
The Corridor

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Newsletter of the Old York Road Historical Society

Spring 2019

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 lecture series is underwritten by a grant from the Jenkintown Lyceum and is open to the public free of charge.

March 13 – Babe Ruth in Philadelphia – *Philadelphia Inquirer* sports writer, Frank Fitzpatrick will discuss the legacy of Babe Ruth and the several local events that enhanced the legend of the Yankees' slugger. It was in the Philadelphia area where he almost died in a late-night car crash, where he suited up to play for a Catholic parish team, where he hit his longest major-league home run, and where he played his final baseball game.

April 10 – Dirt Track Automobile Racing: Langhorne's Legacy – Dr. Alison Kreitzer has focused much of her research on the development of dirt track automobile racing in the Mid-Atlantic region and she will explore the early decades of racing at fairground speedways and the development of some of the nation's first-purpose built speedways, including the Langhorne Speedway.

May 8 – The Golden Age of the American Country Club – The Philadelphia region led the country in the development of country clubs, which grew out of men's city clubs and resort casinos. Many early country clubs were actually located in cities, but the great suburban migration that began in the 1890s increased the popularity of the sporting life for all family members. Country clubs became an integral part of the suburban lifestyle. In this presentation, Dr. Krulikowski will focus on the development of the American country club until World War II and include notable examples from the Philadelphia region including Huntingdon Valley, Philmont and Manufacturers, among others.

- - SPRING OUTING - -

Stoneleigh

Sunday, April 28, 1:00 p.m.

Stoneleigh is a 42-acre estate in Villanova that was the Haas family home from 1932 to 2016 when it was donated to Natural Lands, which opened the property to the public last year. Stoneleigh's history dates back to the turn of the 20th century when Samuel Bodine, head of United Gas Improvement Company, acquired the property and built a Tudor Revival style residence that still stands. In 1908, he retained the Olmsted Brothers of Massachusetts – sons of Frederick Law Olmsted, and the most prestigious landscape architecture firm in the country – to “guide him in the gradual transformation of the place.” Over the next 50 years, the Olmsted Brothers firm returned periodically to plan vistas and pathways, establish gardens and terraces, reroute points of entry, select plant species, and transplant trees. In 1932 Otto Haas, entrepreneur and co-founder of Rohm and Haas Company, purchased the southwestern portion of the estate including the main residence, launching a more than 80-year tenure of careful stewardship by the Haas family.

On our tour, we will see the main features of the landscape and gardens as well as the main house. The tour of the Tudor Revival mansion will feature the first floor, including a peek at the residence organ, as well as the upper floors. There will be time following the tour for participants to explore the grounds on their own. 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 1:00 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 2019-2020 program year.

A Bit of History – Jenkintown's Early Telephone Service

By James M. Rubillo

One interesting item in the Society's collection is a copy of the May 18, 1906 edition of *The Telephone Times*. This four-page periodical was published jointly every week by The Bell Telephone Company of Philadelphia and The Delaware and Atlantic Telegraph & Telephone Companies.

The purpose of the publication was to inform their employees about the many changes in this rapidly-expanding new technology. Telephone service was growing exponential during this decade. Nationwide, the number of customers in Bell's system shot up from 2.2 million phones in 1905 to 5.8 million in 1910. Examination of this document provides the reader with insights into life the first decade of the 20th Century.

One of the page-one articles announces the opening of the new Bell Telephone District Office Building in Jenkintown. The picture shows the nearly completed building. A description of the building was included in the September 1, 1906 of the *Times-Chronicle*: "This building is located in the angle of ground situated at the junction of Beechwood, Greenwood, and Summit avenues, directly opposite and facing the bridge crossing the tracks of the Philadelphia and Reading railway leading to Wyncote. It was erected by the Charles McCaul Company, from plans furnished by J. T. Windrim, architect, who does all the Bell Company's work."



The building, opposite the Jenkintown train station, remains in use by Bell's successor, Verizon. While the building's external appearance remains basically unchanged, the activities inside the building have changed during the intervening 113 years. In 1906 when the building opened with state-of-the-art technology, the *Times-Chronicle* noted:

- In a first-floor room, "About twenty operators, all young women, will be employed.... when the building is open for business."
- On the second floor "is the retiring room for the operators, which is supplied with everything necessary for their convenience and comfort, including a large couch, chairs, tables, gas

stove for cooking, a refrigerator, and a whole outfit of china ware and table articles. A toilette ad-joins the retiring room."

- In the basement, "the twenty-nine telephone cables and wires from conduits and poles enter the building. The cables carry from 50 to 320 pairs of wires."

This new facility immediately upgraded telephone service for nearby residents and businesses. While the telephone service would appear primitive by today's standards, the public at the time was thrilled and excited by this new development.

Another article in the newsletter highlights a recurring theme – the need to introduce children to new technology. Entitled "Children Use the Bell", the article says, "The children of to-day – the subscribers of tomorrow. 10,000,000 American school children – how essential it is to surround them



with a Bell Telephone atmosphere.”

The article goes on to say that the company “has signed a contract with (Philadelphia) school authorities to place a private branch exchange switchboard in each Division Superintendent’s office to which are connected the schools of the division.”

The article further states; “Place a child where a telephone is seen used five days a week by others, and often by him or herself, and the telephone comes into the sphere of natural and ordinary thing, so when manhood or womanhood is reached the education of years makes it a natural, understood thing that there must be tel-

ephone service in home and office.”

We can see that the marketing strategies in 1906 bear great similarity to those in use today.

There are many other stories, data, and marketing strategies included in this artifact. We thank Bill Wein for contributing this framed document to the Society.

THANKS TO OUR MAJOR MEMBERSHIP DONORS

The Society gratefully recognizes those who have so far supported our work for the 2019 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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OLD YORK ROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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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

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

Recent Archival Donations

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

- Papers, sketches and photographic images by Elkins Park artist Glenn Stuart Pearce (1909-1996), from Craig Deardorff.
- Eight bound copies of the *Times-Chronicle* newspaper published between the years 1919 and 1936, from Paul Pender.
- Memorabilia from Jenkintown High School including a megaphone, from Carolyn Roberts Grubb..
- Painting of Mrs. Edward E. Marshall on horseback, from John A. Bower, Jr. and Mark Bower, given in memory of Mrs. John A. Bower, Sr.
- Model of the Hager house (corner of Washington Lane and Greenwood Avenue) by Leonard W. Steely, from Eileen S. and Thomas Binckley.
- Papers, photographs and scrapbooks of Frank C. Fisher, an early Cheltenham Village postmaster, from G.B. Fisher.
- Ledger Book entitled "Records of Ogontz" that records events held at the Jay Cooke estate between 1866 and 1867, from Cooke descendant, James Harding.
- Eight Jenkintown High School class flags between the years 1939 to 1951, from district superintendent Dr. Jill Takacs.
- A collection of milk bottles from various local dairies, from William Bux.
- Records of the Old York Road Dog Training Club, from the estate of Cheryl Metzel.
- Jenkintown area materials from Michael Foy..

In addition to the above donations, the Society also purchased the daily diary of the artist Xanthus Smith (1839-1929) covering the period from March to December 1886, from the family.

Membership Reminder

We are mid-way through our 2018-19 membership year. If the mailing label on your envelope does not read "2019" 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.

Local Events

Northeast History Fair, Saturday, March 30, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Friend of Northeast Philadelphia History present a history fair at the Cannstatter Volkfest Verein, 9130 Academy Road, Philadelphia 19114. Admission is free. Many history organizations will be present and there will be displays and presentations throughout the event.

Civil War Reenactment, Saturday and Sunday, May 3-5 at the Warminster Community Park. Marking the 155th anniversary of the Battle of the Wilderness, the 28th Penna. Volunteer Infantry will hold an encampment and reenactment of this Civil War battle. The event benefits local historical organizations in the Warminster/Hatboro area.

Lecture, Thursday, May 16, 7:00 p.m., Curtis Hall. The Friends of Curtis Arboretum will host an open house at the restored building. Society Vice President Tom Wieckowski will give a lecture on Cyrus Curtis and the arboretum grounds. Admission is free.

Lecture, Tuesday, March 12, 7:30 p.m., Cairnwood Village. The Alnwick Grove Historical Society will hold its annual meeting that will feature a lecture by local historian Fred Moore on the history of the Pennypack Creek. Admission is free.