



# NEWS

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## **Montco Opens Schuylkill Canal Towpath; New Section Completes SRT from Philadelphia to Phoenixville**

**Port Providence, PA (July 28, 2015)** – The Montgomery County Commissioners today officially opened the newly-restored Schuylkill River Towpath in Upper Providence Township, and in doing so filled in the last unfinished link on the Schuylkill River Trail in Montgomery County between Philadelphia and Phoenixville in Chester County.

Joining the commissioners at the Red Bridge spanning the canal in Port Providence were representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), the Schuylkill River Heritage Area, and the Schuylkill Canal Association.

“Just last week the Schuylkill River Trail was named the best urban trail in America by USA Today, and today we make that trail even better with this opening,” said Josh Shapiro, chair of the county commissioners. “This trail is a gem, and this 1.75 mile link polishes it even more.”

Phase I of the project was completed in 2013. It involved the rebuilding of the overflow spillway, construction of the 125-foot pedestrian bridge, and the underpass for the towpath under Route 29. This portion of the project was designed by Campbell Thomas Architects and Urban Engineers and was constructed by Flyway Excavating, Inc. at a cost of \$938,800.

Phase II, also performed by Flyway Excavating, Inc., included construction and restoration of the eight-foot wide gravel-soil-vegetative mix towpath trail, construction of the Red Bridge over the canal, bank protection and stabilization of the banks along the canal, replacement of the terminus sluice gate, and dredging of a gravel bar in the canal. The cost of Phase II was \$792,013.

“This project would not have been possible, or would have taken longer, without the excellent financial contributions from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the William Penn Foundation,” said Montgomery County Commissioner Val Arkoosh. In addition to the county funds, DCNR provided a grant for \$325,000 for the project, and the William Penn Foundation contributed \$118,900.

The new trail link also provides a connection from Lock 60 and the Lock Tender’s House to Montgomery County’s Upper Schuylkill Valley Park. The link also marks another milestone in the completion of the Circuit, the region’s multi-use trail network currently made up of 300 miles of trails. Once complete, the Circuit will have 750 miles of connected trails in Greater Philadelphia.

“We celebrate today both the preservation and restoration of the canal and the opening of a critical 1.5-mile link in the Schuylkill River Trail,” said Commissioner Bruce L. Castor, Jr. “In the weeks, months, and years to come, thousands will spend an enjoyable day along the canal fishing, bird watching, picnicking, walking, or riding their bike on the towpath or paddling the most unique 5-mile waterway loop in the Philadelphia area.”

### **Background on the Schuylkill Canal**

The existing 2.5 mile Schuylkill Canal in Mont Clare and Port Providence in Montgomery County is one of only two sections of the former Schuylkill River Canal system still filled with water. The other section is in Manayunk.

The Schuylkill River Canal System was a slack water navigation system comprised of locks, canals, and dams to enable boats to travel from Philadelphia to the coal region in Schuylkill County. This navigation system was constructed between 1816 and 1825. Prior to being replaced by faster railroad service, the Schuylkill Canal was used to transport anthracite coal and other minerals, manufactured goods, and food. Canal boats were pulled by mules walking along the towpath.

After the canal system was abandoned, ownership of it transferred to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Most of the canal structures were dismantled and portions of the canal system were filled in. Some parts of the former canal, such as the canal in Mont Clare, were used as part of the Schuylkill River restoration project in the 1950s which successfully lead to the improvement of the river.

By the early 1980s, the Commonwealth no longer had a use for the Mont Clare Canal and entered into a 25-year lease for it with Upper Providence Township. The township supervisors created a Schuylkill Canal Advisory Committee which later on became the Schuylkill Canal Association.

Montgomery County acquired the canal, including the historic Lock Tender's House and fully restored Lock 60 (the only operational lock along the Schuylkill River), from the state in 2010. Other properties along the canal have also been acquired by the county to preserve it for future generations and create new opportunities for recreation.

The Schuylkill Canal Association continues to assist the county in maintaining the canal area and Lock Tender's House. It hosts various exciting events such as Canal Day. This past June marked the 33<sup>rd</sup> consecutive Canal Day.

The county recognizes that the Schuylkill Canal Association has been critically important, and its members' hard work and dedication has been critical in preserving an important part of our heritage. The opening of the restored towpath today, as well as the completion of other projects to restore the canal to its former glory, represents a real milestone for the county and Upper Providence Township and the fulfillment of work begun by a group of citizens in Mont Clare nearly 35 years ago. The canal is an important historical and recreational feature in Montgomery County.