
The Corridor

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Newsletter of the Old York Road Historical Society

Spring 2020

LECTURE SERIES

The Program Committee has arranged for the following presentations to be held on Wednesday evenings at 7:30 p.m. in the John Barnes Room at the Abington Friends' Meetinghouse at 510 Meetinghouse Road. The lecture series is underwritten by a grant from the Jenkinstown Lyceum and is open to the public free of charge.

March 11 – Stage Travel along Frankford Avenue in Philadelphia – During the early 1800's, which represented the high point of stagecoach travel in the eastern United States, passengers would have been jostled in a stagecoach over the Frankford and Bristol Turnpike (formerly known as the King's Highway). In order to gain insight on stage travel, historian Charlie Moody will explain the history of the roads and bridges on which the coaches traveled and the mile markers, tollhouses and public houses along the route where they stopped.

April 8 – From Lyndon to Curtis Arboretum: A Panorama of Surpassing Beauty – For 170 years after William Penn's land grant to William Frampton, the rolling fields of today's Curtis Arboretum were Quaker farmlands. Prominent Philadelphia banker Abraham Barker purchased the Cadwalader farm for his estate in 1854 and named it "Lyndon." Following his bankruptcy in 1890, the estate was purchased by publisher, Cyrus Curtis, who constructed his own mansion on the property. Local historian Thomas Wieckowski will trace the history of Curtis Arboretum and its prominent owners as the property progressed from the agrarian age, through the Gilded Age, and into the 21st century.

May 13 – Ropsley: A Country Estate – Local historian Edward Zwicker III will guide us through the Wyndmoor estate Ropsley, also known as the Poe House. Built in 1916, it was the home of Philadelphia attorney Francis McIlhenny. The presentation will show how the land developed through previous owners before the McIlhennys, and take us on a virtual tour using photos and original architectural plans.

-- SPRING OUTING --

Rittenhouse Town

Sunday, April 26, 1:15 p.m.

Rittenhouse Town is one of the earliest industrial communities in America. In 1687 William Rittenhouse moved to the newly formed neighborhood of Germantown and purchased property along a tributary of the Wissahickon Creek and built the first paper mill in British North America. For the next 40 years, the Rittenhouse family were the only papermakers in America. The original mill was destroyed by fire in 1701 but a new mill was quickly built. The Rittenhouse homestead was built in 1707 and still stands across from the site of the second mill. Other houses and buildings also remain from this once thriving little town.

Our tour will take us into a number of the early houses including the birthplace of David Rittenhouse, astronomer, surveyor and first director of the US Mint. We will also have a demonstration on paper making. 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.

Membership Reminder

We are mid-way through our 2019-20 membership year. If the mailing label on your envelope does not read "2020" 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.

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 2020-2021 program year.

A Bit of History – The Children’s Village

By Stephanie L. Walsh

Donated to the Society in the summer of 2018, this round, dime-sized object with the inscription “Children’s Village Seybert Institution” around the edge and the number “5” in the center was brought by a donor not entirely certain of the piece’s history, significance, intended use, or provenance. Is it a coin? A token? A medallion, perhaps? What exactly is it? Where did it come from?

The Seybert Institution, founded in 1907 as the “Adam and Maria Sarah Seybert Institution for Poor Boys and Girls,” is the legacy of Henry Seybert. An accomplished mineralogist as well as a philanthropist, Henry Seybert was deeply committed to Philadelphia’s civic causes, primarily the welfare of children. At the time of his death in 1883, Henry held in trust nearly \$1.5 million — the majority of his estate — for the establishment of two institutions for the care of Philadelphia’s poor children.

These institutions were to be gender-specific, or one co-educational venture if deemed more practical, to be named after his parents Adam and Maria. Trustees were appointed and began conducting research through site visits and studying similar organizations along the East Coast to determine the best operational structure for such a venture. It was decided by the trustees that one co-educational facility would be the most efficient and economical.

In 1907, the Adam and Maria Sarah Seybert Institution for Poor Boys and Girls was established to provide care, housing, education, and vocational training for chil-



dren from destitute areas or poor family situations. The Institution’s trustees, in conjunction with Children’s Aid Society of Pennsylvania, created the Children’s Bureau to ensure that the needs of the children were properly met.

The Children’s Bureau reviewed applications and determined each child’s placement, ideally within a family home. However, that option was not always available. Understanding the likelihood of such an occurrence, the Seybert Institution developed the Children’s Village. The Village was located on Henry Seybert’s estate, the Seybert Farms at Meadowbrook. Seybert Farms was a 300-acre tract of land at the intersection of Meadowbrook Road and Washington Lane, divided by Old Welsh Road.

The concept of the Children’s Village was devised to create an environment that not only nurtured the children, but aided their social and academic development. Every aspect of the Children’s Village was

designed to prepare the children to return to their own families, placement within a foster home, or (if necessary) another appropriate institution. Each component of the village (the farm, administrative office, mail service, and store) provided the children a means to become financially responsible.

For this, a practical economic system of training was developed with the idea that it would help the children learn values and prices. A currency was minted which could only be obtained and used within the Children’s Village. This object in the Society’s collection is what came to be known as Seybert currency.

To obtain Seybert currency, children at the Village were assigned an age-appropriate duty each day. A record of their time was kept and they were paid for their work. This income was then to be budgeted first for housing and clothing. Any additional funds could be used or saved at the child’s discretion. At the time the child was ready to leave the Children’s Village, any saved currency could be withdrawn and converted to American dollars. It was reported that one Seybert dollar was equivalent to 20 American cents in 1912. Therefore, the “5” on the coin in the Society’s collection was likely equivalent to \$1 in 1912, or about \$26.50 today.

The Children’s Village lasted only a few years. In 1914, the Seybert Institution was incorporated, bringing modifications to the administration. Changes within the City of Philadelphia influenced the Children’s Village operations, prompting the Seybert Institution and other agencies to focus on

more immediate childcare issues within the city limits. As a result, the Institution readjusted its organizational structure and reduced the expenditures of the Children's Village to focus on the growing needs within Philadelphia.

Edward E. Marshall purchased the site in 1917. He renamed and

adapted the property for horse and cattle breeding. Several of the cottages were converted into single-family homes still used today, and The Meadowbrook School is situated on 15 acres of what was once the Children's Village.

Stephanie L. Walsh serves on the Society's Board of Directors and is responsible for publicity and marketing including the Society's web site and Facebook page. She is also an independent archival consultant working for both the Society and the Springfield Township Historical Society.

THANKS TO OUR MAJOR MEMBERSHIP DONORS

The Society gratefully recognizes those who have so far supported our work for the 2020 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 a number of gifts over the past several months, the following being the most significant:

- Barker family papers, photographs and ephemera, from Dwight Barker.
- Several genealogy books on the Elkins and allied families, a photo album of the estate *Weather Hill*, and a photograph album of George W. Elkins' *Chelton House* with hand-colored garden images by Philadelphia photographer Mary Hamilton Craig (1880-1953), from Natalie Thomas.
- Records, photographs, architectural drawings, scrapbooks, clippings and ephemera of both the Hatboro and Abington YMCAs, from Gary Chamberlain and Missy DiMassa, former directors of the Hatboro and Abington YMCAs respectively and now director and assistant director of the new Willow Grove YMCA.
- A manuscript newsletter/bulletin of "The Cabinet Register" issued by the Cabinet of Natural Science of Abington and dated December 17, 1840, from the Abington Friends Meeting. The document is issue number 16, which is added to the Society's holdings of numbers 2 to 9 and 11 to 15.
- A plaque marking the 50th Anniversary in 1981 of the opening of the Strawbridge & Clothier building in Jenkintown, from Wesley Craig.
- Jenkintown school photographs and ephemera, from the School District of Jenkintown.
- A large group of William H. Shoemaker family photographs, from F.E. Foerster via Mary Washington.
- A 1928 US Geologic Survey regional map, from St. John's Huntingdon Valley.
- Photographs and an old directory of Jenkintown, from Ed Foley.
- A Partners' Desk that descended in the Fisher/Drinker family and reportedly was designed by architect John Notman (1810-1865) for use at Alverthorpe, the country estate of Joshua Francis Fisher, and for which Notman was the architect, from John R. Drinker.
- Travel diaries of Mrs. William Welham and ephemera and architectural drawings of and from the Helweg-Rowland Funeral Home.

Local Events

Lecture, Sunday, February 23, 3:00 p.m., LaMott Community Center. The Citizens for the Restoration of Historical LaMott are hosting a talk by Society Vice President Thomas Wieckowski, who will talk about the Ridley/Fox Shooting and its Aftermath. This was the only case where a soldier at Camp William Penn shot and killed a local resident who was intruding into the camp. Re-enactors and musicians will also perform. Admission is free.

Lecture, Saturday, March 14, 10:00 a.m., Abington Art Center/Alverthorpe Manor. The Art Center in conjunction with the American Color Prints Society is hosting a talk by Tony Rosati, former Assistant to the Curator of the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection from 1971 to 1980. Mr. Rosati will speak about the collection (now at the National Gallery of Art and the Library of Congress) and his work with Lessing Rosenwald at Alverthorpe Manor. Admission is \$10 for Art Center members and \$15 for all others.

Lecture, Tuesday, March 31, 7:15 p.m., Cairnwood Village. The Alnwick Grove Historical Society will hold its annual meeting that will feature a lecture by local historian Vera Glenn who will give a history of the Powell House in Bryn Athyn, now the home of the Orchard Artworks. Admission is free.