

Case Study: The Parkton-Starr Homestead

Note: The Parkton-Starr Homestead is a fictional organization modeled on small suburban/rural non-profit historic sites in the greater southeastern Pennsylvania region.

Site Overview

The Parkton-Starr Homestead is a 29-acre historic site dating back to 1762. Its mission is to preserve and protect the site and collection, as well as educate the public about the life and times of the families who lived there.

The property is owned by the state government. It is maintained and run by the Friends of Parkton-Starr Homestead, a non-profit Friends organization consisting of volunteers. The site subsists on a small budget for basic maintenance supplied by the county, grants, donations, and targeted fundraising campaigns.

The property abuts a county-owned park. It is open daily from dawn to dusk and relies on county park staff for security monitoring once per day. The site is only staffed during special events. Buildings are only open when the site is staffed.

There is a covered kiosk board adjacent to the parking lot used to display a map of the property and posters for upcoming events and initiatives. Paper copies of the site's tri-fold brochure, which includes the site's mission and a form to join the Friends group, are intermittently stocked in the kiosk's brochure compartment.

The Mobile App Initiative

Anecdotes from county security and volunteers who spend time on the property suggest that visitors who arrive at the location when special events are not in progress do not understand the site's history or how to explore the site. Numerous anecdotes reveal that visitors "just wander around for a bit" and spend very little time at the location. A vehicle counter at the parking lot entrance indicates that visitors frequently arrive on unstaffed weekends.

The Friends Board has recognized that they are missing opportunities to educate and connect with individuals who arrive when the site is unstaffed. By providing a better unstaffed experience, the Board hopes to engage these visitors, promote site awareness, and garner support. The Board has decided to produce a mobile app to guide visitors through the site. Through a fundraising campaign, the Friends have raised \$25,000 for the project.

More about the Site

History

The Homestead has a rich colonial era and Revolutionary War era history. Like many historic properties in the region, George Washington slept there and the property is included as a suggested stop in several

Revolutionary War-themed regional driving tours. In addition to the Revolutionary War history, the site preserves farm life and regional light industry through the early 19th century.

Points of Interest & Collections

The 29 acre property includes the following points of interest:

1. Farmhouse – 1762, with additions in 1793 and 1834. The house was lived in by generations of the Parkton and Starr families. The first floor and one room on the second floor are furnished with period pieces. The other second floor rooms house the collection and administrative office space. The basement is used for storage. The public spaces of the farmhouse are open to the public during special events.
2. Barn – 1762. Critical to farm operations in the 18th and early 19th centuries, the barn now serves as storage and is off-limits to the public.
3. Springhouse – c. 1768-1770. Used to store food by the families who lived on the property, the springhouse is kept empty. It is staged and open to the public during the late spring and autumn events.
4. Revolutionary War graves site – 1778. Denoted by a plain marker, the location contains the remains of 3 soldiers who died on the property in 1778.
5. Heirloom Garden – Modern. Based on regional gardening practices from the 18th century, the heirloom garden is planted with vegetables, herbs, and flowers that would have been grown by the Starr family. It is maintained on a weekly basis by avid volunteer gardeners. Printed lists of common plants and their uses are kept in a small brochure stand at the garden entrance.
6. Chicken Coop – Modern. The coop is built on the site of the original chicken coop. It is open to the public during the late spring and autumn events.
7. Archaeological Excavation – Modern. An archaeological dig was executed at this location two years ago. Several artifacts were found at this location including a fragment of china, a button, and a shoe buckle.
8. 19th Century House ruin – 1824. The second home was built on the property in 1824. It was destroyed by a fire in 1830.

The collection is housed in the farmhouse. It includes military artifacts, implements of everyday life, furniture, and personal Starr and Parkton family memorabilia from the 18th and 19th centuries.

Activities & Events

The Friends of Parkton-Starr Homestead host 3 major events each year:

- Revolutionary War Encampment – Third weekend in May.
- Apple Festival – Last weekend in September.
- Holiday Celebration – The weekend after Thanksgiving.

In addition to the major events, the Friends organization hosts several smaller scale tours and talks each year.