



# 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

C. David Callahan, *President*  
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## Newtown Historic Association

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

## Recognition Dinner

On Sunday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, the annual Recognition Dinner was held at the Temperance House Restaurant. The Research Center Volunteers and the Christmas Open House Tour Homeowners were recognized. A special presentation of an American Flag that was flown over the Capital was presented to Mike Donovan for his endless hours of volunteer work, in addition to his continuing work on behalf of those fellow classmates and Newtown residents who sacrificed their lives during World War II. Over 60 community members attended this event and recognized the contributions that these individuals have made toward the advancement of the Newtown Historic Association last year.

## New Members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

- Jack & Ruth Bertolino, *Newtown*
- Betty & Bill Craighead, *Newtown*
- Chuck & Gay Hill, *Newtown*
- Tara & Eric Inglesby, *Holland*
- John & Barbara Lehman, *Newtown*
- Charles & Barbara Lewis, *Newtown*
- Melissa Zhou, *Newtown*

## Clean-Up Day

The annual Clean-up Day will be held on Saturday, March 11<sup>th</sup>. Volunteers are needed to help restore luster to the many historical items and furnishings in the Court Inn. No experience necessary!

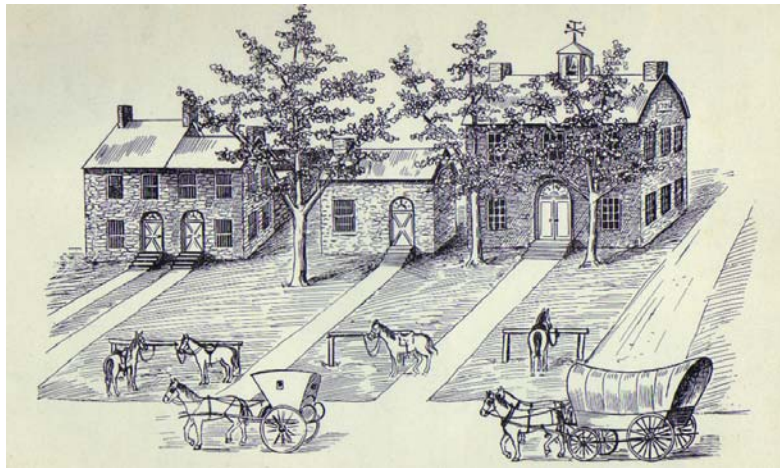
## Colonial Tavern Night

The fourth annual Tavern Night will be held on Saturday, March 4<sup>th</sup> at the Court Inn. The Tavern Night Committee is looking forward to even more colonial cheer in presenting our 4<sup>th</sup> annual Tavern Night in the 18th Century. Some will be toasting King George while others to George Washington. The evening will feature 18th century music, dancing and games along with delicious food catered by the Brick Hotel accompanied by colonial side dishes prepared by the Tavern Night Committee. Come join us for an evening that will take you back to a time when our country was new and exciting. Please RSVP by February 28<sup>th</sup> to Jeanne Haeckel at (215) 860-0921. Tickets are \$50 per person.



## February Meeting

The February meeting of the Newtown Historic Association will be held on Monday, February 20<sup>th</sup> at 8 PM at the Court Inn. "Greetings from Bucks County: Picture Postcards, 1900-1960" features postcards from the Spruance Library from 1900-1960. The public is invited, refreshments will be served.



## When Newtown was the County Seat

- Compiled by Brian Rounsavill -

Although no visible evidence remains today, Newtown served as the County Seat of Bucks County from 1726 to 1812, before it was removed to Doylestown. During this period, this rural community grew into a prosperous governmental center, leaving behind its origin as an essentially agricultural village. Because a substantial amount of town and county business had revolved around the courthouse trade, taverns and inns became staples in the local scene.

In 1915, using plans and descriptions on file at Doylestown, as well as the remnants of the actual buildings, Thaddeus S. Kenderdine made a rough sketch of the county court house buildings as they stood in 1815 (see photo above) in an effort to immortalize them to provide a lasting memorial for the center of Bucks County justice from 1726 to 1812. As noted in the photo, to the left is the jail and keeper's house. The middle structure is the Treasury building that was raided by Tories in 1778. To the right is the court house.

Colonial records indicate that the courts of Bucks County were moved from "Below the Falls" to Bristol in 1705, where they remained for twenty years and then came to Newtown. This movement of the county seat was on account of the population moving northward, so far that their jurisdiction became lopsided. It must be remembered that Bucks, up to 1752, included a much larger territory, which was afterward divided into several counties reaching to the Kittatinny Mountains, so the seat of justice came in 1726 ten miles further up the river.

The tract of land on which the three main public buildings in Newtown were erected, ran along Centre Avenue from State Street back to Court Street, with a large mansion on it (this is the house that sits behind 35 South Salon), and facing southward on part of the ancient village green (long since developed). These grounds covered the area that is essentially now bounded by the Gap (corner of State Street and Centre Avenue) and Old Library building located behind it on the corner of Centre Avenue and Court Street. The grounds continued north including most of the land where the businesses are on west side of South State Street.

This tract had been bought and a court house and jail then built. The original jail was found to be too small for the growing criminality of the county, naturally arising from the wild conditions of a backwoods community, so in 1745 another larger jail was erected. The new jail was directly west of the court house, with the gable end flush with the pavement of the main street (State Street). To this day, some of the west wall can still be seen in front of the "Helig House" (now 35 South Salon, next to the Gap).

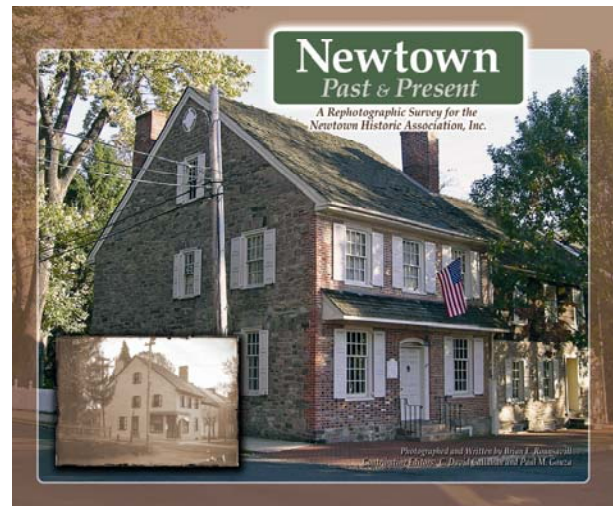
The court house, built in 1726, was close to what was then called Second Street (now known as Court Street), and faced south. It was of stone, 30 x 28 feet in dimensions, and was of two stories; the lower level was used as the court room, while the upper floor was for the grand and petit juries.

Nearly abutting, end to end to the court house, came the treasury building. Built of stone, with walls up to two feet thick and covered with a twelve-inch brick arch, it was well adapted to the use it was put to at times during the Revolutionary War (as a powder magazine). While it was intended to be both fire and burglar proof, the last attribute failed, for most certainly “thieves did break in and steal,” and to the sore loss of the county. The treasury building was moved in 1796 to 40 South State Street (now the Trust Offices of the First National Bank), where it was occupied by county officers until 1812.

Hotels in those early days were prominent factors in the way of travelers getting about, and their scarcity made it disagreeable for such on long journeys. The county’s lower end citizens, who had reluctantly consented for the removal of the county seat to Newtown, were getting anxious about its retention there, from the efforts being made by the upper end citizens to have it still further up county, and were beginning to advocate the erection of new buildings in Newtown to hold the seat of justice there. This further excited the people in the upper townships. At one of the meetings held for the moving of the courts further to the northwest, it was resolved “that the roads through Newtown were so unpopular as never to support enough taverns for people attending court.” So under such pressure the removal came.

Considering it’s “Friendly” environments in different directions (a reference to the many Quakers in the area), Newtown was a rough place surely in those “good old times,” when there was a drinking resort for each ten houses, and not a church till 1815 within its actual limits. The best neighboring religious influences would be hard set to penetrate such a place. But, with the removal of the county seat to Doylestown in 1812 and the incoming afterwards of different places of religious worship, Newtown, in time, redeemed itself.

*[This article was compiled exclusively from excerpts from “When Newtown was the County Seat. Being an Account of Newtown’s County Buildings, Inns, Streets, etc. Between 1726 and 1813. Including Scenes and Incidents in the Long-Ago Years” by Thaddeus S. Kenderdine, 1915.]*



## Newtown: Past & Present Book

The Newtown Historic Association’s forthcoming publication, “*Newtown: Past & Present*” is a photographic and historical journal comprised of eighty photographic pairs that chronicle over a century of progress and change in Newtown, Pennsylvania.

Presented side-by-side, the photographer had to overcome many modern-day obstacles to replicate the original views when attempting to locate the “tripod holes” of the earlier Newtown photographers who first shot these views in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Sometimes unexpected in their revelations, some scenes remain literally unchanged, while others convey a very real and dramatic sense of loss (or gain) that has occurred over the course of the past century.

The result is a remarkable array of historic and contemporary images that provide a testament to the history, charm and change of one of the oldest and most historic towns in Pennsylvania.

The special pre-publication price is \$34.99, plus 6% sales tax and \$5.00 shipping and handling (\$42.38 total). The anticipated publication date is August 2006. All proceeds benefit the Newtown Historic Association, Inc.

## Open House Tour

The 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Holiday Open House Tour was held on Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Over 700 people enjoyed the beautiful weather to tour the private homes and public buildings that were open to the public, which included:

- O'Malley House (313 East Washington Ave.)
- Malzone House (126 N. State St.)
- Anderson House (148 N. State St.)
- Godwin House (144 Liberty St.)
- Gabbe House (109 N. State St.)
- The Brick Hotel
- St. Mark's AME Zion Church
- Newtown Theatre
- Newtown Borough Council
- The Stocking Works
- The Court Inn

The weather was ideal for participants to stroll through the streets of Newtown to visit the sites on this year's tour. The Court Inn, beautifully appointed by the Countryside Gardeners, was open with hearth cooking demonstrations, re-enactors portraying original proprietors Joseph and Margaret Thornton, and music was provided by the "Out of Tuners". The homeowners and volunteers did a wonderful job decorating their homes and hosting the visitors. The Open House Tour Committee wishes to thank everyone who helped make the day a great success.

## Inn & About Newtown

The third annual Inn & About Newtown will be held on Saturday, April 29<sup>th</sup> from 6 to 10 PM. The festivities begin and end at the historic Court Inn with pre-dinner hors d'oeuvres and post-dinner dessert and coffee. Patrons will be able to wine & dine about town in neighborhood homes. Tickets will be \$75 per person. Don't miss this exciting event.

## Around the Grounds

The large ash tree in the rear garden at the Court Inn was recently removed by Sam Willard of Shearer-Penn. The tree was approximately 210 years old; likely planted when the rear addition was added to the Court Inn in 1792. The tree was extensively diseased and a hazard, as the entire trunk was rotted. Mr. Willard is using the wood to make custom tables, in the style of Nakoshima. The first table was on display at the recent Recognition Dinner at the Temperance House. The NHA will receive a percentage of the proceeds from the sale of this furniture. The Building and Grounds Committee also had the large holly tree removed from the Boone Garden. The holly tree was blighted and was overtaking the entire garden. The NHA plans to erect an appropriate fence between the restaurant property (the Grotto) and the garden, and to plant new perennials and other shrubs to beautify the space.

## Archival Review

On October 6<sup>th</sup>, a survey of the archives was conducted by Margaret Jerrido, Archivist from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. The survey reported that the archives are well preserved and organized. On the whole, the NHA is ahead of many other small repositories. The support from volunteers, many with professional backgrounds, such as retired librarians, lawyers, business owners and historians, who give of their time and energy, is commendable. These volunteers work together to make available this invaluable collection of historical documents, images, and artifacts to local researchers.

## Corporate Members

We are proud to highlight our corporate members:

- Anthony Petsis & Associates
- David J. Witchell Salon & Spa
- Dragonfly, Ltd.
- First National Bank of Newtown
- Johnson, Kendall & Johnson
- Mom's Bake at Home Pizza
- Newtown Hardware House
- Newtown-Jamison Physical Therapy
- Newtown Roofing Company
- One Ten South Salon
- Peruzzi Automotive Group
- ReMax Properties, Ltd.
- St. Mary Medical Center
- Stuckert & Yates
- The Law Office of Paul Beckert
- The Temperance House
- The Township House
- Thomas-Guy Design, Ltd.
- Wells Fargo Home Mortgage
- YellowHouse Antiques

## Upcoming Events

- **General Membership Meeting**, February 20. 8:00 p.m.
- **Tavern Night**, March 4. 7:00 p.m.
- **Clean-Up**, March 11. 8:30 a.m.
- **General Membership Meeting**, March 20. 8:00 p.m.
- **Annual Meeting**, April 17. 8:00 p.m.
- **Inn and About Newtown Dinner**, April 29. 7:00 p.m.
- **General Membership Meeting**, May 15. 8:00 p.m.
- **5<sup>th</sup> Grade Historic Walking Tour**, June 7. 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- **Annual Picnic**, June 24, 5:00 p.m.
- **Market Day**, September 16. 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
- **General Membership Meeting**, October 16
- **General Membership Meeting**, November 20
- **Open House Tour**, December 2. 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

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