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The Challenge

PRESERVATION • RESEARCH • EDUCATION

Captain Percival Drayton – The History of a Civil War Naval Officer

A Presentation by Captain Jack Lieberman, USNR (*Retired*)

Thursday, September 22nd, 2011 – 7:30 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church

Bethlehem Pike & East Mill Road in Flourtown, PA

The American Civil War was a tragic time in our nation's history. It was a time when States and families were forced to choose sides and loyalties. Friendships were severed, families torn apart and brother fought against brother.

Captain Percival Drayton was the son of a South Carolina Congressman. He entered the United States Navy as a midshipman in 1827 and served continuously up to the Civil War. His older brother, Thomas, was a West Point graduate and Army officer who remained loyal to the South, becoming a Brigadier General in the Confederacy. When the war began Percival was stationed at the Philadelphia Naval Yard, but was soon given command of a warship that saw action in a Union naval assault against Port Royal, South Carolina, where he fired upon troops and positions commanded by his brother. Percival was eventually promoted to Captain in 1862, serving with Admiral Farragut's West Gulf Squadron in the assault and capture of Mobile Bay, Alabama. When the war ended, he was appointed Chief of the Bureau of Navigation until his early death in 1865. He is buried in Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia.

Please join us as STHS welcomes Captain Jack Lieberman who will present "in character" on the biographical history of this Civil War Naval Officer and his life and times.

Captain Lieberman, USNR (retired) is a native of Cheltenham Township. He received a commission



Captain Percival Drayton



Thomas Drayton

as Ensign in the U.S. Navy in 1965 and went on to serve a long and distinguished naval career. He retired from the Naval Reserve in 1991, after having served twenty-eight years. His military decorations include National Defense Service Medal with Gold Star, Armed Forces Reserve Medal with Hour Glass Device, Expert Rifle Medal and Expert Pistol Medals, Navy and Marine Corps Overseas Service Ribbon and the Navy Recruiting Service Ribbon. Jack is a graduate of the Defense Economics Course at Naval War College, Newport, RI and currently serves on the Boards of Fort Mifflin on the Delaware and the Philadelphia Council, US Navy League. He is a Life Member of the Naval Reserve Association, Reserve Officers Association, U.S. Navy League, and Military Order of the World Wars, U.S. Naval Institute, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), Naval War College Foundation and The American Legion.



Captain Jack Lieberman

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 call

215-233-4600

President's Corner

On a recent Tuesday night we had a visitor to the STHS archives in the Black Horse Inn, **Delcie Supow**, who donated a wonderful collection of materials on the history of the Penn Oak tree. This historic tree formerly resided on East Mill Road in Flourtown, and was a true touchstone for township residents. It was a majestic, white oak tree that dated back to the days of William Penn when he first came to Pennsylvania. While this tree unfortunately succumbed to disease and removal in 1975, it's an interesting story that captured the interest and passion of many residents and non-residents alike during its lifetime.

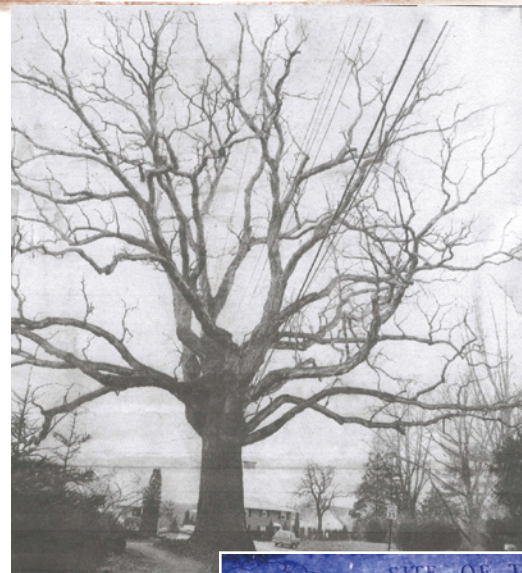
The recorded history of Springfield Township dates back to 1681 when King Charles II of England granted a charter to William Penn, and Springfield was mapped out as one of his manors. As Penn's Manor of Springfield evolved through the years, from a community sustained by farming, then industry, and finally retail and other service enterprises, the people, places and things associated with them continued to come and go. One constant was the white oak tree that stood sentinel just off Bethlehem Pike on East Mill Road.

The oak tree existed in relative obscurity for the first 300 years of its existence. It watched over farming families in the Flourtown area through the 17th and 18th centuries. Then in the late 1700s it bore quiet witness to warring factions in the War for Independence, as troops for both sides marched up and down the King's Highway (Bethlehem Pike). In the 1800s it saw the introduction of the trolleys and trains, and finally automobiles shortly after the turn of the 20th century. The township population grew dramatically around this oak tree, but it sat relatively unnoticed until 1932. In that year Philadelphia was making plans to commemorate the 250th anniversary of William Penn's first landing in Pennsylvania. Preparation for the celebration included locating all the trees that were in existence when Penn first visited. The white oak on East Mill Road was one of those so designated, and a bronze marker was placed on the tree celebrating this designation. From that point on it would be known locally as the Penn Oak.

Within the next 20 years Springfield Township would send men off to defend our freedom in World War II, and with their return in 1945, a housing and baby boom would ensue. Flourtown, like other areas of the township would undergo dramatic development. In 1952 the firm of Flourtown Homes, Inc. was starting to develop the area around the Penn Oak tree. As part of this development, the Township Commissioners ordered the developer to widen East Mill Road and put in a sidewalk. Stakes were put in place and lines drawn for this expansion, which would include removal of the Penn Oak.

Local residents banded together to save the tree, forming a sizable committee (named the Committee for the Preservation of the William Penn Oak), sending out a mailing to a large list of township residents, alerting the local newspapers, and distributing 500 "Save the Penn Oak" buttons throughout the township. In May a delegation attended the Board of Commissioners meeting and presented a petition signed by many residents and people of distinction outside the township. The Commissioners agreed to direct Flourtown Homes, Inc. to suspend the cutting down of the tree "until an alternate plan could be worked out."

The committee first attempted to buy a lot from the developer and build a small plaza around the tree, whereby traffic would be diverted



Penn Oak tree

*Marker designating site of the former
Penn Oak tree*



around both sides of the plaza. The developer rejected this proposal, but did cooperate with the committee by building a macadam (instead of a more harmful concrete) sidewalk around the tree, and donated \$100 to the care and maintenance of the tree. The developer also took advantage of their newfound publicity by naming the development Penn Oak Manor. The committee agreed to take on responsibility for all care of the tree going forward, raising money as needed over the years to address items such as pruning and termite and fungus removal.

In spite of the committee's and resident's generous support and maintenance, a combined effect of human and natural factors eventually led to the demise of the Penn Oak. Damage was done to the rootstock as a result of digging for the sewer and water lines, paving the street, and putting in sidewalks. Given the tree was on a sharp bend in the road, cars running into it also did damage. A termite infestation in 1969 was addressed, but not before it ruined 45 percent of the heartwood. By 1972 the committee learned that the tree only had a couple of years to live, and on December 10, 1975 the Philadelphia Electric Company was called in to cut down the mighty Penn Oak. At the time of its removal it was estimated to be 344 years old, its girth, breast high was 15 feet, and its diameter 6 feet.

While the Penn Oak has been gone now for over 25 years, reminders of it still remain. The Springfield Township seal contains an image of this tree, and the Historical Society seal includes the tree's white oak leaves. Remnants of the Penn Oak were auctioned off in 1976 by the Springfield Township Bicentennial Committee, with proceeds used to help pay for a published history of the township which was distributed for free to residents. This Committee also donated a large cross section of the tree for display in the Township Building, where it still resides today. Finally, a 2' x 1' commemorative granite tablet was created 1979, which still resides today at the former site of the Penn Oak, on Delcie Supow's property at 102 East Mill Road. Many thanks to Delcie for preserving the history and the memory of the Penn Oak for others to enjoy well into the future!

Keeping the past in the present,
Ed Zwicker

Trolley Tour a Success

where the Historical Society archives are now located, to look around, enjoy refreshments and board the trolleys for the tours.

STHS president Ed Zwicker, co-author of two books in Arcadia Publishing's Images of America series, "*Springfield Township, Montgomery County*," and "*Whitemarsh Hall: The Estate of Edward T. Stotesbury*," narrated the **country estates tours of summer residences** built beginning from the latter part of the 1800s through the 1930s. The properties visited showed the assortment of 21st century uses of large residences, such as institutional/nonprofit; private ownership, and redevelopment.

Zwicker's narration included genealogy and information about families, architecture and current usage of Carson Valley School; Camp Hill Hall, the John R. Fell and Sarah Drexel Fell property now owned by WEC International; Belcroft, the Clarence M. Brown mansion on the campus of La Salle College High School; Falcondale, former home of the Rosengarten and Dickey families now owned by Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation; Laverock Hill, the former Lloyd family residence now owned by Hansen Properties; Lane's End, the former Samuel B. Rotan estate/University of Pennsylvania Wharton Sinkler Conference Center that is now privately owned, and Rauhala, the present site of Keystone Hospice previously owned by Clayton and Maria

Platt, John Welsh and Albert Kelsey, as well as the site of Edward and Eva Stotesbury's Whitemarsh Hall, now the site of post-World War II and late 20th century neighborhoods.

The **Revolutionary War/Colonial Era tour** was narrated by Joe Becton, director of Becton Tours and Historical Service and Revolutionary and Civil War re-enactor. Becton, a former park ranger, told of the Revolutionary War happenings at the site of Militia Hill; Hope Lodge; the cemetery at St. Thomas' Church, Whitemarsh, where several Revolutionary War soldiers are buried, and Germantown's Deshler-Morris House, the oldest official presidential residence in the country that hosted several cabinet meetings as well as George Washington and his family. Becton provided commentary on local history as the trolley travelled to Germantown and back to Flourtown.

The trolley tours were organized by STHS' Events Committee, chaired by Vincent Bruner. Members of the committee are Anthe, Dulie Gray and Christine Smith. Sponsors of the trolley tours were BQ Basements, Value Venue, Dan Helwig, Inc. Realtors and Bowman Properties, Ltd. Contributors included Starbuck's Coffee; Salon, Salon of Flourtown and Walgreen's.



Joe Becton, a former park ranger who narrated the Revolutionary War/Colonial Era tour, stands in the kitchen of the Deshler Morris House in Germantown that was part of the STHS tour. Becton is wearing a uniform worn by many continental troops, including the First Rhode Island Regiment. Photo by Christine Smith



Hope Lodge volunteer Nancy Gingrich welcomes trolley tour guests to the Fort Washington property.

Fall Feast and Auction

A Fall Feast and Auction will be held on September 30, 2011 at the Flourtown Country Club benefiting the restoration of the Black Horse Inn. We will be celebrating these achievements while striving to raise additional funds toward restoration. Please come or donate. The Inn will be open to the event guests just prior to the event so you can see the newly restored bar and handsome lobby.



BLACK HORSE INN FALL FEAST AND AUCTION

CELEBRATE WORK THAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED
AND SUPPORT FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2011

5:30PM – TOUR OF THE BLACK HORSE INN
1432 BETHLEHEM PIKE, FLOURTOWN, PA 19031

6:00PM – BEER, WINE, DINNER AND AUCTION
AT FLOURTOWN COUNTRY CLUB
150 MCCLOSKEY ROAD, FLOURTOWN, PA 19031

TICKETS ARE \$75 PER PERSON

CHECKS MADE PAYABLE TO THE SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP
HISTORICAL SOCIETY SHOULD BE SENT TO:

SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY
PO BOX 564, FLOURTOWN, PA 19031

QUESTIONS – PLEASE CALL ANDREW AT 215-836-2636

WWW.USHISTORY.ORG/BLACKHORSE



Memories from the Summer of 1957

The following was published in the 1957 edition of the *Glen Echo*, a newsletter published by the

Paper Mill Glen Civic Association which is an association that existed to serve the neighborhood bounded by Paper Mill Road, Fraser Road, Haws Lane and Harston Lane in Erdenheim.

Gone but not Forgotten

Summer 1957 will be remembered for – DUST – impassable roads... no rain – brown lawns DUST... the worst invasion of Japanese beetles in years...no rain... the best display of Northern Lights since 1940 (yes I was live then, dear)... the Glen's first swimming pool... DUST... the return of the little business man as our offspring tried to make a fast 3 cents selling lemonade to the men working on the roads... no rain... kids playing King of the Mountain on the "hills" behind Harston Lane – DUST.

Visit the STHS Archives at the Black Horse Inn

1432 Bethlehem Pike, Flourtown, PA

HOURS: Tuesday 11am-1pm, 7pm-9pm
Thursday 10am-noon

Volunteers Needed in Archives

The archives is in need of volunteers who are able to give us a couple hours a week, or even every other week, manning the archives, assisting researchers and working on projects.

If you are interested, please leave a message for our archivist, Susan Anthony, at 213 233-4600 or send an email to SAthony_STHS@comcast.net.

FROM THE *Archives*



Carson 1 – Carson Valley teachers and students c. 1930s

The archives keep growing thanks to our generous donors! Recently we received two large donations: **David Contosta** gave us the notes and photos used in writing "*Philadelphia's Progressive Orphanage: The Carson Valley School*," and **Pennwalt** (formerly Pennsalt) donated records from the time the company's regional offices were in Whitemarsh Hall. The latter includes some fascinating "before and after" photographs of the transformation from mansion to laboratory.

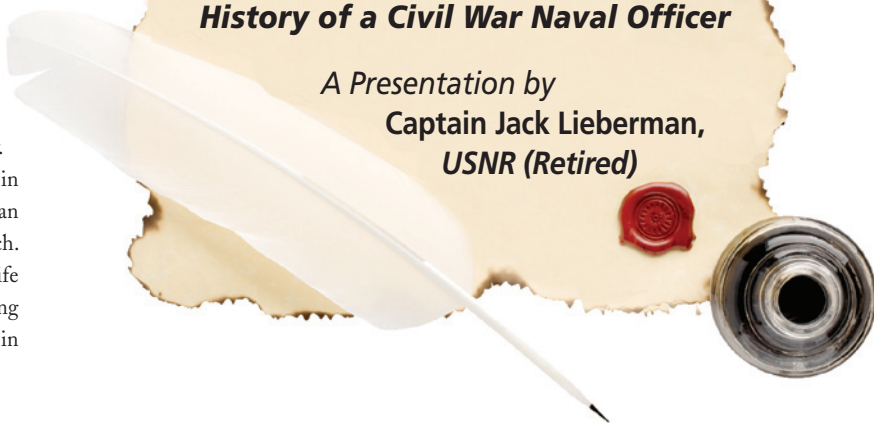
In addition, **Pauline Hornberger** has been a generous donor in recent months, including a large number of obituaries of Zion Lutheran Church members which will be very helpful for genealogical research. **Susan Deane** donated family papers and photographs, chronicling life in mid-twentieth century Springfield Township. Please consider sharing with us documents or photos you have collected during your time in Springfield. *Remember, your past is our history!*

Reserve the Date

Thurs., Sept. 22, 2011 – 7:30 p.m.

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History of a Civil War Naval Officer**

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USNR (Retired)**



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