

The King of Prussia Gazette

Preserving Upper Merion's Past to Enliven its Future

Volume V, Number Two

Summer 2016

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

by Frank Luther

"A COMMITMENT TO PRESERVATION"

In May of this year, the Philadelphia Inquirer published a report on Barbara Cohen, the teacher who would educate a fresh crop of teachers about the history of Phoenixville. "Over there, that was once a stop on the Underground Railroad", she told them, "and those were the homes of former mayors, and that once was the 130-acre tract that housed the steel behemoth that defined the borough". The history buff had helped leverage the Chester County borough's historic district a generation ago and raised millions of dollars to spur a local renaissance and one of the region's economic success stories. For her role she was honored in Coatesville with the Rebecca Lukens Award, named for the woman many call the nation's first female industrialist, and given annually to those who exhibit leadership and other qualities. It is given by the National Iron and Steel Heritage Museum.

Also, in May another article reported that Trappe was planning to celebrate its tricentennial in 2017. The reporter noted that the past is on the front burner every day in this historic community. The fourth annual "Raise the Roof" fundraising gala was held to benefit preservation.

Neighboring townships, Lower Merion and Radnor, have conservancies and historical commissions. In Lower Merion, the Conservancy provides technical support to public officials, municipal staff, historic homeowners and more. Their pro-active approach to Historic Preservation includes an Annual Preservation WatchList, a fall and spring Historic Preservation Lecture Series, an Historic Neighborhoods Initiative, and an Architectural Hall of Fame recognition program.

And in Upper Merion? Was there a gala in 2013 to benefit preservation in the township during its 300th anniversary?

Imagine a Barbara Cohen conducting a bus tour in Upper Merion! As the group was nearing the township building, she could point out the historic Hampton Farmhouse standing next to the township's municipal building. What would she say? What could she say?

Moving on to 700 Moore Road, our Barbara would point out The Moore-Irwin House which served as quarters for General Muhlenberg during the 1777-78 encampment at Valley Forge. The 4.80 acres of the Irwin Estate's historic three-story building, arboretum, cabin, and natural area was the former location of the Upper Merion Community and Cultural Center. After various attempts to revive the property, it remains vacant. What would our guide say here? What could she say?

The wrecking balls and bulldozers have ravaged much of Upper Merion's history. However, there is one area of our history that is still worth saving! How many citizens of the township are aware that there is a Local History Collection in the Township Library? How many citizens realize what the condition of this "collection" really is? Its poor condition illustrates the low priority local history has in our township. It is time for our elected township officials to take stock of the situation and to budget money to hire a professional team to come in, to sort through the material in the collection, and to begin a process of preserving what is there. Digitizing the collection would also be recommended. A cooperative effort between the historical society and the township's elected officials could result in a magnificent collection.

It takes more than a few interested residents to make a difference. The communities that value their past make it a priority with the financial investment to preserve it. Upper Merion still has a chance to prove it has a "commitment to preservation"!

The Town Crier—

updates from the Society...

**OUR 2016 CHARTER MEMBERS**

We acknowledge our Charter Members for 2016 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. Please check the letter from the New Jersey teacher that appears in this 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

A MUSEUM FOR UPPER MERION?

Back in 1965 Mrs. Lucretia H. Morrison had a vision and a dream to create a museum in Upper Merion. On page seven of this issue, you can see the details from THE KING OF PRUSSIA COURIER story published in September 1965. Unfortunately, that vision and that dream never materialized. Is it time for Upper Merion to move ahead once again with such a vision and a dream to preserve what is left of our rich local history?



(The site of Mrs. Morrison's proposed Upper Merion Museum in the King of Prussia Antique Shop. Photo courtesy of Michael Morrison.)

J. HOWARD WALKER

The Society received news from the Walker Family that J. Howard Walker died on March 20, 2016 after a long and happy life. Howard and the Walker Family contributed greatly to Upper Merion Township in so many ways. He and his father, Billy Walker, served as township supervisors. The Fall 2013 edition of THE KING OF PRUSSIA GAZETTE was dedicated to the Walker Family and their role in Upper Merion life. Howard's interview for the INQUIRER was reprinted in that issue.

Go to www.kophistory.org to read the history of the Walker Family and Howard's interview, "The Maturing of King of Prussia".

A MAJOR MOVE

In May of this year, the Society's collection has been moved for storage in the Old Roberts School. Shirley Funkhouser and Marianne Hooper checked out the site to determine whether it would meet our needs. Marianne supplied and set up the shelves. The materials will be in a controlled climate to help in their preservation. Thanks to those board members Dave Montalvo, Russell Rupert, and Michael Morrison and Father Evans, pastor at Old Swedes, for assistance in making the move possible.

FROM THE SOCIETY'S FILES

In his President's message in our Spring 2016 issue, Michael Morrison wrote that an early goal of the King of Prussia Historical Society, dating back to the 1950's, was to create a local museum for our community. "Finding the right place to meet, store and curate our collection, and to display it to the public still remains a challenge. While Christ Old Swedes Church is our current location, it currently does not meet all our needs. We welcome your ideas and comments."

In this issue of the GAZETTE, we are taking a look back to the establishment of the King of Prussia Historical Society in 1953 and what the aims, goals, and dreams of the organizers were. Unfortunately, much of Upper Merion's "progress" greatly affected what remains of our history, as can be gleaned from the articles found in the Society's files. Too often, "Here today became gone... and, sadly, gone forever." The King of Prussia Historical Society's "A Commitment to Preservation" is critical to saving what we have left or preserving remnants of what we had in a local history museum!



(Photo courtesy of the King of Prussia Historical Society.)

THE KING OF PRUSSIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

(From the Society's Archives.)

The King of Prussia Historical Society came into being in 1953 and was originally named the "Committee to Save the King of Prussia Inn." This original group was made up of such local notables as Miss Margorie McKaig who served as Chairwoman, Mr. Henderson Supplee and Mr. Dean Weber among others.

The prime purpose of the committee was to save the historic King of Prussia Inn from planned destruction with the modernization and relocation of Route 202 in the King of Prussia area. The "Committee to Save the King of Prussia Inn" waged a successful struggle against the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (Pen.dot) and eventually acquired a 99 year lease on the Inn.

In 1955, Dr. Robert May, a local physician took over the leadership of the Committee and broadened its scope. Shortly after, the Committee was renamed the King of Prussia Historical Society.

In addition to maintaining the upkeep of the Inn, the Historical Society undertook a survey of the community for historic structures. The result of this was the publication of a booklet entitled "A Traveler's Guide to King of Prussia, Valley Forge and Philadelphia" and a slide show which has been regularly presented over the years to interested groups.

In 1960 the King of Prussia Historical Society completed a four year project to rebuild Old Roberts School---a one room school house built originally in 1848 by the then U. S. Senator Jonathon Roberts. Support for the project was primarily from donations of labor, materials and monies from the community. Presently the building serves as the meeting place for the Historical Society. In addition it is used for field trips by area school districts to demonstrate early American education facilities.

In 1967, Jack Shain, a resident of Gulph Mills and a local historian, became president of the Historical Society. He was followed by Daniel Flint, a lawyer who originally lived and practiced in King of Prussia.

During the period of 1968-1976, the principal activities of the Society were educational with slide shows, house tours, and a guest speaker program, which included Senator Barry Goldwater.

In the early 1970's an electrical fire caused severe damage to the roof and the upper floors of the King of Prussia Inn and efforts were undertaken to raise funds for the temporary repair of the roof.

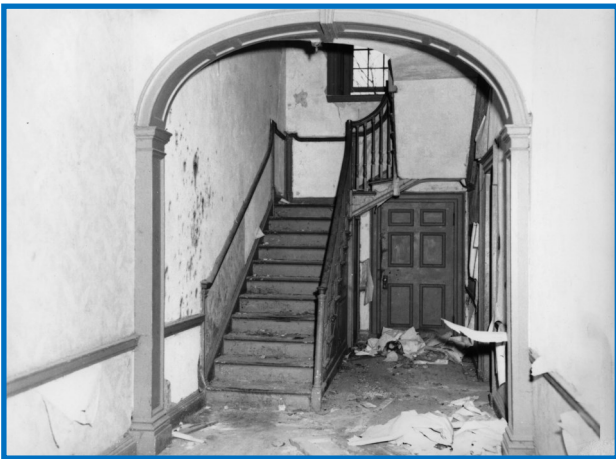


Jack Shain again resumed the presidency of the Historical Society in 1976, and directed a program to restoring the King of Prussia Inn to its 18th century appearance. This was the largest undertaking of the Historical Society; and, because of its relative magnitude, the restoration was divided into Phase I, exterior restoration, and Phase II, interior restoration. This project is currently underway with external restoration nearing completion.

The Historical Society has been actively encouraging youth of the community to become involved in the restoration project. A number of Eagle Scouts have worked on the Inn for their Eagle project.

The Society at the present time continues to maintain its program of guest lectures and slide shows, and it will initiate a new program of bus tours to historical sites in the Philadelphia area in the spring of 1979.

In the planning stage, the Society hopes to write a history of Upper Merion for the celebration of the Montgomery County Tricentennial.



A COMMITMENT TO PRESERVATION

(In a letter dated June 16, 1994 to Dr. Carl F. Schultheis, Jr. from Greg Dean, attorney, we learn that "While throwing out some very old files, I came across copies of the original Articles of Incorporation for the King of Prussia Historical Society. Judging from the copy paper, I would assume this came right from the Recorder of Deeds Office sometime in the fifties. I pass them along to you in case you don't have copies, it appearing from the group of documents that these were with, that Jack Shain never had a copy.)

Background and Goals of the King of Prussia Historical Society, January 3, 1997

The King of Prussia Historical Society was formed by interested citizens in the 1950's. At the time, the Pennsyl-

vania Department of Highways was constructing the turnpike interchange with the Schuylkill Expressway. The construction of the turnpike interchange involved a widening of DeKalb Pike (U.S. Route 202) and a reconstruction of the intersection of DeKalb Pike and Gulph Road. These reconstruction plans involved the demolition of an existing structure near the intersection. The structure was known as the King of Prussia Inn and it was from this structure that the surrounding area developed its name.

The Historical Society was originally formed with the express purpose of preventing the demolition of this historic landmark. As a result of the efforts of the Society, the Pennsylvania Department of Highways modified its plans to relocate DeKalb Pike so that the building would remain intact. In fact, the change in plans by the Department required the removal of several hundred feet of highway which had already been constructed. As the result of the relocation of DeKalb Pike, the historic structure was located in the green area separating the north and south bound lanes.

After the reconstruction of the roads, the King of Prussia Historical Society, with the cooperation of local citizens, businesses, industry, and local and county government officials, undertook the task of restoring the Inn and preserving the same. In the past eight years, approximately \$60,000 in labor, materials and money have been donated to the Society for these purposes. Also, as the result of the actions taken by the Society, in 1976 the King of Prussia Inn was placed upon the National Register of Historical Places.

The most difficult problem encountered in restoring the historical site was in providing adequate ingress, egress and parking to the location. Recently, the Society was successful in negotiating rights with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to provide for ingress and egress as well as areas to be developed for parking purposes.

The Society's goal remains the same, to preserve and maintain this historical landmark. The restoration work which has been instituted by the Society will be continued. The Society has retained historical architects, engineers, accountants, construction and restoration firms, and other professionals as their needs require. This team has coordinated its efforts with volunteers to bring the Inn to its present state.

In summary, there is a strong desire to save this historical landmark. Local citizens, governments, county officials, service organizations, small and large business organizations and others have assisted the King

of Prussia Historical Society in restoring this building that had played a significant role in the American Revolution. Presently, funds are required to open this living monument of American history to thousands of visitors to the Valley Forge area, school children, scholars, and area citizens.

II. Restoring King of Prussia: A Village That Would Not Die.

The village of King of Prussia dates back to the Revolutionary War. During the encampment of the colonial army at Valley Forge, the Inn became a popular meeting point not only for officers from Washington's army, but also for British spies who were headquartered in Philadelphia. The location of the Inn, approximately four miles from Washington's headquarters at Valley Forge made it an ideal location for such meetings.

The village continued to exist in a rural setting through the 1950's. At that time, the village consisted of the King of Prussia Inn, an antique shop, and the Peacock Gardens (now known as Mr. Ron's). These three buildings formed the nucleus of the historic and beautiful hamlet. The development of modern highways and expressways in the 1950's changed many of the community values in the King of Prussia-Valley Forge area and such development endangered this historical area. It was during this time that the Historical Society was formed and the King of Prussia Inn was preserved from demolition.

At the same time, both Upper Merion Township and the Montgomery County Tourist Bureau were interested in preserving the heritage of the area. There were many reasons for this interest however two of the more important reasons were:

1. The residents realized that the over-whelming traffic as the result of a large regional shopping mall and industrial parks together with the rapid growth of suburban housing had overbalanced the historic and rural setting that had originally attracted business and city dwellers to the area.
2. The Montgomery County Tourist Bureau indicated that 80% of the county's \$37,000,000 annual tourist income was generated in the King of Prussia-Valley Forge area.

The combination of these factors led to an increased desire to preserve this historical area and encouraged these groups to join with the King of Prussia Historical Society in preserving the historical significance of this area.

The more recent accomplishments of the Society include the following work at the location of this national landmark:

1. The removal of 40 cubic yards of debris from the site by local volunteers;

2. The construction of a new roof and the replacement of deteriorated joists and beams with labor and materials being donated by Certaineed Corporation and Georgia Pacific Corporation.

3. The removal of the stucco exterior (circa 1860) and the repointing of the original underlying stone by local volunteer help and stone masons under contract to the King of Prussia Historical Society.

4. The addition of exterior lighting with materials and labor donated by the General Electric Corporation.

The efforts of the Historical Society in preserving the King of Prussia Inn are the result of cooperation between the Society and various individuals and industries. Other Companies which have donated labor, money and materials include the Sheraton Hotel, Gino's, American Heritage Contracting Corporation, Nelson Roofing Company, and O'Hara Sanitation Company, Inc.. When funds were needed to shore up and reconstruct a basement wall which was crucial to the structural integrity of the Inn, the National Park Service, the Montgomery County Community Development Fund, The Montgomery County Historical Society and the Mobile Oil Company provided funds necessary to complete the work.

The King of Prussia Historical Society proposes to restore the Inn, to provide safe parking for guests and visitors, and to use the Inn in a variety of purposes. Among the programs planned for the future are:

1. To utilize the Inn as a meeting place for historical lectures, historical movies, classes for school children and the Historical Society itself. The intent of the Society is to satisfy the thirst for knowledge about the War for Independence and the historical events surrounding King of Prussia and Valley Forge.
2. To create a museum which will contain clothing, cooking utensils, a firearms collection, and other artifacts of the Revolutionary War period.
3. To utilize the structure as the historical library for the Society.
4. To allow the Montgomery County Visitors and Tourist Bureau to set up an Information Center on the property. The Bureau is in need of such facility to accommodate the many visitors to this area. In turn, the Society will gain a tenant which will help with maintenance, staffing, and publicity. The location of numerous hotels in the area immediately surrounding the location of the Inn makes such site a natural location.

for such a facility.

The restoration of the King of Prussia Inn will not only return the Inn to its former beauty but it will provide for the restoration of a national landmark which played a significant role in the development of a new nation. It will give children of all ages and scholars the opportunity through books and other communication media the opportunity to link with past generations. It will also enable visitors from all over the country to obtain information concerning the many historical and cultural opportunities available to them in the King of Prussia-Valley Forge area. Finally, it will provide an area in the now highly developed King of Prussia area which emphasizes the heritage of the area.

The restoration of the King of Prussia Inn will achieve the following measurable objectives:

1. The Inn will now be usable and capable of providing the space for the activities described above.
2. Entrance and exit ramps will be constructed so that traffic patterns will not be hampered.
3. Parking will be provided both on the site and at adjoining areas.
4. Historical lectures, movies and multimedia programs will be available to the general public, scholars, school children, and other individuals interested in the area's history.
5. A library, uniforms, photos, sketches, genealogy, furniture, and other historical artifacts will comprise a museum area within the structure.

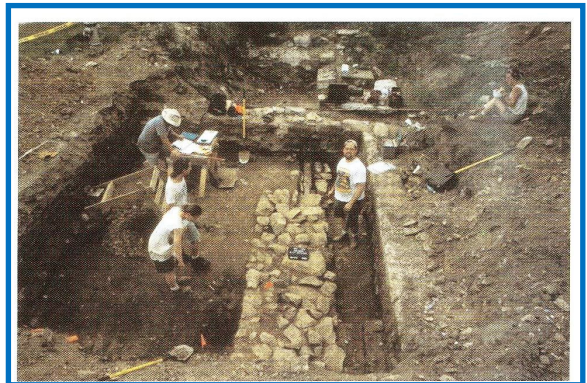
In summary, the King of Prussia area was a small village that refuses to die. The Peacock Gardens Inn, now called Mr. Ron's, is a thriving restaurant. Two hundred years ago it was the home of Dr. Henry DeWitt Pawling. An antique shop still operates on the site of a house built in the late 1700's. The building served as a general store for over 100 years. The quiet little stream that flowed through the hamlet in the days of George Washington continues to exist at a site adjacent to the King of Prussia Inn. It is almost uncanny that these traces of history have survived despite massive changes in the area. It is the intention of the King of Prussia Historical Society that these priceless gifts from the past not be permitted to die. The King of Prussia Inn was an outstanding public facility in its time. The historian, Daniel Boorstein, describes the nucleus of all communities as their inns and hotels. While the King of Prussia Inn had great social and economic value, it was also a beautiful building. Historical architects and scholars will view the restored Inn as

one of the outstanding representatives of colonial architecture.

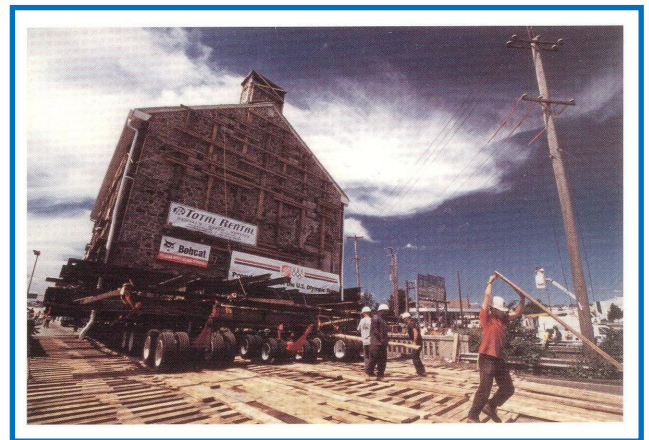
In the national, historical and cultural community, these are sufficient reasons to restore this priceless treasure.

The Inn will not be a passive historical monument. The success of the restoration must be evaluated with the following criteria:

1. A museum will be constructed;
2. A library will be developed;
3. A tourist information center will be available to visitors from all over the country;
4. A headquarters will be established for Society meetings and lectures which will be transferred from the Roberts School (a structure which had been previously restored by the Historical Society.)



(Excavation at the Inn; photo courtesy of the King of Prussia Historical Society.)



(Moving the Inn, August 2000; photo courtesy of the King of Prussia Historical Society.)



(Photo courtesy of Michael Morrison.)

MUSEUM TO REPLACE ANTIQUE SHOP IN "KING"

by Clare Thomson, KING OF PRUSSIA COURIER, September 8, 1965.

"I for one feel that if there's one little thing left, we should hold on. That's why I thought of the museum," said Lucretia H. Morrison as she discussed plans for turning the King of Prussia Antique Shop into a museum.

The shop located at the intersection of Routes 23 and 202, is tucked away behind a gasoline station and located on what is probably one of the township's most valuable pieces of land.

... The museum which she hopes to open in the spring will be run by Mrs. Morrison. Her idea is to have school children come with their teachers (she's a former school teacher) to see how things were in the past.

"Children are very interested...they have no idea of what oil lamps and coffee mills are", she said adding that the museum "would explain things that have become extinct."

Stepping into the store is like taking a step back into the past. It has a strange musty smell, not offensive, perhaps something like taking a whiff of bygone days.

Contents of the store sit waiting for auction. The old things which will be in the museum were used as "props" when the store was in operation.

Old and new offer a strange contrast--- the old is present everywhere in the store with many objects of the pre-Revolution era while outside cars and trucks whiz by on the busy highway.

Jars holding penny candy sit on the counter, shelves behind the counter display dry goods (fabrics) and a display of old-fashioned shoes and boots is in the center of the room.

Against one wall is the old King of Prussia Post Office. Lucrecia Morrison acted as postmaster of the fourth class post office from 1937 to 1947. In 1937 residents were served by the Bridgeport Post Office but wanted a King of Prussia address. ...

The post office back then had about 39 boxes opened with keys in contrast to the huge bank of boxes in the present post office which use combination locks. ...

Morrison collects old tools which will be housed in the museum. There's a collection of wooden planes which were needed to make the mouldings used in olden times. There also are old surveyor's instruments and wooden rakes.

The store offers a contrast to present merchandising methods as it houses all types of merchandise under one roof as opposed to the King of Prussia Plaza with its variety of specialty shops just across the street.

The future museum was an original country store, according to records of the King of Prussia Historical Society, and a private home in the late 1700's. In 1848 it was first documented as a store and the old counters, shelves, and bins were preserved and used with nothing changed. ...

One room in the museum will be a "child's room"---a playroom to interest children so that they can see "what went on back then".

Admission fees will be nominal---\$.50 for adults and \$.25 for children. Children accompanied by teachers will be admitted free.

Some of the objects slated for display date way back. There's a cradle from the early 1700's which swings at the touch of a finger and could hold a two-year old child.

And there's a coffee roaster consisting of a metal cylinder mounted on a pole. Coffee beans were placed in the container and held over the fire.

A hand cart used to move heavy objects looks like the type in use today except that its wheels are iron.

A sled from the 1700's bears little resemblance to present ones. It looks a bit like a bicycle with a large wooden top used for steering.

There will also be a wine press, coffee mill, and a rather cumbersome-looking device once used to shell peas. ...

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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 [in-fo@kophistory.org](mailto:info@kophistory.org)

June 12 ~ 2:00 pm: Field Trip: *Roberts School*

No meetings in July or August

September 10 ~ 2:00 PM: Michael Morrison:
Slim the Lineman

September 17 ~ 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM:
Montgomery County History Day
Theme: Necessities

Heckler Plains Farmstead

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](#)

est. 1953

**KING OF PRUSSIA
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**



PO BOX 60716
KING OF PRUSSIA PA 19406-0716

A Commitment to Preservation!