



HAVERTOWN TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY



P.O. Box 825 Havertown, PA 19083 610-446-7988 Spring 99

Memories of Colleen Brook Farm at April Meeting

The April 15th General Membership meeting will feature Dr. Eleanor Smith Morris, who once lived at Colleen Brook Farm Mansion in Upper Darby. Dr. Smith, now of Scotland, will recount stories of her noted ancestor, Dr. George Smith, and share recollections of childhood days at Colleen Brook.

The Colleen Brook Farm land was originally purchased in 1692 by Ralph Lewis, a Welsh Quaker immigrant and sawmill operator. The farm was inherited by his great-great granddaughter, Mary Lewis, wife of Dr. George Smith, of Haverford, the noted Delaware County Historian, State Senator, and first president of the Upper Darby School Board.

The land was in the Smith-Lewis Family for nearly 300 years. The mansion is now owned by Upper Darby Township and is open to the public. It houses the Smith-Lewis Center for Local History.

Dr. Eleanor Smith Morris
April 15, 1999
8:00 PM
Llanerch Presbyterian Church
Park Road and Lansdowne Avenue
Havertown, PA

New Board Members to Be Elected

At the April 15 Meeting, the membership will vote to fill the following Board seats: President, 1st Vice President, 2nd Vice President, Treasurer, Corresponding Secretary, Curator, and two At-large seats. The nominating committee will present a slate of candidates for these offices at the meeting.

Treasures in Your Attic??

Heirloom Appraisal Day May 1st at Nitre Hall

CANCELLED

That old lamp in the attic just may be worth something. What about that old clock or Great Aunt Mary's umbrella stand? Bring your treasures to the annual Heirloom Appraisal Day at Nitre all from 1-4 on Saturday, May 1.

Appraiser and antique dealer, Raymond Spiller will tell you what your treasure is worth in today's market.

Rules:

There is a five-item limit per session with the appraiser (if you have more, you may wait for another turn). Admission is free.

Fee:

\$3.00 per item/members

\$5.00 per item/non-members

Whether you have a treasure or merely a curiosity, you will learn something and have some fun in the bargain.



Inside This Issue

Progress on Nitre Hall Restoration	Page 2
Results of Member Survey	Page 2
Gunpowder Wars of the 1810s	Page 3
Welcome, New Members	Page 3
In Memoriam: Millicent Phillips	Page 3
Dates to Remember	Page 4

Progress on Nitre Hall Restoration

In late March, HTHS received approval from the Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission (PHMC) to remove all of the stucco on Nitre Hall down to the rubble-stone substrate. Repeated stucco failure since the turn of the 20th century has required patching of large sections, which have also deteriorated. None of the existing stucco is original.

Initially, the grant proposal called for replacement of only the deteriorated stucco. Now the recommended method requires installing wire lath over the entire building to support a new coat of stucco. To avoid damage to the stonework, the lath is nailed to the mortar joints. Historically, stucco would be applied directly to the rubble-stone substrate.

Benefits of this approach

Removing all of the stucco will permit archaeological research on the original construction and perhaps solve the mystery of the second-floor "door to nowhere".

The new, wire re-enforced stucco will last at least fifty years. (The stucco itself will be historically accurate.)

Three months to complete

Once the contract is awarded, the project is expected to take three months to complete, including one to two weeks for the archaeological research. Regrading and replanting the area around Nitre Hall will occur after that.



Raffle Winner

Kathleen Payne, is the proud winner of the Victorian Afghan made by Board member Sally Boyer. Kathleen's cats thoroughly approve. Kathleen, a new member of HTHS this year, is "just thrilled". Ticket #025 was drawn at the February General Membership Meeting. One hundred fifty-eight chances were sold.

Results of Membership Survey

To date, 19 members responded to the survey included with this year's membership renewal and February meeting notice. Of these, 10 have been members for more than 10 years. *You can still make your views known.* Send your opinions, along with your dues (\$10 for individuals; \$15.00 for households) to HTHS, P.O. Box 825, Haverford, PA 19083.

Topics of Interest

The survey respondents suggested the following topics for future meetings:

- History of Delaware County
- Individual sites with slides
- Irish in Haverford Township
- Early photos of Haverford Township
- Early families of Haverford Township
- Archiving: what's worth saving?
- Nitre Hall Library

Present Meeting Location:

Good/Excellent (15); Less convenient (1); Don't know (3)

Membership Directory

Fifteen members find the Directory useful and would like to have an updated version in '99. The other four did not comment. We plan to distribute an updated Directory in October.

Gunpowder Competition in the 1810s

The Census of 1810 indicates that there were two-hundred powder mills in sixteen states in the United States. Nitre Hall and duPont were two of the busiest and they engaged in a lively competition. Powder mills were set up "wherever there was a demand, water power, and wood for charcoal". There were so many mills because transportation of the powder was both hazardous and difficult.

According to historian George Gibson, "The quality and reputation of Nitre Hall gunpowder fluctuated considerably. Up to the time of the War of 1812, Nitre Hall powder was produced for local consumption. During the War of 1812, the company sold all of the powder it could possibly make. After the war, the Nitre Hall Gunpowder Mills were in a favorable condition to compete successfully in an expanding national market."

In correspondence between E. I. duPont, of Wilmington, Delaware and his agent in Boston in 1813, Nitre Hall powder was selling as well as duPont's. This obviously upset duPont, who asserted that his powder "was acknowledged to be Superior by everybody. The Nitre Hall powder will prove upon examination to be very Inferior to ours; the materials are not well

mixed and consequently it makes the guns very dirty."

Although duPont did not think the Nitre Hall quality as good as his, demand for Nitre Hall powder was certainly high. Two years later, Nitre Hall powder was making its way abroad, through agents in Philadelphia and Baltimore.

DuPont apparently kept close tabs on his competition and let his agents know of his displeasure, as

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in the following correspondence. "This morning we heard a very large sale of powder has been made in your place by the Nitre Hall Manufactory. We have seen the owner of the said factory, Mr. Israel Wheelen, who told us that he sold 1600 bags. Mr. W. passes here for being of a braging [sic] disposition and may not be candid with us about the price."

In 1817, when there was a shortage of duPont gunpowder in Boston and New York, the duPont Company advised its agents to get what they needed from the Nitre Hall Mills, "which we regard as the best

after our own".

That same year, duPont explained an arrangement between the rivals. "As to our prices in Philadelphia, we are under an agreement with Mr. Whelen [sic] the owner of Nitre Hall factory not to undersell one another and have agreed not to sell under \$7.50 credit and \$7.20 cash, except for very large quantities."

Sometimes fierce, sometimes pragmatic, this was the competition between the Nitre Hall and duPont powder mills from 1810 to 1820.

Source: Gibson, George H. Nitre Hall Gunpowder Mills, 1963. Eleutherian Mills-Hagley Foundation, Greenville, Wilmington, DE. (This paper also quotes original correspondence from E.I. duPont.) 

Welcome, New Members

Peter Bannan
Stan Bowman
Dan DiGnazio
Christine Farrell
Kathleen Payne
Theresa Smith
Vincent Snyder

In Memoriam

HTHS mourns a dedicated and loyal member, Millicent Phillips, who died this past summer. As Program Chair, she engaged speakers for many enjoyable and informative general membership meetings. Millie was also a faithful volunteer at Fall and Spring clean-up days at Nitre Hall. She will be missed.

Dates to Remember

- ⇒ General Membership Meeting - Thursday, April 15, 8 PM
Llanerch Presbyterian Church, Park Rd. and Lansdowne Ave.
- ⇒ Heirloom Appraisal Day - Saturday, May 1, 1999, 1-4 PM, Nitre Hall, Karakung Dr.
- ⇒ Tours - Nitre Hall, Lawrence Cabin, and the Federal School - First weekend of each month, 1-4 PM from May through October, pending availability of guides.

Landis Valley Spinning Wheel Leaving Nitre Hall

There is still time to see the beautiful walking wool spinning wheel that has been on display in Nitre Hall.

This spinning wheel, on loan to HTHS from Landis Valley Museum, will be returned in July. See Nitre Hall hours at left.



Guides Needed for June 23

Guides are needed for June 23 to work with a group of students at Nitre Hall and/or the Federal School. The students will be participating in the Darby Creek Valley Association's summer education program, "Explore the Darby Creek Valley, Past and Present".
Contact Anne Ackerman at 449-9095.

Did you know?

In 1810, most of the saltpeter for the manufacture of gunpowder came from India.



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Historical Society
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Inside This Issue

Memories of Collen Brook Farm	Page 1
Treasures in Your Attic?	Page 1
Progress on Nitre Hall Restoration	Page 2
Results of Member Survey	Page 2
Gunpowder Wars of the 1810s	Page 3