



The Haverford Herald

Fall 2023

Newsletter of the Haverford Township Historical Society

Our 84th Year

www.haverfordhistoricalsociety.org

HTHS OKTOBERFEST FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13

The Haverford Historical Society is holding its annual Oktoberfest night at Nitre Hall on Friday, October 13 from 7 pm to 10 pm. It's always a delightful, low-key evening event with outdoor eating and live local entertainment on the upper stage. Outdoor lights will be strung, Nitre Hall will be opened up, its windows warmly glowing, and an indoor silent auction will be conducted! Our Oktoberfest serves as an important fundraiser for the Society. Don't miss it! For more information and to purchase tickets, see our website:



haverfordhistoricalsociety.org/oktoberfest/

HAVERFORD HISTORY HEIST:

THE FBI ART CRIME TEAM & THE STORY OF HTHS STOLEN ARTIFACTS OUR FALL PROGRAM: OCTOBER 26, 2023, 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM AT THE QUADRANGLE

On April 14, 1979 approximately 24 antiques were stolen from Nitre Hall and the Lawrence Cabin, two Haverford Township historic buildings. The theft was not solved, and not one of the items was recovered at that time.



Fast forward to May of 2018, when the Historical Society was contacted by Jake Archer, Special Agent of the FBI's Art Crime Team, requesting information about our stolen items. Then in December 2021, an indictment was handed down charging a suspect with possession of 5 articles stolen from HTHS, along with many additional items stolen from other East Coast institutions.

Join us to hear Special Agent Jacob Archer tell us about the work of the FBI Art Crime Team and how they spearheaded the investigation around these thefts. The FBI Art Crime Team Special Agent assigned to the case, the Assistant U.S. Attorney who prosecuted it, and the two Upper Merion Police Department detectives who diligently pursued leads are all expected to be present at the program.

Because the Haverford Township Free Library is in construction transition, the program will take place in the Quadrangle Auditorium (3300 Darby Rd, Haverford). This program is made possible through a partnership between the Haverford Township Historical Society, the Haverford Township Free Library and The Quadrangle.

Valet parking will be available at the Quadrangle.

The program is free and open to the public, but registration is required: <https://bit.ly/HTHSFBITalk>



A NOT-SO-QUIET WALK IN POWDER MILL VALLEY PARK

By Irene Coffey

Have you ever walked along Karakung Drive, enjoying the tranquil sounds of Cobbs Creek, the bird song, the wind in the trees? Two hundred years ago, such a peaceful stroll would not have been permitted by William Rogers, one of two Powder Masters of the Nitre Hall Powder Mills (NHPM), except for Sundays, when Mill operations were paused. During the week such a walk would not have been a quiet one, filled instead with the noise of the water wheel, the noise of the tumbling barrels, the noise of the pounding mill, and perhaps the noise and shock wave of an explosion.

In the 1700s American gunpowder production was primarily a home-based process. Gunpowder was used not only for war but for hunting, building roads, and clearing farm land. Before the Revolution, there was not a single powder mill in operation in the colonies. Imported gunpowder was significantly superior. But in 1774, in an effort to protect against growing colonial unrest, King George III blocked the importation of arms and gunpowder to the colonies. By the 1810 U.S. Census and in time for the War of 1812, there were 208 American powder mills, 20 of them in Pennsylvania and 2 in Delaware County. One of the Delaware County mills was the Nitre Hall Powder Mill on Cobbs Creek.

While the exact date is not known, historians claim that Israel Whelan operated a powder mill on Cobbs Creek before 1810. The mill buildings included the mill wheel, houses for making or refining charcoal, saltpeter/nitre, and sulfur (the three ingredients of gunpowder), a press house, a barrel mill, a dry house, and powder magazines in addition to tenement houses for 10 families and a mansion for the Powder Master. During the war of 1812 (1812-1815) the NHPM produced approximately 32,000 kegs, or 800,000 pounds, of gunpowder. Imagine the noise these operations would have created!

Operating a black powder mill was a dangerous business. Rogers' curmudgeonly attitude about non-employees on the property during work days stemmed from a valid concern that a horse's iron shoe or the metal nails in a person's boot could spark an explosion if they stepped on loose gunpowder.

Powder Masters Whelan and Rogers took many precautions to prevent or minimize the impact of accidents. Roofs on mill buildings were pinned so they would blow off in an explosion, limiting the damage to the rest of the building. A large stockade fence surrounded the entire operation. Workers' shoes were constructed with wooden pegs rather than metal nails. Laborers were warned against using iron shovels or other iron implements in the mill buildings, and they also were advised not to suck on their pipes lest a stray ash ignite an explosion.

Despite all these precautions, the NHPM experienced three major explosions. The first was in January 1825 when the barrel mill exploded. The barrel mill was where the powder kernels were tumbled in barrels to make them smoother and safer. Fortunately, no one was injured, and the building was quickly rebuilt.

The same barrel mill exploded again in November 1825. Local newspapers reported that about 2,500 pounds of powder were blown up. The shock waves and noise were felt and heard distinctly in Philadelphia, but again there were no injuries and no deaths.

The third explosion occurred July 16, 1831. Below is the newspaper account of that explosion:

One of the pounding mills, belonging to the extensive manufactory of Mr. William Rogers, ... known generally throughout the United States as the Nitre Hall Mills, were [sic] blown up on Saturday July 16th at 10 o'clock A.M. Four of the men lost their lives. ...

The pounding mill contains 24 pestles and mortars; in each mortar the ingredients for one keg are placed and pounded about 14 hours. There are four workmen and a superintendent [who] visit the mill every hour; they

remain there about ten minutes, the mill is stopped as soon as they enter, the pounders hoisted and are not put in motion until they are ready to retire. Their business is to mix the composition by hand, add a certain portion of water, and see that all the machinery is in perfect order. The mill had been started about five hours, and was in perfect order, the men had come down to their usual hourly turn, the last man was brushing up the dust, preparatory to setting the wheel in motion, when one of the men was seen ... to take up a copper hammer and strike a small piece of powder which adhered to the brass bottom of the pounder, and on repeating the blow, instantly a spark was elicited and the explosion took place ...

The superintendent had gone outside to the water wheel and was turning the corner of the building on his way to the inside to start the mill when the explosion took place. He was thrown off his feet by this shock but being protected by a thick wall was otherwise uninjured. Owing to their [sic] being six large windows and three doors all open at the time, the walls of the building were not much injured; the roof was thrown off, and broken to pieces; the machinery inside of the mill is broken and destroyed, the whole valuable water wheel, 32 feet in diameter, being protected by a very thick wall, is uninjured. There were [sic] about six hundred weight of powder lost. The entire loss is estimated at about \$900 [approx. \$30,000 today]. The rest of the mills are uninjured. The nearest building was the fire proof magazine about 200 yards off: this contains at present about 3,000 kegs, but from its location it could not be injured by any explosion which could take place. ...

The use of a hammer was strictly forbidden in the mill, and at the time it was used, there was not the slightest necessity for it ... The names of the sufferers [deceased] and the place of their residence in Ireland were

Daniel McAleer	County Tyrone
Patrick McDevitt	Ennishowen [sic - County Donegal]
Andrew White	[County] Tyrone
Patrick Nulty	[County] Louth

(Extracted from: Gilbert Arlan K. "Gunpowder Production in the Middle Atlantic States: a Hazardous Industry, 1783-1833." Dissertation. University of Delaware, 1957.)

Despite the damage, the NHPM continued in operation until around 1840 when Rogers died, although they never recovered their prominence in the gunpowder industry. After Rogers' death the property was acquired by Dennis Kelly, who operated a textile mill on the site.

So the next time, or the first time, you walk along Karakung Drive savoring the peace and quiet of the wooded paths or road, think of the noise you would have heard 200 years ago.

Compiled by Irene D. Coffey, partly from notes of Margaret Johnston, former President of HTHS.

In 1939 John Eckfeldt took this photo of the water-powered mill building and hand-tinted it to add color. He noted by that time it had been converted to housing.



Haverford Township
Historical Society

OVER 80 YEARS AGO -

HISTORIAN J. CARROLL HAYES DISCUSSES MASON-DIXON LINE

In January 1941, West Chester attorney J. Carroll Hayes (1869-1951) gave a lecture on the Mason-Dixon Line to HTHS members. Hayes was a founder and President of the Chester County Historical Society. He was from an old Chester County Quaker family, and his ancestral farm was the 1700 Green Lawn Farm on the Brandywine, adjacent to the farm containing the Star Gazers' Stone that Mason and Dixon used for their survey. It was unlikely any historian could have been more immersed in his topic. Parts of the HTHS speech were drawn from Hayes' extensive study, which appeared later (*Pennsylvania History*, vol 8, no 4, 1941:278-303).

An early HTHS newsletter carried a summary of the speech. "Bulletin #1" was distributed by society Secretary William J. Laramy, himself a local historian and principal of Oakmont School for years. Hayes later wrote to correct a spelling and the map: The Johnston, not Johnson, farm was not in the triangle, as shown, but further north and east, in the curve.

The HTHS goal is to "get it right." We could find no published correction ... until now! - Kathy Case



Star Gazers' Stone, Route 162 and Star Gazer Rd., Embreeville, PA (Newlin Township, Chester County). (Wikipedia photo)

A Wikipedia summary tells us that "Star Gazers' Stone, located on Star Gazers' Farm near Embreeville, Pennsylvania, USA, marks the site of a temporary observatory established in January 1764 by Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, which they used in their survey of the Mason-Dixon line. The stone was placed by Mason and Dixon about 700 feet (213 m) north of the Harlan House, which was used as a base of operations by Mason and Dixon through the four-and-a-half-year-long survey. Selected to be about 31 miles (50 km) west of the then southernmost point in Philadelphia, the observatory was used to determine the precise latitude of its location. The latitude of the Maryland-Pennsylvania border

was then set to be 15 miles (24.1 km) south of the point in Philadelphia. The farm, including the house and stone, were listed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 9, 1985. In 2013 construction was completed on a parking area to allow public access to Star Gazers Stone. Built c. 1724 near the forks of the Brandywine, the Harlan House was enlarged c.1758, and is likely the first house built in Newlin Township. The Harlan family lived in the house until 1956, and carefully preserved the location of the stone through the generations."

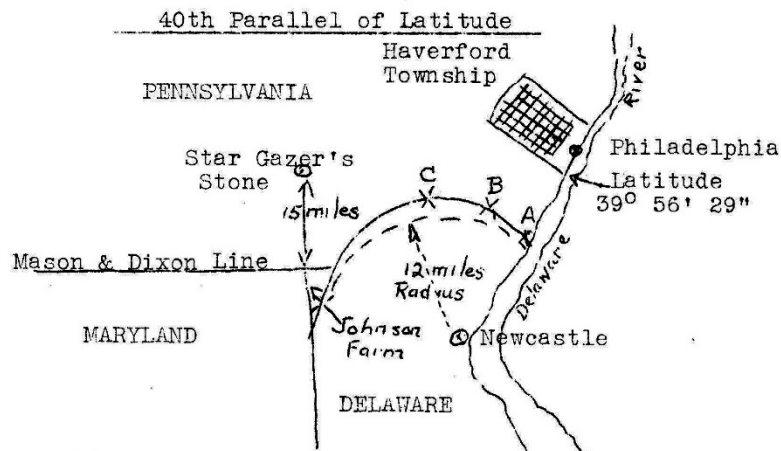
HAVERFORD TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bulletin #1

January 1941

• DO YOU KNOW THAT -

William Penn and Lord Baltimore both claimed the land we occupy in Haverford Township in 1681?
 the 40th parallel was thought to be located near Newcastle?
 the Duke of York declared that Penn should come no nearer than 12 miles from Newcastle?
 this is the reason for the only curved boundary in the U.S.?
 a compromise between Wm. Penn and Lord Baltimore placed the southern boundary line of Pennsylvania 15 miles south of the most southern point of old Philadelphia (Latitude $39^{\circ} 56' 29''$)?
 a resurvey of this circle boundary showed that it was nearly 13 miles from Newcastle according to deeds to properties A, B, C?
 the curve was not a true circle?
 the small triangle at the corner of Maryland was considered in Pennsylvania until Mr. Johnson, living within its bounds took the matter seriously?
 Mr. Johnson paraded through the streets wrapped in an American flag demanding his rights?
 In 1923 the Mason and Dixon line was continued east to meet the curved boundary leaving Mr. Johnson in his chosen state of Delaware?
 Mason and Dixon took observations from the star gazer's stone, then measured 15 miles south before starting west on that famous boundary line in 1763?
 J. Carroll Hayes presented these historic facts at our ANNUAL MEETING on January 17th, 1941?
 your President for 1941 is Walter K. Hardt?
 we should all work together for HAVERFORD TOWNSHIP?
 you should continue your interest in Haverford Township Historical Society by sending today your dues of one dollar (\$1.00) to Walter Huber, 705 Ashurst Road, Upper Darby?



Preserve this for future reference.

William J. Laramy
Secretary

HERITAGE FESTIVAL 2023 WAS A RESOUNDING SUCCESS — ON TO 2024!

By John Kirkland

Haverford Township Historical Society hosted another successful fundraising event, our 14th "annual" Haverford Heritage Festival. June 4 was a bright and sunny day, and thousands came out to enjoy strolling along Karakung Drive, visiting the different crafter booths, listening to live music, enjoying delicious food and having refreshing libations courtesy of Conshohocken Brewing. Tours of Nitre Hall took place, "Ned Hector" regaled the crowds with stories of his experiences as a local black Revolutionary War hero, and quilting and other textile craft demonstrations were on display. The beloved model trains were back in operation (with the model of the Beechwood Amusement Park building), live owl and falcon demonstrations enthralled our visitors, and many other activities and sites were enjoyed throughout the day.



Because of the generosity of our visitors, we were once again able to raise money for some of the many projects the Historical Society is involved in to preserve our Haverford Township history. This year's festival was our most successful to date. Stay tuned for more information about the upcoming 15th Annual Heritage Festival on June 2nd, 2024!

WELL GROUNDED

In a recent newsletter we highlighted and celebrated the work of the Master Gardeners around Nitre Hall and the Lawrence Cabin. Great progress in the appearance of our grounds has been made by this dedicated group, but of course we continue to have ongoing gardening needs. If you are interested in helping the gardeners on a regular basis or on special Park Cleanup Days, please email info@haverfordhistoricalsociety.org. All skills are welcome. We have a lot of weeding, planting, invasive species removal and other projects. Our gardens are looking great! Any help is appreciated.

MEET THE HTHS BOARD: KATHY CASE - by Amy Wolfe



The newest member of the Haverford Township Historical Society Board of Directors is Kathy Case. She brings a wealth of professional knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm to her position as Director at Large.

A Penn State alumna, Kathy majored in English with ambitions of becoming a journalist. It was at the Penn State Daily Collegian that she cut her teeth, attributing her editorial skills to her experience there. Kathy went to work in Philadelphia for the America College of Physicians, rising from copy editor to Senior Vice President responsible for communications, books, newspapers, journals, and online resources.

“It was all about language,” she says. “I tried to make it easier to understand scientific jargon.” Kathy earned her Masters at Drexel and eventually moved on to be publisher for the American Association for Cancer Research. Throughout her publishing career, she served on boards of not-for-profit societies and was president of several publishing organizations. After retirement, she stayed on at AACR as archivist and historian, where she made order of records, photographs and scientific papers dating back to 1907.

“I especially loved being an archivist,” states Kathy, “and always had one foot in history.” That sentiment, along with having served for six years on the Haverford Township Historical Commission, made her a perfect fit for the Historical Society. Her initial project was to research and document the Lenape in Haverford Township, with a goal of correcting common inaccuracies and “getting it right.” Her next goal is to identify “who were really the first township settlers under Penn, as opposed to who owned land (the usual list).”

As an HTHS archivist, Kathy is working to organize records on the history of Haverford Township in accessible formats, with the possibility of a printed book in the future. An avid antique collector, she also wants to help enhance Nitre Hall by focusing on our collections so they “better reflect the story of Haverford Township.”

Kathy is active in the Brynford Civic Association and enjoys archery, hiking, and travel with husband Jacques - most recently to Egypt. She delights in spending time with her four grandchildren. Kathy is also keen on genealogy and takes pride in her descendency from Thomas Wynne, a Welshman who was physician to William Penn. Wynne accompanied Penn to America on the ship “Welcome” in 1682. Learning about Wynne – her 15th great-grandfather – sparked her interest in local history. We at the Historical Society are most fortunate to benefit from that interest.

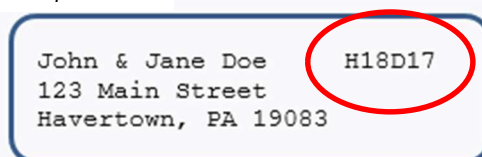
RENEW YOUR HTHS MEMBERSHIP FOR 2024 !

It's now time to renew (or join) the Haverford Township Historical Society for 2024. A renewal form in this newsletter can be mailed in with a check, or you can handle things entirely online. We are a non-profit depending entirely on members, donors and volunteers. Although we are housed in historic buildings owned by Haverford Township and bring them to life (and contribute to their care and costs), no township funds enter our organization's budget. We rely on our members and donors. Please join us and support our work in 2024 and beyond!

Check your mailing label to determine your HTHS membership or financial donation status. Here are the codes:

- Ixx **Individual** member and 2-digit year for which you last paid dues (\$20)
- Hxx **Household** member and 2-digit year for which you last paid dues (\$30)
- Dxx **Donor** and 2-digit year of your most recent general donation
- Nxx **Nitre Club** donor and 2-digit year of your most recent donation (\$25)
- Lxx **Lawrence Club** donor and 2-digit year of most recent donation (\$50)
- Fxx **Federal Club** donor and 2-digit year of most recent donation (\$100)
- Pxx **Powder Master Club** donor & 2-digit year of most recent donation (\$200)
- COMPL.** Complimentary newsletter (other history groups and some officials)

Sample label:



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Send your comments and suggestions for this newsletter to us
via email: info@haverfordhistoricalsociety.org
Editor Fall 2023 – Richard Kerr



HAVERFORD TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Chartered 1964

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