

The King of Prussia Gazette

Preserving Upper Merion's Past to Enliven its Future

Volume III, Number Four

Winter 2014

Holiday Message from the President

by Michael Morrison

As we approach and are immersed in this joyous holiday season, I am reminded of the many reasons to give thanks to our membership for your kindness and unwavering support in 2014, a year of challenges. Blessings come in many shapes and sizes, and I would like to share some of them with you now.

We are making ourselves known not only in the community, but all over Montgomery County by participating in special history related events outside of our borders. This year, the third annual *Montgomery County History Fair* was held at Heckler Plains Farmstead in Harleysville. There we met some very interesting people and were able to visit with other historical organizations from the area to share ideas and gather information.

It seems that wherever we go, people seek us out to donate artifacts, photographs, and manuscripts. Our Archive and Special Collections is growing at a rapid rate, thanks to the generosity of some very kind individuals. There were even a few surprise donations, and they will be presented to our membership at our May 9, 2015 monthly meeting.

Through the help of the Keystone Marker Trust, the King of Prussia Rotary Club and the Upper Merion Township Public Works Department, we have entered into a partnership to restore and replace three "Keystone Markers" in Upper Merion. Although fundraising is always a challenge, we have \$1000 to put toward this project already, thanks to the kind donation of the good folks at Rotary. Look for our efforts to intensify in 2015, as this project nears completion.

We now have a Board of Directors in place, and I look forward to their continued involvement in 2015, as we face the many new challenges before us.



Society President Michael Morrison and our guests at our October Young Historians meeting.

Photo courtesy of Shirley Funkhouser.

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I would like to extend my thanks again to our membership. When I stand at the door of the hall at Christ Old Swedes Church looking toward the parking lot shortly before 2 PM on meeting day, wondering if we will have a full house or not, I am never disappointed. Thank you members and friends, for letting us know just by your attendance that what we are doing matters to you, and to our community.

The Town Crier—

updates from the Society...

**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.

The Society is also pleased to honor 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.

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.

You can also find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/kophistory. Here, you can also find current additional information about the Society.

MEMBERSHIP

Our membership campaign for 2015 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.

Student/Senior (65+): \$35.00, Individual: \$40.00

Family Household \$50.00, Patron: \$125.00

Charter: \$250.00

OUR NEW MAILING ADDRESS

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

A commitment

to Preservation

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.

THOSE GREMLINS!

They'll do it every time! In our fall issue, we featured an article, **GETTING TO THE CHURCH ON TIME**. The most important and last line of the story was cut off, so we're reprinting that paragraph in this issue so you can see the conclusion of the story.

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.

RAFFLE WINNER

Visitors to our booth at the September 6 Upper Merion Community Fair had an opportunity to enter the raffle for a 2015 Society Membership. We are pleased to announce that the winner of the drawing for a 2015 Society Membership was Diane Denick of Champlain Drive in King of Prussia.



Society President Michael Morrison and re-enactors at the Montgomery County History Fair on September 20.

Photo courtesy of Shirley Funkhouser.



The Hampton Farmhouse, before the construction of the Township Building. Photo courtesy of Mary Raichle.

A COMMITMENT TO PRESERVATION?

An interesting article, "Kennel Gets Approval, Farm House to Remain", by Patrick McNally appeared in the NORRIS-TOWN TIMES HERALD on June 18, 2000.

"The decision was made after a hearing, held during the board's Thursday night meeting on June 15. With funds already in place in year 2000's capital budget, the kennel will be built adjacent to The Hampton farm house, behind the township building.

Two plans were initially placed at the board's feet by Police Chief Thomas F. Lawler, both well within budget. The first was to destroy the Hampton house, and build on that site. Doing so would alleviate the need to install new plumbing and electrical lines, but it also would have meant that a piece of Upper Merion's history would be gone.

Working against the building is its deteriorating walls and a sinking foundation that threatens the building and any inhabitants. According to Lawler, eight or nine floor jacks are currently holding up the structure, in an unstable dirt basement. The mortar that holds up the stone house is disintegrating. Further complicating the situation is a township employee, who now lives in the house.

'God forbid that somebody gets hurt in there', said Board Chairman Fiorindo Vagnozzi. 'We should tell them to vacate. It's not a safe building'.

Vagnozzi referred to a report by the township's Facilities Utilization Board in December of 1998 that recommended that the Hampton house be destroyed. But Bob Montemeyer, who was a member of that board, testified that the vote was made because the land was, at that time, meant to be used as a senior center.

'If we demolish that house, it's gone forever', Montemeyer said. 'There was no desire to have it destroyed. It has historical significance, as a part of our community'.

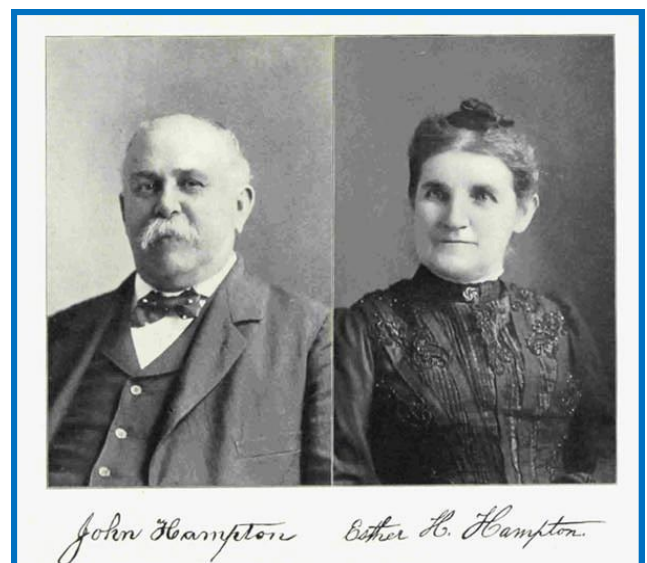
Built in 1690, the Hampton house was part of an active farm, well into the late 1950's. One of the decedents, John Hampton, was a member of the board of supervisors in the late 1870's. Upper Merion Township acquired the land in 1984, and used the site to build the township building. The board of supervisors at that time decided to leave the farm house, rather than have it destroyed.

While not on the federal historical registry, the house is in the Montgomery County book of historical places, according to local attorney and Historical Society member Van Weiss. He suggested that the home, after being refurbished, could become a museum.

'So much has been taken from us. We need to hold onto all that we can', said Supervisor Dan Rooney, and the board agreed."

The question in 2014 is, "Where are we today?" The farm house stands, but in total disrepair, and there is no kennel. A look at its historical significance is important!

The **Biographical Annals of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania**, Volume 1, edited by Ellwood Roberts, pages 52-55, and published by T.S. Benham & Company and the Lewis Publishing Company, New York in 1904, gives us an insight on the Hamptons.



*Photo of John and Esther Hampton from The **Biographical Annals of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania**, Volume 1, edited by Ellwood Roberts, 1904.*

John Hampton, one of the most prominent farmers in Upper Merion, had long been influential in Republican politics in Montgomery County. An active worker at the polls, he also took an active part in the township and neighborhood affairs generally. He filled the position of county commissioner, one of the most responsible offices, for a period of six years, from 1887 to 1903, during which time many important improvements were carried through and the reconstruction of the courthouse entered upon, although not completed. Besides the services thus rendered as a leading spirit in the board, Mr. Hampton had been frequently a delegate to county conventions of his party, had been township auditor, and Republican county committeeman for many years.

Mr. Hampton resided near the village of Abrams. The second son of John and Anna (Chalfant) Hampton, he was a native of Delaware County, Pennsylvania, where he was born August 15, 1842. His grandfather resided in Chester County and was a leading farmer there.

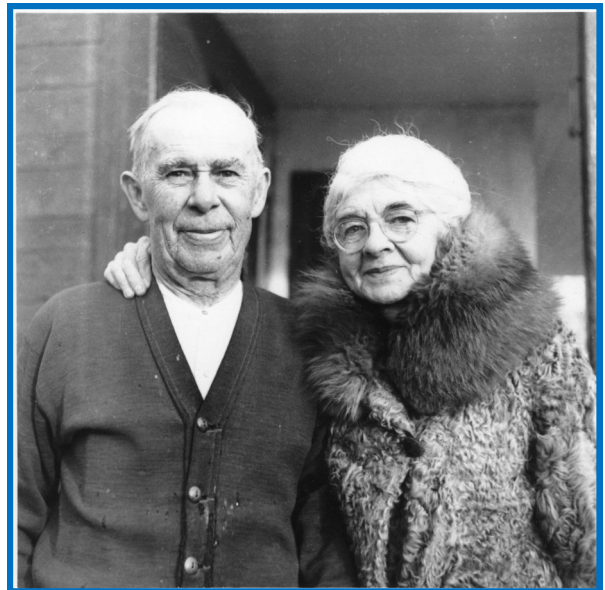
John Hampton, Sr. grew to manhood in Chester County. On coming of age, he moved to Montgomery County and located in Upper Merion Township in 1840. He died in January, 1881. He was a Republican in politics and in religious faith a member of the Baptist church. He took an active interest in township affairs and served as road supervisor as well as holding other local positions. He married Anna Chalfant, who was born in 1806 and died in 1878. The couple had four sons, David, John, Isaiah and George. Their daughters were Lydia, Sophia, who married Joseph Gill, Jane, and Mary, who married Jacob Michner.

Coming with his parents to Upper Merion at the age of two years, ex-Commissioner John Hampton had been practically a lifelong resident of the township. He was educated in the common schools and Treemount Seminary and assisted his father until he was twenty-five. After reaching his majority, he chose the occupation of farming, in which he had been reared, and purchased the farm which he occupied, one of the most fertile and best cultivated in his section of Montgomery County. Mr. Hampton was a practical, progressive and prosperous farmer, giving the most careful attention to business. He had been an active member of the Patrons of Husbandry and also a member of the Masonic order.

In 1866, Mr. Hampton married Esther Hallowell Ramsey, daughter of Benjamin B. and Sarah Potts (Hallowell) Ramsey. Mrs. Hampton was born November 15, 1839 in Upper Merion Township. Her father was a member of an old Montgomery County family of Swedish descent. He was a mechanic and also engaged in the lime business, which was an important industry of Upper Merion. Mr. Ramsey was a Republican and served as justice of the

peace for many years, his influence being exerted to diminish rather than to encourage litigation. He also held the office of school director for several years. Although not a member, he was a frequent attendant at Christ (Swedes) church, Upper Merion. He married Sarah Potts Hallowell, also of an old Upper Merion family, of English descent. Their children were Nathan H. and Esther H., twins, born November 15, 1839, Hannah Wager, born May 14, 1842 and Elizabeth A.

Few men possessed to such an extent of the esteem and confidence of their neighbors as John Hampton had. When he had been a candidate for public office, he invariably led his ticket, receiving many votes from political opponents. In every relation of life, he was an example which every one might follow.



*Howard and Florence Hampton in 1949. They were the last residents of the Hampton House.
Photo courtesy of Van Weiss.*



*The Township Building in 1969 on the site of the Hampton Farm.
Photo courtesy of Mary Raichle.*



Photo courtesy of the Wood Family.

PICTURE THIS!

This popular spot, shown above, was located on Route 202 in King of Prussia; hours of entertainment and enjoyment was provided for local residents. Can you identify the site and tell us if you ever had the opportunity to spend some time there?



Alderbrook *Photo courtesy of Bryn Mawr College.*

ALDERBROOK AND THE MCKAIG FAMILY

(Notes of speech given by Ed. Thomas on October 10, 1982, Upper Merion Park and Historic Foundation---Installation of Memorial Placques honoring Annah French Mckaig and Marjorie French Mckaig.)

The death of Marjorie Mckaig just after Christmas of 1979 was a great personal shock to all of us who knew her. Marjorie had always seemed healthy and strong, and able to withstand adversity. In fact, my own first recollection of Marjorie occurred one day in

the winter of 1965-66. Several inches of snow had fallen during the night, and I was just finishing shoveling my driveway when out of the corner of my eye I saw a Jeep coming up the road. It had no top, the windshield was folded down, and it was being driven by two bears, or so it seemed. A second, or maybe a third reappearance in the spring was required to see that it had really been a lady in a raccoon coat with a big scarf around her head, accompanied by a very large, very long haired poodle named Punkin sitting up in the passenger's seat. That first impression of Marjorie Mckaig as a strong willed individual who was not afraid of nature's adversities was proven over the years to be accurate. But it was certainly not sufficient. Marjorie obviously loved everything that nature had to offer, plants and animals and especially the land on which they grew.

The lands we are interested in today belonged to Marjorie's ancestors as far back as 1709, according to information given to the "Courier" in 1977. The name "Alderbrook" appeared in the *Genealogy of the Descendants of Thomas French* as the name of Howard Barclay French's summer home in Radnor. Howard Barclay French was Marjorie's maternal grandfather. Not clear in my research so far is whether the previous ownership had been in the French line, or in the line of Howard's wife Ida Colket. Nevertheless, it served as a summer home for their daughter Annah Colket French as she was growing up in the late 1800's. The family spent their winters at their home on Spruce Street in Philadelphia.

On April 1, 1908, the original house burned to the ground. It was soon fully rebuilt, perhaps starting in 1908, since that is the date on a stone high in the east wall. The estate included a lake complete with boat house and a water pumping system. In a 1913 picture in the *Genealogy*, the house looks very much as it does today. One report is that the house was subsequently renovated under the direction of Howard Trumbauer, a famous Philadelphia architect. Or perhaps Mr. Trumbauer had directed the reconstruction following the fire.

In 1914, Annah French married a 1911 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, Edgar S. McKaig. By 1918, they had two daughters: Annah (now Mrs. William Sellers of Paoli); and Marjorie, born May 19, 1918. The family lived in Overbrook while Mr. McKaig pursued his law practice and a second interest as head of the Commercial Museum, the forerunner of the current Civic Center. Undoubtedly there were frequent visits to Alderbrook for the girls. Marjorie used to share some of her memories of high society parties at Alderbrook during this period. In 1927, the property was willed to Mrs. McKaig, who continued its use as a summer home, this time for her family.

Marjorie's education was not exactly routine, even for a resident of the Main Line. She went for a time to Miss Wright's Finishing School in Bryn Mawr, and she was graduated in 1935 from Westover School in Middlebury, CT. She continued her education at the Ambler School of Horticulture for Women, graduating in 1939. The next stop was the Womens Army Corps, where she received commendations as a dog trainer. Following the War, Marjorie returned to school, this time to the University of Oklahoma for a Master's Degree as a librarian. Her Master's Thesis, as might be expected, based on her interests, dealt with Philadelphia naturalists of the 19th Century.

Soon after the death of her father in the early 50's, Marjorie and her mother removed to Alderbrook on a fulltime basis. Both then continued their participation in organizations and causes related to conservation of open space, and preservation of historically significant buildings. Powell House in Philadelphia and the King of Prussia Inn were two favorites. Marjorie was a well-informed member of nearly every organization in the state that had anything to do with conservation. But apparently that wasn't enough, so in 1964 she and several others formed the Upper Merion Park and Historic Foundation, dedicated to preserving open space and historical places in Upper Merion. Her mother's bequest of forty-seven acres in 1976 really gave UMPHF something to work on, make the best of, and provide for the people of the Township.

And the next giant step was working with the Township government to expand that forty-seven acres by the addition of another thirty, made possible largely by Marjorie's generous gift of fifteen adjoining acres she had purchased herself in the 50's. This exciting project was culminated in Roberts School in May of 1978 when the plaque to Annah French McKaig was unveiled.

Less than two years later, Marjorie had died of pneumonia and the contents of the estate dispersed by auction or sale. As this was happening, I began to wonder if people would long remember what a tremendous effect she and her mother had had on keeping open space in Upper Merion, Montgomery County, and the State of Pennsylvania. I wondered what would happen to Alderbrook, both her pride and joy, and a cause of her demise. Now today, we see two things that will help us to remember, so that we can tell the McKaig story to those yet to come in Upper Merion. First, whether we like the idea of development or not, the developer is perpetuating *Alderbrook* as the name of the McKaig estate lands. Second, the McKaig Nature Education Center will continue to point out the devotion to conservation of natural space so freely given by Annah Colket French McKaig and her daughter Marjorie French McKaig.

*Notes of speech given by Ed. Thomas on October 10, 1982
Upper Merion Park and Historic Foundation---Installation of Memorial
Placques honoring Annah French McKaig and Marjorie French McKaig.*



Alderbrook Today Photo courtesy of Michael Morrison.



A WAKE UP CALL FOR UPPER MERION?

In the August 2014 edition of the Lower Merion Historical Society's MILESTONES, an article reported that the demolition of the William Penn Inn is another wake up call for Lower Merion.

In 1988, the demolition of the 1851 Victorian Mansion called Analawn, once the Ott Estate, located on Bryn Mawr Avenue and West Rock Hill Road in Bala Cynwyd highlighted the need for historic preservation that eventually led to the adoption, in 2000, of Lower Merion Township's *Historic Preservation Ordinance*. Today, the Township is working on updating their 1979 *Comprehensive Plan*, and the *Land Use Element Committee*, and their *Historic Preservation Subcommittee* is debating on

(Continued on page 7.)

PICTURE THIS! ANSWER

This Upper Merion site was known as Wood’s Shed. John P. Wood III began his venture in 1947 opening the "Wood Shed", a driving range and snack stand, located in King of Prussia, Pa. It wasn't until 1957 that Wood's Golf Center, also known as Woody's, opened in Norristown and had since become one of the most recognized and well-known golfing facilities in Montgomery County. The course was designed by John Wood and Visor Pignoli.

John Wood and Visor Pignoli went on to design three other golf centers: Tri-County Golf Club in Oliver Springs, Tennessee, Hickory Hills Country Club in Springfield, Missouri, and the Links Golf Club at Queen Creek in Arizona.

"I do miss the people," remarked Pen Wood, the patriarch of the Wood family, who owned Woody's since it was the "Wood Shed" in King of Prussia before moving to East Norriton. "Every day, I hear about it from someone. It was a lifetime, and I loved my work."

Woods Golf Center in East Norriton closed in 2010 and the site is now the home of Einstein Hospital.



Wood's Shed at different times. Top photo courtesy of the Cummings Family; bottom photo courtesy of the Wood Family.



The Howard Johnson Motor Inn was built on the site of the former Wood's Shed. Today, the site is occupied by the Best Western Motel. Photo courtesy of Michael Morrison.



A WAKE UP CALL FOR UPPER MERION?

(Continued from page 6.)

what can be done to protect "exceptional historic resources."

Like Analawn, the pending demolition of the William Penn Inn should be a call to action. The inn was built by Joseph Price in 1799 and was inhabited by Joseph Price.

The bigger issue facing the Township today is to exactly how the Township will develop a cohesive and comprehensive policy and preserving our few remaining important historic structures. Talk to your Township Commissioner and explain that Historic Preservation must be a priority in Lower Merion's new and improved Comprehensive Plan, and, just as importantly, then commit to follow that Plan, including adequately funding the new Historic Preservation initiatives. Now is the time that the Township should consider creating a "Lower Merion Preservation Trust" or a "Lower Merion Preservation Foundation" to protect our exceptional historic resources.

And, what about Upper Merion Township? With our Township officials looking at revising the zoning code, is it time for our Township government to develop a cohesive and comprehensive policy and preserve our few remaining important historic structures? Is it time for Upper Merion to adequately fund new Historic Preservation initiatives? Is it time that Upper Merion Township consider creating an "Upper Merion Preservation Trust" or an "Upper Merion Preservation Foundation" to protect what historic resources we have left?

And, the Hampton House? Neither a museum, home for the Historical Society, or a K-9 kennel!

2014 - 2015 Program Calendar

Subject to change. Check the society's website or Facebook page for the most up to date information
www.kophistory.org ~ www.facebook.com/kophistory or contact info@kophistory.org

- January 10 ~ 2:00 pm** Annual Business Meeting
Preview of 2015 Programs
- February 7 ~ 2:00 pm** Sheilah Vance: *The Road to Valley Forge*
- March 14 ~ 2:00 pm** Women's History Month: *Prominent Women from Upper Merion's History*
- April 11 ~ 2:00 pm** Kimberly Morrell: *Archeologist from PennDOT
Recent 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 July and August

Unless noted otherwise, meetings are held on Saturday at **Christ Church (Old Swedes) Hall**, 740 River Road,
Swedesburg PA 19405 GPS coordinates [40.103498, -75.327288](#)



PO BOX 60716
KING OF PRUSSIA PA 19406-0716

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.