

SIGN DEDICATION TO MARK RICKETTS LUMBER TOWN



Sullivan County Museum Photo (1) The morning train makes its way through the lumber town of Ricketts (circa 1908). L-R: Company Store; Train Station; Hotel Ricketts

Pennsylvania Game Commission Northeast Region Information and Education Supervisor William Williams announced there will be a public dedication ceremony to unveil a historical sign highlighting the Ricketts “Ghost Town,” along State Route 487 in Sullivan County, on Saturday, May 24. The event will commence at 10 a.m., with a walking tour of the town starting after the sign-dedication ceremony.

“Ricketts was an active community and lumber-mill company town that was spread across two counties and – what is now – two separate tracts of game lands,” explained Williams. It was home to over 800 people from 1890-1913 and wood products produced there significantly impacted the growth of Pennsylvania during the turn of the last century.”

Ricketts was named for Col. Robert Bruce Ricketts, a Civil War veteran and hero at Gettysburg, who acquired 65,000 acres of virgin forest land after the Civil War. Ricketts leased most of his forested empire to the lumber firm of Trexler and Turrell in 1890 and the town boomed significantly after the Lehigh Valley Railroad was completed through the region in 1893.

The area of town known as “Downtown Ricketts,” on the Wyoming County side of SR 487, was a commercial and residential center, with mills dedicated to the manufacture of excelsior (a shredded wood used for packaging) and barrel staves and headings. A company store, railroad station, hotel, Lutheran church, and community hall were located in this area.

“Uptown Ricketts,” on the Sullivan County side of SR 487, was a more industrial lumbering center that included a large hardwood mill capable of producing 75,000 board feet of lumber daily. A two-room schoolhouse, blacksmith shop, water tower, and many company homes were located in Uptown Ricketts. Stone-building foundations, as well as the remnants of other notable structures that were used during the period, can be found throughout the area.

The sign displays several historical photographs, text explaining lumber operations and life in the town, and a map depicting the locations of buildings and other points of interest. Brochures also have been developed that contain these images and information.

Funding for the sign project was obtained with a grant provided by the Endless Mountain Heritage Region (EMHR), through the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and other sources. The project was a collaborative effort involving individuals from the Sullivan County Historical Society, the Game Commission and EMHR. Historical information was provided by noted local historian and author F. Charles Petrillo.

“Like most areas on state game lands, the entire site is now managed for wildlife,” explained Williams. “Apple trees planted by town residents during the Ricketts era are pruned by our Food and Cover Corps to maintain health and promote new growth. Wood duck boxes dot the old mill pond and spots along the Mehoopany Creek. Selective timber operations near the town were scientifically conducted to promote early successional habitat and ensure future tree growth.”

“The Game Commission also recognizes there are areas on game lands that are historically significant and fall under our stewardship,” added Williams. “This project takes stewardship one step further by providing hunters and the public with a bit of historical interpretation. We hope that folks will attend the sign dedication and walking tour to get an appreciation for the town of Ricketts and its many residents.”

The sign dedication site is located approximately 4.4 miles north of the Lake Jean entrance to Ricketts Glen State Park on State Route 487 (just north of Mountain Spring Road) with GPS coordinates of N 41.389804 W 76.278630. For more information, contact William Williams at the Game Commission NE Region Office at (570) 675-1143.