The first du Pont black powder was made in these powder yards in 1804 launching one of the longest standing and most innovative American enterprises since this country’s founding. Between the company’s founding in 1802 and 1840, the yards expanded twice to include three dams, upper and lower mill races, dozens of mill buildings, and over a mile of infrastructure, much of which can still be seen today.

On your journey through the powder yards you will see historic stone structures that housed the powder manufacturing process, working nineteenth century machinery, water wheels and turbines powered by the river, line shafts that transferred energy, a sixteen-ton roll mill in operation, a stone quarry that supplied the building material of the yards, black powder explosion demonstrations, a coal-fired steam engine, and of course the beautiful Brandywine River.

Be sure not to miss:
- Demonstrations of the only operating black powder roll mill in the country
- The site and debris of one of the largest accidental explosions in the history of the yards
- The sixteen-foot high Birkenhead water wheel at the oldest mills in the Hagley yards
- The silently running nineteenth-century machines in our machine shop
- Black powder explosion demonstrations
- And our newest addition—the restored 1890s Hercules Type A water turbine that now provides power to the machines in the Machine Shop

Over the 120 years that the Du Pont powder yards were in operation on the Brandywine, thousands of workers from diverse backgrounds lived, worked, and died in communities that surrounded the yards. In many ways, life in these communities was very different from life in other industrial towns. Here Irish, French, Italian, and English immigrants worked side-by-side with members of the du Pont family to make this business a success. The dangerous nature of their work created a unique bond among them that provided support during times of joy and sorrow.

During your visit to Workers’ Hill you will meet numerous characters from the Hagley story including du Pont family members as well as powder yard workers and their families.

Be sure not to miss:
- The original powder yard gates where workers stopped every day for inspection to ensure they were not bringing anything into the yards that could cause a spark, leading to an explosion
• The John Gibbons House, home of the Hagley Yard Foreman where on special days you may find Mrs. Gibbons baking cookies
• The Brandywine Manufacturers’ Sunday School where Victorine du Pont taught workers’ children on Sundays for more than thirty years.

• Eleutherian Mills Wikipedia
  Jacob Broom built a cotton mill on the site in 1795. The mill burned down in 1797 and in 1802 he sold the site, complete with a working dam and millrace to Eleuthère Irénée du Pont, who paid $6,740 for the 95 acres (380,000 m²).[4] The first domestic supplies of high-quality gunpowder were made in the USA by E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company.[5] The company was founded in 1802 by E.I. du Pont, two years after he and his family left France to escape the French Revolution.[6]

Original DuPont powder wagon
They set up the Eleutherian gunpowder mill on the Brandywine Creek just north of Wilmington, Delaware, based on gunpowder machinery bought from France and site plans for a gunpowder mill supplied by the French Government.[6] They also built housing for 30 workers.[4] Starting, initially, by reworking damaged gunpowder and refining saltpetre for the US Government they quickly moved into gunpowder manufacture.[6] Saltpetre was refined in an area between the house and the mills that now is occupied by a formal garden. Charcoal was produced from the willow trees that lined the Brandywine. By the end of 1804, DuPont had sold 39,000 pounds of powder; the following year sales tripled. The Federal government and John Jacob Astor’s American Fur Company became regular customers. In 1813 the Hagley property, just downstream from the original mills, was purchased, doubling the size and capacity of the mills. Sales grew during the Mexican-American War and the Crimean War. During the American Civil War, the firm sold 4,000,000 barrels of powder to the Federal government. A major explosion killed 33 people in 1818. Another major explosion occurred on the site in 1847. In 1854 three gunpowder wagons exploded in the city of Wilmington.

The site
Mill race which supplied water power to the mills. A railway car is on the right. The mill buildings used in the manufacture of gunpowder were built with strong stone-walled structures on three sides; but were only covered by light wood structures on the fourth side, which faced out onto the Brandywine Creek. When an accident occurred, the explosion was directed away from the other mills and storage areas and over the creek. Water power was provided from a mill race behind the mills, thus further isolating the mills in case of accident. One water wheel was often used to provide power to two mills. Water turbines were introduced in the 1840s. Alfred Victor du Pont acquired additional property, down stream from the Eleutherian Mills, to add to the manufacturing site. One of these properties was called Hagley, and it became known as the Hagley Yard.

Unrestored mill on the Brandywine

Edge-runner mill in a restored mill
Most of the industrial remains are located in the Hagley Yard. The mills were used in the purification, crushing, and mixing of charcoal, sulfur, and saltpeter. Other mills in the complex were used for glazing and corning, making metal powder kegs, and in cotton and woolen manufacturing. Stables, offices, a machine shop, and a steam powerhouse from the late 19th century also were located in the complex, as was a narrow gauge railway.