



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.

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Newtown Historic Association

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Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting will be held on Monday, April 18th at 8:00 PM at the Court Inn. All members are invited, reports will be given, and refreshments will be served.

Annual Dues

The annual dues notices have been mailed to all active members. In an effort to continue our membership drive, members are encouraged to submit the names and addresses of potential new members to the Corresponding Secretary, Mary Callahan at dcnhh@comcast.net.

Colonial Tavern Night

The third annual Tavern Night was held on Saturday, March 5th at the Court Inn. The evening featured 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. The evening included a silent auction featuring items from local Taverns & Inns. Over 90 people attended and a very good time was had by all. Thank you to all who took part either as a guest, volunteer or member of the committee.

Recognition Dinner

On Sunday, January 30th, the annual Recognition Dinner was held at the Township House Restaurant. The Research Center Volunteers and the Christmas Open House Tour Homeowners were recognized for their efforts on behalf of the Newtown Historic Association. Over 100 community members attended this event and recognized the contributions that these individuals have made toward the advancement of the Newtown Historic Association over the last year.

1886 Map for Sale

The Newtown Historic Association recently printed a limited quantity of reproduction 1886 railroad atlas maps of Newtown Borough. These maps are available for \$100 unframed and are on display at the Court Inn. Interested parties should contact David Callahan at dcnhh@comcast.net.

Open Hearth Cooking

Susan McLellan Plaisted, owner/operator of Heart to Hearth Cookery, a food history business based in Bucks County, offered a demonstration of 17th century through 19th century Colonial American and European cooking methods on February 4th at the Court Inn.

March Meeting

The March meeting of the Newtown Historic Association will be held on Monday, March 21st at 8:00 PM at the Court Inn. "The History of the 128th PA Infantry in the Civil War" will be presented by Paula Gidjunis that gives the audience insight into the history of one of Newtown's closest Civil War regiments. The speaker will have the full muster list of the 128th PA, so be sure to attend if you think you may have an ancestor who served in the unit. The public is invited, refreshments will be served.

Clean-Up Day

The annual Court Inn Clean-up Day was held on Sunday, March 13th. Over 20 volunteers helped restore luster to the many historical items and furnishings in the Court Inn. We are very appreciative of their efforts.

Newtown Goes Electric

- Compiled by Brian Rounsavill -



While working on a forthcoming book project, some intriguing photos were uncovered in a box of old glass negatives on loan from a local resident. The badly deteriorated glass plates were mixed in with some “Worstall Brothers” images, including one image of the current Newtown Beverage Company building where the old Worstall Mill once operated.

At first glance, the images appeared to be of a large factory or industrial complex most likely in another city such as Philadelphia. Even though we focused initially on the photos we could easily identify, the badly deteriorated images of the factory became more and more intriguing. There are two views of a large factory and one close-up view of workers building a large pole and pulley system. The simple notation that they were labeled “Worstall Brothers” seemed to capture our curiosity but the sheer size of the industrial complex in the photos seemed too out of place for such a rural agricultural community like Newtown was at the turn of the century. Following this notion, and after much research, we determined that these images are in fact the only known photos of the Newtown Electric Light and Power Company.

The Newtown Electric Light and Power Company was officially incorporated on May 16, 1899; however, construction on the site began several years earlier in the summer of 1893, as shown in the old glass plates. Ground was purchased from the Worstall Brothers on south Lincoln Avenue, opposite the old Railroad Station. Garret B. Girton began excavation for the foundation walls in July 1893. Here a plant was erected, and light and power furnished to the public.

Construction moved rather quickly, but not without issue. In August, while raising the frame work on the electric light building, the stay of one of the heavy guy ropes pulled out, knocking out one side of the brick wall and heavy rains later toppled an interior cross wall. However, by September, the steam boiler for the engine of the electric light plant was put into position and workmen began digging holes and setting poles about town for the lamps and wires of the electric light. During this process, many shade trees were trimmed and gas lamps relocated. The plant was “well equipped with all modern



A view of the Newtown Electric Light & Power Company from the third floor of the Worstall Mill. Note the 60 foot smoke stack ready to be raised into position and the Stocking Works which is visible in the background.

improvements and of sufficient size for large increase of business. The building was of brick, neatly finished on inside and provided with office and store rooms, and heated throughout with steam, and well lighted with electric lights. The railroad siding, with large coal bins, was also completed.”

In October, “the monster engine driving the electric light dynamo was given a trial test and performed satisfactorily,” marking an epoch in Newtown’s progressive history by exhibiting the first permanent electric light. That first light “hung from the switchboard in the interior of the building and was pronounced “O.K.” by those who witnessed its brilliancy. Attachments were then made at the George School and an exhibition was given in the streets of Newtown for all to witness.” By the end of November, the 60 foot tall smoke stack was raised into position, along with the new 150-horse power engine that would run the generator.

In order to fully test the system, the electrical contractors and a number of the committee and representatives of the George School “gave the light a thorough test by suddenly throwing on and off hundreds of lights, and were unanimous in the praise of the light and working of the plant. At the plant the test was hardly noticeable, as the machinery is so near automatic in regulation. The plant is now running regular, the school being about the only customer, but the Superintendent informs us that



Workers readying the pole, pulley and cable system used to raise the 60 foot smoke stack into position.

they already have a large number of applicants for lighting, just as soon as the wiring can be done.”

The first residence in Newtown to be illuminated by electric lights was said to have been that of Mrs. Kate S. Wylie at 111 North Chancellor Street. Preparations were soon thereafter made for the installation of lights in the Presbyterian and Episcopalian chapels in Newtown. Mrs. Wylie lived in what was later the Episcopal Rectory. In order to expand business, the Newtown Electric Light and Power Company decided “to offer for a limited time to all future patrons, the necessary labor and material for wiring, at wholesale rates, which made the cost of wiring comparatively very light.” The rates for current were established and as a newspaper article announced, “any information in regard to wiring will cheerfully given by addressing the Superintendent.”

Electricity was supplied to the Trolley Company to run cars from Newtown to the “cut off” railroad at Langhorne, and also furnished to the George School, until their present plant was installed in 1903. The first Officers of the Company were: Ashbel W. Watson, President; Paul Blaker, Treasurer; and George C. Worstall, Secretary.

Newtown Electric Light and Power Company merged with twenty other companies covering the central and southeast portions of Bucks County in 1913, officially forming a new company called Bucks County Electric Company. In 1916, this company merged with Doylestown Electric Company, forming a new company

called the Pennsylvania-New Jersey Power and Light Company, which later became the Philadelphia Suburban Gas and Electric Company in 1923 and eventually formed the Philadelphia Electric Company by 1929.

The degradation of the old glass plates leaves a visible shroud of mystery and intrigue on one of the most significant milestones in Newtown’s modern era, the birth of a new industry and the foremost modern improvement of the day. We are fortunate to have recently uncovered and identified these images, as there is scarcely a trace of the expansive electric factory left today, only a green substation tucked in among some trees situated on roughly the same spot where the large generators once whirred and the towering smoke stack once billowed. Unfortunately, not much is known about when the plant officially ceased or what happened to the buildings.

As you turn on your lights or other electric appliances, take a moment to remember just how exciting life must have been a little over one century ago when electricity made its first spark in Newtown from this location on South Lincoln Avenue.



A view of the Newtown China Company located at 451 South State Street. Note the 60-foot smoke stack to the Newtown Electric Light and Power Company in the background, further evidence of its position in Newtown.

[Excerpts from the November 11, 1893 and other editions of the Newtown Enterprise, as well as various clippings on file at the Court Inn.]

Inn & About Newtown

The second annual Inn & About Newtown will be held on Saturday, April 30th from 6:00 PM to 10:00 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 are \$75 per person. Reservations are required on or before April 20th. RSVP to Liz Kelsey @ (215) 860-5993. Don't miss this exciting event.

New Members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

- Michael Demsko, *Newtown, PA*
- Jane Johnson, *Newtown, PA*
- Victor & Letitia Meszaros, *Newtown, PA*
- Gerard & Bridget O'Malley, *Newtown, PA*
- Robert Rocchetti, *Newtown, PA*

Old Photos Wanted

The NHA is asking anyone with old photos or postcards of Newtown to consider donating copies to enhance our archives.

Roof Project Donors

Over \$8,800 has been raised from the following individuals toward our upcoming roof renovation project:

- Nancy & Tom Halpin
- Terry & Jim Keane
- William Welch
- Sidney T. Yates
- Mary & David Hunter
- Douglas & Peggy Levin
- Edna Lang
- Jennifer & Anthony Wolf
- Nu-Tech Inc.
- Vincent & Joanne Nardo
- John & Kathleen Parry
- David & Nancy Schaffer

- Jonathan & Susan Guy
- Rebecca Woodward
- Paul & Laurie Gouza
- Anthony Petsis, CLU
- Brian & Maria Rounsavill
- Gail Laughlin
- David & Mary Callahan
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- Mrs. Harold A. Smith
- Bob & Betsy Appelbaum
- Joseph & Carolyn Evans
- Patricia Carlton
- Ann Linkenheimer Britton
- Brian & Maureen Harrison
- Mr. & Mrs. Dominick DeCaprio
- Paul & Harriet Beckert
- Mary Jane Crumlish
- Tyrol Insurance
- First National Bank & Trust Co.
- Caroline Bennett
- Conway Shields

Recent Acquisitions

- Book of Poems by Helen "Johnnie" Voorhees Hutchinson – *Marie Hutchinson*
- Will Abstracts 1825-1870 & 1870-1900, Bucks Co., PA – *Henrik Booraem*
- 5 Old Morris Family Photo Albums – *Sarajane Dallas*
- Bylaws of the A.W. & W.M. Watson Co. – *Jeffrey & Rebecca Marshall*
- Ballots, Election Certificates and Letters Pertaining to 1977-8 – *Vince & Joanne Nardo*
- G.W.E. Bush "Victory 2004" Rally Ticket – *Paul & Laurie Gouza*
- Ordinance Book, No. 226-386, 1960-1982 – *Newtown Borough Council*
- Signed and Matted Bird-in-Hand Print – *Craig & Belva Hackett*
- Assorted Relay Terminal Posts and Blocks from Philadelphia, Newtown & New York Railroad – *Richard Mansley*

- Digital Aerial Photos of Newtown, 1938 & 2004 – *Brian & Maria Rounsavill*
- 1921 Newtown High Soph. Class Photo, 1947 Council Rock Football Team – *Frank & Madalene Kerns*
- Several Newtown-Related Booklets including Newtown-1894, Newtown Then & Now, The Life and Work of Edward Hicks, Newtown's 275th Ann., Newtown's First Library Building – *Doris Sutterly*
- Newtown Junior New Century Club Booklet, 1945-6 – *Charlotte Arton*
- Several Items Related to the Excelsior Bobbin & Spool Company – *Bill & Teena Hanlon*
- Numerous Items Relating to Newtown – *David & Mary Callahan*
- Many Items Relating to Newtown – *Michael & Jo Donovan*

Upcoming Events

- **General Membership Meeting** (*Paula Gidjunis – 128th PA Regiment*), March 21. 8:00 p.m.
- **Annual Meeting**, April 18. 8:00 p.m.
- **Inn and About Newtown Dinner**, April 30. 7:00 p.m.
- **Local Art Sale**, May 6. 7:00 p.m.
- **5th Grade Historic Walking Tour**, June 1. 12:00 noon.
- **Candlelight Tour of Newtown**, June 3. 7:00 p.m.
- **Summer Fest**, July 17
- **Market Day**, September 17. 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
- **General Membership Meeting**, October 17
- **General Membership Meeting**, November 14
- **Open House Tour**, December 3. 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

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