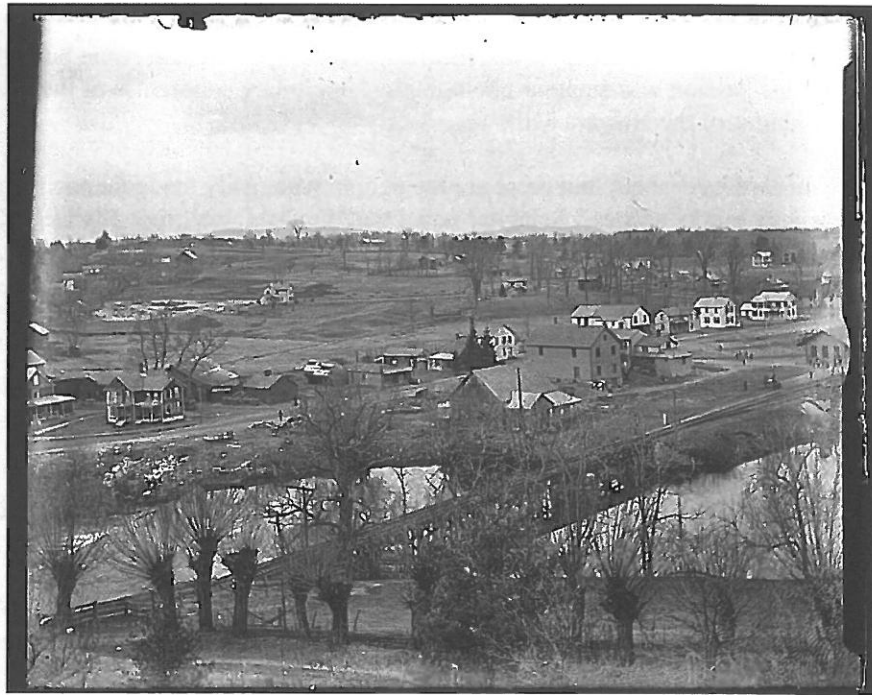


The Berkshire Eagle

The Mount plans special slate of events for Lenox's 250th



The industrial village of Lenox Dale in the 1890s, photographed by local resident Augustus Martin, part of a 40-image display on view starting Friday at The Mount.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY LENOX LIBRARY ARCHIVES

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By Clarence Fanto, Special to The Eagle

LENOX — To help celebrate the 250th anniversary of the town's founding, The Mount, a living history center devoted to the house, gardens and literary works of Edith Wharton, has assembled a series of

special events this summer.

Beginning with a free "Lenox Day" for town residents from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, the landmark cultural center and historic site is launching a season-long exhibit of historic photos depicting the village of Lenox Dale taken by photographer Augustus E. Martin, who lived in the community's industrial center.

"We hope to have a really strong turnout from our residents," said Executive Director Susan Wissler. Visitors can tour the main house, gardens and the current SculptureNow outdoor display as The Mount aims to forge closer ties with the local community.

Martin's images depict day-to-day working-class life between 1890-1915, a period when nearly half of the Dale's residents were immigrants. The exhibit is a collaboration with Lenox Library Director Amy Lafave.

"We wanted to do something to celebrate Lenox during the time period when Wharton was here," said Rebecka McDougall, communications director for The Mount. The home was built in 1902 for Wharton and her husband, Teddy; they lived there until 1911.

"We thought the photo exhibit is a really nice juxtaposition between the Gilded Age history associated with The Mount and this working-life picture of Lenox Dale at the time," McDougall said.

Martin, who lived from 1872-1961, was a barber, mechanic and carpenter, said Anne Schuyler, director of visitor services. "But his passion was amateur photography," including panoramas of the town taken from Willow Hill and depictions of the Niagara Mill.

"The 'cottages' are much talked-about, but these are the people who really made the town work," she said. "He picked up these very quirky scenes." Schuyler noted that the Dale was originally Lenox Furnace, but the name was changed around 1889 to reflect a more bucolic image. By then, residents found employment at the uptown estates as the iron and glass works closed, though the paper mills remained in operation.

"The images are poignant," added Ross Jolly, director of facilities and special events at The Mount. "So much of the infrastructure, including transportation, for the Great Estates was based in Lenox Dale. The labor force was really integral to the larger community."

"Part of the exhibit and the research is about how so much of what was happening in Lenox's past is still relevant and still can be applied to what's happening now," McDougall said, "and we wanted to explore that."

"The relationship between The Mount and the town strengthens with every passing year," Wissler said. "We're getting more and more comfortable with each other; it's mutually beneficial and a win-win for everybody. It feels good, and we look forward to growing it further and moving forward."

A plan to create an open space, park-like area on the grounds, in conjunction with the Berkshire Natural Resources Council, is gradually gaining traction, she noted.

"Nothing is on paper yet, but the other parties, including [adjacent property owners] Scarafoni and Associates, are on the same page," Wissler said. "Some legal things have to fall into place first, but everything is moving pretty much on schedule."

The Mount, in partnership with Town Hall, also is studying the structural integrity of the historic farmhouse at Edith Wharton Park on the shores of Laurel Lake, she added. Discussions on creation of a

cultural district in the area are continuing with the Lenox Chamber of Commerce's executive director, Kameron Spaulding.

"There are a lot of moving parts, but it's all in the right direction," Wissler said.

She cited generous support from the Lenox Community Preservation Committee and town voters, who approved \$75,000 last month to help complete renovations to The Stables, eventually to be used for year-round programming. The total cost of the project, including exterior repairs, exceeds \$750,000.

Other events planned in conjunction with the 250th anniversary include:

- "Edith Wharton's Lenox," a discussion by local historian Cornelia Brooke Gilder based on her new book highlighting the stir created by the author during her decade at The Mount; 3 p.m. July 14 (\$10 general admission, free to members).

- "High Times at Music Inn," a celebration of the concert venue that brought celebrated jazz, folk, pop and rock performers to Lenox from the 1950s to the 1970s. 3 p.m. Aug. 25 (\$10 general admission, free to members).

The non-profit living history center established in 1980, has been totally debt-free since last year on a budget of just over \$2.1 million and is breaking even for operations following a surge in attendance to a record 45,731 in 2016. That's an increase of 8 percent from 2015, with admissions up 17 percent from last year so far this season.

The site is also moving toward an extended season, with plans to remain open with programming on weekends through February, followed by a hiatus until mid-May.

The organization is focused on building an endowment and expanding its slate of programs designed to attract repeat visitors. Among the most successful is the free "Music After Hours," featuring local performers on summer Friday and Saturday evenings from 5 to 8, with food and beverages available for purchase. Each event, sponsored by Greylock Federal Credit Union, attracts 500 to 600 people.

Next in line as the final major capital improvement project is the mansion's terrace, which is "badly in need of major repairs," Wissler stated.

If you go . . .

The Mount Celebrates Lenox, is a series of events commemorating the town's 250th anniversary at the home and gardens of Edith Wharton. All events at The Mount, 2 Plunkett St., off Route 7.

What: Lenox Day

When: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday

Admission free for all town residents to tour the mansion, grounds and SculptureNow outdoor exhibit, plus a new photo exhibit of historic Lenox Dale images captured by photographer Augustus Martin.

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What: Local historian Cornelia Brooke Gilder discusses her new book, "Edith Wharton's Lenox"

When: 3 p.m. July 14

Cost: \$10 general admission, free to members

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What: High Times at Music Inn, a celebration of the concert venue near Tanglewood that brought celebrated jazz, folk, pop and rock performers to Lenox from the 1950s to the 1970s

When: 3 p.m. Aug. 25

Cost: \$10 general admission, free to members

The Mount offers discounts for an annual \$65 individual membership and a dual membership of \$130.

Information: www.edithwharton.org, 413-551-5111, or email info@edithwharton.org

<http://www.berkshireeagle.com/stories/the-mount-plans-special-slate-of-events-for-lenoxs-250th,511891>