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December 2021

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The Challenge

PRESERVATION • RESEARCH • EDUCATION

Penn State Abington and The Ogontz School

Presented by Frank Quattrone

Professor, Penn State Abington

Thursday, December 9 (on Zoom) ■ 7:30 PM

Frank Quattrone will discuss the evolution of The Ogontz School, which was a school for affluent young ladies, to Penn State Abington, a commonwealth campus of the Pennsylvania State University that has an enrollment of approximately 4,000 undergraduate students.

The Ogontz School, first known as the Chestnut Street Seminary, was founded in 1850 in Philadelphia with an initial enrollment of 20 students. Among the many notable students who attended the school was pilot Amelia Earhart, who encouraged the school to not focus on serving wealthy white Christian women but to diversify to include Jewish women.

According to Quattrone, The Ogontz School was the first women's school to offer military training, starting in the 1870s. Then-principal Sylvia Eastman loved calisthenics and taught the girls physical activities, and team-playing discipline, which were innovative practices for the time.

Quattrone will trace the history from its origins as a finishing school attended by prominent women, including the wives of ambassadors, to the large affordable public college that exists today and boasts one of



Frank Quattrone

the most diverse student populations among the Penn State University's commonwealth campuses. Quattrone, who teaches public speaking, said that he had many international students, particularly from China, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Quattrone has taught at Penn State Abington since 1997, when it became a four-year college. Prior to that he was a newspaper editor at Montgomery Newspapers for its *Ticket* entertainment section.

He has written two Arcadia books on Ambler in addition to the book, *Penn State Abington and The Ogontz School*.

The program will be free and open to the public. This meeting will also serve as the official annual meeting of the historical society and will include a vote on new board candidates that will take place at the start of the program. (See election details on page 3.)

Deadline to Register: Tuesday, December 7th

To register for the program, so the Zoom link can be sent to you, please contact Historical Society secretary Katie Worrall at worrallkatie@aol.com or call 215-816-6683.

President's Corner

This will be my final note as President of the Springfield Township Historical Society. Serving in this position for the past nine years has been a distinct pleasure. While my active participation on the Board of Directors will be ending, my interest in the Society's programs and events will continue.

The past two years have been a challenging time for all of us. We've been deprived of personal interaction and consigned to virtual gatherings. Through it all, the Historical Society has survived because of the dedication of our Board, archival staff and volunteers, and the financial support of our Friends and Sponsors. I encourage each of you to express your appreciation by renewing your financial support of the Society.

As I reflect back on my tenure as President, I am particularly proud of three accomplishments. Underwritten by a grant from the Springfield Township Rotary Club, the digitization of the archives collection is well underway allowing this incredible resource to be more readily available to researchers and the public.

The return of the Whitmarsh Hall urns to the Township after 80 years has been very satisfying. Numerous fundraising events made this

possible, along with the coordinated efforts of the Springfield Township Board of Commissioners, Township staff, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Historical Society. Kreilick Conservation was pleased to donate its expertise to provide oversight during the relocation and conservation of the urns once they were placed at the new Municipal Campus.

When the Historical Society was founded 36 years ago, one of its goals was to help establish a Historic Preservation Ordinance in the Township. After several fits and starts over the years, this goal has finally been achieved. I am proud of the Historical Society's role in crafting the Ordinance and our continued participation on the newly formed Springfield Township Historical Commission.

The Springfield Township Historical Society is a vital resource for our community. I believe our quality of life is enhanced by the understanding and appreciation for our history, and the lessons we can learn from it.

Thank you for the opportunity and privilege of serving as your President.

T. Scott Kreilick, *President*
Springfield Township Historical Society

Carpe Vitae!

Gerry Serianni Memorial

We recently lost a local resident who played a major role in preserving the history of Wyndmoor's most famous estate, and in inspiring others to continue efforts to that end.

Gerry M. Serianni (May 7, 1952 – August 27, 2021) is probably best known for having created a very extensive website, starting in 2000, that documented the Stotesbury Mansion (Whitmarsh Hall), providing many local residents with their first real view of what it had looked like in its prime. The website also hosted a guest book where readers could record their memories of the estate. Gerry took on this project as a challenging way to learn the design and creation of web sites, long before today's tools came along that simplify that work.

Gerry's grandfather, Luigi Serianni, came to the area in 1886 from Calabria, Italy, and worked as a stone mason at the Chestnut Hill Quarry on East Mermaid Lane. It is quite likely that Luigi was one of

the immigrant artisans who carved many intricate decorative elements, including spandrels of arched openings, and keystones/volutes of those arches at Whitmarsh Hall, by hand, in 1918-1920.

Gerry's website, while not being updated, can still be viewed (at present) at <http://www.serianni.com/wh0.htm>

We extend our sincere condolences to Gerry's family and friends.



Remembrance Card with a photo of a very young Gerry (undated)



Front Page of Gerry's famous Whitmarsh Hall website

AUTHOR

Richard R. Billig Email: rrbillig@gmail.com

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Administrator, "Fans of Whitmarsh Hall" group on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/groups/WhitmarshHall/>

Notice of Elections

December 9, 2021

Elections will be held at our Annual Meeting on December 9, 2021.
The Slate, prepared by the Nominating Committee, follows.

SLATE

Directors also Serving as Officers – 4 year Terms

President	Vacant.....	TBD
Vice President.....	Robert S. Wilmot, Jr.....	2020-2023
Treasurer.....	Albert M. Comly, Jr.....	2022-2025
Secretary	Catherine Worrall.....	2020-2023

DIRECTORS

Board Members for Re-Election (Terms take effect on January 1, 2022)

Albert M. Comly, Jr.	2022-2025
Cindy Hamilton	2022-2025

Candidate for Election

Nancy McDonald	2022-2025
Roshni Wood.....	2022-2025
Kenneth Tillotson	2022-2025

Board Members Serving 4-Year Terms (elected September 19, 2019)

Kerry Boccella	2020-2023
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

Emeritus Board Member

Dorothy Cutler

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For details, please visit
www.springfieldhistory.org



FROM THE
Archives

This photo shows members of the Scott Family, along with their pets, outside their Erdenheim home in 1900. Anyone who can provide additional details on this photograph is encouraged to call the historical society at 215-233-4600.

Springfield Township Historical Society 2013.154.1054



In the News *By Ray Smith*

Every so often somebody gets it in their mind to go after the speeders on East River (Kelly) Drive.

The October 14, 1903 front page headline in the Philadelphia Inquirer was “*Automobilists Plan to Arrest The Fast Drivers*” and “*John Lowber Welsh, It Is Hinted, Will Be Chosen as Target for First Shot of Campaign.*”

Mr. Welsh lived on the north side of Montgomery Avenue, in Wyndmoor, in a house called “Hillbrow.” His sizeable estate extended from Paper Mill Road, up to Evergreen Avenue and back to about where Mr. Stotesbury later built his house. Mr. Welsh kept a low profile but was reportedly the third wealthiest man in Pennsylvania and was the go-to person amongst the wealthy for questions about finance. His family had made their fortune in trade with the Caribbean and. Mr. Welsh’s father, John, was known as the man who made the Centennial Exposition a financial success and later served as ambassador to Great Britain.

John Lowber Welsh commuted from Wyndmoor on a daily basis to his office in Philadelphia. He kept a team of horses at his home and another in town near his office, driving one team in the morning and switching to the alternate team for the trip home. He had a reputation for making his trips at exactly the same time each day, so he was an easy target for anyone who wanted to time his speed.

The Automobile Club of Philadelphia was angered by the aggressive enforcement of the 7 mph speed limit in the park that was only targeting people in automobiles. They knew that Mr. Welsh’s commute took an hour and ten minutes for the 14 miles, so he must be travelling at almost twice the speed limit. J. Emlen Smith was quoted “my machine is so geared that I know I run at a speed slightly in excess of seven miles an hour, yet when I am on the roads, John Lowber Welsh in his carriage passes me every day. I couldn’t, with my machine, keep up with Mr. Welsh if I tried.”

Unfortunately, on August 23rd of the following year, 1904, His obituary, a glowing tribute, was front page in the Inquirer “*J. Lowber Welsh, Giant of Finance, has passed away.*”

For anyone interested in reading more, the news articles can be found here:

- <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/87054344/welsh-speeding/>
- <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/55224877/1904-08-23-j-lowber-welsh-giant-of/>



JOHN LOWBER WELSH
Financier. S. & J. Welsh, Bankers and Merchants
180, Phila. & Reading R.R. Co. and other Corps.

John Lowber Welsh published in Philadelphia and Notable Philadelphians by Moses King, 1902.



Hillbrow



A.H. Mueller 1897 Map showing location of “Hillbrow”

Community Day 2021



STHS was pleased to participate once again

in Springfield’s Community Day. Special thanks to Erdenheim resident, *Nancy McDonald*, who designed the scavenger hunt signs which incorporated historic postcards of White City and to *Paradigm Color Graphics* for their in-kind donation for the printing of the signs.

Chestnut Hill’s Night of Lights

STHS was delighted to be included again this year in the Chestnut Hill Conservancy’s Night of Lights event. This innovative public art installation is in its 5th year and transforms Germantown Avenue into an interactive display of local history. We are very grateful for the hard work of our archivist, *Stephanie Walsh*, who compiled this years’ exhibit, “Highlights of Historic Buildings in Springfield Township,” and represented STHS on opening night.



Archives

UPDATE

After the last few months of what felt like organized chaos, we are so happy to be back to normal operations! As a result of the diligence of the Springfield Township Public Works Department and local contractors, the necessary repairs from the summer's water leak were completed by the end of August. Shortly after, we were able to move the furniture around, perform a deep clean of the spaces, begin to inventory the collection, and reorganize. We are hoping to have new displays in place soon.

In addition, over the last few months Springfield Township Historical Society received various donations which have included:

- *The Nash Family of Upper Dublin Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania - A Study of the Ancestors and Descendants of Daniel Nash and Maria Shaffer* by Joseph Palme Myers, donated by the author.
- Photographs, newspaper clippings, and newsletters from Enfield Middle and Erdenheim Elementary Schools during the 1970s-1990s, as well as correspondence from Marcel Rowen donated by Linda Bolanos.
- 1998 Senior Day Football program and collection of papers from 8327 Childs Road, Wyndmoor Township sewage line installation 1955 donated by Deborah Zwicker Wilson.

- Springfield Township plate from Franklin's Street and Business Occupancy Atlas of Philadelphia and Suburbs. 1946, 10.5"x17" and Springfield Township Newsletters Fall 2019 -Winter 2020 and Fall/Winter 2021-2022 donated by Cindy Hamilton.

Despite the working conditions, STHS has been able to aid the community with research inquiries from individuals seeking information on the estate *Ropsley*, the Sandy Run Country Club, *Springfield Sun* articles from the 1970s-1980s, photographs of Chestnut Hill Amusement Park, The Wheel Pump Inn, and the Springfield Hotel, information regarding water bodies and empty land in Springfield Township for a cartography project around Sunnybrook Creek, and various property addresses.

We are extremely thankful for all of our dedicated volunteers. They provided approximately 67 hours of service from August – October.

- Ongoing efforts by volunteers Ray Smith and Barbara Coleman to help get the Society reorganized, as well as assist researchers, have made a significant contribution to the accessibility of the STHS holdings while we've been closed.

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.

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.

The Archives Are

OPEN

To the Public

WEDNESDAYS

1pm – 5pm

&

SATURDAYS

9am – 12noon

*For more information,
call 215-233-4600*

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