

FIRST STATE HERITAGE PARK

ANNUAL REPORT
Fiscal Year 2021



First State
Heritage Park

HISTORIC SITES

SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

To say Fiscal Year 2021 was an interesting year would be the understatement of the century. With the historic COVID-19 pandemic came a lot of firsts for the First State Heritage Park (FSHP). Across all sites and divisions, museums were closed, programming came to a halt and staff were left wondering what the future would hold. As true professionals, staff throughout FSHP were able to switch course and put on new hats. They started to learn the intricacies of digital and virtual content, how to expand their reach through social media, took the time to deep clean and finally had a chance to sit down and think of new and creative ways to engage audiences through rewritten and brand new in-person programming for the future. Throughout the year, some sites saw re-openings with limited time slots and limited programming, so the public was able to still take advantage of our renowned events before statewide closures came back. Despite these hurdles, FSHP was still able to engage 952 visitors through the John Bell House and park wide 12,040 total visitors enjoyed virtual and in-person content. I am proud to say all FSHP staff went above and beyond to ensure some form of normalcy in a time when people needed it most. Our standards did not drop and in fact, staff have set a new level of excellency that will be the marker for all programming as we move forward. New programming relationships have formed across sites and everyone is starting to truly embrace what FSHP stands for: giving visitors to Delaware's Capital a cohesive and engaging experience throughout the city. I am very excited to see what the new year brings.



NICOLE WORTHLEY

Park Superintendent



PARK HISTORY

First State Heritage Park became Delaware’s first “urban park without boundaries” in 2005 when Gov. Ruth Ann Minner signed Executive Order No. 55 into law. The Historical Park Task Force was comprised of leaders from the community and various historical organizations who came together to lay the foundations of the park that exists today. First State Heritage Park combines the talents and history of several Dover sites including Delaware Public Archives, Biggs Museum of American Art, Old State House Museum, Johnson Victrola Museum and the John Bell House. Staff from Delaware State Parks provide various thematic walking tours of The Dover Green, Legislative Hall, Christ Church cemetery, Methodist cemetery, Presbyterian cemetery and Woodburn – The Governor’s Mansion.



MISSION OF FIRST STATE HERITAGE PARK

- To interpret historical and cultural resources of Delaware’s Capital City of Dover.
- To foster among both Delawareans and visitors a deeper understanding of Dover’s historical significance and contributions of the city and its residents to the history of Delaware and of the nation.
- To encourage stewardship of Dover’s historic buildings and natural areas and documentation of its rich history.
- To raise the visibility of Delaware’s capital as an attraction for heritage tourists by creating and marketing a more comprehensive and cohesive picture of the cultural assets of Dover and its historic significance to the State of Delaware.

COVID-19

For the first time in the Park's history, all sites across First State Heritage Park were shut down due to the historic COVID-19 pandemic. Staff continued to work behind the scenes to preserve Dover's unique history and worked on updating and creating new programming to bring to visitors once the sites reopened. While some programming continued, regulations were put into place to protect staff and visitors and adhere to the Governor's and CDC recommendations, such as reduced program capacity, virtual programming, reduced site hours, reservations, tour time slots, masks, hand sanitizer, telecommuting or closed off areas of a building. Staff across all sites made the smooth transition to virtual and digital content programming, which not only allowed visitors to experience all the programming FSHP has to offer from the comfort of their own home, but also allowed visitors who normally are not be able to travel a chance to participate in our programs.

The John Bell House, in accordance with state COVID-19 public health orders, was unfortunately closed to the public and no walking tours were conducted. During this time, staff had a chance to rework or create new programming, which became successful once FSHP was able to reopen.

FSHP reopened in several phases in accordance with COVID-19 guidelines and started offering tours on a more limited basis with reduced capacity. Staff took this time to create virtual Programming, which included at-home crafts, lectures and fun-fact videos that were widely successful for FSHP's first foray into the virtual world of interpretation.



Welcome Back!
First State Heritage Park is excited to announce our first phase of reopening!
Beginning Friday, April 23, we will be offering Walking Tours from the John Bell House on **Fridays and Saturdays at noon.** Tours must be reserved in advance.
Call **302-739-9194** or email **TourFSHP@delaware.gov** to book **TODAY!**

PARTNER REACTIONS

While the Biggs' physical site closed to the public from March 13 through July 8, 2020, the museum was quickly able to adapt to a virtual format to deliver programs and exhibitions to maintain engagement and preserve the visitor experience. The museum offered virtual options for children's programs, hands-on workshops, specialized tours and lectures, school trips and free meditative walking tours highlighting each exhibition. Through these offerings, the museum was able to keep the spirit of the Biggs alive during closure and continue to provide options for varying comfort levels including hybrid, in-person or virtual programming as the pandemic progressed. The museum closed once again from Dec. 16 through Jan. 30 as the virus surged; however, at this stage, staff had procedures in place to continue with business as usual in a virtual format. For on-site visitation, the museum monitored and implemented recommendations from the Delaware Division of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control to preserve a safe environment, employing tactics, such as enhanced cleaning protocols, capacity limits, social distancing and timed ticketing when needed. Masks were required on-site, and programs were held outdoors when possible and appropriate to allow participants to spread out and remove masks if desired.

The Johnson Victrola Museum (JVM) and the Old State House (OSH) operated in a limited capacity during the COVID-19 shutdown, with reserved tours being offered at specific times. Initially tours began with Fridays and Saturdays and additional days were gradually added as the situation seemed to improve. Eventually, tours were offered four times daily: Wednesday through Saturday for JVM and Wednesday through Sunday for OSH. Staff followed all COVID-19 public health orders, including requiring masks and social distancing. Cleaning and disinfecting became a part of the daily routine between tours and at the end of the day.



VISITATION

First State Heritage Park would not exist without the amazing historic sites and museums it encompasses. FSHP is unique in that the museums operate independently but still come together for programming collaborations while making sure to give visitors to Delaware's Capital a cohesive and streamlined experience. Due to site shutdowns, state of emergencies and a general halt to travel, the numbers for FY2021 are considerably lower than previous years. It is worth noting that when sites did open and programming was presented, visitors welcomed the change of pace. Lantern tours sold out and the limited programming offered was successful.

Overall program attendance: 419

Walking Tours: 223

Bell House General: 242

Group: 52

School programming: 16

Legislative Hall, Woodburn, Hall House:

closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and renovations.

Outreach: 0

Total for DSP managed sites: 952

Biggs: 5,456

Archives/Welcome Center: 3,702

Johnson Victrola Museum: 992

Old State House: 938

Total for Partner managed sites: 11,088

Total for all FSHP sites: 12,040 visitors

Social Media:

FSHP's social media saw an upward trend in usage and engagement, with more than 200 new followers and 51 new page likes.



JOHN BELL HOUSE

Purchased by the State of Delaware in 2012, the John Bell House is an 18th-century building that has worn many hats throughout its history. Today, it stands as an interpretive center for Delaware State Parks, the starting point for the various walking tours offered and a programming center for the park.

The staff at the John Bell House worked hard to create new programming and reinvented old programs. Some of the programs and events that were created during the COVID-19 shutdown include a “Revolutionary Heroes” walking tour, researching an African American walking tour, the Victorian Picnic and entire sets of new, handmade interpreter clothing.

Staff was also able to focus entirely on virtual programming, including videos, lectures and crafts, a new venture and that became the new normal during the shutdown. Initiatives like the Colonial Garden will also lead to future programming to broaden FSHP’s interpretive scope.

Leadership:

Park superintendent:

Jim Hall and then Nicole Worthley as of February 2021

Interpretive programs manager:

Ryan Schwartz



Make Your Own Suffragist Sash!

Step 1

Gather some paper (cut into strips), glue or tape, markers/crayons, and anything you want to add to your sash (stickers, stamps, etc.)



Step 2

Connect your strips of paper, coloring them purple, white and gold. These were the colors worn by American suffragists!



Step 3

Add any embellishments you would like to, and your sash is complete!



DELAWARE PUBLIC ARCHIVES AND WELCOME CENTER

As the repository for records of Delaware state and local governments, the Delaware Public Archives contains thousands of documents and other materials that can help with researching one's genealogical roots. Among these records are census materials, tax assessments, probate/estate records, land deeds, military records and vital statistics including birth, death and marriage records.

The Welcome Center serves as the starting point for a visitor's experience to FSHP. A visitor can obtain information and brochures, learn about Dover's offerings and also take a moment to walk through the center's exhibit space.

Leadership:

Director: Stephan Marz

Media relations:

Corey Marshall-Steele

Information resource specialist:

Dawn Mitchell

Information resource manager:

Edward McWilliams

Welcome Center supervisor:

David Littleton



BIGGS MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

The Biggs Museum of American Art was founded in 1993 and is the only museum in FSHP not operated by a state entity. The Biggs prides itself on decorative arts and new art initiatives, and always pushing the envelope with exhibits while working with the community to tell little-known stories. Their museum programs embrace diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion within its community, and allow visitors to engage with the arts in unique ways, often for the first time in their lives.

Through rotating exhibitions in FY21, the Biggs was able to showcase a variety of artists ranging from world-renowned to emerging local talent. The most popular exhibitions were “Stairway to Heaven,” which featured illustrations by surrealist Salvador Dali, and “Winslow Homer from Poetry to Fiction: The Engraved Works,” which featured wood block prints from the famous 19th-century Illustrator who was known for capturing scenes of American life. The museum also promoted the arts in Delaware through highlighting local artists like Jack Lewis, Rosemary Connelly, members of the Delaware Watercolor Society and the Delaware Division of the Arts 2021 individual artist fellows in major exhibitions. The museum also introduced more than 120 QR codes throughout its exhibits to aid visitors’ appreciation and understanding of the collections’ objects and reinvented family guide materials to give children an easier way to engage with the artworks.

Leadership:

Executive director:

Charles A. Guerin

Curator:

Ryan Grover (through July 2021)

Director of Marketing and PR:

Kerri Lacey

Visitor Services and Membership manager:

Kathryn Marro

Curator of Community and Academic Programs:

Kristen Matulewicz

Director of Development:

Gina Sacchetti



OLD STATE HOUSE MUSEUM

The Old State House Museum was built in 1791 and served as the State Capitol building and courts until the construction of Legislative Hall in 1933. The historic museum was the center of Delaware’s most public debates in the 19th and early 20th centuries including slavery, the Reconstruction Amendments and Suffrage. Saved from demolition by one of those very suffragists, Mabel Lloyd Ridgley, the building stands to teach about the battles that took place within its walls.

The OSH team had to find new ways to communicate with the public, diverse communities and stakeholders. Zoom, WebEx, social media and phone conferencing became the answer to maintain relationships. The staff developed several virtual programs including “We Didn’t Vote for Him” about President Lincoln; “Remembering Washington” featuring John Haslet, Elizabeth Battel and George Washington; “First Women of the First State;” Dr. James Sykes; Thomas Macdonough; and “American Revolution from Other Perspectives.”

Due to restrictions, many of the Friends of Folk concerts were postponed until spring 2021. The concerts eventually continued safely. Some artists live streamed and others performed for a small audience.

Leadership:

Director: Timothy Slavin

Deputy director:
Suzanne Savery

Site supervisor:
Nena Todd

Lead interpreter:
Gavin Malone



JOHNSON VICTROLA MUSEUM

Built in 1967, the museum stands as a testament to perseverance and 20th-century innovation. Detailing the biographical history of Eldridge Reeves Johnson and Leon F. Douglass, co-founders of the Victor Talking Machine Company, visitors learn the history of the company, recorded sound and the talking machine. Recent efforts by its new site supervisor include improvements to interpretation to detail the socio-economic background of the 20th century, which allows visitors to understand why and how a small company grew so large and radically changed the entertainment and sound industry in the United States.

In the first half of FY21, JVM was able to overhaul its second floor exhibit space, which included a new Francis Barraud exhibit, a new layout for machines from the Heiges collection, and revised lighting to improve displays and to address issues related to excessive brightness.

JVM offered many new programs including “Mischief Managed: Throwing a Hotsy-Totsy Halloween Bash,” which focused on emerging Halloween celebration trends in the 1920s; “Seasons Eatings,” a digital program that recreated and examined recipes from 20th-century holiday traditions; “Williams and Walker,” an in-depth look at the careers of Bert Williams and George Walker, musical pioneers; and “Across the Atlantic to Appalachia,” which delved into the history of country music and the importance of Victor’s recording sessions in Bristol Tennessee.

JVM staff also worked to further research the founding of the Victor Talking Machine Co. and uncovered unknown insights into operations and Co-Founder Leon F. Douglass.

Leadership:

Director: Timothy Slavin

Deputy director:
Suzanne Savery

Site supervisor:
Christopher Hall

Lead interpreter:
Nicole Rogers



NON-FSHP PARTNERS

Throughout the year, FSHP turn to our various other community partners for volunteers, events and programming.

These partners include First State National Historical Park and the National Park Service, The Friends of Old Dover and the First State Club.

The First State Club is a group of students, operating out of Milford High School, who volunteer to help with events and programming but also create their own programs to present to the public. Some Programs they have presented include 18th-century games, and a video series interviewing Delawareans impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and how it compared to the 1918 Influenza Pandemic.

As part of new interpretive initiatives to increase diversity, FSHP partnered with The Hannibal Guards. The Hannibal Guards are a United States Colored Troops (USCT) reenactor organization with a mission to bring awareness to those who fought as USCTs in the American Civil War. FSHP partnered with the guards to develop a series of Facebook videos that detail the history of USCTs in the United States and the history of Juneteenth. The series proved quite popular with 490 reactions, 3,299 views and a reach of 13,700.

FSHP staff also worked with NPS to bring ArCH Days to a new digital format and participated in filming an Orientation Video that will be played in the new First State National Historical Park Visitor's Center in New Castle.



BUDGET AND REVENUE

A budget of \$250,000 has been allocated for First State Heritage Park each year since FY2005 and covers salaries for park staff, programming supplies, contractual services, marketing and more.

Beginning in FY21, Delaware State Parks transitioned the superintendent's position, previously contracted through the New Castle Conservation District, to a Cultural Conservation Program manager position that will now be paid through the DNREC Division of Parks and Recreation budget. This created a more permanent position for the park and allowed for the redirection of funding to new programming initiatives and events that were planned for that fiscal year.

Most of these plans, however, were stalled by the COVID-19 pandemic. The stop to programming was not a total loss as the excess of money not spent allowed FSHP to make improvements behind the John Bell House.



Interpretive Program manager: \$57,485.85
New Castle Conservation district position. Includes benefits and a premium incurred by using NCCD.

Seasonal salaries: \$105,000

Capitol Police: \$18,000 allocated to Department of State for overtime expenses.

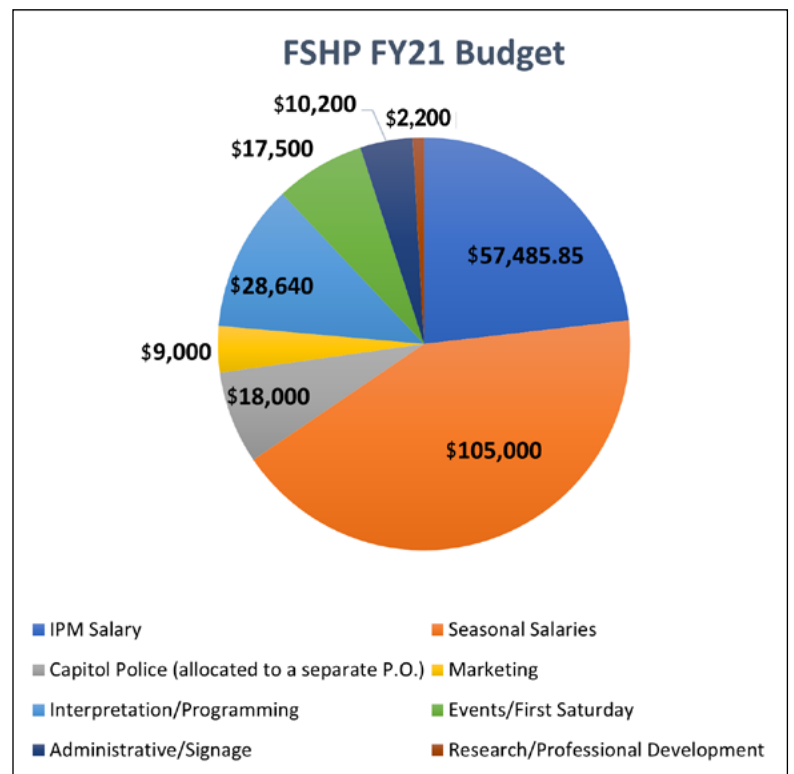
Marketing: \$9,000

Interpretation/programming: \$28,640

Events and First Saturday: \$17,500

Administrative and signage: \$10,200

Research and professional development: \$2,200



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Lantern Tours

Several Lantern and “Dark Dover” tours were held throughout FY21, but not as many as in the past. The standard Dover Green Lantern Tour was offered at reduced capacity but was still successful. **Four were held in October 2020 with 44 visitors, totaling \$440, and three were held in May and June 2021, with 31 visitors totaling \$310.**

Dover Days

The Dover Days in-person event was again canceled, but the Friends of Old Dover held the event virtually. FSHP created a video that discussed pre-revolutionary Dover, which was well received. **The video reached 355 people and received nine likes and reactions, while the whole virtual event reached 3,388 people, received 100 likes and recreations, and was shared 16 times.**

Make A Splash

“Make A Splash” was moved from in-person to a digital format so teachers and students could still learn from the expertise and knowledge of John Dickinson Plantation partners.

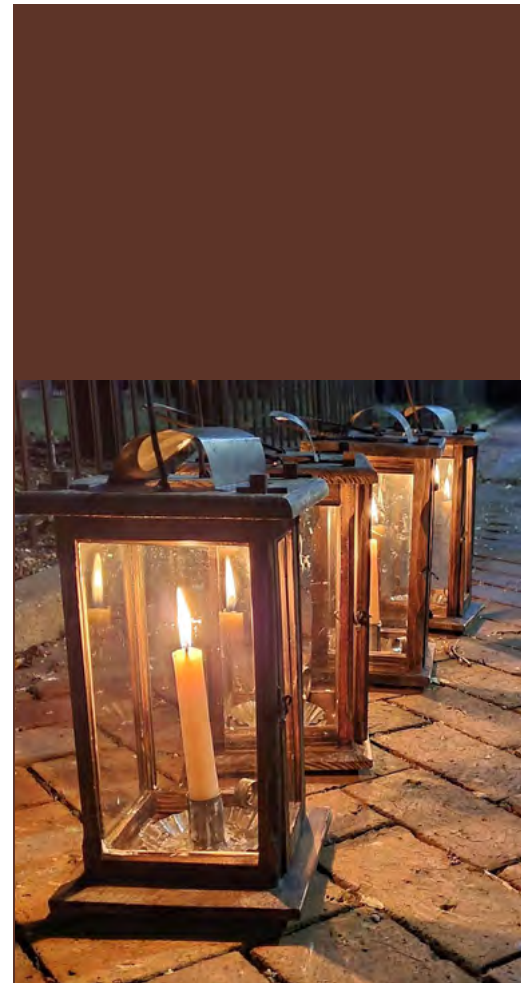
Suffrage

In honor of the 100th anniversary of Suffrage and the 19th Amendment, which was ratified Aug. 19, 1920, a historical marker was installed to commemorate the work done by Delaware women who fought for women’s rights. Park staff offered suffrage-based crafts, walking tours and a symbolic march around The Green. The height of suffrage-based programming was held in August to align with the official anniversary and **90 visitors** came to visit the John Bell House during that time.

Earlier in the year, park staff conducted “War of the Roses,” a full-length theatre piece that takes its namesake from suffrage vs. anti-suffrage debates.

Market Fair

Market Fair transitioned to a small, successful First Saturday event with popular acts from previous fair, with **100 visitors** who turned out to watch the performances.



INTERPRETER INITIATIVES

Historic Clothing and Maker's Workshops

One of the biggest behind-the-scenes tasks was the start of a complete overhaul of interpreter costuming. Rachel Sheffield, seamstress and historical interpreter, has been an amazing asset to this initiative as she took on the bulk of the work beginning during her time as the historical clothing intern. Her biggest project to date were five 1870s-1880s bustle dresses created for FSHP's first "Victorian Picnic on The Green."

This initiative has also led to staff wearing completely historically accurate costumes and educating the public on the process of making these outfits and what getting dressed looked like for women on a daily basis during that period. "Getting Dressed in the 18th Century" and "Getting Dressed in the 19th Century," two Facebook videos, detailed women wore and had a reach of more than 2,000 people. The videos are being adapted for in-person programming.

Rachel also worked on colonial-era clothing, such as English gowns for herself and Laura Parks, historical interpreter, and some shifts and other undergarments to be used by staff. Colonial clothing is typically what staff wear for general daily walking tours.

To share this knowledge with visitors, Rachel is creating hand-sewn garments in the John Bell House and has worked with Madison Coleman, FSHP staffer, to create and host "Maker's Workshops." For a small varying fee, \$5 to \$30 based on the type of item being made, visitors can make an item of clothing and take it home. So far pockets, aprons and haversacks have been created in the workshops.



INTERPRETER INITIATIVES

Garden

Alexander Rumm came to FSHP with a passion for cooking and food, so he naturally wanted to plant a garden behind the John Bell House that features plants a typical colonial family would have. Seeds were sourced as heirloom varieties from Thomas Jefferson's Monticello horticulture department. Small garden plots were built and soil laid out. Alex also wanted to grow the plants and maintain them as a colonial family would, so only colonial pest remedies were utilized. Orange peels and rosemary plants did the trick to keep most of the pests away. Grown in FY2021 were lettuce, spinach, several varieties of beans, radishes and carrots. Some plants produce seeds, which FSHP will use for next year. The plan is to expand the plot to grow more and create more specific programming related to not only colonial foods, but colonial agriculture.

The first of FSHP food programming included "First Taste with FSHP." This series of five videos featured Laura Parks with her son cooking various recipes from the past and have been a hit on social media, reaching more than 4,500 viewers. Alex has continued his research into colonial foods and agriculture, and this series is expected to return.



EVENTS

Victorian Picnic

FSHP was very excited to present its first Victorian Picnic on The Green in June 2021. The project was a year in the making, during which Rachel Sheffield took on the enormous task of creating five 1880s-style dresses from scratch. Basing her designs on extant garments, Rachel was able to design and personalize dresses for each female staff member showing the differing silhouettes Americans would have seen at this time.

The Victorians designed The Green to be a quiet, nature-based haven within the bustling up and coming city of Dover. They would have enjoyed lawn games and picnics under the newly planted trees that still shade The Green today. Aside from the addition of sidewalks and slight size adjustments, The Green has remained largely unchanged, so FSHP staff knew they wanted to bring this idea into modernity. With dresses made, men's suits ordered, croquet and other lawn games secured, all that was left was the food and entertainment. Lunch boxes were prepared by La Baguette Bakery and Catering based on typical picnic foods of the period: sandwiches, salads and small pastries. Guests were able to purchase their box lunch for \$20 and had several sandwich options to choose from. Guests were encouraged to bring their own lawn chairs or blankets, and to come in costume, so they could sit and relax under the trees with food and listen to the Fort Delaware Cornet Band perform several popular Civil War-era pieces. Tre Solle Dolce's ice cream cart was available for visitors to purchase bottled drinks and ice cream. Inside the John Bell House, visitors had the opportunity to decorate their own boater hat with fake birds, ribbons, flowers and more, see an 1885 map of Dover and play the lawn games in the yard with the First State Club. About 200 people enjoyed the festivities and many compliments were heard throughout the day. Many visitors wanted to know when the next picnic would be held. It was the perfect, relaxing, outdoor event for visitors during the pandemic and FSHP plans to turn it into an annual event.



NEW STAFF

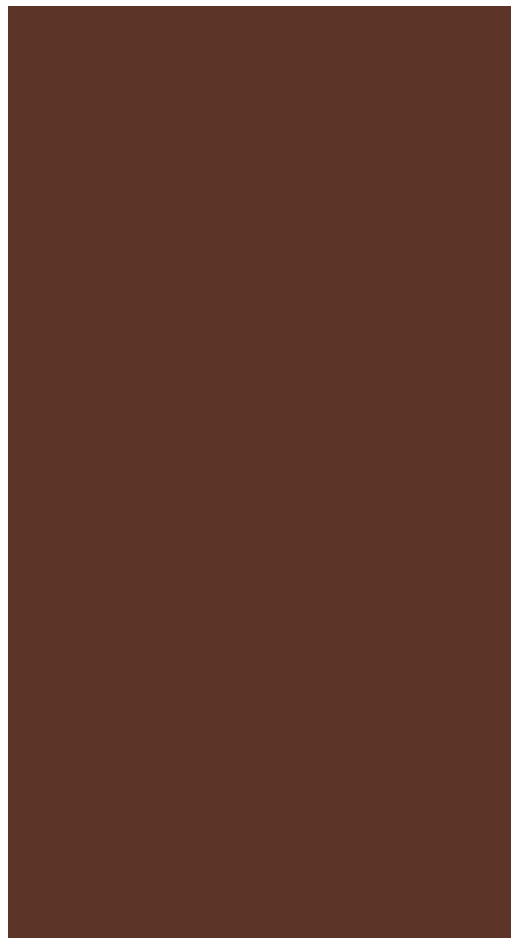
In addition to a new superintendent, FSHP was excited to bring on several other staff members during FY2021, including interpretive staff and interns:

Madison Coleman
Steve Pulinka
Alexander Rumm
Skylar Morrell



IN MEMORIAM

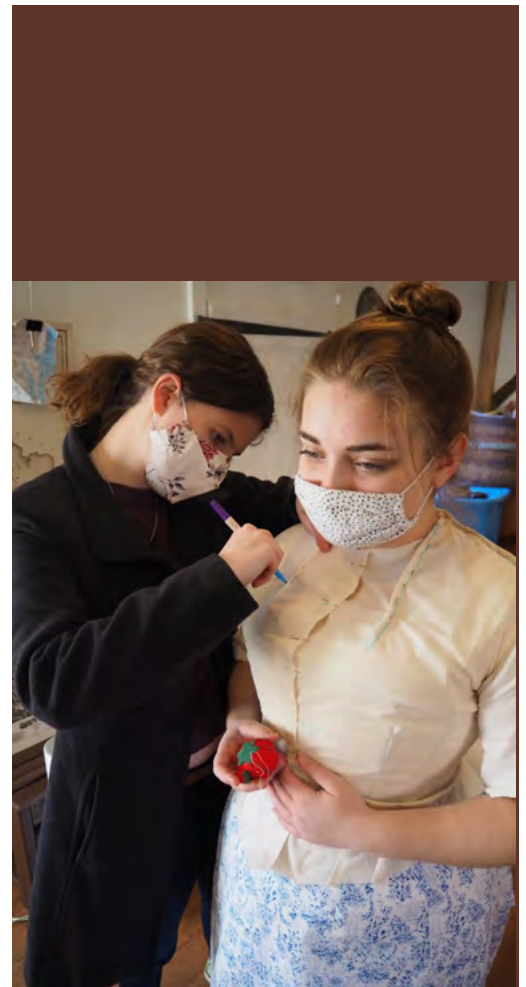
In March 2021, Rosemary Staniszewski, FSHP's most tenured historical interpreter, unexpectedly lost her husband of more than 50 years, Timothy F. Staniszewski. Like Rosemary, Tim was a fixture of First State Heritage Park and his was a life of service. He served in the U.S. Air Force and then in law enforcement, as a City of Dover police officer and later with Delaware State Police. After retirement, he continued to give back to his community as a social worker. For FSHP, Tim was ever a helping hand: whether it was to install hardware, fashion historic theatre props, put on historic clothing or set up and tear down at special events. He danced at FSHP with Dover's English Country Dance group. Tim and Rosemary helped enhance the park with the knowledge they brought back from travelling to museums and other cultural sites. First State Heritage Park is blessed to have benefitted from Tim's knowledge, wisdom and friendship. He is sorely missed.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Due to excess funds from FSHP's closure during the COVID-19 pandemic, the formal talks and designs have begun for a two-stall bathroom unit with storage to be built in the backyard of the John Bell House. This allows park staff to clear out a crowded storage area in John Bell House's second floor and will offer a place for visitors and staff to use the restroom. Currently, the only public bathrooms are at Public Archives, the Biggs Museum and the basement of the Old State House. If any of these buildings are closed or staff are not available, no restrooms are available to the public at FSHP. This has especially become an issue for evening programming, when staff at the Old State House must stay later so park guests can use the restroom.

FSHP staff are hoping to get internet access on the second floor of the John Bell House and install a handrail on the front steps for safety. Upgrading the HVAC system and fixing doors on the John Bell House are also a priority. By fixing temperature issues, FSHP can move forward with plans to enhance interpretation by including objects for exhibits.





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destateparks.com/History/FirstStateHeritage

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DELAWARE STATE PARKS
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