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## MAY 2012

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# The Challenge

PRESERVATION • RESEARCH • EDUCATION

## Victorian Funerals and Mourning

A Presentation by Mr. Robert Reese

Thursday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 – 7:30 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church

Bethlehem Pike & East Mill Road in Flourtown, PA



Curtains would be drawn and clocks would be stopped at the time of death. Mirrors were covered with crape or veiling to prevent the deceased's spirit from getting trapped in the looking glass. A wreath of laurel, yew or boxwood tied with crape or black ribbons was hung on the front door to alert passersby that a death had occurred. The body was watched over every minute until burial, hence the custom of "waking".

When Queen's Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, died the whole of the realm went into mourning. Many experts agree that this was the start of Victorian era funeral craze. Indeed, there were funerals pitched at all levels of society. At their most elaborate, they could bring even a great metropolis like London to a standstill. Very elaborate rituals and traditions sprang up that dictated what to wear, how to mourn, and what type of service was appropriate based on your social standing. An entire industry was developed around the mourning rites and burial practices of the Victorian era funeral process. Victorian funerals were big business.

Please join us as STHS welcomes Mr. Robert Reese, who will provide us with a history and

understanding of many of the funeral customs that would seem strange to us by today's standards. Bob will present artifacts from the time period along with stories and the history of many of the traditions and customs from this era.

Bob Reese has served as the Vice President of the Friends of Hope Lodge and was the 2008 recipient of the Volunteer of the Year for the Friends of Hope Lodge. He has been involved with the activities of Hope Lodge since 2003. Besides his work at Hope Lodge, Bob enjoys historical re-enacting. He has been a Revolutionary War and Civil War re-enactor for 30 years, often portraying a Civil War chaplain. Bob also collects Victorian funeral artifacts, and has provided presentations on Victorian Funeral Traditions at many historic sites and for local societies.

This promises to be a fascinating and educational program on an interesting topic. The public is invited to attend, and there is no charge for admission. Reservations are not required. Light refreshments will be served.

**For more information call 215-233-4600**



Funeral Wreath

### PLEASE NOTE:

Attendees to the June program are encouraged to bring a canned food item to donate to the First Presbyterian Church's neighborhood food pantry. Please help us to support this important cause.

# President's Corner

My President's Corner articles have covered quite a number of very diverse topics over the past eight years, but sometimes the most obvious ones are those you don't think to write about. It hit me recently as I stood before an audience of over 160 people to introduce our guest speakers, Thomas Keels and Lawrence Arrigale, for that evening's "Philadelphia's Golden Age of Retail" presentation. I realized how fortunate the Springfield Township Historical Society (STHS) is to have such a dedicated loyal following that support our programs and events, and contribute financially to help fund the services that we provide to Springfield Township.

STHS was founded in 1985 by a small group of passionate and dedicated volunteers who made up the Board of Directors and oversaw the initial growth of the society. One of the founding members, Dorothy Cutler, still serves on our Board. She has seen the members of the Board change throughout the years, but its size has remained relatively stable with the current number at seventeen. What has grown tremendously is the number of STHS contributors, supporters and those benefiting from the services STHS provides. No longer are the people involved with STHS just those living in Springfield Township as they were twenty-seven years ago. Today they include people from all around the country and even abroad, who have visited our website, read our published books, requested information from us, visited our archives, donated items to our collection, and taken part in our events.

In just the past year STHS has hosted a number of events that were successful due to the support of its followers. These included historic

trolley tours of local country estates and revolutionary war sites that filled up three touring trolleys, attendance and donations from over 130 people for a dinner and auction that benefited the Black Horse Inn, and several speaker programs on topics of national, regional, and local interest that regularly drew over 120 people to each. A Springfield High School history class produced and donated copies of a driving tour CD of the Whitemarsh Encampment as a fundraiser for STHS. In addition, our collection continues to grow with donations of family photographs, paper documents, memorabilia, and stories. STHS has also received contributions of office equipment, including a recent, anonymous donation of almost \$2,000 towards the purchase of much needed new computer equipment and software. As of this writing another friend of STHS, who owns a beautiful historic home, has come forward to offer to host a STHS fundraiser in early summer. It has been through the generous contributions and support of our friends and followers that STHS has been able to grow so significantly in recent years. This has directly resulted in our being able to expand our service offerings, which are focused on the research, preservation, and education of Springfield's history.

STHS is an organization that exists as a steward for Springfield Township's history. We preserve the past, educate those in the present, and ensure that it will be available for future generations. The Board of STHS thanks each and every one of you who have been so instrumental in helping us grow and flourish in support of this important mission!

*Keeping the past in the present,*  
Ed Zwicker

## Furness Chapel Reborn in Local Healthcare Residence

By Dorothy C. Nickelson

Sometimes the best treasures are those that you stumble upon or those that you find after thinking they must have gone away or believe they've never been around in the first place. The most recently found treasure in Springfield Township was the actual rediscovery and restoration of a room designed by legendary Philadelphia architect, Frank Furness. The scene of this fortuitous

find took place last year in what appeared to be an old storage room at the Wyndmoor Hills Health Care and Rehab Center (formerly Montgomery Rehab), built in 1886 and still in its present location at 8601 Stenton Avenue in Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania.

The long established patient-care facility, founded by the Philadelphia Protestant Episcopal City Mission, first opened as the Home for Consumptives, where it provided cutting-edge treatment to female patients suffering from tuberculosis

or "the white plague" as it was known back then. The Home for Consumptives became All Saints' Hospital for the Treatment of Tuberculosis in 1946 and

changed its name to All Saints' Hospital for the Treatment of Chronic Diseases in 1958. During the 1970s, the hospital focused on rehabilitative therapy, changing its name again to All Saints' Rehabilitation Hospital. In 1987, Chestnut Hill HealthCare, the parent organization of Chestnut Hill Hospital, acquired All Saints and Springfield Retirement Residence.

When the healthcare compound was sold to its current owners in 2009, the new administrator, Edward P. Harding, NHA, PCHA, was eager to learn more about the history of the hospital, knowing that 19th Century architect Frank Furness had been commissioned by the Philadelphia Protestant Episcopal City Mission to design several of its main structures. "Two of Furness' original buildings are still standing," he said on a recent tour as he pointed to one of the red brick buildings with the Victorian architect's signature pair of oversized chimneys—the massive main building with offices, reception areas, patient rooms, cafeteria and meeting halls. Directly behind the main building is the master 19th Century architect's other remaining work on the site, the Shields House, originally designed as an administration building and likely looking much as it did when it was built more than a 125 years ago.

As Ed began to research the hospital's archives, he found early photographs of people suffering from tuberculosis being treated with fresh air and diet regimens along with other therapies considered advanced for the late 19th





(left) The newly-restored Frank Heyling Furness Chapel, March 2012.

(below) Painting of the Chapel.



(left) Stained-glass windows in the Chapel.



The Shields building, located behind the main residence, designed by Frank Heyling Furness and named for Mary Shields, an early benefactor of the Home for Consumptives.

and early 20th Centuries. Pictures of children with tuberculosis of the bones or skin going through heliotherapy or “sun cure treatments” were also discovered as well as many photos of the administrators, doctors, nurses, and support personnel who served on the staff. Augmenting his research were early newspaper accounts of the hospital, which contained photographs and references to its past and its ongoing evolution. In one paper was a photo of an elegantly designed chapel, with a very simple altar, stained-glass windows, hanging pendant chandeliers and high wooden beams. It even contained a marble baptismal fount and a ceiling-high wooden pipe organ with multiple keyboards and pedal boards.

Mostly, the picture of the room “looked far removed from anything one would typically think of as Victorian,” said Ed. It was eclectic and Gothic-looking: it was classic Furness. Did it still exist and if so, what shape was it in?

The good news was in learning that the chapel had not been located in the Wilstach or Powers Cottages or in any of the brick and stone patient dormitories or other buildings that had been demolished. Ed formed a team, leading the charge on a mission to locate and restore the chapel. The first part of the task was relatively easy to accomplish as they knew the chapel had to be somewhere in the main residence. It wasn't long before they found it situated at the end of a long corridor on the second floor of the original residence. However, the former chapel had been converted into a storage room full of old files, broken beds and worn-out furniture. Restoring it to its original glory would be the hard part, because the rehabilitation center itself was undergoing major renovations with money and resources going toward upgrading the interior and exteriors of most of the buildings on the 10-acre grounds.

The team, however, was determined to see it through to completion. The room not only needed a complete overall and a thorough scrubbing from top to bottom, but heavy furnishings had to be moved and files had to be carefully preserved. An all-out-effort to find and restore the original liturgical vessels was made. Original lighting fixtures had to be found and made operational. Original windows and furnishings needed to be restored.

Work started in October 2011 and was completed in February 2012, in time for a special rededication ceremony of the chapel on February 24, 2012. The event, according to Ed, was more like a celebration than a rededication ceremony. The residents and staff of Wyndmoor Hills Health Care and Rehab Center, Springfield Residence and Evergreen Adult Day Care Center joined with members of the community to learn more about the hospital's proud history and to share stories through remembrances of the home and its residents. In attendance were about 45 residents and staff members along with Springfield's commissioner from the second ward of Montgomery County (See photo of the rededication ceremony in 3/15/2012 edition of The Chestnut Hill Local.)

The goal going forward is to once more have the chapel serve the community. Plans are underway to showcase this special place through various healthcare venues and there have also been discussions around renting the space to interested community groups so that further restoration work that is needed could take place. (For more information, please call 215-233-6200.)

Well into its second century, the chapel is honoring its world famous designer by taking on a new life.

## STHS Welcomes New Archivist



The Springfield Township Historical Society recently welcomed *Heather Burychka* as its new archivist. Heather processes acquisitions to the archives, helps members and visitors do research at the archives, works with volunteers on projects and does outreach within the community. She recently created a flyer about the historical society for distribution around Springfield Township.

Heather has a background as a librarian and teacher and is the reference/instruction librarian at Gwynedd-Mercy College. Formerly a librarian at Glenside Free Library, it was her experience as a special projects cataloguer in the special collections section at the Lehigh University Library that sparked her interest in being the archivist for the historical society.

The archives are housed in the Black Horse Inn at 1432 Bethlehem Pike in Flourtown. The collection includes numerous photographs of Springfield Township sites, a selection of Colonial era tax records, research on the history of various residences and institutions, and atlases and maps from the late 19th through the 20th century and more. The collection also contains a number of deeds and documents relating to Springfield Township properties, as well as an extensive holding of information, photographs and artifacts from the Stotesbury estate, Whitemarsh Hall.

The archives are staffed by Heather and volunteers and are open to the public from 7 to 9 p.m. on Tuesdays, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Wednesdays and from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, Saturdays. If you would like to visit the archives to do research or to volunteer, please call Heather at (215) 233-4600 or email [archives@springfieldhistory.org](mailto:archives@springfieldhistory.org) to set up an appointment. Fees for research visits are \$5 for STHS members, and \$10 for non-members. If you live too far away to do research, we will do research for you for \$20 an hour.

### STHS Archives Hours

Tuesdays 7pm – 9pm  
Wednesdays 11am – 1pm  
Saturdays 9am – 12noon

### Volunteers Needed in Archives

Anyone interested in working with Heather on our new projects is encouraged to email STHS at [archives@springfieldhistory.org](mailto:archives@springfieldhistory.org) or call 215-233-4600.

# STHS *Archives* Recent Acquisitions

Recently, the Archives received several very generous donations from community members. These valuable donations help us preserve the township's history, assist researchers and educate the community about our past. Flourtown resident Jack Yeakel donated the 1892 receipt for deed for Daniel Yeakle's 81-acre farm in Springfield Township. Mr. & Mrs. James Robinson of Erdenheim gave seven Springfield Township High School yearbooks ranging from 1993-2000 to the society and Oreland resident Bob Hibbert donated a bowling trophy from the Flourtown Lanes. Former Archivist Susan Anthony donated a 1960s postcard of the Whitemarsh Valley House on Stenton Avenue while township resident Bob Scott brought us an Ambler Gazette newspaper clipping from March 31, 1966 that was written by Sgt. Aubrey H. Williams. This article was the first in a series published in the paper in 1966 about Springfield Township history. In addition, Herbert Craft of Oreland recently donated seven deeds for properties in the township ranging in date from 1903 to 1953. Thank you to all of these residents who so kindly donated these items to our collection.

*Visitors, friends and researchers are invited to stop by the archives at the Black Horse Inn, 1432 Bethlehem Pike, Flourtown.. For more information, visit our website at [www.springfieldhistory.org](http://www.springfieldhistory.org) or call us at (215) 233-4600.*

*Reserve  
the Date*

**Thurs., June 7, 2012 – 7:30 p.m.**

## **Victorian Funerals and Mourning**

*A Presentation by  
Mr. Robert Reese*



Address Service Requested

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