

Who *Really* Built the Iconic Stone Steps at the Ledges and the Intriguing, but Long-Gone, Structures at Virginia Kendall Park

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Abstract

This paper will explore the origin of the Stone Steps at the Ledges in Cuyahoga Valley National Park and who constructed them. Much is known about the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s and their tremendous impact on the landscape and facilities that we enjoy today in the park. Were they the original builders of the Stone Steps? Equally fascinating are three lesser-known structures that predate the CCC's arrival: two small cabins built by a Cleveland coal peddler who amassed a fortune in that industry, as well as a stone house built by a popular hotel proprietor from Cleveland. The stone house was later planned to be the site for a shrine to the American chestnut. Today, only the latter has visible remains. Still, they are part of the rich, pre-park history and worthy of discussion.

Introduction

The Ledges Trail passes through one of the most scenic areas in Cuyahoga Valley National Park and offers close-up views of stunning rock formations. The Stone Steps is a popular feature along the trail that is often photographed (Figure 1). The steps thread their way through a narrow passage between the moss and lichen-covered rocks, and connect the top of the Ledges plateau to the base of the rock formations below.

The National Park Service (NPS) has long credited the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) for building the Stone Steps in the 1930s. Photos certainly show CCC enrollees working on stones at the landing (Figure 2a). Other photos show them improving a path to the top of the Stone Steps (Figure 2b). These photographs give rise to the idea that the CCC workers created the Stone Steps. Clearly, a task such as this would not be out of line with the other major projects performed by the CCC at Virginia Kendall State Park between December 1933 and 1939. These projects included: grading roads; clearing deadwood; installing power, sewer, and water

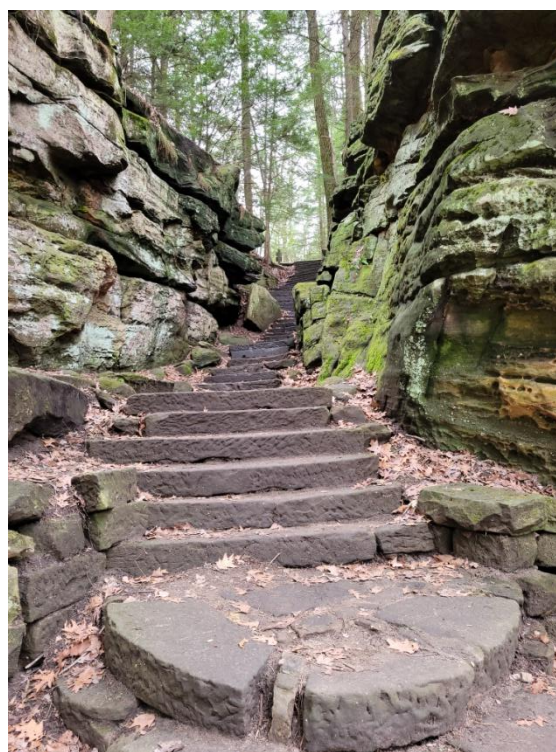


Figure 1. Stone Steps along Ledges Trail. NPS/Becky MacKay, March 15, 2025.

lines; constructing shelters, latrines, and parking areas; creating a lake; reforesting the land; and establishing foot trails.^{1,2} CCC crews transformed this rural area into an accessible recreational destination for the public.

But did the CCC originally construct these iconic steps? Or, did the CCC repair or rework steps that previously existed? To answer these questions, we must go further back in time to learn about relevant property owners before the area became a state park (operated by Akron Metropolitan Park District) and then a national park.

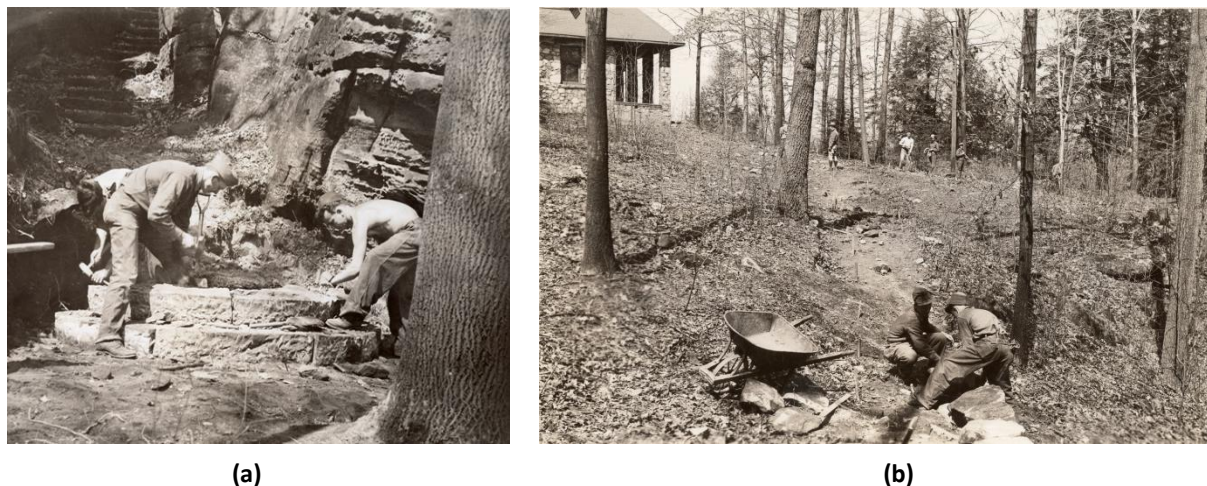


Figure 2. CCC workers in 1934: a) aligning stones on the landing of the Stone Steps, and b) improving a path to the top of the Stone Steps. Note the stone building in the upper left corner of Figure 2b. Courtesy: Summit Metro Parks.

Landowner James Thompson

In 1904, Clevelander James Thompson began looking for a quiet summer home. After seeing the Ledges only one time, he decided it was the ideal place for his future cottage.³ On July 15, 1904, Dr. Harry C. Long and James Thompson purchased 45.45 acres from Jerry and Margaret Wicks in Lot 13 in Boston Township for \$900.⁴ The property contained the north portion of the Ledges and continued further north to State Route 303. Today, this land contains the north tip of Ledges Trail, as well as Haskell Run Trail and Happy Days Lodge, in Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

James “Jim” Thompson was described as “a citizen of accepted prominence,”⁵ “a kind of provost of metropolitan style and courtesy,”⁶ and “a tall, stately man of influence and importance and tremendous acquaintance.”⁶ Called a “perfect host,” Thompson was the genial and popular manager of the Hollenden Hotel (Figure 3)⁷ in Cleveland for 28 years.⁸

The Hollenden was a large, glamorous hotel that hosted U.S. presidents and celebrities but also offered

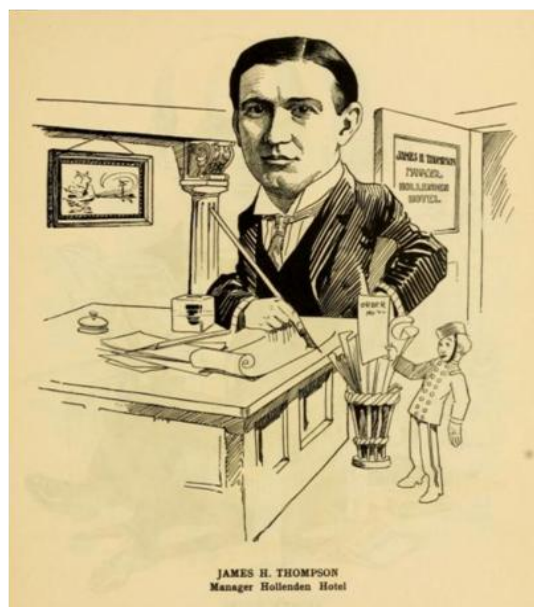


Figure 3. Caricature of James H. Thompson.
Reference 7.

accommodations for permanent residents and hotel staff. In 1900, 20 boarders and 43 hotel servants rented their residences at the Hollenden Hotel, including Thompson, his wife Edna, and Dr. Harry C. Long.⁹ By 1910, James Thompson was listed as Proprietor and appeared to own the residences of 29 servants and lodgers at the hotel.¹⁰ Thompson became close friends with Dr. Long, who was the house physician at the Hollenden Hotel for many years.¹¹

Less than a year after Long and Thompson purchased the 45-acre parcel, Dr. Long transferred his partial ownership in the property to his father, Daniel N. Long, for \$2,000.¹² In 1906, Daniel Long sold his one-half interest of this property to Edna Thompson for \$2,500.^{13, 14} Dr. Long moved to Florida in an attempt to recover from an illness, but he died on February 23, 1909.^{11, 15}

The partial plat map of Boston Township in 1910 (Figure 4)¹⁶ shows the Thompson property denoted by a red star. It was located in Lot 13 south of State Route 303 and was also north of Samuel Ritchie's 88-

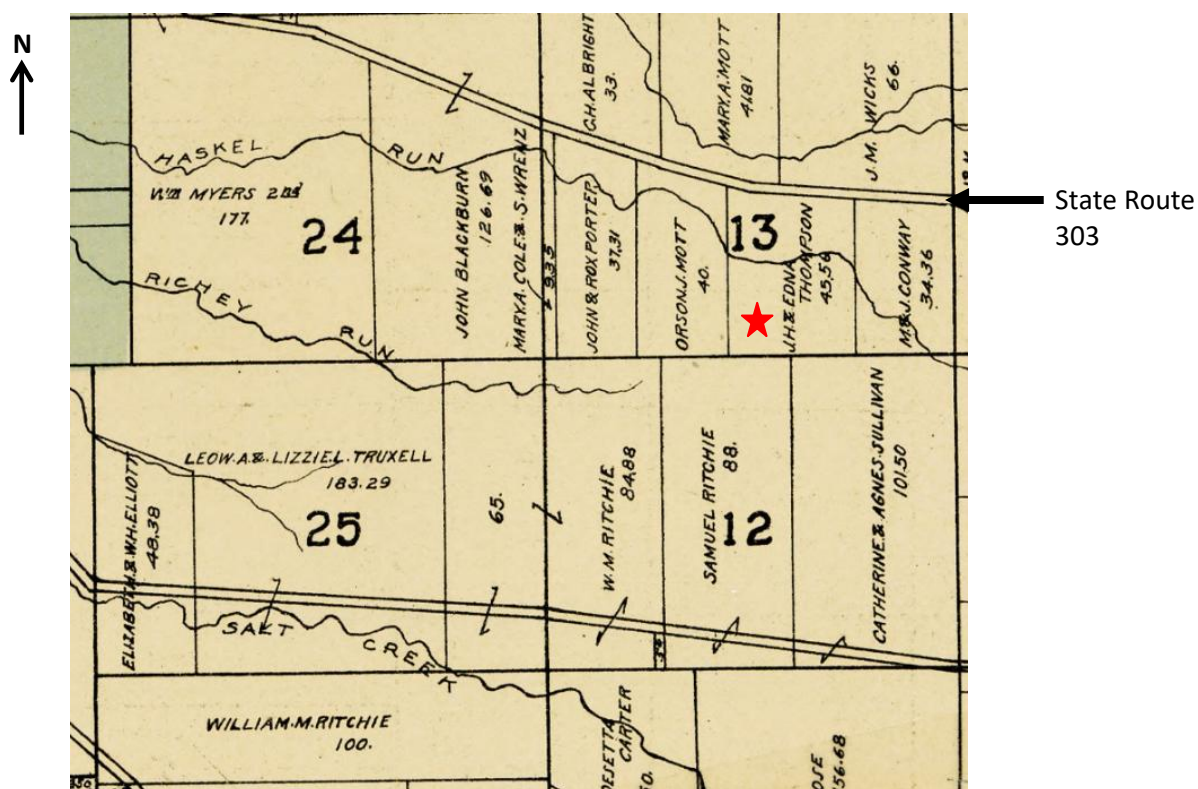


Figure 4. The Thompson property (denoted by a red star) was located in Lot 13 of Boston Township, south of State Route 303. This 1910 partial plat map is from Reference 16.

acre parcel in Lot 12. Haskell Run ran in an east-west direction and bisected the Thompson property. Plat maps for Boston Township in the 1800s show the northern part of the ledges extending into Lot 13, north of Samuel Ritchie's property line. The Stone Steps would have been located in Lot 13. *Did Jim Thompson have any connection to the Stone Steps?*

Thompson Builds Stone Steps to Reach the Site for his Summer Home

Access to the Thompson property in the early 1900s was from State Route 303. A two-car garage with red "Spanish-type" roof tiles sat at the end of a short driveway from Route 303.^{17, 18} The driveway was located just west of present-day Happy Days Lodge.¹⁷ The rest of the property had been left in its natural state, and the "undergrowth was so heavy that it was almost impossible to reach the crest on which Thompson planned his cottage."³

In order to walk or carry the building materials and interior furnishings to the site, a path had to be created from the driveway, across the 45-acre property, and up the side of the Ledges outcropping to the top. A 1906 *Plain Dealer* article reported that in "some parts the path is so steep that steps have been provided and one of the most picturesque spots on the walk is a long flight of stone steps between the huge rocks just before the summit is reached."³ A photograph published in that same article shows James Thompson and another man standing on stone steps on the "path to cottage," which is shown in Figure 5.³ The appearance of the steps in the photograph, as well as some fissures in the surrounding rocks, looks extremely similar to that of the Stone Steps today.



Figure 5. James Thompson and J.M. Megligee on stone steps. This 1906 photo is from Reference 3.

The cellar for the cottage was first blasted out of the solid rock at the top of the Ledges with dynamite. The walls of the house were constructed using large, chunky rocks as well as smaller stones collected on the crest. "A force of stonemasons put together an artistic dwelling after surmounting innumerable obstacles."³ A photo of Thompson's summer home (Figure 6)³ was published in the 1906 newspaper article. As described years later by George H. Dittoe, Jr., the mortar used between the rocks was distinctive and "colored."¹⁷ The mortar and stone construction is more readily seen in the 1937 photographs presented in Figures 7a and b. The house was also pictured in the upper left corner of Figure 2b. Because of its construction materials, the house was later called the "Stone House."



Figure 6. Thompson's Stone House at the Ledges. This 1906 photo is from Reference 3.



(a)



(b)

Figure 7. James Thompson's Stone House, photos taken September 1937. a) Front view. b) Side and back view. Courtesy: Summit Metro Parks.

<https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2320625>

A screened-in porch on the front of the house¹⁷ provided a vast view of the Cuyahoga Valley “for miles toward the lake.”³ Big red barns could be seen in the valley below. A carriage road was reportedly being built from the south side of the Ledges in 1906, although it was not expected to be suitable for providing access via automobiles.³

“The interior of the cottage was finished like a city house,”³ and mahogany wood was used throughout.¹⁷ Guest rooms were built on the second floor.³ Each room in the house had connections for running water. A hydraulic pump had been installed to pump water from a natural spring situated “100 feet” below and “half-way down the hillside”³ along the new path from the house to the driveway off of Route 303. The Spring House shown in Figure 8³ was built at the natural spring. It had a stone construction similar to that of the summer cottage and contained “an artistic stone basin... where the water can be dipped out on the hottest days as cold as if just off the ice.”³ Three decades later, park officials discovered that a 1,000-gallon water tank had been installed at the Spring House.¹⁹

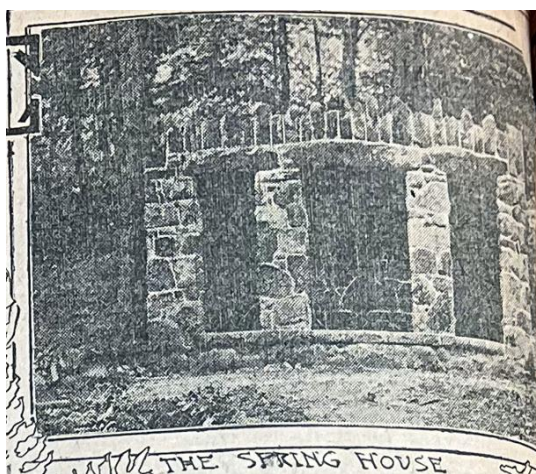


Figure 8. The Spring House had a stone construction similar to the summer cottage. This 1906 photo is from Reference 3.

The location of the Stone House is shown at the north end of the Ledges plateau near the rock ledge in a 1939 Master Plan for Virginia Kendall State Park, as indicated by the red arrow in Figure 9.²⁰ The dashed rectangular symbol for the Stone House was labeled “Stone House Museum,” because plans for a museum were being developed for the site at that time. The Spring House is represented by a solid square (see yellow arrow) in the same Master Plan (Figure 9) and may be seen north of the Stone House and below the rock ledge. The dashed symbol for the Stone House suggests that it had been removed by 1939, which is supported by other park records. The solid symbol for the Spring House suggests it was still standing in 1939. It is believed that the site for the Spring House can be identified today by a large concrete slab that rests on top of a brick foundation along the connector path between Ledges Trail and Haskell Run Trail. A large tree that fell a few years ago currently remains on top of the slab.

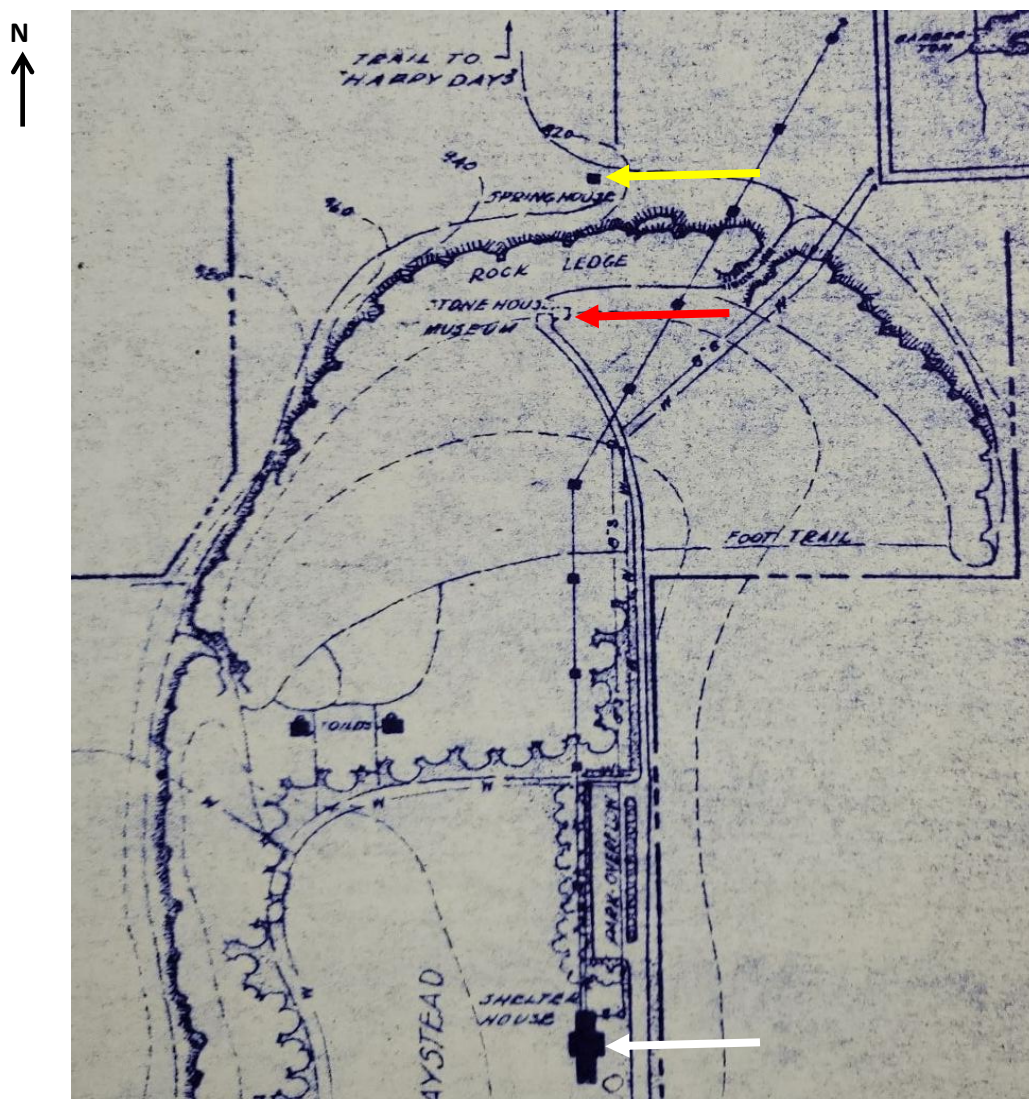


Figure 9. Master Plan blueprint of Virginia Kendall State Park, dated August 10, 1939, and revised April 2, 1941. The Spring House (yellow arrow), Stone House (called a Museum) (red arrow), and Ledges Shelter (called Shelter House) (white arrow) are displayed from top to bottom. Courtesy: National Park Service, Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Reference 20.

Hayward Kendall Purchases Property and Builds Cabins

In July 1918, James and Edna Thompson sold their property to Hayward H. Kendall for \$10.00 and other considerations.²¹ Kendall purchased this property after he had started buying land nearby from Harvey B. Ritchie, son of Samuel Ritchie. Some people still refer to the Ledges as the “Ritchie Ledges.” An 1874 plat map of Boston Township in Figure 10²² displays a horseshoe-shaped feature that is labeled, “Richey Ledges,” despite the fact that Isaiah Humphrey owned the north part of the Ledges at that time.

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However, according to Peninsula resident Charles Petersen, who was born around 1851, the locals called the north part of the Ledges, “Humphrey’s Ledges,” and the “south section...owned by Samuel Ritchie ... (was) known as “Ritchie’s Ledges.”²³ Samuel’s brothers, Daniel, John, and William M. Ritchie, also owned land in the south section of the Ledges at various times during the 1800s.^{22, 24, 25, 26}

Comparison of the plat maps in Figures 4 and 10 makes it clear that the northeast part of the horseshoe-shaped rock formation was within the Thompson property lines in Lot 13. The 1906 article referenced earlier also describes the ledges where Thompson built his summer home as being “in the shape of a horseshoe --like a giant rampart, in one uninterrupted ridge for half a mile.”³

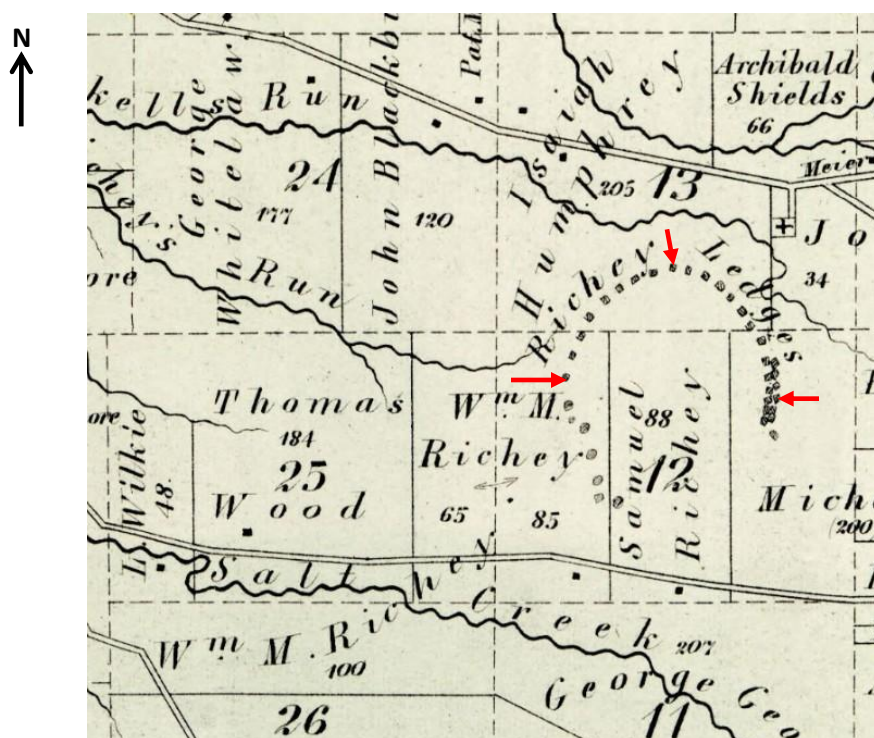


Figure 10. Portion of 1874 plat map for Boston Township (Reference 22). Red arrows point to “Richey” Ledges.

Hayward Kendall was urged by his friend Fred C. Kelly to buy farmland nearby.^{27, 28} Kelly was a syndicated columnist, author, and conservationist who lived in Peninsula. Locally, he was also known for planting thousands of pine trees on his residence property.^{28, 29, 30} This area is now accessible from Pine Lane Trailhead in Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Kelly had amassed 700 acres of land in the Peninsula area from 1914 to 1957, including a large fraction of the land that was later developed into Brandywine Golf Course by a subsequent owner. (The former golf course area is now known as Oxbow Meadows and Sycamore Bend and is undergoing restoration in the national park.) Interestingly, Kelly lived at the Hollenden Hotel in downtown Cleveland, while he was working for the U.S. Department of Justice.³¹ Fred C. Kelly undoubtedly knew James Thompson, who was the proprietor and owner of the residences of the boarders at the Hollenden. Perhaps Thompson was the catalyst who clued Kelly into the benefits of owning farmland in the Peninsula area, and in turn, Kelly convinced Hayward Kendall to do the same.

Hayward Kendall's first land purchase at the Ledges in 1914 was a small parcel, under 10 acres,* for which he vigorously negotiated a purchase price of \$1,200. The deed history for Hayward Kendall's property in the Ledges area is summarized in Appendix A. Kendall acquired larger and larger parcels as time went on, with the biggest single land purchase acquired in 1921.^{32, 33} This property was 252.2 acres in Lots 12, 25, and 26 and was obtained from The Union Trust Company, to which the Ritchie family had conveyed the land in 1920.³⁴

Hayward Kendall continued to purchase additional land in this area until he acquired a total of 430 acres in 1922 (Appendix A). Of this total, 341 acres had been conveyed directly or indirectly from the Ritchie family, and 88 acres was purchased from two other property owners (including the Thompsons) who had land adjacent to State Route 303. The locations and boundaries for each of Kendall's individual land purchases are approximated in Appendix B using plat plotting software and are based upon the metes and bounds provided in the original deeds. It is interesting to note that the first properties Kendall purchased were near the Ledges Overlook, as indicated by labels 1 and 2b in Appendix B.

Kendall initially purchased property at the Ledges for weekend hunting retreats. He built a shack on the property for \$500 with the aid of his friends and hunting companions Frank Johns, George Howard Dittoe, Sr., and William J. Zohl.^{23, 35} The shack was likely built soon after the first property purchase, since "every Saturday, the quartet would drive down from Cleveland, plunge into the wilderness and go to work."³⁵ A 1933 local newspaper article referred to this weekend retreat as a "rude shack."³⁵ The spindly-looking support beams and its overall rough construction earned that description, as seen in the published [photograph](#).³⁶ The structure appeared to be built on top of a rock outcropping. The rude shack was "where Kendall liked to spend his time."^{35, 37, 38} It is not believed that Kendall stayed in Thompson's former summer cottage, as he preferred a more rustic existence in which he "donned the garments of a woodsman and went forth to swing an ax."^{38, 39}

It was reported that Kendall built some stone steps in many of the more inaccessible places, but "he didn't make it too easy because after all, what he set out to build for himself was a retreat where the too timid would not want to visit too often."⁴⁰ Thus, he would not have built the iconic Stone Steps.

Hayward Kendall also built a second structure on his property. This was a picturesque log cabin (Figure 11) that had a more solid, well-built appearance compared to the rude shack. It was likely built after parcel 3a (Appendix B) was acquired a little further north in 1916, although its actual construction date is not known. In Figure 11, Hayward Kendall is believed to be outside the log cabin and wearing part of his U.S. military uniform. George Howard Dittoe, Sr., is believed to be pictured inside the cabin.⁴¹

George Howard Dittoe, Sr., (known by many as Howard) was employed as a salesman at the Kendall Coal Mining Company by the mid-1910s.⁴² By 1919, Kendall hired Howard Dittoe to be the caretaker of his

**The deed in Reference 43 clearly shows Hayward Kendall's first purchase was for a 9.84-acre parcel of land. Reference 35 reported erroneously that Kendall had first bought 15 acres, which has been commonly referenced in subsequent documents and on-line, as seen in References 23, 44, 45, and 46.*



Figure 11. Hayward Kendall's log cabin built along the western edge of the Ledges plateau. Kendall is believed to be pictured outside and caretaker George Howard Dittoe, Sr., is in the window. Courtesy of the Peninsula Library & Historical Society (Peninsula, Ohio).

property to supervise and manage the land.⁴² During his time as caretaker, Dittoe would take a team of horses to meet Hayward Kendall on State Route 8, where Kendall would leave his car. They would travel on horseback to access Kendall's property.⁴⁷ It was said that Howard "was supposed to have been in charge of the land, but the land took charge of him."⁴² The Director-Secretary Harold Wagner of the park district said in 1942 "...the story of Howard is really the story of the rise to affluence of Hayward Kendall and the real person for being of the park itself."⁴⁸

Locations of Hayward Kendall's Cabins

Various records provide clues for the locations of Kendall's cabins at the Ledges, but their exact locations are not certain. Susan Garland, who did extensive research on the CCC, indicated "Hayward Kendall had a stone house and several small wood cabins around the rim of the Ledges for his personal use."⁴⁹ This quote suggests that the cabins were located on top of the rock ledges and not below, which agrees with notes for a 1935 Park Board meeting³⁷ and a 1938 park report.⁵⁰

However, park records indicate that Kendall had built only two cabins. A 1938 report written by the Park Director-Secretary indicates that the log cabin was "located a bit north and directly west of the main shelter."⁵⁰ Notes for a 1935 Park Board meeting indicate that the log cabin was at the "westerly end" of

the Ledges and that the building “near the lookout point” was the one that was used the most by Kendall.³⁷ The building near the lookout was the rude shack. The Overlook, located atop the southwestern edge of the Ledges, was often referred to as the “lookout point” at that time.

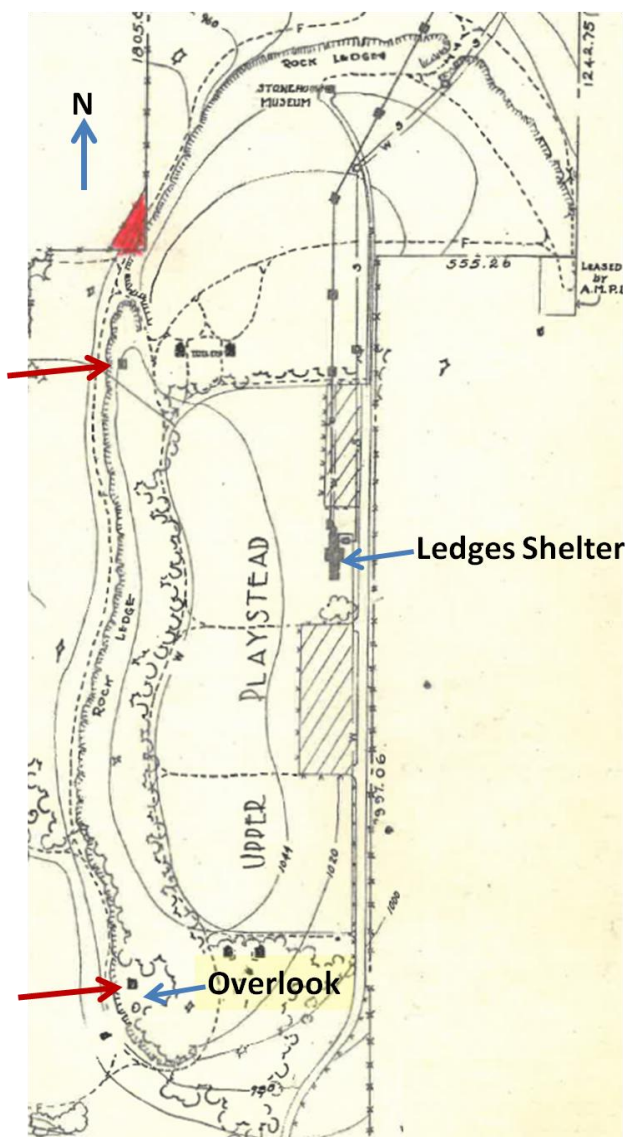


Figure 12. Master plan map for Virginia Kendall Park, 1937. Red arrows mark the likely locations of two cabins. Courtesy: Summit Metro Parks.

These descriptions also are consistent with a 1937 Virginia Kendall master plan, a portion of which is shown in Figure 12.⁵¹ The location of the log cabin appears to be represented by the solid square symbol (near upper red arrow) that is shown in Figure 12 along the western rock ledge, northwest of the Ledges Shelter. The log cabin was built on land that Kendall acquired in 1916; it was his third purchase, as shown in Appendix B. The solid square (near lower red arrow) near the Overlook may represent the location of the rude shack. The first of Kendall’s purchases included land at the Overlook, which is also evident in Appendix B.

The log house and the rude shack were both inspected in July 1935. It was decided that “the log house [was] to be refinished and used as a side camp by Happy Days Campers, the Kendall Camp to be removed and the main section placed near Happy Days Camp.”⁵² However in 1938, the log house was “completely demolished and removed” from the park.⁵⁰ It is not known when the rude shack was removed. The subsequent 1939 Master Plan²⁰ did not have the same square symbols at the locations where the log cabin and rude shack are believed to have been located. Instead, a council ring symbol for a semi-circular seating arrangement was displayed at the Overlook in the 1939 plan.

Hayward Kendall and How his Land Became a Park

When Hayward Kendall spent time on his rustic property, he “was satisfied to occupy one of the humblest of the three small cottages.”³⁹ “Kendall was an ardent lover of nature but in no sense a specialist.” As such, he did not employ “the scientific twaddle of the systematists and taxonomists.”⁵³ “[He was] a soul wholly in harmony with nature.”⁵³ In contrast, Hayward Kendall’s wife Agnes never used, nor liked, the Ledges property or the Stone House.^{54, 55}

Hayward Kendall was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, on March 17, 1876,⁵⁶ but spent most of his life in the Cleveland area. By 1905, Kendall was a coal dealer,⁵⁷ or “a coal peddler as he called himself.”⁵⁵ The 1910 U.S. Census lists him as a wholesale coal dealer and employer in Cleveland.⁵⁸ Hayward Kendall was the President of The Kendall Coal Mining Company and an opportunistic businessman. He began buying up carloads of coal from companies that were nearly out of business during WWI.⁵⁴ He sold coal to the Canadian government, the Cleveland Illuminating Company, and the railroads.^{35, 54, 55} Kendall enlisted in the U.S. military on October 4, 1917, as a First Lieutenant in the Officers’ Reserve Corps.⁵⁹ Promoted to the rank of Captain on May 7, 1918, he then served during WWI as a member of the 328 Aero Squadron in the American Expeditionary Forces between October 16, 1918, and December 20, 1918. He was honorably discharged on January 6, 1919.⁵⁹ Given the timing, it may be that Kendall hired Dittoe to be the caretaker of his land in anticipation of his military service in WWI.

Hayward Kendall became the Vice President and Treasurer of the Montour & Northwestern Coal Company^{38, 60} and the principal stockholder in the Montour & Northwestern Railroad that shipped the coal.⁵⁵ Walter C. Teagle was President of the Standard Oil Co. of New Jersey.⁶¹ The two had been students together at Cornell University.⁶¹ Walter’s brother, Frank H. Teagle, who was also a Cornell graduate, leased 40 acres of land from Kendall at the Ledges.⁶² The Teagles got Kendall interested in investing in International Petroleum,^{54, 55} and “they showed him how to make money faster than selling coal.”⁵⁵ Later in life, Kendall became a freelance writer known for his criticism of institutions and his sometimes unflattering sketches of successful businessmen. “His holdings in the oil fields and his coal and shipping interests made him at the time of his death, one of the wealthiest men in Cleveland.”³⁸

Hayward Kendall died in New York City on November 19, 1928,** after a brief bout with pneumonia.^{38, 56, 63, 64} Kendall’s will stipulated that his property be used in perpetuity for park purposes and be named, “Virginia Kendall Park,” in honor of his mother, Virginia Hutchinson Kendall.^{23, 44, 47, 46} In 1930, the Kendall trustees donated Kendall’s property to the State of Ohio, making Virginia Kendall State Park a reality. The state park experienced high visitation, but public dissatisfaction grew from the absence of road maintenance and facilities. In September 1933, the state assembly granted management authority of Virginia Kendall State Park to the Akron Metropolitan Park District (AMPD), now called Summit Metro Parks.^{44, 46, 65, 66} Harold Wagner was the Director-Secretary of the AMPD at that time. On January 1, 1978, the State of Ohio transferred Virginia Kendall State Park to the National Park Service, following the establishment of Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area in 1974.

Why is Thompson’s Stone House Significant?

James Thompson’s Stone House is part of the rich, pre-park history of the area. While describing the Stone House in February 1937, Harold Wagner stated, “Certain sentimental value is attached to the

***The year of Kendall’s death has been erroneously reported as 1927 in References 44 and 65, which are often used as primary sources. As a result, this error has been perpetuated, as seen in References 45, 67, 68.*

building itself...the building is of prepark [sic] origin.”⁶⁹ The Stone House was also significant to the park’s history because it became the site that the AMPD planned for a trailside museum in the 1930s and then for a Shrine to the American Chestnut in the 1940s.

In 1935, CCC project plans first described a trailside museum, which was said to be “ideally located” in the heart of the new trail system at the northern tip of the Ledges plateau.⁷⁰ The function of the trailside museum was similar to those built in the 1930s in the nearby Cleveland Metropolitan Park System (now Cleveland Metroparks).⁷¹ The idea was that a nature museum would be intentionally located on a trail a distance from the parking lot, so that visitors could experience nature firsthand before entering the museum.

Initially, the museum was to be constructed by remodeling Thompson’s Stone House, and several plans were proposed to the AMPD Board of Park Commissioners in April 1935. The Park Board voted to inspect the Stone House prior to approving these modifications.⁷² After inspection, it was determined that: “The stone house at Virginia Kendall State Park be remodeled into a trail museum of one room, one story in height [sic] to be covered with a flat pitch roof, and new fireplace in east wall.”⁵²

Plans for the trailside museum were contemplated for two more years. In October 1936, “The old stone house...might very well be revamped into a trailside museum by removing the entire structure above the one story stone portion. This would involve \$500.00 for materials and 800 man days.”⁷³ In February 1937, Harold Wagner proposed that the stone house be renovated “by removing all of the interior walls and existing fireplace and rebuilding a roof... covered with chestnut shakes to conform with the established style of other park buildings.”⁶⁹ However, he also stated “that we should be open to the opinion of others as to whether or not the present stone work should be salvaged, or the whole building obliterated and an entirely new museum building be constructed.”⁶⁹ This latter quote indicates that despite the “certain sentimental value” of the Stone House, a different approach was being entertained. Only three months later, in May 1937, Wagner stated “an old residence structure which is of undesirable character and which at various times we have considered for rebuilding... we reached the ultimate conclusion that the building [Stone House]... should be razed and the materials therein salvaged.”⁷⁴ George Dittoe, Jr., indicated many years later that Harold Wagner thought the construction style of the Stone House would not fit in with the other buildings that had been constructed by the CCC in Virginia Kendall State Park.¹⁷

Museum plan studies were still being proposed for the CCC Design Schedule in August 1937,⁷⁵ but these plans were for an entirely new building instead of a renovation. In November 1937, the AMPD Board Minutes showed continued support for building the Stone House museum, although it was ranked as a third priority out of four future CCC construction projects.⁷⁶ Less than two months later, the Stone House project was downgraded to a fourth priority,⁷⁷ with the shelter and bath house at Furnace Run Reservation (now in Summit Metro Parks) moving up in priority ahead of the Stone House museum. In February 1938, the Stone House was “completely demolished and removed” from the park.⁵⁰

Shrine of the American Chestnut

The idea of a trailside museum certainly did not die with the removal of the Stone House. Instead, the concept morphed into a “Shrine to the American Chestnut” in February 1940.^{78, 79} The shrine was still going to be a trailside nature museum but with a unique focus of memorializing the American chestnut tree and portraying its history. Such a shrine was envisioned because the American chestnut was once a dominant and beloved tree of the eastern United States before most of its population was killed by a non-native fungus in the early 1900s.² The trees in Ohio were similarly affected. As described in 1929 by the State Forester of Ohio, “chestnut trees on the Kendall property are dying very rapidly.”⁸⁰ In fact, one of the first tasks for the CCC workers upon their arrival was to remove the remaining dead chestnut trees in the park,⁸¹ and that task continued throughout the nine years of the CCC.⁴⁹



Figure 13. Drawing of one of the designs for the proposed Shrine to the American Chestnut. (Reference 83) Courtesy: Summit Metro Parks.

Design Office.⁸⁶ This office employed the architects who had been creating the detailed design plans for the shrine. AMPD Director-Secretary Wagner responded to this office closure stating that “One of these days we will build it....There is a lot more interest in that particular thing [Chestnut Shrine] than there was before and only a situation in which we do not want to create more buildings to maintain prevents us from completing the plans at the present time.”⁸⁶

Communications regarding the shrine continued through March 1942,⁸⁷ but they ended when the CCC program officially closed on March 31, 1942,⁸⁸ a few months after U.S. involvement began in WWII. In July 1942, Wagner said, “...we are in a stage of doing no building construction whatsoever, continuing that policy for the duration.”⁸⁹ Despite the considerable planning efforts, the Chestnut Shrine was never built.

In 1940, formal blueprints of several different designs were produced, and color drawings were created for the Chestnut Shrine.^{82, 83} A cut-through section of the main room of the Shrine (Figure 13)⁸³ illustrates where a large, standing chestnut log was to be prominently displayed. Three dioramas were also under consideration that would show the original chestnut forest in the park, the forest at the height of the chestnut blight, and the post-blight forest.⁷⁹ Displays of leaves, twigs, moths, butterflies, and a portrait of Hayward Kendall were also planned.

The Chestnut Shrine was expected to be built, or at least in construction, by 1941.^{84, 85} The final design plans for the Chestnut Shrine were close to completion, when in July 1941, the NPS liquidated the CCC Ohio Central

Thompson's Lasting Legacy

Although the Chestnut Shrine never came to fruition, a small part of James and Edna Thompson's Stone House still remains. A depression from the old cellar, as well as foundation stones inside the depression, may be seen today at the site (Figure 14a, left of center). Sturdy stone retaining walls (Figure 14b) are also evident on site, although these walls were not physically connected to, nor part of, the house. The 1906 newspaper article on Thompson's house makes no mention of any retaining wall. The same retaining wall is shown in a photograph from 1934 (Figure 15), as it was being built by the CCC as part of a landscaping and rock retaining wall project.^{90, 91} A new wayside exhibit is expected to be installed at this site in 2027, which will be based on the new research described in this paper.



Figure 14. a) A depression (white arrow, left of center) from the former cellar and b) a retaining wall are shown in 2023 at the site of James and Edna Thompson's Stone House. NPS/Becky MacKay



Figure 15. Retaining wall being built by the CCC in August 1934, near the site of James and Edna Thompson's Stone House. Courtesy: Summit Metro Parks.

<https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2320625>

The 1906 *Plain Dealer* article,³ described earlier in this report, provides convincing documentation that the Stone Steps at the Ledges predated the arrival of the CCC by nearly three decades. However, it is not the only evidence. A series of local newspaper articles were published a few months before the arrival of the CCC, in order to acquaint Akronites with the park and what was going to be done with it. A photo of the Stone Steps was taken on September 28, 1933,⁹² more than two months before the CCC enrollees arrived at Virginia Kendall State Park. This [photograph](#)⁹² of the Stone Steps was published in the *Akron Times Press* on October 8, 1933.⁹³ This 1933 photo and newspaper article provide proof, along with the 1906 *Plain Dealer* article, that in fact the Stone Steps were built before the arrival of the CCC. An updated wayside exhibit is expected to be installed in 2027 near the base of the Stone Steps, and will reflect this new research about their origin.

The CCC enrollees clearly worked on and repaired the existing Stone Steps for anticipated use by the public. However, there is now no doubt that the construction of the original flight of stone steps preceded the work of the CCC. The steps were built initially to provide access to James and Edna Thompson's Stone House in 1906. These Stone Steps are not only a beautiful and enduring landmark in the park, connecting the top of the Ledges to the trail below, but the Stone Steps remain as James and Edna Thompson's lasting legacy.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A

Hayward Kendall Deed History – Ledges Area*

Purchase	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Grantee (to)	Hayward H. Kendall	Hayward H. Kendall	Hayward H. Kendall	Hayward H. Kendall	Hayward H. Kendall	Hayward H. Kendall	Hayward H. Kendall	Hayward H. Kendall	
Grantor (from)	Harvey B. Ritchie	Harvey Ritchie	Emma C. Lane and Henry M. Lane	Harvey B. Ritchie	James H. Thompson and Edna Thompson	Agnes T. Kendall	Agnes T. Kendall	The Union Trust Company	
Date of Instrument (from Index)	4/30/1914	12/9/1914	2/10/1916	12/16/1916	7/12/1918	5/12/1921	5/12/1921	6/7/1922	
Transfer Date of Deed	5/1/1914	12/14/1914	3/9/1916	12/18/1916	8/2/1918	9/27/1921	9/27/1921	6/30/1922	
Deed Book Volume	486	497	533	577	642	854	854	879	
Deed Book Page	204-205	252	456	199	421	185	186	165	
Deed No.	3671	12835	33745	56863	1732	15345	15346	31125	
Type of Deed	Warranty	Warranty	Warranty with Release of Dower	Warranty with Release of Dower	Warranty with Release of Dower	Warranty with Release of Dower	Warranty with Release of Dower	Quit-Claim Deed-With Dower	
Lot(s)	12	12	12	12	13	12, 25, and 26	12	13	
Parcels and Acreage	9.84 acres more or less	Parcel a: 3.34 acres Parcel b: 3.71 acres	Parcel a: 22 acres Parcel b: 2.31 acres	15.28 acres	48.4214 acres more or less	Lot 12: 87.5 acres Lot 25: 65.0 acres Lot 26: 100 acres	32.198 acres	40.0 acres	
Total Acreage	9.84	7.05	24.31	15.28	48.4214	252.5	32.198	40	429.5994
Consideration	\$ 1,200.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 100.00	\$10.00 and other considerations	\$ 10.00	\$ 10.00	\$10.00 and other valuable considerations	
Prior Owners	Mary Elizabeth Ritchie	Mary Elizabeth Ritchie	Harvey B. Ritchie	n/a	Jerry M. Wicks et al.	James C. Ritchie et al.	Harvey B. Ritchie	Orson J. Mott	
Subsequent transfers between Hayward H. and Agnes T. Kendall after initial purchase	To Agnes 4-18-1920, vol. 850, p. 344 and back to Hayward 5-12-1921, vol. 854, p. 187	To Agnes 4-18-1920, vol. 850, p. 345 and back to Hayward 5-12-1921, vol. 854, p. 190	To Agnes 4-18-1920, vol. 850, p. 346 and back to Hayward 5-12-1921, vol. 854, p. 189	To Agnes 4-18-1920, vol. 850, p. 343 and back to Hayward 5-12-1921, vol. 854, p. 184	To Agnes 4-30-1921, vol. 850, p. 458 and back to Hayward 5-12-1921, vol. 854, p. 188				

* Deeds may be found in the IBAV (Index Book Archive Viewer) for Summit County at <https://ibav.summitoh.net/#>.

<https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2320625>

Appendix B

Approximate Boundaries of Hayward Kendall's Land Purchases* at the Ledges between Truxell Road in the South to State Route 303 in the North



*Numbers represent the sequence of properties purchased by Hayward Kendall. These property boundaries have been superimposed on a current-day satellite image of the area. Only part of purchase 6 is shown, in order to focus on details related to this research. Similar parcel boundaries may be seen in a 1942 plat map.⁹⁴