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# The Challenge

**PRESERVATION • RESEARCH • EDUCATION**

## HOPE LODGE – PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

A Presentation by Mr. Jack Gumbrecht and Mr. Jack Washington

**Thursday, September 30th, 2010 – 7:30 p.m.**

**First Presbyterian Church**

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

Hope Lodge, located at 553 S. Bethlehem Pike in Ft. Washington, is an historic landmark that is well known both locally and nationally. A beautiful example of Colonial Georgian architecture, it was built between 1743 and 1748 by Samuel Morris, a wealthy Philadelphia merchant. It was used by Washington's army during the Revolutionary War and, along with Mather's Mill, has been part of our local history for over 250 years. Hope Lodge is significant for its architecture, its history, and its collections. It has provided a great classroom with rich resources for all ages and levels of historical interest. Today it stands closed to the public, due to budgetary cutbacks from the State to PHMC (Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission), who owns Hope Lodge. PHMC has been challenged to consider future alternatives for this landmark. "Hope for the Future" is a current campaign that has been organized, seeking to enhance



the historic site by looking at additional uses that will provide long-term sustainability and make the site a better resource for the local community.

Please join us as STHS welcomes Mr. Jack Gumbrecht and Mr. Jack

Washington (President and past President of the Friends of Hope Lodge), who will present the history of this historic landmark from its early beginnings to current status. We will explore the various owners of this home and estate, the roles that the home has played in our local history, and – most importantly – the current status and the future plans to keep Hope Lodge as a viable and important historical landmark and educational treasure.

This promises to be an important 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 call 215-233-4600*



*Tedyuscung Questers Chapter #346 presented a grant of \$500 to STHS in June. Pauline Holt (left) and Bea Kline (right) of the Questers chapter presented the check to STHS Vice President Charles Zwicker. The grant will fund historical displays for installation in the Black Horse Inn.*

# President's Corner

The Springfield Township Historical Society (STHS) is proud to be celebrating its 25th anniversary this year! Other notable silver anniversaries include Air Jordan sneakers, Microsoft Windows 1.0, the discovery of the wreck of the Titanic, America Online (AOL), the Discovery Channel, Block Buster Video, the MacGyver show, and Nintendo with Super Mario. Locally, in Springfield Township in 1985, the Black Horse Inn was still serving cold refreshment to travelers along Bethlehem Pike. It seems the more things change, the more they stay the same. Twenty-five years later, the Black Horse Inn is open again (after being closed for twenty of them) and home to the Historical Society!

Over the course of two days in July, STHS Board members, Friends, and volunteers helped move our collection, furniture, and office equipment from our former home on Germantown Avenue in Chestnut Hill, into our new headquarters. Many thanks go out to all who participated in this milestone event of the Historical Society. Our Archivist, Susan Anthony, along with volunteers Ginny Bergey, John Frantz, and Dulie Gray, are busy getting everything organized, so that we can schedule an Open House in the near future for Friends and township residents to tour our new home.

The STHS move into the Black Horse Inn has been a long time in coming for our organization. But it comes as a result of tireless hard work over several years, by public and non-profit organizations, as well as by many individuals, to first preserve and then restore the Inn. Special thanks go out to the Township Commissioners and to Township Manager Don Berger for all their support and cooperation throughout this process, which resulted in the STHS being installed in the Inn as the first, and anchor tenant.

STHS is currently occupying two rooms on the first floor, in the South end of the Inn. In addition to housing the collection, our space will offer a research area, museum displays, and eventually a small gift shop. Set hours that the headquarters will be open each week are still being finalized, so keep an eye on our website ([www.springfieldhistory.org](http://www.springfieldhistory.org)) for updates. Congratulations to the Springfield Township Historical Society and their Friends on a successful 25 years of Research, Preservation, and Education of our township's history, and on the move into their permanent home in the Black Horse Inn.

*Keeping the past in the present,*

Ed Zwicker

## Archives Update

Recently, volunteer Dulie Gray finished a long-term project organizing and cataloging thirteen notebooks full of information about Whitemarsh Hall and the Stotesbury family. These notebooks had been created by STHS founder Marie Kitto over many years. Dulie consolidated photos and clippings into 3 large archival binders and two boxes of photos. Now photos of Whitemarsh Hall, from its construction to its demolition, family documents, auction catalogs from the mansion's sale and other important ephemera are safe and accessible. We thank Dulie for her outstanding effort! If you would like to volunteer to help in the archives, either by cataloging the collection or manning our open hours in the Black Horse Inn, please contact Susan Anthony at [santhony\\_sths@comcast.net](mailto:santhony_sths@comcast.net) or leave a message at 215 233-4600.

The Springfield Township Historical Society completed its move into the Black Horse Inn over the summer under the direction of treasurer Scott Armington. Furniture and remaining boxes were moved in on July 10 with the help of archivist Susan Anthony, her husband Dave and son Peter; Scott's neighbor Bill Fikioris; high school helpers Doug Bauer and Greg Fasold, and retired contractor Dick Meyer (and his trailer) as well as board members Liz Jarvis, Katie Worrall, and Vince Bruner. Other material had been moved earlier by Armington, his daughter Jill, Bruner, Ed Zwicker, Christine Smith, Barbara Coleman, and Anthony. The archives are open by appointment. Call 215-233-4600 for more information.



*This diploma was given to Jennie (Jane) Ellen Griffith in 1918. Jennie lived on East Bells Mill Road in Erdenheim and after completing her studies in music, taught that subject at the Conshohocken High School. She later started the first music program in the Wyndmoor Elementary School on Willow Grove Avenue. This certificate was donated by her daughter, Marianne Wehner Mebane of Wyndmoor.*

## ERDENHEIM FARM IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

(For the preceding article, "The Early Days of Erdenheim Farm," see the May, 2010 issue of "The Challenge.")

After a series of sales, the 246 acres then comprising Erdenheim Farm came into the possession of Aristides Welch in 1861. Welch was an American breeder of thoroughbred race horses, and it was he who began the conversion of the Farm's primary activities from agricultural pursuits to stock breeding.

Welch also acquired the Lukens Farm, adjacent to Erdenheim on the west side of the Wissahickon Creek, expanding his holdings to 400 acres.

In 1872, Welch purchased "Leamington," a horse that became North America's leading sire in 1875, 1877, 1879 and 1881. He also purchased "Flora Temple," a world-class trotting horse. "Leamington," "Flora Temple," and seven other deceased thoroughbreds, are interred at Erdenheim Farm in honor of their accomplishments on the racetracks of the world.

In 1882, after a highly successful 21-year career in the sport of kings at Erdenheim, Welch sold the Farm and most of its bloodstock to Commodore Norman Kittson and his brother, James, of Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Norman Kittson, a wealthy fur trader, transportation entrepreneur, and budding devotee of horse racing, continued breeding the bloodstock of Erdenheim with great success. By this time, Erdenheim's 400 acres sprawled across Springfield and Whitmarsh Townships, Montgomery County, and, as late as 1909, many of Kittson's descendants were still living in the area.

Kittson died suddenly on May 10, 1888 in a dining car of a Chicago & North Western Railway train headed toward St. Paul, MN.

Upon Kittson's death, his heirs sold Erdenheim to Robert N. Carson, a Pennsylvania railway and traction magnate, and a gentleman who was to have a great impact on the history of Flourtown.

In 1903, Carson made out his will, and one of its provisions directed that, upon his death, a significant portion of Erdenheim's acreage and the bulk of his fortune be set aside for the development of "...a rural children's village for poor white orphan girls." He patterned his idea on Girard College in Philadelphia, a school for orphaned boys.

Four years later, in 1907, Carson, like Kittson, died suddenly. He succumbed to a heart attack at the end of a performance in the Chestnut Street Opera House, Philadelphia, leaving a bequest of \$5 Million for the establishment of his school, to be effective after the death of his wife.

The Carson College for Orphan Girls opened in 1917 and remains today an effective and progressive organization, caring for boys and girls in need under the banner of Carson Valley Children's Aid. Though the name has changed, the mission and ministry remain the same, affirming the vision and generosity of Robert Carson.

The modern era of Erdenheim Farm commenced in 1918 with its acquisition from Carson's heirs by George D. Widener, Jr., a leading businessman and international breeder of racehorses. He was one of only five people ever designated "Exemplars of Racing" by the National Racing Hall of Fame.

In 1912, at the age of 23, he had lost both his father, George Widener, Sr. and brother, Harry Elkins Widener, when the Titanic sank in the Atlantic on her maiden voyage on April 15. It was widely reported that both father and son gave their lifejackets to other passengers and were last seen standing together on the deck of the sinking ship. Their bodies were never recovered.

With George, Jr. as squire, Erdenheim Farm became a center of excellence in the breeding of thoroughbred racehorses. Among all this success,

however, tragedies continued to follow the Wideners. Fire had long been a nemesis of the Farm. Blazes in 1902 and 1909 had inflicted serious damage, destroying the stables and killing 19 thoroughbreds, a heifer and the best pony in its class in America.

On Widener's watch, fires in 1921 and 1937 struck terror into the hearts of the owners, with the 1937 blaze destroying the main barn, an incident that was deemed possible arson by investigators.

Mystery shrouded another adverse event at Erdenheim. There was on the old Lukens portion of the Farm a cemetery, the deed for which was given by Samuel Farmar to Henry Bartleson and Peter Knight on September 2, 1746. In this burial ground were headstones dating to 1722, and the plots were surrounded by stone walls with a covered gate.

Sometime in 1917-1918, during the transition of the Farm to the ownership of George Widener, the cemetery was obliterated. The stone walls were torn down and the tombstones removed and broken. In a paper read by Samuel Yeakle of Fort Washington at a meeting of the Montgomery County Historical Society on July 20, 1922, the author claimed he had knowledge that the removal of the cemetery was one of the conditions under which Mr. Widener bought the property. Though Mr. Yeakle describes the removal of the physical components of the burial ground, he makes no mention of the disposition of the dearly departed interred there.

*We'll conclude this series of articles on Erdenheim Farm in the November issue of "The Challenge," looking at recent events, the stewardship of Fitz Eugene Dixon, the new owners, and the future of the property going forward into the 21st Century.*

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

## 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:*

*"Dettreys Pharmacy: ice cream soda fountain and where ice cream cones went from 10 cents to 12 cents. Also we tried to read movie magazines in back corner of store for free instead of buying them. Mrs. Aiman, everyone's kindergarten teacher. She was a neighbor on Wyndmoor Avenue. A lovely lady and a good teacher. She asked me to ask my mother if she would bring in my twin sisters so I could "show and tell" about them. We did."*

**Jane Monefeldt Strock** (Wyndmoor resident, 1941-1958)

*"Since we lived in "the village" (Whitmarsh Village) on the old Stotesbury estate, it became our playground. We hiked the open areas, ice skated on the fountains near the old mansion, and explored the abandoned Cromwell mansion which was located between the mansion and the Cheltenham Avenue."*

**Tom McGinn** (Wyndmoor resident, 1948-1953)

*Continued on back cover*



## Community History Documentation Project *Continued*

*“The neighborhood when I was growing up at Laverock Farm was much less suburbanized than now. Fewer houses, lots of open. My father would ride over the fields to Haws Lane sometimes with nothing in the way. I was allowed to ride my horse on Mr. Stotesbury’s land which was wonderful. There was a pond where we swam our horses. Laverock was sold when my father, Arthur E. Newbold, died. The magnificent house was torn down and houses built on the land. What a shame.”*

**Margaret Newbold Pearson** (Wyndmoor resident, 1928 through most of her life)

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.springfieldhistory.org](http://www.springfieldhistory.org) or by calling STHS at 215-233-4600. Forms are also available at the Springfield Township Public Library. Please encourage your friends and neighbors to share their memories of life in Springfield Township.



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