Next year, in August 2007, Lower Merion will be celebrating the 325th anniversary of the founding of “The Welsh Tract” in America. This landmark date will be celebrated by a series of events that will focus on the growth and development of our various communities. In preparation for this commemoration, the Society, as part of its continuing education program, has been working with our local government and the school district to inform the community about our unique heritage. Also, we’re actively involved in basic research on topics that have been published in professional journals, popular magazines, research papers, booklets, specialty books, lecture series, guided tours, and video documentaries that promote our Lower Merion.

Another important aspect of our mission is to speak out in favor of preservation and restoration of our neighborhood communities. This takes on many aspects: speaking up about preserving those valuable buildings that define who we are today; establishing historic districts; and putting specific buildings on the National Register of Historic Places (like our Lower Merion Academy). Our history best defines our community and creates a sense of place, a neighborhood that has a shared heritage.

In the July 2006 issue of “Main Line Today,” our “award-winning historical society” was the recipient of the “Best of the Main Line and Western Suburbs” in the category “History Hounds.” Thank you to all our volunteers who work with the community and helped us earn this public recognition.

Sincerely,

Preserving Our Past for the Future

For more than a century, Lower Merion has had the distinction of being called “The Main Line.” A more recent term that has been used to identify our community is “Camelot.” An affluent area with large castle-like stone houses that, in some cases, architecturally incorporate a turret style addition. This kind of economic statement is not a bad thing, but too much of a good thing can have its consequences.

Pieces of our township are disappearing every week. Building by building, it is being torn down and replaced with new and larger houses. Demolitions are a natural process when poorly-designed or poorly-built structures need replacement. Some of these new houses are bigger, some are better built, some are stylish, some are uglier.

“In short, there’s simply not a more congenial spot for happily-ever-aftering than here in Camelot”

lyrics from Lerner and Loewe’s “Camelot”

Continued on page 3
We Gratefully Accept Donations

Our library holdings continue to grow thanks to the generosity of the local community. During these past six months, the following groups/people have donated items related to our Lower Merion history:

John W. Alexander, Jr.
Ann Bagley
Joseph Betz
Frank Parke Bicking
S. Jonathan Bugbee, Jr.
Max Buten
Estate of Margaret Hill Collins
Victoria Donohoe
Franklin Maps
Helen E. Hanna
Cathy Hetznecker
Dr. William J. Homer
Melissa Hope
Donald Lawler
Farilyn Leopold
Lower Merion Conservancy
Lower Merion School District
Bala Cynwyd Middle School
Lower Merion School District
Harriton High School
Richard Reuss
Joan C. Roberts
Stefan Schreier
Township of Lower Merion
Planning Department
Frank Weer
Dr. G. Britten Winters
Nick Zarvalas

Collection Highlights

As a community, we’re proud of our Quaker roots and William Penn’s influence in molding our form of government. We’re fortunate to have in our Archive Collection source materials that relate to William Penn. Two Penn memorabilia items in our collection are:

The Seal from William Penn’s “Charter of Privileges”

On October 28, 1701, during Penn’s second and last visit to the colony, Penn signed his “Charter of Privileges for the Province of Pennsylvania and its Territories,” formally establishing a stable frame of government that, for its day, was remarkably liberal. In this document, Penn granted a set of individual rights to the inhabitants of Pennsylvania, codifying the freedom of conscience and that the inhabitants were never to be “molested or prejudiced” for their religious beliefs or practices. Before William Penn returned to England, he wrote to the Welsh settlers stating: “You shall be governed by laws of your own making and live a free people.”

The Works of William Penn by William Penn

This publication is a complete set of Penn’s writings and epistles which was published in 1726. It is printed in an oversized format in 2 volumes; Volume 1 is 911 pages, Volume 2 is 916 pages. The formidable title of this anthology is “The Works of William Penn: The Guide Mistaken, & Temporizing rebuked: or, A Brief Reply to Jonathan Clapham’s Book, intituled, A Guide to the True Religion In Which His Religion is Confuted, His Hypocrisy is Detected, His Aspersions are Reprehended, His Contradictions are Compared.” This publication offers us a window into the past and an account of Penn’s beliefs and dreams.

We Would Like to Recommend

The historical society supports the work of American INSIGHT (AmericanINSIGHT.org); a local non-profit video production company. Its mission is to produce historical documentaries about the lives and work of Americans who have made lasting contributions to the cultural, social and political life of our country.

Currently, American INSIGHT is working on a series of documentaries titled “Pennsylvania Visionaries.” The next installment, “Free Speech: A Sacred Challenge,” will be a one-hour documentary that explores the origins of free speech in England as well as its immigration to America through the auspices of the founder of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, William Penn.

When We Were Kids!

Organized in 1996, the Historical Society’s Intergenerational Program teaches Lower Merion School District’s fourth graders about life in the past. The program ran throughout May when we visited the six elementary schools. This year we had twenty-five volunteers who participated in the Intergenerational Interview program. They were:

Lita Cohen
Marlene Dubin
Barbara Earle
Margot Flaks
Al Gebhart
Fran Gebhart
Mary Giersch
Ted Goldsborough
Alison Graham
Emmy Hartley
Sylvester Haynie
Felicia Howard
Bettie Javoronok
Christine Jones
Dick Jones
Bonnie Kauffman
Joe Manko
Dr. Bill O’Brien
Joan Roberts
Dick Schneider
Peg Schneider
Bob Swartz
Jim Wiggins
Jill Ziemer
Diane Zullinger

Website Update

We have not slacked off on our commitment of building the best website that incorporates the “must have data” on Lower Merion. Our “virtual library” continues to be updated due to the recent acquisitions to the General Reference and Vertical File Collections. Also, our online database of Lower Merion Alumni has been update with the addition of more than 35,000 names from Lower Merion High School (1949 to 2003) and Harriton High School (1959 to 2003).

We must be doing something right. One way to measure success is to look at our year-to-date statistics that show that there were 110,797 visitors to our website!
Upcoming Events for Spring 2006

Haunted History: The Ghosts of Lower Merion!
Sunday, October 29th at 5:02pm (at sundown)

Meet at the Conservatory at West Laurel Hill Cemetery, 225 Belmont Avenue, Bala Cynwyd

Here’s the perfect event to celebrate Halloween. Lower Merion is a hotbed of haunted history and Jerry Francis will provide the stories behind 13 local ghosts. Most people know that the General Wayne Inn is haunted, but did you know the ghost’s name is Wilhelm? Hear the stories of the German clockmaker, the Colonel and the Lady in Gray, Tuggie the Witch, Murder Orchard in Penn Valley and other ghostly events from our past.

And for the really brave, there’s an optional flashlight walking tour of the cemetery after the lecture. Use the western gate on Belmont Avenue and follow the signs to the Conservatory.

Co-sponsored by West Laurel Hill Cemetery and The Lower Merion Conservancy
Free admission and complimentary refreshments supplied by the Bringhurst Funeral Home.

Centennial Fever: The 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition and our Union Sunday School

Sunday, December 3, 2006 at 1:30pm
Lecture and Slide Presentation by Rochelle Christopher
Lower Merion Academy, First Floor Meeting Room

Come explore the fair commemorating the 100th anniversary of the nation’s independence as we explore the values, mores, and wonders of the Industrial Revolution. Rochelle Christopher, of Victorian Vanities (VictorianVanities.net) will be our guide to the latest gossip and inventions seen on this marvelous journey back through the only World’s Fair ever hosted in Philadelphia.

Free admission and complimentary refreshments.

Camelot - continued from page 1

What is most disturbing about the avalanche of demolitions in Lower Merion is that many of these are teardowns of perfectly good housing stock. What was wrong with these structures is that they are presumably too modest in size and understate their presence.

Lower Merion is a great place to live and raise a family. Therefore, land is expensive, we have low taxes, good municipal services from the township/borough, excellent schools, proximity to the city, and lack of crime. At this time of greater economic affluence and moderately low interest rates, there is also a demand for more and bigger houses. To meet this market demand, the solution is often to teardown a modest sized house and to build a much bigger structure.

The problem with this trend is the loss of housing for those of modest income. We should have places for people of all ages and incomes to live, for our neighbors who are employed in municipal, educational, sales, clerical, construction, and service industries. To have a well-balanced community we need to retain a mix of housing for the different socio-economic levels of our population. We should maintain an inventory of housing stock, such as small apartment buildings, twins, row houses or smaller singles on smaller lots. These are the type of houses that are disappearing; namely “workforce” housing. Teardowns have a negative impact on the nature and character of our neighborhoods and should be discouraged in most situations.

“Camelot” should be a diverse community where a family can work, afford a home, and raise their children. We all contribute to the general welfare of Lower Merion.

by Ted Goldsborough, Max Buten and Jerry Francis
The Lower Merion Historical Society's mission is to "Preserve Our Past For The Future." This is accomplished through stewardship of local history, education of the community, preservation of historic resources, and outreach to promote awareness of the cultural heritage of the Township of Lower Merion and the Borough of Narberth.

Location:
Lower Merion Academy
506 Bryn Mawr Ave., Box 2602
Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004

Library Hours:
Wednesday evenings, 7:00 to 9:00 pm
Saturday afternoons, 2:00 to 4:00 pm
Also by appointment

Our Missions:

- Mark Your Calendar

Officers:

- President - Gerald A. Francis
- Vice President - Ross L. Mitchell
- Treasurer - John B. Hagner
- Secretary - Barbara McElroy
- Corresponding Secretary - Betty Cannon

Directors:

- Alison Graham, S. Hamill Horne, Joan Roberts
- Andrew Amsterdam, Denise H. Francis, Bruce D. Read
- Dennis McQuig, Lawrence, Bruce D. Read
- Allen Graham, S. Hamill Horne, Joan Roberts

Contact:
Phone and Fax: 610-664-3216
E-mail: LMHistory@comcast.net

Mark Your Calendar:

- Sunday, October 29, 2006
  Haunted History: The Ghosts of Lower Merion
- Sunday, December 3, 2006
  Centennial Fever: The 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition and our Union Sunday School
- March 2007
  Guided Tour of Rittenhouse Town
- April 2007
  Banquet and Annual Meeting at the "New" Tavern Restaurant (members only)
- May 2007
  Guided Tour of the Merion Meetinghouse and the Lower Merion Academy
- June 2007
  Centennial Fever: The 1876 Philadelphia Centennial
  Remember the 1876 Pennsylvania Centennial
- Sunday, December 3, 2006
  Lower Merion Historical Society's Christmas Family Event
- Sunday, October 22, 2006
  Lower Merion Historical Society's 50th Anniversary

The Historical Society is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization serving the community since 1949, for more than 75 years, and is dedicated to preserving the rich history of the Lower Merion community.