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The Challenge

PRESERVATION • RESEARCH • EDUCATION

The Golden Age of the AMERICAN COUNTRY CLUBS

Presented by Anne Krulikowski

Thursday, April 27th, 2017 – 7:30 p.m.

Sandy Run Country Club – 200 Valley Green Road, Oreland

APRIL 2017

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Please join us on April 27 as the Springfield Township Historical Society will take the show on the road to the Sandy Run Country Club for a program on the history of the golden age of the American country club. Guest speaker Anne Krulikowski, a former curator at Rockwood Museum in Wilmington, Delaware who now teaches at West Chester University, will examine the social, cultural, and architectural history of the American country club, which extended from 1890s until the Great Crash of 1929.

The Philadelphia region led the country in the development of these suburban institutions, which extended from sources such as men's city clubs and resort casinos. The great suburban migration beginning in the 1890s increased the popularity of the sporting life for entire families

desiring to lead a more active physical and social life all year round. Country club design became a notable part of some architectural practices and national architectural journals began featuring clubhouse designs and plans.

Among the country clubs discussed at the program will be Sandy Run Country Club, which was founded in 1923 under the name of Edgehill Country Club. Founder was J. Franklin Meehan,

an architect and entrepreneur who enjoyed conceiving the idea for a club, finding the property, laying out the golf course, bringing together a number of kindred souls, and running the club during its formative years. The club subsequently acquired a part of the former I.D.H. Ralph estate, 115 acres at the southeast corner of Valley Green and Walnut Rds. The club took its current name in 1927 from the stream that runs through the property.

Krulikowski obtained her Ph.D. in American History and Material Culture from the University of Delaware. For five years she worked as Curator of Education and directed the docent program at Rockwood Museum. She now teaches material culture, public history, consumerism, and urban/suburban history in the History Department of West Chester University. Her publications include

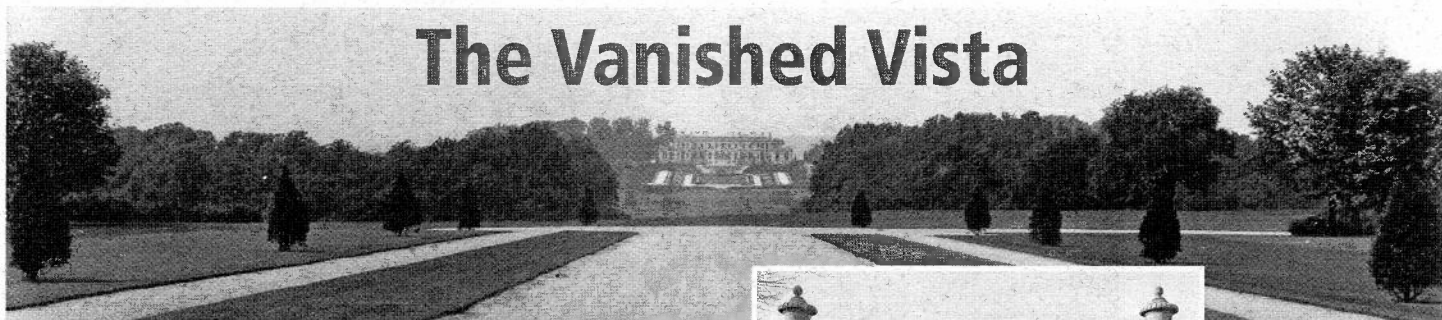
articles on working class suburbs, oral history, the serpentine stone quarry in Chester County, and urban grocery stores.

The program is open to the public. We suggest a \$5 minimum donation to help with the cost of the special venue. Light refreshments will be provided and a cash bar will be available. For more information call the historical society at 215-233-4600.



Arlington, Sandy Run's original clubhouse, was the residence of Irene duPont Hendrickson Ralph. Demolished in 1954, the house was situated in an area where the club's main practice green is located today (Photo courtesy of Sandy Run Country Club).

The Vanished Vista



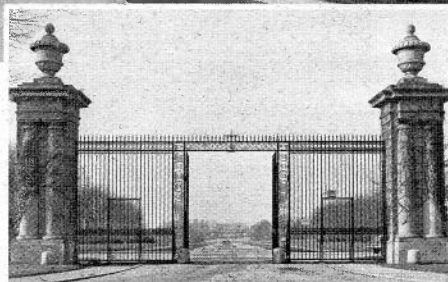
The massive gate pillars and connecting stone walls on Willow Grove Avenue (at Douglas Road) hardly even hint today of their role as a portal to a wonderland.

These pillars once framed a stunning achievement of landscape design by the same French genius who brought us the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia – Jacques-Henri-Auguste Gréber. Well before ground was even broken for the construction of the Stotesburys' Whitmarsh Hall mansion in mid-1916, Gréber had already envisioned a series of vistas and roadway alignments that would dazzle people for years to come.

Visitors arriving at Whitmarsh Hall, often from the train stations in Chestnut Hill, entered through the middle pair of the very ornate gates; only that center section opened to admit cars – the left and right sections of the gateway were fixed, but contained pedestrian gates for foot traffic.

Waved onwards by a Stotesbury employee manning the gates, visitors drove forwards on the center of three parallel white-crushed-stone paths – the center section was the roadway, while the outer two were walks. Directly ahead, at a distance of almost a mile, one could see the garden front of the Whitmarsh Hall mansion, and in just a small example of Gréber's intricate design, the two gravel walkways on either side of the roadway seemed to perfectly align with the outer white paths in the garden, far away. To make the garden paths more visible from this distance, Gréber sloped the main garden down, at an almost-imperceptible 2.3 degree angle.

But he only allowed the visitor a brief time to admire this alignment, as one quickly came to a small circle in the drive, where the two outer paths vanished and the driveway continued at an angle to the right. Very soon, a stand of trees completely obscured the prior view, and the road curved downhill, shortly to bend left and enter "The Plaza," which survives today as Claridge Circle. Because of the landscape design, the



Whitmarsh Hall main gates, circa 1940. Photographer unknown.

Above: View towards the mansion from just inside the Willow Grove Avenue gates.

Photo taken August 25, 1920 by William R. Hellerman, for the George A. Fuller Corporation.

Plaza could not be seen when one passed through the gates, and was somewhat of a surprise for the first-time visitor. From the Plaza, one could again see the mansion – but not the gardens – atop the hill.

The mansion would again disappear from view as the car left the Plaza on another road to the right, then curved again left, and passed through another stand of trees. Now, the driveway was running parallel to the garden, but the view of it was blocked by Maple Allée, the double-row of mature Norway maple trees placed by Gréber for precisely this purpose. Continuing across a bridge over the service driveway (which was cleverly camouflaged by hedges literally planted on the bridge), the visitor finally found himself in the forecourt, facing the pillared portico of the mansion, to be greeted by the Stotesburys' liveried footmen.

Sadly, the remarkable vista inside the Willow Grove gates, and the theatrical path of the main driveway, were lost forever in the late 1940s, and can be recalled now only in photos.

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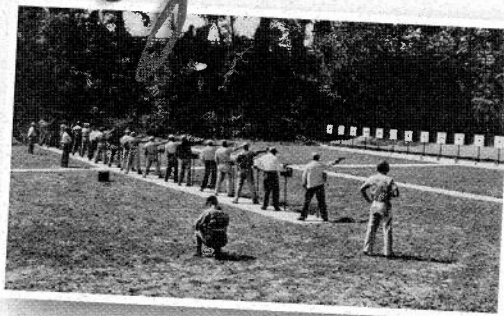
Sweep Away the Cobwebs

Our volunteers are working on documenting various important people, institutions and businesses in Springfield. Your assistance is needed if you:

- Lived in or had relatives who lived or worked in **Bethesda Christian Children's Home**. It was located at Willow Grove and Stenton Avenues and closed in the late 1940's.
- Have any information about **Saint Agnes Residence**, a home for the aged, that was located at Gravers and Stenton Avenues. It closed in the late 1950s.
- Have any information about **Dr. Carolina Sylvia Ruth Engelhardt** who may have operated a Hospital or Sanitarium at Gravers and Stenton Avenues between 1922 and 1937
- Are a descendant of, or worked for, any of the Commercial **rose growing families** in Wyndmoor.

We will welcome any pictures, documents, stories or recollections about the above topics. Please pass this along to anyone you know who can help and call us during our regular office hours (215-233-4600) or send us an e-mail (archives@springfieldhistory.org).

FROM THE
Archives



First annual pistol tournament for the Springfield Township Police Officers, circa September 1951

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Springfield's Historic Businesses:

SPOTLIGHT ON

FISHER'S SERVICE STATION

(former Lukoil on Willow Grove Avenue, Wyndmoor)

Served the Springfield community for over Sixty Years

Ninth in a series of articles
highlighting historic businesses
in Springfield Township.

Written by Katie Worrall

JOHN C. FISHER'S SERVICE STATION at 919 E. Willow Grove Ave., Wyndmoor, closed at the end of 2016 after serving the neighborhood since 1952.

Fisher's father, Charles A. Fisher, and his brother, Philip A. Fisher, rented the station from Gulf Oil, which had it built. It was a gasoline and service station that did car washes in its early days. After his father served in the Navy, he worked in roofing when the opportunity to own his own business came up.

His father won first place among Gulf stations in Pennsylvania, winning him a trip to Hawaii in the 1960s. Philip left the business in 1965 to work for his father-in-law at the Meyer's Sump Pumps and John Fisher's father became the owner.

John recalls that his mother did the book work after he and his brother left for school. "We had guard dogs before we had alarms," John recalls.

John, who grew up in Oreland and now lives in Lower Gwynedd, recalls partying at the ruins of Whitmarsh Hall, the Wyndmoor estate owned by Edward T. Stotesbury.

John and his brother Michael began working at the station in 1968, cleaning up and being part of life at the station. When John left to study law at Temple University from 1972 until 1977, Michael stayed at the station to head the mechanics work. His father took ownership of the station in the 1970s and sent Michael to work at his service station in Elkins Park. The station in Elkins Park was sold in the 1970s and his father had additional lifts and bays installed behind the station in Wyndmoor,



John C. Fisher



Charles A. Fisher, proprietor of the service station for a number of years, clears the windshield of a customer's car at the time the station was a Gulf station.

bringing the number of lifts and bays to seven, up from the usual two or three.

The business was built on service. It is a necessity for the business, John said. In the late 1970s, they survived the gas crisis in which custom-

ers were sold gas on an odd and even number basis. As the 1970s and 1980s continued, John and his brother took over so that their father could retire. In 1992, when Michael was in charge of mechanics and John was in charge of gasoline, the service station switched from Gulf Oil to Mobil. That was the beginning of self-service, John said. They pumped more than 90,000 to 100,000 gallons of gasoline.

Michael got cancer in 2012 and died in 2014. Their parents have also passed away.

John is closing the business for health reasons at his doctor's suggestion. "It has been quite a ride. We have had terrific customers," he said.

When he was on his honeymoon in the Caribbean in 1993, three customers came up to him to say hello. He had similar experiences in Europe.

When Exxon and Mobil merged, John said that the Federal Trade Commission said that every station south of New York City



The Fishers' service station was a Mobil station after it was a Gulf station.

would be a Mobil station and every station north would be an Exxon station. John had a contract with Lukoil, so the station became a Lukoil station.

The property has been purchased and a redevelopment plan for the property has been proposed.

LIBRARY HIGHLIGHTS

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

History of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, edited by Theodore Bean, is THE comprehensive history of the county, people and localities that all later histories use as a reference. It was published in 1884 to mark the centennial of the county. Col. Bean was a war veteran, a lawyer from Norristown and one of the original officers of the county historical society.

The chapters cover numerous aspects of our local past, from aborigines to zoology, the various groups who settled here and the industries that made us prosper. Because of its proximity to the civil war, Col. Bean devoted a large portion to the Montgomery county regiments, detailing their activities and listing all of the men who served.

Of particular interest are the sections on stage lines, where Flourtown experienced early growth, and on Springfield itself. You can read about our loss of access to the Schuylkill River, our covered bridge over the Wissahickon and the stops on the Plymouth railroad at Flourtown and Oreland. There is also extensive coverage on the prominent families that called Springfield Township home.

An example of the many interesting things you'll find, are "*minutes of first court held in Montgomery County*" (nota bene: Springfield township was a litigant).

"The only cases adjudicated at this Court were the Overseers of the Poor of New Hanover Township. vs. The Overseers of the Poor of Providence Township, and the Overseers of the Poor of Whitmarsh Township vs. the Overseers of the Poor of Springfield Township." — Quarter Sessions Docket, No.1. p.1.

This isn't a book that you'll want to read, cover to cover, but you'll leaf through the chapters and indices and certainly spot topics of personal interest. The downloaded version of the book is in PDF format, making it much easier to "find" (ctrl+"f") names and references instantly.

While the books in our library are there for research purposes only, many of the older books are available, on-line, 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:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t9g45bb93>

We are available to provide assistance if you need help getting the book. Please call the archives at 215-233-4600 or send an email to archives@springfieldhistory.org for assistance in accessing this book.

Archives UPDATE

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

- A watercolor painting of the back of the Black Horse Inn, donated by Bob Cutler.
- A poster from the Whitemarsh Valley Hunt Races from 1951, donated by Joanne Cisco Olszewski

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

- Cataloging maps, atlases and blueprints
- Cataloging our library collection
- Sorting through the Springfield Township Historical Society records
- Processing and cataloging photographs of local estates

We are extremely thankful for all of our dedicated volunteers, without whom these projects would not be accomplished! We are currently looking for archival and social media volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering, please email us at archives@springfieldhistory.org.

Reserve the Date

Thurs., April 27, 2017 – 7:30 p.m.

The Golden Age of the American Country Clubs

**Presented by Anne Krulikowski
Sandy Run Country Club**

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