

# The King of Prussia Gazette

Preserving Upper Merion's Past to Enlighten its Future

Volume II, Number Four

Winter 2013

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Michael Morrison

### The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

I have good news; I have bad news, and some really bad news. The good news is that the former structure that was once Marrone's (earlier the Yankee Doodle) Restaurant, on Shoemaker Road is being restored and repurposed as an office building. The King of Prussia Historical Society supports the restoration of old buildings and the owners are to be commended for their efforts. So often we find, especially here in Upper Merion, that history is forced to give way to "progress", and the story is lost forever. In this case, the former row homes of quarry workers at the Henderson Quarry are being converted into modern office space, not unlike many of the historic structures in that area, like the Henderson home, barn, and other worker's quarters.

The Historic King of Prussia Inn is for now, remaining in the hands of the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, and that is bad news. No explanation has been offered to the Society regarding this sudden change of position, and on at least one occasion we have been denied access to the facility. Our efforts to reclaim the Inn for the people of Upper Merion and surrounding communities are ongoing, and the following letter printed by the editor of the Inquirer (11/6/2013) clearly states our position:

### A NEW PURPOSE FOR THE KING OF PRUSSIA INN

The route of the Chester Valley Trail will branch off of the Schuylkill Trail, through Bridgeport, cross 202 at the light at Saulin Blvd., continue straight where Saulin bends and then bear right to cross Henderson Road near Hansen Access. The trail will then follow the PECO right of way between the Abrams apartments and Valley Forge Homes, go right past the King of Prussia Inn, and continue on to connect to the existing trail at Gulph Rd.

Wouldn't this make a wonderful trail head for hikers and bikers, and an information center for visitors, where they could stop, take a break, get some refreshment, and learn about the past, present and future of Upper Merion? This is what the King of Prussia Historical Society envisions - to return the Inn to the people of Upper Merion who invested in moving and restoring it back in 1999, and have it be a welcome center, museum and library - as it was promised to be when it was originally moved. The Society will continue its mission and will keep you informed as to our progress.

Now, for the really bad news. The Historic Christ Church Old Swedes, the new home of your King of Prussia Historical Society, is in serious need of repair. Like so many vintage buildings, it has fallen victim to age, but interestingly, its deterioration is accelerated by high levels of acid rain caused mainly by chemical compounds like sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides being released into the air from the PA Turnpike above.

We have taken up the challenge of attempting to raise money to repair the roof of Christ Church Old Swedes (1760), one of the oldest remaining structures in the township. We found a wonderful volunteer who will do the repairs at no charge, but we must pay for the materials, which will cost \$6,500. We already have \$1000, but are looking for help with the rest.

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If helping to support historic preservation is important to you, please send your donation today to: The King of Prussia Historical Society, 612 General Scott Road, King of Prussia, PA 19406.



### VETERANS DAY TRIBUTE

This year's Veterans Day Tribute, sponsored by the W.S. Hancock Society and held at Christ Church (Old Swedes) on Sunday, November 10, 2013, honored George W. Bisbing and all veterans. The event was co-hosted by the Church and the King of Prussia Historical Society.

## *The Town Crier*—

*updates from the Society*

### **OUR CHARTER MEMBERS**

We acknowledge our Charter Members and thank them for their support: Emma Carson, Father James Evans, Dave and Marianne Furman, Frank Luther, Raymond Doreian, Dr. Carl Schultheis, and Van Weiss.



### **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 2014 meetings with dates, times, locations, and programs.

### **MEMBERSHIP**

Our membership campaign for 2014 is now underway! New memberships and renewals will be accepted at this time. Looking for a unique holiday 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.

### **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](mailto:info@kophistory.org) and we will provide an answer in a future issue.

### **NEW PUBLICATION**

As King of Prussia celebrated its 300th year of existence, there is a strong movement to bring back passenger rail service to King of Prussia to serve the business and residential communities. **THE RAILROADS OF KING OF PRUSSIA, PA: THE PAST LEADS TO THE FUTURE** looks at the rich 175 year history of the railroads in King of Prussia. In doing so, the author makes the determination that the present day demand for renewed passenger rail service is a microcosm of King of Prussia as it has traveled the path from a rural township to a business dominated suburb of Philadelphia.

King of Prussia Historical Society member Michael Shaw authored this book. He and Alex Tsioulfaidis, also a Society member, photographed the current photos of abandoned tracks and rail beds.

### **COMPLIMENTARY MEMBERSHIP**

During Upper Merion's Community Day on September 7, the Society gave visitors an opportunity to win a complimentary

congratulations and a hearty welcome to our winner, Nadiah Ahmed.

The Society is also pleased to announce that a complimentary membership was presented for the Fall Fling and for the MS fund raiser in September.

### **TALK RADIO**

Bruce and Karen Stocking of the Hancock Society are hosting a talk radio show, H2O---History to Opinion. The hosts discuss history and opinions and can be heard from 9:00 AM to 10:00 AM on Saturdays on radio station WFYL AM (1180 AM). Since its inception in 1995, the W.S. Hancock Society has concentrated on the life and legacy of Winfield Scott Hancock, Major General, USA. The Society's endeavors seek the preservation of any and all sites related to the General and his family preceding, during and subsequent to his lifetime.



### **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.

### **MEETINGS**

See the schedule for meetings for the first half of 2014 on page eight of this issue.

### **VOLUNTEERS**

We are always looking for new people to step up and to take on new projects. If interested, please come to a meeting and talk to us or contact us by electronic or conventional mail.

### **ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP**

Student/Senior (65+)	\$35.00
Individual	\$40.00
Family Household	\$50.00
Patron	\$125.00
Charter	\$250.00



## HISTORIC PRESERVATION: HOW ONE SOCIETY DOES IT

(This article originally appeared in 1958 in **HISTORIC PRESERVATION**, published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C.)

"For its program devoted to the preservation of a true account of the beginning of the American Way of Life, emphasizing the firm conviction and perseverance of our forbears in their quest for individual liberties," the King of Prussia Historical Society, King of Prussia, Pa., was presented the 1958 Freedom Foundation Award.

Organized in 1955, the King of Prussia Historical Society, under the leadership of Robert D. May, M.D., is not a collection agency; it is primarily an educational and cultural organization. The educational endeavors for the community include the preparation of historical exhibits during Upper Merion weeks; distribution of reprints throughout the community about historic buildings and historic preservation; and a publication of a guidebook of the area, *HERE AMERICA BEGAN*. (The Welsh came to Upper Merion Township in the 1680's; the Swedish trappers came earlier.) A humorous one-page monograph, *DON'T KICK AN OLD HOUSE WHEN IT'S DOWN*, was published for distribution to local school children in an attempt to discourage vandalism and encourage respect for others' property. The Society holds four meetings a year, two of which feature national speakers; all meetings are open to the public without admission fee. *WELCOME TO UPPER MERION*, distributed by the Welcome Wagon, summarizes the history of the area and invites new members to join the local historical society.

The Upper Merion Planning Commission is assisted by a survey conducted by the Society in 1956. Guided by an 1848 map of the Township, workers located 246 sites and buildings constructed before 1850; of these 182 buildings remain and are largely still in use.

The Society works with the Upper Merion Township Supervisors, the Upper Merion Township School Board, and the Upper Merion Park and Playground Commission in an attempt to relate parks and planning to the preservation of old buildings. Students from the Upper Merion Public High School are laboring under direction of the re-creation of the Roberts School, built in 1848 for the use of children of mill workers in the early days of the community. The Society has encouraged the preservation and use of the old Union School and the Stewart Fund Hall as a Township library and Township building. A million-dollar shopping area adjacent to the new Township center will utilize colonial design throughout.

The economic advantages of preservation have long been a theme of the King of Prussia Historical Society, which recently received recognition from the Upper Merion Chamber of Commerce and civic associations. An 8 mm. movie, 20 minutes in length with sound track, shows the historic houses of the area and describes the advantages of good historic preservation. A second edition is in progress. The films are used by public groups to acquaint citizens with Upper Merion's heritage.

Cultural endeavors of the organization are the fall house and garden tours to historic houses of Upper Merion; the candlelight concert series of eighteenth-century music on eighteenth-century instruments in eighteenth-century houses; the publication of the *PECHIN PRIMER*, the story of the Roberts School, written by a former teacher in the school; publication of the *KING OF PRUSSIA COOKBOOK*; a quarterly, *THE KING OF PRUSSIA GAZETTE* (patterned after the 1799 Norristown *GAZETTE*); and Upper Merion Note Paper with sketches of significant buildings in the area.

A library and consultation services are offered individuals who are restoring an old house. Members of the Society are available for speaking engagements throughout the state.

The Society was able to help modify a legislative bill before passage to delete a clause which would have required that the King of Prussia Inn be sold and moved or destroyed by the Highway Department.

Two outstanding students of history in the local high school were awarded scholarships this year to a course in pioneer living at Cooperstown, N. Y. Future plans include an educational program for young people, "Week End with the Past." This program will take children of different ages with appropriate adult leadership and permit them to spend a week end in a restored farmhouse as a family, sleeping on a featherbed, cooking the family meals in the fireplace, chopping the wood, and doing other household chores which children of the past accepted as their responsibility.

**HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW!**

Over the years, Upper Merion Township has witnessed incredible change. Unfortunately, preservation of historic sites was not a top priority. The efforts made by the Society in 1958 have fallen by the wayside. To create an awareness of our mission and to emphasize that we preserve what we have left, we present these photos. Can you identify any of these sites?



1



4



5



2



6



3

Photo 1: Lock House at Catfish Dam

Photo 2: Pechin Farmhouse on site across from Wegman's

Photo 3: Holstein House on Henderson Road; former residence of the Maiale Family, owners of Villanova Nursery. (Your editor spent many hours here when he worked at the nursery.)

Photo 4: Stewart Fund Hall on Route 202 and Allendale Road; former school, meeting hall, and township building.

Photo 5: Port Kennedy (The only building remaining is the railroad station.)

Photo 6: Eddie Mack's (Mackiewicz) Sandwich Shop on Route 202, the current site of Chili's.

## THE KNICKERBOCKER ICE COMPANY HISTORY

The year was 1834, and there were no refrigerators or freezers. Ice was available, but only in the winter months when ice froze in lakes or in rivers. That didn't help very much in July, when someone wanted to cool off and dive into a dish of ice cream. It seemed unfair, somehow. There had to be a way to save a piece of winter for summer.

A few imaginative gentlemen figured out a way to do just that, using ice from Rockland Lake in New York. They started the Knickerbocker Ice Company. Electricity was not yet harnessed to produce the power that would eventually enable refrigeration, and that would not be possible for some years to come. However, if one were careful enough, ice could be preserved and could be made to last until the following winter.

Starting in 1835, developing the way to preserve ice began in earnest. The three enterprising gentlemen, John J. Felter, John G. Perry, and Edward Felter came upon a frozen lake in Rockland County, New York, cut out a sloop load of ice and sold it at nearly 100% profit. Between 1835 and 1865, methods improved so greatly to harvest ice that it was possible to enjoy ice cream in July. The Knickerbocker Ice Company was the king of the industry, and delivered ice as far away as New York City and its suburbs. Ice production and preservation were responsible for transforming the food industry, and for the first time a butcher could keep meat fresh, vegetables could be transported longer distances, and hotels could ice beverages on the hottest of days.

But there was one small issue: back then, people just didn't use ice. One could only gather it in the wintertime, and no one had developed a way to preserve it for warmer months. And if ice was needed in the winter, one simply went to a frozen cistern or well and chopped some out. It was quite dirty, not clear. Hotels and butchers were the only users of this ice, since the average household preserved food by drying, canning, brining or smoking.

By 1885 everyone could purchase an icebox and keep their groceries fresh longer. Most kitchens had one. They looked a little bit like a modern refrigerator, standing about three or four foot high, often with two doors on front, which opened. A block of ice rested in one compartment and food would be placed in another. Depending upon how hot it was outside and how well the icebox was insulated, the block of ice would last about five days to a week.

Here, in Upper Merion Township, the Knickerbocker Ice Company was well known. The largest of several sizea-

able ice houses were located along the Schuylkill in the Abrams section of Upper Merion Township. The company was the leading ice company in the Philadelphia area and employed four to five hundred men through the late 1890's. In 1899, the Knickerbocker Ice Company shipped 2,000 carloads of twelve inch ice from the Abrams site. Today, that site lies in ruins.

After being cut from the frozen river each winter, large ice blocks were stored in the Knickerbocker's warehouses on the east bank of the River. They supplied the homes, shops and restaurants down river with cooling throughout the summer. The blocks were transported on the Schuylkill Navigation using Knickerbocker's own canal boat and team. In his remembrance Folklore of the Schuylkill Canal, John B. Bowman wrote: The Knickerbocker Ice Co. of Philadelphia had four exceptionally large, coal black mules, always well groomed, each one with a high plume on his head, a large red, white and blue tassel at each ear, and a magnitude of bells at his chest. When they came swinging into a level at half trot with a light boat, it was, indeed, a sight to behold. The music of the bells was greater than that in the song "Jingle Bells."

Knickerbocker Ice was delivered by horse and wagon, and the iceman delivered it to homes. He would drive his wagon down the street and stop by the different houses. Sometimes the iceman would put the ice in the icebox and sometimes people who lived in the house would take the ice with ice picks from the iceman and place it in their icebox themselves.

On November 11, 1894, one of the large icehouses caught fire. Even though the icehouse was built partially of stone, it was destroyed since there was no volunteer fire company in Upper Merion. Bridgeport Fire Company Number One responded to the alarm with its horse-drawn apparatus. The building was consumed. A shift in the wind saved the other icehouses and two dwellings for the company employees.

In the early 1900's, ways were created to use electricity to refrigerate foods and although expensive, the days when families relied on the iceman and iceboxes were drawing to a close. By the 1920's, refrigerators were becoming affordable to most families and took the place of iceboxes. The clomping sounds of the horse-drawn wagons bearing ice deliveries passed into history.

*(Continued on page 6.)*

*Have you renewed your membership for 2014?  
Your membership helps the Society in its efforts  
to preserve Upper Merion's past  
to enlighten its future!*

*(Continued from page 5.)*

Huge icehouses along the Schuylkill River in the Abrams section of Upper Merion provided jobs for hundreds in the wintertime. The river was shallow, and the ice could be cut and pulled ashore and stored in the vast facilities. The Knickerbocker Ice Company was the largest in the area. Knickerbocker employed four to five hundred men in one facility, cutting and transporting ice whenever its thickness reached six inches or more. In the winter of 1899, over 2,000 carloads of ice were shipped to Philadelphia and beyond. On November 27, 1894, one of the larger icehouses caught fire and burned to the ground. One of the stone walls of that building can be seen in the picture above, taken in the spring of 2005. The building measures about 30' x 60'.



*(Photos courtesy of Michael Morrison)*

The photograph below shows the ice on the Schuylkill, taken in Swedesburg in February of 1918. The advent of refrigeration put an end to the ice cutting industry.

*(Courtesy of Ed Dybicz)*



**CHICKEN AND WAFFLES**

The King of Prussia Inn was famous for its chicken and waffles. The Society is looking for someone who had the experience of enjoying this meal at the Inn. We would like to interview for details about what was served and how the chicken and waffles platter was served.

You might be wondering why we are interested in this topic. Well, any interview we do will be published in a future issue of THE KING OF PRUSSIA GAZETTE. In addition, we are planning a fundraiser for the Society and the menu would be Chicken and Waffles "a la the King of Prussia Inn" version. We want to replicate the recipe as closely as we can. Can you help us?

## THE ICE HARVEST

*(Illustrations courtesy of American Agriculturist)*

Ice production required the efforts of many hard-working people. Over the course of three weeks, workers had to clear, mark, cut, saw, float, lift and pack ice that would last until the following winter. Here's how they did it:

### Clearing the Snow

A plow, drawn by a horse and steered by an ice worker, would clear the snow from the ice, as well as any debris such as branches and rocks. A shine sleigh would create a smooth, clean finish to the ice to prepare it for cutting.

### Marking and Cutting

The cleared surface of the ice is marked by an iron point to create a grid pattern on the ice. This enables the cutter to make ice cakes efficiently by tracing the lines with the ice plow. The ice plow is a long blade with coarse teeth that, when drawn over the ice, makes a deep groove.

### Sawing and Barring Off

After deep grooves are formed in the ice by the plow, it is now possible to saw the ice. Workers would break off, or bar off, a large mass of ice and float it toward the ice house. The ice would be pushed by a long iron bar.



Fig. 1.—CLEARING THE ICE OF SNOW.



Fig. 2.—MARKING AND CUTTING.



Fig. 3.—SAWING AND BARRING OFF.

### Floating to the Ice House

Huge, floating squares of ice would be guided toward the ice house, using horses to help tow them. There, the large islands of ice would be further processed for storage.

### Final Cutting

Once the large cakes arrive at the ice house, they are sawed into uniform blocks. Ice would then be lifted into the storage facility by means of conveyor belts, known as elevators, which were powered by steam engines.

### Packing and Storing

Workers take the ice that arrives in the warehouse off of the elevators and pack them as compactly as possible. Ice was placed in the center of the storage room first, filling out towards the walls. Care is given so that the cakes line up perfectly, leaving no room for air spaces.



Fig. 4.—CANALING TO THE HOUSE.



Fig. 5.—THE ELEVATORS.



Fig. 6.—PACKING AWAY THE ICE.

**The King of Prussia Historical Society  
Meeting Schedule for January-June 2014.**

Saturday, January 11 at 2:00 PM: Business Meeting: Upcoming Programs  
Speaker: Michael Shaw: *Railroads of Upper Merion*  
Location: Christ Church Old Swedes Church Hall

Saturday, February 8 at 2:00 PM: Business Meeting  
Speaker: Sheilah Vance: *The Road to Valley Forge*  
Location: Christ Church Old Swedes Church Hall

Saturday, March 8 at 2:00 PM: Business Meeting  
The History of Chocolate featuring Zwahlen's Ice Cream and Chocolate Company  
\$20.00 per person. (This is a fund raiser for the Society.)  
Location: Christ Church Old Swedes Church Hall

Saturday, April 12 at 10:00 AM: Field Trip: Sheep Shearing Day at the Peter Wentz Farmstead  
Location: Worcester, PA

Saturday, May 10 at 2:00 PM: Business Meeting  
Speaker: Kate Hammond from Valley Forge Park  
Location: Christ Church Old Swedes Church Hall

Saturday, June 14 at 2:00 PM: Business Meeting  
Program: Digging into the Upper Merion Archives followed by the Society Picnic  
Location: Christ Church Old Swedes Church Hall



King of Prussia Historical Society  
612 General Scott Road  
King of Prussia, PA 19406  
Attn.: Frank Luther

Check out the King of Prussia Historical Society website at [www.kophistory.org](http://www.kophistory.org).

And follow us on Facebook at [www.Facebook.com/kophistory](http://www.Facebook.com/kophistory)

**Have you renewed your membership for 2014?**