

The King of Prussia Gazette

Preserving Upper Merion's Past to Enliven its Future

Volume I, Number One

Fall 2012

THE REBIRTH OF THE KING OF PRUSSIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

by Michael Morrison

On April 24, 2012, a meeting was held at the Historic King of Prussia Inn to sign papers that would finally re-establish the King of Prussia Historical Society, and bring it back to the people of Upper Merion. This meeting was twelve years in the making!

On August 20, 2000, the 550-ton King of Prussia Inn was moved less than a half mile from its original location in the middle of US 202, to its new home on Bill Smith Boulevard. That day, thousands of onlookers witnessed the miracle of that move; an engineering feat second to none. What grew out of saving the inn was an awakened interest in our local history, and the acute need for an organization prepared to tell that story.

A group originally established in 1953 as the "Committee to Save the King of Prussia Inn", was successful in saving the structure from being removed when US 202 was to be widened for the first time. Although it resulted in the inn being stranded between the north and southbound lanes of the highway, at least it was spared the wrecking ball. In 1956 due to the success they achieved in saving the inn, the Committee broadened its scope to include other important buildings in Upper Merion, and was renamed the "King of Prussia Historical Society". This group of dedicated individuals was extremely active in the community, and for over 30 years documented our local history and valiantly attempted to preserve it. The Old Roberts School is an excellent example of a structure saved and restored by the Society.

As more and more of our history gave way to progress, the society found itself with a building that was falling apart, and a dwindling membership. There was no real official end to the functioning Society, and when the King of Prussia Inn was moved, interest began to grow again, but somewhere along the line the King of Prussia Chamber of Commerce, the forerunner to the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, absorbed it. Meetings were held shortly after the Inn was moved, to try to open up the Society once again, but the idea was always met with resistance. It was not until this year that the Chamber finally agreed to allow the name to be licensed, in time for our Tricentennial celebration in 2013. The Society will be actively seeking members to help preserve our history, and share it with the community.

We then envision the building as a Welcome Center, a Museum, and a meeting place for the King of Prussia Historical Society as well as other community organizations. Of course, funding is in short supply right now, so we must be creative. However, this "three-prong approach" has a great deal of merit and is more likely to appeal to those handing out the dough. The four offices on the second floor could continue to be revenue producers, and I would hope that the King of Prussia District would consider moving into the building, as it just makes sense.

If you share this vision and would like to become part of the process, please let me know and we will schedule a meeting convenient for everyone.



Photo, Courtesy of Pam McLean-Parker

K of P Historical Society Officers: J. Michael Morrison, President; Marianne Hooper, Secretary/Treasurer; Frank Luther, Chairman.

...preserving and sharing Upper Merion's 300 year History

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.

OUR PURPOSE

The goals of the Society are fourfold:

To encourage research in the history of Upper Merion Township and adjoining communities, regularly exchange local historical knowledge, and present such research in a public forum.

To promote interest and research in local history by publishing and distributing a periodical entitled *THE KING OF PRUSSIA GAZETTE*, dedicated to proclaim historic truths and to ennoble the present through a recognition of the past.

To collect, archive, and preserve the various documents, photographs and artifacts of local historic significance that have, or will, become the property of the Society.

To maintain a cooperation with the teachers and administration of the Upper Merion Area School District, and the Upper Merion Township Library, designed to increase community interest in local history.

MEETINGS

Members and friends of the King of Prussia Historical Society are invited to regular meetings nine times a year. No meetings will be scheduled in July, August, and December. A topic dealing with local history will be presented following a brief business meeting. Meetings will be held at 2:00 in the Upper Merion Township Building.

An "Annual Meeting" will be held each January. The purpose of this meeting will include the election of Directors and Officers, the reporting of the business of

the Society, and for any other objectives that may be deemed necessary.

WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN

Your membership supports the Society's efforts to preserve Upper Merion Township's past through maintenance and expansion of our written and photographic archives, the on-going development of our website, and the continuation of our public programs on local community history.

Annual membership entitles you to receive by mail quarterly issues of **THE KING OF PRUSSIA GAZETTE**, which features articles about our local history and other valuable information.

Members will have an opportunity to meet like-minded neighbors, community leaders, and historians who share an interest in expanding the knowledge of the fascinating history of Upper Merion Township and its architecture, genealogy, and other remarkable intriguing aspects.

VOLUNTEERS

The Society benefits greatly by the knowledge and expertise of dedicated and capable volunteers whose efforts enable all of our varied activities, from coordinating our public programs to working with our archives and managing our publications and our website.

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

Members can volunteer for:

- meeting setup
- computer data entry
- programs and events
- website assistance
- social networking
- advertising

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

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

SWEDESBURG'S TRICENTENNIAL

A year before Upper Merion was recognized as a separate township in 1713, the village of Swedesburg had already been established a year before.

William Penn and his Quaker settlers arrived in Pennsylvania in 1682, but there were some primitive settlements in Pennsylvania long before Penn's arrival. The Swedish settlements were established prior to 1640.

The end of the Swedish nation on the Delaware was sealed in March 1681 when William Penn received his charter for Pennsylvania. This was supplemented, on 24 August 1682, by deeds to Penn from James, Duke of York, adding the three lower counties (present Delaware). Although Penn did not come to the Delaware until late October 1682, twenty-three ships arrived from England in 1681-82 carrying his Quaker followers. The domination of the up-river Swedish nation was now history.

William Penn courted the Swedes' favor and it was desperately needed for his new enterprise. Not only did the Swedes provide food and housing for the newcomers but also essential services in negotiating with the native Indians. Peter Rambo, Peter Cock, Lase Cock, Mins Cock, Sven Svensson, and Peter Petersson Yocum were called upon to serve as interpreters in the purchase of lands from the Indians, lands which the Swedes had purchased many decades before. Maryland challenged Penn's claims to lands on the Delaware. Finally, the Swedes cooperated in providing Penn the lands he wanted for the City of Philadelphia, for his Pennsbury estate, and for disposition to new settlers."

While the Swedes took up no lands in Lower Merion, they made an important settlement within two miles of its borders. In 1684, two years after Penn's arrival, a company of them accepted a right to 1000 acres of land which was afterward laid out in what is now Upper Merion Township. Penn had set aside 5,000 acres in present Upper Merion for future Swedish settlement. But after Penn left Philadelphia on 12 August 1684 to return to England, Peter became increasingly distrustful of the provincial government. Penn had promised him 500 acres from his daughter Laetitia Penn's tract in present Upper Merion township ...Peter Peterson Yocum had been on close personal terms with William Penn. But after Penn left Philadelphia on August 12, 1684 to return to England, Peter Yocum became increasingly distrustful of the provincial government. Penn had promised him 500 acres from his daughter Laetitia Penn's tract in present Upper Merion Township in exchange for the surrender of his land at Pennypack.

About 1712, a number of Swedish families moved from the Delaware to their new farms, which were laid out along the Schuylkill from Swedes' Ford nearly to the Gulf hills. Among them were families named Rambo and Yocum, many of whose descendants lived among the Welsh. Peter Rambo's son, Gunnar Rambo, and his grandson, John Rambo, were among the first settlers of the Swedes' tract at Matsunk (Swedeland).

One of the earliest Swedish settlers in Upper Merion was Matthias Holstein, Jr. who was born on July 1, 1681 in Passyunk, Moyamensing, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Matthias moved to Upper Merion with his wife; he purchased 1,000 acres of land, beginning at the Schuylkill River, comprising what is now the borough of Bridgeport and extending one and one half miles west to the top of Red Hill. The oldest deed for this land is dated 1708. Matthias resided for a time at Swedes' Ford, and in 1714 he built a stone house on his farm, a mile and a half from the river. The Swedish settlers of that day chose the sites for their dwellings near springs and streams of water. These dwellings descended from father to son.

The large stone barn which Matthias built at the same time was considered remarkable, and it was reported that people came from long distances to examine it. Prior to and during the building of Christ's Swedish Church, services were held in the barn, since the threshing floor could accommodate all of the community. Eventually, the old barn was torn down to make room for a still larger one.

The Swedes had settled near the mouth of the Schuylkill in 1642, and it has been shown that Peter Cox had made a purchase of land within the present limits of Upper Merion before 1702. Gunnar Rambo in the same year had endeavored to secure a tract beside him. The Swedes came into the township about 1712, and settled on a large tract which they purchased from the Welsh, who had preceded them. The names of these early settlers were Mats Holstein, Gunnar Rambo, Peter Rambo, Peter Yocum, and John Matson.

The Swedes settled several hundred acres each on land which ran from the present borough of Bridgeport down to the Lower Merion Township line, and back nearly two miles from the river. It had been recorded that this fertile tract of land was almost unequaled in Pennsylvania and comprised nearly one-fourth of the present area of the township. On this tract the names of Swedes' Ford, Swedes' Church, Swedesburg, Swedeland and Matson's Ford indicate the presence of these settlers.

At the Swedes' Ford, in 1733, the settlers built a small school building, which was also used for religious services whenever a pastor could journey out into the country. Burials were made in the adjoining ground.

THE FIRST NATIONAL THANKSGIVING DAY



Joseph Plumb Martin was born in western Massachusetts in 1760. His father was a pastor who often got in trouble for speaking his mind too freely. At the age of seven, Joseph was sent to live with his affluent grandfather. When the war started in 1775, Martin was eager to enlist, but he was too young. Many of Martin's friends had enlisted and Martin was under peer pressure to join his friends.

At a time when less than half of all Americans were literate, Joseph "Plumb" Martin, was an exception. Though young and penniless, Private Plumb could read and write. Very well, in fact, having received a free education while growing up in Massachusetts, the most progressive of the colonies.

In June of 1776, at the age of 15, Martin, though wary of a long enlistment, decided "to take a priming before I took upon me the whole coat of paint for a soldier." Thus, much to the chagrin of his grandparents, Martin enlisted for six months as a private in the Connecticut state troops. After serving at the Battles of Brooklyn and White Plains on the side of the Patriots, the farm boy decided not to reenlist in December 1776. But a long winter at home proved too dull for the teenage veteran. He enlisted again in 1777, this time in Washington's Continental army, and served for the duration of the war, seeing action at a number of major battles.

At the age of 70, the venerated veteran then living in Maine published **A NARRATIVE OF SOME OF THE ADVENTURES, DANGER AND SUFFERING OF A REVOLUTIONARY SOLDIER, INTERSPERSED WITH ANECDOTES OF INCIDENTS THAT OCCURRED WITHIN HIS OWN OBSERVATION.** The book which did not sell particularly well fell into obscurity until rediscovered in the 1960s when it was republished with the title *Private Yankee Doodle*. Martin recorded his observations of the First National Thanksgiving at Gulph Mills.

On December 12, the troops began the move from Whitemarsh to the west bank of the Schuylkill River at Valley Forge. It was a thirteen mile march that was delayed and took eight days.

The troops had crossed the Schuylkill on a wobbly, makeshift bridge in an area called the Gulph. They were forced to bivouac at the Gulph for several days after a snowstorm and several days of icy rain made roads impassable. On December 18, the soaked and miserable troops observed a Day of Thanksgiving declared by Congress for the American victory in October at Saratoga, N.Y.

Private Plumb's journal entry, written on Thanksgiving Day, 1777 was timely and poignant. In plainspoken but penetrating prose, the eighteen-year-old Martin conveyed in stark detail what the common soldier faced, endured, and, sometimes, survived.

While we lay here there was a Continental thanksgiving ordered by Congress; and as the army had all the cause in the world to be particularly thankful, if not for being well off, at least, that it was no worse, we were ordered to participate in it. We had nothing to eat for two or three days previous, except what the trees of the fields and forests afforded us. But we must now have what Congress said, a sumptuous Thanksgiving to close the year of high living we had now nearly seen brought to a close." Our country, ever mindful of its suffering army, opened her sympathizing heart so wide upon this occasion as to give us something to make the world stare. And what do you think it was, reader?" Guess. You cannot guess, be you as much of a Yankee as you will. I will tell you: It gave each and every man half a gill of rice and a tablespoonful of vinegar!" With this extraordinary superabundant donation, we were ordered out to attend a meeting and hear a sermon delivered upon the happy occasion.

We accordingly went, fo we could not help it. I heard a sermon, a "thanksgiving sermon", what sort of one I do not know now, nor did I at the time I heard it. I had something else to think upon. My belly put me in remembrance of the fine Thanksgiving dinner I was to partake of when I could get it. Well, we had got through the services of the day and had nothing to do but to return in good order to our tents and fare as we could. As we returned to our camp, we passed by our commissary's quarters. All his stores, consisting of a barrel about two-thirds full of hocks of fresh beef, stood directl in our way, but there was a sentinel guarding even that.

However, one of my messmates purloined a piece of it, four or five pounds perhaps. I was exceeding glad to see him take it; I thoghut it mught help to eke out our Thanksgiving supper, but alas! How soon my expectations were blasted! The sentinel saw him have it as soon as I did and obliged him to return it ot the barel again. So I had nothing esle to do but to go home and meke out my supper as usual, upon a log of nothing and no turnips.

... The army was now not only starved but naked. The greatest part were not only shirtless and barefoot but destitute of all other clothing, especially blankets. I procured a small piece of raw cowhide and made myself a pair of moccasins, which kept my feet (while they lasted) from the frozen ground. Though the hard edges of the moccasins galled my ankles, this was better than going barefoot, as hundreds of my companions had to, till they might be tracked by their blood upon the rough frozen ground.

The army continued at or near the Gulf for some days, after which we marched for teh Valley Forge in order to take up winter quarters. We were now in a truly forlorn condition-no clothing, no provisions and as disheartned as need be.



est. 1953
KING OF PRUSSIA
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.kophistory.org

Join us today
 to preserve Upper Merion's past
 to enliven its future!

PICTURE THIS!



These structures pictured above still survive in Upper Merion Township. Do you know where they are? The road at the left that curves around the barn might be a clue.

The original barn was built in 1790 in Upper Merion Township. The smaller building attached to the barn was added in 1802 by the same person (S. H. M. whose initials appear on the date stones).

See page 7 for the answer.



POTTS' LANDING AT SWEDELAND



ROBERT TOWER POTTS, OF SWEDELAND

William W. Potts was born at Swedeland on December 1, 1838, the youngest son of Robert T. and Eliza M. (Hitner) Potts. Robert T. Potts, his father was born on his father's farm in Plymouth Township on January 11, 1790. After leaving school he worked in the store of Harman Yerkes at Harmanville for a time. He soon went to Philadelphia and entered the employ of Isaac Lawrence. Later, Robert became a partner in business with Isaac. The firm carried on a large dry-goods business and after the death of Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Potts associated himself with Mr. Reynolds and later Mr. McFarland, the firm name becoming Potts, Reynolds & Co.

In 1840, Robert Potts retired from the business and moved to a one hundred acre farm in Swedeland, where he lived until his death. His farm was called Potts' Landing. In politics he was an active Whig and was a candidate for congress at one time.

In 1828, Robert T. Potts married Mrs. Elizabeth McCalla Weaver, daughter of Daniel Hitner of Marble Hall, and widow of William Weaver. She had two sons by her first marriage. Robert T. Potts died in Swedeland on December 13, 1873 at the age of eighty-four. His wife died in 1851, at the age of fifty-nine.

Robert's grandfather was Zebulon Potts who was born on the family's old homestead near Plymouth Meeting House in Plymouth Township and became a farmer in the township. Zebulon married Martha Trotter of Philadelphia in 1771. He was the first sheriff of Montgomery County after its organization and was also a state senator. He died while he was serving his second term in this office. Although he was a firm member of the Society of Friends he was disowned by the Society since he had entered the Revolutionary Army. He took part in the battle of Brandywine and other historic struggles and was a member of the committee of safety with Robert Morris and others. A price was set on his head by the British government. He served as justice of a court in Philadelphia.

The Potts Family had been in America from the earliest times. William Potts' great-great-grandfather, David Potts came to America in 1681 from Bristol, England with William Markham who was appointed by his first cousin, Governor William Penn, and served as acting governor while Penn was in England. Markham sailed for America soon after his appointment. He landed in Boston and made his way to New York where he showed his credentials and took official control of the Delaware territories which had also been given to Penn. On 3 August 1681, Markham arrived in Upland (now Chester, Pennsylvania), the only town in the colony at that time. He assembled a governing council that included six Quakers and three other early colonists. As governor, Markham helped select the site for Philadelphia, bought land from the Indians along the Delaware River and Pennsbury Manor, and began the discourse with Lord Baltimore over the disputed boundary between Pennsylvania and Maryland.

A young man at the time of his immigration, David Potts settled at Bristol, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. He was a member of the Society of Friends and by occupation a farmer. In 1693, he married Alice Crosdale who had come to America on the ship *Welcome* with William Penn.



HOME OF ROBERT TOWER POTTS, AT SWEDELAND. Built in 1835.

Home of Robert Potts at Swedeland, 1835

William attended the public schools at Swedeland and in 1851 he entered Haverford College; in 1854, he entered the Pennsylvania State College at Bellefonte. On completing his education, he enlisted in Company K, Fourth Pennsylvania Infantry, in April, 1861. After his return from the war, he resumed his agricultural pursuits at Swedeland. In politics, Mr. Potts is a Republican and served as an Upper Merion school director for some time, being treasurer of the board part of the time. On November 9, 1870, William married Ella Holstein, daughter of Dr. George W. and Abby Holstein, of Bridgeport. They had five children.

William W. Potts enlisted on April 20, 1861 as a private in Company K, commanded by Captain Walter H. Cooke, Fourth Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, commanded by Colonel, afterwards Major General John Hartranft. They were mustered into service at Camp Curtin, Harrisburg, and were supplied with arms and knapsacks but no uniforms. They started at once for Perryville, Maryland, where they encamped, and while learning the drill, they did duty in keeping the line open between Philadelphia and Washington. From Perryville, they were sent to Annapolis, Maryland, where they remained for some time.

Company K next went to Washington and from there to Alexandria, where they remained until their time expired. While at Alexandria, their line was attacked and the skirmish which resulted was one of the first of the war. As their time expired, just before the battle of Bull Run, they were requested to stay until after the battle. A vote was taken and Potts was one of those who voted that they should stay. He was discharged at Harrisburg on July 26, 1861, the expiration of his term.

After remaining at home for a few months, he enlisted again as second lieutenant in a company raised in Delaware County. They went to Harrisburg, but since the company was not accepted, he and his men enlisted in Company F., commanded by Captain Frank Crosbey of the One Hundred and Twenty-fourth Pennsylvania Vol-

unteers. The company was raised in Chester and Delaware counties and nearly half of its men were members of the Society of Friends. As the officers of the company had all been chosen when he entered it, he was again a private. Later he was made corporal and afterwards sergeant. Being the only one in the company who had seen service, he acted as drillmaster until he was wounded.

From Harrisburg his company was sent to Washington and camped at Arlington Heights, Fort Albany, where they remained until the Antietam campaign. On September 9, 1862, he started in the Maryland campaign. On the evening of September 15 his company crossed South Mountain and had pursued the enemy to Antietam Creek. On September 17, Potts was engaged in one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. He was in advance of the line and received a gunshot wound in the right foot, which ended his active service. He was sent to Harrisburg where he placed himself in the hands of a private physician. Mustered out of service on February 10, 1863 because of the wounds he received in battle, he returned to Swedeland.

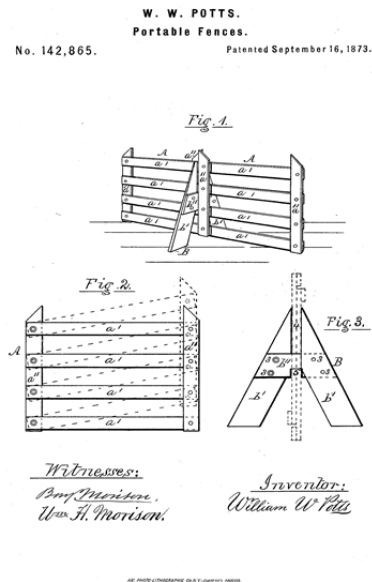
William W. Potts took a very active part in the Patrons of Husbandry, laboring earnestly on behalf of farming interests throughout the county and state. His grange connection was probably responsible for his entrance into politics. He became a candidate for the legislature in 1898 and made many speeches throughout the county on behalf of the legislative ticket but failed to be elected.

Potts took an active interest in the work of the Montgomery County Historical Society, having been chairman of the committee which erected the Lafayette monument at Barren Hill (This monument was replaced with a state marker and the original is now in the back area of the site of the Historical Society in Norristown.). He was a public-spirited man, and an earnest worker in everything that benefitted the community in which he lived. He was devoted to farming interests and stood high among the agriculturists of Upper Merion Township and Montgomery County.

In 1845, William's father, Robert, was recognized at the Philadelphia Agricultural Exhibition, sponsored by the Philadelphia Agricultural Society, for his O.K. or Swedeland wheat. At the United States Centennial Commission's 1876 International Exhibition, William W. Potts exhibited iron-post portable fence that was simple, durable, economical, and storm proof and saved time and money.

On June 18, 1873, William W. Potts filed an application for a patent for a portable fence. This application was approved on September 16, 1873. In his application, William stated that the object of his invention was to

produce a portable fence for farm and other purposes, which would be simple and inexpensive to construct, easily erected and removed, and as occasion required, whether on level or hilly land, would be sustainable and reliable.



PICTURE THIS!

Those structures pictured on page 5 are the site of the current Village Mart on Shoemaker Road. The road bending at the upper left is Shoemaker Road.



The barn was built in 1799 by former U.S. Rep. Samuel Henderson of Pennsylvania, whose house still stands across the road. (It is now an office building owned by Pasquale Properties.) In the barn Henderson stored equipment from the rock quarry he ran, horses and his prize-winning bull.

In 1932, near the end of the Prohibition era, the barn was used as a bootlegging operation and was raided by police. In 1963, the Village Mart was opened. In the surrounding fields during construction, old cannonballs, coins from as far back as 1853, and a sword were found.

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!
UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP IS CELEBRATING ITS TRICENTENNIAL!
SEPTEMBER 2012-DECEMBER 31, 2013**



**Check out [Upper Merion Township Tricentennial](#) on Facebook
and Upper Merion Township Website at www.umtownship.org for up-to-date information!**

And Check out the King of Prussia Historical Society at www.kophistory.org.



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