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# The Corridor

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Volume XXVII, No. 2

Newsletter of the Old York Road Historical Society

Fall 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 church is located at the corner of Old York and Homestead Roads. The Parish House sits immediately behind the sanctuary building. The lecture series is sponsored by a grant from the Jenkintown Lyceum and all programs are open to the public free of charge.

**October 10 – The 7-30 Man: Jay Cooke and Ogontz.** One of the most illustrious residents of Gilded Age Cheltenham was the banker, Jay Cooke. Cooke is best known for his heroic efforts to raise millions of dollars for federal expenses during the Civil War. After the war, he directed the construction of the Northern Pacific transcontinental railroad as well as the school that became Penn State Ogontz. This illustrated lecture by local historian and Society Vice President Thomas J. Wiekowski will explore Cooke's early life that prepared him for his accomplishments. He will review Cooke's tenure in the Cheltenham Hills where he built one of the most extravagant estates yet seen in the United States and where he founded a new church to serve the growing community.

**November 14 – Trolleys of Montgomery County.** Montgomery County was once served by a 140-mile network of electric trolleys. Constructed between 1893 and 1915, the independently owned trolley lines connected the far corners of the County, from Pottstown to Hatboro, Telford to Ardmore. This illustrated talk by author Michael Szilagyi will cover the length and breadth of the County with a focus on the four trolley lines that converged at Willow Grove Park. He will show scenes along Old York Road and trace the route of the suburban Route 6 through Abington and Glenside with its long stretches of railroad-style right-of-way, and discuss why the Route 6 trolleys were replaced with General Motors diesel buses in 1958. Copies of his recent Arcadia book will be available after the lecture.

## -- FALL OUTINGS --

### American Swedish Historical Museum

Sunday, October 14, 2:00 p.m.

Join us for a private tour of the American Swedish Historical Museum in South Philadelphia. The museum's founder, Dr. Amandus Johnson inspired a group of committed, successful Swedish-Americans to build the Museum as a permanent monument to Swedish contributions in the United States. The Museum's architect, Swedish-American John Nydén, combined architectural features from three prominent edifices in his design, modeling the main building after a seventeenth-century Swedish manor house. The Society will have an extensive and private tour of the museum and see its many display and exhibits featuring Swedish contributions to the development of the Philadelphia area as well as America. The cost is \$32 for members and \$37 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.

### Bryn Athyn Train Wreck Talk and Walk

Saturday, December 1, 1:30 p.m.

Join the Society as it partners with the Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust for this annual program observing the anniversary of the Bryn Athyn Train wreck, which occurred on December 5, 1921. Society member and railroad historian Larry Eastwood will give a lecture at the Trust's Visitors Center on the disaster, and Society President David Rowland will lead a walking tour to the site. Please contact the Pennypack Trust at 215-657-0830 to register. Society and Trust members are free, all others are \$5. The Visitors' Center is located at 2955 Edge Hill Road, across from the June Fete Fair Grounds in Huntingdon Valley.

# A Bit of History – A Double Portrait

By David B. Rowland

When you enter the main reading room of the Old York Road Historical Society at Alverthorpe Manor, you are greeted by a double portrait painting hanging prominently over the bank of filing cabinets. Folks often wonder who painted the portraits and who are they of.

The painting is of the artist Russell Smith and his granddaughter, Mary Russell Smith, better known as Polly. Interestingly, the painting is based on a photographic portrait taken by Russell's son and Polly's father, the artist Xanthus Smith.

The Smith family lived in a castle-styled house called *Edge Hill* that stood overlooking Edge Hill and Easton Roads. While the house remains, the views and frontage along those two major roads have long since disappeared thanks to developments that occupy the bulk of the original estate.

The Smith's moved to the Weldon community in 1855 from Philadelphia. The family remained in the house until 1954, when Polly's brother, Xanthus Jr., sold the last remaining portion of ground, including the main residence, and moved his family permanently to Maine.



Russell Smith (1812-1896) was born in Scotland and emigrated with his family to America when he was a child. The family eventually settled in the Pittsburgh area where all of the Smith children were involved in cultural and theatrical pursuits.

In 1835 theater impresario Francis Courtney Weymss came to Pittsburgh without his scenic painter. Russell was engaged and Weymss was so impressed with his work that he sent the young man to Philadelphia to do the scenic painting for his theaters there. Smith remained in the Philadelphia area for the rest of his life.

For a time, Smith forswore scenic painting in favor of landscape painting but was recalled by the Academy of Music when it first opened in 1856. From then until the late 1880s, he was the principal painter for the Academy in addition to doing work for other theaters all along the Atlantic coast. Despite his work for the theater, Smith remained a prolific landscape painter.

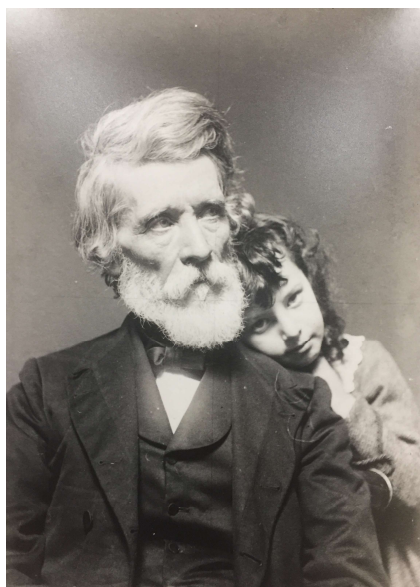
Smith's wife, the former Mary Priscilla Wilson, and their two children, Xanthus and Mary,

were all painters of note. Mother Mary painted botanicals while daughter Mary specialized in scenes with chicks and other small animals.

Xanthus (1839-1929) was a skilled landscape painter like his father. In addition, he gained wide acclaim for his paintings of Civil War naval battle scenes. His two most famous paintings of *The Monitor and the Merrimac* (1869) and *The Kearsarge and the Alabama* (1875/1905) are both in the collection of the Union League of Philadelphia.

Early in his artistic studies Xanthus explored the nascent world of photography but turned it aside so

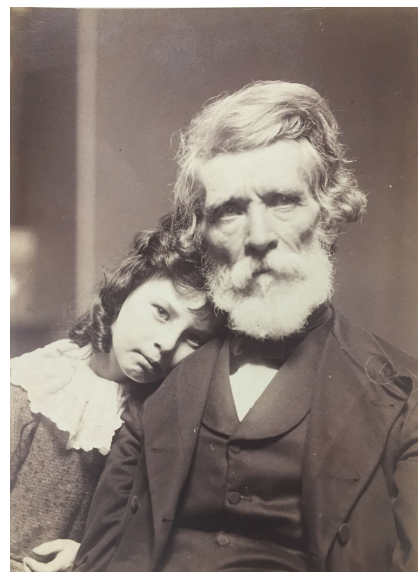
that he could focus his efforts on painting. When he was well established in reputation as a painter, he then turned his attentions back to the camera. He took up photography and went on to write numerous articles throughout the 1880s for many of the photography journals then in publication. He illustrated many of his articles with his own photographs, drawings and paintings.



Around 1886, Xanthus photographed his father and daughter. Two of the images from this photo session survive, one in the Society's Russell Smith Family Papers collection (with an additional copy at the Archives of American Art) and one that is owned by Smith's descendants (for which the Society has a copy). The Society's image was used to illustrate an article Xanthus published in *The Photographic Times*. The photograph in the family's possession was the basis for the painting now hanging at the Society.

While the painting is not signed or otherwise inscribed, it is believed to have been painted by Russell. The original photographic print retains lines drawn to segment the image into quarters that would have aided in laying out the image on the canvas. During the time this painting was done, Russell was busying himself painting portraits of notables that he had worked with or known personally, including Joseph Leidy, Henry Rogers, and Benjamin Silliman.

All of these portraits were done from photographs.




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*David B. Rowland is President of the Old York Road Historical Society Board of Directors. He organized and curated a series of art exhibitions on the Smith family that were held throughout the Delaware Valley in 1998. He continues to conduct extensive research into the Smith family of painters.*

## Recent Donations to the Archives

The Society was very fortunate to receive the books, papers and photographs collected over many years by the late Cheltenham Village historian Betty Adams. Betty was involved with many historical endeavors both at her church and within the community including the Cheltenham Village Tricentennial celebrations. Her daughter, Katherine A. Swift, recently donated her collection to the Society. Included are many records of the Cheltenham United Methodist Church that will join other records of that congregation already in our holdings (and previously donated by Betty Adams). There are also many wonderful photographs of the Rowland mills along the Tookany Creek as well as the records of the Cheltenham Needlework Guild. We are most grateful for this important gift.

In addition to the Betty Adams collection, the Society recently received many wonderful and generous donations to the archives including the following:

- Records of the Old York Road Dog Training Club, from Adrienne Kelly.
- Records of the Wyncote Players, from William D. Barker.
- Property records and correspondence relating to Alverthorpe Manor, from Linda Rosenwald Levy.
- Soda fountain menus from the Weldon-Glenside Pharmacy, from June Parkinson.
- Materials from the Seybert Institution's Children's Village, from Elizabeth Coe.
- Cheltenham High School ephemera and objects, from Jeffery Kenneth Kohn.
- Hardcopy of the *Ambler Gazette* newspaper, 2003-2018, from the Wissahickon High School library.
- Records of the Coates-Jordan American Legion Post #163, from William Adair.
- A wooden model of the Fox Chase Hotel, from Richard and Susan Snyder.

## Society Membership Information

### Membership Renewal

Now is the time to renew your membership! At the top of the membership form you will find the dates for the current membership year. The membership year is the same as the school year; the advanced year being used to denote the year on your mailing label. So, for the membership year that runs from the fall of 2018 to the summer of 2019, the date on your label should be "2019". Annual dues have not increased this year. Please contact the Society at 215-886-8590 with any questions. As always, support at the Patron level or higher greatly enhances the work we are able to do.

### Matching Gifts

Did you know that the Society is eligible to receive corporate matching gifts? Several members have doubled the impact of their gift by submitting paperwork to their company for this purpose. Check with your employer to see if the Society qualifies for a corporate match. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

### Making a Bequest

Updating your will? Please consider including a bequest to the Society's general endowment fund in your will or estate plans. Your gift will help ensure a vibrant future for the Society.

### OLD YORK ROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Alverthorpe Manor, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
515 Meetinghouse Road  
Jenkintown, PA 19046

215 - 886 - 8590

#### Archive Research Hours

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

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

Society's Website

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

## *Fall Events of Interest*

**State Historical Marker Unveiling**, Saturday, September 22, 1:00 p.m., Abington Friend's Meeting, Meetinghouse Road. The Abington Monthly Meeting will be unveiling an official state marker commemorating Radical Abolitionist Benjamin Lay.

**Trolley Tour of Historic Properties**, Sunday, September 23, 1:00 p.m., The Friends of Boileau Park are running trolley tours of historic properties in Upper Moreland Township. Tours at 1:00 and 3:00. Cost is \$10 per person and registration is on-line.

**Harvest Festival**, Saturday, October 13, 1:00-5:00 p.m., Curtis Arboretum, Greenwood and Church Roads, Wyncote. The Society along with other historical organizations in Cheltenham will have a table at this event.

**Lecture**, Sunday, October 21, 2:00 p.m., Glenside Free Library, Keswick Avenue. Society President David Rowland will present an illustrated talk entitled "The Philadelphia Area Architecture of Horace Trumbauer." Program free and open to the public.

**Lecture**, Sunday, November 11, 2:00 p.m., Glenside Free Library, Keswick Avenue. Society Vice President Tom Wieckowski will present an illustrated talk entitled "Cheltenham Hills: First Outpost of the Gilded Age." Program free and open to the public.

**Holiday Open House**, Friday thru Sunday, December 7-9, 1:00-4:00 p.m. daily, Richard Wall House Museum. The Cheltenham Township Historical Commission and the Old York Road Garden Club host an open house featuring holiday decorations throughout. Donations gladly accepted.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The following are the officers and directors for the Society's 2018-2019 program year:

President: David Rowland  
First Vice President: Thomas Wieckowski  
Second Vice President: Edward Landau  
Secretary: Eileen Koolpe  
Treasurer: Marty Kalos, CPA

Directors: Leslie Bell, Kirsten Gyllenhaal, Bryan Havir, Natalie Karas, James Rubillo, Betty Smith, Stephanie Walsh and Mary Washington.

Directors Emeriti: Janet Chapman, Martha McDonough, Joyce Root, Robert Skaler, and Mildred Wintz.