



# 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 events in our area. We welcome any suggestions for future articles.

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## Newtown Historic Association

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## Annual Dues

Annual dues notices have been mailed to all members and were due by April 15th - if you have not already paid your dues, please do so to continue your membership.

## Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Newtown Historic Association was held on April 20<sup>th</sup> at the Half Moon (Court) Inn. All members were invited to attend. In keeping with tradition, the Annual Business Meeting included reports from all standing committee chairmen. The NHA had a very busy and successful year, which was captured in the many items that were reported. Following the Annual Business Meeting, a presentation entitled, “*The History of Horse Racing in Newtown*” was given by President, Brian Rounsavill. Although not much has been written on this topic, this brief lecture covered the history of several local race tracks, as well as a showing of some selected images relating to horse racing from the archives.

## New Members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

- DeFrehn Roofing, *Newtown, PA (Complimentary Corporate Membership)*
- Richard & Carol Forchetti, *Newtown, PA*
- Leonard & Marilyn Franckowiak, *Newtown, PA*
- John & Kathleen Hauler, *Kunkletown, PA*
- Barbara Hogan, *Yardley, PA*
- Holland Floor Covering, *Newtown, PA (Complimentary Corporate Membership)*
- Karen White, *Newtown, PA*

## Spring Cocktail Party

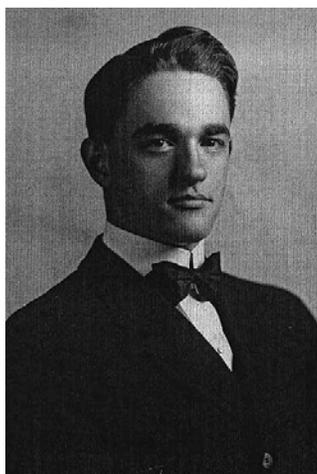
The annual spring cocktail party was held on April 18<sup>th</sup> at the Half-Moon (Court) Inn. The delightful evening provided the opportunity for members to catch up with acquaintances, old and new and enjoy the spring evening and historic charm of the Half Moon (Court) Inn.

## 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!

## 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Historic Walking Tour

The annual 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Historic Walking Tour of Newtown was held on June 3<sup>rd</sup> and was organized by Peg Walker. Over 450 students participated from three local area schools: Goodnoe Elementary, Newtown Elementary and St. Andrew’s Elementary. The Half-Moon Inn and eight other historic sites were visited on the tour. The weather cooperated and the children had a great time. Special thanks to the volunteers!



## The Story of Morell Smith

- by Jon Guy -

Morell Smith was born in Newtown on September 3, 1888, the only child of Dr. and Mrs. Charles B. Smith. Morell's father was born in Newtown in November 1864, and graduated from Jefferson Medical College (now University) in 1884. Morell's mother, Maria Anna

Stackhouse of Penn's Manor, had graduated from what is now Yale School of Nursing in 1884; interestingly, with her sister, she was one of the first two registered nurses in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. After marrying in 1887, the couple ran Newtown's family medical practice for many years, working from their home office at 1 South State Street.

Young Morell attended Newtown Public School, then transferred to the George School, where he matriculated with the Class of 1907. He attended the State College of Pennsylvania (now Penn State), and graduated there in the Class of 1911 (see photo above). Following some travels, he landed a terrific position as the Superintendent of the Pulitzer/Whitney "Kiluna Farm" in Long Island in 1913. As someone who loved to work in the outdoors, this was a tremendous opportunity.

Morell made friends quite easily. Sometime in 1913, he travelled across the Long Island Sound to meet with Edward Platt of Milford, Connecticut, a renowned expert on hybrids of McIntosh apples. It was on this trip that Morell met the young lady who was to become the love of his life. Over several years of visits, Morell grew very close to the family, and a romance with Mr. Platt's daughter, Sarah, blossomed over time. She was born in 1898, and went to live her entire life in Milford, other than one short stint at Skidmore College from 1917 to 1918.

Meanwhile, for nearly three years America had done its utmost to remain neutral towards the combating nations of the war in Europe. This stance ended in April 1917, when war was declared on Germany, and the country entered the First World War. Quite an idealistic and patriotic man, Morell volunteered for service shortly afterwards. In a letter to Sarah he wrote, "I feel that I will enjoy military life and am going into it with my whole heart."

Due to his education and voluntary status, Morell Smith entered the Army as an officer candidate, and was assigned to the 306th Infantry, 77th Infantry Division. This was comprised mostly of New York immigrants, although Morell

reports men of all class and ethnic backgrounds were mixed together in the unit. Arriving in Camp Upton, on September 18, 1917, he reported himself to be 29 years old, 6'1" tall, and weighing 198 lbs. Training was hard that winter, due to unusually harsh weather conditions. He was quickly promoted to First Sergeant, and was head of his squad of officer trainees when his unit finished training in April 1918.

Because Morell Smith's unit was scheduled to ship overseas later that month, the state arranged a dance and farewell party for the departing New Yorkers. Morell invited Sarah to come down, and offered to put her up in a nice hotel in the City. Refused permission to leave, Sarah was suspended the rest of the semester for leaving without permission; as luck would have it, the Dean was on the same train down to New York! Word is Sarah never regretted her decision to go, and never went back to study at Skidmore

From arrival in theatre until July 1918, Morell Smith's unit was assigned to a quiet sector and given training by British units. Later that month, Morell was given a commission to Second Lieutenant and reassigned as a platoon leader in Company C, 310th Infantry, 78th Division. This was a unit largely comprised of immigrants from New Jersey, although records show several men from Bucks County were assigned to this division.

The correspondence from Morell Smith to his parents and to Sarah Platt gives an interesting insight into the mindset of the American soldier in 1918. There is a sense of purpose and duty that sounds remarkably similar to what one might have heard from a soldier in World War II, or even today. Morell Smith was committed to do his part to ensure that free people could remain free, and that the world that came after the war would be better for the sacrifices made by those serving in the trenches. From a letter to Sarah Platt, September 25, 1918, from a "hole dug in the side of a trench", somewhere in France:

*"You, the women of the world are looking for us to end the war with Victory. We must settle this war with a peace and league of nations that will make it forever impossible for a nation or group of nations to arm to the teeth, and, seeking the domination of the world, break its pledges to its unsuspecting neighbors, and slaughter their men, their women and their children. The pages of history must not be turned backward. This war of itself is the greatest of arguments for peace and we must insist on a peace that will protect the generations to come from the suffering this generation has endured. We are bound to win and we are going to win because we are in the right. The torch of civilization, undimmed by 'Kultur', will blaze forth in greater brilliance, and out of it will come the world newborn."*

The final letter from Lieutenant Smith to his parents was written on October 14, 1918, four days before his death. We are missing that letter, but some of his words were, "Mud was very deep, country and roads rough, exposed to long-range gunfire by day, bombing raids by night. Food conditions were bad; kitchens were

*in the rear, unable to be brought forward. Immediately before action on the front line, many of the men were ill."*

This was written during the final push Meuse-Argonne Offensive, launched to assault the rough terrain between the Argonne Forest and the Meuse River. Some famous stories from this operation are those of Sergeant York and the "Lost Battalion". The 78th Division was in reserve until October 16, when it took the mission to keep the momentum of the attack past the Hindenburg Line. Their neighboring unit inaccurately claimed to have taken the key village of Grandpre, which put the 78th at great risk as it advanced towards the fortified German lines. Lt. Smith entered Bois des Loges with his platoon on October 17 and desperate fighting ensued throughout the night and into the morning.

Assigned to lead a volunteer patrol toward the German lines at dawn, Lieutenant Smith is reported to have chosen not to carry his sidearm in favor of a walking stick. "No, I shall not need that," he said. "Keep five yards apart and make straight for the woods." Together with his Platoon Sergeant Richardson, his orderly Private Ruggiero, and Sergeant Doty, the patrol proceeded about fifty yards when they were mowed down by machine gun fire. Only Sergeant Doty made it back to the retreating American lines. The situation became chaotic, and there were reports that Lieutenant Smith and his orderly were wounded and evacuated to a field hospital, or possibly that the bodies were recovered and buried by the Germans.

We know now that Lieutenant Morell Smith was killed in action near the Bois de Loges, France, on October 18, 1918. He was just over thirty years old. It was less than one month before the end of the war. Not hearing from Morell for several weeks, and without confirmation of his fate or whereabouts, the situation played heavy on the hearts of the Smith Family. The correspondence from the Smiths to both the War Department and individual officers still in France changed from hopeful to frantic, to sorrowful and resigned. There were several occasions over the next four years in which authorities believed to have found Lt. Smith's body, but these were all false alarms.

Meanwhile in late 1919, the returning veterans from Newtown resolved to form a chapter of the American Legion. The group was assigned the designation "Post 440", and in honor of the only Newtonian to die in the Great War, named it The Morell Smith Post. Our Legion Post was housed at 27 Court Street until the completion of the current facility on Linden Avenue was dedicated fifty years ago. Remarkably, the U.S. Graves Registration Service never gave up on positively identifying all remains found in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. The remains of Lieutenant Morell Smith and his faithful orderly, Private Augustino Ruggiero, were discovered in mid-1924, and positively identified by their ID tags. The bodies were likely covered up by dirt from artillery

bursts, agonizingly close to where the original search had been conducted. Private Ruggiero now lies in the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, the largest such site in Europe.

Since his body had not been already interred in that cemetery, the Smiths chose to bring their son back to Newtown. He was buried in the Newtown Cemetery with full military honors in October 1924. It was one of the largest such ceremonies ever to have taken place in the county, a fitting tribute for the only young man from Newtown to have sacrificed his life in the First World War.

With failing health and a broken heart for the loss of his only child, a despondent Dr. Smith shot himself over his son's grave in 1927. Mrs. Smith dedicated a plaque at the gateway to the Newtown Meeting to the memory of her husband, and it stands there to this day. She herself passed away in 1945, just before the end of the Second World War. The entire family rests together in the same cemetery plot, remarkable for the rough-cut stone marker dedicated to Lieutenant Morell Smith.

In 2006, a letter and package with photos and letters arrived at Post 440 from one of Sarah Platt's daughters, Ms. Joan Stowe. She told us the rest of her mother's story. In 1921, Sarah Platt married local dairy farmer Cornelius Stowe (d.1981); together they had three daughters. Sarah died at age 101 at her daughter Joan's home in Milford. Joan went on to explain that Sarah never forgot Morell Smith, and corresponded with the Smiths for many years. They returned some fifteen times to Newtown to place red roses on the graves of Morell and his parents. Sarah told her daughters that Morell Smith was the finest man she ever met. He once told her that he just did not want to be forgotten – to Sarah, her daughters, and us in Newtown, he never was. Incredibly, Sarah kept Morell's portrait on one side of her bureau, and her husband's on the other, until her death in 1999.

#### Bibliography and Sources

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- Association of the 310th Infantry, Schilling Press, 1919
- American Armies and Battlefields in Europe
- American Battle Monuments Commission, USGPO, 1938
- The War to End All Wars, Edward M. Coffman, Oxford University Press, 1968
- Burial File of Lt. Morell Smith, Michael J. Donovan, American Legion Post 440, 2001
- Newtown Enterprise and Advance of Bucks County Newspapers, Files and Archives of the Newtown Historic Association, Newtown, PA
- Accumulated Letters and Recollections, Joan R. Stowe, Milford, CT

*[Taken from a joint presentation for the Newtown Historic Association and American Legion Post 440, by Mike Donovan and Jon Gny on March 16, 2009.]*

## Diamond Flower Show

The Newtown Historic Association will host the Countryside Gardener's Flower Show on September 25 from 2-9 pm and September 26 from 10 am-12:30 pm at the Half Moon Inn. The theme is "Celebrating Diamonds" and a special class called "Champagne Diamond," an arrangement of fresh plant material to be displayed in a champagne glass, is open only to NHA members. Arrangements must be brought to the Inn on September 25 between 8-10 am and judging will start at 11 am. Entries are to be removed by 12:30 pm on September 26. No stuffed birds, artificial fruit or foliage are permitted. No coloring or treating of fresh material is permitted. Four entries are needed for the class.

## Historic Walking Tour

On June 19<sup>th</sup>, over 70 people attended an historic walking tour featuring the Half-Moon Inn, Centre Avenue, Chancellor Street and the surrounding area. The tour was led by Jeff Marshall, Vice President of both the Newtown Historic Association and Vice President of Resource Protection at the Heritage Conservancy and it provided many interesting architectural facts during the informative and enjoyable stroll through the streets of Newtown.



## Corporate Members

We are proud to highlight our corporate members:

- Anthony Petsis & Associates, Inc.
- Carriage House Collection
- David J. Witchell Salon & Spa
- DeFrehn Corporation
- First National Bank of Newtown
- Gemmi Construction, Inc.
- Harold Beck & Sons, Inc.
- Holland Floor Covering
- Johnson, Kendall & Johnson, Inc.
- Newtown Hardware House
- Newtown-Jamison Physical Therapy
- Peruzzi Automotive Group
- ReMax Properties, Ltd.
- Stuckert and Yates
- The Law Office of Paul R. Beckert, Jr.
- Thomas-Guy Design, Ltd.
- Waitkus Design Landscape Architects
- Wright Realty Solutions LLC

## Market Day is Coming

The 33<sup>rd</sup> annual colonial craft fair will be held on September 19<sup>th</sup> (rain date Sept. 20<sup>th</sup>). 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 Mary or David Callahan (215) 968-3914, Laurie Gouza (215) 579-0298 or Jeanne Haeckel (215) 860-0921. Also, if you have something that you would like to donate to the NHA for the auction that will be held at Market Day, please contact Dave Callahan (215) 968-3914.

## Some New Accessions

- Framed Portrait of Abraham Lincoln – *Frank & Cheryl Tyrol*
- Collection of Deeds and Documents Pertaining to Linton Hill Farm – *Frank & Cheryl Tyrol*
- 1894 Bucks County Directory – *Glenn Teschner, In Memory of Herman G. Teschner*
- Genealogy and Photographs Pertaining to the Hauler Family – *John Hauler*
- Army & Navy "E" Award made for Lavelle Aircraft Corporation Employees when they won the award in 1945 – *Martin & Elizabeth Ogletree*
- Newtown Reliance Company for the Apprehension and Detection of Horse Thieves and Other Villains, Membership Book, 1952-1996 – *David Callahan*
- Various Deeds, Correspondence and Documents Related to the Plummer Family – *Richard N. Mansley*
- Various Antique Linens, Clothing, Quilts, Collars, Hairpieces, Shoes, Fans and Hats, Circa 1900 – *Tom Richardson*
- *Various Newtown Property Deeds, Mortgages, Settlements and other Historic Documents, Pertaining to the Hellyer, Smith, Cunningham, Campbell, Morris, Phillips, Stackhouse and Hillborn Families – Robert & Ann Bartels*

## Upcoming Events

- **Market Day**, September 19.
- **General Membership Meeting**, "Bucks County Farmhouses," October 19. 8:00 p.m. @ the Half-Moon Inn
- **General Membership Meeting**, November 16. 8:00 p.m. @ the Half-Moon Inn
- **Open House Tour**, December 5.

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