

Leadership Centre County History Day
Roopsburg Brewery Interpretation

Welcome to Spring Creek House and the site of the Roopsburg Brewery.

This property was recently purchased by Jim Lanning, whose goal for this property is to demonstrate best practices in conservation, while serving Veterans and supporting Trout Unlimited and Clearwater Conservancy. Before we leave today, you'll start to see how this site is an important part of Centre County's history, and how its history is tied to the work that is being done by Clearwater Conservancy and Trout Unlimited.

Let's start with the story of the land on which we're standing. As you know from Lee's talk this morning, European settlers made their way into this part of the county in the mid-1700s. After the Revolutionary War, we see land in this area being claimed by land warrant, which is a certificate that allowed people throughout history to claim tracts of land.

In 1795, a surveyor named Daniel Turner acquired 400 acres of land, including this particular site. Turner was the first person to settle here and he chose the site because of the fast-moving and pure water of Spring Creek, as well as other natural resources.

Daniel Turner established a forge mill, a saw mill, and a grist mill, in operations called Turner Iron Works and the Spring Creek Forge. Unfortunately, despite his tenacity, these business ventures failed and in 1801, the property went up for sale.

Between 1801 and 1825, this property sold a number of times. The mill operated under different owners until 1807, but for the last 18 years of that period, the mills and property were abandoned and became decrepit. Nothing remains of those structures.

In 1825, along came a man named Jacob Roop. He was a prominent Bellefonte attorney, and purchased a portion of the Turner property. He built a home and a gunsmith shop and became the first permanent resident of this area, thus the name "Roopsburg."

After he had established his home and shop, he noted a need for locally-produced beer. First brewery in Centre County was established in 1819 on Bald Eagle Creek, but it burned down shortly after being built, so nothing was produced locally. High-quality water is an important ingredient in beer, and he had a seemingly limitless supply. In 1826, he established the Spring Creek Brewery.

Business was good. In a newspaper advertisement when Roop tried to sell the property in the 1830s, it was noted that it was "[worth] the attention of persons who wish to engage in such business. There has always been demand for all the beer he was able to make."

Roop did not end up selling the brewery. Instead, he continually purchased more land in the vicinity, including the land that we're standing on, and developed other properties. With Jacob Roop's industrial pursuits, as well as other forges popping up along the river, Roopsburg grew into a bustling town down the road from the county seat. This was a sprawling community that trailed down Roops Lane for three miles and had its own school. In a way, Roopsburg became a sort of incubator for industry: it was close to the county seat, it had a community with homes and schools, and there were jobs.

In 1844, Jacob Roop sold 100 acres of land, his dwelling house, the gunsmith shop, and the brewery to Joshua and Michael Fishburn. Unfortunately, after three years, the Fishburns were unable to pay their debt to Roop, and the whole property went up for Sheriff's Sale.

Now we meet our next nonfiction character: a man named Henry Brockerhoff. Brockerhoff was born in 1794 near Dusseldorf, Germany. He had a notable career, which included serving as Napoleon's private secretary until Waterloo. After Waterloo, he came to the United States and worked as a merchant, arriving in Bellefonte in 1825. Brockerhoff began purchasing property, he became involved in local politics, he made a politically strategic marriage. He purchased this property and ran the brewery on his own for ten years. People start calling the brewery the Roopsburg Brewery rather than Spring Creek Brewery.

I want to emphasize that as we approach the late 1850's, growth in Roopsburg and the newly formed (1853) Benner Township is incredible. Increased need for iron with the Civil War bubbling, and the need to finish the rail link from Bellefonte to the main line between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. In 1860, the population of Bellefonte is 1,477, and the population of Benner Township is 1,193. Increased population means that Henry Brockerhoff has expanding markets for his beer.

In 1857, Henry Brockerhoff recruits a man named Louis Haas who is originally from Bavaria to serve as the brewmaster at this brewery. He sells him 50% of the interest in the brewery, which operates as a partnership.

After Haas comes on, he and Brockerhoff undertake a truly phenomenal project. We know that there were some facilities for storing and aging beer on this property prior to 1833 when Jacob Roop first tried to sell the property. What Brockerhoff and Haas undertake on this land had not been done in central Pennsylvania.

Welcome to the Roopsburg Brewery beer caverns. In 1857, Louis Haas commissions the building of these caverns. They have stood, intact since 1857.

I do want to take just a moment to talk about why they would have done this. The beer produced by the Roopsburg Brewery, and Spring Creek Brewery before it, is a lager style beer. Lager beer is so-called because of the conditioning process. Conditioning process is one of the last stages of brewing, before filtration and packaging. Lagers are stored at cellar temperature

or below for 1–6 months while still on the yeast. The process of storing, or conditioning, or maturing, or aging a beer at a low temperature for a long period is called "lagering". This process can be used for other beers, like ales, but is essential in producing a lager-style beer.

Creating these caverns would have been a massive undertaking, both from an engineering perspective, and from the perspective of capital expenditures. Louis Haas hails from Bavaria, where he would have seen similar caverns, so he knows how they're built, but moving the amount of earth necessary, cutting into bedrock, and laying and mortaring stones is something that would have taken many men a very long time to complete.

Given the success of this beer, and his relative place in the community, Louis Haas build a large Georgian-style home that he called "Haas House" in 1857. This is Spring Creek House, 35 feet away.

Over the next decade, business is great. During and after the Civil War, the Roopsburg Brewery Lager is marketed over a wide geographic area. Henry Brockerhoff uses some of his considerable income to build the grist mil across the creek in 1862. In 1872, Louis Haas purchases Brockerhoff's interest in the brewery and becomes its sole owner. At this point, the brewery's brewing kettle had a capacity of 20 barrels. This is the absolute high point for Roopsburg Brewery.

In 1882, Louis Haas passes away. His family inherits the home, but no one is skilled in beer making, and no one is ready to manage a business in a changing market. Industry is changing and shifting, and the temperance movement is gaining traction. For four years the brewery doesn't produce, then Mrs. Catherine Haas operates the brewery for six years before it falls out of operation again. In 1896, four men work to open the brewery which the Haas family still owns, before finally ceding in 1902.

Between 1902 and 1914, the property is partitioned, and parts of it are rented or sold. The Haas family moved into the old gunsmith house, which still stands today. In 1914, an entrepreneurial woman named Mary Kane moves into Spring Creek House. Over the next few years, Miss Kane operates a house of ill repute in Spring Creek House.

In 1919, the 18th Amendment is passed. Miss Kane already has an open house of ill-repute and a beer cavern. What do you think they do? They open a speakeasy and distill their own liquor. The spout in the ceiling would have gone straight up to the still, and there is a ladder on the other side for easy climbing up to that still, as well as escape. In the ceiling, you'll also notice some holes; these were operated on a pulley system to easily pull up liquor for sale.

This brothel/speakeasy/bootleg distillery operated for years. Clients included politicians, policemen, and judges. Throughout its lifetime, this brothel allegedly was the site of a suicide as well as two murders, one of which included a same-sex relationship. All of these events were more or less brushed under the rug because of the clientele. Spring Creek House was

sold after Mary Kane passed away in 1944, and was renovated and became a family home. The caverns were sold with the home, and fell out of use. The gunsmith shop had been a home for the Haas family and was sold to another family that still owns it today. The woman who lives there is 94 years old and has lived in that house her entire life.

I want to take just a minute to bring you back to the reason that all of this is here. It is rushing alongside us: Spring Creek. Lee talked this morning about the integral role that Spring Creek played in the selection of Bellefonte as the county seat, but in addition to that, it is the reason that industry thrived here. Daniel Turner, Jacob Roop, Henry Brockerhoff, Louis Haas, and dozens of other individuals saw their success because this creek fueled their livelihoods. The communities that we live in all trace their success back, at least in part to this part of the county, and this part of the county traces its success to Spring Creek.

With that in mind, I want to give Kevin Abbey a few minutes to talk about Clearwater Conservancy and Trout Unlimited, and the work that their team is doing in concert with Jim Lanning to conserve this part of our shared history.