

The King of Prussia Gazette

Preserving Upper Merion's Past to Enliven its Future

Volume IV, Number Four

Winter 2015

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Holiday Wishes

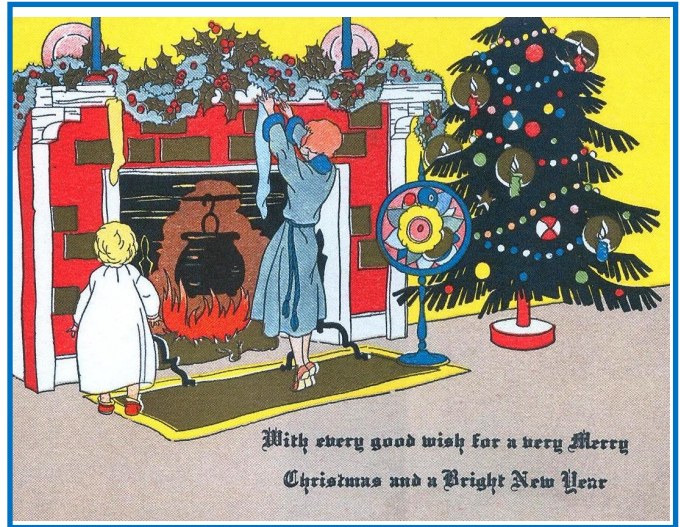
The holiday season is a time for wishes, so this year I thought I would add three wishes to my list. Let's see how I do.

My first wish is for our new collaboration with UMGATV to continue, and produce an initial three programs based on our rich local history. The first of these programs will feature the life of Anna Morris Holstein, one of Upper Merion's greatest and most important figures. Next we will turn our attention to "Grave Tales", as we pay tribute to some of the important individuals resting in the cemetery at Christ Old Swedes Church. For those of you who took part in Grave Tales on October 24, 2015, I am sure you will agree that this program will be fascinating when brought to TV. The thirds program in this series will take us to the Old Roberts School, and a day class with Miss Elisabeth Hawkesworth. Miss Elizabeth Hawkesworth is a traveling schoolmarm of the early 1800's, whose personal story speaks of similar scenarios that many of our immigrant ancestors would identify with. Her late education at the Philadelphia School for Girls, makes her one of the most learned women of our age (when really only men could claim this title). While she was born in Wales, she worked as a domestic servant while living with her aunt and Uncle, Colonel Peter Hawkesworth of Hatfield Township in Montgomery County. She is the oldest child and only daughter of Mary and Edward Hawkesworth and the sister to four brothers. This program is a true step back to how school was conducted in the early 19th century.

My second wish is for a continuing relationship with Upper Merion Township officials. It is a relationship of good faith, and of dedicated cooperation that further enhances the lives of residents and guests alike. Thanks to a grant from the Board of Community Assistance in 2015, we are in the process of producing an interactive book for children, based on a timeline of the history of the township, as well as a program to erect new Keystone Markers along the 202 corridor and Gulph Road.

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Vintage 1920's Christmas card, courtesy of Michael Morrison.

My third wish is for you, our loyal membership. I wish you peace and joy throughout this holiday season, and I thank you for your loyal support for so many wonderful years. It is solely through your generous contributions to our society that we are able to put forth the kind of quality programming that we are being recognized for producing. A great program is nothing without an audience, and maintaining your membership and attendance allows us to continue our hard work.

Respectfully,

J. Michael Morrison,

President

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

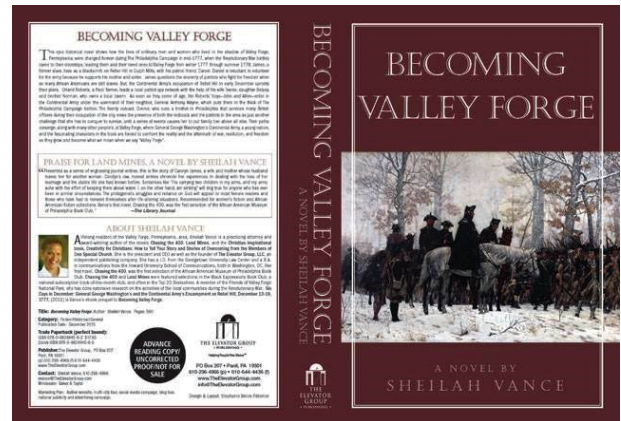
Our membership campaign for 2016 is underway! New memberships and renewals will be accepted at this time. Looking for a unique gift? Why not present a family member or friend with an annual membership for the King of Prussia Historical Society! We supply a gift card for you to present to the recipient.

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 mailing address is King of Prussia Historical Society, PO Box 60716, King of Prussia, PA 19406-0716.

A commitment to Preservation



NEW PUBLICATION

Sheilah Vance has announced that her new book, **BECOMING VALLEY FORGE**, will be available in December. Sheilah was our guest presenter at our February 2015 monthly meeting. In her book, Sheilah traces the movement of General Washington and his army from Gulph Mills to Valley Forge in December 1777.

IN APPRECIATION

Frederick Henry Salter, 82, died Friday, Sept. 3, 2004, at his home on Foothill Road in Kalispell, Mont. He was born August 19, 1922, in Gulph Mills, grew up in the hills of Pennsylvania, ran a trap line and played fiddle in a hillbilly band at barn dances. He joined the U.S. Horse Calvary while a teenager, fought in North Africa as a reconnaissance scout from 1942-1943, then in Sicily in 1943 and also in Italy in 1944. Fred shared his war experiences in **RECON SCOUT** which he authored after the war.

The Society is grateful to Emma Carson who donated a copy of **RECON SCOUT**, as well as copies of **FOREVER ON THE EDGE** and **POEMS BY THE MAVERICK TUMBLEWEED**, to the Society Library.

More can be learned about Fred Salter in the Society's **UPPER MERION: THE FIRST 300 YEARS**.

WELCOME

The King of Prussia Historical Society joins with The Historical Society of Montgomery County in welcoming its new executive director, Barry Rauhauser. Rauhauser brings 13 years upper management level experience at LancasterHistory.org, a leading regional county-level historical society. He is a graduate of Penn State University's American Studies Program and University of Delaware's Winterthur Program in Early American Culture.



(Drinker Oak by John Peirce. Photo courtesy of Michael Morrison.)

DRINKER OAK---A PICTORIAL ESSAY

PENN'S WOODS 1682-1932

(Excerpt from PENN'S WOODS, 1682-1932, THE OLDEST TREES IN PENNSYLVANIA, NEW JERSEY, DELAWARE, AND EASTERN SHORE, MARYLAND by Edward E. Wildman, and M. Joy Callender. Philadelphia: Christopher Sower Company, 1933, page 70.)

"Go on to King of Prussia. On the north side of the road, as you enter the hamlet, see the great white oak. It measures eighteen feet, six inches, breast high, above the embankment where it grows.

"As a supplement to my letter of last winter regarding the "Washington" oak at King of Prussia, Montgomery County, Pa., located on the edge of Gulph Road (Montgomery Avenue) about five hundred feet southeast of the old King of Prussia Inn, I am enclosing a photograph of the old oak herewith, which I'm not sure whether or not you have entered as a Penn tree.

"When Washington, accompanied by his distinguished staff and followed by his Colonial Army which were engaged a few months before in the Battle of Brandywine and Germantown, left the site of their encampment east of the "Gulph", near the hanging rock, they marched northwest through the "Gulph", followed the old road toward King of Prussia, and passed under the bare branches of this sturdy tree on December 20, 1777, and then continued on to Winter Quarters at Valley Forge.

"There is no doubt that Washington and his staff viewed this white oak many times while in that vicinity and admired its symmetry, and in truth might have said, "That tree was a centenarian when Penn landed at New Castle." It was probably two hundred years old at that period and would be the logical landmark of designated meeting place for many an important military conference."

DRINKER OAK DEDICATION

(This article is from an EVENING BULLETIN 1933 newspaper article. Courtesy of the King of Prussia Historical Society.)

Some 300 years ago, when expeditions sponsored by Sir Walter Raleigh were amazing England with American tobacco and potatoes, an oak sapling stood near the point where the Gulph Road now winds through King-of-Prussia in Montgomery county. Next Saturday, August 19, at four o'clock, the huge tree, into which that sapling has grown, will be dedicated by the Pennsylvania Forestry Association to its president emeritus, Dr. Henry Sturgis Drinker, former president of Lehigh University, and from 1917 to 1923, president of the American Forestry Association.

With appropriate public ceremonies, the historic tree will be marked for future years by a bronze tablet bearing the following inscription: "White Oak, circumference, 18 feet, 6 inches at 4 1/2 feet above the ground in 1932, growing here more than 100 years before William Penn's arrival in 1682. Washington and his army marched by it to Valley Forge in 1777. Dedicated to Henry Sturgis Drinker for his services to Forestry, by the Pennsylvania Forestry Association, 'Restore Penn's Woods.' 1933."

The idea of thus honoring a notable Pennsylvanian was made possible through the interest of Dr. Henry R. Forer, president of the Valley Forge Nurseries, and Alexander H. Crockett, owner of the land on which the ancient giant stands.

When Washington, accompanied by his distinguished staff and followed by his Colonial Army, which were engaged a few months before in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown, left the site of their encampment east of the Gulph near the Hanging Rock, they followed the old road toward King-of-Prussia, and passed under the bare branches of this sturdy tree on December 20, 1777, then continued on to winter quarters at Valley Forge.

Perhaps no tree in the land has looked down on more passers-by, because it stands on the very edge of the main highway from Philadelphia to Valley Forge, a route taken by many thousands of motorists each week. When the grade of the road was lowered, many of its large roots had to be cut away, but it has withstood these shocks, and today is enjoying a new span of life, with all its heavy branches in full vigor and luxuriant leaf.

This dedication will call attention anew to the excellent work done by the Pennsylvania Forestry Association, which came into existence 47 years ago through the

unusual foresight and vision of Dr. Joseph T. Rothrock, of West Chester, properly remembered as the "father of forestry" in Pennsylvania. It was his enthusiasm which caused a small group to realize that depletion of forests, then proceeding at an alarming rate, must be combatted by reforestation if future citizens were to inherit something better than barren wastes.



KING OF PRUSSIA OAK—MRS. CROCKETT, MR. CROCKETT, MR. BIRKINBINE AND MR. FRORER

(Photo of Mrs. Crockett, Mr. Crockett, Mr. Birkenbine, and Mr. Rorer at the August 19, 1993 dedication of the Drinker Oak. Photo courtesy of the King of Prussia Historical Society.)



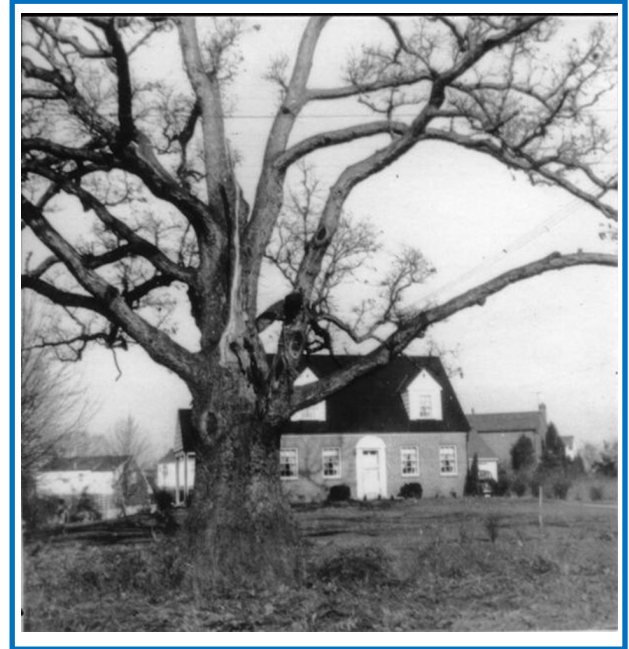
A DEED TO THE COMMONWEALTH

(Excerpts from a letter to Alexander H. Crockett dated August 10, 1933. Courtesy of the King of Prussia Historical Society.)

In August 1933, James N. Rule, Chairman of the Pennsylvania Historical Commission wrote to Alexander Crockett that Carl P. Birkinbine, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Forestry Association advised him that the Crockett's had "generously offered to deed to the Commonwealth an old white oak standing at King of Prussia and the ground in a square 22 feet on each side of the centre, and to give an easement on adjoining ground for the right to enter on the land to protect and trim the limbs and branches for such purposes only."

Mr. Rule noted that this is an historic tree and thus referred the acceptance of the tree to the State Historical Commission. The Commission would have the power "to accept and take title, in the name of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to the sites of historical markers."

Mr. Rule went on to advise Mr. Crockett that the State Historical Commission has unanimously agreed to accept the gift and expressed its grateful appreciation of Mr. Crockett's generosity in making possible the preservation of this historical tree for future generations.



(Undated photo of the Drinker Oak with the Crockett house in the background, courtesy of the King of Prussia Historical Society.)



PROGRESS OVERCOMES PENN OAK

(From an article written by Joan Shaw for the December 8, 1982 KING OF PRUSSIA COURIER.)

A life that spanned more than three centuries came to an end in a few short hours.

Upper Merion's oldest denizen, the Drinker Oak, met its demise at the hands of the woodcutters last Thursday.

"I felt very, very sorrowful to see something come down as majestic as it was," commented Helen Roback, president of the Upper Merion Park and Historic Foundation, who witnessed the tree's end.

"It had stood through so much of the history of our country and our own local community," said Mrs. Roback.

The American white oak was a member of the exclusive arboreal circle known as Penn trees, so called because they were growing when William Penn arrived in 1682. A survey made in 1979 showed that 40 of the trees still survived. Now there is one less.

Upper Merion's township arborist William Hascher pointed out that the oak tree had been protected over the years by several conservation groups concerned with saving Penn trees. In addition, private citizens have contributed funds to have it pruned and cabled.

"Committees were formed to study the best way to save the tree, but due to the extent of the cavity and now a disease problem plus the danger of its falling on a busy parking lot, the tree had to be removed," said Hascher.

In 1932, the Pennsylvania Forestry Association dedicated the oak to Henry Sturgis Drinker for his role in conservation and forestry. The tree was in its heyday then, measuring 18' 6" in circumference and stretching more than 100' high.

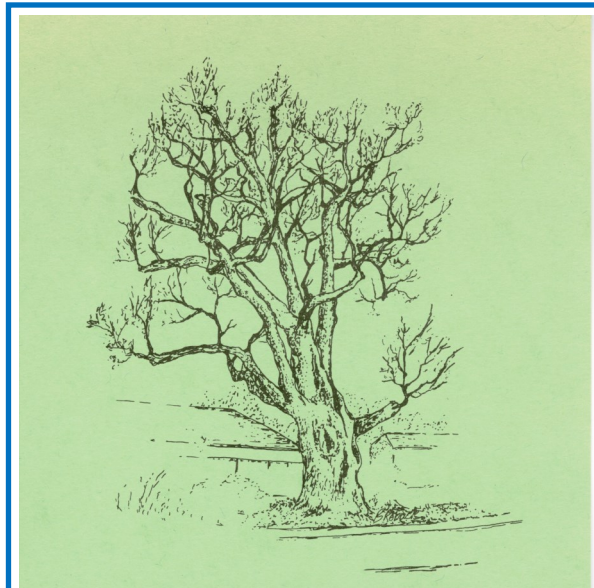
As insect infestation, the diseases of old age and environmental stress took their toll on the old oak, the conservationists took steps to preserve the tree. Its upper branches were cut back, thinned out and cabled to prevent high winds uprooting it.

The oak is gone, but plans are in the works to preserve the site of its long life. Hascher, who is a member of the Penn-Del chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture, said the organization will plant a new oak at the site, possibly within the hollow stump of the Drinker oak.

The plaque dedicating the fallen tree to Drinker will also remain. And Hascher envisions landscaping in the area, which is located in Penn-DOT right of way.

For sentimental and history minded citizens, there will be mementoes of the old oak tree. Penn-DOT graciously allowed Mrs. Roback to take as many pieces of the tree as she could load into her pickup.

The Park and Historic Foundation will have the wood seasoned and sliced into one-inch slabs. At the same time, the foundation will prepare a history of the tree and documentation of the authenticity of the samples. Mrs. Roback hopes to have the souvenirs ready in time for the planting of the new oak, which is set for Arbor Day next April.



WASHINGTON OAK MEMENTO

This wood represents a piece of our country's history. The tree was a century old when William Penn surveyed his newly acquired land and almost 200 years old on December 20, 1777 when General George Washington passed under its branches as he led troops from the Gulph to the Valley Forge encampment. In 1933 the tree was dedicated to Henry S. Drinker, a pioneer in Pennsylvania forestry, and was named the "Drinker Oak".

Heroic efforts were made to preserve the tree, but age and disease combined with the rapid growth of King of Prussia forced its removal. The great white oak was felled December 2, 1982.

(Pen and ink drawing of the Drinker Oak. A copy was given with each purchase of a piece of the oak tree. The wood was cut and sold by Upper Merion Park and Historic Foundation. Drawing by Barbara Roback.)



THE DEMISE OF THE WASHINGTON OAK

(Information collected from various news clippings.)

The plaque near the Washington (Drinker) Oak stated that the tree was standing 100 years at the time William Penn came to the King of Prussia area in 1682. It was felled on December 2, 1982. Tony Pizzo from Pizzo Tree Experts of Warrington, hired by PennDot, started felling the tree at 8:15 AM by taking apart the limbs rather easily. It was obvious to onlookers how deteriorated the tree had become. The last piece of stump was removed at 11:47 AM. It grew for over 400 years and was demolished in three hours and twenty-eight minutes. The tree had an eighteen foot, six inch circumference and a seventy-seven inch diameter when it was felled.

Tom Schunder, a land developer from King of Prussia, noted that the amount of asphalt around the roots caused a smothering effect and put the tree under further stress.

As limb by limb crashed to the ground under the direction of the PennDot contracted tree experts, workers scurried to avoid thousands of bees the tree housed. Two squirrels also jumped out of the tree, no longer having a home.

Before the last portion of the tree was brought down, many observers stopped and had one last look, and even a snapshot, of the fallen oak. Dr. Greenspan, local veterinarian, came on his motorcycle and asked for a souvenir. When he heard that the wood was to be slabbed and sold, he gave a donation of \$5.00. Others just took mementos.

Three small truckloads of logs were deposited at the Cultural Center (the Moore House) to be slabbed by the Park and Historic Foundation. Tom Schunder also took two large loads to his place on Croton Road. This wood would also be slabbed for the Park and Historic Foundation. Lasting souvenirs of the old oak would be carved up and sold by the Foundation. Proceeds from the sale of pieces of the Drinker Oak, so named in honor of Henry Sturgis Drinker for his role in conservation and forestry, will go to the McKaig Nature Center, a project he would surely have endorsed.

For sentimental and history-minded citizens, there will be mementoes of the old oak tree. The Park and Historic Foundation will have the wood seasoned and sliced into one inch slabs. At the same time, the foundation will prepare a history of the tree and documentation of the authenticity of the samples.

And from the ashes of the Drinker Oak, a young white oak sapling will be planted on the same spot on Arbor Day in the spring. Perhaps in another 400 years, that tree will scoff at the culprits which killed its predecessor---

insect infestation, the disease of old age, and environmental stress.

The oak is gone, but plans are in the works to preserve the site of its long life. Hascher, who is a member of the Penn-Del chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture, said the organization will plant a new oak at the site, possibly within the hollow stump of the Drinker Oak.



Editor's Note: Unfortunately, the new white oak sapling had only a short existence. A driver, backing out of the WAWA parking lot, crashed into the young tree, destroying it. The young sapling was never replaced.



THE DIARY

(A glimpse of life in Upper Merion in the early half of the nineteenth century.)

Anna M. Holstein, a very prolific writer, was a frequent contributor of historical articles and talks in the early years of the Historical Society of Montgomery County. She was also the compiler of the official Holstein family genealogy.

The Holstein family is part of one of the older clusters of the Swedes in Pennsylvania, along with such families as Rambo, Yocum, and Matson.

Isaac Wayne Holstein was born January 25, 1823, and died on April 8, 1884. He is buried in Christ (Old Swedes) Church in Upper Merion Township. He is seventh in descent from his unknown immigrant ancestor, who appears to have arrived about 1642. Isaac married, December 27, 1854, Alice Hallowell, daughter of William R. and Debora Hallowell, also of Upper Merion Township.

Isaac's feelings on the value of a diary are revealed in an entry for September 1, 1848: "I cannot help finding the proceedings of a Journal both entertaining and interesting." The present diary excerpts are from a beautifully handwritten volume for the years 1845 to 1853.

The Holstein diaries were donated to the Historical Society of Montgomery County by Elizabeth Ellis DiLiberato; they give us a glimpse of life in Upper Merion in the early half of the nineteenth century.

As one can glean from the diaries, Isaac Wayne Holstein was very involved with the Upper Merion Township area. He was a farmer, as were most of his many friends and acquaintances. But he was also of the world, taking an active interest in the key events of his days. Traveling to Philadelphia or to Phoenixville was routine for him. It is fortuitous that the years of Isaac's diary (1845-1853) are close to the occasion of the 1850 U.S. Census. This was the first year of the federal census to provide the names of all members in a household, not the head of the household only. Ages are also given, as are occupations (of males of age). The value of real estate owned by that head of household is provided, thus giving an idea of how prosperous the family was.

December (1845)

Monday 1st: *[This is the first date of entry for this*

diary. Isaac Holstein was a very meticulous diarist, even to the point of comprehensively indexing each person or topic mentioned on each page.] Winter commences furious ... Geo. Shainline spent this evening here. The ground is freezing very hard.

Wednesday 3rd: I dined at W. B. Roberts, today spent part of the morning there. Began to snow about 4 o'clock. Continued on very fast until dark. Geo. Bisbing called here. He, sister Louisa, and I went down to Bridgeport in his dearborn. Spent the evening at Mr. Evans and danced with some of the young ladies of Bridgeport.

Friday 5th: Geo. Shainline and Geo. Wagner are here today at thrashing wheat with the machine....Geo. Shainline staid all night.

Saturday 6th: Very clear and cold all day ... I am engaged all day at helping to thrash wheat ... Mr. Lightner, Miss Fanny Ellis, Benj. B. Hughes and Wife, Mrs. Emily Rambo, Miss Sarah & Rebecca Shainline, Miss Louisa Brewer [Brower], and Geo. Shainline took tea here. A great many sleighs a running today. This evening, I took Miss Louisa Brewer and Rebecca Shainline a sleigh ride, up toward the King, back by Moloneys to Bridgeport....Mrs. Hannah Carver and Dr. Merallats' child died today.

Sunday 7: ...I went out riding on horseback to day over into Radnor Township, inviting to Mrs. Carver's funeral...A great many sleighs traveling today. The sleighing is very good...

Tuesday 9: ...Sister Louisa and I went to the funeral of Mrs. Carver in the one horse sleigh. We called at Cousin R. Roberts. Spent a little time there and went to the Church and heard Mr. Lightner preach the funeral sermon....

Thursday 11: ...Miss Rebecca Lane and John Wentz called here. Miss Rebecca staid all night here. I went up to meet the band this evening, in the sleigh. I called for Clinton Shainline, had a rough ride of it a going up and a cold [one] a coming home....

Saturday 13: ...I am engaged all day at thrashing wheat with the machine.... Mr. Geo. DeWeese (of the Marsh) came here this afternoon to spend some time. Squire Bisbing" called here. He and I spent the evening at Mrs. E. Rambo's at Bridgeport...dancing, good plays....

(To be continued in the Spring.)

2016 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 9: ~ 2:00 pm: Business Meeting at the King of Prussia Inn
- February 13 ~ 2:00 pm: Richard Baumann: Swedes in the Delaware Valley and along the Schuylkill River with a focus on our area.
- March 12 ~ 2:00 pm: Jim Brazel: Reading Railroad's Chester Valley Line
- April 2 ~ 10:00 pm: Board Meeting
- April 9 ~ 2:00 pm: Michael Tolle: They've Been Down So Long.../ Getting Up's Still on Their Minds
- May 14 ~ 10:00 pm: From the Archives: The Ed Dybicz Collection Society Picnic and Book Sale
- June 11 ~ 10:00 pm: Field Trip: Valley Forge Military Academy

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

A Commitment to Preservation!