THE OCTORARO LOOP

The Horseshoe Scout Reservation Alumni Association (HSRAA) News

Winter 2026

The Cecil Paper Mill

By Eric Lorgus: Camp Staff 1966-73, 76-77



Drawing of the Cecil Paper Mill; Cecil Whig, 2017



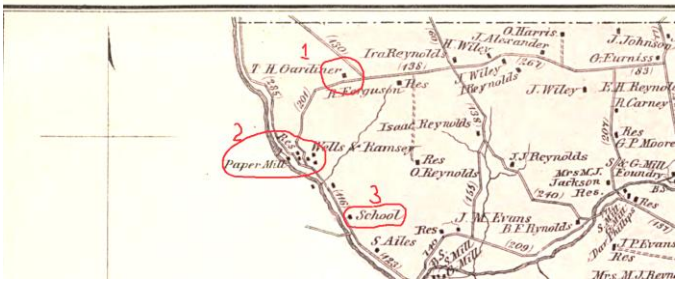
The remains of the paper mill, what it looks like today

For those who remember the old camp road, just inside the camp gate were the ruins of an old mill. All that remained was a small concrete building and the mill race. As I drove by, I wondered if the concrete building had ever been used by the bootleggers who once inhabited that area.

What I never realized was that this spot was once a bustling industrial center. Around 1791, an iron forge was established on 3,000 acres just south of the Horseshoe Bend on the Octoraro Creek. The 1820 census reported its name to be Frey's Forge. At that time, it employed 50 men who operated two forges, four bellows, and a slitting mill.

In 1871, the old forge property was sold and became the Cecil Paper Mill. By September 1873 a new mill was producing 12 tons of manila paper per week. Cecil County once had seven paper mills; the others were on Little Elk Creek.

While the mills on Little Elk had rail service, the Cecil Paper Mill was accessible only by a road that ran from Ridge Road (now the camp entrance) down to the old Camp Road just outside the camp gate. Present-day maps still show the path of this road which was used by six-mule wagons back in the day. In 1859, a covered bridge was built a mile south of the mill, which is likely when a road was built from the mill to it. That bridge was destroyed by the June 1884 flood and replaced with a pin-connected, 9-panel Pratt through truss iron bridge that still stands today.



1. Existing Ranger's house at camp entrance,
2. the old mill, 3. the old school.



John David Donache with team of six mules, c 1899. An employee of the Cecil Paper Mill. By Kara Reisler

Historical records show that by 1877 the mill had 20 employees with machinery running full-time. Over the next decade many improvements were made with machinery replaced with larger, heavier boilers and turbines. Output increased to 14 tons per week.

But in 1888, the business was put up for sale and there was evidence that things had slowed down. The acreage decreased from 150 to 68 and there were only five tenant houses. A new owner ran it until 1899 when it went bankrupt. The mill closed and laid off its 25 employees. In May 1901 it was auctioned to Charles Egan and became the Cecil Paper Company. Egan made extensive improvements, including two new waterwheels.

Then came the Octoraro Water Company. What made this site perfect for a mill was an 18-foot fall on the Octoraro Creek. There is little evidence of that today because of a dam and reservoir built upstream in 1951. However, around 1905 the water company began pumping water from the Octoraro which caused the mill to shut down periodically due to low river flow. Newspaper accounts in 1916 indicate the mill had been closed "for some time past" when it reopened briefly. By January 1920, it had reopened, after having been shut down and practically stripped of its machinery three years prior. The mill now would make wallpaper for the Sears Roebuck and Company.

In the Midland Journal on April 21, 1933, the final demise of the mill was revealed. The heavy stone walls of the mill were dynamited. At that time the mill had been abandoned for years and was sold for back taxes two years prior to the Chester County Council Boy Scouts.

What is remarkable is that the mill lasted that long. By 1900, most traditional water-powered mills had either shut down or converted to steam. I remain curious about what's left. The small building that remains is poured concrete, not brick. This suggests it was built in the 20th century. Amazingly, it still has a wooden roof, so someone has maintained it since the demise of the mill.



Who knows what else remains, hidden by the overgrowth? Archeology merit badge project?



The Sump Pumps from the early 1970s are Matt Christensen, Jim Goudie, Fred Page, Phil Puls, Dave Cline, Tom Lull, Tom Fosnocht, & Bob Behrle.

Cool Air Coming to the Dining Hall

Those sticky hot camp meals at Horseshoe may be a memory of the past. A large grant has been given to Council to air condition the Dining Hall and Kitchen. The renovations are to begin in the new year, completed by May 2027. The building will need to be insulated first, and that includes removing all the plaques mounted on the rafters and walls. It's been said that the artwork will be put back, with a probable filtering in the process.



Camp Horseshoe Winter Patch

Every year, many Troops spend the weekend winter-camping at Horseshoe. In celebration of our 100th anniversary, an anniversary patch will be available for those Troops camping in 2027. This patch is a replica of a painting courtesy of fellow alum, Bill Kassel – Artist.



A Memorial Service for HSR Alum, "Somewhat Obedient" Dick Bensing

On October 10, 2026, Troop Paoli 1 celebrated the life of Dick Bensing, **10/21/1943 – 6/22/2026**.

For over 70 years, Dick played a major role in his Troop, the Alumni Association, and the Council. In addition to our camp improvement projects, Dick designed and built the Clifton Lisle pavilions, plus the redesign of PARC, the new Chester County Council headquarters.



Dick played a key role with Troop Paoli 1 in addition to the 20 years he served as their Scoutmaster



Dick served in the Korean Demilitarized Zone



Dick Bensing, Tony Wetzel, and Jake Segal taking a break after a tasty reunion dinner

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HSRAA HORSESHOE SCOUT RESERVATION ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

26 Years Supporting the Reservation

Established in 2000, HSRAA has spent the past 26 years helping make Camp Horseshoe and Camp Ware special places for Scouts. Beyond the routine maintenance and improvements required to operate camps, HSRAA has funded and completed numerous projects that have enhanced the camp experience for generations of Scouts. These projects include the stone walls surrounding the Parade Field, historical park-style signage, clearing and improving the Picnic Grove, reseeding the Parade Field, gateways to both camps, Ware's stone flagpole structure, the Archery Range at Camp Ware, the Alumni Pavilion near the Health Lodge, a berm to screen the kitchen trash bins and propane tanks, a baseball backstop at the athletic field. HSRAA also helped fund Camp Council projects, including the Dining Hall kitchen roof and the rebuilding Achgheketum. This year HSRAA built the Alemain Pavilion in Staff City.

HSRAA's commitment to preserving Horseshoe extends beyond the physical camp. Our website

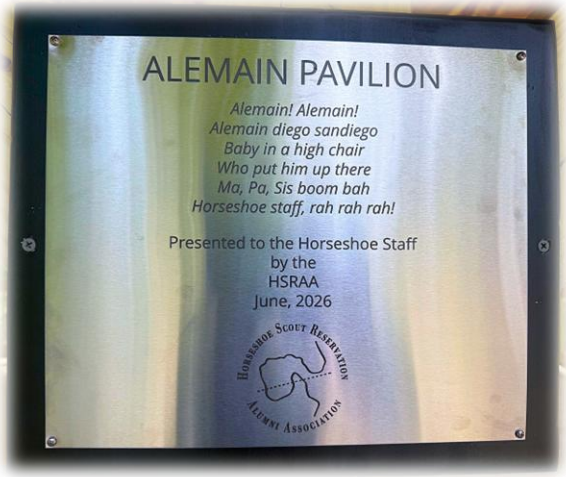
and Virtual Museum help keep the history and traditions of the Reservation alive and accessible to alumni, Scouts, families, and the Scouting community. The Octoraro Loop, published quarterly, continues that tradition by keeping alumni informed about current developments while revisiting the stories and memories that shaped Horseshoe.



Andy Smith, Mark Siegle, and Ryan Teat

As we look ahead, an extraordinary milestone is approaching: the 100th anniversary of Camp Horseshoe. HSRAA looks forward to helping celebrate a century of camping excellence and supporting the next 100 years of Horseshoe's legacy. Plans will include weekly centennial celebrations throughout the 2027 summer camp season, along with a special 100th Anniversary Camporee in October 2027.

For 26 years, HSRAA has helped preserve the past, improve the present, and invest in the future of Horseshoe Scout Reservation. As we approach 100 years of camping, the goal remains the same; to ensure that generations of Scouts can continue to experience the magic of Camp Horseshoe and Camp Ware.



The Alemain Pavilion is named for the staff cheer

Be sure to join the HSR alumni crew next July, in celebration of Horseshoe's 100th birthday! Next year's festivities will be extra special as we look back on the 100 years that made our camp great. Save the date: **Friday, July 16, 2027**

