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## FEBRUARY 2017

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# The Challenge

PRESERVATION • RESEARCH • EDUCATION

## THE COMPANY AND (OR) AS THE CITY: Architecture at Philadelphia Electric, 1900-1930

*Presented by Aaron V. Wunsch*

**Thursday, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017 – 7:30 p.m.**

First Presbyterian Church – Bethlehem Pike & East Mill Road in Flourtown, PA

*If it isn't electric, it isn't modern* was a slogan of the Philadelphia Electric Company, developer of a network of metropolitan power stations serving the greater Philadelphia area at the turn of the 20th century.

Wunsch, who teaches a course and a seminar in American architecture, and two courses on the documentation of historic sites at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate Program in Historic Preservation, is the co-author with Muhlenberg College art professor and architecture photographer Joseph E.B. Elliott of *Palazzos of Power: Central Stations of the Philadelphia Electric Company, 1900-1930* published in 2016 by the Princeton Architectural Press.

Wunsch and Elliott contributed information and photographs about the power plants to the Hidden City Philadelphia website ([www.hiddencityphila.org](http://www.hiddencityphila.org)) in a posting entitled *Considering Our Riverfront Palazzos of Power: Their History and Potential*.

According to a description of the book on the Princeton Architectural Press website, the power stations, "once-brilliant sentinels of civic utility and activity were designed to convey solidarity and immensity in an age of deep public skepticism. They now stand vacant and decaying, a blight in the eyes of city planners and a beacon to urban explorers."

Wunsch's talk at the historical society will be related to the book and include the history of the early power plants, which he said were spectacular. Among the themes he will discuss will be why they



Delaware Station



Richmond Station

These turbine halls are among the "palazzos of power" that Aaron Wunsch describes in his book, *Palazzos of Power: Central Stations of the Philadelphia Electric Company, 1900-1930* and posted on the [Hidden Philadelphia](http://HiddenPhiladelphia.org) website.

are spectacular and the political environment PECO (Philadelphia Electric Company) found itself in in the early 20th century. Founded in 1900, Philadelphia Electric Company was bought by Exelon 10 years ago. There are five power plants in Philadelphia, one near Chester and one in Conowingo, MD. After the program, Wunsch will be available to sign copies of his new book.

Special interests include: antebellum suburbs and cemeteries, infrastructure and industrial architecture, Quaker aesthetics, and the politics of commemoration. He serves as vice president of Philadelphia's Woodlands Cemetery and has been active on other nonprofit boards. His preservation advocacy work has received various forms of recognition, including the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia's Public Service Award for Preservation in the Public Interest, shared with Mayor Wilson Goode, Sr., in 2015.

The program is free and open to the public. No reservations are necessary.

For more information, call the historical society at 215-233-4600 or visit [www.springfieldhistory.org](http://www.springfieldhistory.org).

*Friends attending the February 16<sup>th</sup> program will be asked to vote on the recently updated historical society bylaws. To request a copy, please call the archives at 215-233-4600.*

# President's Corner

I have written previously regarding the importance of learning from the past. The events of recent months have demonstrated that our society is having difficulty discerning fact from fiction, and that our moral compass appears to be out of balance. Many people are anxious about the current state of affairs. I have spent a great deal of time lately meditating on how we got here and what to do about it. Historians will debate the former for years to come. The latter is up to us. While I don't have all the answers, I firmly believe that there are steps that we can take as individuals and as a Historical Society composed of people who believe our shared history has value in our daily lives.

There is so much to do. It's easy to feel overwhelmed. As individuals, I think it's critical that we identify one issue that we feel strongly about and do what we can to advance that issue. I believe our respective efforts on an individual basis are cumulative.

One of our Society's fundamental imperatives is Education. I propose we start by educating our community with regard to the ways in which we have been enriched by a long history of religious freedom. Pennsylvania was, after all, founded on the principle of religious tolerance. The founding fathers sought to codify the right to freedom of religion in the First Amendment to our Constitution. This country is comprised of all races, creeds, and colors. To diminish one, is to diminish us all.

At this, the beginning of a new year, I want to wish everyone peace and good will.

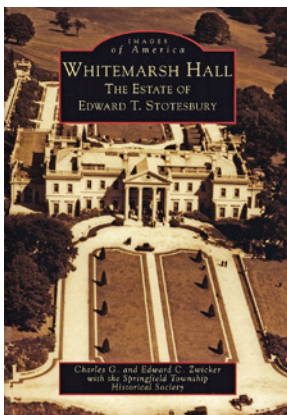
T. Scott Kreilick, President  
Springfield Township Historical Society

## FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION:

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

## When Wyndmoor Hosted Royalty

While members of the Historical Society are familiar with the popular *Images of America* book on Whitemarsh Hall co-authored by Charles G. and Edward C. Zwicker, most are completely unaware of the significance of the remarkable photo on its cover.



That photo captures the beginning of the highest-profile social event ever to occur in the township – a much-anticipated three-day visit by Swedish royalty, on June 1-3, 1926.

Crown Prince Gustavus Adolphus and Crown Princess Louise came to Wyndmoor at the beginning of a two-month-long tour of the United States, and made the Stotesburys' Whitemarsh Hall

estate a base of operations for their Philadelphia area visit. They arrived by limousine mid-afternoon, June 1, 1926, with a police motorcycle escort. The photo was taken about 4:00PM, shortly after their arrival; their limousine is parked under trees on the right side of the photo, and members of their police escort are seen standing in front of the portico; the motorcycles are parked on the left side of the forecourt. A red carpet was rolled down the front steps of the mansion for the royals, but all of the other guests are seen walking up the western approach – and not using that red carpet. (We know of no other photos showing a red carpet on the portico steps – this is a clear indication of the royal visit.)

Earlier, upon their arrival, the Crown Prince and Crown Princess were shown to the Portico Suite – the largest and most elegant of the seven suites reserved for guests at Whitemarsh Hall. The Crown Princess decided to rest before dinner, while her husband returned downstairs to meet the assembled newspapermen who had been awaiting his arrival.

Later, the Stotesburys hosted a formal dinner for the royals and a select group of about 40, including Mayor and Mrs. Kendrick of Phila-



*Crown Prince Gustavus Adolphus and Crown Princess Louise Alexandra of Sweden, taken during their visit to Washington, D.C. in 1926*

delphia, Senator and Mrs. George Wharton Pepper, Mrs. Alexander van Rensselaer, Mr. and Mrs. George McFadden, Mr. and Mrs. Charlton Yarnall, Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Montgomery, Mr. and Mrs. Henry C. Boyer, Cardinal Dougherty, Mr. Morris R. Bockius, Mrs. Alexander Williams Biddle, Miss Caroline Sinkler, Mrs. Sydney E. Hutchinson (Mr. Stotesbury's eldest daughter), Mr. and Mrs. Arthur H. Lea, Mr. and Mrs. J. Kearsley Mitchell (Mrs. Mitchell was Mr. Stotesbury's youngest daughter), General and Mrs. Douglas MacArthur (Mrs. MacArthur was Mrs. Stotesbury's

daughter), and Mrs. Edward Sturges.

Dinner was followed by an elaborate reception for more than 200 additional guests, held in the Ballroom, featuring a remarkable musical program starring Giovanni Martinelli (Tenor with the Metropolitan Opera), Felix Salmond (Cellist; member of the faculty at Juilliard and Curtis), and Dr. Thaddeus Rich (Violinist; Concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra), accompanied on the mansion's Aeolian pipe organ by Mrs. Edward Philip Lynch.

The following day (June 2), the royal couple toured Independence Hall, laid the cornerstone of the John Morton Memorial Building on the Sesquicentennial grounds, and after some other events, were hosted for dinner by Joseph E. Widener at Lynnewood Hall in Elkins Park, before again returning to Whitemarsh Hall for the night. They departed Whitemarsh Hall on June 3, starting a tour that would take them across the country, with stops in Boston, Niagara Falls, Chicago, Minneapolis, Yellowstone National Park, the Grand Canyon, Zion National Park, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, before setting sail for the Far East on August 1.

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group on Facebook



# RITTENHOUSE LUMBER & MILLWORK

*Served the Springfield community for more than three generations*

**RITTENHOUSE LUMBER & MILLWORK**, a privately held family company now in its third generation, has provided customized woodworking products and services at 608 Bethlehem Pike in Erdenheim, since 1958.

It is located on the site of the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company, which ran a trolley line in the area. People who went to the White City Amusement Park that was located on the site of the present-day Cisco Park would get off the trolley there and walk the short distance to White City. Stan Hrynko, president of Rittenhouse Lumber & Millwork, pointed out to a recent visitor, the location of the trolley tracks and bridge, as well as the transit company building still used by Rittenhouse Lumber & Millwork.

The business was started in 1940 on Rittenhouse Street in Germantown by Ray Kosten, who ran the business with his brother-in-law, Berck Werner, according to Kosten's son-in-law, Stan Hrynko, who is now president of Rittenhouse Lumber & Millwork. The business closed during World War II, in which both Kosten and Werner served.

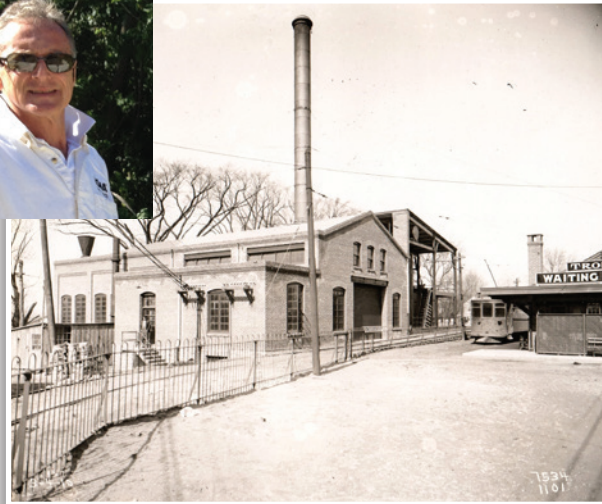
When Rittenhouse Lumber & Millwork relocated to 608 Bethlehem Pike in 1958, the property had been Chestnut Hill Lumber. The company was tight-quartered on Rittenhouse Street and needed elbow room, Stan said. When Kosten moved the business to Erdenheim, the second floor was leased to someone who used it as a cabinet shop.

As the business grew, the building in the rear of the property was used as a workshop. The old trolley stop building was lost in an electrical fire four and-a-half years ago and was replaced with a metal building.

The business has commercial accounts, small businesses and



Stan  
Hrynko



*This 1916 picture from the historical society archives shows the back of the current Rittenhouse Lumber building, on the left, when it was the power station for the trolley line that stopped there so that riders could go to the amusement park that was located where Cisco Park is now. The building on the right, used as a waiting room during the trolley era and as a workshop by Rittenhouse Lumber, burned a few years ago.*

do-it-yourselfers, Stan said, as he explained that millwork is the shaping of things like staircases and mantels, while the lumber part of their work is the baseline, before starting the millwork.

Among the things they build are custom built-ins, custom libraries, entertainment units, radiator covers, vanities in custom-built bathrooms, old wooden windows, custom doors and custom islands in kitchens. Sometimes they make corbels, the carved brackets that hold up overhanging porches. They work with Pennsylvania hardwoods and walnut. In recent years, they have also worked with composites.

The changes, using newer materials, has expanded the business since Kosten started the business. At that time, it was a two-man business. The custom millwork and shop has grown and the materials have changed. They are using cedar and mahogany more often.

Stan said that he was working in the food industry, when Kosten asked him if he had ever thought

of taking a sabbatical. Stan's father was a carpenter and woodworking was in Stan's blood. He has been at Rittenhouse Lumber & Millwork for 43 years. Kosten continued to come to work until four and a half

years ago when he died at the age of 95.

Stan points out that you must have a strong crew to run a strong business. Stan's son Paul, who is now the store manager, has a degree in industrial engineering from Carnegie Mellon University and has worked for several big corporations. His son-in-law, Justin Marks, joined Rittenhouse Lumber & Millwork this past spring. Others who work there include Victor Hyezko, Joe Melnid and Bill Carderas, as well as Stan's wife Elaine, who does the paperwork for the bookkeeper and the accountant.

The talent in the cabinet shop, where employees cut wood and work with their hands is what makes the business, Stan said.

The Springfield Township community has helped Rittenhouse Lumber & Millwork succeed and the business has reciprocated, assisting with projects such as donating clear cedar to the Flourtown War Memorial and helping the Flourtown Fire Company.

*Written by Katie Worrall*



## STHS Welcomes New Archivist

The Springfield Township Historical Society recently welcomed **Jessica Walker** as its new archivist. Among her many duties, Jessica catalogues acquisitions, assists visitors with research, and oversees our numerous volunteers.

Jessica has a background as an Archival Digitization Specialist and recently worked for Ancestry.com, where she digitized records. Prior to Ancestry, Jessica volunteered in the archives of the Germantown Historical Society and the Historical Society of Montgomery County, where she processed photographs and documents pertaining to local history in this region.

The historical society archives are staffed by Jessica and volunteers and are open to the public from 7 to 9 p.m. on Tuesdays, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesdays and from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, Saturdays. If you would like to visit the archives to do research or to volunteer, please call Jessica at (215) 233-4600 or email [archives@springfieldhistory.org](mailto:archives@springfieldhistory.org) to set up an appointment.

## RECENT DONATION: The Enfield Pottery & Tile Works Garden Statue

Written by Ed Zwicker III



The Springfield Township Historical Society has a new resident; it's a terra cotta bird and weighs one hundred and thirty five pounds.

The story begins with my Society presentation this past September about the Enfield Pottery & Tile Works. After the lecture, I was approached by a friend who said she knew of a man who was moving out of the area and had placed some items for auction, including a piece of pottery, possibly from the Enfield Pottery & Tile Works.

She gave me the phone number for the man's parents who happened to be 1948 graduates of Springfield Township High School. I subsequently met John and Edythe Cannon at our annual Alumni Luncheon in October, and they put me in contact with their son, John, the owner of the piece. John said he was willing to consider donating the bird, but he didn't know if it could be withdrawn from the auction that was scheduled for December. He also said he had no idea of its value, and that a Doylestown antique dealer was planning to bid on it. I told him we were interested and would wait to hear from him.

The next day I received an email from John, saying arrangements had made to see it at the auction house. If it was decided to be a suitable addition for the archives, he would

then "discuss the next possible steps." The bird is a large and heavy sculpture with no mold lines. It is constructed of terra cotta and then over-glazed with multiple colors before re-firing, known as Majolica. It is a rather fanciful rendition of a tropical bird consisting of three pieces: the head, body, and tail. There is a cockscomb on the head with a stylized fleur-de-lis in front. Since this is normally associated with the royal family of France, it was possibly commissioned by an estate that was decorating in the Louis Quatorze period. Since it had no identifiable markings, it was important to determine the provenance as being from the Enfield Pottery & Tile Works. After talking with John's mother, Edythe, I found the following information. As a young girl, in the early 1930s, her parent's home was at 6802 Crittenden Street in Mt. Airy, and this bird sculpture was in their garden. She told me her father got it from the Enfield Pottery & Tile Works about 1936. The piece had been stored in their basement from the mid 1950s until her father, Melvin Henry Grebe, died in 1993. It then passed into the possession of their son, John Cannon III.

After informing John of the Society's desire to add this artifact to our collection, he replied, "I would be delighted to donate the bird to the Historical Society. I cannot think of a more fitting home for it." Finally in early November, the bird arrived at the Society archives.

We know that Joseph Allen did not mass produce his pottery; it was primarily for specific commissions, which leads me to believe that this is a one of a kind piece and therefore is a significant artifact, especially for Springfield Township, which was the home of the Enfield Pottery & Tile Works.

We are indebted to the Cannon family, especially John Cannon III, who relinquished any monetary gain by withdrawing it from auction and donating it to the Springfield Township Historical Society.

## Library Highlights

*This is the first in a series of reports by volunteer Ray Smith on books housed in the archives of the historical society.*

*History of the One Hundred and Thirty-Eighth Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry*, by Osceola Lewis, follows the Montgomery County soldiers from August 1862 through the end of "The war for the suppression of the recent great rebellion." Written in 1866 by a member of the regiment, the narrative gives a day-to-day, battle-by-battle firsthand look at the lives of our men in uniform.

After basic training, the troops spent the rest of the year and most of 1863 guarding rail lines that were vital to the cause. Although they weren't far from Antietam and Gettysburg, they weren't engaged.

November 1863 marked their first major battle, at Brandy station. From that battle on, our regiment was in the thick of the war, fighting in the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, Cold harbor, Monocacy and other well-known battles that we read about in our history books.

This history is different because it was written at the time of the war by a participant. His patriotic bias comes forth in all the glorious victories and his humanity shines in the less frequent defeats. After each battle, there is a list of casualties with the names of our men who were killed, wounded, missing and taken prisoner. The author doesn't mince words, speaking of "the imbecility of commanding officers" and like thoughts. Although some of the words and phrases used in the book are antiquated and military, it is an easy, fascinating read. Here is a sample

*"Get ready, men!" commanded Colonel McClennan, and the "click" of five hundred muskets gave notice that it was done. Then burst forth in thundering tones five hundred iron throats, and "buck and ball" were hurled against the advancing enemy with telling effect. His lines wavered, hesitated and finally halted, but the storm of battle did not abate.*

While the books in our library are there for research purposes only, many of the older books are available, online, for free. The book described above is available in a digital form for you to download and read on your own computer, smart phone, tablet or e-reader. The link is:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=loc.ark:/13960/t87h1t81q;view=1up;seq=9>

Please call the archives at 215-233-4600 for assistance in accessing this book.

FROM THE  
*Archives*

*Locals relaxing at  
Dudley's Place,  
700 Bethlehem Pike,  
Erdenheim,  
circa 1940s*





# Tales from our Archives

*Archives volunteer, Ray Smith, has made some fascinating discoveries while cataloging the collection.  
Below, Ray shares accounts of a horrific incident at a local Sanitarium.*

## World Focus on Springfield: Patients Shackled at Belle-Vista Sanitarium

### “Chained Lunatics Die in Blaze”

*The Sydney Morning Herald*

### “9 Men Die in Blaze”

*The Hong Kong Telegraph*

### “Man Confesses Hospital Arson”

*The Straits Times (Singapore)*

### “Nine Die in Hospital Fire”

### “All Victims Shackled to Beds in Ward”

*Chicago Daily Tribune*

Major newspapers around the globe were reporting on Springfield Township 67 years ago when 26 year old Nicholas Verna, a patient at Belle-Vista Sanitarium, set a fire in the basement of the hospital. There were front page headlines about the fire and the shocking conditions within the walls of this little-known sanitarium. The hospital complex was located at the intersection of Germantown Pike and Northwestern Avenue, the present site of the Lincoln Woods Apartments. At the time, asylums had much less oversight and, unless there was a serious mishap, the doctors who ran the hospitals had free reign in providing care to the patients.

Mr. Verna had been committed because of his propensity for arson. No one at the hospital seemed to take the dangerous nature of some of the patients seriously, and this arsonist was able to borrow a lighter from one of the custodians. Photos of the fire and its aftermath appeared globally, along with interviews of township and county officials. By all accounts, the staff at the hospital and our Flourtown fire department did everything possible to save the patients, but the impediments were overwhelming.

As quickly as the newspapers reported the catastrophe, the news was dropped, with only occasional news about the aftermath and the difficulties the owner was having

in keeping his license for the hospital. Older township residents may remember that Northwestern Psychiatric occupied this location after Belle-Vista ceased operations.

The historical society has digital copies of some of the newspaper stories published around the world and will make them available to any interested readers. The following article is from the Chicago Daily Tribune...

*Philadelphia, March 30 [Thursday]-[Special]* Nine patients shackled to their beds in the violent ward of the Belle-Vista, private sanitarium in nearby Springfield township, were suffocated, and 30 others, including patients and firemen, were overcome by smoke when the sanitarium's third fire in 14 months broke out last night in the basement.

Nurses and attendants groped thru dense smoke that filled the L-shaped two story stone building to lead most of the 91 patients to safety.

Firemen were forced to break thru barred doors and windows to rescue mental patients who were sleeping directly above that section of the basement where the fire was first discovered.

#### All Shackled to Beds

Five of the nine victims were pronounced dead at the scene. Three died in Montgomery hospital,

Norristown, and another at Germantown hospital. All had been among the 15 mental patients shackled to their beds in the violent ward.

Volunteer firemen summoned when the blaze was first discovered were unable to cope with it and went across the Philadelphia city limits to summon help. Firemen from other surrounding towns joined in fighting the flames and leading patients to safety.

Screams of the patients added to the confusion of the scene and some of the inmates of the institution fought off firemen, flailing their arms when released and attempting to run toward the flames.

Water was pumped from Wissahickon Creek and hydrants into the seething basement. The fire was confined to the basement.

#### Treat Many at Scene

An emergency ward was set up in the institution's administration wing – a converted private home, and many of those overcome were treated there. Others were sent to hospitals.

George Lewis, 45, an attendant, said he was awakened by the sound of arriving fire equipment. He groped thru the smoke and led firemen to the ward where windows were barred, doors locked and unruly patients strapped to their beds.

Lewis said he helped firemen force open the locked doors and went from bed to bed, calling the patients by name in an attempt to calm them as firemen cut the leather straps that bound them to their beds and carried them out.

#### Form Human Chains

Nurses and other attendants herded patients into small groups and led them by human chains thru the acrid smoke to safety.

A group of women patients who had climbed out windows onto a porch roof were rescued by firemen who raised ladders.

Springfield township authorities tentatively identified five of the victims as: John Siggins, 70; A. Romano, 26; Perry Fass, 19; Nicholas Terinini, 26, and Irving Halpern, 42.

The Belle-Vista, a 40 year old sanitarium for convalescent, aged, nervous and mental patients, had 43 male patients on the first floor, 33 women on the second floor, and 15 male mental patients.

Origin of the fire was not determined by firemen who said the blaze centered in a storage room in the basement. The flames were brought under control at 12:40 a.m., about three hours after the first alarm was turned in.

On Jan. 2, 1949, a fire forced patients to flee from an older wing of the institution. Last Jan. 29 a burning mattress was found in the basement but was extinguished quickly.

The Archives are  
**OPEN**  
to the Public

TUESDAYS 7pm – 9pm  
WEDNESDAYS 1pm – 5pm  
SATURDAYS 9am – 12noon

For more information,  
call 215-233-4600



# Archives UPDATE

*Over the past few months we have received the following donations:*

- A terra cotta garden bird created by Enfield Tile and Pottery Company, donated by John Cannon.
- A baseball cap from the Orelan-Wyndmoor Little League, donated by Bob Hibbert.
- Memorials for the class of 1961, donated by Virginia Bergey.

*Our dedicated staff and volunteers have been working on the following projects:*

- Digitizing the photograph collection
- Cataloging newspaper articles relating to Springfield Township and the historical society
- Cataloging our book collection
- Cataloging new acquisitions for the archives

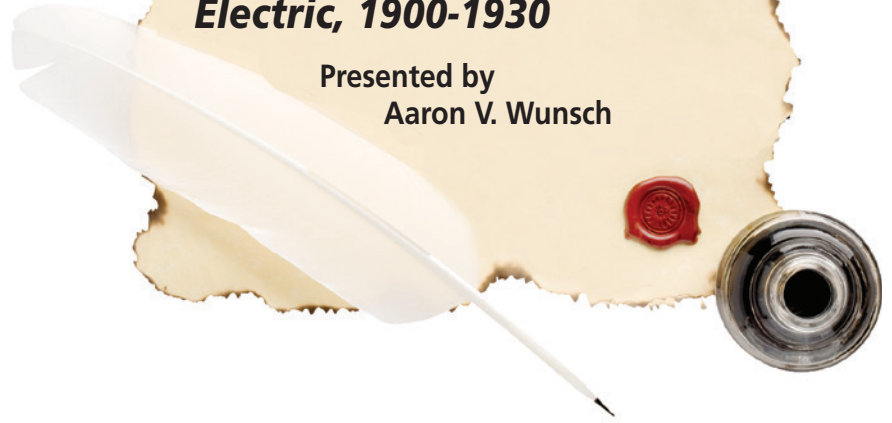
We are extremely appreciative of our volunteers, who have given over 370 hours of service in 2016. If you are interested in volunteering, please email us at [archives@springfieldhistory.org](mailto:archives@springfieldhistory.org).

Reserve  
the Date

**Thurs., Feb. 16, 2017 – 7:30 p.m.**

**Architecture at Philadelphia  
Electric, 1900-1930**

Presented by  
**Aaron V. Wunsch**



Address Service Requested

**The Challenge**  
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