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The Challenge

PRESERVATION • RESEARCH • EDUCATION

Philo T. Farnsworth INVENTOR OF ELECTRONIC TV

Presented by Coxie Toogood

Member of Board of Directors, STHS and
Former Historian at Independence National Historical Park

Thursday, September 23 (on Zoom) ■ 7:30 PM

Philo T. Farnsworth, an inventor who developed the first all-electronic television system, lived in Chestnut Hill and later Wyndmoor area.

Farnsworth was a technical prodigy from an early age. He knew that only an electronic system could scan and assemble an image fast enough, and by 1922, he had worked out the basic outlines of electronic television.

In 1926, he went to work for charity fundraisers George Everson and Leslie Gorrell, who he convinced to go into partnership to produce his television system. Farnsworth moved to Los Angeles and with funds from Everson and Gorrell and laboratory space at Crocker First National Bank of San Francisco, he made his first successful electronic television transmission on September 7, 1927, and filed a patent for his system.

His backers at Crocker First National Bank approached the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), which sent the head of its electronic television project, Vladimir Zworykin, to evaluate Farnsworth's work. Zworykin's receiver, the kinescope, was superior to Farnsworth's, but Farnsworth's camera tube, the image dissector, was superior to that of Zworykin.

Farnsworth rejected an offer from RCA for his work and joined forces with Philadelphia Storage Battery Company (Philco) in 1931. Philco was the largest manufacturer of radios in the country, according to *The Distant Vision: Romance and Discovery on an Invisible Frontier*, written by his wife, Elma G. Farnsworth, and published by Pemberly Kent Publishers Inc., in 1990.

Farnsworth's association with Philco lasted until 1933. He then formed his own company, Farnsworth Television, which in 1937 made a licensing deal with American Telephone & Telegraph (AT&T) in which each company could use the other's patents.

Farnsworth Television reorganized in 1938 as Farnsworth Television and Radio and purchased



Philo T. Farnsworth, 1939

phonograph manufacturer Capehart Corporation's factory in Fort Wayne, Indiana, to manufacture both devices. Production of radios began in 1938. After a series of court battles with RCA, RCA agreed to pay Farnsworth royalties for his patents. Television development in America was halted during World War II. In 1947, Farnsworth returned to Fort Wayne and Farnsworth Television produced its first television set. The company was taken over by Inter-

national Telephone and Telegraph (IT&T) in 1949 and reorganized as Capehart-Farnsworth, which produced televisions until 1965. Farnsworth served as vice president of research.

He later worked on a fusor device that he hoped would serve as the basis for a practical fusion reactor, but IT&T cut his funding in 1967. He relocated to Brigham Young University, where he continued his fusion research with a new company, Philo T. Farnsworth Associates, but that company went bankrupt in 1970.

An historical marker at 1260 E. Mermaid Lane, Wyndmoor, states that Farnsworth made some of the first experiments in live local TV broadcasting in the late 1930s from his station W3XPF at that site.



Pre-registration is required so that the Zoom link can be sent to interested guests.

Deadline to register is Monday, September 20.

To sign up, please send your name and email address to Katie Worrall, secretary of the STHS board of directors, at worrallkatie@aol.com

President's Corner

I hope you had a chance to get away this summer. We headed up to Maine for a few days, where Cynthia got together with several girlfriends from high school. On the way, we stopped in Hatfield, Massachusetts. On September 19th, 1677, Hatfield was raided by Native Americans who had been forced to leave the Connecticut River Valley and relocate to Canada at the end of King Philip's War. King Philip was sachem of the Wampanoag people. He led the effort to stop Puritan expansion in the Massachusetts Bay colony. My 8th great grandmother, Sarah Day Gunn Kellogg, was killed during the raid. Her eight-year-old son, my 7th great-grandfather, Samuel Kellogg, was held captive, taken to Canada, and ransomed the next year. The folks at the Hatfield Historical Society could not have been more generous with their time and resources as I learned more about my ancestors.

Once in Maine, I visited Fort Halifax, built in 1754 during the French and Indian War and site of the oldest extant block house in the United States. I also toured the homes of General Henry Knox, senior artillery officer during the American Revolution and later the first

Secretary of War; and Governor Joshua Chamberlain, awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Battle of Gettysburg.

On the way home, we stopped in Windsor Locks, Connecticut to visit the New England Air Museum. The Museum's wonderful collection includes the control car from a dirigible. This restored control car (K-28) is one of 134 K-class airships built between 1938 and 1944 for the purposes of anti-submarine patrol and convoy protection, mine sweeping, search and rescue and photography. Cynthia's father, LtJG Raymond Rafetto, piloted a K-class dirigible during WWII.

I guess you could say I got a full dose of history on this trip, both martial and genealogical. Once again, however, I was reminded that it's not the destination, it's the journey.

T. Scott Kreilick

President

Springfield Township Historical Society

Annual History Award

Dan Dailey, a 2021 graduate of Springfield Township High School, was the winner of this year's Springfield Township Historical Society's annual History Award, given to a graduating senior who is interested in history.

He said that this past year, school was on a hybrid schedule starting in the fall, because of the Covid-19 epidemic, and eventually went to a full class schedule. He was one of two presidents of the school's youth and government club, was captain of the football team and played lacrosse.

He attended a summer term at Penn State's main campus and started his fall term there last month. He said that the summer term was very beneficial to him. He plans to major in history and ultimately go into political science.



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 or 215-233-4600.

FROM THE
Archives



Do you know us?

This undated photograph of a group of unidentified individuals on horseback at 149 Northwestern Avenue, also known as the Henry Dewees House, was found in the collection without any information! Can you help us figure out any additional details? Springfield Township Historical Society Collection 2006.6.2.

Stotesbury as Technology Trend-Setter

Despite being over 72 years old at the time his Wyndmoor mansion (Whitemarsh Hall) was opened to the public on October 8, 1921, Edward Townsend Stotesbury was quite up-to-date with the latest technology and gadgets of the day. He was very much the “early adopter” sought after by present-day marketers.

This attitude, together with proximity of Philo T. Farnsworth’s experimental transmitter tower on Mermaid Lane (line-of-sight to Whitemarsh Hall, and less than one mile in distance) would have made Stotesbury an ideal early customer of Farnsworth’s TV service. However, we have yet to uncover any evidence of a Farnsworth receiver at Whitemarsh Hall.

Still, one would have expected Stotesbury to have embraced television as soon as it became available, given the leading-edge equipment at Whitemarsh Hall. Here is an incomplete survey of the technological wonders of the mansion and estate:

- Centralized audio distribution system, allowing guests to select programs from pre-tuned radio receivers located in a “radio room” on the Third Floor.
- An “Auditorium Orthophonic Victrola” costing \$7,725 (automatic record-changer and amplifiers) with remote speakers (“horns”) in the Boudoir, the Lower Hall (Ground Floor) and the Great Hall (Ballroom).
- Fully-automatic, push-button operated Otis elevators (passenger & freight).

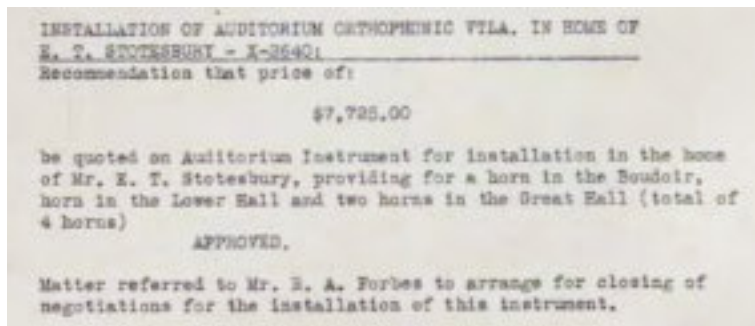
- Push-button-operated remote controls for all fountains on the estate.
- A very large Aeolian pipe organ, with two pipe chambers, one of which was 43 feet tall internally. This instrument was most often played using its “Duo-Art” player feature, which fully automated playback once a “record” (actually, a paper roll) was inserted into the player and the start button was pressed.
- A high-power central vacuum system, operating much like central vacuums do today, but rarely seen in homes in the 1920s.
- Two SIMPLEX 35mm movie projectors, later equipped for sound playback, located in the Projection Room on the Ground Floor.

We continue to attempt to document all of these unique elements of the mansion’s complement of wonders, and it would be wonderful to be able to add a Farnsworth TV receiver as well.



Pepper Foody, daughter of Paul Foody, who at the time was living at 8015 Southampton Avenue on the Whitemarsh Hall estate, is seen playing with a radio that had been originally in the Third-Floor Radio Room of Whitemarsh Hall. The radio is a Freed-Eisemann NR-5, the exact same model as the first such set installed at the White House in Washington, during the Warren G. Harding administration in 1921. The “KYW” escutcheon seen atop the radio was not connected to it, and was probably saved from a microphone housing at the time.

This reproduces notes taken at a board meeting of the Victor company on June 22, 1927, in Camden, NJ. While it describes the Stotesbury instrument and its price, it does not confirm that the installation was ever made, and we do not have a photo of it, or its horns, in Whitemarsh Hall.



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Archives UPDATE

We were very excited about the potential reopening of the Society over the summer. However, a small leak in our front room put a hold on those plans. While the incident delayed reopening, we are happy to report little-to-no damage occurred to the Society's holdings. Work began in late July on the space to remove and repair the damaged plaster bringing it back to its historical aesthetic. We are extremely thankful to Pat DePaul, Springfield Township Public Works Foreman and Thomas Lynch and his crew from Eastern Diversified Services, Inc (EDS) for their timely response and restoration efforts on the day of the leak.

Regardless of the challenges over the last year and half, we have continued to stay busy. Over the spring and summer, Springfield Township Historical Society

received various **donations** which have included:

- A videotape of the 2-minute segment WPVI ABC6 newscast covering the funding for the restoration of the Black Horse Inn donated by Anthe.
- Three (3) necklaces with wooden beads believed to have been made from the Penn Oak tree according to accompanying notes donated by Adele Viehl.
- "Welcome Wagon" packet, 1988 from Christine Smith, received with new home in Wyndmoor.
- School District of Springfield Township, Enfield K-2 Early Learning Center, Outstanding Project Award article from Learning by Design, Architectural Awards Showcase digital issue, Spring 2021 from Gretchen Slapinsky.

- Springfield Township memorabilia and ephemera donated by Carolyn McGrory.

In addition, STHS has been able to assist the community with **research** inquiries from individuals seeking information on the Gilbert Dairy (location and years of operation), Artifacts or other materials pertain to skeeball, Philo T. Farnsworth residence, 1930s street address confirmation, Montgomery County Historic Place marker original colors, the Wyndmoor School and various property addresses.

We are extremely thankful for all of our dedicated volunteers. They provided approximately 56 hours of service from May 1 – July 31.

- On-going efforts by volunteers Ray Smith, Barbara Coleman, and Andrew Birkelbach to organize, scan, and catalog records in the Society's collection, as well as assist researchers, have made a significant contribution to the accessibility of the STHS holdings while we've been closed.
- The Society is pleased to welcome new volunteer, Jim Villante.

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.

The Archives Are

OPEN

To the Public

WEDNESDAYS
1pm – 5pm

&

SATURDAYS
9am – 12noon

For more information,
call 215-233-4600

*Interested in Learning About
Our Historical Society?*

Stop by our table at
Springfield Township Community Day
Sunday October 3rd, 10am-1pm – James A. Cisco Park
256-322 Montgomery Ave, Erdenheim, PA 19038




Handwriting Led to Man's Arrest

By Ray Smith

A little over 100 years ago, in January of 1919, a prominent Wyndmoor resident and businessman became the victim of a high-profile extortion attempt. The area along Willow Grove Avenue was known for large commercial rose growing businesses. Frank P. Myers lived in a large house, known locally as the "old graystone house," where Seven Dolors was later built. His farm and greenhouses extended back toward Mermaid Lane. He lived there from 1885 until his death at age 99 in 1951. Mr. Myers was well known and active in the Wyndmoor community. He ran

for office and was credited with many of the improvements to the area, among them the macadamizing of roads, development of the fire service and bringing better train service to the town.

On January 9th in the day's mail, Mr. Myers received a "Black Hand" letter demanding \$5000 to be left in a box near Mermaid Avenue [sic] and Queen Street, with threats of his greenhouses being blown up if he didn't comply. Mr. Myers instead notified the police, who then involved postal inspectors.

Myers left a note in the box saying he wouldn't leave money because someone else might take it. The extortionist responded with another letter threatening to blow up Mr. Myers house and that of his partner, Charles Santman, who received a demand for \$1000.

This time, the letter specified that the money had to be delivered to George Burton, a Germantown florist (who was the employer of the extortionist). The letter made a point of stating that Mr. Burton was unaware of the demand but would turn the money over.

This was enough information for the postal inspectors to go to work. Of course, this was long before fingerprinting and DNA tracing. The postal inspectors started searching through draft board questionnaires, comparing handwriting with that of the extortion letters. Since all the letters were mailed from the Main Line, that was the area searched and a match was found.

A local 26-year-old Wyndmoor man, Kernen, living on Pleasant Avenue was questioned in the federal building. Initially he denied that he had written the letters, but after a few hours, he broke down and confessed, saying that he needed the money.

Mr. Myers said "... we made up our minds that the writer should not have the money. Our procedure was watchful waiting. The postal inspectors and police watched and we waited. I was influenced in the refusal to give up the money, by the possibility that other neighbors might be treated in similar fashion. I am inclined to be sorry for Kernen whom I have known since he was a child. He was always a good worker, with only occasional wild traits."

The extortionist was later sentenced to one year in federal custody. Around this same time, other Wyndmoor and Chestnut Hill residents also were Black Hand targets, but Mr. Myers' case was the one that made the newspapers.



This 1916 map shows the extent of the greenhouses that once existed in Wyndmoor. A. H. Mueller, Map of Montgomery County – North Penn, 1916, plate 19.

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