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## SEPTEMBER 2019

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# The Challenge

PRESERVATION • RESEARCH • EDUCATION

## There Once Was a House Called Compton

*Presented by Joyce Munro*

Author, essayist and former Dean, Graduate School of Chestnut Hill College

**Thursday, September 19, 2019 – 7:30 p.m.**

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

When John T. Morris and his sister Lydia T. Morris bought property in Chestnut Hill in 1887, they immediately started planning their house. They chose to situate the house on the highest point of the property – located on present-day Morris Arboretum land – not just to catch the summer breezes but to preside over what soon became known as one of the “most remarkable country seats” in the Philadelphia area. Its fixtures were modern and its rooms sizeable enough to accommodate treasures purchased on trips to foreign lands and their ever-increasing botanical library.

After making their preferences known in a series of sketches, John turned the project over to architect Theophilus T. Chandler, Jr., who was an aficionado of European-inspired gables and bays, dissimilar window styles and irregular roof lines.

But the story of this house is not only its architecture and its owners; it's about what went on inside, who worked there and what ultimately happened to it.

In the program presented by the Springfield Township Historical Society, Dr. Munro will draw

from her research on the Morris family, use photos, maps, blueprints and anecdotes to tell the story of the house from private estate days to university era. Along the way she will discuss why John and Lydia named it Compton, how they celebrated

the 25th anniversary of the house and what each of them wanted done with the house when they died (spoiler alert: they did not want the same thing).

Dr. Munro is an essayist and former Dean of the Graduate School of Chestnut Hill College. She is author of “Untold Stories of

Compton” for the Morris Arboretum blog and “From the Archives” for the arboretum's Volunteer Newsletter. Her long-form essays about the Morris family can be found in Philadelphia Stories, Hidden City Philadelphia, Broad Street Review, Poor Yorick, The Copperfield Review and WHY? Speak Easy.

This Historical Society program is open to the public free of charge. Reservations are not required. Light refreshments will be served. For more information, call 215-233-4600 or visit [www.springfieldhistory.org](http://www.springfieldhistory.org)



Compton

### PLEASE NOTE:

Attendees to the September program are encouraged to bring a canned food item to donate to the First Presbyterian Church's neighborhood food pantry. Please help us to support this important cause.

# President's Corner

Two large urns, formerly located at Whitmarsh Hall, and currently housed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, will be returning to Springfield Township on September 19th. The urns are being deaccessioned by the Museum as part of a significant redesign of the West Entrance.

In April, Dr. David Contosta, Professor of History at Chestnut Hill College, gave an encore presentation of his research on Erdenheim Farm and Carson Valley. The proceeds of this event will be used for the urn relocation project. In May, the Wyndmoor Hose Company and the Flourtown Fire Company organized a very successful car wash (*see page 4*). Many thanks to all who organized and participated in these events. In addition to the proceeds from these events, funds remaining from the completed restoration of the Black Horse Inn will be used for the urn relocation project.

After the urns are relocated, there will be on-going expenses including annual plantings, insurance, and maintenance. The urns will be protected during the winter months, as they were when originally displayed at

Whitmarsh Hall. Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to this effort on our website at [www.springfieldhistory.org](http://www.springfieldhistory.org).

I am also very pleased to share with you the progress that has been made in drafting a Historic Preservation Ordinance for the Township. STHS Vice-President Al Comly and I have been working with a sub-committee of the Planning Commission for many months to craft an ordinance that will provide some protection for the historic resources in the Township. It appears as if the Commissioners will have the Ordinance for their consideration before the end of the year.

Please contact your Commissioner and ask that they support the adoption of the new Historic Preservation Ordinance.

Thank you for your continued support of the Historical Society.

**T. Scott Kreilick**

*President, Springfield Township Historical Society*

## SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY · 6TH ANNUAL HISTORY IN MOTION



# LAVEROCK HILL

**November 7, 2019 • 7PM**

**Ambler Theater, Ambler, PA 19002**

*ESTATE OF THE SIMS,  
STARR & LLOYD FAMILIES*

**Laverock Hill**, an estate that straddles Springfield and Cheltenham Townships, will be the subject of Springfield Township Historical Society's sixth annual History in Motion on Thursday, November 7th at the Ambler Theater.

America's Gilded Age was well represented in Springfield Township, with splendid manors built on manicured acres, designed by leading architects of the day, and lived in by prominent Philadelphia families. In some cases, these homes or their scattered remnants still exist to remind us of their splendor, with names such as Belcroft, Harston Hall, Guildford, and Whitmarsh Hall leading the roll call. But another such estate that straddles Springfield and Cheltenham Townships, which will cease to exist by the end of this year, is Laverock Hill.

In the latter half of the 19th century this estate consisted of a modest house on 23 acres of farmland owned by James Brooke. In 1892 he would sell it to John Clarke Sims, Jr. who would add acreage to the estate over time. Sims, the secretary of the Pennsylvania Reading Railroad Company, subsequently commissioned the architectural firm of Cope & Stewardson to build him a suitable country residence looking over the Whitmarsh Valley. This Jacobean-style residence, originally named Falcon Hill, was host to many high society events hosted by the Sims. When John Sims died prematurely at the age of 55, the property was put up for sale and rented until a buyer could be found. During this time an heiress by the name of Miss Julia Garrett passed away and left the bulk of her estate to her stock broker, Isaac Tatnall Starr. He

purchased Falcon Hill in 1915, and hired renowned architect Charles Platt to remodel and enlarge the main house, which he then renamed Laverock Hill. Starr had Platt design new outbuildings and greenhouses, as well as remodel the stable and barn. Platt also collaborated with landscape architect Ellen Biddle Shipman to create a formal garden next to the main house, replete with reflecting pool and pergola housing a bronze statue of Pan by New York sculptor Henry Herring. Starr and his wife, raised three of their children at Laverock Hill. Their daughter Hope, her husband Morris Lloyd and their family were the last residents of the mansion. This Gilded Age country home is today owned by a developer and slated for demolition and redevelopment as a housing community in 2019.

The program will be presented by Historical Society archive volunteer Ed Zwicker III, and Ed Zwicker IV, an archive volunteer and former Historical Society president, who have presented talks for STHS in the past, including most recently one on Whitmarsh Hall. They will recount stories of Falcon Hill/Laverock Hill, including its early beginnings, growth through the years, and the events and people surrounding it at different points in its history.

Tickets are \$25 each and may be purchased online by visiting our website, [www.springfieldhistory.org](http://www.springfieldhistory.org), or send a check payable to the "Springfield Township Historical Society" to P.O. 564, Flourtown, PA 19031.

**For more information, call the Historical Society at 215-233-4600.**



# All That Glitters Is Gold... or Brass...

Thursday, May 19, 1938 marked the end of the Gilded Age in Wyndmoor.

That was the day that Edward Townsend Stotesbury left his Wyndmoor estate, Whitmarsh Hall, for the last time.

Mr. Stotesbury had died three days earlier, after suffering a heart attack while being driven home from work. Preparations began immediately for his funeral service – the last major event that would be held at his mansion – and Mrs. Stotesbury was adamant about security. She hired Pinkerton men to “sweep” the mansion and grounds, to make sure that no uninvited guests – or photographers – could sneak in. Guards were posted at all of the gates around the property.

A very selective list of 300 guests were invited to attend the 2:30 PM service, to be held in the mansion's Grand Salon (Ballroom).

The bier holding Mr. Stotesbury's casket was placed at the center of the room. Harry Harris Jr. (son of the manager of Stotesbury's Winoga Stock Farm on Mermaid Lane) recalled in a 1986 interview that “the casket itself was draped with a gardenia blanket, made by Battles florists right there in Whitmarsh Hall.” Wyndmoor druggist John F. Dettrey recalled seeing, earlier that morning, 100 truckloads of flowers, in H.H. Battles trucks, coming down Willow Grove Avenue. The small trap drum that Stotesbury had so often played at public occasions was placed at the foot of the casket, draped in black crepe. Red roses wreathed a recently-completed bust of Mr. Stotesbury, as well as the large portrait of him which hung in the Entrance Hall. The Grand Salon was lit entirely with candles for the service.

Tony Leach of Chestnut Hill recalled that his father, Nicholas Leach, normally a member of the landscaping staff, had been detailed to guard the Service Entrance gates on Cheltenham Avenue, and redirect all traffic to the main gates on Willow Grove Avenue. Nicholas had to deny entrance to Mr. Atwater Kent's limousine, and Mr. Kent was apparently unhappy that his status as one of Stotesbury's close friends did not accord him special access. During the



*Doris Duke's custom-built 1936 Cadillac V-16 Town Cabriolet, photographed in June 1936 in 'The Plaza' at Whitmarsh Hall. This location still exists as Claridge Circle in Wyndmoor. This is a still frame from a 16mm Kodachrome home movie shot by James H.R. Cromwell, and was reproduced in the article 'A Sweet Sixteen for the World's Richest Girl' in 'The Classic Car', Volume LXV, Number 4, Winter 2017.*



*The casket of E. T. Stotesbury is carried to his gravesite at Woodlands Cemetery by uniformed Fairmount Park guards, May 19, 1938. Photo credit: Temple University Urban Archives*

services, the house and grounds were monitored by Pennsylvania State Police, Springfield Township police detectives, Fairmount Park guards, and special officers in plainclothes. Springfield Township patrolman Thomas Taylor was given the special

honor of guarding the main gate on Willow Grove Avenue.

When the cortege finally departed the mansion with a motorcycle escort, at about five PM, it seemed like all of Wyndmoor was lining the route, down Willow Grove Avenue to McCallum Street, where it turned to follow Wissahickon Drive through the park.

It was along Willow Grove Avenue, outside the main gates, that seven-year-old Anna Mae McGlade and her friends waited – all they really wanted to see was Doris Duke's famous “gold Cadillac.” Two years earlier, Doris had ordered the full-custom V-16 Cadillac, after returning from her year-long honeymoon. Her new car was twice as expensive as any other Cadillac produced in 1936, with



*Doris Duke Cromwell, heiress to tobacco millions, and her husband, James H.R. Cromwell, son of Mrs. E. T. Stotesbury, shown in the funeral procession for Mr. Stotesbury yesterday.*

*Photo and caption from the Philadelphia Inquirer, May 20, 1938, page 4.*

chrome parts deleted and trim parts fabricated in hammered brass, all of which appeared to be gold, along with a gold hood ornament. This was unthinkable extravagance during the Great Depression – but perhaps not for Doris, the “World's Richest Girl.” (Anna Mae was the daughter of John McGlade, the longest-tenured employee at Whitmarsh Hall – he began work on the construction of the estate, and continued under all subsequent owners until his passing in 1974.)

Six months after this momentous day, Whitmarsh Hall would be closed up, the staff dismissed, and by the end of 1938, Wyndmoor's part of the Gilded Age had ended forever. While the mansion was reopened secretly, to store artworks for the Metropolitan Museum of New York, (1942-1944), and later in 1944, was converted by PennSalt into its Whitmarsh Research Laboratories (1944-1964), the glory days of America's Versailles had already passed.

**Coming Fall 2019**

to the **Springfield Township Public Library**

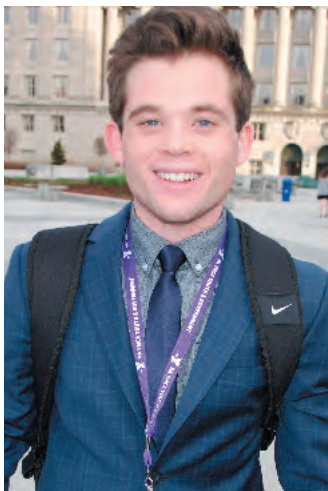
**Springfield Township Historical Society's Exhibit on**

**Springfield's Great Estates of the Gilded Age**

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<http://www.facebook.com/groups/WhitmarshHall/>





## Historical Society Gives Award to High School Graduating Senior

**Dean Hanlon**, of Oreland, was presented with the Springfield Township Historical Society's scholarship award at an assembly at Springfield Township High School in June.

The award is given to a graduating senior who plans to major in history, social studies or economics. Dean, who graduated from the school in June and will attend Boston College, said that he has always been interested in history, whether US, world or government. He plans to major in political science and do ROTC. He would like to be a lawyer for the U.S. Army.

In high school, Dean served as class president during his senior year, played on the soccer team and participated in a program called "Youth and Government" in which participants visit Harrisburg and do a mock trial each year.

# Archives UPDATE

During the first half of 2019, Springfield Township Historical Society received 24 gifts of personal papers, photographs, ephemera, and objects which have included:

- Postcard of La Salle High School from Old York Road Historical Society.
- Photograph of Mr. and Mrs. Stotesbury with guard (Joe) from Michael Bonacci.
- Six (6) issues (November 2018 – January-April 2019) of the *Enterprise* from Ed Zwicker IV.
- Two (2) Township of Springfield Newsletters, Spring/Summer from Mary Washington and Spring/Summer 2019 brought in by Ed Zwicker IV.
- Photographs of St. Genevieve's Church and St. Joseph Villa circa 1987-99 used for publication in the *Chestnut Hill Local* from the Chestnut Hill Conservancy.
- Materials relating to Jane S. Johnson's involvement with the Flourtown Women's Club and the

Springfield Township Historical Society including minutes, correspondence, clippings, ephemera, and photographs from Carol J. Johnson for Jane S. Johnson.

- "Plan of Chestnut Hill" 1827 plate (Wyndmoor) framed from David and Jan Kollack.
- Book: *The Mines and Minerals of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania* by Ronald A. Sloto.
- Digital image of Sunnybrook housing plan brochure circa 1948 by Cindy Hamilton.
- Photocopy of article "Oreland's Pool" by Edward Breisacker from the *Boy Scouts of America Delaware and Montgomery Counties 1924 Annual*, with photocopy of the Annual's cover from Bob Hibbert.
- Matthew H. McCloskey obituary and copies of Philadelphia Inquirer ads for Whitmarsh Village homes from Cindy Hamilton.

STHS has had several inquiries. Several drop-in visitors and phone calls were received from

individuals seeking general photographs of Home of Consumptives/ All Saints Hospital, Harston Hall, Whitmarsh Hall, Robert Carson, Erdenheim Farm, and John McCloskey as well as records on local houses. We are extremely thankful for all of our dedicated volunteers. They provided approximately 233 hours of service from January 1 – July 31. On-going efforts by volunteers Ray Smith, Barbara Coleman, Ed and Muriel Zwicker, Ed Zwicker IV, and Steve Lester to sort organize, scan, catalog records in the Society's collection, as well as assist researchers, have made a significant contribution to the accessibility of the STHS holdings.



*If you are interested in volunteering, researching a topic, or have items you wish to donate to the Society, please email us at [archives@springfieldhistory.org](mailto:archives@springfieldhistory.org).*

## CALL FOR Archives Volunteers

Our dedicated group of volunteers are continuing to catalogue our collection. Our volunteers provide a valuable service to the Historical Society and are vital to carrying out our mission. If you like history and working with computers and have an hour or two to spare each week please contact the archives at [archives@springfieldhistory.org](mailto:archives@springfieldhistory.org) or 215-233-4600.

## White City to be featured at Chestnut Hill Night of Lights

**Mark your calendars:** On the evening of **Friday October 4, 2019** from 7pm to 9:30pm (rain date October 5) at 7PM, Springfield Township Historical Society will be participating in the Chestnut Hill Conservancy's annual Night of Lights event. This innovative public art exhibit transforms Germantown Avenue into an interactive exhibit of local history and architecture. At the invitation of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy, STHS has curated a series of postcards from the collection featuring the Chestnut Hill Amusement Park which will be projected through storefront windows along the avenue. Also known as "The White City," the amusement park operated just a few short years on land across from the Wheel Pump Inn between Paper Mill Road and Bethlehem Pike. For more details on the entire evening, please visit the Chestnut Hill Conservancy's website, [chconservancy.org](http://chconservancy.org).



Volunteer firefighters from the Wyndmoor Hose Company #1 and the Flourtown Fire Company washed cars at a car wash in May to help the Springfield Township Historical Society raise money to bring two urns that were part of the Stotesbury estate home to Springfield Township. One thousand dollars was raised at the event, which attracted a terrific crowd of people who care deeply about supporting Springfield Township. The urns, which are being deaccessioned by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, are expected to be installed on township property this month.



# Our Public Schools



Written by Ray Smith

Looking at the new school building going up on Paper Mill Road and the repurposing presently underway of the Willow Grove Avenue School, you can't help but wonder how the school district has changed over the years. The Historical Society has a few books, yearbooks and manuscripts that document these events and changes. We'll share a few of the highlights here and invite you to stop by the archives to explore the details.

A comprehensive school district history was researched and written in 1980 by Nancy Parke and William Grundy. In it, they noted that public schools weren't required until 1849, and that education earlier than that was largely church related. Our earliest school board records start in the 1880s, although records show a Ridge Road school as far back as 1843. The Flourtown School was built in 1879 and Orelan and Wyndmoor had schools by 1880.

- The Pennsylvania "Free School Act" was passed in 1836, but it took 19 years for all of Montgomery County to comply.
- The History of Montgomery County has a table for 1842 showing the length of the school year by township. The Springfield Township school year was 4 months, second from the bottom, surpassing only Whitpain Township.
- An 1858 History by William Buck states "Education is not neglected in Springfield, and for the school year ending June 1st, 1857, four schools were open eight months, attended by three hundred and forty nine scholars, and \$1,081 were levied to defray the expenses of the same." For reference, the 1860 census shows the population of Springfield Township at 1,067.
- Up until 1932, the principal of a school was one of the teachers, given additional administrative responsibilities. District administration was conducted by the elected school board until a district superintendent was appointed in that year. Additional administrators came on board in 1952 and 1960.
- By 1896 the district had eight teachers. Two were in Flourtown, three in Wyndmoor, two in Orelan and one on Ridge Road. Many Wyndmoor children, residing at Bethesda Home were schooled at the home by three teachers. The 1900 annual report shows that of the 169 children, "A large number of children attended the Parish School under the care of St Paul's P.E. Church" and "A few of the larger children go to the Public School at Chestnut Hill."
- Some of the High School yearbooks from later years show that some of the institutionalized students from Bethesda and Carson Valley attended our High School.
- The Flourtown school had additions built in 1907, 1921 and 1950. In 1909 Springfield schools went up to 10th grade. Eleventh and twelfth grades were provided by Ambler with the students commuting there by trolley.
- In 1919 Springfield School district had 16 [sic] schools staffed by 16 female teachers with an average attendance of 345 students. The numbers were found in the 1923 county history by Clifton Swenk Hunsicker.
- In 1920 a nurse was hired to examine all of the students.

- In 1929 Wyndmoor students received religious training from Grace Lutheran church.
- In 1932 the schools delayed opening until October 16th, due to an infantile paralysis scare.
- In 1940, Kindergarten was offered by the district.
- During the war years, education was adapted to prepare the students for eventual war service. Many upper class students and teachers left to join the effort. (This is documented in the yearbooks.) Students from outside the township were enrolled in our high school.

## Help us Document the Recent History of the Springfield Township School District

The recent and ongoing changes in the School District point out the need for an update to the Parke & Grundy school history written in 1980. We could use some people with various backgrounds to research, compile and write a supplement for the past 40 years

If you have a background in historical research, writing, editing or data compilation, we could use your help. Ideally, we would like to have a retired STSD administrator or teacher to direct this research and help us locate relevant information.

If you are interested in any of these volunteer opportunities, please send an e-mail to [Archives@Springfieldhistory.org](mailto:Archives@Springfieldhistory.org) with "School History" in the subject line. If you would like to review the existing history, please stop by the Archives during our regular hours and ask for 2011.88.46 and 2014.21.1.

## Notice of Elections, September 19, 2019

Elections will be held at our Annual Meeting on September 19, 2019. The Slate, prepared by the Nominating Committee, follows.

### SLATE Directors also Serving as Officers – 4 year Terms

<b>President</b> .....	T. Scott Kreilick.....	2018-2021
<b>Vice President</b> .....	Robert Brock .....	2020-2023
<b>Treasurer</b> .....	Albert M. Comly, Jr.....	2018-2021
<b>Secretary</b> .....	Catherine Worrall .....	2020-2023

### DIRECTORS Terms take effect on January 1, 2020

#### Board Members for Re-Election

Robert Brock .....	2020-2023
Dolores Jordan Cannon.....	2020-2023
Katharine Haight .....	2020-2023
Bud Henkels.....	2020-2023
Robert Wilmot .....	2020-2023
Catherine Worrall .....	2020-2023

#### Candidate for Election

Kerry Boccella.....	2020-2023
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#### Board Members Serving 4-Year Terms (elected October 5, 2017)

Albert M. Comly, Jr.....	2018-2021
Cynthia Hamilton .....	2018-2021
T. Scott Kreilick .....	2018-2021
Judy Smith.....	2018-2021
Anna Cox Toogood.....	2018-2021

#### Emeritus Board Member

Dorothy Cutler

**Become a Friend of  
S T H S**

FOR DETAILS PLEASE VISIT:

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# FROM THE *Archives*

Patients at the Home for Consumptives, circa early 20th Century. Built on the country seat of William Bucknell Esquire (8601 Stenton Avenue), noted architects Furness & Evans designed the Home, which was established in 1887 to address the growing need for tuberculosis treatment. The building shown in this photo, possibly Bucknell's house, is no longer extant on the site. Springfield Township Historical Collection 2010.84.2



The Historical Society is on Facebook; find us at ***Springfield Township Historical Society.***

## *Reserve the Date*

**Thurs., Sept. 19, 2019 – 7:30 p.m.**

### **THERE ONCE WAS A HOUSE CALLED COMPTON**

**Presented by Joyce Munro**

***First Presbyterian Church  
in Springfield***



Address Service Requested

***The Challenge***  
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