
The Corridor

Volume XXXIII, No. 1

Newsletter of the Old York Road Historical Society

Spring 2024

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 are also accessible live via Zoom. The lecture series is sponsored by a grant from the Jenkintown Lyceum and all programs are offered free of charge.

March 13 – Warminster Speedway: An Unrealized Dream – Early in the 20th century, automobile enthusiasts planned to bring "big time" auto racing to Warminster. The vision was to create a circuit that would rival the famous Indianapolis Motor Speedway. An elaborate plan was developed, funding was secured, and construction started. However, the speedway was never completed. Imagine eastern Montgomery County today if a successful speedway had evolved into an economic centerpiece of the area. Join us as local historian Jim Rubillo shares the tale of the rise and fall of this dream.

April 10 – Landscapes of the Lord's New Church – The property of the Lord's New Church, located in Huntingdon Valley across from the June Fete Fair Grounds, was the estate of the Rev. Theodore Pitcairn. In 1927, he purchased the former Mann farm with its 200-year-old farmhouse. He developed a unique complex of buildings and a small working farm reminiscent of estates found in the French countryside. Today, Theodore's estate is home to the Lord's New Church. Join Chris Mendel, Executive Director of the Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust, as he presents a fresh look at the landscape history and development of this property.

May 8 – Strawbridge & Clothier – In her new book, *Philadelphia's Strawbridge & Clothier: From Our Family to Yours*, Margaret Strawbridge Butterworth charts the 128-year history of Philadelphia's iconic department store through vivid stories from past employees. The department store branched out to suburban locales including Jenkintown beginning in the late 1920s. At the time of its sale in 1996, Strawbridge & Clothier was the oldest department store in the country with continuous family ownership and management. Copies of the book will be available for sale and signing following the talk.

--- SPRING OUTING ---

Pennypacker Mills and Peter Wentz Farmstead

Sunday, April 28, 12:45 p.m.



The Society will tour two historically important Colonial era homes for its Spring Outing. The first stop will be Pennypacker Mills. The original house was built c. 1720 and it was last enlarged in 1901 by architect Arthur Brockie in the Colonial Revival style as the centerpiece of a 170-acre estate. Pennsylvania Governor Samuel W. Pennypacker lived here and the house retains many of his furnishings.



Our second stop will be the Peter Wentz Farmstead, a restored 18th-century historic site and working farm, first settled by Peter and Rosanna Wentz in 1744. The house, built in 1758, is a remarkably unique example of colonial Pennsylvania German architecture and design. It is furnished throughout with period-accurate objects. The house served as headquarters for General George Washington in October 1777, during a time between the Battle of Germantown and the Whitemarsh Valley campaign.

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 12:45 p.m. Sharp (notice the early departure time) and return around 5:00.

ARCHIVES NOW OPEN ON TUESDAYS

The Society is pleased to announce that we are adding weekly Tuesday research hours beginning on March 19th. Thanks to Daniel Myers, the research library and archives will be open to the public on Tuesdays from 12 noon. until 3:00 p.m. for research purposes. Our Wednesday hours will continue.

Happenings Along the Corridor

(All events are open to the public free of charge.)

John Wanamaker Lecture

Society Vice-President Tom Wieckowski will present an illustrated lecture on John Wanamaker at the Huntingdon Valley Public Library (625 Red Lion Road) on Thursday, April 4 at 12:30 p.m. Wanamaker's exploits spanned what easily could be called three careers: Merchant, Politician, and Civic Activist. The program will cover the history of Wanamaker's ground-breaking stores and the exciting life of this notable citizen of Philadelphia and the Cheltenham Hills, and the history of his estate, *Lindenhurst*, that was the center of many of his events.

Northeast History Fair

The Society will have a booth at the Northeast Philadelphia History Fair on Saturday, April 13 from 10 to 3. The event will be held at the Cannstatter Volkfest Verein, 9130 Academy Road, Philadelphia, PA 19114. The Fair is sponsored by the Friends of Northeast Philadelphia History and will include displays by many of the region's historical groups.

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 27 from 10 to 2. The event will feature representatives from the many historical organizations in Eastern Montgomery and Lower Bucks Counties. Admission is free and all are welcome. Come support the various organizations that keep local history alive in our region.

Preservation lecture on Lynnewood Hall

The Cheltenham Township Historical Commission will hold its annual Preservation Lecture on Thursday, May 9 at Curtis Hall (1250 Church Road) beginning at 7:00 p.m. Edward Thome, Executive Director of the Lynnewood Hall Preservation Foundation will report on the group's efforts to preserve and restore the Widener estate, *Lynnewood Hall*.

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:

- An 1864 photograph of the third building of Abington Presbyterian Church (1833-1866), from Dawn Magaha.
- A scrapbook, photographs and ads related to Gamburg's Furniture store in Hatboro, from Walter Beck.
- A photograph of the tennis courts at the Bethayres Tennis Club, c. 1950, from Sutherland McColley.
- Records of the Every Woman's Club of Glenside, from Jim Cummings, to be added to the organization's records.
- Research files and notes of Frank Ames, former treasurer of Rockledge borough, from Joseph Cuddy.
- Manuscript material and ephemera of John Wanamaker, from David Rowland.
- Jenkintown school memorabilia and ephemera from masonic organizations in Rockledge, from Anne Halpern.
- Photographs of the Glenside Theatre, from Barbara Kotzin.
- Papers, photographs, genealogical information and ephemera of the Francis R. Taylor family, from Terrie Cornell, to be added to the existing Taylor Family Papers Collection.
- Papers, clippings and ephemera of Betty Adams of Cheltenham Village, from Katherine Swift.
- A letter carrying the earliest known use of a postal hand stamp for Jenkintown, dated June 1829, from Andrew Edelman.

Membership Reminder

We are midway through our 2023-2024 membership year. If the mailing label on your envelope does not read "2024" 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 2024-2025 program year.

A Bit of History – Juliana’s Cave

By Thomas J. Wieckowski, Ph.D.

It seems almost certain that the little cave along the Tookany Creek must have been known as a shelter to the Lenni Lenape people who travelled along their well-worn trail nearby for thousands of years. The trail was the route from their winter homesteads along the Delaware River to their summer hunting grounds in the wilderness area known today as Bucks County. But the cave did not get named until the middle of the 19th century, thanks to the growth of the area along the trail, “improved” and, as of 1711, named Old York Road.

The cave, still relatively secluded, sits at the bottom of a rock outcropping of gray Wissahickon schist about twenty yards from the banks of the placid Tookany Creek and about one hundred yards above Church Road in Elkins Park.

Juliana’s Cave has been known by that name in local lore for almost two hundred years, and most residents and local historians who can name the cave will mention the story of a young girl and her love of reading. The Rev. S. F. Hotchkin, in his classic compendium of Old York Road sites, notes this landmark in 1892. He attributes the name to “Juliana Kirkbride, who was of a literary turn, and used to go there when she was living in Shoemakertown with the Shoemaker family” in the 1840s.

Juliana’s patrimony is clear, however, and not exactly as Hotchkin conveyed. She was the daughter of Joseph Kirkbride who, in Feb-

ruary of 1812, purchased a small property along the rural Old York Road straddling the properties of first purchasers Richard Wall and Patrick Robinson. Juliana is estimated to be about twelve years old at the time. Joseph moved to the Old York Road from the Frankford area where he had married Mary Paul in 1788 at Frankford Friends.



The undeveloped land behind the Kirkbride home would have given Juliana easy access down the hill to the cave. The Kirkbrides were members of Abington Friends Meeting and Juliana was the middle of seven children. Her name is spelled as “JuliaAnn” in the Abington Friends’ records. Half a century later, the property would be John Wanamaker’s first home in the area in 1868 as Gilded Age Cheltenham Hills began to entice Philadelphia’s wealthy capitalists to establish country estates there (see photograph of the house).

The Friends’ minutes indicate that “Julian” Kirkbride married David Clarke of Philadelphia on December 16, 1829. To add to the confusion over her name, “Julian” is crossed out and “JuliaAnn” is

overwritten in the minutes. Unfortunately, no further information about her - or David’s - fate can be found in the existing records.

Hotchkin’s apparent confusion on the identity of Juliana’s residence may have been caused by the marriage in 1811 of Juliana’s older sister to Dr. Nathan Shoemaker of Shoemakertown, descendant of the original George Shoemaker of

Wall House fame. Nathan and Frances, however, did not continue to reside in Shoemakertown as he began his medical career after his graduation and marriage at 816 Chestnut Street in Philadelphia, where he resided until his death in 1868.

The Ambler Gazette published a prosaic account of

a visit to “Julian’s Cave” in November of 1898. It asserts that the name “was acquired through the habitual use of it by Miss Julian Kirkbride, a lady of literary turn, who, book in hand, would saunter down to this cave and enjoy solitude.” The author rhapsodizes about the sylvan scene: “With trees above to shelter her from the sun and the murmur of the rippling water of old Tacony, she would while away many afternoons of the long summer days during the 30’s and 40’s.” One can say much the same about the verdant and tranquil scene today (until a SEPTA train passes by on the nearby tracks) although the author is probably incorrect about the time frame and the young lady’s name.

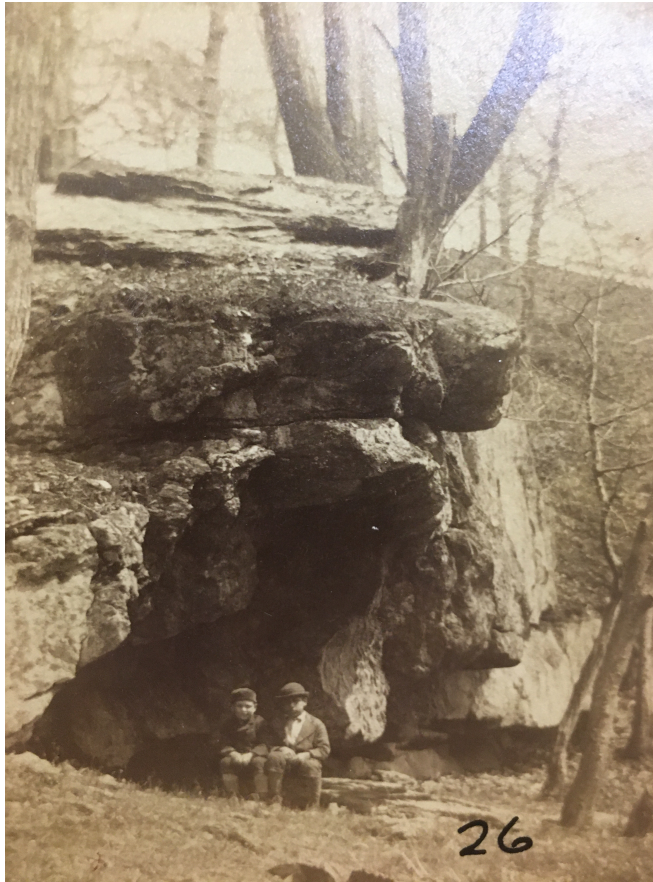
In 1941, Charles Sinkler, writing in his history of the Old York Road (*OYRHS Bulletin*, Vol. V, 1941), takes the reader past the cave on his literary tour of the area. Sinkler writes: "there is still visible from the railroad St. Julian's cave, a favorite spot for swimming and picnicking." Apparently, the "swimming" part was a minor problem as the *Public Spirit* of June 4, 1897, noted complaints from railroad riders of the "bare show" by young boys swimming in the creek.

Also, in a 1910 article in the *Public Spirit* (Hatboro) about John Wanamaker's improvements to his estate, the paper refers to the new road that "leads to Church road by way of Julian's cave along Tacony creek." It is likely that Wanamaker, concerned about the naturalistic portrayal of his landscaping, deliberately set the route of his carriageway to pass the cave for the rustic view it provided. Wanamaker had acquired the property encompassing the cave in 1880 when he expanded his country estate and constructed his opulent Lindenhurst mansion on the property that extended from the railroad north to Old York Road.

Interestingly, there is a Julian in history with a connection to Cheltenham, albeit Cheltenham, England. Julian of Norwich was a fourteenth century English mystic – and Julian was female. She is also known as Dame Julian and Juliana of Norwich and, since her real name was unknown, she was assigned the name Julian as she lived in a cell at the church of St. Julian in Norwich. She was known as a hermit, once lived in a cave, and her writings are believed to be the first books written by a woman in the English Language.

She is revered throughout England, and Cheltenham, England, has recognized Julian with a street, school, church, and park.

How can the inconsistencies in the local lore be reconciled? Perhaps, like the classic whispering game,



historical anecdotes change over time or multiple myths evolve lacking a solid factual base. The Cheltenham-British colonists may have endowed the cave with the lyrical reference to their hermit mystic. Later generations, perhaps losing that original context, allowed the name to morph into a more familiar and secular form based on a more recognizable local figure. The answer remains elusive and wanting more data.

The cave – or at least its legacy – enjoyed a brief respite of public attention in 1936 when the famed Abington Hospital June Fete was conducted at *Lindenhurst*. The festive fairway of booths on the front lawn included one entitled "Juliana's Cave." It featured a team of astrologers and palm

readers who "provided a glimpse into the future" according to *The Inquirer* of June 7 of that year.

Juliana's cave can be seen from Cheltenham Hills Drive just west of Church Road – at least in winter when the trees are bare. John

Wanamaker constructed a carriageway from Church Road to his mansion along the Tookany Creek in 1910 and lined the roadway with stone pylons topped by oil torches. A rutted remnant of the carriageway still passes the cave and the last surviving lantern pylon can be seen in front of the cave. The Breyer Woods townhouses now occupy the ground above. The height and volume of the cave have been diminished by about half from colonial days due to flooding and resulting silting of the channelized stream by railroad construction in 1854, the construction of the Wanamaker carriageway, and the installation of a temporary sewer line

along the Tookany Creek in 2015 that necessitated the loose rock paving over a raised bed.

The quaint little cave lives on in quiet solitude - except for the passing trains - sequestered behind a locked gate at the carriageway entrance and no-trespassing signs. It provides a reverie of a past age that reminds us of our rich historical legacy along Old York Road.

Thomas J. Wieckowski, Ph.D., is vice-president of the Old York Road Historical Society and Chairman of the Cheltenham Township Historical Commission. He is a resident of Wyncote and has written a number of books and articles on the history of the Cheltenham Hills area.

THANKS TO OUR MAJOR MEMBERSHIP DONORS

The Society gratefully recognizes those who have so far supported our work for the 2024 program year through membership at the Patron level and above.

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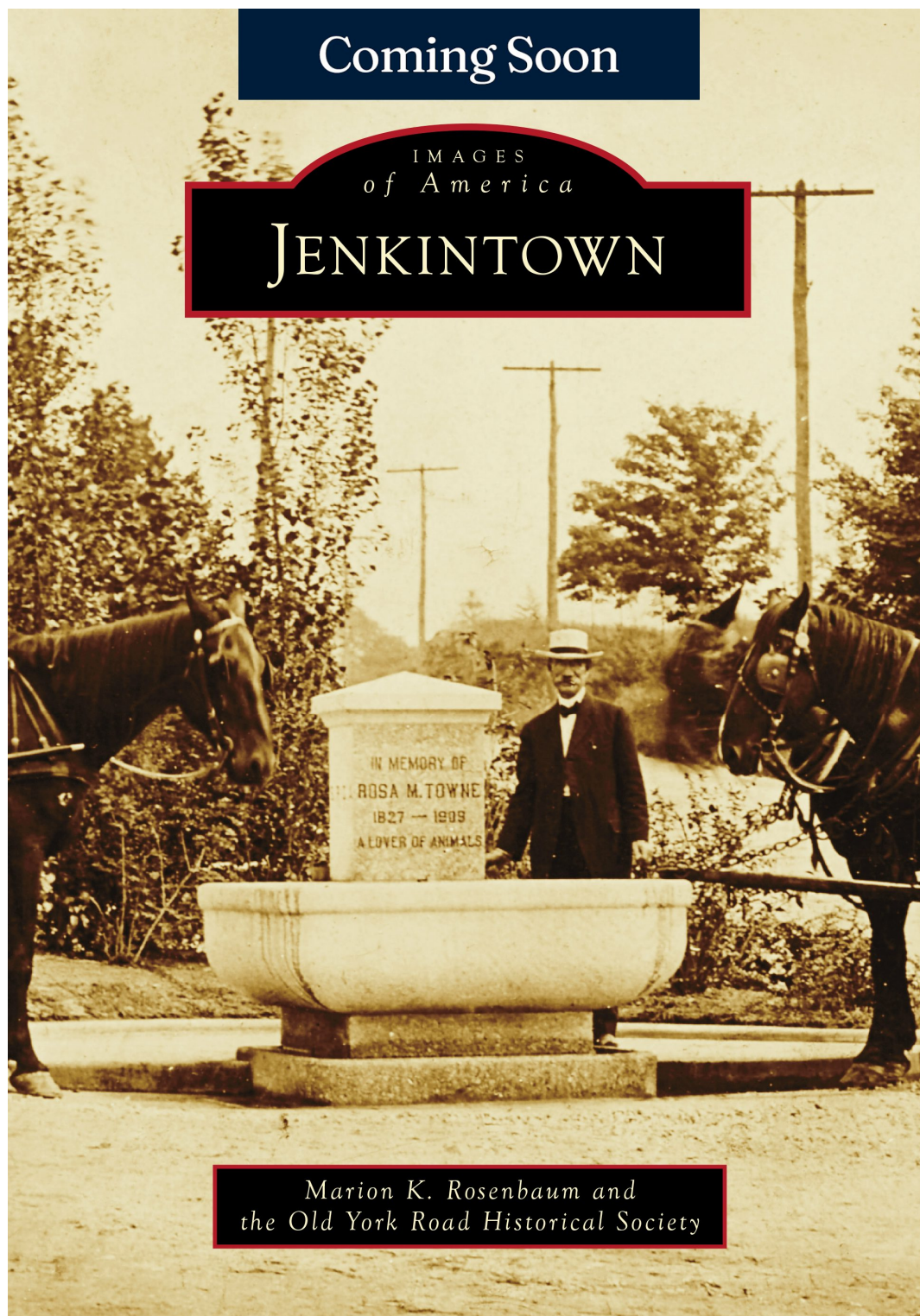
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New Exhibit at Alverthorpe

The Society has mounted a new exhibition in its display case at Alverthorpe Manor. Entitled, "An Historical Sketch," the exhibit features drawings and sketches by local artists. Artists included in the show include members of the Russell Smith family (Glenside), Glenn Stuart Pearce (Elkins Park), and Joseph T. Pearson, Jr. (Huntingdon Valley). The exhibit is accessible during our Tuesday and Wednesday public hours.

Coming Soon - *Jenkintown*

The Society and Society member Marion K. Rosenbaum have recently finished writing a new Arcadia Publishing book entitled, *Jenkintown*. The book contains nearly 230 historical images of the borough and has been compiled for the 150th anniversary celebration of the establishment of the borough and school district. There will be a special book launch event in early May (date to be determined). While the book retails for \$25, all Society members will be able to buy one copy for \$15 and additional copies at our regular selling price of \$20. Information about book sales and the launch will be sent in April. Society sales will benefit our collection preservation activities.



Coming Soon

IMAGES
of America

JENKINTOWN

Marion K. Rosenbaum and
the Old York Road Historical Society