

NEWTOWN HISTORIC ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

Spring 1998 Issue
David Callahan, President

Lorraine H. Pentz &
Helen F. Randle, Editors

CALENDAR

Sunday, May 3 2:00 p.m.	Walking Tour and Court Inn Open House conducted by Jeffrey Marshall of the Heritage Conservancy and arranged by "Skip" Gittens. Questions? Call "Skip" at 968- 8783.
Monday, May 4 7:30 p.m.	Full Board Meeting
Monday, May 18	No Membership Meeting
Monday, June 1 7:30 p.m.	Full Board Meeting
Saturday, June 20 6:00 p.m. - Social Hour 7:00 p.m. - Dinner	Annual Picnic at Court Inn (to be held outdoors if weather permits) Chairman - Martin Sutton 968-3211. (See flier)

No Meetings in July or August

COURT INN SPRING CLEAN-UP

Once again a faithful crew showed up at the Court Inn on February 8, willing to roll up their sleeves and give our headquarters a good cleaning. Everyone felt a sense of accomplishment, lunch was served and the day was enjoyed by all. Thanks to the following members: Helen Randle, Alan Anderson, Jeanette Rogers, Lois Molloy, Cathy Fink, Mary and David Callahan, Lorraine Pentz, Ann Linkenheimer, "Skip" Gittens, Michael Swanda, Joanne Nardo, Ann Balderston, Paul Gouza, Nancy Freudenthal and Mary Kester.

STUDENT WALKING TOUR IN MAY

Fifth Grade classes in Local History, under the supervision of Mary Ann McKee of Goodnoe Elementary School, will be taking a Walking Tour of Newtown on Wednesday, May 20 and Wednesday, May 27. The Tour will include a visit to the Court Inn arranged by "Skip" Gittens.

ANNUAL ELECTIONS

The following slate of officers and board members were voted on at the April 20, 1998 and the membership meeting.

OFFICERS: (Two year terms)

President	David Callahan
First Vice President	Paul Gouza
Second Vice President	Martin Sutton
Recording Secretary	Ann Linkenheimer
Corresponding Secretary	Mary Callahan
Treasurer	Eleanor Janney

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Ann Balderston	4 year term	Barbara Reeder	4 year term
Lois Molloy	2 year term	Brian Rounsavill	4 year term
Lorraine Pentz	4 year term		

The Nominating Committee consisted of Joanne Nardo, Chairman; Stephen VonHohen, Laurie Gouza, and Brenda Mc Intyre.

MARGARET THORNTON'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

Margaret would have been pleased! The bar was opened; displays of food on the tables; much talk and laughter. It was probably pretty much as it would have been 200 years ago when Margaret and her husband, Joseph, ran the Court Inn as a tavern located across the street from the Court House. The present day crowd was there to celebrate Margaret's birthday and raise some money for the Newtown Historic Association. Jeanette Rogers and Lorraine Pentz were the hostesses. They had much help from members who brought hors d'oeuvres. Skip Gitten's contribution was the highlight of the evening - oysters and salmon which he served on beautiful dishes. Joe Molloy and Brien Harrison were the very capable bartenders who looked quite elegant in their roles. The Inn was filled with fresh spring flowers which Jeanette and Lorraine gathered from the back yards of members. Candles everywhere added a warm glow and it was good to see the inn filled with old familiar faces and some new ones too.



Women in Wartime

Patricia Stallone was the speaker at the March membership meeting. Pat is studying for her doctorate in history at the U. of PA. She spoke last year in October about "Women in Colonial America" and we were once again entertained by her depiction of "Women in the Civil War". While they stayed closer to home and did not participate in the war as much as their colonial counterparts, they served as scouts, spys and nurses.

We hope to have Ms. Stallone back again!

The Newtown Historic Association has received a State Technical Assistance Grant in the amount of \$1,500 to be used to prepare a new walking tour brochure.

Historic House Plaques

Once again, we remind the members that beautiful bronze plaques are available to display on private homes or commercial buildings. They are 8" x 10", cost \$135 each, and are usually delivered in 2 or 3 months. The house or building must be 50 years of age or older, with documentation of such. Please contact David Callahan at 968-3611 or Joanne Nardo at 968-9052 if you would like to place an order, or if you have any questions.

The Lower Makefield Historical Society is holding its Annual Meeting at the Court Inn in the form of an 18th Century colonial Dinner and Candlelight Tour on May 16. (Sorry! Attendance is by reservation only and the limited quota has been met.)

NHA, NJHC & HARB

Many people, even some of those in authority, seem to be confused about these three local agencies: the Newtown Historic Association, Inc, the Newtown Joint Historic Commission, and the Historical Architectural Review Boards (HARBs). We hope that this will clarify the issue.

The Newtown Historic Association, Inc. is an incorporated non-profit organization dedicated to the collection of objects of historic interest, the provision of facilities for sharing interest in local history and the encouragement of the restoration and preservation of historic properties in the Newtown area. This association is open to membership of any individual, family, or business interested in its goals, with no restriction on place of residence. Nominal dues are collected at the April Annual Meeting.

The Newtown Joint Historic Commission is a governmental agency, officially designated by the Borough and Township of Newtown to act in an advisory capacity as advocates for preservation of the community and to perform research, collect information and present recommendations on historic properties to Borough Council and the Township Board of Supervisors. It consists of 4 members appointed by Newtown Borough and 4 by Newtown Township for staggered 4-year terms.

NHA, NJHC & HARB continued

At the present time, 2 of the Commission members are on the Association Board and 3 additional Commission members are also members of the Association. Because of this overlap and the common goals of the two organizations, there is often confusion in the minds of the public as to which is which.

The members of a third agency, the Historical Architectural Review Board, are also appointed by Newtown Borough Council and the Board of Supervisors of Newtown Township. They have jurisdiction within the Historic Districts only and are created to promote the preservation and protection of historic places and areas of unique historic and architectural interest within the 2 municipalities. The Borough's Board of 7 members are appointed to 5-year terms; the Township's Board is composed of 7 members who serve 4-year terms. Both are required to include a registered architect, a licensed real estate broker and the municipal building inspector. The Township Board must also include a member of the municipal Planning Commission.

Both the Newtown Joint Historic Commission and the Historical Architectural Review Board serve in an advisory capacity only.

Helen F. Randle

MEMBERS HONORED AT RECEPTION

In 1963, a group of residents met at the home of Newton and "Dolly" Gish. As a result of that meeting the Newtown Civic and Historic Association was formed and Helen became its first President. The following year the civic responsibilities were dropped and the Newtown Historic Association, Inc. was formed. In the 35 years since, Helen and Dolly have never lost sight of the original objectives of NHA, which include the encouragement of restoration,, preservation or appropriate commemoration of dwellings, buildings and places of historic interest in the Newtown area. Both have served on the Board. Helen is now Parliamentarian and Dolly is an Honorary Lifetime Director. They also serve on the Newtown Joint Historic Commission, Dolly is Chairperson and Helen, Treasurer. When a building is threatened, the Commission has the authority to research it and, if determined to be of historical significance, recommend that it be saved. Many buildings stand today as a tribute to the efforts of the Commission. Both ladies served time on their respective municipal planning commissions. Helen's other activities include office on the School Boards, the P.T.A.'s, two Civic Associations and the League of Women Voters.

On Sunday, March 29, the Newtown community came together to honor Dolly and Helen for their many years of volunteer service. The recognition was a joint effort of the Newtown Borough Council, Mayor Glenn Hains and the NHA. Accolades from state, county, township, borough and the association were given, praising Dolly and Helen.

Those of us in the audience, standing in the back yard of the Court Inn that lovely Sunday afternoon listened to the achievements of two very dedicated individuals and had the opportunity to see what "good citizenship" really meant. We are grateful to these remarkable ladies for their concern, wisdom and reason. Future generations will benefit from their efforts as we in Newtown do now.

Lorraine Pentz

HISTORICAL NOTES
An Architectural History of the Court Inn
The Late Period
 by Thomas C. Mayer

A major event in the development of the Court Inn occurred in 1792 when Josias Ferguson extensively rebuilt the North Portion of the building (Periods B and C of the previous article). Ferguson had purchased the building from Margaret Thornton, who had successfully operated the tavern from 1750 to the time of her death in 1790. Margaret not only ran the tavern during these 40 years, but she also purchased the land fronting Court Street to Mercer Street. She built the brick-front stone house next to the Court Inn in 1782, and her land between the Inn and Mercer Street was used as gardens and orchards supplying the inn. The other brick houses standing on that land today were built during the early to middle 19th century.

Ferguson demolished the frame shed-roof "lean to" structure that had been added to the east facing facade of the original "Half Moon Inn" and replaced it with a substantial two and one half story stone structure. The wall facing Centre Avenue as seen today represents this 1792 period of construction. The datestone and the wall "seam" above the exterior door confirm this interpretation. The restoration architects of John Milner Associates, who analysed the development of the building, wrote the following description of the North Portion:

"The 1792 addition embodies a curious combination of then-old-fashioned and modern building techniques. Out of style in 1792 would have been the closed string dogleg stairway and boldly panelled doors which speak of mid to early eighteenth century work. Very up to date on the other hand is the fashionably conceived Federal style mantelpiece and the use on the interior doors of butt hinges, which were hardly known at this date outside large metropolitan areas".

Figure 1 shows the location of the North Portion along Centre Avenue and identifies the other major late periods of construction. The appearance of the Inn in 1792 is presented in Figure 2, a photograph of a cardboard model of this period made by the architects.

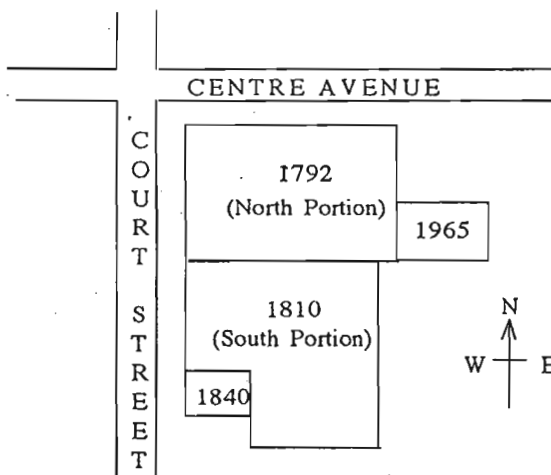


Figure 1. Plan of the Court Inn showing the locations of late periods of construction.

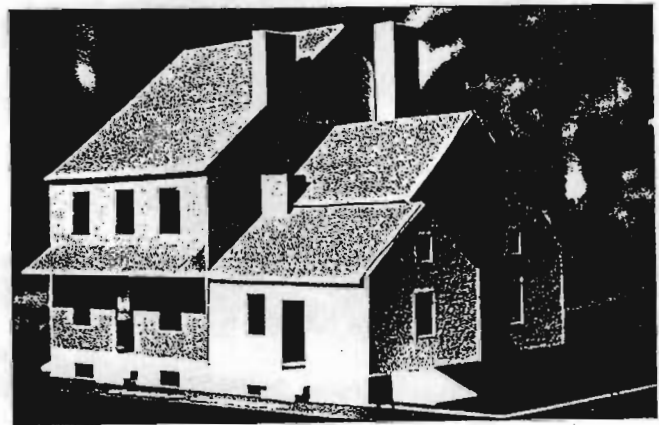


Figure 2. Model of the Court Inn following the major renovation of the North Portion in 1792.

General Francis Murray, who lived in the large stone house across Centre Avenue from the Court Inn, purchased the tavern in 1795 and it is believed he made the next major renovation about 1810. At this time the South Portion (Periods A and D of the previous article) was of frame construction and one story high. Murray demolished the exterior frame walls of the entire South Portion and

replaced them with stone. In addition, a one story kitchen wing with a large cooking fireplace and bake oven was appended to the south facade. Note that the bake oven was rebuilt in 1983. The entire South Portion at this time was only one story with loft above, but now of stone construction. Figure 3 is a model of the tavern as it existed in 1810 and dates to the Francis Murray period of ownership.



Figure 3. 1810 period showing newly constructed one story stone South Portion and new kitchen with bake oven.

The major event in Newtown during the early 1800's that influenced the tavern business was the removal of the Courthouse to Doylestown in 1813, and with it the activity associated with the County office buildings. Francis Murray continued to own the Court Inn and operate it as a tavern until his death in 1818 when it was sold to Joseph Briggs, hatter. The Briggs family now used the building as a residence and about 1840 made two major changes to it. They raised the entire South Portion including the kitchen to a full two stories with frame weatherboards, and they enlarged the living space in the southwest corner by extending the building about 10 feet covering the cellar entrance and infilling the alcove near the bake oven (see Figure 4). At this time the size of the building was essentially the same as exists today with the exception of the modern kitchen added to the east facade of the North Portion.



Figure 4. Model of the Court Inn c1840. At this time the building was essentially the same size as exists today.

Although the building was not subjected to any major structural changes following 1840, the interior of the South Portion was gutted about 1900, and the exterior "Victorianized". In view of the major changes to the Court Inn, especially the South Portion, during its long history, the Newtown Historic Association restored the exterior of the building to the 1840 period. The interior of the North Portion is more consistent with the eighteenth century tavern (1792 period). Limited restoration focal areas of the South Portion interior are the 1730 cooking fireplace in the Reception Room, and the 1810 period corner and cooking fireplaces in the Meeting Room.