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## MARCH 2011

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# The Challenge

PRESERVATION • RESEARCH • EDUCATION

## PHILADELPHIA'S WISSAHICKON VALLEY

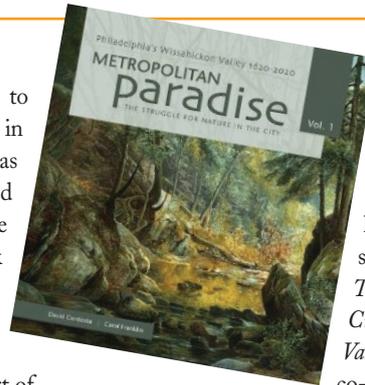
A Presentation by Mr. David Contosta

Thursday, March 17th, 2011 – 7:30 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church

Bethlehem Pike & East Mill Road in Flourtown, PA

Sacred to the Lenni-Lenape and to many early Europeans who settled in the area, the Wissahickon Valley has all the elements of "paradise" recognized in many cultures – the dramatic gorge with high cliffs, twisted rocks, dark hemlocks, sparkling water and the bountiful, rolling terrain directly to the north beyond the city boundaries. Ironically, this paradise is part of a large, old North American urban region, suffering from all the troubles of the modern metropolis. The Wissahickon Valley is a microcosm of changes in the American landscape over the past 400 years. The lessons of its history, present treatment and future possibilities, are both universal and unique. Understanding the history of this region of Philadelphia will provide an exploration of how to resolve the crisis of a collapsing natural world.

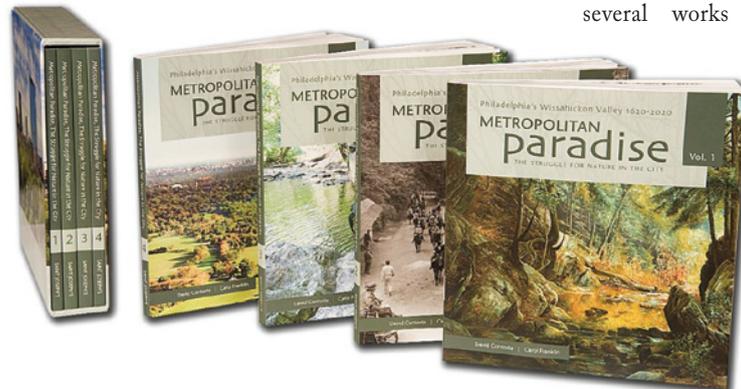


Please join us for this presentation as STHS welcomes David Contosta who will present on material from his recently released four volume series, *Metropolitan Paradise, The Struggle for Nature in the City, Philadelphia's Wissahickon Valley 1620-2020*, which he has co-authored with Carol Franklin

(Saint Joseph's University Press – 2010).

David R. Contosta is Professor of History at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia. He is the author of 17 books, as well as numerous articles and reviews. His writings include the classic *Suburb in the City: Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia*. He has also written about religion, higher education, orphanages, urban and suburban history, architecture and landscape, urban parks, historic preservation and a variety of topics in social, cultural and intellectual history – several works focusing on Philadelphia and Philadelphians.

This promises to be an exciting and educational program on an interesting topic of Philadelphia history. The public is invited to attend, and there is no charge for admission. Reservations are not required. Light refreshments will be served.



For more information  
 call 215-233-4600

# President's Corner

Eva Stotesbury  
1936

Almost two years ago I had the pleasure of speaking with Mrs. Maquita (Santa Maria) Driscoll, who lived on the "Whitemarsh Hall" estate for nine years and personally knew the Stotesburys. Her sister, Elena, was head of household for the Stotesburys, responsible for sixty-five servants working in the mansion. Her younger sister, Maquita, lived with her on the estate, in a home still standing on Paper Mill Road. I wrote of this interview at that time in my President's Corner, and how Mrs. Driscoll brought the Stotesbury's to life. This past August, Mrs. Driscoll passed away at 100 years old. Her niece, Joanne Dhody very generously donated a number of items from her aunt's collection of Stotesbury photographs and letters to the Historical Society. Reading through the correspondence from Eva Stotesbury to Elena Santa Maria once again provides a brief glimpse into the life of the Gilded Age Stotesbury family. I want to share some samples from this recent donation, and see if you don't agree.

Each of the letters represents a different time and place in Eva Stotesbury's life. The first excerpt is from a letter that Eva wrote to Elena from Whitemarsh Hall on a Christmas Eve (undated). "Dearest Elena, It must make you very happy to have seen the joy your charity brought, not only to your own dear family but to one and all, high and low in this great house. It just means this - that we can't live without you. A merry Christmas dear, and my loving thanks for your donation. Always yours, Eva Stotesbury."

The second letter from Eva was written regarding Elena's recent arrival at El Mirasol in Palm Beach, Florida, the Stotesbury's winter residence. Elena and other selected servants would travel with the Stotesburys to their seasonal residences. "Welcome to Palm Beach dearest Elena, and I do hope all will go well with you. I spent the day with a house brigade trying to get your old room and office ready for you to have one "hideout" while you open that great dreary house. Even Mr. Stotesbury said tonight that you must not be all work to stay at Mirasol. Please take time to

eat and bathe and rest and I will see you after your luncheon. Love, E.S."

The final letter was sent from Eva to Elena from Wingwood House, the Stotesbury's summer residence in Bar Harbor, Maine. "I had a perfectly lovely birthday, although only Jimmy of the family group was here. Poor Eaton was held up in Montreal, and unable to get transportation from there to Bar Harbor. At five in the afternoon we had a birthday cake for the household in the music room, and champagne for all. I find, dearest Elena, that I am truly rich in friends. It almost reconciled me to eighty-one, which is a fearsome age. We are going to stay on here until the end of October, if I can keep the servants' wing warm. My plans are so uncertain about where to go between Wingwood and Mirasol that I dread moving." Regarding an invitation Eva extended to some military personnel passing through Bar Harbor, she writes, "I expected about thirty in all, but you know this house, and a hundred and thirty came instead." In Post Script, Eva adds "Margaret tells me Dr. Rehffuss (the Stotesbury's family doctor) urges I stop off a couple of weeks in Philadelphia, to be what he calls "checked out." It is not known if Eva followed this advice or not. The postmark date on the envelope is September 9, 1945. Eva would pass away in May of the following year at El Mirasol.

My sincere thanks goes out to Joanne Dhody for her generous donation to the Historical Society on behalf of her aunt Maquita Driscoll, for all to enjoy in the years to come.

*Keeping the past in the present,*  
Ed Zwicker



## Save the Date Trolley Tours of Historic Springfield

On Sunday, May 22nd the Springfield Historical Society will launch their first annual *Trolley Tours of Historic Springfield*. Two unique tours will be offered with each visiting some of the many historic treasures in the area. The first tour, **COLONIAL ERA SPRINGFIELD** will survey various locations that played a key role in the Revolutionary War and the founding of the United States. Of particular interest will be a visit to the newly renovated Deshler-Morris House. Also known as the "Germantown White House," this building is the oldest official presidential residence in the country and hosted several cabinet meetings as well as George Washington and his family.

During the second tour, **COUNTRY ESTATES OF SPRINGFIELD**, we will learn about some of the many mansions and summer residences built in Springfield beginning from the late 1890s through the 1930s. With the advent of the railroad, Springfield became a preferred destination for many of Philadelphia's elite to escape the heat and pollution of the city. Many of the opulent homes built during that period survive today and this tour will provide a chance to see up close some of the architectural grandeur of a bygone era.

Tours will depart from in front of our new home in the Black Horse Inn and will last about 1 ½ hours. Tickets are \$25 per person. Check the STHS website [www.springfieldhistory.org](http://www.springfieldhistory.org) for details on ordering tickets for this exciting event.



*STHS Hope Lodge Program that was given September 30th: Jack Gumbrecht (current President of Friends of Hope Lodge), Ed Zwicker, and Jack Washington (past President of Friends of Hope Lodge)*

## STHS Welcomes New Board Member Kathy Haight

STHS welcomes new board member, **Kathy Rohrer Haight**, who grew up in Baltimore, Maryland and Bronxville, New York. In the 1970s Kathy moved to Benezet Street in Chestnut Hill and she remembers driving to Flourtown past the Black Horse Inn and the cows that pastured in the adjoining field, to the old Acme that fronted Bethlehem Pike, where the Acme parking lot is now. In 1984 she moved to Flourtown and two years later to Erdenheim where she, and her husband, Tom, have been ever since. Her daughter, Emily (27) went to Springfield High and now lives in New York City.

Kathy's diverse interests include sewing, needlepoint, knitting, refinishing old furniture, preserving old buildings, genealogy, art and history. At her position as a paralegal at the law firm of Richard Stevens in Jenkintown she deals with estate and trust administration. Her duties include handling estates and trusts and preparing the necessary tax returns, as well as the bookkeeping to run the office. She also does research into client's assets; collections of old or rare items and historic houses, and dealings with auction houses such as Freeman's in Philadelphia. Kathy has researched her family genealogy and sometimes has found the family lore doesn't jive with the facts! This process can be challenging, when her father was an only child of an only child, and there are not many people she can turn to for a search.

We look forward to having Kathy become involved with the Archives at the Black Horse Inn.

## Archives UPDATE

We are settling in nicely in our new home at the Black Horse Inn. Volunteers are currently working on a notebook of photos and a history of Whitemarsh Hall, to make highlights of the collection more easily accessible to the public. This notebook will go along with one already created that traces the history of historic inns along Bethlehem Pike. Be sure to check them out when you visit!

In addition, we are working on a long-term project to index more than 30 years of microfilmed newspapers. When we are done, births, marriages and deaths from as early as the 1940's will be indexed—a real boon to those tracing their family history.

## CD Driving Tour of Whitemarsh Encampment Now Available

The Springfield Township Historical Society has received more than \$360 from the sale of a CD driving tour made by Springfield Township High School students that traces the route of Revolutionary War soldiers from the Battle of Germantown to the Whitemarsh Encampment. The students did the project last year for their AP US History class, under the guidance of teacher Peggy Zehner.

The CD takes drivers from the Cliveden House, through Chestnut Hill and then into Flourtown. Once they're in Flourtown, they pass by the Black Horse Inn, and stop at Mather's Mill, St. Thomas' Church, Hope Lodge, Fort Hill, the Emlen House, and then they end up at the Black Horse Inn. There's narration for each of those places as well as narration for the drive itself.

To prepare, students researched local history at the township library and online and heard talks by guest speakers Don Ernsberger, Roddy Davis and Gene Hough. Each student wrote up a specific topic and Zehner converted the write-ups into a script. Parts of the CD are narration and other parts are audio skits. Once the story was recorded, the class found copyright-free sound effects and period music online and edited them into the narration. Technical help and editing was provided by Joe Coughlin, a high school technology support staffperson and teacher Dan Meder. Student Harrison Lynch created the local map for the cover of the box.

In addition to Lynch, participating students were Samantha Chamberlin, Sophie Finn, Victoria Holt, Rafiat Kasumu, Samantha Kennedy, Francisco Marty, Erica Moser, Victoria Reynolds, Mary Helen Schwartz, Lina Sorg, Jennifer Uehling and Scott Vierick.

The CDs were sold at the Historical Society's program in October on Hope Lodge and at Hope Lodge's Living History encampment in November. Copies of the CD are available for \$10 and can be purchased at the Archives in the Black Horse Inn (open Tuesdays 11am-1pm, 7pm-9pm, Thursdays 10am-noon).



*Peggy Zehner (far right) and her Senior AP History class who created the Whitemarsh Encampment driving CD. From left to right: Samantha Chamberlin, Mary Helen Schwartz, Erica Moser, Jennifer Uehling, Scott Vierick, Lina Sorg, Victoria Reynolds, Sophie Finn, Rafiat Kasumu, Samantha Kennedy, Victoria Holt, Harrison Lynch, and Peggy Zehner (Francisco Marty, also helped with the CD but could not attend the meeting of the historical society).*

## Expanded Hours at STHS Archives

We are pleased to report that the STHS Archives has expanded its hours at the Black Horse Inn. Anyone interested in researching their house or learning about the history of our community is encouraged to visit and see our collection. Our regular hours have recently expanded to include Tuesday evenings to provide better access for those unavailable during our daytime hours. In order to cover the costs of collections management, a

research fee of \$5 for STHS friends and \$10 for the general public will be charged. We ask that you call or email ahead so that we may best serve you. Contact us at 215 233-4600 or [santhony\\_sths@comcast.net](mailto:santhony_sths@comcast.net).

### ARCHIVES HOURS

Tuesday 11am-1pm, 7pm-9pm • Thursday 10am-noon

**In Memory of STHS Board Member  
JOSEPH B. TIMONEY**

Lifelong Wyndmoor resident and STHS Board Member, Joe Timoney, passed away November 22nd at the age of 85 after a long and courageous battle with cancer.

Mr. Timoney proudly served in the US Navy during World War II. Locally, he was a member of the Wyndmoor Hose Company #1 for 60 years during which time he managed the construction of the existing fire station on Willow Grove Avenue. For 20 years Mr. Timoney served as chief or chief officer of the fire company, and for 31 years he was an officer of the Wyndmoor Hose Company #1 Corporation. Mr. Timoney was also a board member of the Springfield Township Fire Board and a charter member of the Montgomery County Fire Board. From 1986 to 1996 he served as Chairman of the Montgomery County Fire Board during which time he played a major role in the construction of the Montgomery County Fire Academy. Since 1996 he served as an Emeritus Member of the Board.

In his role on the board of STHS, Mr. Timoney was renowned for his vast knowledge of local history and regaled the board with stories of former township residents, long lost neighborhood institutions and events that shaped the development of Springfield. STHS president, Ed Zwicker, dedicated the December program to Joe Timoney noting "When I think of Springfield history, Joe's just one of the people who immediately come to mind."



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