

# The Wall Paper

Fall 2016

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## IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PAST

### The Shoemakers

The past came alive this summer with the visit of two Shoemaker families to the Wall House. The visits helped to reinforce the genealogical research into the family histories they have been compiling.

Shoemakers from California made the museum their family destination the last week of July. Stephen and Karen Shoemaker and their sons, Grady and Thomas, were treated to an extensive orientation at



Picturesque old Shoemaker Burial Ground, Ashbourne Road

the Richard Wall House complex, a Shoemaker home through the marriage of Sarah Wall, granddaughter of Richard Wall, to George Shoemaker of Germantown.

During the viewing of the orientation video the boys understood more fully the challenges of sheltering in a wilderness, and how a cave provided shelter for the first settlers in Cheltenham Township. An extensive description of the architectural elements of the house, still visible, added to the impact of our graphic chart of the evolution of the house.

The family was most interested in how the house expanded after the Shoemakers were residents.

The wayside signs along Wall Park Drive and the use of the model of the mill enlightened the Shoemakers on the success of the family enterprise and an understanding of why the town was once known as Shoemakertown in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many photographs were taken by the family to record the history of the house and their visit to their ancestral home.

A site tour was conducted by Chairman Jack Washington and his wife Mary Washington. Afterwards, the history tour continued with an informative visit to the old Shoemaker burial ground nearby on Ashbourne Road. While time has erased many of the genealogically  
*(Continued on Page 3, Column 1)*

## CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER

The Cheltenham Township Historical Commission resumed its monthly meetings on the second Thursday of September. Meetings are held at the Visitor Center at the Richard Wall House Museum and are always open to the public. An exception to this venue comes in February and May when the meetings are held at Curtis Hall prior to our sponsored public lectures.

Thank you Louise Cohen for steadfastly helping to keep the museum open for visitors on the fourth Sunday of each month. At the museum, the trolley exhibit has benefited from an additional poster on the trolley magnates W. Elkins and P.A.B. Widener thanks to Tom Wieckowski and David Harrower. Some transfers and a stock certificate are also on display along with other artifacts of that enterprise.

Appointments were honored for special tours of the museum over the summer. (See the related article to the left.) Persons wishing a tour can call the Richard Wall House Museum at 215-887-9159 and leave their contact information. Every effort will be extended by our volunteers to accommodate you for a tour.

The Township has been keeping the grounds trimmed and cut. A much  
*(Continued on page 2, col. 1)*

*(Chairman's Chatter continued)*

appreciated additional interest in the beautification of the museum grounds has come from Bob Dominick and a few of his crew. Check out the improvements.

Our museum friend, Bill Chambres, has been keeping us informed of the soon to open Museum of the American Revolution on Chestnut Street in Old City.

Three Historical Commission members, also members of the Old York Road Historical Society, attended the Greater Philadelphia Preservation Alliance program at the Union League in early June where the Society was recognized on their 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Upcoming lectures at Curtis Hall in 2017 are slated for Black History Month in February and our own Dr. Thomas Wieckowski, vice-chair of the Commission, will present a program on Jay Cooke, Cheltenham resident and financier of the Civil War. Those persons who were fortunate enough to attend his previous offerings know the value of his presentations.

Make plans to take in the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Holiday Open House with the decorations by the Old York Road Garden Club, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup>.

Thank you for your support of the Wall House, and I am looking forward to another productive year honoring the history of our great community.

*Jack Washington, Chairman*

**Cheltenham Township  
Historical Commission**

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

## NEWLY NAMED BRIDGE

Cheltenham has a new bridge, or more accurately, a new name for a bridge. The Greenwood Avenue Bridge spanning the SEPTA railroad tracks in Wyncote has been named in honor of long-time legislator Lawrence Curry who represented parts of Cheltenham and Jenkintown in the State Legislature. The ceremony was held at the Jenkintown/Wyncote railroad station on August 31, 2016.

The current bridge has an interesting history that parallels the development of the area. It is the third bridge to span the busy tracks of what was first the North Penn Railroad, then the Reading Railroad, and now SEPTA's Trenton/Warminster/Doylestown lines.

The North Penn Railroad established a station at the new road to Jenkintown in 1859. The official founding of the new village known as

Wyncote in 1887 brought traffic problems and many accidents, some fatal, to the once secluded Greenwood Avenue railroad crossing. By the spring of 1900, the county appointed a jury to consider the matter of erecting a bridge that would result not only in the taking of adjacent property but also the vacating of a portion of Greenwood Avenue. The first hearing was held on May 24, 1900, in the old drug store at the corner of Greenwood Avenue and Glenside Avenue.

The proposal percolated for a year, and the jury reconvened for another hearing in the same location on Tuesday, April 30, 1901. In the intervening year, the proposal generated opposition and an alternative plan. That scheme, probably the work of neighbor, John Wanamaker, was to build a bridge connecting the bend in West Avenue on the Jenkintown side, with the top of the hill on Glenside Avenue on the Wyncote side. This route was duly  
*(Continued on page 3)*



The new Greenwood Avenue Bridge in the spring of 1905. Note the wood pilings. The waterway in the foreground is the millrace that led from the Mather pond (today's Morgan Park) to the Mather Mill, which was located at the Washington Lane crossing, one half mile to the south. Photo courtesy of the Old York Road Historical Society.

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## SHOEMAKER

(Continued from Page 1)

researched names inscribed on the stones, the spirit of those ancestors was very much present.

Within weeks another Shoemaker descendant and her husband also visited. Jean and Burnell Hilker arrived from Florida to visit the museum and the cemetery. Information on the Wall House and a newsletter had been forwarded to them prior to their visit. They found much to engage their interest in their family history as they viewed the bones of the old mansion.

As with the California Shoemakers, Mary Washington guided them to the burial ground where they seemed to relish the opportunity to walk among the Shoemakers of the past.

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### IF YOU GO

The historic and little-known old Shoemaker Burial Ground is worth a quick visit. It is still a quiet and thoughtful presence in the middle of bustling Cheltenham Township.

The ground was donated to the Friends of Cheltenham Township by Richard Wall in 1697, although the grounds were already used as a burial place. Records of Abington Meeting indicate that Richard Wall, Jr., was buried there in 1689. Of the original six acres, only one half of an acre was enclosed by a stone wall. That wall still exists today.

About 30 Shoemaker family members are buried there. Friends of that day did not approve of marking the last resting place of the departed, so there are comparatively few stones visible and time is slowly erasing the few marking on the stones, rendering them invisible.

A small lane, not surprisingly called "Graveyard Lane" by locals, connected the graveyard with Old York Road. The lane was extended to Washington Lane in 1854, and is today's Ashbourne Road.

## Holiday Open House

The second annual Holiday Open House at the Richard Wall House Museum will be held on three successive Sundays: December 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>.

The award winning Old York Road Garden Club will again be decorating the house with their arrangements and greenery. Last year, they won a national award for holiday decorations at an historic site. Be sure to look at the accumulating awards garnered by this group of dedicated gardeners that are displayed just inside the entrance door to the Visitor Center.

While the museum relies on your generous donations, the garden club will endeavor to offset some of their costs by hosting a "Country Store" in the Visitor Center during the open house. Featured will be hand-made crafts, bagged cookies, fresh greens arrangements and attic treasures.

Come to the Richard Wall House Museum and enjoy this truly merry holiday happening.

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### BRIDGE Continued from pg. 2

considered, if unenthusiastically, at the hearing.

The proposed bridge, with its angular route, was approved by the jury in early 1902, and Joseph W. Hunter, the Jenkintown entrepreneur and surveyor, began documenting the bridge-site in July of 1902. Excavations began in Thomas Nicholson's coal yard in September of 1902. Nicholson was awarded \$7,500 for his lost property, but sued to obtain what he considered a more suitable level of compensation due to the "ruthless destruction" of his property. He was unsuccessful.

Concerns about teams driving off the carriageway and down the em-

bankment led to the installation of an ersatz fence made from logs pounded into the ground at the edge of the carriageway, topped with old gas pipes in early November 1903. A surprising amenity was added to the bridge on January 30, 1904, when a new-fangled electric light was placed atop a telephone pole at the center of the bridge.

Finally open for traffic - with little apparent fanfare - in January of 1904, that bridge and its two successors safely linked vehicular traffic between the two burgeoning communities of Wyncote and Jenkintown.

The station would survive until 1932 when society architect Horace Trumbauer was hired by the Reading railroad, successor to the North Penn, to design a new station worthy of the affluent communities surrounding it. The bridge lasted another ten years after that and was replaced in 1942.

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## Fate Links Camp William Penn Museum with the new National Museum of African American History

Listeners to NPR in mid-September heard extensive coverage of the opening of the new Smithsonian Museum of African American History. One particular display is of local interest and connects that extraordinary enterprise with our Camp William Penn Museum.

One NPR segment was devoted to the donation of a tiny album, just two inches square, containing the photographs of the black troops of Company G, 25<sup>th</sup> Regiment, United States Colored Troops. The men had trained at Camp William Penn in La Mott, and the album had been assembled by their dedicated officer, Capt. William A. Prickitt. Through several generations, the album had passed to Prickitt's great-grand  
(Continued on page 4)

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)

**USCT PHOTO ALBUM - Continued from page 3**

daughter, Aenita Atwood Gates of Petersburg, Illinois. In 2012, an illustrator from Illinois seeking information about Camp William Penn on the Internet contacted Historical Commission member and curator of the Camp William Penn Museum, Joyce Werkman. Shayne Davidson explained to Ms. Werkman that she had been producing a genealogy of 17 members of the Civil War Company of black soldiers by a friend who possessed an album of their photographs. Werkman stayed in touch with Davidson and met with her in Illinois. The result was a set of drawings based on the photographs and a poster featuring the drawings of the soldiers that Davidson had produced. Gates and Davidson later went to Washington to discuss placement of the album in the Smithsonian. The poster was delivered in time for display at the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of Camp William Penn held in La Mott in September of 2013.

Reproductions of the poster are available from the Camp William Penn Museum. Contact Joyce Werkman ([pt@usct.org](mailto:pt@usct.org)) either through the Historical Commission or at the Camp William Penn Museum.

**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