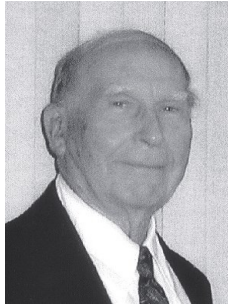


The King of Prussia Gazette

Preserving Upper Merion's Past to Enliven its Future

Volume IV, Number One

Spring 2015



IN MEMORIAM

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Ed Dybicz on February 18, 2015. Ed was known as "Mr. Upper Merion History" for the local history articles he wrote when he worked at the Times Herald as a reporter.

Ed also co-authored "Montgomery County - The Second Hundred Years". He was extremely insistent on truth and accuracy when recalling history, and was a good friend, a great supporter, and a member emeritus of the Society.

He will be missed very much.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Michael Morrison

Why Are We Here?

I often wonder why we do this. I am speaking of the ongoing challenge of preserving our rich local history, so that future generations can better decide where they are going by seeing where they have been. I have been wondering if people are actually reading our publication, or taking away valuable information from our meetings and actually thinking about how we are all impacted by our past. Yet we continue to paint the picture in hope that someone someday will benefit.

Recently there has been a hint of affirmation; enough that I am briefly placated, because that someday seems to be today! Let me explain.

Last year the Historical Society of Pennsylvania contacted us to ask if we would participate in their "Hidden Collections initiative for PA Small Archival Repositories", or (HCI-PSAR). Our collection was subsequently reviewed and

by October it went online with other collections from other societies in PA. It was not long after that we were contacted by a doctoral student from Columbia University, working on her dissertation relating to the history of organized youth football. She was particularly interested in our collection from the King of Prussia Indians Football Association. She visited us in January, and we rolled out the red carpet for her. A report will be included in our summer issue.

A "Business Meeting" rarely draws a big crowd, but our By-Laws make it a necessary rule of our tax-exempt status, so we hold it in January. I was pleased to see a nice group of regulars, and a spirited discussion ensued. After the meeting we were approached by a gentleman who had found out about us online, and drove from New Jersey to attend the meeting. After some time we learned that he was a direct descendent of Jonathan Roberts, and had brought his family genealogy as proof. And if that were not all, he also expressed an interest in someday being buried in the family cemetery on U.S. 202! Marianne Hooper Furman was kind enough to take him to Valley Forge Memorial Gardens, the home of the Roberts family, once called "Swamp Vrass". We will surely see him again, and will have a nice copy of the Roberts family tree for our Archive and Special Collections.

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The Town Crier—

updates from the Society...

OUR 2015 CHARTER MEMBERS

We acknowledge our Charter Members for 2015 and thank them for their support: Emma Carson, Dave and Marianne Furman, John and Shirley Funkhouser, Michael Morrison, Frank Luther.



The Society is also pleased to honor Ed Dybicz (1923-2015) as an honorary member for his many contributions to the Society and for his untiring efforts to preserve the history of Upper Merion.

INTERESTED IN WRITING?

The Society welcomes articles prepared by its members. Contact Frank Luther if you might be interested in writing and sharing an article for our publication.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Check the back page for the listing of our upcoming meeting dates and our special programs.

INFO ABOUT UPPER MERION

Is there a question you have about some aspect of the township's history? You can submit your question to us at info@kophistory.org and we will provide an answer in a future issue.

Check out the King of Prussia Historical Society website at www.kophistory.org. And find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/kophisory

MEMBERSHIP

Our membership campaign for 2015 is now underway! New memberships and renewals will be accepted at this time. Looking for a unique gift? Why not present a family member or friend with an annual membership for the King of Prussia Historical Society! We supply a gift card for you to present to the recipient.

Student/Senior (65+): \$35.00

Individual: \$40.00

Family Household \$50.00

Patron: \$125.00

Charter: \$250.00

OUR MAILING ADDRESS

Please note that our new mailing address is King of Prussia Historical Society, PO Box 60716, King of Prussia, PA 19406-0716

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the King of Prussia Historical Society is to preserve and interpret the history of Upper Merion Township as relevant to its various neighborhoods of Gulph Mills, Gypsy Hills, Croton Woods, King of Prussia, Valley Forge, Abrams, Belmont, Town Center, Swedesburg/King Manor, Henderson, and Swedeland, as well as the areas of Rebel Hill, Port Kennedy, and Hughes Park. The Society's goal is to stimulate public interest and to support the township's heritage through educational programs and public events focusing on preserving the past and shaping the future.

OUT OF WAR, A NEW NATION

To mark the 150th anniversary of the end of the Civil War, The King of Prussia Historical Society is sponsoring an event on Saturday, April 25, 2015 at Christ Church (Old Swedes) in Swedesburg. The theme for this celebration is *Out of War, A New Nation*. We plan to have re-enactors, presentations, and exhibits, many with an emphasis on local history and the citizens of Upper Merion who were so supportive of Lincoln and the War.

OUR ANNUAL FIELD TRIP

Our Annual Field Trip is scheduled for Saturday, June 13 to St. David's Church on 763 South Valley Forge Road in Wayne. We will meet at the church at 2:00. This year marks the 300th anniversary of the church.

Driving directions from the Upper Merion Township Building: Depart PA-23 / W Valley Forge Rd toward North Henderson Road to DeKalb Pike to drive onto 202 South. Take the ramp right for East Swedesford Road toward Valley Forge Road. Turn left onto PA-252 / Valley Forge Road. Keep straight onto North Valley Forge Road. You will bear right onto Devon State Road. Turn left onto Old Lancaster Road, and then immediately turn right onto North Waterloo Road; please note that the road name changes to South Waterloo Road. Turn left onto South Devon Avenue. Turn right onto Dorset Road; road name changes to South Valley Forge Road. Arrive at 763 South Valley Forge Rd, Wayne, PA 19333. The last intersection is Maplewood Avenue. If you reach Church Rd, you've gone too far.

The driving distance is 8.9 miles with 18 minutes of driving---23 minutes with traffic.

A commitment

to Preservation



"NO ONE SENT THEM. THEY VOLUNTEERED TO GO..."

The National Women's History Project has announced "Weaving the Stories of Women's Lives" as the theme for National Women's History Month 2015. This theme presents the opportunity to weave women's stories---individually and collectively---into the essential fabric our nation's history.

Accounts of the lives of individual women are critically important because they reveal exceptionally strong role models who share a more expansive vision of what a woman can do. The stories of women's lives, and the choices they made, encourage girls and young women to think larger and bolder, and give boys and men a fuller understanding of the female experience. Knowing women's achievements challenges stereotypes and upends social assumptions about who women are and what women can accomplish today.

There is a real power in hearing women's stories, both personally and in a larger context. Remembering and recounting tales of our ancestors' talents, sacrifices, and commitments inspires today's generations and opens the way to the future.

In the history of Upper Merion Township, many women played important roles. Not every woman who had an impact on the history of the township lived in Upper Merion, but their contributions influenced our history. In this spring issue of THE KING OF PRUSSIA GAZETTE, we recognize women's achievements and their impact on the township.

We might begin with the women of the Lenni Lenape tribes that occupied the land that is today's Upper Merion. With their matriarchal society, the women played an important role and made the critical decisions affecting the tribe.

The early Swedish settlers in Upper Merion certainly were influenced and strengthened by the women in their lives. In 1696, John Rambo, his wife Anna Laicon, and his father Gunnar arranged to purchase a tract of land in what is now Upper Merion Township, near Bridgeport. Before finalizing this deal, it was found that the land was part of 7,800 acres Penn had granted to his daughter, Letitia. However, in 1709, Penn's attorneys restored two hundred and fifty acres to John Rambo. Later his tract was found to contain three hundred and fifty acres. In the mid-1730's, a schoolhouse was built for the church on his land. Undoubtedly, Anna played a significant role in the early settlement of Swedesburg.

Brigitta Rambo married Matthias Holstein on October 19, 1705 in Wicaco Church. The family moved to Matsunk, now Swedeland, where Matthias established a large farm. The family resided in Upper Merion Township in 1714, where they built a stone house a mile and a half from the Schuylkill on Spring Creek. More than four generations were born and lived in this house. A stone barn was also built in which services were held during the building of Christ Church (Old Swedes) in Upper Merion Township.

Brigitta Holstein was still living in 1754 when she was listed in the census of nine Swedish families that formed the beginning of Christ Church. The census showed that Brigitta, her sons and their families still spoke and read the Swedish language as well as English. Brigitta died by 1758 when her estate was administered.

According to Oneida oral tradition, an Oneida woman named Polly Cooper walked several hundred miles from her home in Central New York to Valley Forge in the cruel winter of 1777 -78 to help feed Gen. George Washington's starving troops. She had stayed with the troops and taught the soldiers how to cook the white corn, taking them through the preparation process and the lengthy cooking time. She stayed on after the other Oneidas departed for their homeland and continued to help the troops.

There are two different accounts of how she was recognized. In one story, Washington had offered her money, but she refused. Martha Washington had bought her a shawl, bonnet and hat from Philadelphia. What is known is that Martha gave Polly one of her shawls.

After the war, the Colonial Army tried to pay Polly Cooper for her valiant service, but she refused any recompense, stating that it was her duty to help her friends in their time of need. However, she did accept the token of appreciation offered by Martha Washington. The shawl has been handed down by successive descendants of Polly Cooper.

Samuel Tyson married Sarah H. Roberts of Upper Merion Township in 1858 after his first wife Mary died. Sarah was the daughter of Jonathan and Eliza H. (Bushby) Roberts. A native of Upper Merion, she had resided there all her life. In 1859, Samuel purchased a farm in Upper Merion. They built the home in 1860, which was destroyed by fire in 1898. It was rebuilt, and Mrs. Tyson

"NO ONE SENT THEM. THEY VOLUNTEERED TO GO..." *(Continued from page 3.)*

had a fine country home and a farm containing one hundred and thirty acres. Samuel Tyson was a good farmer and a strong anti-slavery man. His wife, Sarah, was reared on the Roberts farm in Upper Merion and was educated in the private school maintained by her father, Jonathan Roberts. She was a woman of much natural ability and of a kindly disposition, her whole life having been devoted to her family. She was an active member of the Montgomery County Historical Society and of the Abolitionist movement in the county.

Perhaps the role of Upper Merion women in the township's history as well as the nation's history can be summed up in the words of Anna M. Holstein: "No one sent them. They volunteered to go". Leaving behind more quiet lives, a handful of Montgomery County women answered the call for civilians to nurse Union Army wounded during the U.S. Civil War.

Between 1862 and 1865, they trekked in plain dress, with hair pulled back, to battlefields in Pennsylvania, Maryland and the South. They had scant training or supplies, yet managed to care for the hurt and comfort the dying. "The Brigade Surgeon has assured me more than once, that far more lives of the wounded soldiers have been spared thro' the tender nursing of our ladies than by the skill of all the surgeons," the husband of a nurse wrote in 1862.

Sarah Priest of Bridgeport, a civilian nurse lies in a grave at Christ (Old Swedes) Church in Upper Merion. The grave was found using burial records. Starting after the Battle of Antietam in 1862, Brower, of Norristown, spent two years caring for the wounded in Sharpsburg, Md. She was helped by Priest, who stayed ten months. The pair gave out the bandages, linens and food that had been collected and sent by the Norristown Ladies' Aid Society which included women from Upper Merion.

"They were reliable, valuable, effective women," Anna Morris Holstein, who was there, wrote in her 1867 book, **THREE YEARS IN FIELD HOSPITALS OF THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC.**

At a meeting on April 19, 1861, in Norristown the women "resolved to furnish aid to those who volunteer in service of their country." The same day a meeting was held in the library room of Stewart Fund Hall in Upper Merion. Mrs. Jonathan Roberts, president, Mrs. William H. Holstein, vice president, Mrs. Sarah H. Tyson, secretary, were in attendance as well as a large number of earnest women. They "resolved that the women of Upper Merion

will devote their utmost energies to aid and encourage the brave men who have gone to meet a treacherous and rebellious foe; that no new bonnets should be procured or dresses purchased while the war continued, excepting calico; while the money these articles would cost should be used in our Army Aid Society." "Resolved, that the Union colors, emblematic of our national flag, should be worn by us until peace was re-established." A tiny silk flag was placed upon the left shoulder, or arranged among loops of ribbon in front of hat or bonnet.

Indeed, many other women have had an impact on our township's, state's, and national history. In the words of Anna M. Holstein, No one sent them. They volunteered to go; they were reliable, valuable, effective women." Help us to weave women's stories---individually and collectively---into the essential fabric of our township's, of our state's, and of our nation's history. Send the KOPHS your nominations with a brief summary of your nominee's accomplishments and contributions.



Photo courtesy of the King of Prussia Historical Society.

ANN W. PECHIN: ACTIVIST AND LEADER IN LIFE-LONG EDUCATION

by Doris L. Freeman, resident of Upper Merion from 1957 to 2009 and president of the League of Women Voters-Upper Merion from 1961 to 1963.

Ann W. Pechin, daughter of John Wagner Pechin and Mary Emily Pechin, was born on January 31, 1877 in Radnor. She grew up in a plain stuccoed house, a severe colonial built in the early 1700's, located under

sylvania Turnpike.

Miss Pechin attended Upper Merion schools, West Chester Normal School, and Ursinus College. She began teaching at the Roberts School in the Upper Merion School District in 1895. After seven years, she became assistant principal of the Spring City High School; she later taught for nine years in the Radnor School District. Miss Pechin was elected a member of the Upper Merion Board of Education in 1931 and served as its president in 1934 and 1935.

Always curious about human potential, Miss Pechin became interested in the women's suffrage movement and in the League of Women Voters which was established soon after the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. Early in 1926, members of the newly organized League of Women Voters of Upper Merion selected Ann Pechin, its founder, as their president. She served in the office for twenty-eight years. At their thirty-fifth anniversary luncheon, past president Lillian McEver said, "Our League and Ann Pechin are synonymous. Without her energy and farsightedness, our League might not have been in existence today. ... During all her years in the League she was a constant inspiration to the many women with whom she came in contact, encouraging them to accept the civic responsibility that the right the franchise had given them by studying current events and matters of political importance on the local, state, national and international levels."

In addition to her work in public education, Miss Pechin devoted a great deal of time to several organizations whose purpose was to aid those less fortunate. She served as vice-chairman, chairman, and honorary chairman of the Valley Forge Chapter of the American Red Cross. She had been a director, president, and honorary president of Needlework Guild in Upper Merion. Miss Pechin was also a member of the Huguenot Society of Pennsylvania, the Montgomery County Historical Society, the King of Prussia Historical Society, and the Valley Forge Historical Society. She was also a member of the Montgomery County Children's Aid Society, of the Montgomery County SPCA, and of the Washington Memorial Chapel Guild. Miss Pechin was also a superintendent of the Episcopal Mission, which conducted its meetings at Stewart Fund Hall, the Upper Merion Township Building before it was razed.

I met Miss Pechin-- no one called her Ann--at the annual League luncheon at the Peacock Gardens in the spring of 1959. A woman from New York spoke powerfully about foreign policy, answering questions with confidence and spirit. I knew that I had found an excellent organization where women's ideas were valued. A busy mother of three young sons, I quickly sensed that child-focused discussions in my new neighborhood did not have to define

my life.

At subsequent meetings I observed Miss Pechin who led mostly by her commanding presence, by the self-discipline she exhibited: straight back, full attention to topic, asking searching questions, outlining consequences of action with her suggestions pointing to logical solutions. She spoke, softly but clearly, in full sentences, with sensitivity to relationships of our rapidly growing township to actions the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and our nation. What an example she was!

Obviously, Miss Pechin was motivated by a strong sense of social justice and she brought her considerable energies into women's new-found political life. She relished the role of informed citizens and she personified the purpose of the League: "A non-partisan organization which promotes informed and active participation in government."

With her strong and steady leadership, our group of younger members of the League's evening unit studied issues at three levels: national---one-man/one-vote and home rule for D.C.; state---merit selection of judges, first and second class townships, and authority financing; local---parks and recreation, school district budgets, zoning and land use, and the township manager ordinance. We learned that we could be open and impartial in our discussions, no matter what our political party affiliations were, regardless of the range of our personal experiences.

We held candidates' meetings and published voters' guides. On hand-held miniatures, we demonstrated Montgomery County's new voting machines in the young King of Prussia Mall.

When Ann Pechin died on September 1, 1967 she left a small savings account as a legacy for funding the League but I am certain that her most lasting gift was her unwavering trust in education and in our country's political processes. This dedicated and powerful little woman taught so many that together we could try to make a difference in our communities and our world.



The Pechin House, c.1700 King of Prussia, Pennsylvania.



PAULA HIMMELSBACH BELANO, DESIGNER OF WINDOWS

Although she never resided in Upper Merion, Paula Himmelsbach Balano left a lasting impression in the Township.

She was born in Leipzig, Germany in 1877 and moved to Philadelphia at the age of two. She attended Drexel Institute (now Drexel University) and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. In 1899 she won the Academy's Cresson Travelling Scholarship that enabled her to study in Paris under Alphonse Mucha, noted Czech artist. On returning to the United States, Balano continued her artistic training, first with Cecilia Beaux and later with William Merritt Chase. She supported herself as a portrait painter and teacher, serving on the faculty of the School of Design for Women, now Moore College of Art, from 1910 to 1934.

Balano was already in her forties when she entered the stained glass profession. She first apprenticed with Nicola D'Ascenzo in Philadelphia. Several years later, in 1925, Balano opened her own studio in Germantown. In 1928 she received her first major commission, for twenty-nine stained glass windows in St. Stephens Church (Philadelphia). The church closed in 1993 and the windows were purchased by the Archdiocese of New York for adaptive reuse projects. Balano may have been the first independent woman in the field at a time when all studio proprietors were men. She usually executed all of the work herself, from initial design to completed panel, receiving assistance only for the final stages of installation. Paula operated her studio at 22nd and Spring Garden Streets until the Great Depression, and then moved to Germantown until her death.

Balano designed in the Neo-Gothic style as did many of her contemporaries. Her work was included in the 1999 exhibit Philadelphia Stained Glass at the Paley Design Center of Philadelphia University (Curated by Joseph K. Beyer), and her windows can still be seen in various area churches. When Balano signed her windows, she used either her studio monogram or simply "P.H. Balano" and sometimes included the date.

And Paula's connection to Upper Merion? Paula Himmelsbach Balano was the painter and stained glass artist who created the windows for Christ Church (Old Swedes) in Swedesburg.

In 1925 she started her own studio for the production of stained glass windows. There she worked in the paint---which was considered eccentric by a woman at the time---late into the night while chain-smoking cigarettes. The students she received found her harsh, but inspiring. Her own description of her work was: "To make stained glass work, one must be an artist, pattern maker, glass worker, mechanic, potter, draftsman, glazier and an optimist". She also noted, "The secret of color in glass is to let the light do the blending instead of the brush. It was also about a balance between color and light to yield the intended decorative effect even when the room was dark."

Between 1938 and 1948, her work was temporarily interrupted during World War II, when she was she went voluntarily to the front and without compensation portrayed nearly 1,500 troops on postcards that they could send home to their families and friends.

Paula Himmelsbach Balano was active until the age of 82 and died in 1967.



Two windows in Old Swedes. Photo courtesy of Michael Morrison.



MOUNT PLEASANT REVISITED

by Thomas A. Hobson, Jr.

In September 2014, the Society received a letter from member Thomas A. Hobson, Jr. He had read the article about the Exley Log House and saw the announcement about the October 2014 meeting featuring the Cabrini College oral history project with the residents of Mount Pleasant. Mr. Hobson shared the following thoughts with us and we thought it fitting to share what he had written with the members of the Society.

"My father, Tom Hobson, Sr., owned Peacock Gardens in the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's. It has changed hands five times since we owned it and is now called The Tilted Kilt. The building is the oldest building in King of Prussia---even older than the King of Prussia Inn, although it didn't become a restaurant until the 1920's.

I knew Michael's (Morrison) father and uncle and his grandmother had an antique shop close by. But the reason I want to contact Michael is to give him some additional information about the upcoming history on Mount Pleasant section in Wayne, which he might like to use.

My grandfather moved to Mount Pleasant in 1900. My father was born there in 1906 and I was born there in 1930. In 1902 and 1903 my grandfather opened a general store there which remained open as a grocer---family owned and operated for eighty-five years.

"Hobson's Store" was also a sub-station for the Wayne Post Office in the 1930's and earlier. My grandfather was also the first rural mail carrier in Wayne delivering mail by horse and buggy and later by motorcycle and then by automobile. In the 20's, 30's, and 40's, the area was mostly rural. His mail route was fifty-four miles long and three hundred and fifty stops and covered from Radnor train station as far as the Valley Forge Music Fair, New Centerville and all the way over Route 202 to Henderson Road and down Henderson to

Gulph Road (Route 23) and Gulph Road back to Route 202. It included Colonial Village, the Morrison house on King of Prussia Road (then Route 252). Chesterbrook was just two stops in the 1950's when I served it.

Grandfather retired in 1936 and my father took over the grocery store and the mail route until 1947 when he bought Peacock Gardens. I also have history and some letters written by my father about the early history of Mount Pleasant by two of the village's centenarians, Miss Mazie Hall and Mrs. Clarence Smith. I also have some papers by my father on the early history of "Hobson's Store" which, after thirty-five years as a grocery, was later Rented as an antique shop, and then a thrift shop, and for the last fifteen years as a barber shop.

After reading the current issue of THE KING OF PRUSSIA GAZETTE, about Miss Emily Exley, who was my next door neighbor from 1957 to about 1965, I might mention also that my grandfather secured the lumber from the old Indian school mentioned in that article after it had closed down, and built five low rent houses on what is now Fairview Avenue in Mount Pleasant.



Mount Pleasant photos courtesy of Michael Morrison.

(Continued from page 1.)

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

We know that prior to the moving of the King of Prussia Inn on August 20, 2000, a fundraiser was undertaken by the King of Prussia Chamber of Commerce and the then King of Prussia Historical Society. This fundraiser included the sale of Holiday Ornaments, Wilton Armetale Commemorative Plates, Renderings of the Inn, and Brick Pavers. Concerned donors continue to ask about the pavers, curious as to why they were never produced. This King of Prussia Historical Society has absolutely no information regarding this fundraiser, as no records have ever turned up. If you have any information regarding these donations, or have contributed yourself, we would like to hear from you. Please contact us as we plan to honor you by erecting a plaque to commemorate your kind donation.

So we will hold our course, steady and true. We will continue to deliver our story, as long as there is someone out there listening.

2015 Program Calendar

- April 11 ~ 2:00 pm** Kimberly Morrell: *Archeologist Recent PennDOT Finds and Discoveries*
- April 25 ~ 10:00 pm** *Out of War, A New Nation A Celebration of the end of the Civil War*
- May 9 ~ 12:00 Noon** *Digging into the Upper Merion Archives*
Followed by Society Picnic
- June 13 ~ 2:00 pm** Annual Field Trip: *St Davids Church*
LOCATION: 763 S Valley Forge Rd,
Wayne

No meetings in July and August.



PO BOX 60716
KING OF PRUSSIA PA 19406-0716

Check out the King of Prussia Historical Society website at www.kophistory.org.

And find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/kophistory