

# The Wall Paper

Spring 2016

Volume XIII Number 22

## THE GHOST OF THE OLD YORK ROAD TROLLEY

A reminder of our forgotten past recently emerged from the ground just a hundred yards from the Wall House.

Utility work under the Old York Road spur prompted the curiosity of our Commission Chairman while passing one day. Jack Washington stopped to peer into the hole created by the work crews and noticed some type of rusted metal structure. Salvaging bits and pieces, he discovered the remnants of the rails for the trolley system that used to ply

Old York Road. What we know as the "spur" today, was once the main route of Old York Road before the cut to the east of "Ogontz Hill" was made in 1945. In the photograph below, Commission member Jim McCann studies the portions of rails, ties, and spikes that fastened the rails to the ties. They were buried several feet under the present street level by successive paving and improvement operations in the ensuing 75 years since the trolley operations were suspended. You can see the artifacts on display at the Richard Wall House Museum.

The Old York Road trolley line was once one of the most important transportation projects in the Phila-  
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## CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER

It is a pleasure to share with you, our friends, old and new, these items as the new year unfolds at the historic Richard Wall House Museum.

Looking back to Holiday Happenings last December, the members of the Old York Road Garden Club, their friends and families, put forth an exceptional effort in decorating the museum with a grand assortment of floral arrangements, tokens of decorations of days gone by, and even a train layout. Those who visited expressed their delight in all that they saw.

The first of two public programs at Curtis Hall sponsored by the Cheltenham Township Historical Commission with support from the Jenkinstown Lyceum will be in celebration of Black History Month. The program on February 11<sup>th</sup> is staged by Mrs. Lise Marlowe and sixth grade students from Elkins Park School. The presentation, "Back in Time with Cheltenham: Lucretia Mott and the Cheltenham Residents who Fought for Freedom" is educational, emotional, and showcases the budding abilities that are being nurtured by our exceptional Cheltenham School District teachers.

The second notable presentation will be on May 12, 2016, during  
(Continued on page 2, col. 1)



(Chairman's Chatter continued)

Preservation Month. Dr. Thomas Wieckowski will present a history of Cheltenham residents John Wanamaker and his family. See our event listing on page three and mark your calendar now.

The Shoemaker family owned the Wall House and operated the mill on Tookany Creek for many years. Recently, two descendents of the notable family contacted the museum. Upon visiting, Mrs. Lettice Moon shared a number of family heirlooms and traced her ancestry on a large genealogical chart. From Florida, Mrs. Jean Hilker arranged for a visit to her ancestors' homestead during an anticipated vacation trip north in August. It is always exciting and informative to share the Museum that the Township has treasured for so long.

Dr. Sharon Holt from the Division of Arts and Humanities at Penn State Abington has chosen the Wall House as a laboratory for her students to develop a program of interpretation and increased public awareness of the Museum. The efforts of Dr. Holt and the students are much appreciated.

Reorganization of the Commission under the provisions of the Home Rule Charter has taken place. The Historical Commission has dutifully organized a team to move forward in the coming year. Committee chairs for Education and Public Programs,

**Cheltenham Township  
Historical Commission**

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- Chairperson: Jack Washington**
  - Vice-Chair: Thomas Wieckowski**
  - Financial Secretary: Timothy Esposito**
  - Archives: Karen Uhrich**
  - Newsletter Editor: Thomas Wieckowski**
  - Program Chair: Louise Cohen**
  - Preservation Chair: Timothy Esposito**

Preservation, Museum and Special Events are eagerly awaiting your assistance and input. Won't you please apply to the Township for an appointment to serve the Commission.

*Jack Washington, Chairman*

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## CHELTENHAM PERSONALITIES

[One in a series of spotlights on  
celebrated historical residents of  
Cheltenham Township.]

Famed merchant and resident, John Wanamaker, and his wife, Mary Brown, had six children. Their opulent estate, Lindenhurst, stood on the hilltop behind today's Salus University along Township Line Road between Washington Lane and Old York Road. Two of their eldest children, Rodman and Mary, were part of the group of Philadelphia socialites who founded the snow-bird enclave of Palm Beach, Florida. After Henry Flagler completed his railroad to West Palm Beach in 1894, it became possible for northerners to easily access resorts in the sub-tropical climes of Florida.

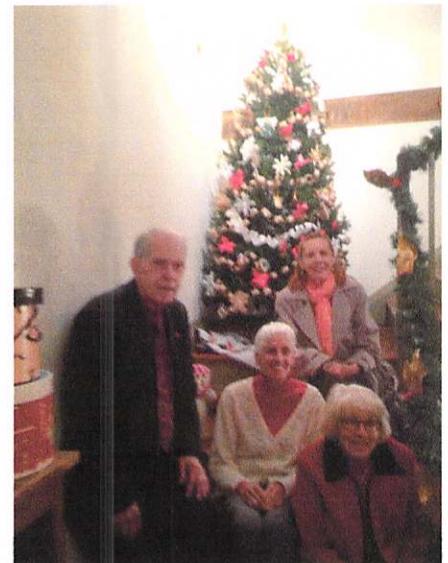
Rodman's daughter, Marie Louise, married Gurnee Munn, a celebrated horseman and the president of a horse betting scoreboard company called the American Totalisator Company. They were married in Philadelphia and their reception was held at Lindenhurst on June 28, 1915. Grandfather Wanamaker had the event filmed, the first such private endeavor in the Philadelphia area as the new technology of motion pictures began its march into the mainstream of American life. It was the first private event "seen by the eye of a motion-picture camera," according to a July 1915 issue of *Moving Picture World Magazine*.

Rodman died in 1928, leaving an estate valued at \$41 million dollars.

Marie and Gurnee divorced in 1933 and Marie moved back to Cheltenham and took over her father's estate, Millrose. That estate was located across Washington Lane from Lindenhurst, Marie married George Kent, a third generation Cheltenhamian in the study of her Millrose estate in 1934. Marie resided there until her death in 1955.

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## Successful Holiday Event at the Wall House



The Wall House sparkled during the recent "Holiday Happenings" festivities. Thanks to the work of the Old York Road Garden Club, the Museum was decorated in merry splendor for the season. Christmas trees were decorated by the Daughters of the American Revolution. The display was open to the public at the grand opening on December 6<sup>th</sup> and for the two succeeding Sundays. Pictured at the opening event are (L to R) Jack Washington, Historical Commission Chair; Mary Washington, Commission member; Marjorie Sears and Nancy Doyle of the Garden Club.

## GHOST

(Continued from Page 1)

delphia region. Since the time of Richard Wall, who built his house in 1682 along an old Indian trail leading from the Delaware waterfront, Old York Road was one of the main thoroughfares out of the city to the north and New York. The trolley had its inception in 1892 when a group of Philadelphia entrepreneurs incorporated the Philadelphia, Cheltenham, and Jenkintown Passenger Railway. It was designed to operate between 15<sup>th</sup> Street and Erie Avenue in the city to a point between "Valley Road and the Philadelphia Bound Brook Rail Road" in Jenkintown. The company was a front for the powerful Philadelphia Traction Company being assembled by Cheltenham residents P.A.B. Widener and William Elkins.

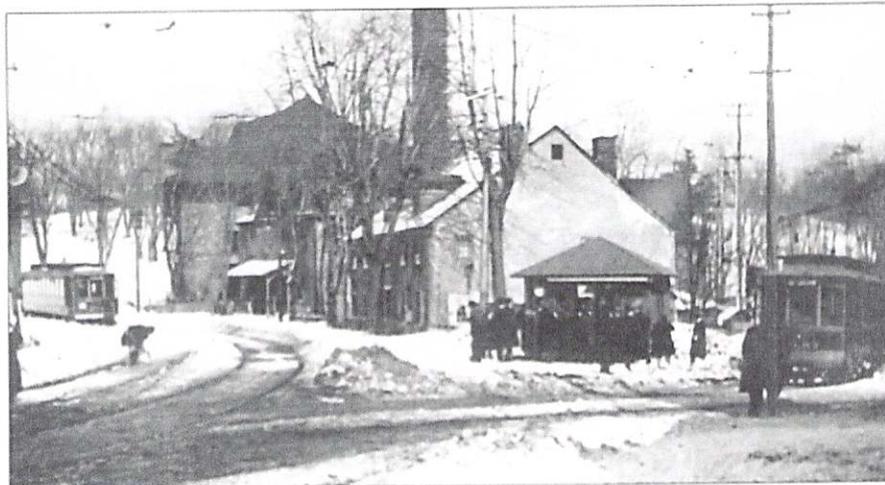
Construction began in 1894 along the old road through a region that had little public transportation. The long distances involved outside the city brought new problems, such as with electrical power distribution, prompting the erection of a power station at the bottom of Ogontz Hill at the corner of Old York Road and Forrest Avenue. Finally, on January 24, 1895, service was opened to the Forrest Avenue terminal.

After the spring thaw, the line was extended up the Ogontz Hill, through Jenkintown, and out Old York Road to Willow Grove. That summer, one hundred acres was purchased by

Widener and Elkins in Willow Grove for the purpose of a picnic ground. But Widener and Elkins had bigger plans and created an amusement park that would drive customers to the trolley line. Willow Grove Park opened on May 30, 1896, with a consequent flood of ridership on the new trolley line. So it is likely our artifacts date to the 1895 construction to Willow Grove.

The trolley line was a success and became a landmark in the area. By 1918, publications such as the Automobile Blue Book depended on the trolley line for directions. The book provided routing information for the new crop of "motorists" before there were government designated route numbers. In its 1918 edition, the book directed motorists going to New York to go "straight through with the trolley" through Cheltenham, Jenkintown and Abington. "At Ogontz fork, bear left with trolley upgrade on Old York Road" instructed the journal. The same automobile that was a novelty in 1918 was the death knell for the trolley line. Car number 8042 made the last run on the line on September 8, 1940.

(In the 1913 photo below, the trolley on the left is in front of the Wall House. The Ogontz power station is the building in the background with the smoke stack. The new cut through Ogontz hill for Old York Road has not yet been made. Photo courtesy of the Old York Road Historical Society.)



## EVENTS



**The Cheltenham Township Black History Month Lecture** will be held on **Thursday, February 11**, at 7:30 pm. It is held at the historic Curtis Hall, 1250 W. Church Road in Wyncote. Elkins Park teacher Lise Marlowe and her 6<sup>th</sup> grade students will perform "Back in Time with Cheltenham: Lucretia Mott and the Cheltenham Residents who Fought for Freedom." Admission is free.



**The Cheltenham Township Preservation Month Lecture** will feature "Wanamaker and Family: Gilded Age Citizens and Residents". Commission vice-chair Dr. Tom Wieckowski will present the story of this notable and accomplished Cheltenham family on Thursday, May 12, at 7:30 pm. The lecture will be held at the historic Curtis Hall, 1250 W. Church Road in Wyncote. Admission is free.



**The Spring Tour of Historic Wyncote** – Back by popular demand, this guided tour will cover approximately one square mile of Olde Wyncote. Participants will be escorted on a small tour bus by local historian, Tom Wieckowski. The tour will take place in mid-May. An informational brochure will be available in April with date and details. Advanced reservations are required. Tickets are \$25 per person.

**For information on these programs, contact Louise Cohen at 215-635-3168.**

THE RICHARD WALL HOUSE  
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

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OPEN

FOURTH SUNDAY  
OF EACH MONTH

1 - 4 PM

~  
GROUPS BY APPOINTMENT

215-887-1000, ext. 227

(Business Hours)

215-887-9159

(Wall House)

**A BIT OF HISTORY**

BY MARY WASHINGTON

**FIFTY YEARS AGO**

From the *Times Chronicle* of March 17, 1966  
More Cheltenham Streets scheduled for resurfacing.

**SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO**

From the *Times Chronicle* of March 27, 1941  
The Roberts firm, 74 years in Real Estate and the original  
suburban developer of the area, celebrates 43 years in its  
Glenside Office.

**ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO**

From the *Times Chronicle* of February 5, 1916  
The Cheltenham Township Commissioners appropriate  
\$5,000 to the Township's fire companies to develop  
additional fire protection services.

**BE A FRIEND OF THE WALL HOUSE**

Help to preserve the rich history of Cheltenham Township

Benefactor, \$100.00 \_\_\_ Sponsor, \$50.00 \_\_\_ Patron, \$20.00 \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

Post Office \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

email \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to Cheltenham Township Historical Commission. Mail to:  
FRIENDS OF THE WALL HOUSE  
c/o Cheltenham Township  
8230 Old York Road  
Elkins Park, PA 19027