



HTHS



610-446-7988

HAVERFORD TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FALL 2004

General Membership Meeting

Thursday, October 21, 2004

7:30 PM

Llanerch Presbyterian Church
Lansdowne and Park Avenues
Havertown, PA

William J. McDevitt, Esq.,
Historic Reenactor
Interprets Dr. George Smith

Dr. William McDevitt, past president of the Upper Darby Historical Society and Chair of the Department of Management and Business Law at St. Joseph's University, regularly portrays Dr. George Smith in period costume at Collenbrook Farm.

Dr. Smith, born at "Narbeth," Haverford Township in 1804 is best known for his *History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania* and as the founder of the Delaware County Institute of Science.

The program is free and open to the Public. 🌿

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2	HTHS Recognized for Publication; Bike Tour; Gifts to Society; Haverford Township Day
3	Powder Mill Valley ...Connections
5	Societies Combine for Outing; Road Rally; Nitre Hall Holiday Open House; Lewis and Clark Nat'l Exhibition
6	Calendar of Events; Member News

Art Reception and Silent Auction

Friday, October 15, 2004

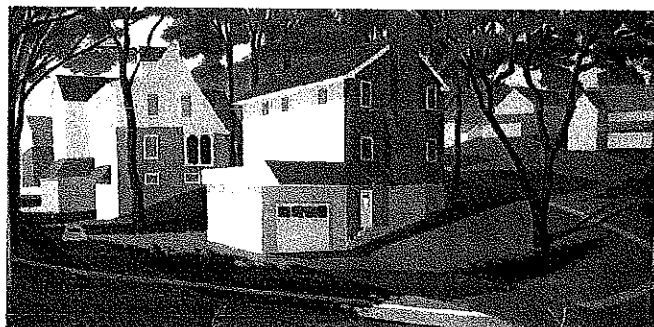
Reception 7:00 to 9 PM

Tyme Gallery
17 West Eagle Road,
Havertown

Havertown artist *Edwin A. Brent* has generously donated several of his paintings to the Society for our fund-raising activities. Mr. Brent's large canvases depict neighborhood buildings and landscapes in bright blocks of acrylic color. The artist, who lived here from 1964 to 1990, studied at the University of Michigan School of Design, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and in New York and Europe.

On the night of the auction, bidding ends at 8:30 PM. Successful bidders may take home their pictures that evening. All three levels of the Tyme Gallery will be open for the reception. (The Gallery is located next to Orner's Nursery near Eagle and Darby Roads).

You can stop by Tyme Gallery for a preview from October 12-15 between 10:00 AM and 6:30 PM. Or just come for the festivities and auction on Friday evening. There is no admission charge. Proceeds benefit the historical society. 🌿



HTHS Recognized for Publication - *Images of America Haverford Township*

The twenty-sixth annual Preservation Awards, sponsored by County Council and the Heritage Commission of Delaware County, were awarded on May 4, 2004. The Commission is appointed by County Council and charged with the mission to acknowledge and promote the cultural heritage of Delaware County. Susan Faccioli and Mary Courtney, seen here with Alice Brennan, Rich Paul, Andrew Reilly, Michael Puppio, Linda Cartisano and Tim Murtaugh, accepted the award on behalf of the historical society committee at the County Council meeting at the Government Center in Media. The pictorial history of the township celebrates the heritage, architecture and people of Haverford Township and is now in its second printing. 🌿



Bike Tour Comes to Powder Mill Valley October 24

Nitre Hall is the starting point for the Fall Bike Tour sponsored by Haverford Township Recreation Department. Historic sites in Powder Mill Valley will be open Sunday, October 24 from 1 to 3 PM. Cyclists should meet at 12:50 PM at the lower parking lot of Nitre Hall and the Lawrence Cabin on Karakung Drive for a ride through Powder Mill Valley. Riders should be at least 7 years old. 🌿

Answer: Lawrence Cabin

Gifts to the Society in 2004

The Historical Society gratefully acknowledges gifts from the following generous donors.

- From the Lower Merion Historical Society,
An 8x10 photograph of the Oakmont Chess Club and a copy of a 1687 Pennsylvania map showing the townships of the Welsh Tract.
- From the Darby Historical Society,
Darby Borough, Lindy Wardell, editor.
- From Friends of the Thomas Massey House –
The original mantle from the stone addition to the Lawrence Cabin, House of Three Generations, saved by Hilda Lucas.
- From member Jack Freas of Tamerlane Books,
A tri-color promotional brochure
“*Absolute Auction 230 unexcelled Residential Lots at Merion Golf Heights, 1925.*”
- From Grace and Jeff Hill,
nearly half a cord of seasoned fire wood for Colonial Living.
- From Upper Darby Historical Society – *The History and Development of Upper Darby Township*, Second Ed, by Thomas J. Difilippo.
- Thanks also to the many people who have donated fat and candle wax for Colonial Living. 🌿

10th Annual Haverford Township Day – Saturday, October 2

HTHS' booth will again be located in front of the Skatium.

This year we will be featuring

- toys of long ago – “Graces,” hoop, cup and ball.
- Basket of History Raffle.
- *Images of America Haverford Township* the pictorial history of the township for \$19.99.
- Membership applications

Powder Mill Valley

*Connections to the American Revolution,
Lewis & Clark, and the War of 1812*
by Mary Courtney with Dick Walker

Several documents in the archives of the Haverford Township Historical Society attest to the production of gunpowder for the American Revolution on the Cobbs Creek in Powder Mill Valley. Among them, H.S.J. Sickel in 1937 writes that "during the years of Captain Charles Cruikshank's ownership of the Grange there grew up a great powder industry along the Cobbs Creek from Manoa Road to Beechwood, about 1765." Margaret Johnston, former president and curator of the Society, writes in her notes: "...gunpowder used during the Revolutionary War came from these mills which were visited by Gen. George Washington." Can this be local legend or is there truth in the letters, history papers, and newspaper clippings now at Nitre Hall? Where else might that powder have gone?

*CONDITIONS FOR POWDER PRODUCTION IN
THIS QUIET VALLEY WERE PERFECT DURING
THE 18TH AND EARLY 19TH CENTURIES.*

Early settlers needed powder for hunting, quarrying and clearing fields. These nearly self-sufficient farmers had both the knowledge and the ingredients to make gunpowder in small batches for their own use. Although very labor-intensive, it could even be mixed with a mortar and pestle. Conditions for powder production in this quiet valley were perfect during the 18th and early 19th centuries. In addition to a long history of mills along the Cobbs Creek, (Haverford Mill-1688) there were an ample water supply and dense woods, including willow trees, to supply charcoal. The recipe was no secret in the 18th century.

The three ingredients for gunpowder are nitre or saltpeter (potassium nitrate), carbon or charcoal and sulphur also known as brimstone, which can be "roasted" out of iron pyrite. Of these three, nitre is the most difficult to obtain; but, it can be found on cellar and stable walls as efflorescence and, in fact, can be made from plant and animal waste containing nitrogen. To the decomposing mixture, limestone and urine are added. A nitre house could easily be set up near a barn. In colonial times and in the years prior to the revolution, nitre was both homemade and imported.

In 1774 England banned exports of gunpowder materials to America and at the start of the revolution

only Oswald Eve's Frankford Mill in Philadelphia produced commercial gunpowder. In 1776 Committees of Safety, recognizing the need for domestic gunpowder, published and distributed handbills with directions to produce saltpeter or nitre. If millers along the Cobbs Creek in Haverford Township modified or expanded their existing grist and saw mill technology to produce gunpowder, output was probably modest. We do not know for certain if local gunpowder made its way to Washington's troops. It would have been a secret operation. We do know that in December 1777 General Cornwallis' troops raided the township for supplies and destroyed local stone buildings. Were some of these powder magazines?

After the Revolution, powder making flourished. By the mid 1780's, Joseph J. Miller had a powder mill near Frankford in Philadelphia. Around 1790, Israel Whelen, Sr., a successful Philadelphia merchant and former commissary general in Washington's army, took Joseph Miller as a partner and began trading in gunpowder and nitre. Arthur van Gelder and Hugo Schlatter in their book *History of the Explosives Industry in America* state that the powder mill, later named Nitre Hall Mills, was built by Whelen ("Wheelen") about 1800. The first powder out of rival Eleutherian Mills on the Brandywine was in 1804.

Quaker Israel Whelen was born at Uwchlan, Chester County near Downingtown on December 13, 1752. He married Mary Downing (22) in May of 1772. Israel died on October 21, 1806 at age 54 and is buried in the Friends Burial Ground at 4th and Arch Streets, Philadelphia. Mary (called Polly) died March 31, 1831. They owned a town home at 66 S.6th St., Philadelphia, near Washington Square and a country house in Downingtown on the Lancaster Turnpike. His successful business was conducted from the NW corner of 4th and Market Streets, Philadelphia.

Whelen, a "fighting Quaker," was censured by the Arch Street Meeting when he joined the Continental Army. A copy of a letter to his wife, written in 1776 when he was 24 years old, explaining his motives, is in the archives of the Haverford Township Historical Society at Nitre Hall. After the war, Whelen became financial agent for the new government. In 1791 he was a director of the U.S. Bank. In 1795 he was elected "Senator in the Senate of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania." In 1798 he appears in the diary of Elizabeth Drinker, when he stood for election to the office of "Collector of the Port." Israel Whelen
(continued on page 4)

Powder Mill Valley (continued from page 3)

became the Purveyor of Public Supplies by 1800 under President John Adams and in 1803, President Thomas Jefferson sent Meriwether Lewis to him in Philadelphia to be outfitted with everything from trade beads to gunpowder for the Corps of Discovery Expedition. Did some of this powder come from the mill he owned along the Cobbs Creek?

Israel Whelen was in partnership with Joseph Miller to refine nitre and manufacture gunpowder "stored at their arsenal above Frankford." With his military supply experience gained during the Revolutionary War, knowledge of the geographic area and his fine business sense, investment in a powder mill was a logical venture for Israel Whelen, Sr. Whelen's interest in powder manufacture may have been largely proprietary in nature, not "hands on". It is hard to imagine him a powdermaster. In fact, he distances himself from the business in his letter dated March 29, 1799, writing that "I never had anything to do with the management of the Powder Mills...Miller's property there." Nitre Hall Powder Mills also had a nitre house and produced huge quantities both for separate sale and in the making of black powder. Some believed that he built Nitre Hall as early as 1800. We now think it more likely that he expanded or improved an existing mill on Cobbs Creek as an investment even before 1800 and the house was built in 1810 during the partnership of his son Israel Jr. with William Rogers.

Could gunpowder have been made in small quantities for years at sites along the Cobbs Creek, including Jonathan Miller's "Echo Hollow" location at the end of Mill Road in Haverford Township? J. Miller is listed in the tax records in 1794 as a "Single Freeman" and by 1802 he paid taxes on 149 acres of land in Haverford Township. In 1808, he is listed as an innkeeper, owning "a range of stone sheds," two stone barns, a stone stable and stone house. In 1810 this same Jonathan Miller sold the land in Powder Mill Valley to Israel Whelen, Jr. and William Rogers. (Deed Book BKK page 213.) By this time Whelen, Sr. was dead and the partnership with Joseph Miller had been dissolved. Joseph Miller left for France after a scandal involving quantities of nitre to be delivered to the U.S. Government. Were Joseph and Jonathan Miller related?

The Whelen papers are in the Clements Library at the University of Michigan. In 2002 the Haverford Township Historical Society engaged Ellen Poteet,

researcher there, to read and summarize them. We learned more about the business dealings and family relationships and looked specifically at receipts and letters for the period. They reveal both Whelens to be skilled business men.

By 1800 Israel Whelen, Jr. was seventeen years old and was learning the extensive Whelen business. At some point during this period William Rogers joined the partnership, whether with Whelen, Sr. first and later with the son, or only after Israel Whelen, Sr.'s death in 1806, is unclear. In November, 1810 Israel Whelen, Jr. married Mary Siddons of Philadelphia, where he owned a residence at 194 Chestnut Street. They had seven children. Mary Siddons, of a wealthy family, may have had Quaker roots in Salem, New Jersey. However, Whelen, Jr. was censured by the Philadelphia meeting for going outside Friends traditions in marriage. It seems unlikely that the newlyweds took up residence in the powder mill. 1810 is also significant as the date of sale of the land in Powder Mill Valley to "Whelen and Rogers" and is a more acceptable date for Nitre Hall itself.

IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT IN 1803... HE SENT GUNPOWDER THAT CAME FROM OUR OWN POWDER MILL VALLEY ON THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY EXPEDITION.

Nitre Hall, the home of the powdermaster of Nitre Hall Powder Mill, is now thought to have been built by the partnership of Israel Whelen, Jr. and William Rogers, as part of the business venture in 1810 and not as Whelen's residence. Nitre Hall was long known as "William Rogers' house." In Dr. Eckfeldt's book, *Cobbs Creek in the Days of the Powder Mill*, William Rogers is credited with having built the stone mansion.

Little is known of William Rogers, the powdermaster. He was a Lutheran and worshipped in Lower Merion. After his death and the sale of the mills to Denis Kelly in 1840, his wife moved to Philadelphia. The best documented historical significance of the Nitre Hall Powder Mill is its part in the War of 1812, supplying gunpowder for the American effort against Britain in the "Second Revolution". A case can be made for nitre and black powder manufacture at Nitre Hall Mills along Cobbs Creek as early as 1800. It is quite possible that in 1803, the year Israel Whelen, Sr. supplied Meriwether Lewis, he sent gunpowder that came from our own Powder Mill Valley on the Corps of Discovery expedition. 🌿

Haverford Township / Lower Merion Societies Combine for Outing June 13

Before traveling to the 30th anniversary celebration of the Grange Estate purchased by Haverford Township, members of the Lower Merion Historical Society were instructed in the manner of 19th century school days in the oldest building in Delaware County erected specifically for education purposes. After a lesson using the tools of the day, which included the horn book, slates, McGuffey's Readers and the dunce cap, guests explored the exterior of the building and exchanged stories of their own school days. Next spring we will visit Historic Harriton House, celebrating its 300th birthday this year. Watch for an invitation in the spring of 2005. ❀

Nitre Hall Holiday Open House – Sunday, December 12

Karen MacKay: Traditional Appalachian folk music performed by musician, story teller and self-styled "West Virginia Woman" from 1 to 4 PM will highlight our festivities this yuletide season. Ms. MacKay keeps the "old stories" alive through the music of autoharp, guitar, violin, banjo and dulcimer on her CDs, *West Virginia Woman* and *Flying With Angels*. ❀

Road Rally

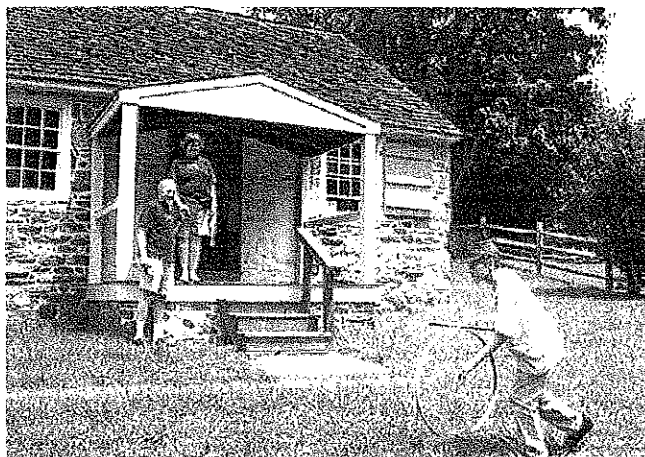
HTHS participated in the Fifth Annual Road Rally, sponsored by the Delaware County Historical Society's *Passport to History* Program, on July 17. We opened our sites to record-setting numbers of visitors. Carloads began the day at the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology in Media and cruised to historic sites for a free tour. Enthusiastic travelers had their Passports stamped, exchanged secret passwords with the site guides and puzzled out the answers to riddles.

Participants ended the drive with a picnic at Greenbank Farm. Sites in Media, Chester and Chadds Ford are being considered for next year's Road Rally.

Lewis & Clark: The National Bicentennial Exhibition

The first East coast stop for this remarkable exhibition is the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia from November 6, 2004 through March 20, 2005.

After its debut in January in St. Louis, this exhibit will make just two stops on the East Coast. The exhibit features hundreds of artifacts including rare and priceless objects and documents that have not been seen in one place since the U.S. Army's Corps of Discovery returned in 1806. The Academy of Natural Sciences is seeking volunteers who would enjoy being involved with visitors to the museum for this special exhibit. For details and an application contact Lois Kuter, Volunteer Coordinator at the Academy of Natural Sciences 1900 Benjamin Franklin Parkway Philadelphia, PA 19103 or call 215-299-1029/ kuter@acnatsci.org. ❀



Tommy Frick rolls the hoop while his parents, Charles and Lorraine watch from the porch of the 1797 Federal School.

Can you solve this riddle?

A new home early settlers came to seek,
And this they first built near Darby Creek.
When destruction threatened, I moved in with a buddy,
The only industrial building left in Powder Mill Valley.
Who am I? *Answer on page 2.* ❀

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Haverford Township Day

Saturday, October 2 - 10AM - 4PM

Art Reception and Silent Auction at Tyme Gallery

Friday, October 15 - 7-9PM

HTHS General Membership Meeting

Thursday, October 21 - 7:30PM

Fall Bike Tour at Nitre Hall

Sunday, October 24 - 1-3PM

Holiday Open House at Nitre Hall

Sunday, December 12 - 1-4PM

General Membership Meeting:

Thursday, February 17, 2005 - 7:30PM

Annual Meeting:

Thursday, April 21, 2005 - 7:30PM

PLEASE CALL 610-446-7988 TO VOLUNTEER

Welcome New Members

John J. and Nancy Cunningham

Anita Intenzo

David and Carol Porkorny and Family

Mark and Nancy Rupp

Robert Wall, Sr.

New Members of the Board of Directors

Bette Ferrill - Publicity

Amy Wolfe - Education Coordinator

In Memoriam

Frederick H. Stafford

Helen Wagner