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# The Corridor

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Newsletter of the Old York Road Historical Society

Fall 2025

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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 the John Barnes Room of Abington Friends Meeting (520 Meetinghouse Road, Jenkintown). The programs will also be accessible via Zoom. The lecture series is sponsored by a grant from the Jenkintown Lyceum and all programs are offered free of charge.

**October 8 – More Than Golf.** In 1897, the city of Philadelphia was the leading manufacturing center in America. During this time, millionaires became plentiful, but social woes plagued the country. Mark Twain labeled the period “The Gilded Age” – serious social challenges masked by a thin gold gilding of economic expansion. In the midst of this, the wealthy were introduced to and embraced a new game called golf. The Huntingdon Valley Country Club was founded in 1897, and its original membership is a great illustration of the times. In his book, *More than Golf – Stories of how the original 1897 membership of Huntingdon Valley Country Club shaped Philadelphia and the Nation*, George Henninger profiles 205 men and women who did amazing things. Names include Elkins, Wanamaker, Widener, Disston, Bond, Barney, Stotesbury, and Gribbel. Learn how club members created the “birdie” and “eagle” in golf talk, the “Bloody Mary” in beverage talk, as well as why the pink flamingoes at Hialeah have their origins at HVCC.

**November 12 – Poquessing Trail of History.** The Byberry area of Far Northeast Philadelphia has an incredibly rich and diverse history. Poquessing Trail of History Project Director Jack McCarthy will speak on this exciting initiative that will activate four historic sites in Byberry through historic restoration and interpretation: the Benjamin Rush birthplace house, the Byberry Township African American Burial Ground, Byberry Hall, and a memorial to the area’s original inhabitants, the Lenape. McCarthy is a longtime Philadelphia historian who is co-founder of the Northeast Philadelphia History Network and former president of the Friends of Northeast Philadelphia History.

## - - FALL OUTINGS - -

### Elstowe Manor

Sunday, October 12, 2:00 p.m.

Elstowe Manor was built for William L. Elkins, traction magnate and business partner of P.A.B. Widener. The Italian Renaissance-style house was designed by architect Horace Trumbauer in 1898. Originally, the house had 40 bedrooms and 12 baths and many splendid public rooms. The residence is set amid some 35 acres that constituted the Elkins’ family compound. The Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine de Ricci purchased the building from the Elkins family in 1932 and later purchased the adjoining George Elkins estate, Cheltenham House. The Sisters used the combined properties as a retreat center until 2007. In 2019, they sold the then-named Elkins Estate to Landmarks Development, a boutique hospitality and development company. Landmarks has transformed Elstowe Manor into an event and hotel venue. The public rooms have been restored and the upstairs bedrooms and baths have been modified to current standards. While the property is not open to the public, the Society is fortunate for the opportunity to tour the mansion and grounds. The cost is \$30 for members and \$35 for non-members. Please use the enclosed reservation form.

### The Bryn Athyn Train Wreck

Saturday, December 6, 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 104 years ago on December 5, 1921. This head-on collision of two trains along the Newtown railway line resulted in the deaths of 26 people.

Railroad historian Larry Eastwood will give a presentation on the train wreck with a Q&A period to follow. At 2:45, a walk to the crash site will be led by Society President David Rowland. Pre-registration is required by December 3 through the Pennypack Trust web site ([www.pennypacktrust.org](http://www.pennypacktrust.org)). Pennypack Trust and Old York Road Historical Society members are free; non-members \$10. This program will be held at the Trust’s Visitors’ Center.

# A Bit of History – The County Atlas

By L. A. Feldstein

I wandered into the Old York Road Historical Society last summer looking for information on my Glenside property. Why? When making plans for a new deck, I found concrete two feet underground. This is when I fell into the 'rabbit hole' of maps and the time machine. If you have never had the opportunity to time travel at the Society stop in and do so. Go back in time and see a landscape of farmland dotted with windmills because electricity was not widely available. Fast forward twenty years and see the farmland disappear as it was replaced by houses or planned housing developments.

While maps date back to prehistoric times, the first recorded printed atlas dates from 1570 by Abraham Ortelius, a Flemish cartographer. The Society's 30 atlases date from 1871 through 1955. These large volumes have sheets measuring 20-1/2 inches by 24-1/2 inches and each volume is at least one-inch thick. They are lithographs, hand-colored, printed on heavy paper on one side only and linen-backed. This is what has enabled these books to last for over a hundred years despite repeated use.

Commonly known as County Atlases, they are unique to the United States and first appeared in 1814. In *The County Landownership Map in America* (1984), Michael Conzen tells us rapid population growth and commercial and industrial growth inspired the county mapping that would eventually be used by businesses, real estate firms, urban planners, infrastructure developers and county assessors. Over the years, County Atlases have become wonderful resources for historical research, property boundary clarification, family and local history. They are 'snapshots in time.' Year by year,

the growth of our area is documented in impressive detail.

Surveyors: There is a surprising level of exactness in the atlases. How was the final product achieved? Surveyors did the field-work. *The Evening Public Ledger* from November 22, 1920, has a help-wanted advertisement from the City of Philadelphia. A principal surveyor salary was \$2185 per year. Surveyors who were not public civil servants were often freelance and worked part time. Formal training was not required, rather, hands-on experience and apprenticeships were the norm. Surveyors were expected to own their own tools of the trade; it was a considerable investment which included: Transit, tripod, plumb bob, leveling rod, and steel tape. The Buff & Buff Manufacturing catalog from 1916 shows the total cost for these tools to be over \$200. If you were to purchase these products today from The Engineering Supply Company, it would cost approximately \$2500.

Draftsman: The surveyor's notes were given to the draftsman who then prepared the maps. Once the draftsman had the measurements and observations, he would begin the process of transforming the data into a tangible map. Franklin Survey, one of our area's larger atlas printers, employed draftsman full time. *The Evening Public Ledger* from November 22, 1920, has a help-wanted advertisement from the City of Philadelphia. A draftsman's wages were \$1200-\$1560 per year. As in the case of a surveyor, a draftsman was apprenticed and had hands-on experience.

The draftsman's work was labor-intensive and detail oriented. Property boundaries, individual buildings, property owner names, and planned development needed to be revealed in elaborate detail. An-

drew Amsterdam, owner of Franklin Survey Company tells us: "One person did the line work. Another draftsman added the large lettering. All lettering was done with a fine pen – dimensions, house numbers, etc." Mr. Amsterdam goes on to write: "The colored areas (i.e. red for brick buildings) were hand painted with watercolors using stencils. One stencil for each color. One map could be worked on as many as eight to ten times, depending on the number of colors and stencils."

Putting it all together took time. To summarize all the steps:

1. surveyor notes
2. preliminary sheets with owner's names, subdivision plans, etc.
3. pencil in the notes, ink them, draft them
4. sketch buildings, construction material, house numbers
5. one person did the line work; another did the lettering
6. print using offset process
7. after printing, sheets are varnished – stencils were cut to apply color
8. color applied with watercolor paint by hand
9. atlases assembled and bound (usually hand-sewn)

Sales and Financing: In the 1800's, atlases were sold by salesmen who went door-to-door. Michael Conzen wrote in *The County Land Ownership Map in America*: Prominent citizens were the first on the list. Requesting a pre-order of around \$10, businesses and homeowners could be persuaded to enhance their visibility by having their portrait, home, or business included. One of the strong appeals of these early atlases was having a view of the entirety of their county. The G. M. Hopkins Atlas of

1871 includes a business directory, while the J. D. Scott Atlas of 1877 includes many pages of local history and pictures of residents' dwellings.

As municipalities grew and became incorporated (Hatboro in 1871, Jenkintown in 1874, Cheltenham in 1900, and Abington in 1906) the selling of the atlases changed. Now homeowners and businesses were not necessarily the primary buyers. Municipalities, county seats, tax assessors, realtors, and property developers realized the value in the detail the atlases provided. Maps began to include lot numbers, building dimensions and street widths. Names of the property owners, churches, schools, cemeteries and hotels became part of the finished product. Atlases were also considered educational. *The Fulton County News* (Pennsylvania) reported on March 2, 1916, "in regards to the forthcoming publication of a new atlas: The present generation has very little knowledge of the geography of their own county; the coming book will give them this much needed and important information."

Eventually, financing of atlases changed to a subscription basis. Subscriptions could include the lithographically printed maps of townships, updating services, installment sales and blanket orders. Atlases sold for approximately \$15 from the late 1800's through the early 1920's. According to Andrew

Amsterdam, the atlases to be updated would be picked up and brought back to the print shop. All the revisions were on stickers along with corresponding page numbers. The stickers were then applied to the appropriate pages. If one looks carefully, the revision 'stickers' can be seen. Atlases were updated approximately every ten years.

While using red for brick buildings and green for parks may seem obvious, it is not necessarily the case. In 1881, the U. S. Geological Survey published recommended standards for color and symbols. They stressed using light colors for easier readability. In Europe in 1908, Max Eckert sought to unify map colors using an object's natural color. The International Geographical Congress agreed and confirmed this recommendation in 1913. Mapmakers, however, continue to differ on color choices. Standards for surveyors' measurements were set by the Public Land Survey System in 1785. In 1855 the first of many revisions was published.

G. Wm. Baist, born in Philadelphia in 1859, began publishing maps in 1886. He is notable because he is credited with additional detail not previously included. His maps laid out property boundaries, property ownership, building footprints, street layouts, water pipes and sewer lines. With the inclusion of this level of detail, the atlas now became invaluable for urban plan-

ning, real estate developers and insurers.

Today, the atlases are used as reference material for historians, researchers, and homeowners interested in the history of their property, and on occasion, genealogy. Atlases can be matted, framed and hung on the wall. Full of surprises and amazing information, the atlas collection at the Old York Road Historical Society is our most-used resource. It is no wonder that their pages are well-worn and torn. Over the years, hundreds of our patrons have wanted to know "what was there before my house was built?" In fact, the atlases are time machines. You may even see your house and the name of the previous owner. The first half of the 20th century, before digital technologies became the norm, atlases were a marriage of hand-crafted and detail-oriented work – a wonderful combination of art and information. Come see us and use our time machine.

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*L. A. Feldstein has been a Wednesday volunteer at the Society since 2024. Recently retired from a long career in finance, she holds a B.A. from Chestnut Hill College where she majored in History. She would like to thank the librarians at Abington Free Library and historian and archivist Jefferson Moak for their support of this project.*

## Events of Local Interest Including Society Open House

There are two history related community events coming soon:

**Camp William Penn and Historic LaMott Day**, Saturday, September 20 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on the grounds and surrounding areas of the LaMott Community Center at the corner of Sycamore and Willow Avenues.

**Richard Wall Museum Open House**, Sunday, October 19 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Richard Wall House Museum at 1 Wall Park Drive, Elkins Park. The Society will have a table at this event.

In addition, October is Archives Month in Philadelphia, and the Society is participating for the first time in Archives Month Philly, a month-long schedule of events celebrating archives, the work of archivists, and the rich history of the area held in archives, which is being held across the Delaware Valley. The Society will host an Open House on Wednesday, October 22, from 5 to 8 p.m. at its headquarters in Alverthorpe Manor. Tours of the archives will be conducted and refreshments will be served.

# Archival Donations

The Society has received a number of significant donations since February including the following:

- A 1958 painting by Eleanor Glanz of the Abington Bank and Trust Company building at the northeast corner of Old York and Susquehanna Roads, from Richard Sautter.
- A collection of photographic negatives documenting civic events in Cheltenham Township during the 1940s, from Walter Scott.
- An outdoor school banner that hung at St Basil's Academy, from the Sisters of Saint Basil.
- A number of Jenkintown High School yearbooks, from Murray Levin, and nearly 30 Bishop McDevitt High School yearbooks, from Dan Greenberg and the Friends of Bishop McDevitt.
- A collection of real photo postcards documenting buildings and events along the Old York Road from Oak Lane to Hatboro, from David Rowland.
- Papers, letters, photographs, ephemera, business records, and other materials of the Feidt family to be added to the existing Feidt Family Papers Collection, from Ario Rivera.
- Photographs and memorabilia of Rita Thompson Myers during her time at Abington Memorial Hospital School of Nursing (1951-1953) and employment with the American Red Cross (1973-1982), from Daniel Myers.
- Records from the Retired Executives and Professionals (REAP) that will be added to the existing collection, from Marion Rosenbaum.
- Six volumes of *Scientific American Architect and Builders News* spanning the period 1888 to 1892 that will be added to the existing run of the periodical, from David Rowland.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The following are the officers and directors for the Society's 2025-2026 program year:

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

Directors: Leslie Bell, Bryan Havir, Maria Paula Mugnani, James Rubillo, Sharee Solow, Stephanie Walsh.

Directors Emeriti: Martha McDonough and Mildred Wintz.

## Society Membership Information

### Membership Renewal

Now is the time to renew your membership! 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 2025 to the summer of 2026, the date on your label should be "2026." 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.

### IRA Donations

For the past several years, many folks have taken the opportunity to donate their required minimum distribution (RMD) to charitable causes. As a 501(c)(3) organization, the Society qualifies as a worthy cause for your IRA donations.

### Making a Bequest

Updating your will? Please consider including a bequest naming 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

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515 Meetinghouse Road  
Jenkintown, PA 19046

215 - 886 - 8590

### Archive Research Hours

Tuesdays, 12 noon to 3:00 p.m.  
Wednesdays, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.  
Or by appointment

### Society's Website

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

### Society's E-mail Address

[OldYorkRoadHistory@gmail.com](mailto:OldYorkRoadHistory@gmail.com)