling Roebing Historical Society, the organization

that was the predecessor to the Museum's founding in 2007.

As a result, Peg was one of a group of residents who were able to go into the mill buildings and identify objects that the Museum wanted to preserve, from tools to hard hats to engineering drawings to the enormous pieces of equipment now in the Museum's Millyard. Peg knew there were plenty of artifacts to rescue because "My kids and other kids would sneak in there and tell me about it," she says.

She knew a bit about the town's part in building the great suspension bridges of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but working on the Museum taught her much more.

In addition to her work as a librarian at the Burlington County Library, from which she retired in 2019, she has taken courses in archiving to learn how to catalog the Museum's growing collection. "People don't really know what an archivist does," she says. The key difference is in how objects and papers are organized, she says. Librarians arrange materials based on subject, but archivists sort documents and objects according to where they came from and how they were arranged when they arrived in the collection. At least one evening a week, Peg is in the basement of the Museum, working on cataloging, sorting and labeling everything from John A. Roebing's Son Company promotional matchbooks to the bass drum from the Marshall Band, which performed at Roebing community events for many years.

What's missing? The Museum holds many wooden patterns used in sand-casting machinery at the mill, all of which are numbered. At the top of Peg's wish list is an index for those patterns. She'd also love to find rent books for the village houses, which would give wonderful details about who lived in Roebing during its 40 years as a company town. Roebing residents continue to contribute their family treasures to the Museum, so Peg is still hopeful.

"Things keep coming in," she says. "You never know what you're going to get."





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**John A. Roebling and the rest of us at Roebing Museum want your help!**

At Roebing Museum, we couldn't do what we do without the support and enthusiasm of our volunteers. They give tours, greet people at the front desk, work with the historical objects in our collections, and help our events run smoothly.

We are always looking for more folks to come and join us! If you or someone you know is interested in supporting the work of Roebing Museum through volunteer work, please be in touch—we'd love to hear from you!

Find more information at [roebingmuseum.org](http://roebingmuseum.org) or by calling us at (609) 499-7200.



**HOURS & ADMISSION**

**Due to COVID-19 our hours will vary. Check out our website or follow us on Facebook for the most up to date information about hours and upcoming events.**

**March through December:**

Wednesday through Sunday 11:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.

**January and February:**

Open by appointment for groups and researchers

Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas, New Year's Day & Easter

**\$7.00**—Adults; **\$6.00**—Seniors and Children 6-12  
**Free** for Members and Children under 6

Roebing Museum is supported by a grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the federal CARES Act.

Roebing Museum received an operating support grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State.



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