

# The King of Prussia Gazette

*Preserving Upper Merion's Past to Enliven its Future*

Volume III, Number Three

Fall 2014

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

*by Michael Morrison*

### A Commitment to Preservation

About two months ago representatives from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania visited us and evaluated our collection. This is part of a program of the PACSAL (Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries), and the "Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories", supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The goal of this project is to make better known and more accessible the largely hidden archival collections of the many small, primarily volunteer-run historical organizations in the five-county Philadelphia region, such as local historical societies, historic sites, and small museums. As of March 31, 2014, over 108 repositories have been surveyed, including 55 historical societies, 28 historical sites, 9 museums, and 16 other related groups. These collections will be available online for scholars and researchers, once the program has been completed. We were very pleased to have been selected to participate.

Thanks to all who work tirelessly to increase our visibility in the community and throughout the region by reinforcing our commitment to the preservation of our rich local history.

We have three very exciting programs coming up for our fall session that are worthy of mentioning here. On Saturday, September 20, we will be taking our meeting on the road to participate in the Montgomery County History Fair, which takes place at the Heckler Plains Farmstead in Harleysville. The theme of this year's program will be "Montgomery County in the Civil War". This is a wonderful event for the whole family, and I urge you to consider joining us for this very special event. Many residents of Upper Merion were active participants in the war, and we will tell you all about their contributions and sacrifices.

On Saturday, October 11, we will be back at Old Swedes at 2:00 PM for "Young Historians". This year we are pleased to partner with students and educators from Cabrini College, who will present, "Mt. Pleasant—a Community Betwixt and Between". Find out the history of this community shoehorned in between three townships and three counties, and the changes that have happened over time.

We end our fall season of regular 2 PM meetings on Saturday, November 8, with local historian and friend, Greg Prichard, and a look at the "Pennsylvania Keystone Marker" program. Greg sits on the Board of both Radnor and Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Societies, and has been involved for several years with identifying, restoring, and

replacing the Keystone Markers in our area. You may have seen one of his recent new markers identifying the Knox Bridge in Valley Forge National Historical Park. Together with the help of the King of Prussia Rotary, your society has raised over \$1000.00 to restore and replace the three original markers in Upper Merion, and after the goal of \$4000 is reached and the markers produced, the Public Works Department of Upper Merion Township has agreed to install and maintain them. This is a very worthwhile project that not only partners with other organizations, but continues our commitment to preservation in our community.

And don't forget to join us on December 13, at 7 PM for the Saint Lucia Festival and Holiday Celebration for Society Members, here at Old Swedes. Thank you all for the support you have shown to your Society in 2014.

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*The Town Crier*—

updates from the Society

**MEMBER EMERITUS**

The Society is pleased to include Ed Dybicz as a member, emeritus, for his many contributions to the Society and for his untiring efforts to preserve the history of Upper Merion.

**OUR 2014 CHARTER MEMBERS**

We acknowledge our Charter Members for 2014 and thank them for their support: Emma Carson, Dave and Marianne Furman, Michael Morrison, Frank Luther, James Pickens.

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

You can also find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/kophistory](http://www.facebook.com/kophistory). Here, you can also find current additional information about the Society.

**YOUNG HISTORIANS PROGRAM**

Sharon Schwarze, a professor at Cabrini College, has been working with her students on preparing oral histories of the Mount Pleasant area of Upper Merion. One history student researched the oral histories and created a presentation on Mount Pleasant for the Society's October meeting, "Young Historians". Professor Schwarze will introduce the project and briefly describe what she and the students have done as a class working with the Mt. Pleasant residents.

**COMMUNITY FAIR**

Don't forget that Upper Merion's Community Fair is scheduled for Saturday, September 6. Stop by the Society's tent and enter the contest for a 2015 membership for yourself or as a gift for a family member or a friend.



*The*  
*"Once Upon A Time in Montgomery County"*  
 Committee  
 proudly offers

**MONTGOMERY  
 COUNTY  
 IN  
 THE CIVIL WAR**

**SATURDAY,  
 SEPTEMBER 20, 2014**

**HECKLER PLAINS  
 FARMSTEAD  
 237 Landis Road  
 Harleysville, PA**

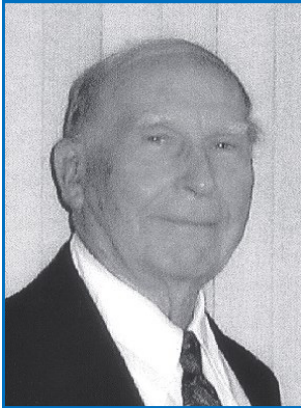
*9:30 am to 4:30 pm*

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**FREE ADMISSION**

**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.



## A "THANK YOU"!

by Ed Dybicz

June 15, 2014

Dear Michael:

I wish to thank you and the King of Prussia Historical Society for the Emeritus Membership.

I am, indeed, very grateful and appreciative of this honor and will do everything in my power to assist, support, and promote the ideals of the Historical Society.

I would like to be active but I have been trying to resolve the many health problems associated with aging.

May I take this opportunity to congratulate you, the officers, and the King of Prussia Historical Society on its outstanding and interesting dedicated programs to preserve the history of Upper Merion Township.

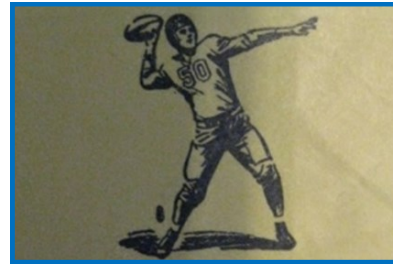
Sincerely,  
Ed Dybicz



## ARCHIVAL ADVENTURES IN SMALL REPOSITORIES

*Football Season at the King of Prussia Historical Society by Celia Caust-Ellenbogen, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, June 11, 2014.*

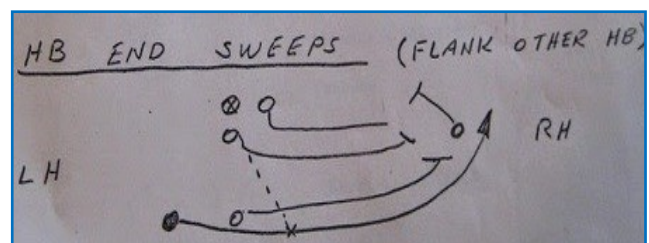
*Celia Caust-Ellenbogen is Senior Project Surveyor on the Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories. She began working at HSP in early 2011 under the auspices of the PACSCL-CLIR "Hidden Collections" project, and has been working on the HCI-PSAR project since September of 2011. She holds a BA in History and World Literatures from Swarthmore College, and an MLIS with a concentration in Archives, Preservation and Records Management from the University of Pittsburgh.*



It's still a few months before football starts, but if you can't wait that long, remember that archival research is always in season! Youth football in King of Prussia "kicked off" in 1956 when the King of Prussia Indians team was formed by Mary and Dave Vannicelli. Still going strong nearly 60 years later, the story of the sports organization, now known as the Upper Merion Viking Youth Football Association, is told in the Mary and Dave Vannicelli collection on the King of Prussia Football Association. The collection can be found at the King of Prussia Historical Society in Montgomery County, Pa.

The main objective of the King of Prussia Football Association, as stated in its constitution, was "to implant firmly in the boys and girls of our community the principles of good character development; i.e. courage, responsibility, sportsmanship, fair play, leadership, and respect for rules and regulations, as well as to foster high achievement in scholastic activities." Initial practices were conducted in a cow pasture, although over time the group became much more organized, with improved facilities, championship wins, and some participants going on to illustrious colleges and even professional football careers.

Impressive, right? Not that I would recommend stealing plays, of course, but if you want to repeat the Indians' success you might find some "inspiration" in this play-book.



(A play from the King of Prussia Indians' playbook)

Of course, the main purpose of the King of Prussia Football Association was not to win games, it was to foster character development in the boys and girls who participated. To learn about the association and its mission, you might be more interested in the various administrative and financial records that form part of the collection, such as board minutes and by-laws, as well as publicity materials and issues of the Football Association's newsletter. The collection also includes game programs, photographs, and team yearbooks. The information you need to "score a touchdown" in your research could be waiting for you at the King of Prussia Historical Society!

## EXLEY LOG CABIN

*Hidden behind the trees along Radnor Road in King of Prussia sits a treasure dating back to 1648.*



*(Emma C. Patterson wrote "Your Town and My Town" for the SUBURBAN AND WAYNE TIME from 1949 to 1958. The articles are a wealth of information, with many names and places listed. The two articles reprinted in this issue of THE KING OF PRUSSIA GAZETTE offer a unique capsule of Upper Merion and Pennsylvania history.*

*"Cherry Garth", part 1 appeared on Friday, May 5th, 1950 and "Cherry Garth" part 2 was published on Friday, May 12th, 1950 in the SUBURBAN AND WAYNE TIMES.*

*The articles are reprinted here with the permission of the Radnor Historical Society.)*

(Because Miss Emily Exley, the well-known landscape architect is opening her beautiful gardens and log cabin home, "Cherry Garth", built about 1648, to the public on Saturday, May 13, we are interrupting this column's series of articles on the Old Spread Eagle Inn to tell our readers of one of the oldest houses, perhaps the very oldest, in this vicinity. A garden Fete and Country Fair will be held on the above date (or on May 20 in case of rain) for the benefit of the Woman's Medical College, under the auspices of the Soroptimist Club of the Main Line.)

Few among us who are driving from Wayne toward Chester Valley along Radnor State Road (route 252) fail to notice the lovely white cottage known as "Cherry Garth", set as it is against a woodland background, with a small stream cascading its way between house and road. But perhaps not many outside Miss Emily Exley's wide circle of friends know that the two-room log cabin, which forms the nucleus of her home, dates back some thirty years before William Penn received the grant of land, from Charles II of England, which was later to become the great state of Pennsylvania.

Built about 1648 by an early Welsh settler, the original log cabin consisted of two rooms, with a large open fireplace in the Northern room. Through the years that ensued, ownership of the log cabin changed many times. But it was never without its occupants, none of whom altered greatly either its exterior or its interior.

In 1922, when the house with some of the surrounding acreage was purchased by Miss Exley, she kept the original structure almost intact, gaining larger living quarters only by the addition of two wings, each constructed in harmony with the simplicity of the little home built almost three hundred years earlier. Though there are no pictures of this first little log cabin, it must have looked very much as it is shown in the sketch made by Jean Stineman, of St. Davids, which is reproduced with this article.

Four years after her original purchase, Miss Exley bought additional acreage which had at one time been the woodland which the Lincoln Institute had used for their Summer Camp for Indian boys. Additions to the house were all built from wood from trees on the place, while stones came from the tumbled-down ruins of the old grist mill which was built in the early years of the eighteenth century and operated with the stream as a source of power. The lovely gardens now surrounding the house are planted almost entirely with flowers and shrubbery native to this section of the country.

The man who first cleared the land and built the small cabin which was to endure for so many years was a Welshman named Lavis, in whose family possession it remained until 1702, when one of his descendants, David Lavis, sold the property to John Davis, of Philadelphia. The original Lavis must have made his way by Indian trails to the spot where he built the home for his family from materials near at hand. Very quaint and interesting to the eyes of the present day observers are the unevenly spaced windows, the floors at different levels, with some of the ceilings higher at one end of the room than at the other. All beams are hand hewn.

Five years before Lavis built his small home, white men made their first permanent settlement in what is now Pennsylvania when Swedes and Finns came to Tinicum Island on the Delaware River. This was in 1643, and so rapidly did the colony grow that by 1645 there were not only houses, but a church in Tinicum.

Pennsylvania differed from all other early American colonies in that many settlements were made within her borders and many races contributed to her people. Its written history begins with the chronicles of Captain John Smith, of Virginia, who in 1608 sailed up Chesapeake Bay to its head and then two miles further up the Sus-

quehanna River until his small craft was stopped by rocks.

In 1609 Henry Hudson sailed from Holland on the "Half Moon" and entered what is now known as Delaware Bay when he cast anchor. After he had reported back to his native country on a land rich in furs, the Dutch immediately claimed the section which Hudson had visited. The Dutch West India Company was chartered by the Dutch Government.

Later the Swedes disrupted their rights, naming a large tract of land on both sides of the Delaware River "New Sweden." In 1644 two Swedish vessels reached New Sweden. A third came in 1646 and a fourth in 1648, the year in which the Welshman Lavis was building his log cabin. In 1664 Dutch and Swedish dominion was ended forever by the advent of the English.

In 1680 William Penn petitioned King Charles II for a grant of land for houses for Quakers who were undergoing persecution in England. His petition was granted with the gift of a large tract of land which its owner named "Penn's Woods" or Pennsylvania. This, in brief, is the history of this great state in the time when Lavis and his immediate descendants were cultivating the land around the small log cabin on the outskirts of what is now Chester Valley.

If Lavis had any of his own countrymen as close neighbors, there is no record of it. It is much more likely that those with whom he came in contact most frequently were the Indians who occupied the fertile lands of Pennsylvania before encroaching white settlers drove them farther West.

Only two tribes lived in this part of the country at that time - the Algonquin tribe along the Delaware River and the Iroquois tribes along the Susquehanna and the Ohio rivers. These were the hunters and the fishermen, the wonderful woodsmen whom the English and French first met. On the whole they were a peaceful lot, among whom war was not frequent before the advent of the White Men. Strange as it may seem, North America has never been as thoroughly a country of farmers as it was before the coming of the white men to its shores. Though agricultural implements were of the crudest character, sometimes merely a stone or a shell, or even a bone attached to a piece of wood, their crops were varied and plentiful. Corn, tobacco, beans, squashes, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, peanuts, gourds, sunflowers and cotton were raised by many of the tribes, with the work done mostly by the women. Some of these same crops may have been among those that the Welshman Lavis raised.

The small house built by a Welshman named Lavis in about 1648 with the acreage around it, which is now the home of Miss Emily Exley, on Radnor State Road, remained in the Lavis family until 1702. In that year it was sold to John Davis, a silversmith residing in Philadelphia, where he had owned his own small shop. From that life to one of a hard-working farmer on the edge of Chester Valley must indeed have been a change to the new owner of this property.

The town from which he came was then but twenty years old, having been laid out in 1682 by Captain Markham and a small company who had been sent there the year previous by William Penn. In 1683 it was reinforced by a company of Germans, who upon Penn's suggestion, settled a few miles up the Schuylkill River at what was later known as Germantown. By 1685 the Philadelphia settlement was in a thriving condition with about 200 buildings and some 2400 inhabitants, largely Quakers, with Germans second in numerical strength. Such faith did Penn have in his "City of Brotherly Love" that he delegated to the inhabitants more privileges and powers than the colonists possessed in any other colony.

Absolute religious freedom was the most important and, for those times, the most remarkable concession. All Christians holding certain amounts of property were to be eligible voters and officeholders. Soon after Penn's arrival in the Colony in 1682 an assembly held at Upland formally adopted Penn's plan of government. In 1683 Penn made his "Great Treaty" with the Indians, an agreement that preserved Pennsylvania from Indian hostilities during Penn's lifetime.

To the Colony thus founded came the oppressed and persecuted of many countries. Quakers soon surpassed all others in members. Some of them were of Welsh stock, a large colony settling in the "Welsh Barony" in Montgomery and Delaware Counties which was later to become part of our present Main Line section. By 1699 Philadelphia had grown to be a town of 4500 people and of over 700 residences. In 1701 Penn chartered his "City of Brotherly Love." It was in 1702 that John Davis, silversmith, left this rapidly growing community on the Schuylkill to become a farmer on the land formerly owned by the Welsh family of Lavis.

John Davis and his family owned the land for thirty-four years. In 1736, Thomas Davis, John's son, sold the family holdings to Isaac Walker. The latter not only farmed the land, but built a grist mill for which he had found there was great demand. As a source of power he used the stream that now runs between the house and the road. In the first century after the settlement of Penn-

sylvania the comparatively simple needs of its people were supplied by individual artisans among them. Along the stream mills driven by the weight and mountain of falling water sawed the logs, ground the flour and fueled the woven cloth.

After a few years of farming and of running his mill Isaac Walker sold his holdings to Philip Eillers, who greatly developed and improved the original small grist mill. It is more than likely that Eillers himself ground corn for the soldiers of the American Army during the Revolutionary War. For certain it is that many of their members were encamped almost in sight of the Eillers place during the dreadful winter of 1777-78, when Washington held his cold and hungry troops together at Valley Forge, preparatory to his march on Philadelphia.

Originally the Lavis homestead had consisted of one hundred and seventeen acres. This was kept intact until 1784, when one Benjamin Jones "lawfully seized" fifty-seven acres from Phillip Eillers. It is not known what claim he laid to the land, as it is not recorded in the deeds. It is possible, however, that he was some relation to Isaac Walker, Philip Eillers' predecessor. The log cabin and the grist mill were included in the fifty-seven acres.

When Benjamin Jones died in 1815, he left provisions in his will for thirty-six acres to be sold by his executors. In carrying out his instructions they sold two acres to a Richard Sands. When they were about to sell the rest a Charles Jones lawfully claimed the remaining thirty-four acres by proving that he was a son of Benjamin Jones. Perhaps the latter had good reason not to include Charles in his will, for it was only five years before Charles was in debt to such an extent that he forfeited the whole property to John Mitchell. The latter took the case to the Court of Common Pleas of Montgomery County.

Strangely enough, however, John Mitchell and his wife, Mary, had no use for the land after it had been awarded them. For a year later, in 1821, they sold it to James Bard Patterson. In 1823 Richard Sands also sold his acreage to Patterson, who had now bought most of the land around the grist mill, including the miller's house and the grist mill itself. This mill was immediately converted into a small woolen factory, making use of the same mill race that had been utilized to run the mill. With his wife Matilda, James Patterson ran the woolen mill for twenty years.

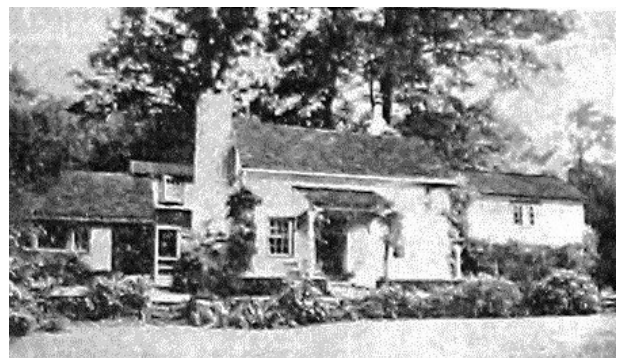
When the latter retired in 1841, he sold the whole property to Richard Martin and his wife Hannah, who operated the mill very successfully until sometime between 1860 and 1870. In 1871 Martin died, leaving his wife a

widow for ten years. When she died in 1881 the seven Martin children inherited the land. Upon Mr. Martin's death the old woolen factory had fallen into disuse. Eight acres were sold in 1882 by the heirs to the second oldest brother, William Martin. After that the rest of the land was divided into two lots, the one containing the log cabin being sold in 1883 to William B. Morris and Jacob Morris. The latter had bought the land as a lumber speculation. When in 1898 Jacob Morris died, his portion was sold to Phoebe Morris. When the lumber was exhausted the land was divided into three farms. When William Morris died in 1914 a number of close relatives inherited his property.

The other lot of land to be sold by Richard Martin's children went to the Lincoln Institution in 1885. This Indian school used the woodland as a camp for their boys in summer. In 1922, heirs of William Morris divided their holdings into three portions, two of which were bought by Miss Emily Exley and the other by Hy Gage, of Philadelphia. He in turn sold to Miss Peacock.

The additions Miss Exley made to the humble little cottage of 1648 were described in last week's column. Suffice to say that they have been built in such a way as to harmonize with the original small home which Miss Exley has kept almost intact and which she calls "Cherry Garth" (Garth meaning an enclosure). The illustration used with this article shows the charm of the whole structure. Seldom open to the public, Saturday afternoon (May 13) affords an opportunity to everyone who is interested to see the house and the gardens which will be open to the public at a Garden Fete and Country Fair to be held for the benefit of the anniversary fund of the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania, under the auspices of the Soroptimist Club of the Main Line. In case of rain this affair will be postponed to May 20.

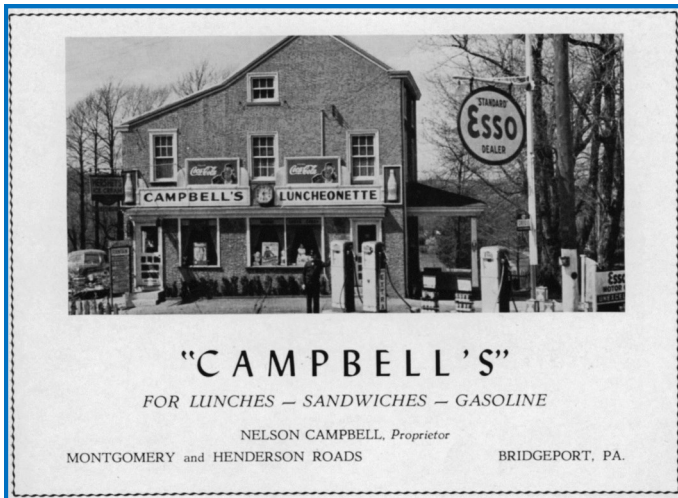
(For her information the writer is indebted to notes given her by Miss Exley and to a number of reference book sent her by the Wayne Memorial Library.)



*Photo, courtesy of the Radnor Historical Society.*

Cherry Garth Today (1950)

**PICTURE THIS!**



*Photo, courtesy of the King of Prussia Historical Society.*

The above photo appeared in the 1942 PIONEER, the Upper Merion High School yearbook. Campbell's placed the ad as a patron, supporting the publishing of the yearbook.

On a current map of Upper Merion, could you determine the location of Campbell's? Don't let the address mislead you!



**GETTING TO THE CHURCH ON TIME!**

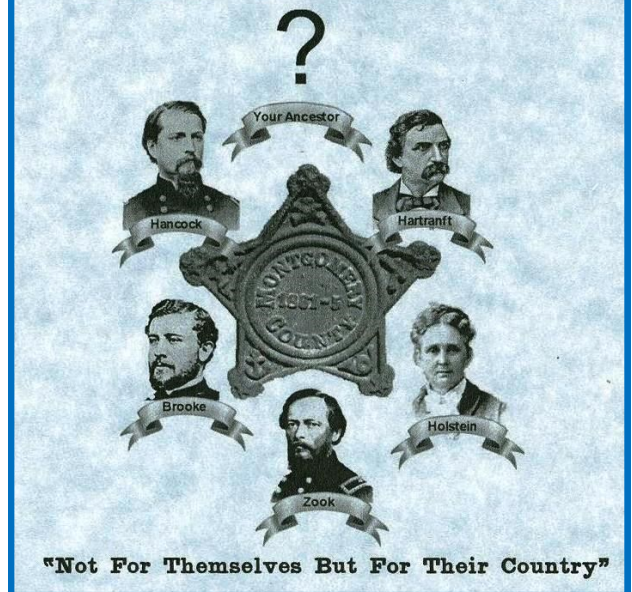
An interesting piece of Upper Merion history was uncovered recently. Imagine travelling from Berks County to Upper Merion! Route 422! Imagine travelling from Berks County to Upper Merion in the mid 1700's! It would have been more than the hour or so it takes today! In 1744, the Swedes took the "express" route!

Wedding party canoes travelled from Douglassville to Upper Merion on the Schuylkill River!

About 1744, Mathias Holstein, 4th, married Magdalena, daughter of Marcus and Margaret Hulings of Morlattan (now Douglassville), Berks County, PA. "The wedding party came to Christ Church (Swedes), Upper Merion, all in their canoes." Magdalena was originally betrothed to Frederick, Mathias' younger brother. Frederick invited Mathias to accompany him on a visit. Mathias was so smitten with the beauty and loveliness of Magdalena that he continued his visits, and eventually supplanted Frederick in her affections and married her.

Celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Civil War by learning about the many ways and many people from Montgomery County who served as America witnessed the greatest challenge to her Constitution from the years 1861 to 1865.

We welcome you to tell your family story as it relates to this period in our Nation's history, by joining us in the descendant's tent. Bring your youngsters and we'll enroll them to be citizen soldiers for the Union Army or visit with our local historical societies who will share the tales of their region of the county during this turbulent era.



**VISIT THE HISTORY FAIR!**

The Montgomery County History Fair 2014 is scheduled for Saturday, September 20 from 9:30 to 4:30 at Heckler Plains Farm in Harleysville. Stop by the King of Prussia Historical Society table, meet Anna Holstein, and watch Colonial beer making!

**PICTURE THIS! (Answer)**

Campbell's Oasis was located on the corner that is presently South Henderson Road and Gulph Road. An Exxon station, across from the Merion Building, is located there today.

In 1942, the high school was in the present Merion Building. Principal Robert Strine had a rule that the students were not to leave the school building to go for lunch at Campbell's. It is a known fact that often, the rule was disregarded by the students.

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

**The King of Prussia Historical Society**

*Preserving Upper Merion's Past to Enlighten its Future*

Meeting Schedule for September-December 2014.

No meetings are scheduled for July and August.

Saturday, September 20: In lieu of our monthly meeting, the Society will be hosting a table at the Montgomery County History Fair at Heckler Plains Farm in Harleysville on Saturday, September 20. We will feature exhibits and share local history information.  
Location: Heckler Plains Farm in Harleysville from 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM

Saturday, October 11: Business Meeting  
Program: Young Historians  
Location: Christ Church Old Swedes Hall at 2:00 PM

Saturday, November 8: Business Meeting  
Speaker: Greg Pritchard: Keystone Markers  
Location: Christ Church Old Swedes Hall at 2:00 PM

Saturday, December 13: No meeting  
Saint Lucia Feast: Holiday Celebration for Society Members  
Location: Christ Church Old Swedes at 7:00 PM followed by reception in 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 find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/kophistory](http://www.facebook.com/kophistory)**