

# Many Worked to Create, Preserve Story of Treman Park

Donna Eschenbrenner, Correspondent, July 11, 2014



*Photo caption: This mid-1860s image is labeled "Pic Nic in Enfield Ravine, Ithaca." Hiking the park trails in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century clothing must have been challenging, especially for women.*

Summers in Tompkins County are extraordinary: Green and leafy, with fragrant air and long, long evenings. The lake and the parks add to the pleasure, and it's especially enjoyable knowing their rich history. Not just natural history, although that's special enough, but the human stories behind our beautiful parks as well.

One of our best, indeed, one of the most dazzling state parks in all of New York is Robert H. Treman Park. It's comprised of more than 1000 acres stretched along the southeast corner of Enfield into the town of Ithaca, with the clear waters of Fishkill and Enfield Creeks running through it. Glaciers set the stage for this stupendous gorge and its multiple waterfalls by creating Cayuga Lake; the waters of Fishkill and Enfield Creeks have done the rest over the past 10,000 years by removing glacial sediments and eroding through numerous layers of sandstone and shale. The waters flow over twelve different unique cascades, including the breathtaking Lucifer Falls, formerly known as Enfield Falls, over 115 feet high.

The land that we know of as Treman Park was popular with locals and tourists as early as the mid 1800s. One early reference is by William Brewer writing in 1866 in *The Scenery of Ithaca and the Head Waters of the Cayuga Lake*. Brewer grew up "about two miles from the falls, and like many other boys of the neighborhood, was familiar with the spot, long before it became known to the world outside. A Grist Mill stood near the entrance of the ravine. Here the family flour was ground, and often, long years ago, while 'waiting for a grist,' with other boys, we penetrated the mysterious but fascinating 'Gulf.' That was what *we* called it. To be sure, a party of tourists from a distant city had visited it about this time, and had called it Lucifer Falls, and had given fanciful names to various portions of the ravine, but to us it was simply, The Gulf."

Brewer goes on to relate the ways he and his adventurous friends worked their way into the ravine – mostly by crawling along narrow ledges of rock and "climbing onto the tops of trees and descending their trunks." At the time of his writing in 1866, however, access into the gorge was easier and much, much safer. Trails and bridges were installed by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Wickham in what may have been the 1840s. They built and managed the Enfield Falls Hotel, a popular tourist attraction from the 1850s until at least the 1890s. This was located in the hamlet of Enfield Falls, where upper Treman Park exists today. The hotel was not the only notable building of the hamlet: A grist mill was first built there in 1817 by Isaac Rumsey. That mill burned down in the 1830s and a new one was built by Jared Treman, Robert H. Treman's great uncle, which was in use from 1839 until 1917. A post office, homes and other establishments existed here as well, and appear on maps of the area, including one as late as 1895. But by 1916 the hotel had suffered extensive fire damage and the roof was falling in.

That was the year that Robert H. Treman began buying up the land around Enfield Falls, and in 1920 he and his wife Laura donated the land (originally just 387 acres) to New York for a park. (Later acquisitions comprised the park that we know today.) First called Enfield Glen State Park, in 1939 it was named Robert H. Treman State Park to honor the generous benefactor who donated all the land and worked tirelessly to make it available to the public. As the state made improvements and added parking, many of the last remaining buildings of the hamlet of Enfield Falls were razed. The mill itself has survived and has been turned into a museum highlighting the

history of the mill and its workings, as well as other aspect of park history. Wonderful interpretative panels in the mill tell the story of the CCC camp that was located in the park from 1933 to 1941. President Roosevelt's New Deal program Civilian Conservation Corps put many thousands of young men to work throughout the country. In Tompkins County the men of Camp SP-6, Company 1265 were, according to the late Neil Poppensiek, local historian, "trucked to work sites in Enfield Glen (later Robert H. Treman), Buttermilk Falls, and Taughannock Falls State Parks. There they excavated flagstone and did masonry work, blasted, excavated fill, graded, planted trees, shrubs and grass, built roads, bridges, and water systems, erected park buildings, and – after the disastrous floods of July 1935 and August 1937 – repaired damaged facilities that in many cases they had only recently completed."

Since 1998 Cornell Professor Sherene Baugher has supervised students doing a series of archaeological digs at upper Treman Park, unearthing the history and the buildings of the hamlet of Enfield Falls. There is an archaeology walking trail marking the sites of all the buildings that have been excavated. Visitors step inside the granite footprints to get a feel for the size of these 19<sup>th</sup> century homes. The interesting archaeology exhibits in the mill highlight some of their ongoing work revealing the history of the little village that lies hidden beneath the magnificent park so many of us love to visit each year.

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