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# The Corridor

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Volume XXXV, No. 1

Newsletter of the Old York Road Historical Society

Spring 2026

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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. The programs are also accessible live via Zoom. The lecture series is sponsored by a grant from the Jenkinstown Lyceum and all programs are offered free of charge.

**March 11 – Little Known Revolutionary War Naval Encounters from Philadelphia to Cape May** – Local historian Jim Rubillo will discuss three seldom mentioned British naval actions in our region, the Battle of Turtle Gut Inlet, the Siege of Fort Mifflin, and the Battle of Cape May. In the Turtle Gut incident a young privateer, named John Barry, exhibited the strategic capabilities and courage that eventually led to his fame as a founding father of the U.S. Navy. These three military encounters each contributed to the American quest for independence.

**April 8 – The Many Bells of Independence Hall** – Independence National Historic Park volunteer Ranger Jeffrey Hill will talk about the various bells that hung at Independence Hall from the earliest “Province Bell” to the “Centennial Bell” that hangs in the tower today. The “Liberty Bell” was bell number four. Each bell has a unique and interesting story, with many of the bells used in various historical events that contributed to the overall significance of Independence Hall.

**May 13 – Camp William Penn** – Local historian and author Donald Scott will speak about Camp William Penn, the first and largest federal Civil War facility under President Abraham Lincoln’s Bureau of United States Colored Troops (USCT) to train Black soldiers during the war, in what is today the LaMott section of Cheltenham Township. Camp William Penn hosted many of the great anti-slavery abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Robert Purvis, Lucretia Mott and William Still. Nearly 11,000 soldiers were trained in the eleven regiments that mustered out, later to fight in a slew of major battles. Three members of the 6th USCT earned the Medal of Honor for their bravery, and many others gave their lives.

## GLENSIDE BOOK LAUNCH PARTY

Society Vice President Thomas Wieckowski has recently written a book on the early history of Glenside. Entitled, *A History of Early Glenside*, and published by The History Press, the book traces how the Glenside community developed out of a formerly pastoral landscape. The narrative history is well illustrated with many images from the Society’s collections. To celebrate this wonderful addition to the published history of our area, the Society is hosting a book launch party at Glenside’s Memorial Hall (185 South Keswick Avenue, parking at the Glenside Library). As a special offer, Society members can purchase a copy for \$20 at the reception. The reception is free for members and the purchase of the book (\$25) for all others. Please see the enclosed flyer.

## Happenings Along the Corridor

(Events are open to the public free of charge.)

### Northeast Philadelphia History Fair

The Friends of Northeast Philadelphia History is hosting its bi-annual history fair on Saturday, April 11 from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM at Cannstatter Volkfest Verein, 9130 Academy Road, Philadelphia, 19114. There will be many historical societies and organizations (including the Society) present from Philadelphia, Montgomery and Bucks counties.

### History Unleashed – Greater Whitemarsh 250

The Greater Whitemarsh History Consortium is hosting its inaugural event at St Thomas’ Episcopal Church in Whitemarsh on Sunday afternoon, April 12 from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. The Society will have a table at this event celebrating 250 years of shared history in the Whitemarsh Valley and surrounding areas. Festivities include performances by the Philly Fife and Drum Company, a Colonial flag presentation, costumed reenactors, patriotic face painting, and historical society and site information booths, with Colonial desserts and snacks for sale.

*The Annual Meeting of the Society will precede the May lecture. Officer and Committee reports will be given and the Nominating Committee will present a slate of Officers and Directors to be elected for the 2026-2027 program year.*

# Acquisition Challenge Campaign

The Society was very fortunate to receive a gift of \$10,000 from Barbara Kotzin through the Serody Family Trust to be used for acquisitions. The gift was a matching gift and so the Society set out to raise an additional \$10,000. Thanks to all the donors listed below and their overwhelming generosity, the Society raised over \$22,000!

For those who contributed \$50 or more to the campaign, we will have a reception on Sunday afternoon, March 29<sup>th</sup> at Alverthorpe Manor (invitation enclosed on purple paper). Many of the purchases will be on display and there will be brief remarks about the significance of some of the items. Again, the Society wishes to express its deep appreciation to Barbara Kotzin and all the donors who made this possible:

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## Recent Archival Donations

The Society is pleased to have received a number of gifts over the past several months including the following:

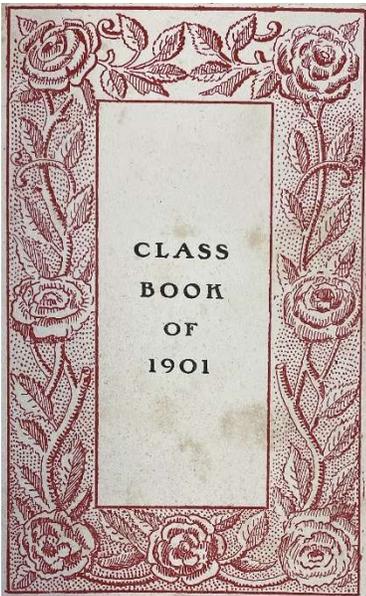
- Group of photographs of Jenkintown events, places and people collected by former Jenkintown Police Chief, the late Louis J. Murray, from Mary Flannagan Murray.
- Abington Friends School yearbooks (16), from Toni Vahlsing, Director of Libraries, Abington Friends School.
- Beaver College scrapbook, 1937-38, from Donna Fluegel.
- A collection of family and estate items of Rodman Wanamaker and his family including photographs, his daughter's wedding album, and correspondence between Rodman and his mother, from Tom Keels.
- Scrapbook of the flower shows of the Jenkintown Home and School Association, 1983-85, from Jane Bales.

# A Bit of History – The 1901 Ogontz School Yearbook

By James M. Rubillo

The Society's archive has a collection of yearbooks from many of the schools in the Old York Road area. The oldest of these yearbooks is a tattered and delicate copy of the 1901 Yearbook of the Ogontz School for Young Ladies then located in Elkins Park on the former estate of Civil War financier Jay Cooke. For thirty-four years the school student body of about a hundred privileged girls thrived at the ornate Victorian Cooke mansion.

The 1901 yearbook describes many of the activities of the class during their senior year. One long-standing class tradition was held on Halloween night. On that evening the class donned their graduation caps and gowns. That night the class motto, class song, class sponsor, and honorary member were all revealed. The yearbook prominently featured a picture of the



1901 honorary member, Jay Cooke. As evident by the article in the yearbook, Cooke served as a mentor for the class.

Other sections of the book describe the "Class Spree" held on the Wednesday before Commencement. It describes the antics of this "illustrious and largest class

Ogontz has ever known." They donned bright red scarlet suits, and seizing lighted torches, marched across the estate singing their class song until they stood below the window of the school principal, Miss Sylvia Eastman. There in a bright red light, they sang, "Here's



to you, Miss Eastman." As written in the book, "They sang bravely with their hearts in their voices, yet many tried to hold back tears." After singing the praises of their teachers, they marched to an area where a bonfire was blazing. Once there, the class members, amid enthusiastic cheers, bid goodbye to their school days by burning their classroom notebooks. They let loose and enjoyed the close bond they shared with their classmates.

The yearbook also featured the complete text of the sermon delivered at the Sunday morning Baccalaureate service as well as the sermon, *Beauty and Bands*, delivered at Commencement. This yearbook, which also contains the photographs and comments about all of the class members, provides a peek into the fashions, interests, and customs of the time.

The Ogontz School for Young Ladies operated from 1850 until 1950. Among its most notable attendees and/or graduates are:

- Legendary aviatrix Amelia Earhart (attended 1916-1918).
- Mary Curtis Bok Zimbalist founder of the Curtis Institute of Music.
- Well-known artist Eleanor Massey (nee Bridges) who also taught at Vassar College.
- Metropolitan Opera lyric soprano Queena Mario (nee Tillotson),
- Popular singer Evelyn Duerler who had a career in films and light opera under the stage name of Evelyn Case.
- Betty Huyler (Gillies), Winnabelle Coffe (Pierce) and Cornelia Fort were all ferrying pilots (supplies and equipment) during World War II. When Fort's plane crashed in a routine flight over Texas, she became the first woman in active duty to die in that war; and
- Nancy McFeely (Rogers) produced a son who became known internationally for his television program, *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*.

You may have access to your own school yearbook. However, you may find it interesting to explore the yearbook of a parent, friend, mentor, or ancestor. One of our yearbooks may provide you with insights, information, and photographs of someone from your past. They are sitting on our shelves awaiting your exploration.

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*James M. Rubillo is a retired college dean, professor, and non-profit CEO. He is a prolific and well-travelled speaker who has an intense interest in local history. He serves on the Society's Board of Directors.*

# THANKS TO OUR MAJOR MEMBERSHIP DONORS

The Society gratefully recognizes those who have so far supported our work for the 2026 program year through membership at the Patron level and above.

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## Membership Reminder

We are midway through our 2025-2026 membership year. If the mailing label on your envelope does not read "2026" 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. It is the dedicated support by members that keeps the Society operating.