



PO Box 564
Flourtown, PA 19031
215-233-4600
www.springfieldhistory.org

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The Challenge

PRESERVATION • RESEARCH • EDUCATION

WICKED PHILADELPHIA SIN IN THE CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

A Presentation by Mr. Thomas Keels

Thursday, March 25th, 2010 – 7:30 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church

Bethlehem Pike & East Mill Road in Flourtown, PA

Prim and proper Philadelphia has been rocked by the clash between excessive vice and social virtue since its citizens burned the city's biggest brothel in 1800. With tales of grave robbers in South Philadelphia and harlots in Franklin Square, *Wicked Philadelphia: Sin in the City of Brotherly Love* reveals the shocking underbelly of Philadelphia. In one notorious scam, a washerwoman masqueraded as the fictional Spanish countess Anita de Bettencourt for two decades, bilking millions from victims and even fooling the government of Spain. From an 1843 media frenzy that ensued after an aristocrat abducted a young girl to a churchyard transformed into a brothel (complete with a carousel) this presentation will unearth a history of Philadelphia's most scintillating scandals and corrupt characters.

Please join us as STHS welcomes back Mr. Tom Keels. Tom will provide us a rollicking history from pictures and information researched for his latest book, published by History Press, Inc. Tom is the author of numerous publications, including "Chestnut Hill," "Forgotten Philadelphia: Lost Architecture of the Quaker City" and "Philadelphia Graveyards and Cemeteries." A member of the Springfield Township Historical Society, he has spoken to the Society in the past on topics such as Philadelphia architecture and Laurel Hill.

This promises to be an exciting and educational program on an interesting topic of Philadelphia history. The public is invited to attend, and there is no charge for admission. Reservations are not required. Light refreshments will be served.



For more information visit www.springfieldhistory.org
or call 215-233-4600

President's Corner

Happy New Year, 2010! This promises to be another exciting year for the Historical Society, as we head into our 25th year of existence. We welcomed three new Board members in January, are preparing to move into our new home in the Black Horse Inn, and have kicked off a Community History Documentation project to capture stories from Springfield's past and current residents. I want to share some excerpts from letters we've received already, with the hope that it inspires you to send us some of your own memories.

Robert Voigt (Erdenheim, 1943-1963): *"My earliest memories date to the mid 1940's when the entire neighborhood celebrated the announcement of the end of the second World War by marching around on the streets banging pots and pans, blowing musical horns and cheering wildly. My friends and I would trap rabbits in the field (woods) behind Chesney Lane. Mr. Rich would pay us 75 cents for the live rabbits which he took up to a game preserve in northern PA."*

Dick Gregory (Flourtown, 1926-1962): *"Everyday we walked to grade school where Miss E.T. Comley was our teacher. At this time, there were only seven streets in Flourtown and we knew every person by name. One of our favorite places to ride our bikes was the neighborhood swimming hole at Wissahickon Creek. My mother warned me not to wear out my bathing suit, and I 'obeyed' by sometimes stripping down to my skinnies."*

Jane E. Freas (Oreland, 1947-1963): *"The local business I remember best was Danny's Market. It always smelled so good in there! Lunch meat, pickles, fresh bread. It made you hungry as soon as you walked in. I also used to get a lot of vanilla Cokes at Perkel's Pharmacy. They were the kind that had to be mixed. Somehow the more recent ones just don't taste the same as the old fashioned kind. There was a store right by the West Oreland School called Daniel's Sweet Shop. I have a lot of cavities from what I bought in that store!"*

Esther Bonnie Rosa Cintron (Wyndmoor, 1940-1964): *"The*

firehouse was on Queen Street and we had dance classes upstairs, held once a week so that we could become acquainted with ballroom dancing. One could never forget the grandeur of the Stotesbury Mansion. The breathtaking view gazing through the massive gates on Willow Grove Avenue led one to believe in fairy tales. There was no Whitemarsh Village then and the scenery was spectacular."

Walter L. Ritter, III (Erdenheim, 1952-1965): *"The local 'hang-out' was Groves Hoagie Shop on Bethlehem Pike, located just at the beginning of the steep incline on the Pike that leads to Chestnut Hill. Groves made the best hoagies outside of South Philly for 25 cents, and an extra nickel would get it toasted with cheese. There used to be a bowling alley at Haws Lane and Bethlehem Pike with a jukebox that seemed to always be playing Rosemary Clooney's 'Come On-A My House'. Many of us earned extra money by being 'pin boys'. The pay wasn't great but we managed to get free Cokes and bowling."*

Barry Hoefermann (Enfield, 1943-Present): *"I visited the (Enfield) post office as a child to mail packages with my mother in the mid 1940's. It was in the building which is presently the dentist's (Dr. Davis') office. There was no red light at Paper Mill and Church Road. Paper Mill and Oreland Mill had stop signs at the time. I can also remember when they were building the development at Marks Road which was at the low spot of an old farm (whose) clay in that area was yellow."*

I encourage you to send us one or more of your own stories of living in Springfield Township. All you have to do is fill out the form included in this newsletter, and mail it back to us. In this way, you'll help preserve a little bit more of Springfield's past for future generations to enjoy.

Keeping the past in the present,

Ed Zwicker

Richard Wood Snowden Receives Marie Kitto Memorial Award

The Springfield Township Historical Society presented its Marie Kitto Memorial Award to Richard Wood Snowden at its annual meeting on December 3. The award is given in memory of Kitto, a founder of the Historical Society in 1985, to a person who has made significant contributions to the Historical Society's tenets of research, preservation, and education.

"This year's recipient has quietly demonstrated a strong commitment to preserving Springfield Township's history over parts of the last three decades. For his inspiration he had to look no further than his own grandmother, Virginia Wilmsen, who herself was one of the founders of the Historical Society along with Marie Kitto and others," STHS president Ed Zwicker said, while presenting the award.

Through the years, Snowden, along with his grandmother, worked behind the scenes to protect some of Springfield Township's larger tracts from becoming high-density developments. Some examples include three Wyndmoor properties: Griffiths Tract (Biddle Woods), Stenton Avenue and Paper Mill Road; Buttonwood Farms on Montgomery Avenue, and Lane's End, the Wharton Sinkler Estate at Gravers Lane and Flourtown Avenue.

High-density development had been proposed for the Griffiths Tract property to create apartments and a shopping center. Snowden became involved and was instrumental in finding a solution whereby a limited number of houses would be constructed with the open space protected by easements, which were donated to the Natural Lands Trust.

When a nursing home was proposed for construction on the site of Buttonwood Farms, Snowden assisted in making the development work with the retention of the main house as a single-family house and the retention of the barn and conversion to a single family house. There were easements taken to protect the house and land in perpetuity.

At the time the University of Pennsylvania announced the sale of Lane's End and there was discussion of the potential for new construction on the site, Snowden lent his expertise to help retain all of the existing buildings and protect all open space.

In addition, over the years when the Historical Society was in need of a home, Snowden has provided a location in which to store archives where researchers could access them.



Richard Wood Snowden was presented with the Marie Kitto Award by the Springfield Township Historical Society for his work to protect several tracts of land in Wyndmoor. The award was a framed copy of an 1877 map of Springfield Township.

STHS Board of Directors Update

Recent months have seen changes on the Springfield Township Historical Society board of directors. **Christine Fisher Smith** stepped down from the board in December after many years of service, but will continue to be active in the society. **Alessandra Cartelli**, **Ed Welch** and **Vincent Bruner** joined the board in January.

Alessandra, who brings a love of history of Springfield Township and Chestnut Hill, is a former reference librarian at the Free Library of Springfield Township. She is a volunteer in the archives at the Chestnut Hill Historical Society.

Ed, who has an undergraduate degree in history, is a volunteer firefighter at the Wyndmoor Hose Company and author of the Wyndmoor Hose Company Centennial History. He recalls meeting Marie Kitto, an STHS founder, at a time when he was a school bus driver for her tours on which she and a history teacher would narrate township history. He is now a ranger and researcher at Independence National Historic Park.

Vince, a freelance writer who occasionally works in commercial production, considers himself fortunate to have grown up in Springfield. He believes that among the things that make Springfield a great place in which to live is its sense of community. An area's history provides perspective and it helps to tie people together because it is something that all can share and provides a sense of place, he said.

Christine, who worked on many projects and initiatives over the years, including programs, newsletter and special events, was responsible for setting up the historical society website and will continue to serve as its webmaster.

Over the years, Christine made arrangements for the historical society programs, edited the newsletter and worked on special projects and events such as the society's Marie Kitto Award and at the historical society tables at the township Community Day and Wyndmoor's American Legion Post Memorial Day ceremony, among many others.

The Board of Directors would like to extend its sincere thanks to Christine for the generosity of her time and energy she has given to the historical society over the years.

Springfield Township Historical Society president **Ed Zwicker** (right) recently welcomed **James Garrison**, author of *Houses of Philadelphia: Chestnut Hill and the Wissahickon Valley, 1880-1930*. Garrison gave a lively presentation on many of the great estates in the township, sharing his research, historic and current photographs, and his knowledge of local architecture.



Holiday Houses at Paper Mill Glen

In 1955, the Holiday at Paper Mill Glen housing development introduced split level home design to Springfield Township. The development is located in Erdenheim in the area of Paper Mill Road and Cheltenham Avenue. Architect Thomas Brandow touted his design as a "house created for the happiness and completeness of family living."

Holiday House residents Nancy McDonald and Michael Grothusen recently donated a copy of an advertisement for the Holiday homes to the archives that was provided by their neighbor, Jack Roback. It contains both exterior and interior drawings and descriptive language that is obviously written to entice new home buyers. For example, wouldn't you be intrigued if you read:



"From the time you drive into the oversized garage with its oversized door until you fall asleep in one of three large, delightful bedrooms you are aware that 'Holiday' is contemporary design at its zenith. Over 300 square feet of carefully distributed storage space includes unusually large closets and a tremendous 11 foot storage wall in the family room."

Other rooms in the house are also highlighted in the brochure. The foyer has mahogany walls, flagstone paved floor and expansive glass windows. The family room boasts a living area with a 37 foot panorama. The spacious living-dining room has a double window wall that looks out onto a rear terrace.

The kitchen is situated in the front of the house. Cabinets are solid maple with walnut and white accent. Apparently very desirable at the time were the pure white formica work surfaces on the base cabinets.

Bathrooms included a hall bath with tub and a master bathroom with a stall shower. There is also a powder room located off the family room.

Lots were advertised to be a minimum of 80' x 155' or a total of 12,500 square feet.

So next time you drive by Paper Mill Road and Cheltenham Avenue look for the Holiday houses, "an exciting new departure in split level home design...in an established, gracious community."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Holiday Houses are located in Erdenheim on the following streets: Fraser Road, Atwood Road, Bent Lane, Harston Road and Haus Lane. The author of this article, John Frantz, is a volunteer at the Springfield Township Historical Society archives.

Help make STHS a bit greener:

In our efforts to save trees and postage, and to see *The Challenge* in full color, provide us with your email address and future issues and special notices will be sent electronically.

Emails should be directed to: contact@springfieldhistory.org. Please remember to include your name and address.

BECOME A FRIEND OF STHS

To continue to receive *The Challenge* in paper format or our e-newsletter, readers must sign up as a Friend.

As a Friend, you will help to support our mission of "Research, Preservation and Education," and you will receive:

- Four issues of our newsletter, *The Challenge*.
- Discounts on programs and activities (bus trips, tours, etc.).
- Discounts on gift items such as books, maps, prints and tiles.
- Recognition of your contribution in our year-end issue of *The Challenge*.

Members contributing at the William Penn level will also be invited to attend a year-end party held at an historic Springfield home.

To sign up as a Friend, please visit our website: www.springfieldhistory.org

Share your Memories

Please help in our efforts to document local history by completing the Community History Documentation Form which is included as an insert in this edition of **The Challenge**. Additional copies can be downloaded from our website www.springfieldhistory.org. Encourage your friends and neighbors to share their memories of life in Springfield Township.

Archives Report

The archives continue to grow thanks to our generous donors. Suzanne Repasky donated 19th century deeds, wills and other miscellaneous papers from the Maquire family who lived at 9401 Stenton Avenue and Richard Snowden donated two Edward Stotesbury deeds dating to the early 20th century. Nancy McDonald and Michael Grothusen donated a copy of a brochure on the Holiday Houses at Paper Mill Glen (see related article in this issue of *The Challenge*.) Our own Ed Zwicker added a copy of an article about the Newbold estate from *Country Life* magazine, 1929.

The date for our move to the Black Horse Inn is getting closer and we hope to be in this Spring. With the move will come the opportunity to be open to the public for set hours each week. We will be needing several more volunteers to staff the archives and assist visitors with research. Please call 215 233-4600 or email Susan Anthony at swanthyony_sths@comcast.net if you can help us. You need not be available on a weekly basis, though that is preferable.



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