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# The Corridor

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Volume XXVIII, No. 2

Newsletter of the Old York Road Historical Society

Fall 2019

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## Lecture Series Moving to New Venue

The Lecture Series is moving to the John Barnes Room at the Abington Friends Meeting. Located at 520 Meetinghouse Road across the street from Alverthorpe Manor, the Meeting is easily accessible from several major roads. There is plenty of parking, the facility is handicapped accessible and the room will comfortably accommodate all attendees.

## LECTURE SERIES

The Program Committee has arranged for the following presentations to be held on Wednesday evenings at 7:30 p.m. The lecture series is sponsored by a grant from the Jenkintown Lyceum and all programs are open to the public free of charge.

**October 9 – Benjamin Lay: Abington's Radical Abolitionist.** Society Secretary Jim Rubillo will present an illustrated talk on Benjamin Lay, a small, fearless Quaker, who conducted dramatic protests against slavery in the early years of 18<sup>th</sup> century Philadelphia. He confronted Philadelphia's wealthy Quakers demanding that they free their slaves and boycott items produced by slave labor. Lay published a scathing book, printed by Benjamin Franklin, that attacked many prominent Quakers, who in turn, had the Society formally disown him. Well after Lay's lifetime, the Quakers eventually abolished slavery in their midst. This talk examines the life and times of this remarkable man who has been called the "Quaker Comet."

**November 13 – Discovering Philadelphia, Places Little Known.** Architect and author David Traub will present an illustrated lecture on his book that looks at little known corners in Philadelphia. It is the long stretches of brick row homes along narrow streets that give Philadelphia its characteristic form and flavor. But positioned here and there within the matrix of crisscrossing byways are very unusual places that stand out against the backdrop of regularity. These places, the subject of Traub's talk, are not only buildings but landscapes as well. Traub will show a number of images from his book, taken from all sections of the city of Philadelphia, from Manayunk to Moyamensing, from Spruce Hill to Society Hill. Autographed copies of the book will be available after the presentation.

## - - FALL OUTINGS - -

### An Afternoon of Art

Sunday, October 20, 2:00 p.m.

Join us for private tours of two art exhibitions that feature works by Russell Smith and his son Xanthus Smith, who were well-known 19<sup>th</sup> century artists from Glenside. The first exhibition, held at the Union League of Philadelphia is entitled, "The Blue and the Grey at Sea" and focuses on representations of major Civil War naval battles. Xanthus Smith served in the Union Navy was an early and frequent delineator of the naval engagements of the period.

The second exhibition includes landscapes by Russell Smith and is held at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. The show, entitled "From the Schuylkill to the Hudson" traces the development of American landscape painting as I originally centered around the oft-painted Schuylkill River and Fairmount Water Works.

The tour at the Union League will be led by the show's curator, Dr. Robert W. Torchia, and the PAFA tour will be led by Society member and PAFA docent, Marita Krivda Poxon. The cost is \$32 for members and \$37 for non-members. A bus will depart from the Jenkintown Library parking lot at 1:00 pm and return by 5:00 p.m. Please register using the enclosed form.

### Bryn Athyn Train Wreck Talk and Walk

Saturday, December 7, 2:00 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 Bronze Plaque

By James M. Rubillo

Among the physical items that can be found in the Society's collection is a bronze plaque that was once installed at the Old Grist Mill located at the corner of York and Horsham Roads in Hatboro. The plaque was placed at the mill in 1924 by the Civic Committee of the Neighbors. The Neighbors of Hatboro was a women's civic organization, founded in 1910. The group was active in community affairs for over 90 years before dissolving in 2001.

In November, 1924 the Neighbors organized a tour of Hatboro area sites for the Historical Society of Montgomery

County. The highlight of the tour was the placement of three bronze plaques at various historical sites. One was placed at the Crooked Billet, another at Loller Academy, and this one at the Grist Mill.

The text on the Grist Mill plaque reads: Pennypack Mill 1724.

The first grist mill of the community. The Pennypack Creek which ran the mill was named for Pemmapecka, a chief of the Lenni Lenape Indians. General Washington with his troops stopped here on their way to meet Lafayette at Hartsville in 1777.

The first piece of information on the plaque indicating that the creek was named for an individual is questionable. Other sources indicate that the name comes from a Lenni Lenape word that means "downward-flowing water" or

"deep, dead water; water without much current." Swedish maps used the name *Pemipacka*. As the colonists constructed mills and dams, the flow of the creek was altered and the Lenni Lenape description of the creek no longer applied. Later, mapmaker Thomas Holme called it *Dublin Creek*. On later maps the creek carried the now familiar label *Pennypack*.

The next sentence of the plaque's text merely indicates that Washington passed by the site in 1777. The importance of Washington's visit on the history of the Old York Road area is well documented.



Legend also records that the bridge over the creek at the mill site played a small role in the Battle of Crooked Billet in 1778. It was from this bridge that Colonel Lacey's sentry spotted and fired upon British troops coming up York Road to attack the Americans at the Crooked Billet campsite.

In a sense, the plaque missed the historical significance of the mill. Emmanuel Dungworth built a grist mill at this site in 1724. The building is the oldest surviving building in Hatboro. Until 1912, the mill

gave uninterrupted service to the surrounding countryside for a total of one hundred eighty-eight years. The primary work of the grist mill was grinding wheat, corn and other grains into flour for local farmers and merchants. As documented by Society emeritus board member, Dr. Millie Wintz, the mill's sturdy fundamental design was 18<sup>th</sup> century state-of-the-art. "This building is the only mill on the Pennypack to still have its 'Hurst Frame' intact. A Hurst Frame held all the running gears of a water mill so that the rumbling vibration would not shake down a stone building."

After 1912, the mill building served as a machine works that produced parts for other mills. About 1915, the building was modified and operated as a tea room for the next fifteen years. In the 1930s, the building was renovated and reopened as a restaurant and for the balance of the century and into the current

one, the old mill served as a venue for a variety of restaurants.

In 2018, the Pennypack Mill reopened as an event venue for weddings, meetings, and other social gatherings.

The mill is important to the history of our area for three fundamental reasons. The Mill was well-built, functioned well, and has survived as a mainstay along the Old York Road.

The unanswered question: Why is this plaque now housed in the archives of the Society?

The answer comes in two parts:

- When the Neighbors of Hatboro dissolved, their records and files were divided and presented to two organizations, the Millbrook Society in Hatboro and the Old York Road Historical Society. Among the items in our research archive are several scrapbooks containing newspaper articles, and meeting minutes. We also have notes describing the Neighbors' civic programs and activities.
- In August 2011, Hurricane Irene devastated the Hatboro area. The Pennypack Creek inundated the Grist Mill. The flood waters caused extensive damage to the building's lower levels. Walls, floors, and other items were severely damaged and required removal from the



building. Following this flood, the bronze plaque was donated to the Society.

Despite many floods and ownership changes, the Pennypack Mill still stands as one of the most recognizable historic sites along the Old York Road. The Society looks forward to the celebration of the tricentennial of this remarkable building in 2024.

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*Jim Rubillo is a retired college dean, professor, and non-profit CEO. He is a well-travelled speaker having presented over 800 talks, at least one in every state and Canadian province. Jim has an intense interest in local history and serves on the Society's Board of Directors as Secretary.*

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## Donations to the Archives

The Society has recently received many wonderful donations including the following:

- Photographs from the Ogontz School, from Nancy Posel.
- 1886 daily diary of artist Xanthus Smith along with pencil sketches by the artist, from the Smith Family.
- Abington High School ephemera from the 1960s, from Susan Turner.
- 1971 Bell Telephone Suburban Philadelphia Directory, from Jim Woods.
- Local photographs and milk bottles, from William Bux.
- Architectural elements from *Laverock Hill* salvaged during demolition, from Edward Zwicker
- Stock Certificate of the Doylestown Willow Grove Railway Company, from Dennis Whisman
- Records of the Church Door Canteen and the Churchwomen of the Church of Our Savior in Jenkintown and other ephemera and photographs of the church, from the church courtesy of William Cutler.
- Additional records of the Abington Civic Club and the Kiwanis Club of Jenkintown.

## SOCIETY MAPS UNVEILED

The Society held a reception on Sunday, September 22, to unveil the conservation work done on 8 oversized and wall maps in the Society's collection. The conservation work was funded through a campaign held in honor of the Society's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016. Over the past several years, the maps were delivered to a conservation studio in Massachusetts where they were conserved. This included the removal of backing linen supports, detaching the pieces that made up the large maps and removing any varnish placed on the top surface. In addition, the paper was deacidified, repairs were made and loose pieces were rejoined. The new maps were lined for strength but the large sheets were not rejoined, so that we can store the maps in our flat files. Thanks to all who helped make the conservation work and the afternoon reception both successful endeavors.

## 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 2019 to the summer of 2020, the date on your label should be "2020". 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)

## *Recent News of Note*

Society President David Rowland recently delivered two short historical addresses on August 7, one at the deBenneville Burial Ground and the other at Northwood Cemetery, each on the history of the respective sites. This was part of the festivities surrounding the visit to Philadelphia of the bishop-designate of Dover, the Rev. Rose Hudson-Wilkin. She is presently Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons and one of a number of private chaplains to the Queen. Her visit coincided with the anniversary of Jamaican independence and included stops at sites where British soldiers were buried.

British General Agnew and Lt. Col. John Bird were both killed during the Battle of Germantown and eventually buried in the deBenneville Burial Ground when the British decamped from Philadelphia in the spring of 1778. At Northwood, there is a Cross of Sacrifice where British veterans are buried as well as a Revolutionary War British soldier. Mr. Rowland has since been invited to represent the Society at both cemeteries for the upcoming visit of British Lt. Gen. Jonathan Riley, who will be making a visit in early October as part of the British Officers Club of Philadelphia's Centenary Anniversary celebrations.



### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

The following are the officers and directors for the Society's 2019-2020 program year:

President: David Rowland  
First Vice President: Thomas Wieckowski  
Second Vice President: Edward Landau  
Secretary: James Rubillo  
Treasurer: Michael Czerwonka, CPA

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

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