

The King of Prussia Gazette

Preserving Upper Merion's Past to Enliven its Future

Volume VI, Number Three

Fall 2017

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Michael Morrison

We are all the Gatekeepers of History

Last year I found myself standing on the roof of 251 DeKalb apartments. It was a cold and windy day, and I was there to photograph the King of Prussia skyline from what I believe to be the highest point in the township. I was accompanied by educator and fellow historian David Montalvo, and we were both on a mission to capture an image of the ever-evolving town of King of Prussia, nestled within a lovely background of fall colors.



(Stewart Fund Hall which stood at DeKalb Pike and Allendale Road)

As I stood trying to steady my camera against the wind, I thought about how things had changed since I first began taking pictures of our town so many years ago. It took the US Bicentennial for me to begin to realize that things were changing all around me, but I had no idea that they would change at such an alarmingly fast pace.



(The Village of Port Kennedy)

Then it hit me. We are all gatekeepers of history, and now it is more important than ever to document the changes we see. We all have an advantage over earlier historians though, and that little advantage is of course, the camera in a cell phone. With it we are now all historians, and we are now all tasked with the responsibility of documenting the present, in order to learn for the future.

Think about it, the reason there are no pictures of the "Purple Cow" at the old Plaza is probably because we all thought it would be around forever. It was not; and so many things like it have vanished forever.

As I have always said, if you don't embrace your history, you are destined to repeat it, and not even know why. Please take a moment to look around and document what you see, because in the blink of an eye it will all change.

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(Catfish Dam Lockhouse)

The Town Crier—

updates from the Society...

OUR 2017 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 2018 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	

The Society accepts PayPal for dues and donations.

**OUR MAILING ADDRESS**

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

FROM NANCY POWELL-DALEY, CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS

Hi, there, relatives, friends, and Mr. Qubain, I recently came across this old picture of yours truly (c. age 13-14) sitting in the old front yard of the Powell house in 1956 before the road was elevated and widened and all the development took place. It's the same fence (as was just removed) which was originally at my great aunt's house down in Oakmont, PA. Of course, the stone bench, the birdbath, and the big flower boxes were just hauled away in pieces. My movers moved the stone vases up here, and they're now on my back patio. They were all bought by my great uncle c. 1930 after they married. Allendale Road, then, was a country road of about a lane and 1/2; when cars passed each other, you had to go toward the roadside to pass safely. You probably had to go to Wayne or Norristown to the grocery store.

What a time lapse.

Best,
Nancy P.-D.

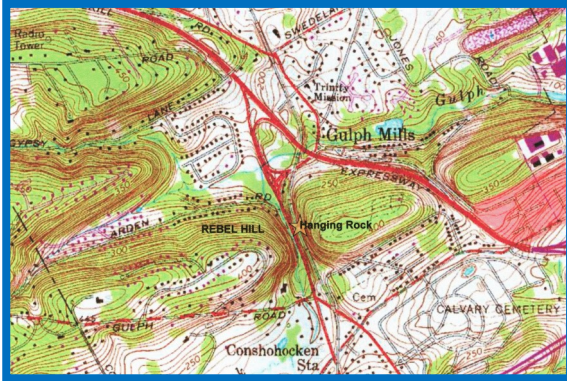
The house is located at 158 Allendale Road and went on the market last fall. With the value of the land in that district, not much hope is held out for the home itself. The oldest section of the home was the north side (gable end), built in 1750. An addition was added to the south side in 1917, adding a dining room and kitchen. A porch was added in 1956, covering over the old pump and well.

It was a tenant house for Billy Walker's Farm and then he sold it to the Powell family in 1944. They moved in during that summer according to the writing inside the cellar wall. So, it has been the Powell residence since then. The police station was next door at one time where a law office is now located.

Nancy Powell Daley was kind enough to donate many items of interest to the society and has allowed us to make a photo documentation of the property. We will be posting some of the many treasures that we have acquired on our website.

THE DEMISE OF REBEL HILL, part 3

by John J. Hagan and reprinted with his permission



(Current map of area.)

MORE EARLY MAPS

An 1886 map of Mechanicsville showed six dwellings on the Upper Merion side of Matsonsford, with three out-buildings sitting back from the road. The two properties nearest to the West Conshohocken line were identified as belonging to Charles Rodenbach. There is also a schoolhouse located near the intersection of Matsonsford Road and Old Gulph Road, and a Baptist church located at that intersection. Although they were not named on the map, these were Calvary Baptist Church and School. There are sixteen buildings situated on the left side (ascending the hill) of Rebel Hill Road and thirteen on the right side. The owners of only two dwellings on the left are identified, namely Henderson Supplee and Mrs. DeHaven. The owners identified on the right side include E. Saxe, T. Daly, D. Kinsey, Ed. Hiltner and H. Miller, who owned two houses side-by-side. The houses on Rebel Hill Road begin at the intersection with Matsonsford Road and continue to the crest of the hill. The road then enters a large wooded tract owned by Samuel Tinkler, where it makes a bend to the right and continues on in a northeasterly direction until its junction with Balligomingo Road. There are no more houses until, just before that intersection, there is one solitary dwelling on the left side of the road. This house fronts on Rebel Hill Road, but owing to its location, would be more properly considered to lie in Gulph Mills. On this map, Belfont Avenue now shows only five houses, all located on its downhill side. The owner of only one house is identified. This was the home of D. Donovan. The two houses located at the western end of Belfont were those of Mrs. Wolfhorn and Doherty. Interestingly, a new, unnamed road appears running a short distance along the property of Mrs. DeHaven (lower down the hill than the previous road shown on the 1877 map). At the end of the road are two houses, one of them owned by John Yerkes. This road was the beginning of DeHaven Street and would become, by the middle of the next century, the other major street in Mechanicsville. In 1886 it extended only a few hundred feet and ended at the edge of a large tract owned by Joseph Griffith.

In J.L. Smith's Montgomery County Atlas, drawn in 1893, the area was still designated as Mechanicsville. This map showed five houses on the Upper Merion side of Matsonsford Road, one to the right of Rebel Hill Road

(as viewed from the Lower Merion side of Matsonsford) and four to the left. Charles Rodenbach owned the property on the right, and on the first property to the left was the home of T. Daily. There were now 19 homes on Rebel Hill Road. The nascent DeHaven Street still bordered the uphill property line of Mrs. DeHaven and ended at the home of John Virko. (20) Just beyond that home was the 70-acre property of Emily E. Griffith. Belfont Avenue looked mostly unchanged from 1886, with five houses on the downhill side, including the property of D. Donovan, and two houses at the end of the avenue, one identified as Doherty.

A map of the area drawn up in 1912 continued to identify the area as Mechanicsville. There were many dwellings along the Upper Merion side of Matsonsford Road, including tracts owned by Mrs. Masterson, Patrick Ready (5 acres), Thomas Daley, and Henderson Supplee (24+ acres). At the corner of Matsonsford and Old Gulph Roads sat the Gulph Christian Church and School, with the parsonage directly across the road in Lower Merion Township. Opposite Rebel Hill Road, on the Lower Merion side of Matsonsford, was the 111-acre estate of Mrs. Elizabeth Walker. On the northeast corner of her estate was an area identified as an iron ore quarry. This was on the opposite side of Matsonsford Road from Mechanicsville and just northeast of Rebel Hill Road. This must have been the quarry mentioned by M. Regina Stiteler Supplee in her HSMC Bulletin article of 1947. Tucked in between Mrs. Walker's estate and the West Conshohocken line was the 93-acre Mineral Valley Farm of Joseph E. Griffith. This farm derived its name from the iron ore and other minerals mined there prior to the Civil War. The map showed a dirt road leading back to an area known by local boys as "Griffie's Rocks", where generations of youngsters climbed over the rocks and through the naturally formed caves that existed there.

On this map, Rebel Hill Road still spanned the hill from Matsonsford Road to Balligomingo Road. The landowners identified included Henderson Supplee, Elizabeth E. Supplee, J. Barr and I. Fritz. As in 1886, dwellings ceased at the crest of the hill and the road passed through 9+ acres of land owned by Emma C. Jones and another parcel of unidentified land, before passing through the property of Rachael Tinkler. The Tinkler property spanned both sides of the road and there was a house on the property fronting on Rebel Hill Road with Balligomingo Road to its rear. The Tinkler family owned a woolen mill on Gulph Creek. There were three more small unidentified properties fronting Balligomingo Road and backing up on Rebel Hill Road before the latter intersected with the former. A small triangle of land formed by this intersection was identified as being owned by Rachael Tinkler, but there is no building shown. Sometime in the 1950's this property became the home of Walter and Harriet Bradley, who raised six children on that plot. As stated before, although the Rachael Tinkler houses and the other three properties fronted or abutted Rebel Hill Road, they were part of the Gulph Mills section of the township and not part of Mechanicsville or Rebel Hill.

By 1912 Belfont Avenue had been extended, descending the southwest side of the hill and intersecting with Old Gulph Road. The newer section of the street passed through land owned by Henderson Supplee (23+ acres) and, at the southwestern end near the intersection with Old Gulph Road, through land belonging to the De Kalb Realty Company. DeHaven Street had also been extend-

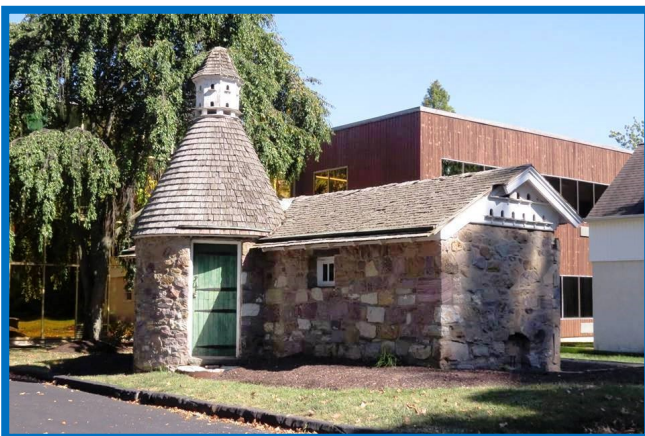
ed to the northeast beyond its 1886 length. The entire downhill side of this street was occupied by the 5-acre property of Patrick Ready that fronted on Matsonsford Road. The landowners identified on the uphill side, from southwest to northeast, were Lenore Buler, James Wack and Theodore Harrison. The name James Wack must be a mistake, since the federal censuses from 1900 through 1940 fail to record a James Wack ever living there. The property actually belonged to Harry Casper Wack, Sr., beginning at least by 1900. Harry was the son of Benjamin Brooks Wack of Tredyffrin Township, Chester County, and was, as far as the author can ascertain through research and family interviews, not related to anyone named James. The Wack family would become one of the dominant families on DeHaven Street, as we shall soon see. After Theodore Harrison's property, DeHaven Street came to an abrupt end in 1912 at the property line of Isaac D. Griffith. The reader might notice that the owner of this property in 1886 was Joseph Griffith, who now, in 1912, owned a farm on the opposite side of Matsonsford Road in Lower Merion Township. Isaac was Joseph Griffith's son. On the northwest corner of Isaac Griffith's land was a reservoir owned by the West Conshohocken Water Company. That reservoir no longer exists but it was once a favored hiking destination for local adolescents.

(In the next issue, BUILDING THE EXPRESSWAY.)



THESE OLD HOUSES

These unique and interesting, broken and small remnants of Upper Merion/King of Prussia's past, are a number of tiny examples of the township's history scattered or tucked away around Upper Merion: mile markers, estate pillars, parts of buildings, and buildings.



The Pigeon House of the old Lee-Irwin Estate, one of the remains of a couple of the Lee-Irwin Estate's out buildings. The estate was also known as Gen. Muhlenberg's Revolutionary War quarters and served as the Upper Merion Community Center in the 1970's and 1980's. The structure shown was used to raise pigeons, a practice that was a popular pastime about a hundred years ago. If you were a person of means you built a whole outbuild-

ing to house them. There are about three more remnants of outbuildings on the property.



Pictured above is "Ballygomingo," also known as Poplar Lane is on Boxwood Court and is on the National Register of Historic Places. The original portion was built in 1758 and expanded in 1816 and 1821.

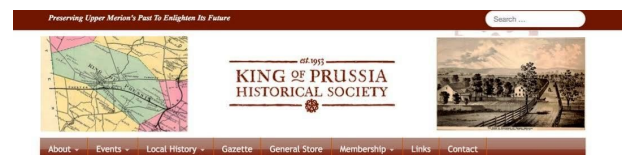


This unique, attractive, and Interesting historic old home of Upper Merion/King of Prussia close to the hanging rock at the corner of Arden and S. Gulph Roads, just above the creek. Many long-time residents of the township remember when a Nativity graced the front of the property during the Christmas season.

NEW LOOK OF THE WEBSITE

Our thanks to Dave Montalvo and Shirley Funkhouser, Society Board members for their work to create the new look for our website. Check it out at

www.kophistory.org.





MT. ZION AND THE ROBERTS FAMILY BURIAL GROUND

(This article originally appeared in THE ACORN, the quarterly newsletter of the Historical Society of Montgomery County, Spring 2017—from Our Blogs—Michael Green, Volunteer)

This cemetery in the King of Prussia area contains not only the burial remains of the Roberts family but also some 190 departed souls who were members of the Mount Zion AME Church in Norristown, Pennsylvania. The burial ground was established by Jonathan Roberts (1771-1854), who served as a United States Senator from 1814 to 1821. He died in 1854 and is buried there. Senator Roberts made provisions for the indigent to be buried in the area surrounding the central family plot. It is in this context that we embark on the journey of those of Mount Zion who were buried or reburied in this cemetery.

The journey of those Mount Zion parishioners was a long one, beginning with the founding of the church in 1832. According to the "History of Mt. Zion Church Anniversary Booklet" the church was organized by Mr. and Mrs. John Lewis. The church parishioners were reportedly "runaway slaves" who liberated themselves from the South and migrated to the Norristown area by way of the Underground Railroad.

These early church pioneers established their first building at Airy and Walnut Streets in a dwelling house. This period of self-determination was reportedly interrupted by slave owners arriving to abduct some of the parishioners and use the legal system to force their return South. As the story goes, two escaped slaves were to be transported South after capture. However, the local black residents and two white citizens protested. The latter paid the enslavers \$600 and \$300 respectively and successfully procured the men's freedom. According to the church record, it was during this disruptive time for the Norristown community that a number of the church members fled Norristown to Spring Mill, some even leaving for Canada. Members John and James Lewis held meetings and services in their residences in Spring Mill, near Conshohocken, during this time.

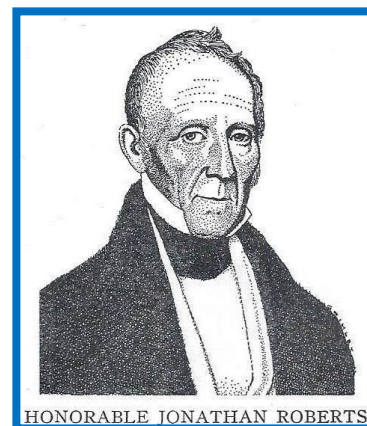
In 1845, the church members regrouped in Norristown, purchased land, and built a one-story church on Lafayette Street between Chain and Pearl and the Mount Zion Cemetery was formed. The church moved in 1853 to Basin Street and again in 1915 to its current location on Willow Street.

Once the church congregation moved, and with restrictions on where blacks could be buried, the bodies at Mount Zion Cemetery were removed and reinterred at the Roberts Burial Ground in the 1870's. It should be noted that a number of black Civil War veterans who were active members of Mount Zion were buried there as late as 1894.

The story of the Mount Zion Church is crowned by the congregation's efforts to advance voting rights in the 1870s, Pastor Amos Wilson's advocacy for Civil Rights in the 1880s, as well as the efforts to improve the education and welfare of the community. Not to be forgotten in this story is the commitment to humanity exhibited by the Roberts family whose leader years ago dedicated his land to the benefit of all.



The Society had a thread asking about the little cemetery up on the hill behind Steve's Sew'n'Vac on 202. This is the Roberts Family Cemetery. (It is NOT a pet cemetery as has sometimes been rumored.) Its most prominent grave is that of Jonathan Roberts, a US Representative and Senator from 1811-1821. His estate, Swamp Vras, is now the site of Valley Forge Memorial Gardens; the large white house was his family home. Jonathan Roberts' great-grandfather, John Roberts, emigrated to Pennsylvania from Northern Wales. John Roberts bequeathed 250 acres of "the plantation lying back in the woods" to his son Mathew. The Valley Forge Cemetery Association purchased eighty-one acres in 1915. Jonathan Roberts is the namesake of the Roberts School. He built the original old Roberts School for the education of the mill workers along Croton Road.



HONORABLE JONATHAN ROBERTS



ALAN WOOD STEEL COMPANY

(From the description of Records, 1728-1950 (bulk 1869-1937). (Hagley Museum & Library). WorldCat record id: 86123696)

The Alan Wood Steel Company was incorporated in Pennsylvania as the Alan Wood Company on January 23, 1929, and was renamed the Alan Wood Steel Company on February 16, 1929. It represented a reorganization and recapitalization of an earlier firm, the Alan Wood Iron and Steel Company. The firm was a small, family-controlled integrated steel company, producing primarily steel sheets.

The company traced its roots to James Wood (1771-1852), the grandson of an Irish Quaker immigrant. During the early 1800s he had worked at a number of forges in the Philadelphia area, mostly engaged in the manufacture of scythes and other agricultural implements. From 1826 to 1832 he operated the Delaware Iron Works on Red Clay Creek at Wooddale, Del., in partnership with his son Alan (1800-1881) and engaged in the manufacture of shovels.

In 1832 the entire operation was moved to Conshohocken, Pa., to obtain better access to the iron and anthracite coal coming down the Schuylkill Canal. The rolling mill and shovel factory was operated as James Wood & Son until 1840, when Alan and William W. Wood took over as Alan Wood & Brother. Alan left that same year to resume operation at the Delaware Iron Works, and his father came out of retirement and reconstituted the firm as James Wood & Sons. Puddling furnaces were built in 1847. In 1848 James again retired, and leadership was assumed by his son John (1816-1898) as J. Wood & Brothers. The Corliss Iron Works was constructed in 1864, and the firm was incorporated as the J. Wood & Brothers Company in 1886.

The Delaware Iron Works was leased by John Wood in 1840 and purchased outright by Alan Wood in 1843. Leaving his sons to operate this mill, Alan Wood established the Schuylkill Iron Works in 1857, next to the J. Wood & Brothers mill. It became an important producer of steel sheets and was incorporated on December 28, 1885, as the Alan Wood Company. The Delaware Iron Works was abandoned in 1889.

W. Dewees Wood, the son of Alan Wood, moved to western Pennsylvania and in 1851 established the McKeesport Iron Works with his uncle, Lewis A. Lukens,

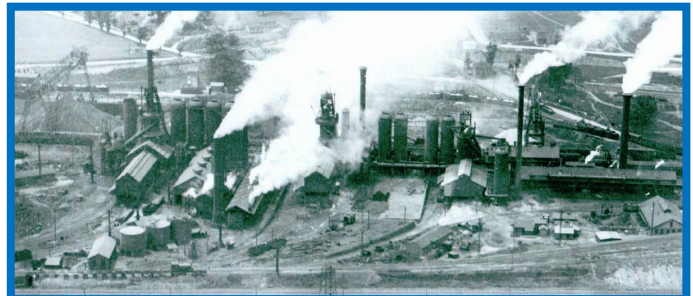
and several other partners. It produced a fine "planished" iron equal or superior to the best Russia sheet iron. A branch plant was established in Wellsville, on the Ohio River, in 1880. Both Wood and Lukens died in 1899, and their heirs sold the property in the following year.

In 1901 the Alan Wood Company was producing 25,000 tons of steel, and the family decided to become a fully integrated steel producer. The Alan Wood Iron & Steel Company was incorporated on December 1, 1901, and over the next two years constructed the Ivy Rock Steel Works just upriver from Conshohocken. The new firm absorbed the old Alan Wood Company on July 1, 1903. However, the J. Wood & Brothers Company remained independent and was not absorbed until March 14, 1917.

On December 1, 1911, the Alan Wood Iron & Steel Company acquired by merger the Richard Heckscher & Sons Company, owning blast furnaces at Swedeland on the west bank of the Schuylkill opposite Ivy Rock. The Rainey-Wood Coke Company was formed on July 11, 1918, as a joint venture of Wood, W. J. Rainey, Inc., a large western Pennsylvania coal producer who provided the coal, and the Koppers Company, who designed and built the by-product coke plant in Swedeland. The Upper Merion & Plymouth Railroad, organized in 1907, connected all the elements of the Wood steel-making complex.

In 1929 the Wood family sold a controlling interest to the Koppers Company, and the firm was reincorporated as the Alan Wood Steel Company. The firm leased two iron mines from the Warren Pipe & Foundry Company in 1929. The Scrub Oak Mine was located near Dover and the Washington Mine near Oxford. These mines were purchased outright in 1941. In 1947 the Wood family repurchased control of the company and continued to modernize, installing a Cold Rolled Department in 1954, a Research Department in 1958, an iron powder plant in 1959 and a basic oxygen furnace in 1968. It also attempted to integrate forward by buying the steel locker and shelving business of the Penn Metals Company in 1955.

As a small producer, Alan Wood Steel was particularly vulnerable to the competitive pressure that hit the American steel industry in the 1970s. The firm went into receivership and steel operations were shut down on August 1, 1977. The company was reorganized as the Vesper Corporation and continues in the steel shelving business. Part of the rolling mill complex was sold to Lukens Steel of Coatesville, and the rest of the works was razed in late 1990.



CANDLEBROOK

The King of Prussia Historical Society recently received a package in the mail with a note "...This photo and newspapers were found amongst my mother's papers. I would like to donate them to the historical society..." One of those was an August 20, 1980, King of Prussia Courier article, "Candlebrook - Convenience, Caring, Community."

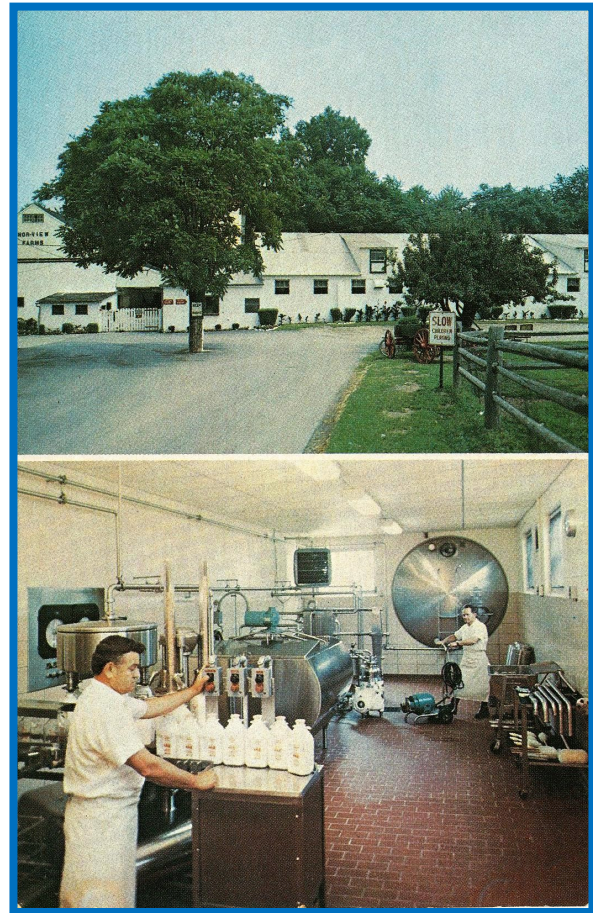
Candlebrook was one of the first big sections in Upper Merion. "It got its start in the post-World War II development boom, that eventually transformed Upper Merion from a primarily agricultural area to bustling business center."

The article goes on to talk about the Valley Forge Presbyterian Church, Candlebrook School, Valley Forge Shopping Center, Upper Merion High School, the King of Prussia Post Office, Wolfsohn Memorial Library, Upper Merion Junior High School, Red Hill Cemetery, Grant's department store fire, annual block parties, Prince Frederick and Tanglewood apartment buildings, and a cross-section of people with so many differences. There was a real sense of community.

Some things never change as the article ends with this to say about the future:

"Fear of commercialism and an increase in traffic would appear to be the principal concerns as Candlebrook enters the eighties. A few have hinted at the possibility of it turning into another 69th Street. For many, however, Candlebrook will remain a cohesive, residential community filled with people interested in the future of their neighborhoods."

(This article was published as a Friday Fact on FACEBOOK on May 12, 2017 and can be found on our website.)



(Nor-View Farm card, date unknown.)

NOR-VIEW FARM

Back in July of this year, Richard and Betsie Webber sent us the 3 X 5 card pictured above with this note: "Glad it has a new welcoming home!" On the reverse of the card is printed this message:

NOR-VIEW FARM DAIRY , 670 N. HENDERSON ROAD – KING OF PRUSSIA, Phone 265-2933 OWNED AND OPERATED BY THE BATTISTA FAMILY SINCE 1922

Producing delicious dairy products on the original homestead farm at King of Prussia for folks who appreciate freshness, quality and economy.

To see how "Nature's most nearly perfect food" is produced under the most sanitary conditions, visit THE COW PALACE at milking time (4:00 to 5:00 P.M. daily) and inspect our modern milking system. See milk flow thru glass lines – never exposed to atmosphere or human hands. Bring the children – they'll love it!

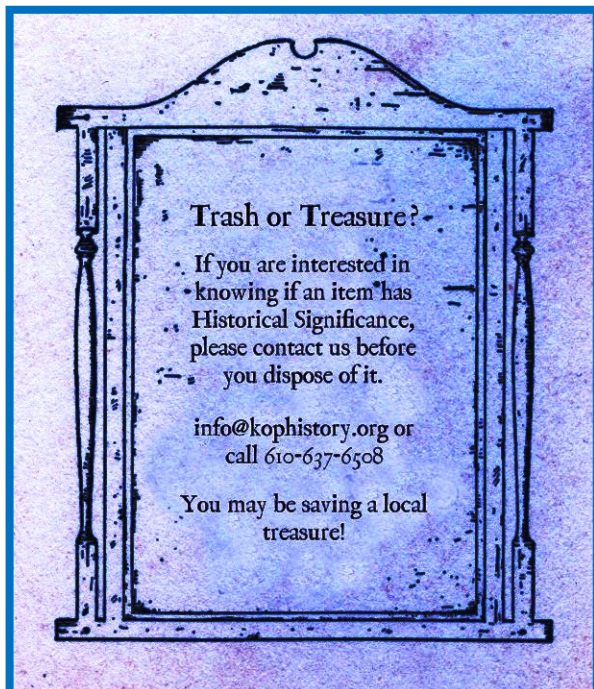
SAVE...BY PICKING UP YOUR MILK AT THE FARM!

TRY OUR QUALITY HOME-STYLE ICE CREAM

Over 30 Delicious Flavors of Old-Fashioned Ice Cream in Cones and Half Gallons

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OPEN DAILY AND SUNDAY



2017 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

September 9 ~ 2:00 PM	History of Upper Merion Schools
October 14 ~ 2:00 PM	Young Historians
November 11 ~ 2:00 PM	A Salute to Upper Merion Veterans
December 13 ~ 7:30 PM	Santa Lucia Feast: Holiday Celebration for the Society in Christ Church (Old Swedes)

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