



NEWTOWN HISTORIC ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

Spring 1997 Issue
David Callahan, President

Helen F. Randle &
Lorraine H. Pentz, Editors

THE GRUBER WAGON WORKS

If you were not one of the dozen or so fortunate members, (and chances are 20 to 1 that you weren't) who attended our March Membership Meeting, you missed not just a slide lecture, but an "experience" at "The Place Where Time Stood Still", conducted by Newtownian Brian Heverin, who is Chief of Construction, Philadelphia branch of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and who gave us an outstanding slide presentation of the many, many steps taken to move the Gruber Wagon Works from Mt. Pleasant, Pa. in order to make way for the Blue Marsh Lake flood control, water supply and recreational project; and to relocate it at the Berks County Heritage Center, 5 miles distant. Mr. Heverin's detailed knowledge of the project (He was in charge of the entire undertaking.) supplemented the excellent pictorial view of this tremendously complicated accomplishment.

From our viewpoint, the Corps of Engineers apparently did everything right, including the placement of the Gruber

Wagon Works on the National Register 4 years before the relocation began, and use of the National Historic Preservation Act for supplemental funding. After studying a number of alternatives, the Corps elected to retain all of the original buildings and machinery as well as hand tools, furnishings and products. John Milnor Associates (who advised our Association on the restoration of the Court Inn buildings) was chosen as preservation architect and planner. Extremely detailed plans of each of the buildings and their relationship were prepared. The original structures and their interiors, and each step along the way were photographed. The work involved in reinforcing the existing buildings, dismantling them and transporting them on the 5-mile trip, and in reassembly, was staggering. Nineteen thousand tools and many wagons had been removed for safekeeping prior to the work on relocation. The description of each of the

steps, together with slides of some of the detailed drawings and of the work in progress, was fascinating. It is impossible to give it deserved recognition in writing without pictures.

The Gruber Wagon Works, built over the years 1882 through 1911, was deeded to Berks County by the U. S. Government. This tremendous undertaking was accomplished at a cost of under \$1 million. It is now being operated as a public museum. It was under the ownership of the Gruber family and continuously operated from 1882 into the 1950's. When it was taken over by the Army Corps,

there were tools left on work benches, coals in the furnaces, sawdust on the floor, giving the impression that the workers had walked off the job and would be back after lunch, thus "The Place Where Time Stood Still". All of its expanding and evolving history has been saved and is now owned by Berks County. Although other things were made, the gruber specialty was farm wagons and they could be identified by their red and green paint and decorative scroll work.

Helen F. Randle

(With appreciation to Brian Heverin for use of the brochure, "The Place Where Time Stood Still" and the publications "History Takes A Step Forward" by James Kahn and "Case Study - Relocation of the Gruber Wagon Works" by Charles A. Parrott, III)

THANKS! THANKS! THANKS! THANKS! THANKS!

President David Callahan wishes to express heartfelt thanks to those stalwart members and friends of the Association who answered the call for workers on Clean-Up Day, February 16, 1997. This promises to be an annual occasion. Much was accomplished by the crew of volunteers listed below. There was no boss. There were lists in each room of items which needed attention. Each person chose his or her own job, and everything was covered: furniture, floors, cupboards, windows, woodwork, fireplaces, curtains, candlesticks, artifacts, etc., even the cellar. All relaxed over a lunch of hoagies and sodas and the hardy souls continued until the Inn sparkled. A good time was had by all! Those attending were:

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| Larry Auerweck | Penny Ettinger | Helen Randle |
| Bob Bartels | Nancy Freudenthal | Marty Sutton |
| Chris Bauman | Dolly Gish | Sue Sutton |
| David Callahan | Skip Gittens | Michael Swanda |
| Mary Callahan | Mary Kester | Marge Torongo |
| Marion Dahlman | Lois Molloy | Cathy Treverio |
| | Joanne Nardo | |

The Edward R. Barnsley Room of Newtown History

In 1982 a research center devoted to Newtown history was established at the Court Inn, headquarters of the Newtown Historic Association. The documents that comprise the core of the facility were a gift of Edward R. Barnsley, and the center is named in his memory. Barnsley was a well known collector of antique records, and the leader in the preservation of the historic character of Newtown Borough. His restoration of the Bird-in-Hand and the Justice's House during the 1930's served as the foundation for the preservation of Newtown's Historic District. In the years following the establishment of the research center the collection has grown with the addition of many documents donated by Newtown residents and other interested individuals. For example, a recent addition to the collection is the gift by Richard Mansley of the complete issues of the Newtown Enterprise on microfilm. These issues cover an important period in Newtown history. Previously researchers had to travel to Doylestown to see these important papers.

The collection consists of the following general categories of information:

Estate Papers: Wills and inventories of Newtown residents dating from the early 18th to the 20th century.

Deeds and Mortgages: Original parchment records useful in dating of houses and land history studies.

Diaries: Personal recollections about early Newtown.

Photograph Collection: Included are antique photos of houses, streetscapes, and residents of the past.

Maps: 1849 Matthew Dripps Plan of Newtown, 1876 Centennial Atlas of Bucks County, 1891 Noll Atlas of Bucks County, Fowler Newtown Map of 1893, Sanborn Insurance Maps, and others.

Newspapers: Complete collection of the Newtown Enterprise on microfilm. Other early newspapers.

Merrick Survey Books: Original survey drawings of Newtown and vicinity real estate dating from 1860's

Rare Books: Relating to history of Bucks County or specifically Newtown.

Vertical File: Contains miscellaneous documents on a variety of subjects such as farms, inns and taverns, schools, Newtown families, social organizations, etc.

The facility is open to the public without charge. It is located on the second floor of the Court Inn at the corner of Centre Avenue and Court Street in Newtown, and is open on Tuesday from 8 AM to 3 PM, and Thursday from 7 PM to 9 PM. It is staffed by volunteers of the Newtown Historic Association who are able to assist researchers in the use of the documents. The information available specifically relates to the Newtown area and is useful to individuals interested in genealogical research, dating of old houses in Newtown, history of businesses and local organizations, schools, birth and death records, etc. Come visit the Barnsley Room and the museum- we look forward to seeing you there.

CALENDAR

May 8, 1997
7:30 P.M.

BOARD MEETING

May 18, 1997
2:00 P.M.

NEWTOWN WALKING TOUR - North
of Washington Avenue - con-
ducted by Jeffrey Marshall of
the Heritage Conservancy
Meet at the Court Inn
Refreshments

May 19, 1997
8:00 P.M.

MEMBERSHIP MEETING - Special
Guest Speaker Richard Mansley
on "Structures on the Newtown
Railroad Line between Bryn
Athyn and Newtown."

June 21, 1997
6:00 P.M.
7:00 P.M.

ANNUAL OUTDOOR STEAK FRY -
Martin Sutton, Chairman
Social Hour
Dinner

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(WAGON WORKS) - We are consi-
dering a trip to the Gruber
Wagon Works (See article in
this issue). If interested,
please call Lorraine Pentz
at 968-4357 or Helen Randle
at 968-3735.

REMEMBER THAT MARKET DAY IS COMING UP - SEPTEMBER 13

PRESERVATION WEEK

MAY 11 - MAY 17

WATCH FOR DETAILS OF AN ARCHITECTURAL CONTEST
IN THE MAY 8TH ISSUE OF
BUCKS COUNTY ADVANCE

Correction: In our previous
issue, on page 4, we listed
as an item of business in
the CALENDAR, "Election of
Officers". This was in er-
ror, as elections take place
only in the even years.

To Whom It May Concern:
Have you returned your
costume?