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# The Corridor

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Volume XXVII, No. 1

Newsletter of the Old York Road Historical Society

Spring 2018

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## LECTURE SERIES

The Program Committee has arranged for the following presentations to be held on Wednesday evenings at 7:30 p.m. in Homestead Hall, the Parish House of the Church of Our Savior in Jenkintown. The Parish House sits directly behind the church at the corner of Old York and Homestead Roads. The lectures are underwritten by a grant from the Jenkintown Lyceum and are open to the public.

**March 14 – The Canals of Pennsylvania** – Society board member Jim Rubillo will give an illustrated lecture on the canals that once crisscrossed our state through a network of over 1600 miles of man-made waterways. These pathways played a key role in America's westward expansion. The presentation will trace the development, heyday, and decline of this now forgotten means of transportation, economic growth and communication.

**April 11 – Digging the City: The Archaeology of Northern Liberties, Kensington and Port Richmond Along the I -95 Corridor** – PennDOT is undertaking a long-term project to improve and rebuild I-95 in Philadelphia. The firm AECOM Archaeologists has been retained to implement a plan to preserve Philadelphia's historic waterfront through scientific excavation and research. Steve Tull of AECOM Archaeologists will highlight how the neighborhood archaeological discoveries and research will recreate historical life at distinct points in time from 6,000 B.C. to A.D. 1900.

**May 9 – Stone Houses: Traditional Architecture in the Delaware Valley** – The immigrants to southeastern Pennsylvania in the colonial area brought many building traditions that coalesced into a powerful local vernacular that persists to this day. A major figure in its development was R. Brognard Okie, architect of hundreds of houses, large and small, including houses in Meadowbrook and Huntingdon Valley. This illustrated program by author Jim Garrison will include the local sources of the architectural style, Okie's masterpieces and some contemporary descendants.

## - - SPRING OUTING - -

### Glen Foerd on the Delaware

Sunday, April 29, 1:15 p.m.

Please join us for a private tour of Glen Foerd on the Delaware. The Glen Foerd estate was established by Charles Macalester, Jr., who purchased the land in 1850. He built a three-story Italianate riverfront house and called it Glengarry. In 1895, the mansion was purchased by Robert and Caroline Foerderer. Foerderer hired Philadelphia architect, William McAuley to handle extensive renovations to the mansion. The house was enlarged and enhanced with Classical Revival additions. The estate name was changed to Glen Foerd, a merger of Glengarry and the Foerderer name. In addition to the mansion, the estate consisted of a stone gas house, ice house, Gothic-style gatehouse, a sixty-foot high stone water tower, five large greenhouses and riverfront cupola.

The house is set amid eighteen acres of rare trees and flowering shrubs, a formal rose garden, vineyard, and riverfront oaks that date back over 300 years. In the 1920s and 30s, Caroline Foerderer and her daughter, Florence, worked with landscape architects Thomas Sears and James Bush-Brown to redesign the grounds.

We will have a guided tour of the mansion and learn the story of those who lived and worked there. Afterwards, we will tour a portion of the grounds including the riverfront and discuss its design and history. The cost is \$25 for members and \$30 for non-members. Please register for this trip using the enclosed form. The bus will depart from the Jenkintown Library parking lot at 1:15 pm and return around 5:00 pm.

*The Annual Meeting of the Society will precede the May lecture. Officer and Committee reports will be presented and the Nominating Committee will present a slate of Officers and Directors to be elected for the 2018-2019 program year.*

# A Successful Expansion Campaign!

On President's Day weekend, the Society formally cut the ribbon on its new space at Alverthorpe Manor. The space adjoins the suite of rooms the Society currently rents. Many collections have been brought in from off-site storage and all the manuscript and newspaper holdings have been re-shelved, integrating items previously in storage with those that were already located at Alverthorpe.

The expansion project entailed removing existing walls and wiring, installing computer and telephone wiring, replacing all the carpeting, installing an air-conditioning system and painting the entire space. Vice President Tom Wieckowski handled all of the details and served as the Society's construction manager. Following construction work, 40 units of shelving were ordered, delivered and installed by a team of volunteers. Additional volunteer work sessions were held until everything was in its intended place and in clean condition (construction and off-site storage are both dusty environments). The job could not have been completed on time without the effort of many hands, and hearty thanks is extended to all those who pitched in, either once or many times.

Finally, the expansion project brought with it a major financial obligation and the Society was able to raise over \$87,000 to fund the work. An enormous debt of gratitude is owed to all those who made a financial gift. It is a truly wonderful thing to have all of our unique collections gathered together in one space that is suitable for archival storage and easily accessible to all those who do research into the history of this area.

Please note that a general open house will be held this summer for Society members and others in the community to see our new space. Again, thanks to all those that made this project possible including our financial donors:

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Upper Donor Levels with minimum amounts: Diamond (D) \$10,000, Platinum (P) \$5000, Gold (G) \$2500, Silver (S) \$1000, Bronze (B) \$500.

# A Bit of History – Images and Preservation

The Society has recently received a flurry of queries regarding high-profile development projects that affect historical properties throughout the Old York Road corridor. The following is meant to highlight some of the more significant properties in question and utilizes images from the Society's postcard collection.



## Abington YMCA

The Board of Commissioners of Abington Township has approved for further discussion a proposal for redevelopment of the venerable Abington YMCA site on Old York Road. Several generations of local residents received their first exposure to gym and swimming at the “Y”.

The proposal from BET Investments, a Horsham based real estate development firm owned by Bruce E. Toll, calls for the construction of a 55-and-over living community on the SE corner of Old York Road and Susquehanna Road surrounding the Abington Presbyterian Church Cemetery. The four-story complex would include approximately 225 one and two-bedroom units and fully enclosed parking. Also slated for demolition along Old York Road are the Helweg-Rowland Funeral Home and the Dutch colonial house that stands between the funeral home and the YMCA.

The original brick Jacobean styled YMCA building (“Colton

Hall”) was constructed during the great YMCA movement of the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Local resident, John Milton Colton, realized the need for organized youth activities in Abington through discussions with a group of men from the Abington Presbyterian Church. Colton was an active member of the church and a partner in the prestigious Philadelphia bank of E. W. Clark.

Colton left provisions in his will to fund the construction of Colton Hall, which took place after Colton's death in 1913. Colton also left four acres of ground for the site of the building. Groundbreaking took place on May 22, 1915. The *Times-Chronicle* said “It will be one of the most elaborate public buildings in the entire Old York Road section.”

## Hatboro YMCA

The Hatboro YMCA is merging with the Abington Y to form a new Upper Moreland YMCA that will be located on Davisville Road. The YMCA organi-

zation acquired the site of the former Willow Grove Day Camp and construction has already begun.

The Hatboro YMCA owns two very historic buildings, the Boileau house on the west side of Old York Road, and the Miller House, *Crestbrook*, on the east. The Hatboro properties are reportedly under agreement of sale with Play & Learn, which has said that they will retain both historic buildings.

The Miller House has certain conservation easements on it but the Boileau residence does not. Both buildings are colonial era buildings and the Boileau house, home to Nathaniel Boileau, is likely one of the most historic in the area as Boileau was a state legislator and Secretary of State for Pennsylvania. Also, the house was reportedly a stop on the Underground Railroad.

## Rothwell Block

The popular Mandarin restaurant at Old York and Davisville Roads served its last meal on February 18<sup>th</sup>. The restaurant and the rest of the block at this corner will be demolished for the development of a five-story, 275-unit residential community with retail and office space.

Brothers Walter and Eugene Rothwell developed the parcel in 1926. The brick two-story building at one time housed a pharmacy at the corner operated by the Rothwells, an A&P grocery store, the Grove Theater, and other businesses. The theater closed in 1961. The Roth-

wells owned the building until 1972. Local florist, Charles Kemp, opened his first store in the corner section of the building and remained until the mid 1970's. By 1982, the theater was demolished and in 1985 the Mandarin opened on the Davisville Road side of the building.

The new development, which has been approved by the township, is to be called the Station at Willow Grove. The developer is J. G. Petrucci.

### **Old Mill in Hatboro**

The Old Mill that was for many years a popular eatery along the Pennypack Creek at Horsham and Old York Roads and that had seen a bit of a revival a year or two ago is now once again dark. The restaurant that had opened last year folded and the property is now for sale. With very limited parking, the options for a profitable use are similarly restricted. The former grist mill is quite old, dating back to 1724, and is one of two that still stands in good condition in eastern Montgomery County, the other being the Fetter's Mill in Huntingdon Valley.

### **Lynnewood Hall**

Anyone who has recently driven by Lynnewood Hall on Spring



or Ashbourne Avenues will notice that the grounds have been cleared of all undergrowth and dead trees. The massive residence can be seen from almost every vantage. The efforts by the property owner come as a result of a negotiated agreement with the township after a series of code violations were issued.

Still unresolved are other building violations that affect the three buildings on the site. And, of course, the long-term future of the buildings is as uncertain as ever (the property is still for sale at the now "reduced price" of \$15.5MM).

With the latest effort to clean up the grounds now completed,

passers-by can begin to get a sense of how grand this property must have looked in its heyday. Lynnewood Hall was built as the principal residence of the Widener family. Designed by Horace Trumbauer and completed in 1900, three generations of Wideners lived here before the family sold it in the early 1940s. Through various owners including the Faith Theological Seminary, it has suffered a slow decline ever since.

### **Fmr. Helweg Funeral Home**

At their January 2018 meeting, the Jenkintown Borough Council approved plans for a Taco Bell eatery on the site of the former Helweg Funeral Home at 463 York Road. The existing buildings will be demolished and replaced with a modern facility with a drive-thru.

The development will also see the demolition of the house on the north side of the former funeral home. This building was once the manse for Grace Presbyterian Church and home to the Jenkintown Music School. The manse was built in the late 1800s and the funeral home in the 1920s.



## OLD YORK ROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

515 Meetinghouse Road  
Jenkintown, PA 19046

215 - 886 - 8590

### Archives Research Hours

Located on the second floor of Alverthorpe Manor, the archives is open:

Mondays, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.  
Tuesdays, 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.  
Wednesdays, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Call for Special Appointments

### Society's Website

[www.oyrhs.org](http://www.oyrhs.org)

Thanks to the continued dedication of volunteers Leslie Bell, Eileen Koolpe, Betty Smith, and Mary Washington, for staffing the archives on a regular basis.

## *WHYY Program*

WHYY television in Philadelphia has produced a program on the Montier family, who lived along Limekiln Pike in Cheltenham Township. The son of first purchaser and Philadelphia Mayor Humphrey Morrey married a black slave woman and bequeathed his farm to her and their issue. A daughter, Cremona, married John Montier and they and their descendants lived in the area until the late 1800s. Some of their children moved to Philadelphia and one Montier descendant and his wife had their portraits painted by Franklin Street. The paintings are considered the earliest known portrait paintings of an African American couple. Descendants of the family have the portraits on long-term loan to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where they currently are on view.

The WHYY program features local footage of the still-standing Montier house and the paintings and includes interviews with Society President David Rowland and Vice President Tom Wieckowski. The program is due to air on WHYY, Friday evening, March 16 at 8:30 p.m. Be sure to tune in!

### Huntingdon Valley Library Display Case

A new exhibit will open in March in the Society's display case at the Huntingdon Valley Library on Red Lion Road and will feature the early businesses in Huntingdon Valley and Bethayres.

## Recent Archival Donations

The Society is pleased to have received many gifts over the past several months, the following being the most significant:

- A scrapbook of William Sewell, US Senator from New Jersey and father of Robert Sewell, a founding trustee of Abington Memorial Hospital, covering the period 1888-1894, from Debbie McNeill.
- Papers of Donald Neiman including records of the Music Theater of Abington, the Kiwanis Club of Glenside and the Abington Township Economic Committee, from Leigh Neiman.
- Records of the Old York Road Community Concerts Association, from Harry Farrell.
- Records of the Cheltenham Hills Savings Bank and Koerwer Real Estate, from Russell Koerwer, Barbara Jacobs and David Rowland.
- Framed portrait of Elwood Terrance Quinn, M.D., and related biographical papers, from Jeanne and Terry Quinn.
- 1842 Quaker wedding dress of Tacy Ann Penrose, from Jesse Hallowell.
- Records of the Abington YMCA's Young Peoples Theater, from Barbara Jacobs.
- An 1891 plot plan of the development of Myers Farm and four paintings of local scenes, from the East Cheltenham Library.
- A group of Jenkintown High School football programs, 1959-1962, from Norman Haac.

## Membership Reminder

We are mid-way through our 2017-18 membership year. If the mailing label on your envelope does not read "2018" or if you are receiving a membership form with this newsletter, you are not current. Please consider renewing at the Patron level or above. Your generous support is critical for our sound fiscal operation and is greatly appreciated.

## Open House and Book Sale

To celebrate the opening of the expanded archives, the Society will host an Open House and Book Sale on Sunday afternoon June 3 from 1 to 5. Volunteers will be on-hand to provide guided tours of the new space. The book sale will include many out-of-print history books with local and regional titles. Also, local history authors will be allowed to set up tables to sell their books and sign copies. Refreshments will be provided. Admission is free and all are invited!

# THANKS TO OUR MAJOR MEMBERSHIP DONORS

The Society gratefully recognizes those who have so far supported our work for the 2018 program year through membership at the Patron level and above. All of those listed will be invited to this year's Patrons' Party.

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## U.S. Colored Troops To Be Honored

The Camp William Penn Museum will host a ceremony to dedicate a new information plaque honoring the United States Colored Troops (USCT) buried in the Philadelphia National Cemetery. The marker celebrates the achievements of the USCT and their largest training ground, Camp William Penn, formerly located in nearby Lamott. The event will pay tribute to those who died in the fight to preserve the Union. USCT re-enactors, music and brief speeches will comprise the program, which will be held at the Philadelphia National Cemetery (6909 Limekiln Pike, Philadelphia) on Saturday, April 21 at 11:00 a.m. (rain date May 5).