

Friends

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF MCCONNELL SPRINGS

McConnell
Springs
LEXINGTON 1775

Volume 32 Issue 2
June 2026

History to Chew On: Savor the Series

Join us the 2nd Tuesday of each month June through October for History to Chew On at McConnell Springs, the place where Lexington's story began. History to Chew On is a popular, free lecture program featuring local experts discussing the region's natural and historical past. Mark your calendars for these events.



History to Chew On

July 14

The Underground Railroad as told through a Quilt
Speaker: Judy Greene-Baker

Quilting has historically provided warmth, decoration, and a means to memorialize loved ones, express political views, and celebrate events. Quilts serve as living history, reflecting generational experiences and struggles. African artists used quilts to convey messages, including codes for the Underground Railroad. This narrative emphasizes survival and resilience in the quest for freedom. A Chautauqua-style presentation on this topic is engaging and popular among diverse audiences.



August 11

Women of the Bluegrass: Nineteenth-Century Kentucky Pioneers in Thoroughbred Breeding
Speaker: Jessica Whitehead

Jessica will explore the remarkable stories of Kentucky women from the nineteenth century who became breeders and owners in the Thoroughbred industry.

Notable society women, Josephine Russell Clay and Meta Westfeldt Hunt Reynolds Tarleton, acquired their expertise alongside their husbands and skillfully maintained their careers even after becoming widows. Their journeys offer a unique perspective on the early history of women's involvement in the sport.



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Dear Friends...

by Charlie Boland, Chair

Greetings to all! Since our last newsletter, McConnell Springs has seen a lot of activity and excitement! Here are a few highlights of things that have happened or are being planned.

The Wine Barrel Tasting held on March 29, 2026 was a resounding success, drawing a strong turnout as participants visited 14 wineries while supporting the Friends of McConnell Springs and its mission to celebrate the park's history, expand environmental education, and preserve its natural beauty throughout the year.

The 2026 Founders' Day Celebration on May 16 was also a big success despite the threat of inclement weather. The event was filled with history, education, music, crafts, food, and more. Mayor Linda Gorton, Councilmember Jennifer Reynolds, and Parks Deputy Director Adrienne Thakur all addressed the crowd, which over the course of the day was estimated at 700 attendees! Thanks to the many people who worked hard to make this event special, including parks staff and our board members.

The 2026 History to Chew On (HTCO) series is underway, with the first event having been held June 9. The 2026 program schedule is highlighted elsewhere in the

newsletter. Congratulations to board member Peter Andrew, who has now produced 16 seasons of HTCO – we are so appreciative of his efforts over the years!

Welcome to our new Parks Manager, Jason Thomas - he and the wonderful staff are doing a great job and we are so thankful to work with each of them! Please make your way to the park this year to enjoy this peaceful little slice of nature nestled right in the midst of Lexington's hustle and bustle – you will think you are far away from city life as you walk the trails and enjoy the site of our founding! Be sure to look at the "Roots for Remembrance" display in the nature education center, and consider purchasing a tree or a paver to honor someone you know in one of these special ways. As always, we appreciate so much your financial support of the Friends of McConnell Springs. Whether through your time or financial support, you make a difference — please keep us in mind.

Sincerely and on behalf of the Friends board,

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Jason Thomas

Wine Barrel Tasting -- Thanks to All!

Our annual fundraiser was held on a cool sunny day in the Bluegrass. Over 300 donors and 50 volunteers participated in the traditional last Saturday of March Wine Barrel Tasting for the Springs date, making stops at the wineries of their choice.

A super big thanks go to the 14 host wineries: 1922 House Vineyards & Winery • Chenault Vineyards • Equus Run Vineyards • First Vineyard Winery • Ghost Fox Winery • Grimes Mill Winery • Hamon Haven Winery • Harkness Edwards Vineyards • Lovers Leap Vineyards & Winery • Prodigy

Vineyards and Winery • Rising Sons Winery • Runner's Ridge Vineyard at Pike Street Wine House • Talon Winery & Vineyards • Wildside Winery and Vineyard, our volunteers, and the donors for making this a special day. At the Friends' May board meeting it was decided to do it again for the 20th time. Please put March 27, 2027 on your calendar for the next Wine Barrel Tasting for the Springs.

-- Dick Mathy, Treasurer



Notes from the Naturalist...

by Jason Thomas

Spring has arrived at McConnell Springs, and the change of season is already bringing fresh color and activity throughout the park. Early wildflowers, budding trees, and warmer days have brought more visitors to the trails. Birdwatchers have been stopping in more often as migration picks up, especially after another successful rendition of the annual Bluegrass Birding Festival, in partnership with Wild Birds Unlimited – Lexington, brought extra attention to the Springs.

We also recently hosted this year's "May the 4th Be With You" Star Wars-themed program, which brought families, costumed characters, and plenty of excitement to the park, proving that a little pop-culture fun is a great gateway into nature for visitors of all ages. And, in mid-May, the Friends' annual Founders' Day celebration returned, once again offering visitors the chance to learn more about the natural and cultural history connected to McConnell Springs and the early origins of Lexington.

As always, we hope you'll visit us often as the year continues to unfold. Explore the trails, look for what's blooming or singing, take part in our upcoming programs, and stop by the Education Center to explore the displays and share your thoughts. Your feedback, curiosity, and participation help make McConnell Springs a vibrant and welcoming place for everyone.

A special Thank You to the Friends of McConnell Springs for their generous donations to the Education Center. The Education Center now features a Bobcat Taxidermy display, an ADA-accessible touch-screen kiosk that displays Merlin Bird App, and beautiful native plants added to the Isabel Yates Fountain just outside.

We look forward to seeing you on the trail and sharing another beautiful warm season here at the birthplace of Lexington.

Founders' Day, Despite Rain, a Success!

Were you among the estimated 700 people that came to McConnell Springs to celebrate Founders' Day on May 16? It was a special day to honor our legacy and to express gratitude to those who founded our city, and on this 250th anniversary of American independence, our nation.

At Founders' Day, over a dozen historical reenactors recreate the period of 1775 with demonstrations of life and skills from that era, and musicians ranging from Scottish bagpipes to Appalachian dance to Bluegrass provide a mix of entertainment and dance, while local groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, environmental educators, animal rescue organizations, beekeepers, and others provide informational displays and activities for attendees. Add food trucks and free kettlecorn and you have all you need for a great day to learn about our history and appreciate the legacy of people who have gone before us to establish the freedoms and quality of life we enjoy.

There will be many events this year to celebrate America's 250th Birthday – if you love this country and appreciate the blessings of liberty we enjoy, please find a way to partake. Thanks to all of the dozens of people involved with planning and producing Founders' Day at McConnell Springs – we will see you again in 2027!



Board Spotlight: Peter Andrew

We have all heard of the crown jewels of the United Kingdom, the collection of royal ceremonial objects and gems of the British monarchy kept in the Tower of London. But at McConnell Springs, we actually have one of those jewels from England sitting on the Friends board – his name is Peter Andrew.

Peter was born in Shrewsbury and raised in Cheltenham England. At age 16 he became an apprentice in an aerospace engineering company and after 5 years of work and study, a mechanical engineer and designer. He married Sue at age 21 and began his rise in the workplace through a series of companies that produced a variety of equipment for the commercial flight and mining industries. Peter is creative, with an inventor's spirit who loves to use his hands and his brain, and developed a reputation as a manager who specialized in taking troubled companies that were acquired by the parent company and turning them back around to profitability. His assignments literally took him all over the world, including places like Malta, Canada, China, Mexico, and of course, America. He worked for firms like Dowty, Dunlop, Parker Seal and was offered many opportunities along the way. After initially coming to America with a job in San Diego, he was later offered an opportunity to relocate to either San Diego or Lexington, and chose Lexington because of its quality of life and beauty and "being an easy place to live". Sue's work led her to Ashland, the Henry Clay Estate, where she has served as docent for many years. He retired from his life's work in 2007, and in 2011, he became a citizen of the United States, and retained dual citizenship with Great Britain.

Along the way, Peter and Sue became parents to a son and daughter, both of whom remained in



England, and they are also proud grandparents to two grandchildren. This means frequent trips across the pond back to their roots.

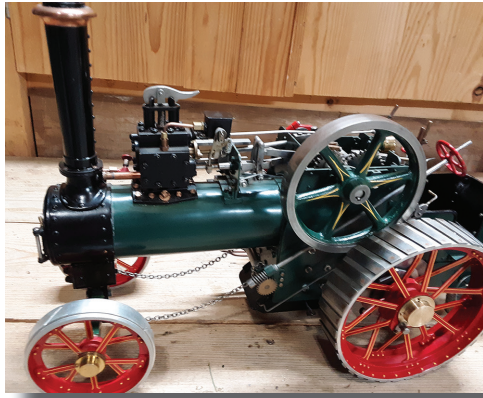
In Lexington, Peter befriended two of our other board members, Franklin Thompson and Dick Mathy, and became involved in civic service through several organizations. He served as president of the Dry Stone Conservancy board for some time, involved with rebuilding stone walls particularly at

older cemeteries, as that trade was revived here in central Kentucky. He then became a board member for Friends of McConnell Springs where he has faithfully served for almost 20 years, and has singlehandedly produced our popular "History to Chew On" series for 16 years, identifying and bringing local speakers in on a wide variety of topics of interest for five sessions each year. These are an annual highlight for the community. He also was the driver in creating the new "Roots for Remembrance" tree design that is in the Nature Education Center, to document those who have had trees purchased in their honor.



As noted, Peter is creative and loves to make things with his hands. This aptitude spans many areas including cooking (English porkpies and sausages a specialty), woodworking, metal working, building accurate working scale models of ma-

chines such as steam engines (see photos), masonry repair, and others. His home is the workshop for entertaining (no catering, all food made in house), building metal and wooden crafts, and so many other things. He is also quite a military history buff.



Peter says among the things of which he is proudest, there is a common theme of putting time into things that benefit other people, and valuing honesty in all things. This includes revamping companies to try and save peoples' jobs and livelihood, engineering innovations in aviation and automobiles that have advanced the mobility of people, and efforts to preserve history, such as with McConnell Springs. And that through all of his many stops along the way, he has kept his unique British accent, unspoiled and rich as ever!

Peter and his wife Sue could have lived practically anywhere they wanted in the world. They have friends in many countries, but they chose America, and in particular, Lexington, Kentucky as their permanent residence, and we are thankful for that decision and his involvement and leadership on the Friends of McConnell Springs board. Peter is a shining example of community engagement and our board is better for his many contributions and perspectives. Thanks, Peter, and we look forward to more to come!

Remembrance at The Springs

Support McConnell Springs' educational programs while helping grow the park's tree diversity. With a \$100 donation, a tree will be planted in a Roots for Remembrance plot during the planting season.

A 7-foot metal tree sculpture in the Nature Center will honor each individual, with names engraved on a leaf as a lasting tribute. Applications are available on our website, at the Nature Center, or by calling 859-225-4073.

History to Chew On: Savor the Series

September 8

History of Gratz Park

Speaker: Jeremy Popkin

Over the more than two centuries since it was designated as an open space in the heart of historic Lexington, Gratz Park has filled many roles. Originally intended as the site of Transylvania University, it has been a home to some of the city's wealthiest residents, a military encampment, a bastion of racial segregation, the longtime home of Lexington's public library, the inspiration for the city's first historic preservation movement, and an attraction for both tourists and ghosts. UK professor Jeremy Popkin's talk will explore the long history of Gratz Park and show how it illuminates larger aspects of our city's past.

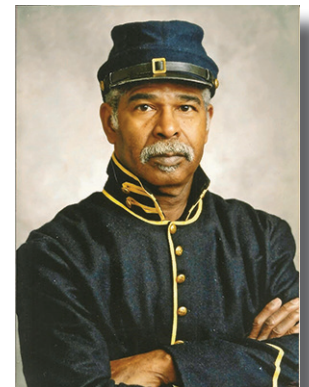


October 13

The Guns Roared and the Earth Shook

Speaker: Robert (Bob) Bell

The largest use of artillery during the Civil War occurred during the 3 day battle at Gettysburg. Bob Bell will discuss similarities and differences between the Union and Confederate artillery over the course of the battle. Topics covered will be on the number and types of cannon used, projectiles and fuses, and the artillery organization of both sides.



FREE	416 REBMANN LANE LEXINGTON, KY	6PM-7PM
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Friends – Memberships

The Friends of McConnell Springs is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization. Your tax-deductible donation supports the preservation of McConnell Springs and educational programs at the site. Can we count on your support in being a Friend? If so, please mail this form to the address below.

Name: _____

Address: _____

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Donation amount:

\$1000 \$500 \$250 \$100 \$50 \$25
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Check this box to make my donation to The Friends of McConnell Springs Endowed Fund #0527 at the BGCF.

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No matter what membership level you give, your generosity is greatly appreciated! Thank you for your support!

Our mission

The Friends of McConnell Springs, an independent not-for-profit 501 (c)(3) organization, works in a partnership with the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government Division of Parks and Recreation, dedicated to the restoration and preservation of McConnell Springs as:



- a national historic site, recognized as the pioneer encampment in the naming of Lexington, Kentucky;
- an environmental and educational resource; and
- a passive recreational park.

FRIENDS is published by the Friends of McConnell Springs

Editor: Reneé Williams

Contributors: Peter Andrew, Charlie Boland, Dick Mathy, Laurie Thomas, and Jason Thomas

McConnell Springs is a natural and historic site at 416 Rebmann Lane in Lexington, Ky. The park has two miles of trails that lets you explore the sinking springs, vegetation, stone fences and vestiges of historic buildings. McConnell Springs boasts more than 130 species of plants and numerous species of urban wildlife that reside at or visit the park. The unique geologic, natural and historic features are protected, providing environmental, cultural and historical education opportunities for the residents of Fayette County and elsewhere.

To learn more about McConnell Springs, call 859.225.4073 or visit www.McConnellSprings.org.