



The Half Moon

- The Newsletter of the Newtown Historic Association -

Welcome

The Newtown Historic Association presents this newsletter to the Newtown community with the goal of providing news and information on related historic and preservation events in our area. We welcome any suggestions for future articles.

Officers

Brian Rounsavill, *President*
David Callahan, *First Vice President*
Jeff Marshall, *Second Vice President*
Michael DiFiori, *Recording Secretary*
Mary Callahan, *Corresp. Secretary*
Marge Torongo, *Treasurer*

Board of Directors

Harriet Beckert
Paul Gouza
Jeanne Haeckel
Bronwyn Jones
William Mahler
Joanne Nardo
Geno Peruzzi
Susan Thompson
David Walton
David Mahler - *Parliamentarian*

Newtown Historic Association

P.O. Box 303
Centre Avenue & Court Street
Newtown, PA 18940 USA
Phone: (215) 968-4004
www.newtownhistoric.org

Research Center Hours

Tuesdays 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Thursday 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM
And also by appointment
Admission is free

New Members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

- Karolyn Fisher, *Newtown, PA*
- Glenn & Eva Gerecke, *Newtown, PA*
- MeMa Mates, *Newtown, PA*
- Linda McCoy, *Newtown, PA*
- Sidney Twining, *Quinton, VA*
- Jeffrey & Kristen Ward, *Newtown, PA*

Market Day is Coming

The 35th annual colonial craft fair will be held on **October 1st (rain date Oct. 2nd)**. Over 60 crafters, reenactors and demonstrators will present a wide variety of interesting crafts, from bee keeping, quilting, rug braiding, spinning and woodcarving. There will also be music, hayrides, children's crafts and our "Festival of Foods" featuring Newtown area restaurants. The Newtown Militia - First Crossing Volunteers will set up a camp situation in the backyard of the Half Moon Inn. As one of our main fund-raisers, we always need volunteers to sell hayride tickets and help at the NHA table. If you are interested in helping, please contact Laurie Gouza (215) 579-0298 or Jeanne Haeckel (215) 327-7958.

Volunteers Needed

During the summer, the Court Inn is open on Sunday afternoons from 2- 4 pm for visitors. We need members to staff the Inn during these times. If you would like to volunteer for a Sunday - please call Joanne Nardo at (215) 968-9052 and she will arrange the schedule for you. It is a nice way to meet people and show them what a wonderful facility we have and also tell them a little about Newtown. No experience needed

October General Meeting

In preparation for Halloween, we will be having our October General Meeting at the Newtown Cemetery on **Sunday, October 9th at 2:00 PM** (rain or shine). The subject of the meeting will be "**Stories from the Newtown Cemetery.**" Approximately twelve notable Newtown residents will be featured with history and interesting facts about each one on a guided walking tour through the cemetery. There will also be an architectural history of the Cemetery Chapel, which is where the tour will begin. Be sure to wear your walking shoes and learn about some of Newtown's early history.



Disastrous Fire in Newtown: A Business Block Destroyed – H. C. Worstall and Mrs. S. E. Dolton the Sufferers – Heavy Losses – Origin a Mystery – Brave Work of the Firemen

The worst fire with which Newtown has been visited for many years, if ever, broke out in the large hardware store of H. C. Worstall, in the Hillborn block on 106 South State Street, shortly before 2 o'clock Wednesday morning, March 1st, 1899. It was lacking about ten minutes of two when many of the residents of the town were awakened from their slumbers by a series of three explosions, the third being by odds the loudest and most terrifying. The cries of "Fire! Fire!" followed a moment later from residents of the locality. Those first to arrive at the scene found the whole interior of the store a mass of flames, bursting from the doors and windows and rapidly eating their way to the upper stories of the building. The fire bell was promptly rung, summoning the firemen to work.

It required some time to get the steamer to the scene, the bad condition of Liberty St. almost proving too much for the boys - in the meantime the hose carriage arrived and streams from the fire plugs were turned on the doomed structure.

Great excitement prevailed. People in the immediate vicinity were fearful for the safety of their property. A great crowd soon collected. The wind being in the west showers of sparks were carried over the old "Bird-In-Hand" place and back over Court St. and the houses beyond.

The extreme improbability of being able to prevent the fire from reaching the contents of Mrs. S. E. Dolton's dry goods store, located in the same building, but separated from the Worstall store by a solid wall, led to a force of men turning in and carrying out about all the goods in her store room. Some of these goods were carried into houses on the opposite side of the street and the balance piled up along the sidewalk.

There was some unavoidable delay in preparing the steamer for action, and during that time the cornice of the Wynkoop building but a few feet away, began to blaze fiercely and the goods of the occupants of the building, George A. Jenks, attorney-at-law, and Clayton Keller, barber, were hastily carried out and across State street as were the household goods of Clinton Duckworth, stored in a room on the second floor and the furniture and paraphernalia of the colored Odd Fellows. When the firemen were able to play on this building the blaze was extinguished. Ashbel W. Watson and others who ascended to the roof rendered valuable assistance.

In the meantime the work of destruction in the brick block was hastening on space. There was another explosion in the front part of the store said to be a box of cartridges, which scattered the crowd for a moment. A little later the front of the store fell with a loud crash. When the fire reached the third story, occupied by the Masonic fraternity, there was no dividing wall to dispute its passage to Mrs. Dolton's side of the building and the water thrown on to the third floor and through the windows spoiled the goods stored there.

The fire was finally gotten under control and further danger to surrounding property averted, but the firemen remained on duty till long after daylight. The manner in which they conducted their operations and prevented the spread of the flames and consequent destruction of more valuable property is highly commended and praises of the firemen are on every lip. They did their part nobly.

The origin of the fire is enshrouded in mystery, and is not likely to be ever cleared up. It is the opinion of many that it started from the heater which was in the basement under the back part of the store room, but this heater was attended to as usual in the evening before closing the store and nothing wrong was observed. Others think that the conflagration might have been started by a spark dropped on Tuesday from some customer's cigar. What caused the explosions is not very clear. There was very little gunpowder or any other explosive in the building.

Nothing whatever was saved from the hardware store and the contents are a total loss. Mr. Worstall's safe was taken from the ruins Wednesday morning and found intact, not having been tampered with or blown open by the burglars as some thought possible. An expert from Philadelphia was sent for. He opened the safe and found the contents in good condition.

The building was owned by H. C. Worstall and Mrs. S. E. Dolton jointly, and insured for \$10,000; \$5,000 in the Lahaska Company, \$2,500 in the Insurance Company of North America and \$2,500 in the German American Company of New York. H. C. Worstall carried an insurance of \$6,000 on his stock, \$2,000 in the German American, \$1,750 in the North American and \$2,250 in the Farmers' and Mechanics' Insurance Association of Bucks County, generally called the Buckingham company. Mrs. Dolton had \$10,000 insurance on her stock.

The paraphernalia and furniture of the Masons is almost a total loss, but Secretary Keith says he thinks the goat can be revived. The record books were not in the lodge room (above the store) and thus escaped destruction. The Masons had an insurance of \$1,600 in the Lahaska Company. The adjustment of losses by the different companies remains to be made. The aggregate loss by fire and water is somewhere between \$25,000 and \$30,000.

Some of the papers in the lodge room were sucked up by the hot air and carried away. One document was picked up in Howard B. Scully's yard, and another out in the cemetery.

Gourley & Tomlinson suffered some loss from water (they are next door). They are insured in the Langhorne Company. The Wynkoop building was insured in the same company. The building will be repaired by the company and operations have already been commenced.

While the fire was in progress it was feared the firemen would not have sufficient hose and a trolley car was dispatched to Langhorne to get assistance from the fire company in that borough. Several of the latter company came up bringing with them a quantity of new hose but the situation had changed for the better before their arrival and the hose was not used.

Hot coffee was provided for the firemen and other workers by different public-spirited citizens and Mrs. Dr. Heston furnished breakfast for a number of the firemen.

It is extremely fortunate that it was a still morning, little or no wind blowing, or it would have been more difficult to confine the flames to the building destroyed. Captain Wynkoop has presented the Fire Company with a check for \$25 in appreciation of their efforts in saving his building from destruction.

The general opinion is that the first to notice the fire was Paul Heinzman, apprentice at Afflerbach's bakery, who saw the flames bursting from the back door and windows of Worstall's store. Others claim the distinction.

H. C. Worstall is making preparations to continue business for the present, in the basement of that part of the Wynkoop Building which he has heretofore used for storage purposes. The Masons have rented the lodge room on the third floor of the same building, formerly used by the Knights of the Golden Eagle. Mrs. Dolton's goods were on Wednesday removed from the different places where they had been carried at the time of the fire to the old Academy building, back of the bank, where they will remain until the insurance adjusters complete their work. Mrs. Dolton's parrot was saved, but Harry Worstall's big pet Maltese cat perished in the flames.

Worstall's store was the headquarters of the Standard Telephone Company and that corporation suffered the loss of four telephones and all their tools. No insurance.

The ruined building, which is generally known as the "Hillborn Block" because built by Cyrus Hillborn, was put up in 1869, and was a well-built handsome structure. It was first occupied by Hillborn & Worstall, hardware dealers, and Amos Eastburn, who kept a general store. The first named firm was dissolved after a few years and the business has since been conducted by H. C. Worstall. Amos Eastburn was succeeded by Amos Eastburn & Son, and that firm gave way in 1875 to Mrs. S. E. Dolton, who kept a general store for a few years and then sold out the grocery department to Cyrus Hillborn, since that time she has dealt in dry goods and notions.

Mr. Worstall was secretary of the school board and also of the Newtown Reliance Horse Company and had the records and papers of both in the store. All were burned except the minute book of the school board now in use which happened to be elsewhere.

(Bird in Hand 3-29-51) from the Newtown Enterprise issue dated March 4, 1899.

Editors Note - The building destroyed was of exactly the same size and general appearance as the present hardware store building operated by David Callahan since 1985. In fact part of the rear wall of the present brick building, erected in 1899 by Worstall & Dolton incorporates a portion of the old wall of the original building, erected in 1869 by Cyrus Hillborn and called "Newtown Hardware House".

Spring Cocktail Party

We had our Spring Cocktail Party on **Saturday evening May 7th from 5:00 to 8:00 pm.** The Inn was decorated with spring flowers and dogwood by Lorraine Pentz and Jeanette Rogers. Delicious and plentiful hors d'oeuvres were served. We were pleased to have quite a few new members and neighbors attend and everyone had a really good time. This is a nice spring event that should not be missed.

5th Grade Historic Walking Tour

The annual 5th Grade Walking Tour was held on **Wednesday, June 1st** – a very hot day. Approximately 500 children from Goodnoe Elementary School, Newtown Elementary School, and St. Andrew's Elementary School took this self guided walking tour through the Borough and Township visiting 10 historic sites. This is a very popular event with the children and enables them to learn about their local Newtown heritage. The children were very interested in all the presentations. This tour is coordinated by Peg Walker - a NHA member. As always, she did an outstanding job.

Summer Picnic

We were not able to have our summer picnic this year due to scheduling conflicts. We plan to resume this in 2012.

Historic Walking Tour

We had our historic walking tour on **Friday evening, June 10th** leaving the Half Moon Inn at **6:30 PM.** This tour was conducted by Jeffrey Marshall, VP of Resource Protection at the Heritage Conservancy. The tour featured North Chancellor Street and North Lincoln Avenue. About 60 people went on the tour and thoroughly enjoyed it.

Photos Wanted

Old photographs, postcards, maps or documents of Newtown and the surrounding area are wanted for preservation in our archives. You can either donate or loan them and we will scan and return the item(s). We are interested in photos of houses, businesses, streets, and events, along with local event brochures and programs. Contact David Callahan via email at dcnhh@comcast.net if you have items that you wish to donate or loan for preservation.



*Newtown Baseball Team,
Circa 1900*

Annual Dues Reminder

Annual dues notices were mailed to all members. Send information on potential new members to Mary Callahan at dcnhh@comcast.net.

Corporate Members

We are proud to highlight our corporate members:

- David J. Witchell Salon & Spa
- DeFrehn Corporation
- First National Bank of Newtown
- Friends Home & Village
- Harold Beck & Sons, Inc.
- Holland Floor Covering
- Law office of Paul R. Beckert, Jr.
- Johnson, Kendall & Johnson, Inc.
- Newtown Hardware House
- Newtown-Jamison Physical Therapy
- ReMax Properties, Ltd.
- Stuckert and Yates
- Waitkus Design Landscape Architects

Upcoming Events

- **Market Day**, *October 1st*
- **General Membership Meeting**, "Stories from the Newtown Cemetery", *Sunday, October 9. 2p.m.*
- **General Membership Meeting**, "Devastation on the Delaware: the Flood of 1955" *November 14. 8p.m*
- **Open House Tour**, *December 3.*

The Half Moon is published quarterly by the Newtown Historic Association, Inc., P.O. Box 303, Centre Avenue & Court Street, Newtown, PA 18940



Printed on Recycled Paper.
