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The Challenge

PRESERVATION • RESEARCH • EDUCATION

Philadelphia's Golden Age of Retail

A Presentation by Mr. Lawrence Arrigale and Mr. Thomas Keels

Thursday, March 22nd, 2012 – 7:30 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church

Bethlehem Pike & East Mill Road in Flourtown, PA

As recently as 1960, Market Street was lined with gigantic department stores from City Hall east to Seventh Street, including Wanamaker's, Strawbridge & Clothier, Gimbels, Lit Brothers, and Snellenburg's. On Chestnut Street, the carriage trade shopped at specialty stores like J.E. Caldwell's, Bailey Banks & Biddle, Jacob Reed's Sons, and the Blum Store. These stores' innovative owners viewed their establishments not just as marketplaces, but as great civic arenas where Philadelphians could witness the latest trends in fashion, art, and technology.

Today, all are gone.

Please join us as STHS welcomes co-authors Lawrence Arrigale and Tom Keels, who will present on their upcoming book *Philadelphia's Golden Age of Retail* (release date March 2012 by Arcadia Publishing). This presentation will bring the city's vanished emporia back to life in all their glory. The authors have assembled hundreds of pictures which trace the birth, rise, and decline of these great stores, along with such topics as their suburban expansion and holiday celebrations. Their illustrated lecture will take you on a journey back to the days when a Center City shopping trip to Wanamaker's or Gimbels was



Eighth and Market Streets in 1936

a special occasion. Philadelphia's Golden Age of Retail will also evoke a city that was a mercantile Mecca, where more sales revenues were generated at the intersection of Eighth and Market Streets than anywhere else in America!

Philadelphia's Golden Age of Retail is Lawrence Arrigale's first book (co-authored with Thomas Keels) and reflects many of Larry's personal interests and experiences. Mr. Arrigale has been in the antiques field for over 20 years and is a personal property appraiser. He has been a frequent guest speaker for the Cheltenham Township Adult School Antiques & Collectibles Seminar and has spoken to numerous Questers groups.

Thomas Keels is no stranger to STHS, having presented to our organization on many topics of local interest. Tom has written five books on Philadelphia history, and has spoken to such organizations as the Christ Church Preservation Trust, Friends of Independence National Historical Park, and the Union League of Philadelphia.

This promises to be an exciting and educational program on an interesting topic of Philadelphia history. 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

PLEASE NOTE:

Attendees to the March 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 article in the last issue of *The Challenge* opened by stating that Springfield Township is a community made up of several distinct areas, including the more well known ones of Erdenheim, Flourtown, Oreland and Wyndmoor. There are smaller neighborhoods within each of these, some of which are long gone, such as the village of Enfield that I spotlighted in that column. Others still exist, but are predominantly known only to those who live in them. My neighborhood, Northwoods, is one of these and this is its story.

Northwoods as we know it today, a 141-home community located in the eastern most portion of Springfield Township, was largely developed just after the Depression and through the post World War II years. But if you travel back in time over the past 325 years to the time when William Penn declared our township as "Penn's Manor of Springfield", you'll find a very different Northwoods that evolved from a farming community to an industrial area, to a recreation location, to the eventual residential setting it provides today. Let's take a look back.

One of the first homesteads in today's Northwoods was a 100-acre farm belonging to Nicholas Hicks, on land deeded to him by the Penn family in 1702. The original 1740's farmhouse still exists at the former intersection of Edann Road and Church Road, and is typical of the architecture of that period. The peaceful farms gave way to violent conflict during the Revolutionary War, and it struck close to Northwoods with the Battle of Edge Hill. Britain's General Howe attacked General Washington's troops, camped along the ridgeline of the Whitmarsh Valley in December 1777. The outermost end of Washington's line, which saw much action, was just above today's Woods and Edann Roads in Northwoods. The battle was really a series of skirmishes, with the eventual outcome favoring Washington. He subsequently vacated this area and headed to his more historic encampment at Valley Forge.

In July 1855 the Iron Horse of the North Pennsylvania Railroad arrived in Springfield, and the first stop in the township was at the Edge Hill station, today's North Hills SEPTA stop on Station Avenue in Northwoods. The result was a population boom in our area, and the arrival of the Edge Hill Iron Company in 1868. The company used the station stop for material drop off, and finished product pick-ups. Raw materials of limestone and ore were

mined on the land owned today by the North Hills Country Club. The sixty-three foot high smoke stacks of the furnaces could be seen for miles around, and the company was in operation until poor economic conditions forced their closing in 1897, putting over 200 men out of work.

Another business followed in the Northwoods area in the form of the Meehan Nursery, whose president John Franklin Meehan grew shrubbery and trees in the Woods and Fairway Road areas for his area retail stores. Meehan was also an avid golfer, and designed and built a 9-hole golf course, which would open in 1910 as the Edge Hill Golf Club, along Station Avenue. This was later expanded to 18 holes, and renamed the North Hills Country Club.

In the late 1920's, builder Samuel Harting and his sons purchased 26 acres of land along Station Avenue, and laid out 61 lots for a development to be known as North Hills Manor. This would encompass homes along North and South Fairway Roads, Tee Road, and Station Avenue. Around the same time, other developers were erecting homes on newly laid out Woods Road and Edann Road. The Depression would curtail home sales for several years, and some sat vacant in spite of price tags of about \$13,000.

In 1952 the Northwoods Association was formed, joining together a community of homes from all of the streets mentioned above. Different builders entered the area in the intervening years, to fill up all the available lots, with the last of those being built around 1990. Today, the Northwoods Association is an active organization sponsoring yearly events including holiday caroling, block parties, Thanksgiving Day football games, golf outings, and garden and book clubs. Today this is a neighborhood that many affectionately call "home", and it is a great testament to that sense of community that the people now moving into Northwoods include second-generation families who grew up here as children, including myself.

If you'd like to share the history and stories about your Springfield neighborhood, send me a letter (at our STHS address) or e-mail (edzwicker@comcast.net), and I'll spotlight it in a future President's Corner!

Keeping the past in the present,

Ed Zwicker

FROM THE *Archives*



The 700 block of Bethlehem Pike in Erdenheim underwent construction in 1960. This photo, looking south on the pike, was taken by Aubrey Williams and is in the Springfield Township Historical Society archives

A car went up the front steps of a house on Bethlehem Pike near the intersection of Gordon Rd. in Erdenheim between 1935 and 1940. The Old Wheel Pump Restaurant, a longtime neighborhood restaurant, was the site of "Floor Show & Orchestra Niteley," a sign says. This photo by Roger Wells is in the Springfield Township Historical Society archives.





STHS Welcomes Three New Board Members



New board member **Christine DeVore** touches history every day for she works in one of the most historic properties in Springfield Township, Keystone Hospice, Rauhala, located at 8675 Stenton Avenue in Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania. Situated on land where Hannah Callowhill Penn once owned a dower farm house, the former John Welsh House marked another of its innumerable milestones in 1997 when it became Keystone Hospice, the first freestanding residential hospice in southeastern Pennsylvania.

"My love for historic properties dates back to my college days when I minored in art history and loved studying architecture, particularly

that of Europe," says Chris. "I seem to be a bit of an anomaly as I'm not a resident of Springfield Township, but work there as Director of Volunteers at Keystone Hospice. As a daily visitor to Springfield, I am captivated by the quaintness of the community and its generosity. In the course of my work, I am constantly asking shop owners for donations to fund our Thanksgiving and holiday outreach programs. I am always met with a smile and a donation to support our work," she says.

What's more all six of Chris' children have been educated in Springfield Township. "My son is a graduate of LaSalle High School, which rests on the site of Belcroft, a historic property STHS featured on a recent tour. My daughter is currently a 10th grade student at Mount St. Joseph Academy, another Springfield Township treasure. My other children have graduated from the excellent public school system. So although my roots are shallow in Springfield, they run deep in appreciation of the gifts Springfield offers," Chris explains.

As a new board member, Chris' goal is to support the mission of STHS by helping with fundraising and special events.



Sue Beil Duckwitz knows so much about the history of her beloved Springfield Township that she could create its first Trivial Pursuit game – and should. Try answering these questions:

- *Do you remember the first library of Springfield Township, the fairgrounds and the railroad tracks that crossed Bethlehem Pike?*
- *Can you picture the three buildings—the post office, the barber shop and the antique store—that once shared the same plot of ground with the Black Horse Inn?*
- *Do you know where the Firehouse and Campbell's Luncheonette once stood?*

Of course Sue knows the answers to all of these questions and more. As she was encouraged by her dad to

pursue her academic interests and to support historical preservation efforts, Sue now works hard at piquing the interest of the sixth-grade students that she teaches in the Springfield Township Middle School. "My father, Jerry Beil, who served on the Board of Commissioners for many years, often spoke about the need to preserve our community's historical sites," she recalls. As a teacher in the Springfield schools, Sue wants to nurture that seed her family planted by instilling the values of good citizenship and pride in our community in every student who comes into her classroom.

Her relationship with Springfield spans nearly 60 years. "As a child I grew up within the magic of Flouertown" she says. "Carson Valley, with its acres of farmland, gabled roof cottages and forests were my childhood fantasy playgrounds. With neighborhood friends, I would explore the dairy farm barns and all of us would imagine we were princesses while dancing around the cottages. The history of these buildings fascinated me as a young adult when my dad served on the Carson Valley Board."

As an adult, Springfield still remained at the center of her world. "Springfield had been my home as a child, where I met my husband, Don and where we raised our family," she says.

As a new board member, Sue looks forward to continuing to support STHS' mission, in particular, its efforts at furthering its stewardship of the Black Horse Inn. "My family was so pleased to see Springfield Township and the Historical Society step in and find a way to preserve the Black Horse Inn in Flouertown," she says, adding that it's critical to keep the momentum going. "The Black Horse Inn and all of our historical properties serve as reminders to us of those who once lived here, the importance of their legacy and the critical need to save these treasures for posterity."



Amanda M. Helwig doesn't just visit and read about historical houses — Mandy, as she likes to be called, is living

in one. When she moved to Flouertown from Skippack, Pennsylvania in 2004, she bought the "Old Milk House," a creamery on Mill Road that was once part of the Weiss Farm where people came from far and near to buy milk. "I love the history of the home and hope to be a good steward of it," she says.

A member of the community told her that when he was a child, area farmers brought milk to the house to be bottled and distributed. At one point, he believed it was called Thomas' Dairy. "I'm hoping others in the community have memories of the building," she says, "meanwhile I've got a small collection of milk bottles on display in the kitchen and hope to acquire more."

Though Mandy has lived in Springfield Township for less than a decade, she's always considered it a second home. On weekends, her dad used to bring Mandy and her brother to work with him in the family's Flouertown business, Dan Helwig, Inc. Realtors. "Just recently, my father has stepped back to semi-retirement and I have taken over as Broker of Record," she explains, "we work very closely together and thanks to the respect and support we've received from the community, our family business is as strong as ever."

Prior to joining the family business in 2004, Mandy worked as a laboratory researcher. She graduated with a B.S. degree from Ursinus College where she majored in biology and minored in art. While still in high school, her interest in local history was spurred by a community effort to save the Colledgeville Dam. "I fought to preserve and repair the Colledgeville Dam, which was one of the first Mill dams in the state of Pennsylvania," she says. "It involved many hours of looking through old newspapers, tracing deeds and visiting local historical societies." Though the dam was torn down, she maintains her resolve to help preserve the so many treasures that surround us.

As a new board member, Mandy's goal is to establish a link between STHS and the Springfield Township Planning Commission, where they plan on establishing an historical commission. "I think some of my knowledge of real estate in the community and business contacts will help with fundraising efforts and getting the word out about the importance of the STHS," she adds.



STHS Archives Hours

Tuesdays 7pm - 9pm

Wednesdays 11am - 1pm

Saturdays 9am - 12noon

Volunteers Needed

STHS is looking for dedicated volunteers to participate on a number of committees including *Programs, Events and Oral History*. Committees meet on an as needed basis. Anyone with an interest in joining these committees is encouraged to contact STHS.

Assistance is also needed in the archives. This spring we will be bringing on a new archivist and there will be several new and exciting projects that will be launched. This is an exciting time to join our efforts as we welcome our new staff member and begin new projects.

Please consider these volunteer opportunities which provide a great way to meet others in the community with an interest in history and help our organization to further our mission of preservation, research and education.

Anyone interested in participating is encouraged to call STHS at 215-233-4600.

STHS *Archives* Recent Acquisitions

Recent donations to the archives of the Springfield Township Historical Society archives have included several booklets printed by the Paper Mill Glen Civic Association, two Springfield Township mugs and a blueprint of the Flourtown's College Avenue neighborhood. Among the Paper Mill Glen booklets donated by Erdenheim residents Nancy McDonald and Michael Grothusen are a 1957 organizational booklet with neighborhood news and directories from 1956-1957, 1965-1966 and 1958. A Springfield Township seal and the dates 1681-1981 – the time of the township's tricentennial celebration – are on the mugs which were also donated by Nancy McDonald and Michael Grothusen. Flourtown resident Louis Bosca donated the College Avenue blueprints which are dated 1939 and include plans for 70 lots on College Avenue, North College Avenue, South College Avenue, West College Avenue and Schnell Avenue. Known as the "Henry Schnell Tract," these plans, submitted by J.P. Schnell and Harry Dehnell, were approved by the Springfield Township Commissioners on April 14, 1939.

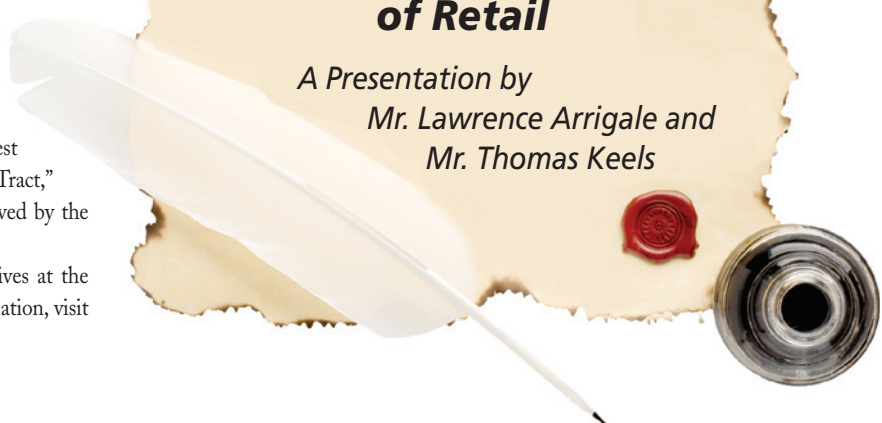
Visitors, friends and researchers are invited to stop by the archives at the Black Horse Inn, 1432 Bethlehem Pike, Flourtown. For more information, visit our website at www.springfieldhistory.org or call us at (215) 233-4600.

*Reserve
the Date*

Thurs., March 22, 2012 – 7:30 p.m.

**Philadelphia's Golden Age
of Retail**

A Presentation by
*Mr. Lawrence Arrigale and
Mr. Thomas Keels*



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