

NEWTOWN HISTORIC ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

Summer 1997 Issue
David Callahan, President

Helen F. Randle &
Lorraine H. Pentz, Editors

CALENDAR

September 13, 1997
10:00 AM to 4:00 PM

MARKET DAY
(See articles this issue)

October 6, 1997
7:30 PM

Board Meeting

October 20, 1997
8:00 PM

Membership Meeting
Guest Speaker - Patricia
Stallone, an active member
of the Bristol Boro Historical
Society and a history major
at the U. of Pa., will speak on
"Women in Colonial America".

November 3, 1997
7:30 PM

Board Meeting

MARKET DAY

Mary Callahan

Summer will soon be drawing to a close and it is time to think about Market Day, our annual colonial craft fair. Market Day will be held on Saturday, September 13th on the streets surrounding the Court Inn in the heart of the historic district. We have over 60 crafters signed up with quite a few new ones and a new musical entertainment group "Mountain Strings Dulcimer Band". There will be a Silent Auction this year at Market Day, which is something new, never tried before at this event. We will have the hay rides and a corn husking contest for the children, the "Weekend in Williamsburg" raffle, the ever popular "Festival of Foods" featuring area restaurants.

HELPERS NEEDED FOR MARKET DAY

Mary Callahan

We are looking for some strong, able bodied people to help set up Saturday morning - 7:30 to 9:30 AM, to help with trash collection during the day, and to help clean up later in the afternoon - 4:00 to 5:00 PM. Market day generates funds to enable the NHA to maintain the Court Inn and carry out other historically related worthwhile projects, but Market Day also generates a lot of trash that must be dealt with. We hire the Newtown Township street sweeping machine to come and clean the streets for us every year immediately after Market Day ends at 4:00 PM, so the pressure is on to get everything off the streets so that the street cleaner can do his job. If anyone would be able to help for some time during the day, please call me at 968-3914 (evenings).

SILENT AUCTION

Vince Stefani

A silent auction will be held on Market Day (September 13, 1997). Any donations or suggestions will be greatly appreciated. Be advised that not only articles but also services or talent can be donated! If you are a computer wiz or a gourmet cook or an expert juggler or whatever, you can donate an hour or two of your time to be auctioned. Please specify the dollar value of the article or service that you donate. If you have any questions, contact Vince Stefani at 968-5788 or Dave Callahan at 968-3611.

**NEWTOWN WALKING TOUR
CONDUCTED BY JEFF
MARSHALL OF THE HERITAGE
CONSERVANCY**

On May 18 the third annual walking tour was conducted by Jeff Marshall. Each year Jeff has concentrated on a different section of the boro. This year the area north of Washington Avenue was explored by approximately 25 people. We are fortunate to have Jeff share his knowledge of historical architecture with us. Even longtime Newtown residents are fascinated to have features of which they were not aware pointed out and to be told some interesting tidbits along the way. At the conclusion of the tour, lemonade and cookies were served by Skip Gittens, Lois Molloy, and Ruth Augustine at the Court Inn.



HISTORICAL NOTES
The Early History of the Court Inn

In 1746 Joseph Thornton advertised a tavern for sale in Newtown with the following description that appeared in the Pennsylvania Gazette:

“The Half-moon Inn, which he now keeps, and hath done about 14 years; it is a convenient house for a tavern or store, having four rooms on a floor, with fireplaces in each, and two ditto above the stairs; also four good cellars, one of which is a kitchen, with an oven and sink in it, and room for a copper to be hung (the flews already made) that adjoining to it has a fireplace; they are all well wall'd and pointed, and have inward and outward doors to each. It is the nearest to the Court-House, and the Court is pleased to dine at it.”

This remarkable description of the Half-moon Inn, now known as the Court Inn and headquarters of the Newtown Historic Association, raises many questions about Newtown in the middle of the 18th Century and Thornton's Tavern. If as is suggested the tavern was in operation 14 years before 1746, then Thornton must have opened his establishment in the early 1730's. It is known that he and his wife Margaret came to Newtown around 1725 from Bristol and they bought the property at the corner of Centre Avenue and Court Street in 1733. Joseph Thornton was listed in the deed as a glazier, but there is evidence he was working across the street at one of Newtown's earliest Taverns, the Red Lyon Inn, now known as the Bird-in-Hand, prior to opening his competing establishment.

Events were unfolding very rapidly in Newtown at about 1730. The major change was the decision in 1725 to move the county seat from Bristol to Newtown and the opening of the courthouse in 1726. In preparation for the construction of the public buildings the County purchased 5 acres from John Walley, son of Newtown's first settler Shadrach Walley. The 5 acres was divided into 6 blocks, one devoted to the courthouse, jail and office building. The remaining 5 blocks were subdivided into 17 small building lots and sold. This first housing development in Newtown became the center of the village and 18th Century houses were built along the east side of State Street between Centre Avenue and Penn Street, and along Court Street in the same area. Since the public buildings were located on the north side of Centre Avenue between Court and State Streets, Thornton's establishment was advantageously located diagonally across Centre Avenue from the Court House.

Joseph Thornton died in 1752 in some financial difficulty, and William Yardley, Sheriff, siezed the tavern and put it up for public sale. Margaret Thornton purchased it in 1755 and continued the establishment until her death in 1790 when the property was sold by her executors to Josias Ferguson. It is interesting to note that Margaret Thornton must have been successful as a tavern keeper, for she not only continued to maintain the business but also built the stone house with brick front directly south of the Court Inn in 1785 (note that the roof was raised at a later date). She also purchased the entire block south to Mercer Street which remained open space until the next century when the brick houses were built by Joseph Schofield. The “Boone Garden” located across Court Street from the Court Inn was a part of the Thornton Tavern complex during the 18th Century. It was commonly called the “stable lot”.

It is clear from the advertisement above that the “Half-moon Inn”, known also as “Thornton's Tavern” and now the Court Inn, was one of the dominant buildings of 18th Century Newtown. In addition, Margaret Thornton, its keeper for 35 years, must have been an important and unusual person in the development of Newtown during that period of it's history.

Thomas Mayer

(Editor's note: Articles will appear in this column periodically. Persons interested in Newtown history are encouraged to contribute).

GREAT TURNOUT AT STEAK FRY

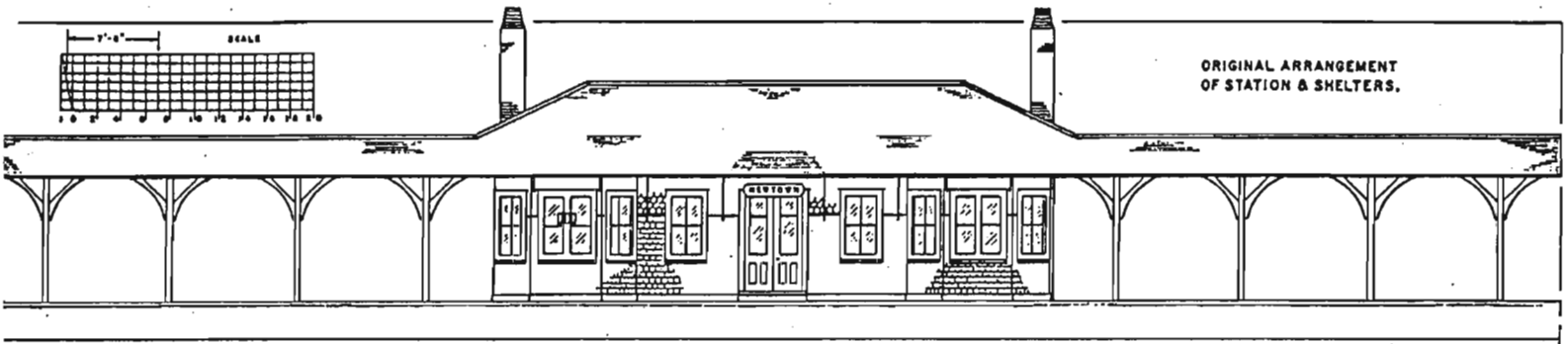
Sue and Marty Sutton and their committee once again were responsible for a delightful evening in the garden of the Court Inn on June 21 when the annual Steak Fry was held. The warm weather didn't stop 60 members from attending and it didn't dampen the good humor of the three men who stood over the grill and cooked the steaks. Mike Donovan, Gus Johnson, and Dick Koenig deserve more than our thanks - they should get medals!! Joe Molloy and Skip Trowbridge manned the bar in their usual professional style. They don't deserve medals tho', they had ice and a breeze now and then. Mary Callahan and Jeanette Rogers provided desserts; Linda Trowbridge and Sue Sutton made the salad. Rolls were brought by Joanne Nardo, who is also responsible for the garden looking so lovely. What a great job she's doing!! Dave Callahan and his able crew from the hardware store set up the grills and tables. An added surprise was the attendance of Claire Hennessy, one of the founding members of the NHA, who now resides in Florida.

SARAJANE DALLAS, COSTUME MISTRESS

Our call for a volunteer to take on the position of Costume Mistress has been answered by Sarajane Dallas, who has already attacked the challenge. It will be up to her to not only perform the duties of, but also define the perimeters of this assignment. Sarajane has separated the costumes, which were mostly made for the annual Open House, from the actual period gowns and accessories (some of which are very elaborate), which warrant special storage and care; and has commenced repairs. It is hoped that the members will cooperate with her system of caring for and keeping track of costumes which they borrow. Sarajane is a member of the Savidge family and a native Newtownian. We appreciate her involvement and wish her success in her enthusiastic undertaking.

EDWARD HICKS

Colonial Williamsburg is organizing an exhibit on Edward Hicks' painting and life, which is planned for opening in the fall of 1998 at the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center and traveling to other museums, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Our President, David Callahan, received a request from Robert Wilburn, President of Colonial Williamsburg, for the loan of four items from our collection of Hicks' memorabilia: the mortar and pestle, painted rocking chair, miniature blanket chest and painted tin box. Our Board of Directors has agreed to extend this loan for the exhibit at Williamsburg. The Folk Art Center provides high standards of environmental control, care and insurance during transport and exhibition, and covers all costs. Knowing the Center's reputation for quality exhibits, the Board believes it to be an honor to the Newtown Historic Association to be included in this exhibit, "The Kingdoms of Edward Hicks".



NEWTOWN'S VICTORIAN RAILROAD STATION.

By Richard N. Mansley

February 2, 1878, was the first of two days of joyous celebration for the people of Newtown. After almost six years of construction, during which the promoters and financiers of the project had suffered every imaginable frustration and adversity, Newtown was finally connected with the outside world by a railroad.

Their joy was short-lived, however, when, in November of 1879, Col. James Boyd, an associate of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, bought 51% of the stock of the Philadelphia, Newtown and New York Railroad, and thereby secured control of the road in the interest of the larger company. The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad soon found itself in financial difficulties from which it emerged in 1884, under new management.

A soda-pop salesman by the name of Archibald Angus McLeod became the General Manager. McLeod had grandiose plans for the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad and borrowed heavily to complete them. It was during his years, first as General Manager and then President, that Reading Terminal was begun, and plans were made for replacing almost everyone of those "weather beaten dry goods boxes," as one wag put it, that served as stations and shelters on the Newtown Railroad.

On January 3, 1891, it was announced that Garret B. Girton of Newtown was the successful bidder for erecting a new station in his home town, which was to cost \$3,500. However, to reach the station, located between Penn and Sullivan (now Centre) Streets and east of Lincoln Avenue, an additional \$8,250 had to be spent for demolishing a barn, procuring the right-of-way and the station property. In addition, Sullivan Street had to be opened, graded and paved to the station to serve as the principal approach from the town.

By May 30, 1891, the railroad station was framed in. The "Enterprise" reported the dimensions of the main building to be 16' x 46' with a 12' ceiling. Waiting room 15' x 35' and the ticket office 10' x 10', each with a handsome bay window. Adjoining the ticket office was a baggage room 6' x 10'. Identical shelters were constructed at each end of the building making it 130' in length. The roof consisted of Vermont slate.

Watson and Buckman furnished the seats and woodwork. Worstall Bros. & Co. had the contract for furnishing the brick, lime and sand used in constructing the foundations. There was no basement. However, the contract called for a special, red, ornamental brick to be used in building the open fireplace at the north end of the station. Charles M. Hauler recalled, years later, helping Frank B. Hart haul the special, pressed bricks, unobtainable

in Newtown, from the State Street siding, where they were unloaded. The bricks were packed between layers of salt hay to prevent marring their surfaces. And the whole load was pulled to the new station site by a black horse named "Old John."

The station as originally planned had the ticket office and baggage room at the north end; as built they were at the south end. Over the years the building was altered several times, and the baggage room eliminated.

As the station neared completion, the editor of the "Enterprise" found fault with it - too close to Penn Street, they said; long trains block crossing; engines have to back to the old station to be turned and watered; engines standing near Penn Street will frighten horses; station painted a drab color; etc.

Nothing was said about the curious arrangement of the platforms and station. The station, shelters and part of the platforms formed one leg of a "V." The tracks and other part of the platform were along the other leg of the "V."

During September of 1891, the curved, perforated seats were installed in the waiting room, and by the beginning of October the building was opened for business. The editor of the "Enterprise" relented a bit and pronounced the station a "modern built, nicely painted, convenient little structure."

Not recorded are the original colors of the station. When last seen, the exterior was painted in typical Reading Railroad colors of white (vanilla) and trimmed in dark brown (chocolate) with the outside windows trimmed around the glass in a milk chocolate color. The station sign was painted black on the back and around the edges. The lettering and edges of the front were painted white, and the background was painted smalt giving it a rough, dark blue appearance.

Inside, the benches were painted a dark red with the cast iron brackets underneath painted black. The baseboard and molding, the dado cap, and the wainscot of vertical tongue, grooved and beaded boards were painted light gray. The upper walls and ceiling were painted oyster white. The ticket counter and the counter attached to the office door were painted dark red. The fancy iron brackets under the ticket counter were painted black.

READING COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA DIVISION

GENERAL ORDER No. 13 EFFECTIVE FEBRUARY 1, 1965

NEWTOWN BRANCH

The status of Newtown Station is changed from that of an agency passenger and freight station to that of a non-agency passenger and freight station, under the jurisdiction of Agent at Langhorne.

In 1967, the New Hope and Ivyland Railroad made a disastrous attempt to move the station to Buckingham. However, the job proved to be beyond their capabilities and the project was abandoned. The remains of the station were torn down by another contractor who wanted the windows, doors, etc. for a cabin in the mountains. The remnants were hauled away and burned in a field near Forest Grove.

A portion of one of the seven drawings I made of the station, including a map and some accountments, is reproduced at the top of this article.