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## MAY 2010

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# The Challenge

**PRESERVATION • RESEARCH • EDUCATION**

## The History, Music, and Souvenirs of Willow Grove Park

A Presentation by Mr. Richard Karschner

**Wednesday, May 26th, 2010 – 7:30 p.m.**

**First Presbyterian Church**

*Bethlehem Pike & East Mill Road in Flourtown, PA*

Many local residents have fond memories of Willow Grove Park, which operated from 1896 until 1975. The park was conceived by the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company, as a trolley park to encourage weekend riders to utilize the trolley line. In its heyday, Willow Grove was one of the premier amusement parks in the United States and hosted some of the greatest musicians of the day, including the world famous John Philip Sousa, Walter Damrosch, Arthur Pryor and others. Tens of thousands visited the Park daily to behold these world-class concerts, as well as to be captivated by attractions such as the Electric Fountain shows in the center of the Park's expansive lake, roller coasters, toboggan rides and two magnificent carousels.

**WILLOW GROVE  
PARK**



Please join us as STHS welcomes Mr. Richard Karschner, who will present the history of Willow Grove Park through a combination of photos, music, and souvenirs from this historical landmark. Richard spent more than thirty years as a high school band director. Having directed award-winning concerts, marching and jazz bands as well as more than twenty-five musicals, he is familiar with a wide variety of styles of music. After 32 years in the public schools, Karschner retired to continue his interest in historic band music and Willow Grove Park. The *WGPark.com* website, which he helped design, includes perhaps the most comprehensive information about the history of the park and the famous conductors who performed there. His lecture-demonstration will focus on the history, music and musicians who helped make Willow Grove Park the Summer Capitol of the United States.

This promises to be an exciting and educational program. 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](http://www.springfieldhistory.org)  
or call 215-233-4600*

# President's Corner

The Springfield Township Historical Society and its relationship with the Black Horse Inn date back to 1988, when the Society applied to have the Inn registered on the National Historic Register. A year later the application was approved, but then-owner Robert McCloskey declined to have it listed. After Mr. McCloskey's death in 1992, his estate actively sought buyers for the Inn and its surrounding property. When the first real estate group purchased it shortly thereafter, it would be the start of a decade long roller coaster of activity to determine the final fate of the Inn. Ultimately several private and public groups, including the Historical Society, came together to ensure the Inn would be preserved and restored.

Throughout the course of the Historical Society's twenty-five years of existence, it has resided in several different, temporary locations. But clearly, the ultimate goal has always been to establish a permanent home within Springfield Township, ideally in a historic structure and most certainly with easy accessibility for those who wish to visit it and take advantage of all that it has to offer. This dream is about to be realized, as the Historical Society is making its final plans for moving into the Inn, and calling it their permanent home.

The Society's Officers and Board of Directors are very excited about the Society's imminent move. They also know that this will take a lot of hard work and considerable people, material, and financial resources, both initially and on a sustainable basis going forward. For starters, the Society's collection requires shelving and boxes for safe storage. An updated computer and printer would provide a more efficient and faster medium for cataloging and accessing the collection for researchers. Glass display cases and picture frames would allow

for secure viewing of the collection in the museum and common areas of the Inn. We are off to a good start thanks to a matching grant from the Tedyuscung Questers group, which will provide \$500 for matting and framing of historic photographs. But the Society needs your help too! Donated items such as those described above will help outfit our headquarters as it continues to expand and serve the public.

The Society's other major resource need is people. We have a talented and dedicated group of volunteers today that help catalog and file the artifacts in our collection. In addition we have a paid archivist who plans and oversees the operations of our headquarters. With the move into the Inn, our goal is to be open on a regularly scheduled basis. This will require additional volunteers willing to man the headquarters during selected daytime, nighttime, and possibly weekend hours. This is a very rewarding experience, as you'll have an opportunity to work with our archives, and to meet and assist local, regional, and international researchers who regularly avail themselves of the Society's collection. Over time we intend to add a small gift shop to complement the research and museum components of our headquarters, and overseeing that would be part of the duties as well.

The Society's move into the Black Horse Inn has been a long time in coming. Today we need your help as a Friend of the Society to make our organization successful and allow others to enjoy and take advantage of it in the years to come. Please contact us at 215-233-4600 if you are willing to donate your time, materials, or treasures to the Society's collection and headquarters. Any and all contributions are valuable and greatly appreciated!

*Keeping the past in the present,*  
Ed Zwicker

## AFTERNOON AT BELCROFT

Fifty-five "Friends" of the Springfield Township Historical Society attended an April 18 reception hosted by the Historical Society at "Belcroft," the 1927 house designed by Carl A. Ziegler for Clarence M. Brown, a lawyer and businessman. Located on the campus of La Salle College High School in Wyndmoor, "Belcroft" is home to 15 Christian Brothers who are current or retired teachers and administrators at the school.

The guests were among the Springfield Township residents and business owners who made William Penn-level donations to the Historical Society last year in a township-wide appeal as the Historical Society transitioned from a member-based organization to a Friends-based organization.

The reception included presentations on "The Gilded Age" by Historical

Society president Ed Zwicker; "Belcroft's Notable Neighbors" by STHS board member Edward J. Welch and on "Clarence Brown and Belcroft" by STHS board member Vincent Bruner. Joy Zwicker served on the event committee with her husband, Welch and Bruner. Violin accompaniment was presented by Temple University music major Liz Zook. Food and refreshments were donated by *Scoogi's*, *Sorella Rose*, *Flourtown Bakery*, *Mindy's Desserts* and *Big Top Beverage*.

In his presentation, Ed Zwicker said that the term "Gilded Age" was coined by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner in an 1873 satire to describe a period begun at the conclusion of the Civil War that exhibited wealth achieved in coal mining, steel, automobiles, railroads, oil, finance/banking, traction/trolley



*STHS president Ed Zwicker (center) with reception guests Jack Lieberman, former Chestnut Hill Historical Society president Patricia Marion Cove, STHS founder and advisory board member Shirley Hanson and Carol Lieberman.*

*Photo courtesy of Katie Worrall.*

companies. Congressional laws helped open the door for this monopolistic accumulation of wealth. Springfield's entrance into the Gilded Age began with the introduction of railroads entering the township in 1855. Prior to that there were gentlemen's farms and cottages in Springfield, but required a two-hour horse drawn carriage ride to get there from Philadelphia. Railroads coming into Wyndmoor and Chestnut

Hill allowed for quicker access to Springfield and their large "cottages." These cottages were built to escape the heat and sickness in the city during the summer months and included homes on Wyndmoor streets such as: Gravers Lane, Montgomery Avenue, Evergreen Avenue, Ardmore Avenue, and Willow Grove Avenue. The definitive end of the Gilded Age is debatable, but several events certainly contributed to



## Community History Documentation Project

In upcoming issues of "The Challenge," we will be sharing with our readers some of the recollections of life in the township that we have received through our Community History Documentation Project:

“ I lived across the street from the Stotesbury Mansion. I have many fond memories of my sister and I playing there. The Pennsalt (later changed to the Pennwalt) Chemical Company occupied the Mansion. Everyday at noon there was a loud siren that blew which at first scared me but later I got used to it! My sister and I built forts, climbed on the statues and I was always over there climbing trees! ”

Karen Vaughan (Wyndmoor resident, 1952 to present)

“ Buckley's Variety Store was right on the corner of Plymouth Ave. and Roesch where you could go in and get a cherry coke made from syrup not poured from a bottle – you could also get a milkshake and strings of red licorice and even order a cheesesteak from Mr. Buckley and sit at the old fashioned counter. ”

John A. D'Lauro (Oreland resident)

The *Community History Documentation Project* seeks to acquire personal recollections from township residents and former residents about the people, places and events that shaped the history of our township.

Please help in our efforts to document local history by completing the Community History Documentation Form which is available for download at our website, [www.springfield-history.org](http://www.springfield-history.org). Encourage your friends and neighbors to share their memories of life in Springfield Township.



Springfield Township Historical Society president Ed Zwicker (center) presented the Christian Brothers with a framed picture of early photographs of Belcroft, their residence on the campus of La Salle College High School, in gratitude for opening Belcroft to the Historical Society for a patrons' reception. Accepting the picture on behalf of the Christian Brothers were Brother Thomas Chadwick (left) and Brother James Rieck. Belcroft was designed by architect Carl A. Ziegler and built in 1927 for lawyer and businessman Clarence M. Brown. The reception, for individuals who made a donation of \$100 or more to the society in its 2009 township-wide appeal, included presentations on "The Gilded Age," "Belcroft's Notable Neighbors," and "Clarence Brown and Belcroft."

Photo courtesy of Jack P. Lieberman.

Guests were entertained by violinist Liz Zook, a Temple University music major.



it, including the 1912 sinking of the Titanic, Woodrow Wilson's federal income tax legislation in 1913, the United States' entry into World War I in 1917, and the 1929 Stock Market crash. Remnants of the Gilded Age still exist in Springfield today, as exemplified by some remains of Edward Stotesbury's Whitmarsh Hall.

Welch focused his remarks on Laverock Farm, the 1920s house designed to resemble a Normandy farmstead by the Philadelphia architecture firm of Mellor Meigs and Howe for Arthur Emlen Newbold, Jr., in the mold of French, English, Italian and Spanish architecture. The 100-acre property bordering "Belcroft" was a farm

where everything that was grown and raised was consumed. Welch said that the farm resembled the fantasy world of "Peaceable Kingdom," as a recluse from the world at the end of the driveway. He said that it exemplified Thomas Jefferson's ideal of the United States as an agrarian economy, as opposed to Alexander Hamilton's concept of the country as an industrial economy. At the time Laverock Farm was built, the U.S. was still largely an agrarian economy. (Now, less than two percent of farms feed the entire country.) The house was torn down in

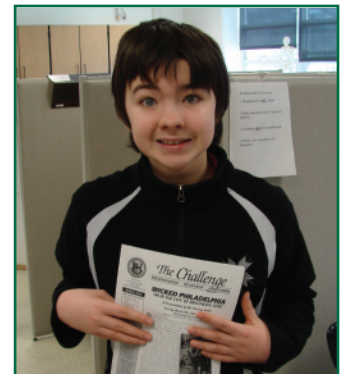
## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

### ARCHIVES ASSISTANCE

The STHS archives will be moving into the Black Horse Inn in June. Once we have settled in, we will need volunteers to open the archives and address researchers. Ideally, volunteers would commit to lunchtime hours, one day per week. No experience is required. This is a great opportunity to serve your community, meet other history-minded neighbors, and help others to learn about the rich history of Springfield Township.

### EVENTS PLANNING COMMITTEE

STHS is looking for volunteers to serve on a committee to plan occasional historical society events and gatherings. Serving on the committee is a wonderful opportunity to work with others interested in helping STHS to remain visible in the community and available to serve as the main repository for Springfield Township's history.



Springfield Middle School student **SEAN MADDEN** proudly holds a recent issue of the Society newsletter. Sean and a few of his classmates collated and assembled our paper copies of the newsletter for mailing. We appreciate their help!

## 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](mailto:contact@springfieldhistory.org). Please remember to include your name and address.

the 1950s and the land is now home to many houses. Welch cited "An American Country House," by Mellor, Meigs and Howe partner Arthur Meigs

Bruner described Clarence Brown as "of the Gilded Age, but not a titan" and "Belcroft" as "comfortable." Born in New York in 1868, Brown earned his high school diploma in an equivalent to today's GED program, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in law and went on to become chairman of the board and general counsel to Pittsburgh Plate Glass. He and his wife Louella and their four children lived on Hortter Street in West Mt. Airy before "Belcroft."

Designed by Philadelphia architect Carl Ziegler, Belcroft was intended to be in harmony with its surroundings in both scale and style. The interior was designed to be luxurious but not opulent and featured white paneled walls and moulding. Brown died in 1958 and the Christian Brothers moved to the property from the La Salle College campus in 1960. Although the house has been preserved, additions include a chapel and bedrooms for the brothers.

The Historical Society board starts its 2010 Friends campaign this month and is making plans for a reception. For more information, call 215-233-4600.

## THE EARLY DAYS OF ERDENHEIM FARM

There are a few words common to all present-day descriptions of Erdenheim Farm, the bucolic estate nestled on 423 acres in Springfield and Whitemarsh Townships: "idyllic," "pastoral," "tranquil," "soothing," all expressing the sensory experience of walking or driving along the public roads that border and pass through the property.

The panorama of rolling hills, flowered meadows and lush pastures grazed by contented thoroughbred horses, Black Angus cattle, and Cheviot Sheep inspires in viewers the warm certainty that all is now, and always has been, peaceful and serene at Erdenheim.

Perception, however, is sometimes far from reality.

The written history of the farm and its various owners is rife with incidents of arson, home invasion, military skirmishes, buried corpses and cemetery desecration, events not normally conducive to domestic tranquility. Obviously much has happened on the land since September 16, 1751 when a young man named Johannes George Hocker stepped ashore in Philadelphia.

Hocker was 18 years old when he arrived from Wurtemberg, Germany. He soon moved to Lancaster County where relatives helped him settle into his adopted country, and he later took a wife, Margarettta. On September 24, 1760 in Cocalico Township, he swore the required oath of allegiance to Great Britain.

Like all young people with pioneering spirits, Johannes (now shortened to John) was hard-working and thrifty, so much so that in 1765, only 14 years after his arrival in America, he was able to purchase 200 acres of land in the western outskirts of Philadelphia, bestowing upon it the name "Erdenheim," which in German means "Earthly Home."

So begins a saga stretching over 245 years with all the joys and sorrows, challenges and accomplishments attendant to rural life in early America.

Though the Hockers apparently lived peacefully on their land during the next twelve years, the calm was shattered early in the foggy morning of October 4, 1777 when George Washington and his army were stealthily advancing through the countryside to engage the British troops under General Howe in the small hamlet of Germantown.

Washington's plan to surprise the British, conceived while camped at the homestead of Peter Wentz in Worcester Township, called for Generals Greene and Stephen to advance along the Skippack Road and Generals Sullivan and Wayne to march down what is now Ridge Pike. Between these two "pincers" bracketing "Erdenheim," companies of soldiers under multiple leaders swarmed the woods and fields of Whitemarsh and Springfield, eliciting sporadic exchanges of gunfire between the Colonials and British pickets.

Certainly the Hocker family was rattled by the two armies engaged in a tug o' war of advance and retreat across the contested land. To add to their distress following the main battle in Germantown, General Howe, enraged by the failure of local residents to give him warning of Washington's approaching army, ordered that all habitation for 12 miles around Philadelphia to be destroyed. Fortunately, such devastation was not visited upon Erdenheim.

Calm was restored when, on December 11, Washington and his army departed the neighborhood for their ill-fated winter encampment at Valley Forge.

On May 27, 1778, Hocker took an affidavit of citizenship to Pennsylvania before Zebulon Potts, Esq. in Philadelphia. He was now 45 years old.

John and Margarettta continued to work from dawn to dusk, tilling and tending the fertile land of Erdenheim, but took time enough from their labors to bear and raise eight children: George, Martin, John Jr., Adam, Jacob, Christopher, Margaret and Elizabeth. It is believed some of the family's descendants still reside in the local area.

Though the Hockers industriously followed a strict schedule dictated by life on a working farm, they did not escape the vicissitudes more common to city life ... such as home invasion.

On a dark night in 1800, two local ne'er-do-wells, hearing rumors of large sums of money kept in the Hocker residence, and secure in the knowledge that only the 67-year old Hocker, his wife and a hired man were present in the house, set out to prove man's unlimited capacity for folly.

Bursting into the house with the expectation of meager opposition, the two thugs found themselves in a maelstrom of resistance. Hocker and his hired man set upon the intruders with a vengeance, and even Mrs. Hocker weighed into the struggle. When the dust settled, the two thugs were severely chastened and hog-tied with ropes.

A group of young men, returning from an apple-boiling party, happened by the house and were only too happy to escort the thugs to jail.

Surprisingly, the new inmates soon escaped and, eager to confirm their limited abilities to absorb life's lessons, they returned to the vicinity of "Erdenheim." True to form, they again bumbled into the wrong people, were quickly recaptured, convicted and tossed into more secure confinement.

After a hopefully quieter and more orderly life, Margarettta Hocker died on July 5, 1816 at the age of 77 years. John George Hocker, the founder of Erdenheim, followed his wife in death on October 4, 1820, aged 87 years and 6 months. He is interred in St. Michael's cemetery in Germantown.

At John Hocker's death, possession of (but apparently not title to) Erdenheim rested for a short time with his son-in-law, William Cress.

In 1823, John's son, Martin, as John's executor, transferred title for Erdenheim to Caspar Schlotter of Upper Dublin for \$15,568. The property then passed through a succession of owners. Schlotter held title until 1830, then sold the farm to Henry Sheetz, who soon conveyed it to his son, Jacob for the reduced sum of \$14,000. In 1842, Jacob sold the property to William Longstreth for \$23,000. Longstreth held title until 1885, when he sold it to George Bright for \$35,000.

In 1861, with the Civil War raging, Aristides Welch appears on the scene as the new owner of what comes to be known locally as Erdenheim Stock Farm, reflecting Welch's passion of breeding race horses, some of them among the best thoroughbreds in the country.

"The Early Days of Erdenheim Farm" will continue in the September issue of The Challenge when we'll talk about subsequent owners, those incidents of arson, unusual burials beneath the front lawn, and the mysterious disappearance of ghostly residents of an ancient cemetery.

*Editor's Note: The author of this article, Jim Foley, is a volunteer at the Springfield Township Historical Society archives.*

*Don't Forget (and note the day change)*

*Reserve the Date*

**Wed., May 26, 2010 – 7:30 p.m.**

**The History, Music, and Souvenirs  
of Willow Grove Park**

**A Presentation by  
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