



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
September—October, 2026 • Vol. 30 No. 5

Friends of Thacher Summertime Fun 2026



The Friends of Thacher Park, with the gracious donations of our members, sponsored several fun and well-attended programs this summer.

We kicked off on July 3rd with Perry Gound, Onondaga native from Rochester. Perry presented “Haudenosaunee Influence on American Democracy”,



an informative session at the Visitors Center. This program is part of his 250-year history of the Haudenosaunee to coincide with America’s 250th celebration. Perry Ground is also a Master Storyteller (Talking Turtle Stories on Facebook) and followed up on the beach at Thompsons Lake Campground with “Stories Across Turtle Island”. This program was part of the Friends of Thacher Sunset Storytelling Series. Perry, dressed in full regalia, delighted all ages with his energetic style.

On August 15th, Friends of Thacher once again sponsored a “Spooky Stories” event to coincide with the campground’s annual “Halloween in August” program. Claire Nolan and Nancy Marie Payne told scary stories well into the evening.

The Park staff outdid themselves this year. They joined the fun with their enthusiastic “spirit”. They

continued on next page ...



Photos top: Perry Ground lecture and storytelling at the beach (left photo by Bert Schou, right photo by Jesse Grayson). Photos bottom and next page by Jesse Grayson. From left to right: Storytellers Nancy Marie Payne and Claire Nolan, Dance performance by the Helderwitches, Park staff Kellen joining in the “Halloween in August” fun.

... continued

decorated the Park and dressed in costume. Even some of the Park's utility vehicles were decorated, including one with a skeleton in the passenger seat. The Friend's program could not have been possible without the help of park staff at the s'mores table and fire pit, and the Friends are grateful to the staff and volunteers for their help setting up and taking down the tent and audio equipment.

A big shout out to Deborah Breitenbach who brought the Helderwitches, an appropriately named local dance group. What better way to enhance the theme of Halloween in August than by having a group of witches show up, complete with broomsticks and magic spells!

The Friends of Thacher's next Sunset Storytelling event will be held on September 4th. Our teller will be the delightful Mary Murphy. This event will also be held on the campground beach but note the earlier starting time of 6:30 pm, due to the earlier sunset. Yes, I am sorry to say, an earlier sunset indicates that summer will soon end and school will begin.

- by Bert Schou



Join us at **Thacher Park's Overlook** on **Saturday, September 12th, from 10:00am to 3:00pm** for the **Helderberg Hawk Watch!**



September is an exciting time to look skyward, as raptors leave their northern breeding grounds and begin their migration south for the winter.

The Helderberg escarpment is a particularly good place to watch this annual journey. Its elevation provides visitors wide, open views of the surrounding area, while the rising air columns (thermals) along the escarpment help migrating raptors gain altitude and save energy on their journey. What might you spot? Depending on the day and a bit of luck, you may see broad-winged or red-tailed hawks, Cooper's hawks, sharp-shinned hawks, kestrels, or even an eagle overhead.

This family friendly event will also feature live animal programs, crafts, and face painting. Bring binoculars if you have them, dress for the weather, and plan to spend a little time simply watching raptors ride the thermals. And when you're ready for lunch, Annabel's Pizza and Uncle Gino's Italian Ice food trucks will be there too. Whether you're a dedicated bird or simply looking for a beautiful fall day outdoors, we hope you'll join us!

- by Christine Gervasi

Photo of red-tailed hawk by Jerry McFarland, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/56509109@N04/42865436545>

Join board meetings virtually!

The Friends Board meets every second Wednesday of every second month. Anybody is welcome at our board meetings and we'd love to have you there! Can't join us in person? Join our Microsoft Teams meetings virtually using this link/QR code! [Friends Group Bi-Monthly Board Meeting | Meeting-Join | Microsoft Teams](#) .



The Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2026
Wednesday, September 9 and November 11, at 7:00 pm.
At Thacher Visitor Center. Come join us!

Do You Know Your Maples?

The sugar maple is the state tree of New York. Its scientific name, *Acer saccharum*, comes from the Latin words for "sharp" and "sugar," in reference to their leaves and its sugary sweet sap. Unsurprisingly, they are very popular for tapping and syrup-making throughout the northeast. In general, maples are easily identified by the shape of their leaves, which feature 3 large lobes and 2 smaller ones spreading from a central point almost like fingers. More than likely, the image that pops into your head is the leaf of the aforementioned sugar maple.

However, there are multiple species of maple trees native to the area, all with their own special traits and a unique twist to the shape of their leaves. The red maple, *Acer rubrum*, is so named for its bright red buds, flowers, and samaras (winged seeds) in the spring. Compared to the sugar maple, their leaves are irregularly serrated and the margins between lobes are much shallower. *Rubrum* also refers to the spectacular shade of red they take on in the fall, as one of the earliest trees to turn color.

Not to be confused with the sugar maple's Latin name, the silver maple is also known as *Acer saccharinum*. The word *saccharinum* comes from not one, but two ancient languages; the Greek word for sugar (sakkharon) and the Latin suffix for "like" (-inum). This refers to the sugary sap rather than the silvery underside of the leaves, but I don't make the rules around here. Speaking of leaves, the lobes are

coarsely serrated and their margins are quite narrow and deep. They tend to turn yellow or brown in the fall and often drop when still green.

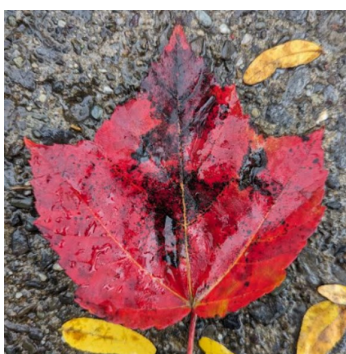
In addition to these native beauties, the shade-tolerant Norway maple, *Acer platanoides* has quite an extensive range in the area. Originally from Europe, these trees were introduced to North America in the 1700s as landscape plants before quite literally taking root and spreading throughout the country. Unfortunately, they are considered an invasive species, as they are fast-growing and can outcompete native maples and other trees. The word *platanoides* means "resembling the plane tree," which is an Asian native related to the American sycamore. The leaves of the Norway maple are broad and may have as many as 7 lobes. They are typically late to change color, becoming yellow rather than red in the fall. A purple-leaved variant has also become popular, and tends to retain its darker metallic hue through the growing season.

It is certainly possible to identify maples by their bark and branches, but often the leaves are a much easier place to start. There are dozens of trees that can easily be distinguished in this way, from oaks, to birches, to poplars, and a great many more. Recognizing the differences between members of the same genus may take a more attentive eye. The next time you find a maple leaf, see if you can recognize who it belongs to.

- by Victoria Gellatly



Acer saccharum



Acer rubrum



Acer saccharinum



Acer platanoides

Check for updates at www.friendsofthacherpark.org

Officers of the Friends Board of Trustees

President:	Laure-Jeanne Davignon
Vice President:	Margaret Naughton
Treasurer:	Betsey Miller
Secretary:	Christine Gervasi
	Immediate former President: John Kilroy

Other Trustees

Bert Schou	(518) 221-8693	John Kilroy	(518) 872 -1501
Madeline Kennedy		Jill Harbeck	
Laura McCarthy		Jesse Grayson	

As always, call (518) 872-0800 or (518) 872-1237 to verify activity times and dates.

Please feel free to call board members with questions or suggestions.

Many thanks to Bert Schou, Jesse Grayson, Victoria Gellatly, Mike Nardacci and Becky Schneider for their contributions to this newsletter.

— Christine Gervasi (Editor)

Friends of Thacher Park
c/o Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center
87 Nature Center Way
Voorheesville, New York 12186-2601



https://etc.usf.edu/clipart/49900/49951/49951_pumpkin_vine.htm

Wednesday, September 9, 2026

Next:

Board Meeting

7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center



The Helderberg Castle

For many years, drivers turning onto Route 157 from Route 85 toward Thacher Park could look up to the high ridgeline to their left and see what appeared to be a craggy medieval tower rising above the treetops. Today it is no longer visible as the trees on the slope below it have grown so tall that they obscure it. In truth, time has obscured the story of the tower and its builder and despite the fact that it is so close to Thacher Park, few people including many park employees seem to have heard of it.

Known popularly since the 1930s as "The Helderberg Castle," the tower and its few remaining surrounding structures were the work of a singularly odd fellow by the name of Charles Bouck White. Born into comfortable circumstances in 1874, White was a magna cum laude graduate of Harvard University and an ordained minister from Union Theological Seminary. In years that followed he began to express radical and often erratic religious and social views, vacillating between anti-war and pro-war views during World War I. He alienated members of the Socialist Party when he maintained that societal change could come through non-violent means and in 1919 he urged New York City to leave the Union rather than accept Prohibition.

Traveling around the Northeast and Paris, he became interested in ceramics and perfected a method of making pottery that did not require firing in a kiln. Known as "Bouckware," the pottery was featured in an elaborate monograph that still can occasionally be found online. Pieces of Bouckware can be seen in the Knox Museum.

- by Mike Nardacci—Thacher Park Geology Educator

As always, you can find a color version of the newsletter at www.friendsofthacherpark.org