December 2013

**Fairmount Park Historic Holiday House Tours**

It is that time of year to get out and see some of our local treasures. From Thursday to Sunday, December 5th to 8th and 12th to 15th is this year’s *Yuletide Tours*. Decorated by various interior designers and garden clubs, the historic houses will delight visitors with festive adornments and stunning interiors. The theme this year for each house is:

- **Strawberry Mansion:** “Home for the Holidays”
- **Laurel Hill:** “Angels at Laurel Hill”
- **Woodford Mansion:** “Wassailing at Woodford”
- **Cedar Grove:** “Simple Gifts”
- **Lemon Hill:** “Holiday Entertaining”
- **Mount Pleasant:** “Visions of Twelfth Night”

This is a perfect way to share the season with friends and family. There are plenty of ways to visit these beautiful homes this holiday season. Visit the houses at your own pace during open house hours, take a guided trolley tour on select dates, or reserve a group tour through the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

[Click Here](#) to download the 2013 holiday events brochure.

**Preserve America Signs Puts the Heritage into Cynwyd Heritage Trail**

The U.S Department of Interior has designated the Township of Lower Merion a *Preserve America Community* and awarded the Township a *Preserve America Grant* to fund the development and manufacture of interpretive signs for the *Cynwyd Heritage Trail*. It has been a collaborative effort between the Township and the Historical Society’s volunteers who did the research, supplied the images, collected the copyrights for the images, drafted the wording, and did the fact checking.
These informative signs (24”x36”) have just been installed by the Township’s Parks and Recreation Department to provide users of the Heritage Trail with information about the heritage of this 19th century industrial corridor. To appreciate the images and the story that they tell, you must walk the Trail and see them in situ. Enjoy your walk!
The two wall mounted signs located inside the Cynwyd Train Station in the Vestibule Area.
The two wall mounted signs located inside the Cynwyd Train Station in the SEPTA Waiting Room
The twelve signs with a low profile base along the wayside of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail
The main sources of Vine Creek are around Lodges Lane and Byrs Meadow Avenue in Cynwyd (not shown on map), approximately one mile from this location. Vine Creek generally ran parallel to the path of the railroad bed. Several creeks, including Vine Creek in Manayunk and West Manayunk, cut deep ravines into the landscape and emptied into the Schuylkill River. These creeks provided power for many textile and paper mills. Vine Creek itself hosted four mills, including William Crego’s Cotton Mill, John Grindell’s Grist Mill, and Isaac Wetherell’s Mill.

Before the advent of parks, the only great swaths of green open space where the general public could visit and picnic were cemeteries. For this reason, the West Laurel Hill Station (1884-1899) was one of the most popular of the early stops along the line and generated much weekend traffic. Factory workers seeking a rural setting, the railroad reinforced this effort by ensuring landscaping the grounds around the station platforms.

After passengers disembarked at the station platform, the train would move another hundred feet down the track to the freight platform, where cargo would be unloaded onto horse-drawn carriages. The brick-paved ramp carved into the hill that leads up to the side entrance of the cemetery is still visible.

The West Laurel Hill Station was decommissioned and disassembled in 1899 to make way for the new station at Broomall, which was better located to serve both West Laurel Hill Cemetery and the newly incorporated Womelsdorf Cemetery.
Clegg's Mill was located on Vine Creek to provide maximum water power. By 1851, three millponds were built to regulate the flow of the creek to turn the waterwheels, that powered the mill. You are standing at the point on the map where Vine Creek and the rail line intersect.

Building 2 of the mill housed a cotton picking machine. Fabric was woven and finished in Building 1. Building 1 was where fabric was dried. The liable nature of cotton manufacturing made it difficult to keep the mill clean, heightening the danger of fire.

In the case of Clegg's Mill, fire protection was provided by two fire iron, fire-proof bucket, and six fire extinguishers. According to the 1881 Census survey shown here, Clegg's Mill employed 36 hands - 9 men, 10 boys, and 18 girls.

Sometime between 1915 and 1917 the Pennsylvania Railroad acquired and closed Clegg's Mill, filled in the ponds, and virtually buried Vine Creek under tons of rubble.

Both sides of the Schuylkill River were lined with factories, mainly dealing with fabric, paper, and steel. During the 1950s, the construction of the Schuylkill Expressway (Interstate 76) along this side of the Schuylkill River radically changed the landscape.

This brief view of Manayunk, looking east from West Laurel Hill Cemetery, was published in 1897 by Everts & Kellogg.
The original Pennsylvania Railroad bridge across the Schuylkill River, known as the "S" Bridge due to its shape, was constructed in 1874 as a double-track iron truss bridge that connected the West Manayunk community in Lower Mount to the Manayunk neighborhood of Philadelphia. An "S" shaped curve was incorporated into the design in order to produce drag, to help slow trains which invariably had built up momentum from descending the slope from Cynwyd Station. The bridge can be seen in the top left, 20th century postcard as right and the 1908 map behind.

Due to heavier load, which primarily consisted of freight trains carrying anthracite coal, the "S" Bridge was dismantled in 1915. It was replaced by the Manayunk Bridge (below), a Stone-arch cement bridge. This newer bridge is noted fondly regarding as many as the definitive architecture of Manayunk.

Above: This image from the 1950s depicts a moment in history when the three transportation corridors of this area operated concurrently. 2 Pennsylvania Railroad passenger trains led by two GG1 locomotives cross the Manayunk Bridge on its way to Valley Forge, before the line was inherited by SEPTA. A freight train runs on the Reading Railroad line at Horsham. Meanwhile, some of the first cars on the newly constructed Schuylkill Expressway drive towards Philadelphia.

Right: This aerial view shows the Pennsylvania Railroad's Manayunk Bridge, the Green Line Bridge in the foreground, and the Tree Path Bridge in the distance. Before the construction of the Schuylkill Expressway.
In 1830, George Biscoe Roberts, alias Cynwyd resident and president of the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR), ordered the construction of the Pennsy Branch off the Schuylkill Valley Division to the Pennsy Iron Works. Up until that time, the iron works, owned by Pennsy Roberts, a cousin of the PRR president, had no choice but to use the services of the Reading Railroad, which passed by the factors as it ran along the river. The PRR branchwas built solely to deliver coal and raw materials, and more or less finished products for the Pennsy Iron Works.

This section of the trail was constructed on a portion of the land that was used for the switchback between the Manayunk Bridge and the trail's terminus at Bank Hill Road and Brinton Avenue. A stretch of the switchback Bridge was found on the trail during a 2009 clean-up—an unusual find since all of the scattered metal was thought to have been sold for reuse.

The Pennsy Iron Works was founded by Agerman and Pennsy Roberts, heirs of John Roberts, one of the first Welsh settlers of this region in 1833. John Roberts had named his land ‘Pencoyd,’ meaning ‘head of the woods’ in Welsh.

In 1852, the brass mills began the construction of a specialty foundry, manufacturing brass wares along the banks of the Schuylkill River. In 1859, the business expanded to include the manufacturing of iron and steel bridges. It soon became a leading bridge producer, constructing hundreds of bridges across North America, including the Pennsy Bridge, and the famous Upper East Side Arch Bridge over Niagara Falls.

By 1883, its footprint encompassed 80 acres, including two miles of railroad tracks, and it produced products at a capacity of 10,000 tons per year. There were over 700 employees, many of whom lived nearby in company-owned workers housing.

By 1900, Pennsy Iron Works had attained an international reputation, and the company was acquired by J.P. Morgan U.S. Steel Corporation in 1902. However, the business was liquidated in 1944 after years of decline that began with the Great Depression.
Let Horse Thieves Beware!

On November 23rd, The Lower Merion Society for the Detection and Prosecution of Horse Thieves and Recovery of Stolen Horses held their 195th Annual Meeting and Banquet at the Cynwyd Club. Founded in 1818, the purpose of this...
society is to honor man’s greatest servant – THE HORSE, and to insure and to protect the horses of the membership from the nefarious enemies of society known as HORSE THIEVES.

The Lower Merion Historical Society actively supports this ancient and honorable society. In 2018, the Lower Merion Horse Company will be celebrating the 200th anniversary of its founding with a gala party and local events. Anyone interested in more information or joining this society, mail your request to: The Lower Merion Horse Company, c/o Corresponding Secretary, 351 W. Signal Hill Road, King of Prussia, PA 19406.

**Amtrak Keystone Train 644 Makes a Visit to the Cynywd Train Station**

**Dateline** Thursday, November 14th at 12:04pm, an Amtrak locomotive with 5 passenger cars passed thru SEPTA’s Cynwyd Train Station and came to a stop at the railroad bumper that is located at the end of the track. The train remained parked there for more than an hour while the 130 dismayed passengers dis-embarked and waited on the platform. They realized that they were not at Penn Station and everyone became upset to learn that their train had come to a stop at a local commuter station called Cynwyd.

There is a lot more to tell of what happen next...from Amtrak's, SEPTA's and the passenger’s point of view. The cause of this unfortunate mishap is still under investigation to how the train got lost and found its way onto the Cynwyd Line.

**Building Photographs- Preserving Today for Tomorrow's History**

This photograph from our Buildings web is part of our ever-changing history.
In 1913 a Pennsylvania Railroad photographer took pictures of attractive single houses in Lower Merion for in a booklet that promoted living on the Main Line and commuting on the Railroad. Prints of the original photos were saved in a common black-paper scrapbook, with descriptions in white ink. Two years after the railroad's bankruptcy in 1970, many of the PRR's records were auctioned; the scrapbook became part of the Penn Central Railroad Corporation Collection in the Pennsylvania State Archives.

In 2012 I stopped at Harrisburg to see the scrapbook/album and took photographs of the PRR photographs with their one-line titles. Photographing them was difficult in the too-bright room with fluorescent lights overhead and bright windows on one side. I had to
prop up the photographs at an angle to avoid the glaring reflections on the prints.

Then came the problem of identifying the prints. They had titles which weren't always correct – The buildings were sometimes placed on the wrong street, which might be misspelled – Bryn Maur, Cynwyde among them. With help from Ted Goldsborough and Bob McCormick almost all of the prints used in the PRR's booklet could be matched to the present buildings.

The buildings are little changed in a century, but their surroundings are vastly different. See how the areas have changed in the 100 years since they were built, in these photographs of old and new on Bala Ave and Colwyn Lane

-Max Buten

Happy Holidays!

The Historical Society’s Executive Board of Directors would like to wish you a joyful and happy holiday season!

Favorite Links

- Lower Merion Historical Society's Website
- Membership Information
- Buy Our Books

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE LOWER MERION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Lower Merion Historical Society is an organization dedicated to Preserving Our Past For The Future. This is accomplished by 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.