



# 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

Brian Rounsavill, *President*  
David Callahan, *First Vice President*  
Jeff Marshall, *Second Vice President*  
Michael DiFiori, *Recording Secretary*  
Mary Callahan, *Corresp. Secretary*  
Marge Torongo, *Treasurer*

## Board of Directors

Harriet Beckert  
Paul Gouza  
Jeanne Haeckel  
Bronwyn Jones  
William Mahler  
Joanne Nardo  
Geno Peruzzi  
Susan Thompson  
David Walton  
Dolly Gish – *Hon. Director*  
David Mahler – *Parliamentarian*

## 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)

## Research Center Hours:

Tuesdays 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM &  
Thursdays 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM and  
also by appointment.  
Admission is free.

## New Members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

- Jon Holcombe, *Wellesley, NY*
- Sue Terry, *Newtown*
- Joe & Maureen Watts, *Newtown*

## Photos Wanted

Old photographs, postcards, maps or documents of Newtown and the surrounding area are wanted for preservation in our archives. You can either donate or loan them and we will scan and return the item(s). We are interested in photos of houses, businesses, streets, and events, along with local event brochures and programs. Contact David Callahan via email at [dcnhh@comcast.net](mailto:dcnhh@comcast.net) if you have items that you wish to donate or loan for preservation.

## Annual Dues

The annual dues notices have been mailed to all active members. As a part of our continued 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](mailto:dcnhh@comcast.net). We are always looking for new members who are interested in joining to celebrate Newtown's history and heritage.

## Cocktail Party

We have decided to cancel the Cocktail Party this year because we did not want to conflict the Library's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary series.

## Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting will be held on April 19<sup>th</sup> at the Half Moon (Court) Inn. All members are invited. The Annual Business Meeting will include the election of officers and reports from all standing committee chairmen. The following slate of officers has been proposed by the Nominating Committee:

### Officers (two year terms):

*President* - Brian Rounsavill  
*1st Vice President* - David Callahan  
*2nd Vice President* - Jeff Marshall  
*Recording Secretary* - Mike DiFiori  
*Corresp. Secretary* - Mary Callahan  
*Treasurer* - Marge Torongo

### Board of Directors:

Harriet Beckert (2 Year Term)  
Paul Gouza (2 Year Term)  
Jeanne Haeckel (2 Year Term)  
Bronwyn Jones (2 Year Term)  
David Walton (3 Year Term)  
*Parliamentarian* - David Mahler

### Other Directors (not up for election):

William Mahler  
Joanne Nardo  
Geno Peruzzi  
Susan Thompson

Following the Annual Business Meeting, a presentation entitled, "Treasures from the Attic: Selected Items from the NHA Archives" will be given by Harriet Beckert and David Callahan. This lecture will showcase selected items from the NHA archives that are interesting and unique to the Newtown community.



## The Langhorne Speedway

Langhorne Speedway was located in nearby Middletown Township (near the Oxford valley Mall) built by a group of Philadelphia racing enthusiasts known as the National Motor Racing Association (NMRA) in 1926 and was the first dirt track built specifically for automobile racing. The track's unique circular layout earned Langhorne the name "*The Big Left Turn*" and featured many famous drivers, such as Mario Andretti. As suburban growth engulfed the speedway, and offers from developers became too tempting to refuse, the final checkered flag fell on October 17, 1971 and auto racing ceased in this area.

At the Newtown Historic Association's March General Membership Meeting, Charles W. Lauble, Jr., Board Member of the Historic Langhorne Association, presented a lecture entitled, "*The History of the Langhorne Speedway.*" The lecture featured many photographs and newspaper clippings highlighting the history of this local attraction. Mr. Lauble provided the following timeline and photos included in this newsletter, which were compiled from various newspaper clippings and programs to highlight the rise and fall of one of the more notable area attractions of the 20th century.

**1925** - National Motor Racing Association purchased 89 acre farm tract for \$27,000 and built a one-mile dirt oval track and stands that would seat 17,500. They also built the first-ever track underpass for access to the infield.

**1926** – In May, the track opened and Toni Dawson raced at 94 M.P.H., four miles per hour faster than the world's record at the time.

**1927** – July 4th - Thousands of spectators rushed on the Langhorne Speedway today to protest the judges' decision awarding the 25-lap feature automobile race to Fred Wannai of Philadelphia, who finished several yards behind Charles Baumann, Pacific coast champion. Many of the fans contended that Baumann had never been taped. Baumann passed Winnai on the last lap.

**1929** – April 28th - American Automobile Association races opened the Eastern Pennsylvania racing season at the Langhorne Speedway. The program was not the initial race of the year for Eastern Pennsylvania, but for the entire east coast.

**1934** – Ralph H. Hankinson, veteran race promoter, purchased the Speedway. Because of the Pennsylvania Blue Laws, up until 1935, no races could be run on Sundays, so the races were run on Saturdays. With the repeal of the Blue Laws in 1935, Hankinson scheduled a race on Sunday with Indy winner Kelly Petillo as the star; 43,000 fans showed up for the race.

**1936** –George "Doc" Mackenzie of Eddington, 1935 AAA auto racing champion, and Miss Verna T. Mather, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Mather, Langhorne, were married in the Reading hospital room where Mackenzie was confined with Floyd Roberts, of Van Nuys, California, recovering from injuries received in a race. Mackenzie and Miss Mather met in 1931 when the bewhiskered pilot was competing at the Langhorne Speedway. A short while after the marriage, "Doc" was killed in an accident while racing in Milwaukee.

**1938** – In the later part of the thirties, Earl "Lucky" Teeter purchased the speedway from Ralph Hankinson. Hankinson had been feuding with AAA, decided to sell and found a buyer in Lucky Teeter, a young thrill show supervisor. Teeter's main goal was to make Langhorne a showcase for his famous "Hell Drivers" and other automotive endeavors. He vowed to make the track in a thing of beauty. A modern office and showroom building flanked by large stone walls, plus a retaining wall along pit row was the extent of the Teeter development program. Financial misfortunes caused him to return to his thrill show as a performer, and in 1942 he died making a ramp to ramp jump. After Earl Teeter's tragic death, Joie Chitwood took over the "Hell Drivers".

**1939** - Stock cars were introduced to the "Horne". They were of the showroom variety, even with mufflers! Bill France, later to found NASCAR, was a contestant, as was the popular Fred Winnai. The then new midget race cars made their appearance at the "Horne" soon thereafter. About two-thirds the size of standard racers, they were nearly as fast.

**1942** – May 10th. Auto racing ends after a war shortened season that produced a new world's record in the mile dirt track event. Jimmy Wilburn of Indianapolis set the record -105.57 miles per hour before a crowd of 33,241, after which the track was closed because of gas and rubber rationing.

**1946** – Racing after WWII resumed June 30<sup>th</sup>, with a 100 mile championship, only open to Indianapolis cars and drivers; it was the first time the race followed the Indianapolis 500 and used the Indy cars and drivers which continued for many years. The Babcocks, John and Pauline who owned a Taxi Service in Washington D.C., purchased the speedway from the estate of Earl “Lucky” Teeter for their two sons, Stover and J. Willard, who became the promoters for the race track.

**1950** – Irv Fried and Al Gerber took over the operation and leased the track and built a quarter mile oval track inside the one mile oval track and a drag strip. A year or two later, they purchased the track from the Babcock family. After purchasing the track, they leased the building out front of the speedway to the Reedman Brothers and Langhorne Motors started operation which eventually moved across the street.

**1951** – Sportsmen Stock car racing under the lights was inaugurated on a new one-quarter mile Yellow Jacket course, and the first Grand National Circuit late model stock car championship ever on Langhorne's world's fastest circular mile course was raced.

**1952** – Langhorne Speedway was rated as the fastest dirt track in the country, and proved to be a supreme test of automotive stamina and durability.

**1957** – Johnny Thomson exceeded the average speed of 100 M.P.H. mark for the first time at the “Horne”, when winning the 100 mile National Championship Race averaging 100.174 M.P.H.

**1959** – The fourth and final Championship meet of the 1959 drag race season was held for both modified and stock car competition. Joe Jacono of Chester, who equaled the existing record of 109.223 mph, came back for the Championship meet to make a last ditch assault on the track record, which he shared with Bill Johnson of Oreland, Pa.

**1961** – A.J. Foyt won the 100 mile National Championship race, his first victory that led to him winning the race four out of five times in the next 100 mile races.

**1964** – Final race on the dirt track occurred.

**1965** – The new look of National Championship racing at Langhorne was unveiled on June 20, when the newly constructed and paved one-mile track was

officially opened with the annual 100 mile race for championship cars and drivers. A rising new star, fresh from a third place finish in the Indianapolis '500', Mario Andretti, then on his way to becoming the National Champion, set a track record in qualifying the Dean Van Lines Special in 30.46 seconds for a speed of 118.188 MPH. Jim McElreath went on to win with Mario finishing in second place.

**1966** – Mario Andretti wins the 100 mile National Championship race.

**1967** – February 9th - Irvin Fried and Al Gerber announce speedway has been sold to a contracting firm (John J. McIlhinney) which will create a large shopping center by 1972. The 93 acre plot sold for \$1.8 Million as announced in local papers.

**1970** – October- Motels Filled up for big race. A big three-day event, the 200-mile National Open Championship race, attracted racing fans who thought they could be viewing an historic event, the last race at Langhorne. The Bristol Motor Inn, George Washington Motor Lodge, and Holiday Inn in Bristol had been booked for seven months in advance by racing fans and participants. Trenton, Philadelphia, and Burlington accommodations also were booked solid. The speedway was home to 300 trailers and campers roughing it, all the local trailer parks were bulging also. Restaurants and local eateries were filled with the over 40,000 fans and participants. The event started on October 9th with over 125 cars entering; and on Saturday, October 10<sup>th</sup>, time trials were held and two special 20-mile races were held in the afternoon; and on Sunday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, the 45 fastest cars from the time trials roared around the track in the 200-mile race. Merv Treichler won the 20th annual National Open Championship Race for modified and sportsman stock cars.

**1971** - Roger Treichler, cousin of Merv Treichler, both from around Niagara Falls, New York won the last race ever (Modified Championship) at Langhorne. Later that year, race track demolition occurred. So the famous “Big Left Turn” was erased for another act of “progress.” The historic old Langhorne Speedway will be missed by many, scorned by a few, but mostly, it will be remembered by all.



## Colonial Tavern Night

The eighth annual Tavern Night was held on Saturday, March 6<sup>th</sup> at the Half-Moon Inn. Over 70 people joined us for this wonderful colonial event. The evening featured 18th century music, dancing, along with delicious food catered by Joseph's Garden Grille accompanied by colonial side dishes. The event also included a silent auction featuring items from local establishments. Thank you to all who took part either as a guest, volunteer or member. Mark your calendars for 2011!

## February Meeting

The February meeting was held on Monday, February 15<sup>th</sup> at 8 PM at the Half-Moon Inn. The NHA invited Wayne Siefert, of the Bucks County Covered Bridge Society, to present a lecture entitled, "*Covered Bridges of Bucks County*." Bucks County at one time had more than 50 covered bridges, only 12 of which stand today. The lecture featured photos of many of the bridges that have been lost, as well as photos of the bridges dating back to the early 1900's. Over 70 people came out and enjoyed the lecture.

## Clean-Up Day

The annual Half-Moon Inn Clean-up Day was held on Saturday, March 20<sup>th</sup>. About 15 volunteers came out to help lend a hand and restore some luster to the many historical items and furnishings in the Half-Moon Inn. We are very appreciative of their efforts!

## March Meeting

The March meeting of the Newtown Historic Association was held on Monday, March 15<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 PM at the Half-Moon Inn, Court St. & Centre Ave., Newtown. The NHA invited Charles W. Lauble, Jr., Board Member of the Historic Langhorne Association, to present a lecture entitled, "*The History of the Langhorne Speedway*." The lecture featured photos and newspaper clippings highlighting the history of this local attraction (see article on pages 2-3 of this newsletter). Over 70 people came out and enjoyed the lecture.

## Historic Walking Tour

On June 11<sup>th</sup>, we welcome you to join us for an historic walking tour featuring the North State Street and the surrounding area. The tour will be led by Jeff Marshall, Vice President of Resource Protection at the Heritage Conservancy. Join us for an informative stroll through the historic streets of Newtown at 6:30 PM on Friday, June 11<sup>th</sup> at the Half-Moon Inn. The public is invited and admission is free.

## Summer Picnic

The summer picnic will be held on Saturday, June 19<sup>th</sup> at the Court Inn. The picnic will be informal, with ample servings of hot dogs, hamburgers, soft drinks, beer and wine. Patrons are asked to bring their favorite salads and desserts. The picnic is a good way for people to socialize and meet the new members and renew old friendships. For more information, contact Mary Callahan at [dcnhh@comcast.net](mailto:dcnhh@comcast.net).

## 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
- Harold Beck & Sons, Inc.
- Holland Floor Covering
- James Hefelfinger & Assoc. Architects
- Johnson, Kendall & Johnson, Inc.
- J. R. Maxwell Builders, Inc.
- Newtown Hardware House
- Newtown-Jamison Physical Therapy
- Peruzzi Automotive Group
- Stuckert and Yates
- The Law Office of Paul R. Beckert, Jr.
- Thomas-Guy Design, Ltd.

## Upcoming Events

- **Clean-Up**, March 20. 8:30 a.m.
- **Annual Meeting**, April 19. 8:00 p.m.
- **5<sup>th</sup> Grade Historic Walking Tour**, June 2. 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- **Historic Walking Tour**, June 11. 6:30 p.m.
- **Summer Picnic**, June 19. 5:00 p.m.
- **Market Day**, October 2.
- **General Membership Meeting**, "*Newtown as the County Seat: The Evolution of the Court Houses of Bucks County*," October 18. 8p.m.
- **General Membership Meeting**, "*The Art of Understanding a Building's Unwritten History: Stories Your Old House Can Tell*," November 15. 8p.m.
- **Open House Tour**, December 4.

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