
The Corridor

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Newsletter of the Old York Road Historical Society

Spring 2023

LECTURE SERIES

The Program Committee has arranged for the following presentations to be held on Wednesday evenings at 7:30 p.m. in the John Barnes Room of Abington Friends Meeting. The programs will also be accessible via Zoom. The lecture series is sponsored by a grant from the Jenkintown Lyceum and all programs are offered free of charge.

March 8 – Wings Over Wyncote: The Story of the Wyncote Bird Club – Since its founding in April 1914, the Wyncote Bird Club has pursued a mission to protect birds and their habitats. The Club has continued to thrive due to the incredible work of many important individuals who founded and led the organization from its founding through to its transition in 1967 as a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Leigh Altadonna, Society and Club member, will profile some of the early personalities as well as spotlight some of the ways in which the Club influenced a cadre of individuals who have influenced the national and international conservation movement.

April 12 – Mineral Industries of Montgomery County – Author and Professor Ron Sloto will talk about his book about Montgomery County's mineral industry, which has a long history dating to the earliest years of colonization and continues today. In the past, Montgomery County was a leading producer of iron ore and pig iron. It also produced copper ore and lead ore. Beginning in the late 1600s, production of lime became an important industry supplying lime for agricultural use and for mortar and cement. Local sites and quarries will be highlighted.

May 10 – Doing Deed Research – Jeanne Sorg, Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds (and Mayor of Ambler), will overview the types of documents that are recorded with the Recorder of Deeds' office and go through how to search the database for current and historical deeds on your property. The County's records date back to 1784 and are mostly public record. Historical deeds, in addition to other documents the Recorder of Deeds stores in perpetuity, can be a useful tool in learning more about your home and family history

-- SPRING OUTING --

The Moland House and Graeme Park

Sunday, April 16, 1:00 p.m.



The Society will tour two historically important Colonial era homes for its Spring Outing. The first stop will be the Moland House in Warwick Township. During the Revolutionary War, this house served as General George Washington's headquarters for nearly two weeks in August 1777. The Continental Army, moving between Philadelphia and New York camped along the Neshaminy Creek while awaiting word on British movements. It was here that the Marquis de Lafayette came to join Washington's army and that Count Casimir Pulaski met Washington for the first time. Additionally, a Council of War was held here that included 13 men of note from American history.

Our second stop will be Graeme Park in Horsham, the summer home of Provincial Governor Sir William Keith and later, Dr. Thomas Graeme, physician for the Port of Philadelphia and a Judge on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. His daughter, Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson, inherited the house. She was a famous literary figure during the Revolutionary War era and hosted America's first literary salon. She experienced much unhappiness in life, first through a failed romance with Benjamin Franklin's son William, and then by her marriage to Fritz Hugh Ferguson, who proved to be a Loyalist during the Revolution and escaped Philadelphia for England after the British left the City in 1778 never to return.

The cost for the trip is \$36 for members and \$40 for non-members. Please register using the enclosed form. The bus will depart from the Jenkintown Library parking lot at 1:00 p.m. and return by 5:00.

Area Preservation Developments

Recent articles on-line and in print serve as official confirmation of the chatter that has been circulating for the past 6 months regarding the sale of *Lynnewood Hall*, the palatial Widener estate on Ashbourne Road in Elkins Park. Lynnewood Hall Preservation Foundation, a non-profit organization, has secured funding and an agreement of sale with Dr. Richard Yoon and his First Korean Church of New York, owners of the property. The rumored price is \$9MM. It is unknown when the transaction will be fully consummated. The group's initial plans will be to make the buildings water-tight and to restore the grounds and gardens for public access. During the past year or so, the group has had entrée to the main residence and has done a good bit of clean-up and minor repairs. This is the first major development in terms of preserving this property and future plans will be eagerly awaited.

The Elkins Estate, comprising *Elstowe* and *Chelton House*, the residences of William L. Elkins and his son George W. Elkins respectively, was purchased for \$6.5MM by Landmark Development, a hospitality development company based in Plainfield, NJ, in September 2019 for the purpose of creating a luxury destination site. During the past couple of years, the first phase of work has focused on *Elstowe*, making it ready to serve as a wedding venue and boutique hotel. Work is nearing completion and reservations are currently being taken for events beginning in June. The schedule for additional work on the other major buildings is unknown at this time.

Abington Township has had road work done on Old York Road at Susquehanna Road in preparation for the demolition of the row of mixed-use buildings on the northwest corner. Originally the site of Winder's blacksmith shop, the current buildings were erected around 1930 and included Powell's Pharmacy on the corner, which was popular with the students at the former Abington High School (now the site of Sunrise Assisted Living on Huntingdon Road). Any number of small businesses have occupied the spaces in the intervening years but now the properties through eminent domain have been shuttered and will soon be demolished. The township's designs on the corner are to widen the intersection at Susquehanna.

The former YMCA sites that were sold for the consolidation of the Hatboro and Abington Ys into the new Willow Grove YMCA on Davisville Road are headed toward future reuse. The Hatboro YMCA's original building was the historic Nathaniel Boileau house. The site was purchased by the adjacent Victorian Village retirement community and the Y buildings, excepting the house, have been demolished. An expansion of the residential campus is to be built and the Boileau homestead will become a library and gathering center for residents of Victorian Village. Similarly in Abington, the old YMCA complex was demolished save for the original Colton Hall fronting on Old York Road. This building has been extensively rehabbed and leased to the YMCA, which will operate a day-care facility to be known as the Abington Early Learning Center.

The Fetter's Mill bridge remains closed to vehicular traffic. Plans for a rebuild have been around for some time. Recently, the water and electric lines that run under the bridge were relocated to under the stream bed. The gas line is next and then, perhaps, putting the bridge work out for bid. The historic look of the bridge will be greatly altered, so present circumstances give passers-by a bit longer to enjoy the Fetter's Mill Historic District before things change dramatically.

Memorial Gifts at Work

Occasionally the Society receives memorial gifts in memory of a deceased member or local history lover. Over the years, the Society's work has been enhanced by these remembrances. The following projects have been completed over the past few years thanks to designated memorials:

- ❖ Purchase of two periodical runs, *The Gardener's Chronicle of America* (1914-1950), and *House & Garden* (1900-1910), and the framing of an original Carrere & Hastings architectural drawing on linen of the main entrance to John Pitcairn's residence, *Cairnwood*, in memory of Stephen C. Costello.
- ❖ Archival processing of the Huntingdon Valley Women's Club records, in memory of Janet M. Chapman.
- ❖ Conservation of Jenkintown's World War I monument on Summit Avenue and the archival processing of the records of the Coates-Jordan American Legion Post, in memory of Theodore Jensen.
- ❖ Archival processing of the records of the Abington Civic Club, in memory of Barbara S. Rowland.
- ❖ Purchase of a sound system and the processing of several Huntingdon Valley related manuscript collections, in memory of GERALYN W. RODEN.

A Bit of History – Leo the Lion

By Daniel O. Myers

For a time during the 1960s, “Leo the Lion” resided at 2428 Old Welsh Road, across from Willow Grove Park. The property, a combination gas station, auto repair shop and residence with in-ground swimming pool, was home to Howard Sautter’s Towing Service. Nestled in the back of his shop was a circus-sized cage containing the big cat. Sautter would take his pet lion out and encourage visitors to pet him. He would also put his arm, up to his elbow, in the feline’s mouth, demonstrating just how docile and tame Leo was. Those who met Sautter and his pet lion continue to recount this memory.

Howard Sautter was quite a character. His obituary read that along with being a successful auto mechanic and tow-truck business owner of thirty-two years, Sautter was a stunt pilot, race car driver and member of the Willow Grove Civil Air Patrol. Adding lion owner to his repertoire, Leo wasn’t the first pet lion Sautter owned, nor was he the last. In fact; there were six lion cubs prior to Leo, which were eventually sold or given away.

Sautter acquired Leo in October 1962 from Nairobi, Kenya. The three-month-old handicapped cub had a broken leg, bowlegged limp and suffered from rickets. Seeking help from Hamilton Animal Hospital in Roslyn, the Philadelphia Zoo’s Curator of Mammals and a professional lion-tamer, Sautter lovingly nursed Leo back

to health. Unfortunately, rickets permanently stunted the lion’s growth. Eventually, Leo reached only 300 pounds instead of a usual 450 for a species of his kind. Along with a diet of meat, bone meal and raw eggs, Sautter gave his pet lion a daily dose of 14 oz. of mineral oil for an intestinal condition.



When not in his cage, Leo would lounge about Sautter’s backyard swimming pool surrounded with palm trees, resembling a jungle oasis. Leo also rode along with his owner in the car doing local errands or on the front seat of the truck during towing calls. Those who encountered the big cat were understandably surprised and shocked to see him. But Sautter assured the astonished viewers that Leo was completely tame and invited them to pet his six-inch mane. The lion and his owner were local celebrities.

Unfortunately, as Leo matured, his roar grew louder drawing the ire of local neighbors. In October 1964, fifty complaining neighbors submitted a signed petition to Abington Township. They pro-

fessed the big cat’s roar was annoying and threatening and, Leo smelled from poor hygiene.

Sautter countered the neighbors’ charges by saying lions only roar when they are lonely, hungry or looking for a mate. To solve the loneliness issue, Sautter installed an in-house intercom where he could talk to Leo and calm his

anxiety. In addition, Sautter said he regularly bathed Leo, insisting, “He is clean and does not smell.” As far as a threat to the community, Leo’s disability made it difficult for him to run, or jump any higher than two feet. Sautter further stated, the lion was either kept in a cage or surrounded by a six-foot backyard fence. Further, he maintained the lion was very friendly and enjoyed being

petted by visitors.

Sautter also claimed Pat Anthony, a professional lion-tamer, told him, “Leo is one of the most tame lions he has ever come across.” But the township was having none of it and sided with the neighbors. On November 5, 1964; with no township law banning lions, Abington Township commissioners unanimously voted to use a nuisance ordinance and told Sautter to get rid of his pet.

In an effort to appease the township’s concerns, on November 25, Sautter took his teenage lion to the University of Pennsylvania Veterinarian Hospital to remove his “manhood.” Sautter hoped the operation would eliminate Leo’s roaring desire to attract a mate.

He passionately expressed, "I hope, following the operation, the authorities will let me keep him. I love Leo and he loves me. It would break both our hearts if I had to get rid of him." Unfortunately, the procedure left Leo with a stunted-growth mane and did nothing to quell his roar.

On December 10, 1964, Abington Township commissioners passed an ordinance to ban "Animals known to have a Wild Nature or Disposition." They told Sautter he had until December 27 to comply. In response, Sautter hired an attorney and vowed to fight the township's order. By January 3, 1965 the commissioners decided to put more teeth into the law by adopting Ordinance No. 1173, "Prohibiting the Keeping of Wild Animals." The new law came with a penalty for violators of \$300 per day and/or five days in jail. Hearing rumors that Sautter was continuing to defy the township, Abington Police executed a search warrant. In the Society's Abington Police Department Photographic Collection, three photos of Leo, including the two printed here, document the police visit.

While Sautter's legal battle with the township ensued, Leo's health began to deteriorate. After several months of illness and losing 30 pounds, Leo passed away on June 14, 1965, and was buried in the backyard at 2428 Old Welsh Road. Sautter's years of hosting lions seemed to have ended.

However, just a few months later in the early hours of October 6, 1965, someone left a five-month-old lion cub wrapped in a blanket, in a basket, at his front door. A note attached to the cub, named Simbu, stated the little lion had all his shots, was declawed and defanged. After an exhaustive search, Sautter never did identify the donor. With the addition of Simba, Sautter and his attorney renewed their legal fight with the



township. However, by January 18, 1966, the lion owner relented, giving up young Simba to a wild-animal-show owner and tamer, Pat Anthony of Trenton, NJ.

As lasting reminders, Howard placed a seven-by three-foot concrete lion statue in front of his shop, where it remained for decades, along with Leo's footprint imprinted in cement by the swimming pool. And so the story of Leo came to an end.

Well, not quite. Howard Sautter died on May 25, 1980. His stepson, Ralph "Butch" Smith, took ownership of the business and the Old Welsh Road property. With the sudden death of Butch in 2008, the property was listed for sale. Before purchasing the property, a prospective buyer decided to clean the backyard of overgrown brush. While digging with a backhoe, they came upon Leo's grave where they discovered the cat wrapped in a blanket, with his mane and collar still intact. Bringing the skull to the surface, one of the workers decided to take a couple of Leo's fangs as a souvenir. And that's when his troubles began. Befallen with a rash of strange and unexplained misfortunes and, fearing it was a result of stealing Leo's dentures, the

absconder returned to the grave and re-interring the teeth, at which time, all returned to normal.

With the sale of the property, the last reminder of Leo, his statue, was acquired by John Ianieri, Sr. and moved to 2346 Old Welsh Road. There it remained until Ianieri's death on October, 23, 2018, when a family friend, Jim McDonnell of Roslyn, purchased the icon. McDonnell had the statue lovingly painted by an artist, where today it adorns his front yard at 2908 Turner Avenue. With McDonnell acting as gracious caretaker, passers-by, especially the neighborhood youngsters, often stop to take their photo with the lion, where Leo's legacy continues to roar on.

Daniel O. Myers has been a Society member since 2010 and currently volunteers in the archives on Wednesdays during our public hours. He would like to thank the following for their assistance in gathering information for this article: Mike Valentine, Park Auto Repair; Dominick Fittipaldi, Landscaping; George Kaufmann, Abington Auto Care; Leslie Bell, OYRHS; Margy Lindem, Univ. of Penna. Director of Vet Libraries; and Jim Woods

Recent Archival Donations

The Society is pleased to have received a number of gifts over the past several months, the following being the most significant:

- Property deeds from the Estate of William L. Elkins to builder Joshua Holmes for land owned in Philadelphia, to be added to the Papers of Joshua Holmes, from Barbara Kates.
- Photographs of the Tomlinson farm and stables from the 1930s documenting the property at the corner of Huntingdon Pike and Meetinghouse Road, from Linda Chekay.
- Records of the Kiwanis Club of Jenkintown to be added to the organization's records.
- A broadside heralding the Yorktown Theatre opening gala on September 3, 1934, from Darren Hill.
- The student nurse's uniform of Joanne Hobsack Hansell from the Abington Memorial Hospital School of Nursing, from Jody Hansell.
- Scrapbook collection documenting the activities and press coverage of Beaver College from 1936 to 1974, from Arcadia University.
- The Board minutes of The Meadowbrook School covering the period from its founding in 1919 to 1986, from Cathy Keim.
- Records of the Steeplechase Questers, from Ruth Weiss and the Steeplechase Questers.
- The Horsham Farmers Club records (1979 to 1993) and various family papers and ephemera, from Frank Jarrett.
- A collection of photographs taken by Walter Ganister of his house on Hewett Road in Wyncote and Wyncote Park, mostly dating from 1939 to 1940, from Linda Ganister.
- The records of the Hoffman Tapes Mills in Cheltenham Village dating from 1942 to 1980, from George Hart.
- A poster for the Preservation Hall Jazz Band's concert at the Keswick Theatre, from David Wismer.

Membership Reminder

We are mid-way through our 2022-2023 membership year. If the mailing label on your envelope does not read "2023" or if you are receiving a membership form with this newsletter, you are not current. Please consider renewing at the Patron level or above. Your generous support is critical for our sound fiscal operation and is greatly appreciated.

The Annual Meeting of the Society will precede the May lecture. Officer and Committee reports will be given and the Nominating Committee will present a slate of Officers and Directors to be elected for the 2023-2024 program year.

Events of Local Interest

Reckoning with Slavery Along the Old York Road

The Cheltenham Township Historical Commission, in partnership with the Abington Friends Meeting and Penn State University Abington, will conduct a program honoring the efforts of area residents to ban slavery in America on Saturday, April 22. The program includes a presentation at the Abington Friends Meeting on the work of Abington abolitionist Benjamin Lay. Following, a luncheon will be served at the Meeting. Events will then resume at the Richard Wall House in Elkins Park. After an introductory presentation, the featured event will be a dramatic reading of Francis Daniel Pastorius' "Germantown Friends' Protest Against Slavery," the first formal protest against slavery in America, which was originally read at the Wall House in 1688. The unveiling of a permanent marker noting the Remonstrance will follow on the Wall House grounds. Events at Abington Friends Meeting will begin at 11:00 a.m., and in the afternoon at 1:00 at the Richard Wall House and Museum in Elkins Park. Admission is free and there is ample parking at both sites.

Crooked Billet History Fair

The Society will have a booth at the Crooked Billet History Fair to be held in the auditorium of the former Pennypack Elementary School in Hatboro (130 Spring Avenue) on Saturday, April 29 from 10 to 3. The event will feature representatives from the many historical organizations in Eastern Montgomery and Lower Bucks Counties. As part of the history fair there will be a book sale of Delaware Valley related history books, including many out-of-print volumes. Admission is free and all are welcome. Come support the various organizations that keep local history alive in our region.

Spring Speaker Series, Building Philadelphia

Society President, David B. Rowland, will be giving an illustrated lecture on Horace Trumbauer and his work in the Philadelphia area for the Greater Philadelphia Preservation Alliance's Spring Speaker Series, Building Philadelphia. The series is held by Zoom every Tuesday evening from February 28 through May 2. Mr. Rowland's presentation will be the last of the series and will be held on May 2 at 6:00 p.m. Please contact the Preservation Alliance for cost and registration information.

THANKS TO OUR MAJOR MEMBERSHIP DONORS

The Society gratefully recognizes those who have so far supported our work for the 2023 program year through membership at the Patron level and above.

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Society Exhibitions at Alverthorpe

Over the past several years, the Society has worked to prepare for display a number of visually interesting and historically important items from our collections. The effort is largely complete and you are invited to view the exhibition during our Wednesday hours. There is a checklist and description of the items to serve as guide. The display will remain hanging for several years, to be augmented as funds for conservation and framing allow.

In addition, the Society has a display case at the Archives. The current exhibition examines the history of the Alverthorpe property. Originally the Fisher family's summer home designed by architect John Notman, the former residence was demolished in 1938 for the building of the present day Alverthorpe Manor. This exhibit will remain up thru July at which time it will be removed and another display will be mounted.