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# The Corridor

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Volume XXIX, No. 2

Newsletter of the Old York Road Historical Society

Summer 2020

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## President's Message

Dear Members and Friends,

Summer greetings via this special issue of "The Corridor". Given that our public gatherings have been suspended, the Board thought that perhaps some historical summertime reading might be a welcome diversion. Many of the articles are reprints or excerpts from historical news articles. So please enjoy this mini vacation into the past.

In terms of a brief update on where things stand with the Society, our lectures and gatherings have been cancelled and the current outlook for coming together in person as a community of local history lovers seems quite far off. We will likely be offering our upcoming fall Lecture Series via Zoom. Perhaps you have already attended programs, lectures, tours or discussion groups through this medium. Our fall newsletter will carry basic instructions for getting this app onto your cell phone, iPad, computer or other electronic device that connects to the internet.

The archives and research library also suspended its regular public hours, but researchers and the curious are being accommodated on an appointment-only basis. Collection gifts continue to come in, some most likely from folks at home who have found the time to clean out; please keep us in mind if you decide to do so. Gifts can be dropped off, picked up or mailed in. Feel free to call the Society to arrange a transfer.

With the receipt of new items into the collections, work behind the scenes at the archives continues on. In order to engage those so inclined, we are working towards having some archival projects for volunteers to do at home this fall. Again, information will be included in the fall newsletter.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to wish you an enjoyable balance of the summer and continued good health in body, mind and spirit as we all accommodate new ways of living and communing. And thank you for your continued support of the Society and your interest in its work.

*David B. Rowland*

## The Montiers: An American Story

Perhaps you have seen the recent re-broadcast of the WHYY documentary about the Montier family of Glenside/Edge Hill? Three Society Board members make appearances in the show.

Originally produced and broadcast in 2018, the Society assisted producer Karen Smyles in the creation of this fine television experience. The show documents the Montier family and the historic property on Limekiln Pike that they constructed and lived in.

Humphrey Morrey was a Quaker from England and was one of the original settlers of Cheltenham Township. He was a merchant and served a 10-year term as mayor of Philadelphia. Morrey's family was a slaveholding family. Cremona was a servant in the Morrey household who bore Humphrey's son Richard, five children. Cremona was freed and Richard gave to her

198 acres of his land in the Edge Hill section of Glenside. At the time, it was unheard of for an African-American woman to own land.

The original 2-story barn structure built by Richard and Cremona's youngest daughter, known as Cremona, jr., still stands on part of the original property as does a more prominent home in front of the barn.

The history of the Morrey/Montier family is traced throughout American history to the current day and the show features many views both inside and outside the Montier home.

So, if you are looking for something good to watch during our stay-at-home adventure, we recommend this fine documentary. You can find it online at: <https://whyy.org/montiers-american-story/>.

*Trips Awheel: Where to go and how to get there*  
*Cycle Route 6 (1897-98 Series)*  
*Philadelphia to Willow Grove Via Old York Pike*

INTO MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Eight miles from start we cross the city line, where the City Line Hotel for a long while defunct, is now revived as an ice cream parlor. Watch for the next road L beyond the city line; the very first house north of it, on L, embowered among a profusion of aged trees, was once the home of Lucretia Mott, whose long life of philanthropy closed about seventeen years ago.

And here on our right is Melrose. And yonder, on R, too, is Ashbourne. They called it Bounty Town once upon a time; thrifty soldiers, home from the war, had started the town with the bounties they had saved up.

Yes, Montgomery county generally, and this Cheltenham township in particular, is decidedly hilly; so is the district around Cheltenham, Eng., whence came Toby Leach, who settled right here as early as 1682, when Philadelphia was founded.

And here comes Ogontz (9 1/2 m.) - an unmistakably Indian name; it means "little pickerel", I believe, and was given to the locality by Jay Cooke (the once noted banker and railroad magnate) in memory of an Indian chief, the friend of his boyhood, who was thus designated. Previous to Cooke's time, the place has always been known as Shoemaker's Mill, of Shoemakertown, as it had been settled by two brothers George and Isaac Shoemaker (Schuhmacher) who had come over from Cresheim, in Germany, in 1685.

Ogontz district, with its galaxy of princely estates and its beautiful roads, deserves that we should pay it a separate visit on some other occasion, and give it a separate description in these columns.

To-day we rush down (carefully) past East Church road on R. (it goes to Oxford Church) to the old Ogontz mill, past West Church road on L (it goes to St. Thomas Church on the Spring House pike), and now we climb that long Ogontz hill, the terror of so many wayfarers awheel.

On a conspicuous board at the top of the hill may be read the warning: "Bicyclers are cautioned against coasting down this grade. DANGEROUS!" Comment is needless.

A short distance beyond this, almost opposite the old-time 8-mile stone from Philadelphia, see that ivy-mantled gateway on L? Yonder costly mansion on the well-kept grounds, within that inclosure, is Mr. John Wanamaker's. We shall come here again, another time, as I said.

Another tollhouse. That road R goes to Huntingdon Valley; straight before us is Jenkintown (11 m.).

JENKINTOWN AND VICINITY

It used to be Jenkins Town, and was so entered on Scull's map in 1758; and I saw "William Jenkins" mentioned in the list of residents appointed to supervise the erection of a meeting house in this place as early as 1692. Its population is now well on the way toward the two-thousand mark.

At the corner on L, opposite Cottman House, notice the road to Weldon and the Limekiln pike; and now, down we run past Noble Station. John Noble settled not very many miles from here on the bank of the Delaware, as far back as 1675, and if you keep your eyes open you will see that his descendants are still hereabouts. By the way, did you ever remark that unusually straight stretch of railroad running northeast from this place to Rydal?

Rydal used to be Benezet, and not a name to be ashamed of either. Few men in our history displayed more active philanthropy than old Anthony Benezet, the Huguenot-Quaker, who settled in Philadelphia in 1731.

And up we climb to where Mary Moore kept a shebeen in 1787. Some folks tried to change Mooretown to Shepherd's and then they altered Shepherd's to Abington Postoffice and now "it's a toss" between the first and last names. It's 12 m. from our starting point. And talking of old times, do you see the date 1714 on the Abington Presbyterian Church on your left?

This road, crossing our own here, is Susquehanna street. Penn's surveyor, Holme, intended it to run in a direct line from the Delaware near Torresdale right on to the Susquehanna.

And hills are still with us. Time was when the section we are now making for was known as Hill township; the irony of fate willed it, however, that this had no reference to its numerous heights, but to Philip Hill, a large landholder here, often named in our records for 1696-1702. Moreland township was its right name, and is still.

## MORELAND TOWNSHIP

It was named Moreland by William Penn himself, in honor of Nicholas Moore, a London physician, who came over in the good ship Geoffrey soon after the arrival of the Welcome, in the fall of 1682. During this digression of mine, we have passed by tiny Rubicam Station; you can just see it from the pike on L; and a short 1/2 mile farther a conspicuous board shows us on L a direct cut to the Willow Grove bicycle track; this is the upper end of the Welsh road. On R it goes down to Holmesburg on the Delaware. Take it if you be so minded, cross the railroad, and an easy half-mile of coasting will land you at the track.

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# Remembering *Action in the Afternoon*

By Thomas J. Wieckowski

Excerpt from  
*The Philadelphia Inquirer*  
May 22, 2020, page B6

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### OBITUARY

*Gilbert Thompson, actor and professor*

By Joe Juliano

*Between earning his bachelor's and master's degrees from Temple University, Gilbert Thompson went into acting as a cast member of Action in the Afternoon, which was shot on the back lot of the WCAU-TV studio on City Avenue and promoted as television's only live daily network Western in 1953.*

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My favorite entertainment as a child was the TV production of *Action in the Afternoon*. In the spring of 1953, my Cub Scout Troop went on a field trip to the new studios of TV station WCAU on City Line Avenue. I, of course, was mesmerized by the new modern building and all the TV production equipment. But my very favorite part of the trip was visiting the set of *Action in the Afternoon* in the back of the building.

*Action in the Afternoon* was a western show, broadcast live every afternoon at 4:00 pm from WCAU. Sheriff Sam Mitchell kept the town of Huberle, Montana, safe from all kinds of western desperados. Recently I found out that it was the first and only

live western on national television.

They had a couple of interior sets for the saloon and sheriff's office set up inside the studio, but the outdoor action took place in the "town" of false fronts set up outside on a former parking lot. The false fronts were only about two feet thick up against the wall of the studio building and propped up on the opposite side by stilts. Upon seeing this layout, I then realized why the western music played for a minute or two every time a character had to exit the interior of a "building" before reappearing on the other side of the door outside, sometimes a tad out of breath. It was shocking, and a real lesson in life, to realize how a false reality was created by television. The Indian totem pole that was in the center of the town turned out to be a decoration on an unfortunately placed telephone pole in the middle of the set. They just made sure the camera never showed the top part.

Each day, the episode began with a tableau on the main street. Townspeople or the main characters would be frozen mid-step as the narrator introduced the show. A hand would appear holding a six-shooter and fire a shot in the air, at which point the characters in the tableaux suddenly moved and went their way and the show began. Occasionally the incongruous sound of a motorcycle on City Line Avenue or low flying

airplane would mar the audio. It is hard to imagine that the metropolis surrounding City Line Avenue today passed for a western wilderness as characters would mount their horses and dash off over the grassy fields into the distant woods. That field now has an office building on the site.

In researching the show, I learned a few interesting facts, including an important local connection to our Society. Once again, life seems to have come in a full circle as I found out that the music director and one of the general directors of the show was Richard Lester. Lester, a Wyncote native, was the brother of the late Dottie Spruill, a life-long Pardee Lane resident of Wyncote, who was a colleague of mine on the Cheltenham Township Historical Commission and a supporter of the Society's (She died in 2014.) Sometime after Lester's local experience with *Action in the Afternoon*, he moved to England, discovered the Beatles and achieved fame directing their movies as well as Peter Sellers' first movies.

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*Thomas J. Wieckowski, Ph.D., is vice-president of the Old York Road Historical Society and vice-chair of the Cheltenham Township Historical Commission. He is a resident of Wyncote and wrote "Making Marathon: A History of Early Wyncote" which traces the history of the area from William Penn through the Gilded Age.*

## OLD YORK ROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Archives Research Hours

Located on the second floor of Alverthorpe Manor, the archives is open by appointment only. Please call or email to make an appointment:

Excerpted from the *Times-Chronicle*  
February 6, 1958

### Del Ennis To Open Own \$500,000 Pin Center North of Rockledge

Del Ennis, one of the great sluggers of modern baseball, announced today that he has closed negotiations for the erection of a \$500,000 bowling center on Huntingdon pike just north of Rockledge.

The center will be located adjacent to the shopping center at Huntingdon Pike and Cedar road. Ennis said it will be the most modern and complete bowling center in the East.

Ground will be broken on or about March 1 and the center will be open in plenty of time for the fall season.

From the *Times-Chronicle*  
November 5, 1921

### JENKINTOWN BOROUGH NOW OUT OF DEBT

At the meeting of Borough Council held Monday evening, the Borough Treasurer was instructed to send out checks covering every cent of the indebtedness of the Borough, so that Jenkintown is absolutely free from debt, with a good balance in the treasury, a distinction which is probably not shared by any other Borough in the state. The borough is also proud of the fact that every street in its limits is macadamized and we have the best lighting system of any town of its size in Pennsylvania.

From *The Times*  
May 19, 1900

### ROYAL BLUE EXPRESS WRECKED; ONE KILLED

Near Jenkintown the Royal Blue Express  
Runs Into a Washout and is Derailed

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Engine Turns a Complete Somersault and  
the Fireman of the Train is Killed

~~~~~

Of the 100 Passengers in the Train Many  
Are Injured by the Accident

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Train Ran Into Washout at Terrific Speed

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The Royal Blue Line express from Washington to New York was wrecked yesterday afternoon by an unusual sort of a washout resulting from a cloudburst at Jenkintown station on the Reading tracks, at 3:38 o'clock. Jenkintown station on the east side of the track was completely wrecked. The powerful engine, derailed by the washout, plunged into the air, turned a complete somersault and landed with the cowcatcher turned south, the direction from which the train had come.

One man, the fireman of the engine, was instantly killed at his post. A number of persons in the train and on both platforms were injured. The engineer shot twenty feet into the air and landed on top of the wrecked station. His arm was broken, but he was not injured otherwise. The track was blocked to all traffic for nearly two hours. The loss will amount to nearly \$50,000.

Thirty minutes after the accident had been reported up and down the line by the telegraph operator at Jenkintown station, the chief of construction and repair of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad was rushing to the scene of the accident with wrecking trains, physicians, and other help. In less than one hour after the accident happened, the work of clearing the tracks had begun. The injured had been cared for and some of the debris had been removed, but nearly three hours elapsed before the body of the unfortunate fireman had been pried out from underneath the cab of his wrecked engine.

The Royal Blue express, which is one of the finest and swiftest trains in the country, was composed of engine No. 581, a baggage car and smoker combined and four Pullman palace cars, the whole known as train No. 508 left Washington at 12 o'clock with 116 passengers on board. This train is the pride of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and is to that line what the Congressional Limited is to the Pennsylvania.