



The Half Moon

The Newsletter of the Newtown Historic Association



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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 and activities in our area. We welcome any suggestions for future articles.

Officers

Barry Fleck, President
Brian Rounsavill, First Vice President
Richard Speranza, Second Vice President
Mary Jo Garner, Recording Secretary
Caroline Bennett, Corresponding Secretary
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Susan Thompson
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Honorary Life Director – David Callahan
Parliamentarian – Tim Potero

Callahan Research Center

100 Mercer Street
Newtown, PA 18940 USA
Research Center Hours:
Tuesday, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Thursday, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
And also, by appointment

New Members

Roger & Nancy Anderson, Leslie Calabrese, Bob Davis, Jr.,
John & Lori Gleason, Mary K. Kipnis, Edward Nowici,
Michael McFarland & Charles Potts IV



Upcoming Calendar

November:

- 11/20: **General Meeting** at 7:30 p.m., Court Inn, Native American Program from the Museum of Indian Culture: "The People of the Northeastern Woodlands"

December:

- 12/2: **Holiday Open House Tour** from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

For further details, visit www.newtownhistoric.org.

September General Meeting

The September general meeting of the NHA was held on Monday, September 18th, 2023, at the Half-moon (Court) Inn. Mike Sellers was the speaker. The topic was "The History of and Future Plans for the Newtown Trolley Bridge."

In this presentation, Mike reviewed the history of the Newtown Trolley Bridge, including its use by the Newtown Electric Street Railway Company, and presented future plans for the bridge.

Newtown Township, Newtown Borough, and the Newtown Creek Coalition are partners in the planning for the bridge project, and support an application to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for funding.

Mike Sellers



This historical and informative presentation lasted about an hour. It was followed by a lively question-and-answer period. Approximately 50 people were in attendance.



Tyler State Park Self-Guided Historical Walking Tour

The NHA held the Tyler State Park self-guided historical walking tour on Saturday, September 23rd, 2023, starting at the Tyler Park boathouse dam. It began with an historical overview of the Tyler family, mansion, and park properties by Brian Rounsavill, First Vice President of the Newtown Historic Association, and Bonnie Tobin, Environmental Education Specialist at Tyler State Park.

Bonnie Tobin and Brian Rounsavill



Over 60 tickets were sold and approximately 20 people were in attendance, down from last year because of the weather.

Many interesting questions were asked during the event. All participants received a copy of the recently published "History of Tyler State Park" book, and they were free to tour the park on their own at the conclusion of the event.



Dave and Mary Callahan



A Successful Newtown Experience® Weekend

Photos: Neale Messina

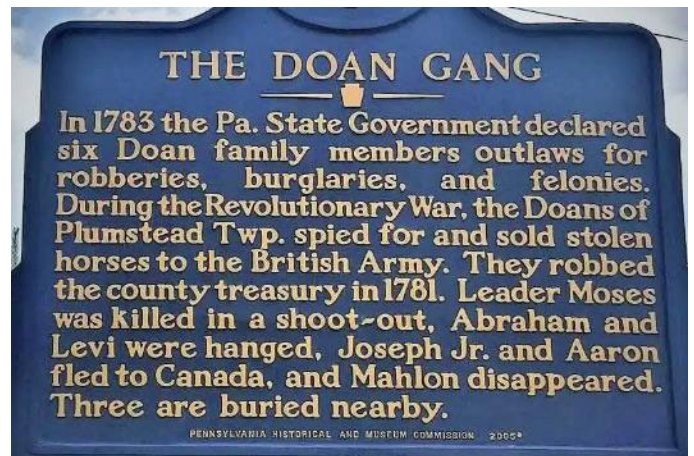
The Newtown Historic Association held its second annual Newtown Experience® weekend on Friday and Saturday, October 6th and 7th, 2023. This fun-filled historic weekend offered everyone of any age the opportunity to experience and learn about what it was like for our forefathers who lived more than 300 years ago.

The weekend celebration started on Friday night, October 6th, at the Newtown Theatre with an evening presentation by the Mercer Museum called, "Spirits of the Outlaws, the Doan Gang and Bucks County Taverns." The presenter was Annie Halliday, Director of Library and Archives.

Annie Halliday



The Doan gang was a group of British loyalists, the most notorious members being five brothers and one cousin from the Doan family of Plumstead. The gang was composed of around 30 members who were accused murderers, attainted traitors, and horse thieves who ferried British prisoners of war to British lines. They were also guilty of robbing tax collectors, their most famous crime being the theft of the Bucks County treasury in 1781.



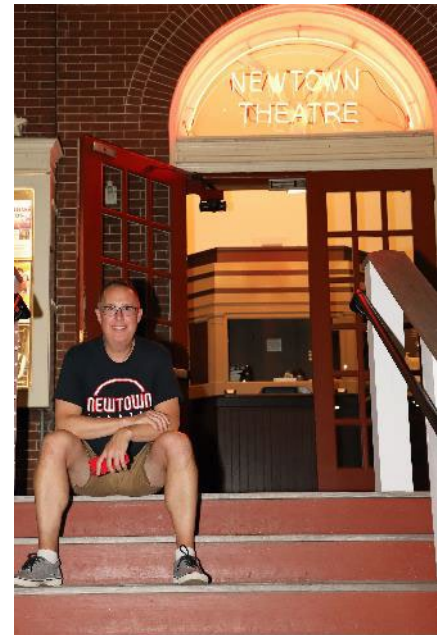
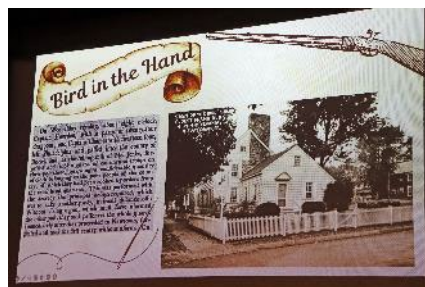
This 45-minute lecture covered the thrilling history of the Doan gang's activities and their frequent visits to colonial taverns in Bucks County. Taverns were the "town halls" of Revolutionary Bucks County. They served not only as a destination for weary travelers but a place to conduct public business such as elections or government meetings, or to record the depositions of victims of the Doan gang's nightly rides.



A Successful Newtown Experience® Weekend (cont'd)

Photos: Neale Messina

A total of 199 tickets were sold—a very successful evening. Proceeds from this event were shared by the Newtown Historic Association and the Newtown Theatre.



On Saturday, October 7th, the Newtown Experience® weekend continued with our 47th annual Market Day. Despite the threat of rain, the streets around the Half-moon (Court) Inn were filled with crafters, musicians, food trucks, fun activities, and more—creating an immersive experience and a glimpse into colonial America. This community-oriented event brought hundreds of people (and four-legged friends) into our town to celebrate our historic past and enjoy the present.

The two winners of the NHA raffle were David Leder of Chancellor Street in Newtown—who has chosen to use his gift certificate to go to the Golden Pheasant Inn, and Dot Cranville of Holland—who has chosen to use her gift certificate to go to the Black Bass Hotel.

A Successful Newtown Experience® Weekend (cont'd)

Photos: Neale Messina



A Successful Newtown Experience® Weekend (cont'd)

Photos: Neale Messina



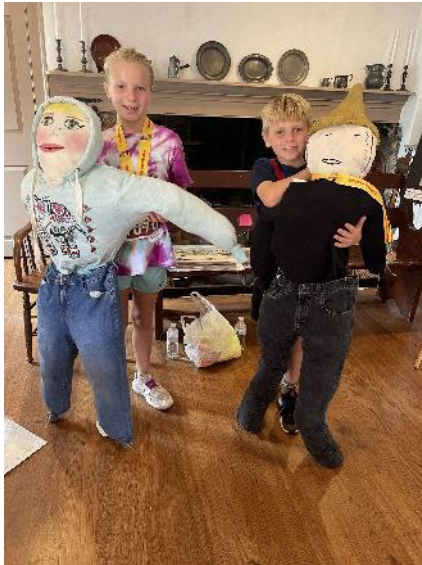
A Successful Newtown Experience® Weekend (cont'd)

Photos: Neale Messina



A Successful Newtown Experience® Weekend (cont'd)

Photos: Keyna Crawford, Neale Messina



A Successful Newtown Experience® Weekend (cont'd)

Photos: Neale Messina



was led by Ashara Shapiro, whose hard work and dedication for the past 6 months made the day a unique and successful event.

The NHA extends our sincerest appreciation to Ashara and her team, including Mary Callahan, Andrea Bayford, Kathy Gonsalves, Susan Thompson, Gary Albaugh, Brian Titus, Annamarie Kaminski, and Bronwyn Jones. And this is the short list! The NHA also extends our appreciation to the Newtown Borough community for their help and support, and the Borough residents who endured the inconvenience of the streets being closed during Market Day. And we thank Mayor John Burke and Chief James Sabath and their staff, who also helped make this event a success. Lastly, the NHA thanks all those who visited Newtown to shop, eat, and enjoy the beauty of our historic town with our community.

We hope to see everyone next year as we continue the Market Day tradition.



Market Day 2023 is now one for the record books. The weather didn't totally cooperate, but it did allow us to conduct the event.

The preparation and effort to hold Market Day requires approximately 100 community volunteers. This team of volunteers



More Half-moon (Court) Inn Improvements

Once again, Jimmy Garner and Dave Callahan volunteered their time and tackled another project at the Inn. (Thank you, Jimmy and Dave!)

This time, an improvement was made to the rear of the property, but you can see it from Centre Avenue as you drive or walk by.

Red stones and a lovely fence have been installed to hide the air conditioning units. The next step is painting.



Speaking of painting, the tavern room is being painted in preparation for the Holiday Open House Tour. Matt Bye is the painter.

We have one more improvement made behind the Inn to report. The brick walkway inside the first fence gate has been repaired by Galaxy Landscaping. The roots from an old tree were the cause of the issue. We think you'll agree that it looks much better, and it is now a safer walkway for visitors.

Before the Repair



After the Repair



Callahan Research Center Improvement

Four new windows have been ordered to replace the existing windows at the Callahan Research Center. Besides needing replacement, these new windows will help contain energy costs.

Callahan Research Center



Corporate Members

We are proud to highlight our corporate members:

- A Love for Life
- ALP Supply Inc.
- Fred Beans Automotive Group
- Lin Bethman Auto Center, Inc.
- DeFrehn Roofing Services
- Mary Dinneen, Realtor
- First National Bank & Trust of Newtown
- Harold Beck & Sons, Inc.
- J. McLaughlin
- Johnson, Kendall & Johnson, Inc.
- Marcolla Realty
- Newtown Business Association
- Wm. B. Parry & Son, Ltd.
- Anthony Petsis & Associates, Inc.
- SDG Holdings I, LLC
- Stuckert and Yates
- T & T Tree Service
- Waitkus Design

Do You Have Historic Items to Donate?

If you have historic items to donate to the NHA (pictures, letters, research on a property or family, furniture, etc.), please contact us at (215) 968-4004.



November General Meeting

How did the arrival of the Europeans impact the peoples of the Northeastern woodlands? Christine Applegate, Educator from the [Museum of Indian Culture](#) will answer this question and more during the November general meeting of the NHA on **Monday, November 20th, 2023, at 7:30 p.m. at the Half-moon (Court) Inn.**

Christine Applegate



In her presentation, Christine will outline the culture of the people of our area, the Lenape, before and after the arrival of the European colonists. Living in our area for a minimum of 15,000 years (they say they've been here since the beginning), the Lenape took advantage of the natural resources and seasonal changes to build their society. They developed unique styles in housing, clothing, cuisine, and social structure. With the advent of the Fur Trade, new products became available and the relationships among neighboring tribes and the natural world changed. The story of these changes will be told through the use of hands-on examples of food, clothing, tools, furs, and trade goods.



Founded in 1980 and located in Allentown, PA, the Museum of Indian Culture is a unique member-supported, volunteer run, non-profit resource center for people of all ages to learn about Native American

cultures, especially from the northeast, but also

throughout the western hemisphere. Their mission is to preserve and perpetuate the authentic histories and cultural heritage of Native American peoples—past, present, and future. For over 40 years, the museum has offered educational exhibits, programs, internships, and collaborative community events for the greater Lehigh Valley and beyond.

From Horse Races to the Space Race, Newtown's State Street Has Seen It All (Lavelle Aircraft History)

By Brian Rounsavill

The bucolic fields of Newtown have long been a place for farming, horse breeding, and stables. In keeping with this deep agrarian past, it was commonplace at the turn of the century to see working farm horses from Kansas being unloaded from railcars at Newtown Station and sold at the Brick Hotel. However, a little known, and very popular, use for horses in Newtown was horse racing.

Horses were the livelihood of this farming community and they also provided entertainment. Fairs were organized each summer in Newtown, at which one of the main attractions was horse racing. Locals would bring their fastest horse for racing just as they brought their prize livestock or produce for judging. It was not a place for the faint of heart however. A quote from the turn of the century: "These fairs, a great feature of social life of that day, were attended by all classes, the great majority bent on having a frolic. Horse-racing, drinking, gambling and stealing prevailed to an alarming extent." (Source: unknown)

There are also stories of horse races taking place on State Street around the turn of the century. For example, J.W. Wynkoop, one of the early members of the Bucks County Agricultural Society, enjoyed a good horse and a good race, and was a very capable driver. He would often take his horse and buggy to Newtown to race all comers down State Street. He often won. (Source: The Newtown Railroad Reel, 1966, p. 4238)



From Horse Races to the Space Race, Newtown's State Street Has Seen It All (cont'd)

By Brian Rounsavill

Easter Boy as driven by Harry Leedom, circa 1915, photographed at the White Hall Hotel stables on State Street (in background). Courtesy of the Newtown Historic Association



At around this same time and location on South State Street, the Excelsior Bobbin and Spool Works, now known as the Stocking Works, began operations. In 1884, the Excelsior Bobbin and Spool Works was founded by John B. Mawson in Yardley. In 1889, it was moved to this location at 301 South State Street in Newtown by his sons James, William, and Charles after a fire destroyed the Yardley plant. In 1904, the Bobbin and Spool Works chartered the name Excelsior Bobbin and Spool Company, which expanded with new buildings and updated equipment. After the tenure of the stocking manufacturer, the building was used by a stained-glass company and a bobbin factory. During World War II, the building was used by the Lavelle Aircraft Corporation.

The Excelsior Bobbin & Spool Works Workers, located at 301 South State Street, circa 1900. Courtesy of the Newtown Historic Association.



Founded in 1940 by Thomas Lavelle and Henry Liese in Newtown at this location on South State Street, Lavelle Aircraft Company was a leading manufacturer of precision metal and electronic parts for many landmark aerospace achievements. During World War II, the firm produced parts for many U.S. military aircraft, including the huge tail fin for the famous C-46 Curtiss Commando cargo airplane. They also made parts for the Martin Marauder, the Brewster Dive-Bomber, and the Grumman Hellcat, along with radio, engine and radar parts.

When World War II started, there was a tremendous demand for aircraft. Lavelle expanded to meet demand, increasing from under 10 employees to over 400 employees, when various plants around Newtown were established to produce parts for planes. In all, there were ten locations in the Borough of Newtown. To mark its success, the company was awarded the Army-Navy "E" for excellence in production. After the war, aircraft contracts were canceled, and the added employees were discharged. Many

were later rehired when the company invented and produced farm equipment, such as conveyors, wagon unloaders and power hoists.

Lavelle Aircraft Company, located at 301 South State Street, 1945, decorated for the Army-Navy "Excellence in Production" ("E") Award Celebration. Courtesy of the Newtown Historic Association.



Early in 1950, the company realized that the type of power used in aircraft was changing rapidly from reciprocating engines to jet power that involved stainless steel and new steel alloys. The company changed over to stainless steel production for jet engines, missiles and satellites, which made up about 90% of the plant's capacity.

Starting in 1960, the Lavelle Aircraft Company, under contract from the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), built all six versions of TIROS – the Television Infrared Observation Satellite. TIROS was the first experimental and operational meteorological satellite and was overseen by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the U.S. Army Signal Research and Development Laboratory at Fort Monmouth, NJ. In all, six versions of the weather satellite were

From Horse Races to the Space Race, Newtown's State Street Has Seen It All (cont'd)

By Brian Rounsavill

produced through 1962 and over 178,000 TV pictures were sent back to earth over 1,397 days. Around this time, Lavelle Aircraft also helped build the Telstar satellite for Bell Telephone Laboratories – the first telecommunications satellite.

After the war, Lavelle played a major role in the free world's first nuclear ICBM system when it built the internal structure of the RVX series of Air Force ICBM re-entry vehicles on behalf of General Electric. Lavelle also manufactured the Talos anti-aircraft missile for the U.S. Navy. In 1964, the firm built the RCA Ranger VII Spacecraft that surveyed (via television pictures) the lunar surface in preparation for the U.S. Manned Lunar Landing Program. During the Apollo program, Lavelle built the antenna head yoke assembly for the Lunar Excursion Module, as well as the lithium hydroxide cartridges which were used to remove excess carbon dioxide from the air. These cartridges were originally designed for the life support system carried in the backpacks of the astronauts during their exploration walks on the moon surface. Lavelle made air purification filters for every Apollo mission. During the Apollo 13 crisis, with the command module's environmental control system

dead from lack of power, the lunar module system supported both cabins. However, the available air purification cartridges did not have enough life to get the astronauts back to earth safely, so the Lavelle cartridges were jury-rigged together in order to provide enough fresh air to save the astronauts of Apollo 13 from certain death by carbon monoxide poisoning.

TIROS Weather Satellite, 1963. Courtesy of the Newtown Historic Association.



In 1976, the original founders sold the company to other investors and, in 1987, Lavelle Aircraft was moved to northeast Philadelphia. In 1994, the company filed for bankruptcy protection and was completely dissolved in 1999. The Newtown factory site on South State Street was restored as the present Stocking Works office complex.

Walking by this site on South State Street, it is hard to believe that it once served as the finish line of horse races over a century ago, and it was also the place where the space race was launched, saving the lives of the Apollo 13 astronauts and transmitting the first weather satellite images back to earth. Yes, Newtown is truly a special place.

Sources:

1. Newtown Enterprise, June 7, 1934.
2. Pennsylvania Historical Marker Nomination Form, Newtown Historic Association.
3. Misc Archives, Newtown Historic Association.

NHA Newsletters

If you would like to revisit previous newsletters, you can find them on the Newsletters page of our website:

<https://www.newtownhistoric.org/about-us/newsletters/>.

Holiday Open House Tour Update

By Kathy Gonsalves

The Newtown Historic Association's Holiday Open House Tour returns for its 60th year on **Saturday, December 2nd, 2023.**

An anticipated winter tradition, make it yours and take this self-guided walking tour of the 5 private residences and the 6 public buildings featured this year.



Holiday Open House Tour Update (cont'd)

By Kathy Gonsalves; photos: Kati Sowiak, Linda Yosen

Houses on the tour are 141 Liberty Street, 221 South Chancellor Street, 237 South Chancellor Street, 116 North Chancellor Street, and 127 Court Street.



Public buildings open to tour-goers are the Friends Home, Anthony Petsis and Associates, Newtown Fire Association, Newtown Library Company, NHA Dave and Mary Callahan Research Center, and NHA Half-moon Inn.



Midway through the tour, respite can be found at several of the Borough churches hosting lunches at a reasonable cost – St. Luke's Episcopal Church and Newtown Presbyterian Church. Or dine at one of Newtown's great restaurants and get a head start on holiday shopping by visiting the shops along State Street.

Tour hours are from **10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.** It includes entry into the Half-moon Inn, home to the Newtown Historic Association. Once inside this beautifully restored 18th-century building, tour-goers will enjoy period musical entertainment, hearthside colonial cooking demonstrations, and refreshments of mulled cider and cheese.



Holiday Open House Tour Update (cont'd)

By Kathy Gonsalves

Early bird ticket prices are \$30 for members or \$35 for non-members starting November 15th, 2023.

Advance tickets can be purchased at Newtown Book & Record Exchange (check or cash only), 102 South State Street in Newtown or on-line on the NHA's website:

<https://www.newtownhistoric.org/events/annual-holiday-open-house-tour/>.

On the day of the tour, December 2nd, 2023, ticket prices are \$40 and can be purchased at the Half-moon Inn, 105 Court Street and at the Stocking Works, 301 South State Street, Newtown.

Please, no picture taking, and high-heeled shoes are not permitted in the houses.

For additional information, call the Newtown Historic Association at 215-968-4004 or visit our website: <https://www.newtownhistoric.org/events/annual-holiday-open-house-tour/>.

All proceeds from the tour benefit the Newtown Historic Association and its programs dedicated to the preservation of Newtown's historical heritage.

New Accessions

- Photographs and negative of the Stocking Works and Newtown China Company, newsletter articles related to Henry Liese work at Lavelle

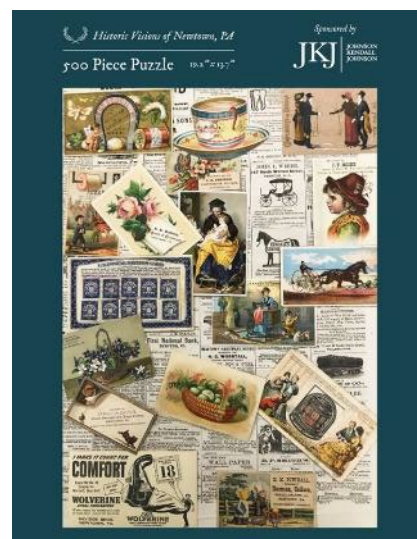
Aircraft Corp, two Historic Preservation May/June 1988 issue – Alan Smith

- WWII Army uniform (in memory of William Hamilton Yard Borden) – Roger Anderson
- Ledgers and engraving plates from the Newtown Cemetery – Richard Tomlinson
- Photographs of and relating to the Temperance House, and a WWII photograph of Nicholas Volk (in memory of her father and mother & aunts/family restaurant) – Elizabeth Becker
- Photograph of men who renovated the White Hall Hotel, June 1983 – James Lee
- Mexican sombrero, painted rattling gourd, two decorative carved paddles, two cast iron doorstops, two wooden bowling pins, two wooden balls, four croquet mallets, wooden baseball hat, and more (in memory of Mary Hicks Richardson) – Edward Richardson

- Newtown garden photos poster, \$20
- Historic Newtown, Images of America book, \$21.99

The two books are also available for purchase from the NHA website at

<https://www.newtownhistoric.org/shop/>. The puzzle can be purchased online as well at <https://www.newtownhistoric.org/shop/historic-visions-puzzle/>.



NHA Holiday Items for Purchase

A reminder that the NHA has several unique items for purchase. These items would make lovely gifts for family and friends this upcoming holiday season. All items are available for purchase at the NHA Callahan Research Center during open hours.

- Holiday ornaments, \$15 (for 2023, the Newtown Theatre)
- History of Tyler Park book, \$16
- Historic puzzle #2, \$20

