

The King of Prussia Gazette

Preserving Upper Merion's Past to Enliven its Future

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MESSAGE FROM THE VICE RESIDENT

by Dave Montalvo

Just about 110 years ago, Reverend W. Herbert Burk stood in what was at the time an unfinished Washington Memorial Chapel and delivered an address to the Historical Society of Montgomery County. In it, he spoke of the long struggle to create a memorial to the sacrifice and courage of George Washington and the Continental soldiers and officers who spent that terrible winter at Valley Forge.

"Year by year the work will go on until a grateful nation shall have expressed here its sense of obligation to the founders of the Republic and generation after generation will come to this house of prayer to ask a blessing such as was sought on these hills by the Father of his people, when amid the snows of Valley Forge he offered his prayers for the new nation." ["Valley Forge", an address by Rev. W. Herbert Burk in Historical Sketches: A Collection of Papers Prepared for the Historical Society of Montgomery County, 1919.]

At that point, his beloved chapel was constructed as much of faith and hope as it was of wood and stone. How often we forget that the institutions we take for granted, like the Washington Memorial Chapel, began as the hard work and vision of a few committed people.

Valley Forge itself had only been established as a state park just sixteen years before Rev. Burk's address, and he took the opportunity to draw attention to the work and perseverance of Anna Morris Holstein and others in their earlier quest to preserve George Washington's Headquarters and the surrounding land.

As we continue working toward finding a home, we can take heart from their experiences. I have confidence that one day, a Museum of Upper Merion History will be an institution taken for granted, and it will be so integral to the township and schools that those who benefit from its presence will likewise marvel that its existence was ever a question.

In the meantime, the Society's work continues apace. Our display "Slavery in Montgomery County" at the Black History Month Celebration garnered a lot of attention. Special thanks to Marianne Hooper Furman and Russell Rubert for manning the display with me. Look for more information about slavery in Montgomery County in a future Gazette, and potentially as a talk at one of our meetings in the Fall.

The Society has also been asked by Township Supervisor Tina Garzillo to serve as a consulting party in PennDot's Trinity Lane Bridge Project. The Trinity Lane Bridge over Gulph Creek was first constructed in 1788, and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. As such, it is one of the oldest bridges still in use by vehicular traffic in the US. As PennDot plans to repair and reinforce the bridge, rest assured we will work to ensure that the bridge retains its historic character and appearance as much as possible.



(The Woodland Chapel, Rev. W. Herbert Burk's first chapel at Valley Forge.)

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(Early postcard of the finished Washington Memorial Chapel.)