

**Day 143 – May 23, 2023**

## **Buttermilk Falls Natural Area**

Indiana County's Miniature Niagara



AURORA FALLS IN WEST WHEATFIELD TOWNSHIP

Indiana County's Buttermilk Falls is one of many waterfalls named Buttermilk Falls. In PA and neighboring states there are at least eleven other Buttermilk Falls and in south central New York a Buttermilk Falls State Park exists. While the name is common, Indiana County's Buttermilk Falls is a unique and special place with its own interesting history.

At one time Buttermilk Falls was known as Aurora Falls. A newspaper photo appearing in the *Indiana Progress* newspaper in 1916 referred to the falls as "Aurora Falls, Indiana County's Miniature Niagara".

Over the years, the name Buttermilk Falls gained favor. The 1871 F.W. Beers & Co. map of West Wheatfield Township designates the falls but does not refer to it by a specific name.

Waterfalls the size and scale of Buttermilk Falls are uncommon in western Pennsylvania. Falls occur when a stream wears away an easily erodible layer of rock then encounters a resistant layer. The resistant layer erodes at a slower rate than the surrounding rock, forming a waterfall.



At Buttermilk Falls, a resistant layer of sandstone underlies easily erodible shale. The result is a drop off that reaches 45 feet in height. Buttermilk Falls is located on Hires Run, a tributary to the Conemaugh River.

The 48-acre natural area was donated to Indiana County Parks & Trails in 1995 by the Keystone-Conemaugh Group, a consortium of owners of the nearby Conemaugh Generating Station. As a natural area the site has been set aside to protect both typical and unique plant and animal communities and to protect outstanding examples of natural beauty.

## Day 143

This day is set aside to honor the life and legacy of Fred Rogers and to encourage kindness. The number 143 stands for the letters in I Love You. Ironically, it was also the weight that Fred Rogers maintained throughout his adult life.



*Imagine what our real neighborhoods would be like if each of us offered, as a matter of course, just one kind word to another person.*

*- Fred Rogers*

## The Fred Rogers Connection to Buttermilk Falls



Between 1931 and 1956, the property was owned by Fred McFeely, the grandfather of Fred Rogers of children's television. Mr. McFeely was a wealthy industrialist from Latrobe, PA, who utilized the property as a retreat and a place to entertain his friends, associates, and political allies. The cottage was built during the Great Depression and near the end of the Prohibition era. Local residents were employed to work on the cottage and surrounding grounds. Young boys were paid fifty cents a day for their labor.

The estate featured a cottage, horse stables, a three-car garage, various outbuildings and a swimming area and goldfish pond in the creek above the falls. The garage had a waiting area on its second floor for the guest's chauffeurs. As a privileged child Mr. Rogers often visited the site. Stone foundations and retaining walls from the estate are still visible throughout the site.

## The McFeely Cottage

*"In talking to others, I have come to believe that for most of us some lonely spot, some private nook, some glen or streamside-scene has impressed us so deeply that even today its memory recalls a mood of lost enchantment."*

- Edwin Way Teale, *The Lost Woods*

For the late Fred Rogers, Buttermilk Falls was a place of childhood enchantment. Fred Brooks McFeely, Mr. Roger's maternal grandfather, once owned the Buttermilk Falls property.

As a child, Fred Rogers visited his grandfather's cottage near Clyde, PA with his parents. After Sunday dinners and on summer vacations he walked the grounds with his grandfather sharing in special times. Many ideas and expressions used in the children's public television program 'Mr. Rogers Neighborhood' were originally conceived at Buttermilk Falls.

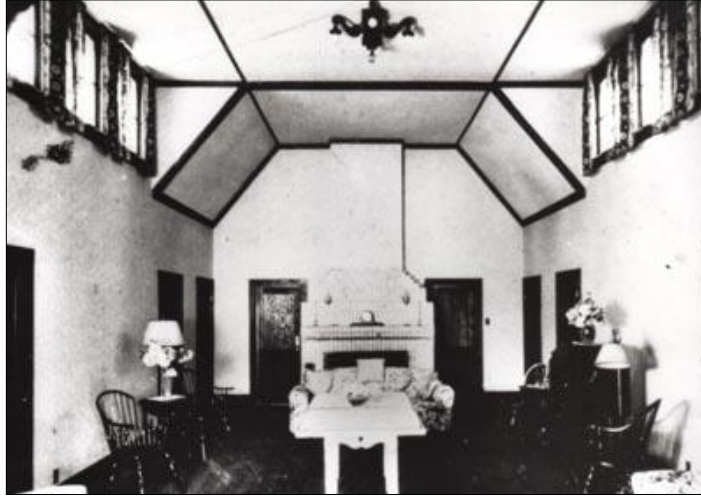
Fred Rogers vividly recalled his days at Buttermilk Falls. In a 1996 *Indiana Gazette* interview, he remembered climbing on the stone walls at the site and crawling behind the falls to look through the cascading water.

Remnants of the stone walls are still visible, and the water still flows over a 45-foot cascading waterfall. Much has changed at Buttermilk Falls since Fred McFeely's and his grandson's visits. When visiting the site today it is easy to imagine how a young boy could recall in later years the significance this place held for him. Even today Buttermilk Falls is a place of enchantment.

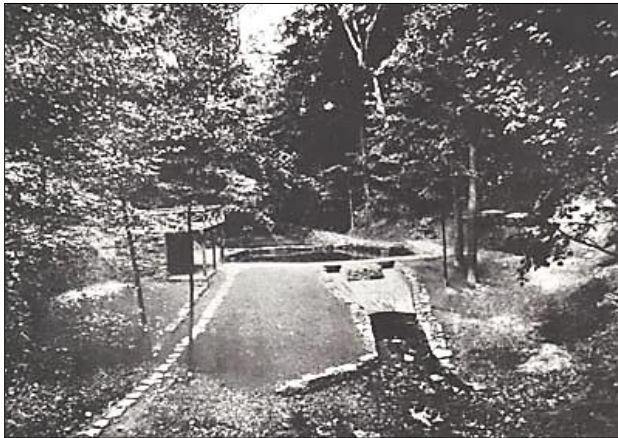
## Photos of the McFeely Cottage



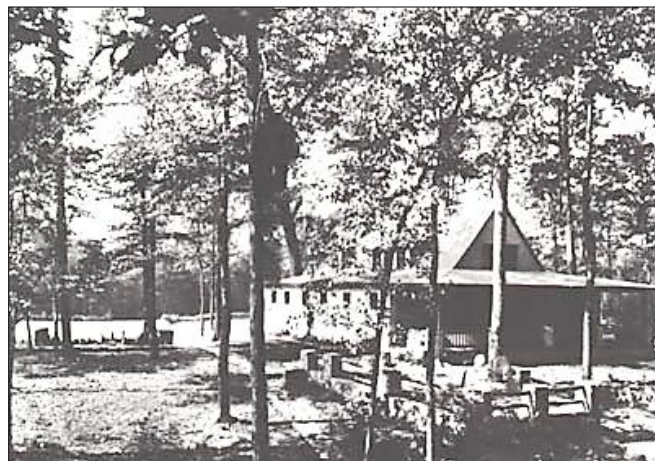
*View of the cottage and stonework above the falls. The stonework at the site was completed by local residents hired by Mr. McFeely during the Great Depression of the 1930s.*



*Interior view of the McFeely cottage. The cottage was later owned by the Leo and Rita Nist Family before being purchased by the owners of the nearby Conemaugh Generating Station. Mr. Nist operated an equipment repair shop at the site. A large concrete pad at the site, now used as a parking area, was the floor of the repair shop. Two small dams were constructed just upstream of the falls. One pond was for swimming and the other for goldfish. Remains of this stonework are still visible at the site. A view of cottage and patio deck above the falls:*



*Historic photos courtesy of Rita Nist.*



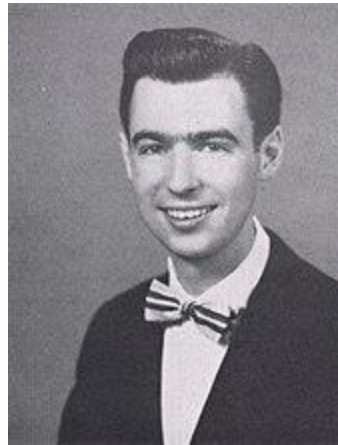
## Fred Rogers Timeline

- Fred Rogers was born on March 20, 1928, in Latrobe, PA. Attends Latrobe schools.
- In 1939 Rogers' parents adopt a daughter, Elaine.
- Rogers attends Dartmouth College (1946-8) and Rollins College (1948-51) to earn his bachelor's degree in music composition.
- Began his television career in 1951 at NBC New York as a floor director.
- On June 9, 1952, Rogers married Sara Joanne Byrd.
- In 1954, Rogers is hired by WQED in Pittsburgh, PA to work as a puppeteer on The Children's Corner. The program host was Josie Carey.
- In 1959, his son James Byrd Rogers was born.
- In 1961, his son John Byrd Rogers was born.
- In 1962 graduated from the Pittsburgh Seminary, ordained as a Presbyterian minister.
- In 1963 appears on camera in Mister Rogers, 15-minute daily episodes on Canadian Broadcast System.
- In 1964 Mister Rogers Neighborhood begins airing on WQED.
- In 1967 composes, 'Won't You Be My Neighbor'.
- In 1968 Mister Rogers Neighborhood begins airing on PBS.
- In 1969 testifies at the U.S. Senate to defend funding for public television. PBS's funding increases from \$9 million to \$22 million.
- In 1971, Rogers creates Family Communications. Inc. to create offices for WQED.
- In 1975 stops producing Mr. Rogers Neighborhood to focus on adult programming.
- In 1979 after 5-year hiatus restarts production of Mr. Rogers Neighborhood.
- In 1979, Rogers defends Sony in *Sony Corp. of America v. Universal City Studios, Inc.*, for the use of VCR's in family homes. He argues that VCR's help families who do not have a lot of time together enjoy their time at home.
- In 1981 an episode with 10-year-old Jeffrey Erlanger demonstrated his wheelchair in one of Fred Rogers most memorable and heartwarming shows.
- In 1984 one of the sweaters his mother made is added to the Smithsonian collection.
- In 1997, Rogers was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Emmy's.
- In 1999, Rogers was inducted into the TV Hall of Fame.
- On August 31, 2001, Rogers ended his show after 31 remarkable seasons.
- In 2002, Rogers was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President George W. Bush.
- On February 27, 2003, Rogers died of stomach cancer, in Pittsburgh, PA.



**The Children's Corner appeared on WQED starring Josie Carey. Fred Rogers worked behind the scenes as a puppeteer on the television show starting in 1954.**

## Images of Fred Rogers



Graduation photo  
Rollins College, 1951



Josie Carey and Rogers filming an Attic scene in *The Children's Corner*. Over Carey's shoulder is Daniel S. (Striped) Tiger, and to the right of Rogers is King Friday XIII.

*“Anyone who has ever been able to sustain good work has had at least one person – and often many – who have believed in him or her. We just do not get to be competent human beings without a lot of different investments from others. From the time you were very little, you have had people who have smiled you into smiling, talked you into talking, sung you into singing, loved you into loving.”*