



Deerpark Diary

Town of Deerpark 1863 School House Museum
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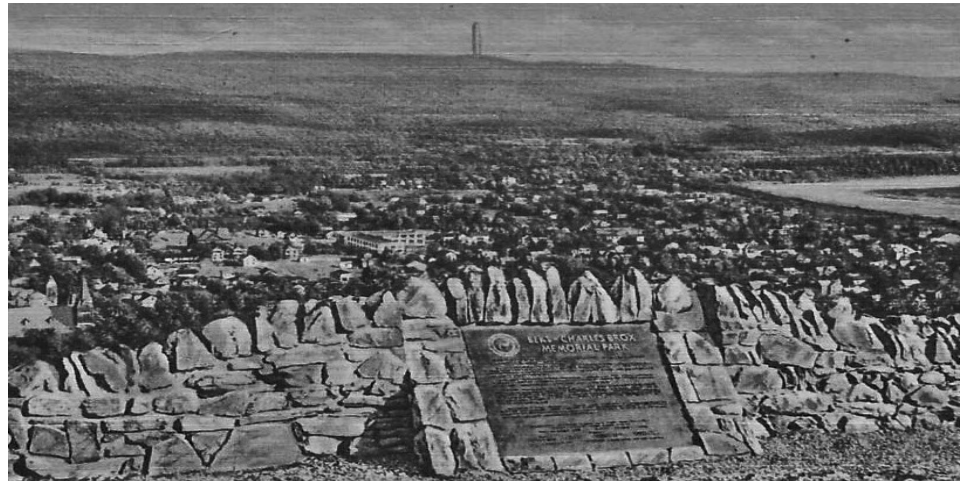
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The Genesis of a Park

By Lynn M. Burns
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Point Peter and Mt. William, also known as the Twin Mountains, are two natural rocky outcroppings that dominate the landscape of Port Jervis, NY. Spectacular views of the surrounding Tri-State area have been enjoyed by thousands since earliest times. However, only the hardiest individuals could climb the steep grade to the top. The beginning calls for a passable road to the peaks were heard 150 years ago. The following articles explore the timeline for just such a route and the idea of a park that was a natural extension for the citizens to enjoy.

***“Point Peter and Mt. William
 Let us Have Easy access
 to them”
 Evening Gazette –
 May 27, 1873***

“Nature has done much for Port Jervis. The mountain scenery around here is certainly inviting and pleasant. To the north the waters of the Neversink may be seen now and then flashing out from its banks as it winds its tortuous way to the Delaware. And

then away to the south the comingled waters of these two rivers are seen sparkling in the sunlight. For eight miles the Erie Railway can be seen wending its way up the side of the Shawangunk, while the course of the Monticello Road can be seen for several miles. At the very foot of these two mounts, winds the Delaware and Hudson Canal, while the view of Port Jervis and its surroundings never tires the eye.

“There certainly is but one thing that prevents these sightly peaks from being more generally visited, that is the difficulty of being readily ascended.

“Now, what we propose is the people take hold of the matter and have a road graded to the top of the mounts. A slight outlay would make the present wood road an excellent carriage road, which would wind up the hill, giving the scenery additional interest. Perhaps a stock company might be formed which could carry out the project and realize a handsome profit.

“During the entire summer season this drive would be extensively

patronized, and Sunday it would afford hundreds a breathing place from which they long and pine.”

Seven years later...

***“The Boulevard Begun
 One Enterprising Citizen –
 Building a Road Around
 Point Peter”
 Evening Gazette –
 April 13, 1880***

“At last there is a wagon road leading up Point Peter. And the citizen that had the enterprise to do the work is William H. Bennet of Main St.

“Mr. Bennet owns a number of acres of land on the side of Point Peter. Two or three years ago the village bought about \$40 worth of gravel of Mr. Bennet. He offered to give the village the gravel if the authorities would build a public wagon road leading around Pt. Peter and approaching the top. The proposition was

considered, and afterward reported upon adversely, and the village paid the money for the gravel.

"But Mr. Bennet did not propose giving up the road project. Last Monday he began work on the proposed road and he soon had it in such condition that he drove over it as far as the little plateau about half way up the hill. This is as far as Mr. Bennet's line extends, the remainder of the property belonging to the Rev. Dr. Mills.

"Mr. Bennet's son "Colonel" and his assistant are at work finishing the work already begun. The road is now passable, and as far as it goes it affords an excellent view of the village – in some respects superior to that obtained from the eminence of the two peaks. The plateau where the present road ends covers nearly half an acre of ground, affording ample room for carriages to turn. It would be a fine spot for a summer hotel or residence."

Thirty-six years later...

***"Loop Connected"*
Evening Gazette –
*July 15, 1916***

"A meeting of the Elk Park board was held at the Elk Home yesterday afternoon. There were present, Dr. H. B Swartout, Father Donahue, Dr. W. L. Cuddeback, Mr. Charles F. Van Inwegen, Mr. F. R. Mason and Mr. E. J. Earley.

"Dr. Swartout, the president, stated that he had called the meeting to render a report of the work done on Skyline Drive. Last year when the work had to be abandoned on account of lack of funds, one and a half miles had been built bringing the road to the highest point of the Twin Mountains. In the past two months another mile and a half has been added, finally circling the mountain and connecting Berme Road with Reservoir Avenue. The loop over to Point Peter which will be built later, was abandoned because it was deemed advisable to open up this one way road as soon as possible to permit traffic. However, the road is not ready for use. To make travel over it pleasant considerable levelling and grading is needed to be

done and for this more money will be needed."

***"Why Called Elks Park?"*
Port Jervis Union –
*Nov. 25, 1922***

"On February 17, 1913, the taxpayers of Port Jervis made a stupid but lucky mistake when they voted down an appropriation of \$1,500 for the purchase of Twin Mountains. Never mind the stupidity but think of the luck. Had the city taken over the property at the time the deeds would have been recorded, Twin Mountains would have been untouched.

"I take my hat off to the spirit of Elkdom. After the defeat of the project, I called Dr. Swartout and discussed with him the advisability of doing something to prevent this valuable property from falling into private hands. Twenty Elks were called and at a meeting nineteen Elks agreed they would stand back of the movement to purchase Twin Mountains as a park for the people. A canvas was made and in three days eighteen hundred dollars was collected from the Elks. Later on Elks Lodge contributed two hundred and fifty dollars for Skyline Drive. It was in this spirit that the name of Twin Mountains became Elks Park. The name Port Jervis Skyline Drive was happily suggested by James H. Sweeney of The New Theatre. The original parcel of land was forty-eight acres, now the park comprises one hundred and fifty-two acres.

"I am glad to acknowledge the aid given by the Daughters of the Revolution. On May 6, 1916, they handed three hundred and twenty-two dollars raised through a chain of dinners served in their homes."

***"Park At Port"*
"Grant Petition of Elks
to Transfer Title
to Tract As City Recreation Area"
Middletown Times Herald –
*Jan. 23, 1932***

"A petition of Port Jervis Elks was granted in Supreme Court, transferring forty-six acres of land, known as Elks

Park, from the fraternal organization to the city. A recent will leaving \$15,000 to the city for a park to be a memorial to Charles Brox was a determining factor.

"The petition was filed with aldermanic approval by Henry Swartout and other trustees of Elks Park, for transfer of the land bought in 1914 with a fund raised by popular subscription. The petition related that the Elks could not develop the park as well as it might be.

"Mrs. Sarah Bell Thorn's will left the money with the stipulation that the park be named for Charles Brox."

"At a meeting of the Past Exalted Rulers of the Elks, it was made known that the park at Skyline Drive will be named Elks-Brox Park according to a specification in the deed."

***"Charles Brox Dies Sunday*
At Age 88"
"Prominent Citizen Was
Vice-President
Of First National Bank and
Former Glass Manufacturer"
Port Jervis Union –
*Oct. 27, 1924***

"Charles Brox, one of the oldest and best known business and citizens of Port Jervis, died at his home, at 28 Buckley St. on October 26th after a long illness.

"Mr. Brox was born in Germany in 1836. In his early life he learned the flint glass making trade and was employed in Denmark for four years. In 1855 he came to Brooklyn, New York and connected with Greenpoint Glass. Mr. Brox formed an acquaintanceship with Christian Dorflinger of the well-known glassworks of White Mills, PA.

"With William Poultney in 1866, Mr. Brox engaged in the glass business in this city establishing a factory at Canal and Hamilton streets. He afterwards disposed of his interest in the business with Poultney and in 1871 established the Orange County Flint Glass Works on Erie St. in company with Wade Buckley. After several years, he purchased the interest of Mr. Buckley and continued alone until 1900, when he formed a partnership with Benjamin Ryall. In 1912, Mr.

Brox sold the plant to the Gillinder Brothers of Philadelphia.

"During his long residence in Port Jervis, Mr. Brox had served as a trustee of the Drew Methodist Church for 45 years, serving many years as President of the Board. He donated the present parsonage at 11 Broome St. and was instrumental in building the church on the corner of Sussex and Ball Streets."

1932...

By 1932, America was locked in the depths of the Great Depression. Unemployment was rampant and the citizens of the Tri-State area suffered right along with the rest of the country. In an attempt to create jobs, the Emergency Relief Agency was formed to supply work through needed public projects. Five such projects included a dam and improvements at #2 Reservoir, carving Park Avenue out of Mt. William to create an easier entrance into Port Jervis, improvements to the road along the Hawks Nest, a wider more accessible Skyline Drive up to Pt. Peter and the completion of the Elks-Brox Park.

"Plans Picnic For Workers Mayor Host to Men Employed On Skyline Drive"

***Middletown Times Herald –
May 23, 1932***

"Frankfurters and rolls will be served next Saturday at Elks Brox Memorial Park. With Mayor Wendell E. Phillips as host to all men who worked on Skyline Drive. The mayor has invited city officials to participate in the suppers preparations.

"As there have been nearly four hundred men employed on the drive during the Work Relief program rendered possible by Elk generosity and the Thorne bequest, Mayor Phillips has instructed Chief Morehead to prepare for a party of five hundred guests.

"Work on the Drive is finished on the Sparrowbush side. A crew of about twenty men is fast completing that on the Reservoir #1 side. More than twenty thousand dollars has been expended in work relief pay and nearly five thousand has been spent for material."



**Top photo—L-R, Mr. Sargent, Dr. Swartout and Mayor Phillips—
First Shovel Full to begin Park work.**

Middle photo—completing work at Point Peter

Bottom photo—view of Point Peter, early postcard

"Eighteen More On Road"
Middletown Times Herald –
Sept. 20, 1932

"Port Jervis – Eighteen more men enrolled by the city unemployment relief agency started work yesterday on the Hawks Nest Road. Instead of two shifts a week as there have been, each of the workers from Port Jervis and the Town of Deerpark will work from twelve to five o'clock each day, six days a week, giving them thirty hours. The new arrangement of hours started yesterday."

***"Anniversary Festival At
 Port Jervis
 Draws Throng To Mountain Top"***
Middletown Times Herald –
July 27, 1932

"After viewing a parade in celebration of the community's twenty-fifth anniversary as a city, more than 5,000 residents and visitors traveled up Skyline Drive last evening to participate in ceremonies incident to the dedication of Elks-Brox Park on the twin summits of Pt. Peter and William.

"Father William Donahue, a former parish priest here who took a leading part in the Skyline development, unveiled a bronze tablet in the park.

"Addresses also delivered by Mayor Wendell Phillips and Walter Petit, executive director of the Emergency Relief Administration.

"The anniversary parade, which began the festivities was a resplendent turnout of fire apparatus and decorated trucks. One of the cars was an old right-hand-drive Cadillac driven by Roy Carpenter.

"The Deerpark Fife & Drum Corps of Sparrowbush led squadrons of girl and boy scouts. Mulvaney's Band was followed by the city fire apparatus, all sirens in action. The din was deafening at times. The Sparrowbush Fire Department also appeared. Firemen from Port Jervis Engine Company Number Four wore uniforms from 1905. They carried the handsome hand-drawn horse cart with its aged frame and new half keg with a spigot in its end. Delaware Fife and Drum Corps of

Matamoras led the main section of floats, representing virtually all the industrial and commercial enterprises of the city.

"The picnic on conclusion of the ceremonies at Point Peter attracted thousands. The fireworks were begun about nine o'clock."

**Father Donahue and Dr Swartout
 dedicating the bronze tablet.**



The 21st Century...

The Elks-Brox Park of today is included in the new **Port Jervis Watershed Park and Recreation Area**. A vast network of walking and biking trails has been created to be enjoyed by all levels and abilities. For more information about this exciting and beautiful extension of the park contact the following:

**Port Jervis Watershed
 Trails Map
 Outdoor Club of Port Jervis
 (845) 288-3165
info@ocopj.org
[Facebook.com/
 outdoorclubofportjervis](https://www.facebook.com/outdoorclubofportjervis)**

