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The Challenge

PRESERVATION • RESEARCH • EDUCATION

SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP – PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE

A Presentation by Mr. Edward Zwicker – President of STHS

Thursday, December 2nd, 2010 – 7:30 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church

Bethlehem Pike & East Mill Road in Flourtown, PA

Many Springfield residents are familiar with various aspects of our township's history. The 18th century stagecoach lines and associated taverns and inns, lime kilns and stone quarries as evidence of early farming and industry, colonial homes from the Revolutionary War era, and palatial summertime residences of Philadelphia's elite during the "Gilded Age" are all part of the rich history of the area that was originally established as "Penn's Manor of Springfield" in 1681. Over 300 years of history much has changed in Springfield Township. Most of the original farms and estates from previous eras are gone, sacrificed to make way for progress and the demands of a growing community. But in the midst of this modern landscape, many historical buildings, landmarks, and remnants remain – if you know where to look!

Please join us as STHS proudly presents a historical presentation of Springfield Township by

Edward Zwicker – our President and co-author of *Springfield Township, Montgomery County and Whitemarsh Hall, the Estate of Edward T. Stotesbury*.

Drawing on a variety of photographs, showing "Now and Then" comparisons, and historical research, Ed will take us through the history of Springfield Township – from early settlement, through the rise of the railroads, development of mansions and summer communities, and post-World War II development. We will come to have a better appreciation of the historical homes and landmarks still standing, as well as to understand what "once was" in our neighborhoods that is no longer there.

This promises to be an educational and entertaining evening. The public is invited to attend, and there is no charge for admission. Reservations are not required. Light refreshments will be served.



*Scenes of
Bethlehem Pike
– Then
and Now*



For more information call 215-233-4600

President's Corner

Selfless volunteerism is what enables great non-profit organizations, such as our own Springfield Township Historical Society (STHS), to run efficiently and deliver real value to the community they serve. The work of countless volunteers throughout the history of STHS led to its initial founding in 1985 and its subsequent growth as an organization that today serves people well beyond our township limits. Throughout my time with STHS I have continued to be amazed at the contributions that so many people have made, and I want to share a wonderful, recent example with you.

This past May I was contacted by a neighbor of mine, whose High School-age daughter was looking for an opportunity to help an area service organization over the summer time. The young woman's name is Jenny Uehling, and she and I got together to discuss different ideas for a valuable service project that she could accomplish before she started back for her senior year at Springfield Township High School. With the historical society about to move into the Black Horse Inn at that time, we agreed that a well-researched brochure telling the story of the inns along Bethlehem Pike would be a great idea. Jenny was off and running with this project.

She utilized over a dozen sources for her research, ranging from the Internet to published texts in libraries and area historical societies. The brochure opens with an informative description of how taverns and inns came into being in the 1700's, and how they evolved over the next hundred years.

Jenny then goes on to spotlight each of the inns along Bethlehem Pike in Springfield Township, including pictures from the late 1800's and early 1900's. She closes with a nice summary of the heritage of the inns along the Pike as well as current day pictures of the remaining inns. While Jenny and I got together a couple of times throughout the summer to discuss her progress and ideas for enhancing the brochure, the final product was all her creation, and it came out fantastic! Copies of this brochure will be for sale at a nominal price at our headquarters in the Black Horse Inn, with all proceeds going to STHS.

At the end of this project Jenny thanked me for the opportunity to conduct her research and prepare this brochure. But it is STHS that owes a large "thank you" to Jenny and all of our other volunteers who have made the Historical Society the successful service organization that it has been for twenty-five years, and one which will continue to grow and serve well into the future!

Keeping the past in the present,

Ed Zwicker



Jenny Uehling is a senior at Springfield Township High School. She is co-President of the Student Council, and has participated in band, cross-country, swimming, and track for four years. Jenny will attend college next fall, majoring in either Public Policy or Environmental Science. We wish her all the best!

Archives Update

We are happy to announce that our archives are now located in our permanent home, the Black Horse Inn on Bethlehem Pike. Are you interested in learning about the history of your house or school? Would you like to know more about the milling industry in Springfield or Revolutionary War events in our area? Come in to see what we have in our collection. Our collection holds information about local institutions including fire companies, women's clubs and libraries. We also have an extensive collection of information about Whitemarsh Hall, including many photos and articles. In addition to the archives, there is also a small exhibit in the Black Horse Inn. We will be open to the public on Tuesdays from 11am – 1pm and on Thursdays from 10am – Noon. In order to cover the costs of collections management, a research fee of \$5 for STHS friends and \$10 for the general public will be charged. We ask that you call or email ahead so that we may best serve you. Contact us at 215 233-4600 or santhony_sths@comcast.net.

Community Day



*Springfield Township Historical Society board member Barb Coleman shows a copy of **Whitemarsh Hall: The Estate of Edward T. Stotesbury** to visitors to the historical society's table at Community Day at Cisco Park in October. Barb organized the table which included a photo display of "Laverock Hill", a property in Springfield and Cheltenham townships that is in negotiations for development; a display about Chestnut Hill Amusement Park that was on the Cisco Park land at the turn of the 20th century; pen and ink drawings of township landmarks and information about STHS membership, programs and archives.*

***Whitemarsh Hall: The Estate of Edward T. Stotesbury** was written by Charles G. Zwicker and Edward C. Zwicker with the Springfield Township Historical Society.*



STHS Board Members Barbara Coleman and Katie Worrall

ERDENHEIM FARM TRANSITIONS GENTLY INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

(For the preceding articles in this series, see the May and September issues of "The Challenge.")

On December 8, 1971, George D. Widener, Jr. died, and bequeathed Erdenheim Farm to his closest living relative, Fitz Eugene Dixon, Jr., sportsman and philanthropist who with his wife, Edith, presided over the estate in the years ahead with dignity, grace and vision. They not only wisely guided the property's agricultural production and preserved its beauty, but wisely planned for its preservation in perpetuity.

Fitz Dixon was not destined to be a dilettante. Upon graduation from prestigious Episcopal Academy and Harvard University, he immediately returned to teach English, French and Health at Episcopal.

He also coached the school's squash, tennis, and 120-pound football teams while serving as director of athletics and assistant to the headmaster. Hence, in 1971, when he inherited his uncle George's vast wealth, amassed in the meat-packing and streetcar business, his energy and work ethic had well prepared him to adapt to and manage the intricate affairs of Erdenheim.

The Farm grew and prospered under the stewardship of the Dixons, and the City of Philadelphia benefitted from their active civic engagement. When, in 1976, the creator of what would become the iconic Love sculpture in the John F. Kennedy Plaza in Center City removed it from the city for non-payment of his \$45,000 fee, Dixon purchased the sculpture and gave it back to the City.

He became an owner/investor in sports franchises such as the Eagles, the Phillies, the Wings, and served as the Vice Chairman of the Flyers when they won the Stanley Cup in 1974. In 1976, he purchased the Philadelphia 76ers for \$8 Million and brought Julius "Dr. J" Irving to the team.

He served on the boards of the Fairmount Park Commission, the Philadelphia Art Commission, and several universities.

Despite all his civic and philanthropic activities, his first love remained the Farm. He bred thoroughbred horses, raised a wide assortment of crops and farm animals, and was a member of the association that owned Man o' War. He was, at heart, a country squire.

Indicative of this affection for and pride in his property was its pristine condition. This was evidenced by the almost instant disappearance of a downed tree, the overnight replacement of a rotted fence rail, or the immediate repair of occasional property damage by an errant automobile on the roads through the farm. One day you noticed the damage while driving through the farm, the next day it had either disappeared or been repaired. It sometimes was easy to envision a tribe of munchkins roaming the property at night, making all things right before the sun rose the next morning.

But when the sun did rise on the morning of August 2, 2006, a pall had descended over Erdenheim Farm that no amount of physical remediation could lift: Fitz Eugene Dixon was dead.

His passing generated feelings of loss, grief, sorrow, and, yes, fear. What would become of Erdenheim Farm, a question few were prepared to answer, always secure in the belief that the hale and hearty Dixon would live well beyond his 82 years, and his farm would endure in perpetuity.

Once recovered from the shock of his death, an amazing conglomeration of civic leaders, politicians, philanthropic foundations, conservation organizations and neighbors came together in an unprecedented example of the power inherent in public/private partnerships.

Leading the charge, the Commissioners of Montgomery County pledged \$4 Million toward preserving part of the Farm. This generous move was actually the second such dedication of public money. Two years prior, the county, Whitemarsh Township and the Colonial

School District agreed to a complex financing deal committing a portion of future tax revenues for the Farm's preservation, expected to generate an additional \$4 Million for the Angus Tract.

Other entities stepped forward: the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Whitemarsh Foundation, the Montgomery County Lands Trust and the Natural Lands Trust, all those esoteric organizations that we hear and read about, but never completely understand until they appear as saviors of open land suddenly endangered by pollution, dissolution or development.

Today, after 4 years of concentrated fundraising, negotiations, compromise and foresighted cooperation among many disparate organizations, the future of Erdenheim Farm as scenic open space seems secure. Even the sudden appearance of surveyor's stakes and a massive earthmover poised on the corner of the Angus Tract which struck terror into the heart of this writer just as he prepared the last lines of this article was not the threat it appeared. The stakes and equipment will soon be used to apportion a section of land for a nature reserve to both beautify and utilize the land for additional neighborhood benefit.

As we move into the next phase of the 245-year lineage of ownership of Erdenheim Farm, from its acquisition by Johannes George Hocker in 1765 to its purchase in 2010 by new owners, Peter and Bonnie McCausland, we extend to the McCausland family our best wishes for happiness, prosperity and peace on your historic lands.

May you derive additional satisfaction in knowing the enjoyment and relaxation enjoyed by all who pass through the tranquil, pastoral vistas of your idyllic property.

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

In Memory of STHS Advisory Board Member JANE C. JOHNSON, 1919-2010

Longtime, STHS Advisory Board Member, Jane Johnson, passed away in late August. Ms. Johnson was born in Wyncote and was a graduate of Cheltenham High School.

A Flourtown resident for 57 years, Ms. Johnson actively served her community through service in numerous local organizations. Ms. Johnson was a founding member of the Springfield Township Historical Society, serving as a board member for many years before assuming a position on the advisory board. She also twice served as president of the Flourtown Chapter of

the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Ms. Johnson was an active member of the Springfield Township's Boulevard of Trees Committee in the 1970s, raising funds to plant flowering trees along Bethlehem Pike. As a longtime member of St. Thomas' Church, Whitemarsh, Ms. Johnson served on its altar guild and volunteered in the church office.

The Board fondly remembers Jane Johnson for her many years of active community service in Springfield Township and her dedication to the historical society.

O'Towne

In late September, Springfield Township Commissioner, Jeff Harbison, served as guest bartender at the O'Towne Tavern in Oreland. STHS was the recipient of 10% of the proceeds raised from the sales that evening. STHS wishes to thank the O'Towne Tavern, Commissioner Harbison, and all those who came out for an enjoyable evening of good food and cheer.



*Springfield Township Commissioner
and guest bartender, Jeff Harbison*



*STHS Board Member Vince Bruner
at the O'Towne*



*STHS
Supporters*

Reserve the Date

Thurs., Dec. 2, 2010 – 7:30 p.m.

**Springfield Township –
Past, Present & Future**

*A Presentation by
Mr. Edward Zwicker*



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