

HISTORIC LINKAGES:  
SYRACUSE CERAMIC GUILD,  
THE POTTERY FAIR & STONE QUARRY HILL ART PARK  
by Steve Waldron

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SYRACUSE CERAMIC GUILD.

The Syracuse Ceramic Guild was established in 1947 by a small group of artists living and working in the Syracuse area. Over the years membership has grown to include individuals located in Syracuse and in many other communities in Central New York. Among the founding members was Dorothy W. Riester, who remains an influential presence in art circles locally and further afield. Her sculpture – in ceramic and other media – is represented in museums and private collections throughout the U.S. Dorothy trained at Carnegie Tech, now Carnegie Mellon University, in Pittsburgh and moved to Syracuse in the late 1940's with her husband, Robert, an engineer with the Carrier Corporation. Dorothy subsequently studied and taught at Syracuse University and established her own studio, from which she produced works in ceramics, metal, and natural materials.

THE RIESTERS.

In the mid 1950's the Riesters purchased property in Cazenovia on which they determined to build a weekend and summer retreat. While designing and building their retreat, now known as Hilltop House, on Stone Quarry Road in 1962, they became so enamored of the property, on the highest elevation in the village, that they eventually made Hilltop House their year-round residence. The A-frame studio was an early construction, providing Dorothy with larger studio space in which to pursue her interest in sculpture. Over time they increased the property by acquiring adjacent land when it became available. They added a recital pavilion and other improvements to Hilltop House, and expanded the A-frame with the addition of the Art Barn. Over the years the Riesters generously shared their home and grounds with their friends and with the Central New York community by hosting musical performances, workshops

conducted by the Syracuse Ceramic Guild, invitational sculpture installations, and other events focusing on art and nature. For years Dorothy has hosted artists in residence, affording them the opportunity to be inspired by the natural surroundings that have influenced her own work.

STONE QUARRY HILL ART PARK.

Recognizing the impact of encroaching residential and commercial development on the character of Cazenovia, in 1991 the Riesters began the process of transforming their home of 40-plus years into Stone Quarry Hill Art Park so that the environment they had loved and nurtured for so long would remain a community asset in perpetuity. Through their generosity, and the commitment of their many friends and others in the community, an endowment was established, a corporate structure was put in place to manage the property and oversee a program of arts promotion and environmental preservation, and staff were hired. The Riesters set a target for the endowment fund and pledged to donate the entire property to the Park when the target was reached. The Riesters were guaranteed a lifetime right to reside at the Park.

Development of the Park continued, even following Bob Riester's death in 1996. In 2000 Dorothy formally transferred the property to the Park ahead of schedule to qualify for State matching funds that underwrote the acquisition of an adjacent parcel of fields and woodlots that established a permanent buffer extending the Park's northern boundary to the Town of Cazenovia aquifer property on Route 20. No further development can occur in this direction under terms of the purchase. The remainder of the Park and its historic structures is protected by a conservation easement held by the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation. Future development within the Park itself must be consistent with the established mission of the Park.

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Since its formal incorporation, the Park has expanded the Art Barn with the addition of the Winner Gallery; built a Maintenance Barn; constructed the Site Manager's Residence/Artists' Lodge; developed and approved a site use plan; hosted internationally acclaimed visual and performing artists; and launched a strategic planning process to guide future operations and programming and ensure that the Park's dual mission of promoting arts and preserving the land will be balanced and complementary. Staff, Board members, and volunteer committees work diligently to maintain the Park, which is open to the public 365 days a year, dawn to dusk. Annual attendance now exceeds 10,000 visitors from throughout the United States and a number of other countries. Through its arts programs and exhibitions the Park has garnered an international reputation for site specific installations inspired by and/or responding to the natural environment. In 2011, its 20th anniversary year, Stone Quarry Hill Art Park was recognized as #2 in National Geographic's "top Ten Sculpture Parks and Trails" in Secret Journeys of a Lifetime: 500 of the World's Best Hidden Travel Gems.

#### THE POTTERY FAIR.

In the mid 1970's several members of the Syracuse Ceramic Guild joined together to participate in a small arts and crafts festival held on the lawn of the Presbyterian Church in Cazenovia -- heavy lifting provided by Dorothy and Bob Riester. The initial event was successful enough to prompt return participation for several years until it became obvious that this collaborative Guild venture had outgrown the village venue. The festival itself eventually was transformed into the CAVAC Fourth of July Arts & Crafts Show now held annually at Lorenzo, the State Historical Site on Cazenovia Lake. Meanwhile, at the urging of Guild member Genelle Altman, and with the support and encouragement of the

Riesters, the Guild launched its initial Pottery Fair at the Riester property in 1980 -- and has never looked back. The Pottery Fair remains the largest single event held each year at Stone Quarry Hill Art Park.

#### THE COLLABORATION.

The Pottery Fair is the largest event conducted by the Syracuse Ceramic Guild. It also remains the largest single event held at the Park. The Pottery Fair is the Guild's largest source of revenue, with which it underwrites its education program of workshops for Guild members and the public, juried exhibitions of members' work, scholarships and sponsoring of ceramic students, contributions to assist in acquisitions for the permanent ceramic collection of the Everson Museum of Art, and support for children's education programs at Stone Quarry Hill Art Park.

Over the years the Syracuse Ceramic Guild collectively, and many of its members individually, have supported the development of Stone Quarry Hill Art Park. The Guild completed a three-year pledge of \$10,000 to the Park in 1996, and contributes to the Art Park each year from revenues generated by the Pottery Fair. Some Guild members join the Park as individual or family members; some donate to the Park's endowment fund or contribute to support specific programming. Several Guild members have provided bequests to enhance the Park. And some Guild members serve as Park volunteers or on its Board of Directors and working committees. Information on opportunities for involvement at the Park can be obtained at any time from the Park staff who can be reached at 655-3196. Stone Quarry Hill Art Park affords a unique venue for the Pottery Fair, which would be difficult, if not impossible, to duplicate elsewhere. Members of the Park -- and the larger community -- have come to associate the Pottery Fair with the Park -- and constitute a loyal following of devoted patrons.