



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

Dan Griffin, President
Brian Rounsavill, First Vice President
Richard Speranza, Second Vice President
Mary Jo Garner, Recording Secretary
Caroline Bennett, Corresponding Secretary
Rich Seidner, Treasurer

Board of Directors

Keyna Crawford
Paul Gouza
Betsey King
Jeff Marshall
Geno Peruzzi
Amy Smith
Susan Thompson
Gina Tognini
David Walton
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

Matthew Ahern, Marilyn Bell, David Holsten, Andy & Amy Smith



Upcoming Calendar

April:

- 4/27: **Annual Spring Cleanup** at 8:30 a.m., Court Inn

May:

- 5/18: **Annual Spring Cocktail Party** at 5:00 p.m., Court Inn
- 5/27: **Memorial Day Tribute to Local Veterans** at 10:00 a.m., Callahan Research Center

June:

- 6/1: **Annual Garden Walk** at 9:00 a.m., Court Inn
- 6/6: **Elementary School Walking Tour**, Court Inn
- 6/21: **Historic Newtown Walking Tour** at 6:00 p.m., Court Inn

September:

- 9/16: **"The Lost Covered Bridges of the Neshaminy Creek"** at 7:30 p.m., Court Inn
- 9/22: **Tyler State Park Walking Tour** at 10:00 a.m., Tyler State Park, Newtown

For further details, visit www.newtownhistoric.org.

Annual Recognition Dinner

Photos: Neale Messina

Every year, we like to honor those homeowners and public building stewards who so graciously opened their homes and buildings for the Holiday Open House Tour, one of the NHA's most attended events.

For the five homeowners and four stewards who participated in the 2023 Holiday Open House Tour, the recognition dinner was held on Sunday, February 4th, 2024. Over

60 people were in attendance. All but one homeowner was able to attend.

Guests enjoyed a scrumptious dinner and delicious dessert, along with an array of beverages to sooth their thirst.

During the evening, a slideshow showed photos taken by Neale Messina on the day before and day of the tour. Messina also prepared a photo album and Zip drive of photos as a gift for each homeowner.

The NHA extends their gratitude to all those who helped make the evening a success, especially Kathy Buczek and her staff at the Temperance House.



Annual Recognition Dinner (cont'd)

Photos: Neale Messina



Annual Recognition Dinner (cont'd)

Photos: Neale Messina



February General Meeting

Photos: Kathy Gonsalves

Our February general meeting was held on Tuesday, February 20th, 2024. The presentation title was “Portraying George Washington: An Evening with John Godzieba.” The event was presented by the Friends of Washington Crossing Park, the Newtown Theatre, and the NHA.

Godzieba has portrayed George Washington since 2009 and serves in this role at Washington Crossing Historic Park. During his presentation, Godzieba discussed Washington’s time in Bucks County, little known facts about the general’s life and character, how Washington’s birthday was celebrated through the years, and the research that goes into Godzieba’s portrayal and uniform. He also shared about his personal experiences portraying Washington at the park’s annual crossing reenactments. The Q&A portion after the presentation was interesting and entertaining.



February General Meeting (cont'd)

Photos: Kathy Gonsalves

Proceeds from the ticket sales benefited all three local non-profit organizations: the Friends of Washington Crossing Park, the Newtown Historic Association, and the Newtown Theatre. It was a sold-out event.

John Godzieba



Exceptional March Fundraiser

NHA First Vice President, Brian Rounsavill, for the fourth consecutive year, ran the David Goggins 4x4x48 Challenge, which involves running 4 miles every 4 hours for 48 hours along the Delaware Canal (a total of 48 miles, or about two marathons in two days).

This year's challenge started on Friday, March 1st, 2024, at 4:00 p.m. and the last run was at 12:00 p.m. on Sunday, March 3rd, 2024.

Brian Rounsavill



This unique fundraiser raised \$4,055 to help offset the costs associated with creating the Newtown Historic Association's Semiquincentennial display on the second floor of the Half-moon (Court) Inn, which will showcase Newtown's history for our nation's 250th celebration that will take place in 2026.

In addition to the funds raised by Rounsavill, Mark Irwin and Associates have agreed to donate all of their labor and materials that were used for constructing the four display cases for the NHA's Semiquincentennial exhibit, which has a value of over \$15,000. The NHA is humbled and appreciative of their generosity.

The NHA is also grateful for Brian's personal dedication to, and support of, the NHA. Thank you, Brian!

March General Meeting

Our March general meeting took place at the historic Old Presbyterian Church on Sunday, March 24th, 2024. The leaders were Phil Winn, Pam Allen, and Brent Wiggins (the Gravediggers). They spoke about the "Restoration of the Old Presbyterian Church Graveyard" and provided a guided tour.

Phil Winn, Pam Allen, and Brent Wiggins



Phil, Pam, and Brent shared the intimate history of the graveyard and firsthand accounts of the activities it took, like the use of ground penetrating radar (GPR), to complete this massive restoration project. There are currently 308 known plots representing 341

individuals—the earliest dating back to 1761.

The weather was picture perfect, which helped bring out the large crowd. Over 100 people were in attendance.



Annual Business Meeting and April General Meeting

The combined Annual Business and April general meeting was held on April 15th, 2024, at the Half-moon (Court) Inn. Annual Business was conducted first—led by outgoing President, Barry Fleck and Treasurer, Rick Seidner. Business included the election of Directors and Officers for a new term and a review of the organization’s events over the past year.



Following the Annual Business Meeting, the general meeting was presented by NHA Board members, Mary Jo Garner and Keyna Crawford—both lifelong residents of Newtown. The presentation topic was “Treasures in the Attic.” Mary Jo and Keyna shared historical women’s and children’s garments from years past.



Annual Spring Cleanup

Our annual spring cleanup day at the Half-moon (Court) Inn will be held on **Saturday, April 27th, 2024, beginning at 8:30 a.m.**



We are seeking volunteers to assist with the cleanup. No experience necessary. Please come help us and have some fun making the Court Inn shine again, especially those who are interested in helping with our buildings and grounds.

If you have any questions, please contact Paul Gouza at pgouza12@gmail.com.

Tyler Formal Gardens & Landscaping Lecture

After you help with the annual cleanup, head on over to Bucks County Community College (BCCC) to hear a lecture on “For Love of Garden: Establishing Jenkins Arboretum & Gardens as a Community Resource.”

Tom Smarr, Executive Director of Jenkins Arboretum & Gardens, near Valley Forge Park, will discuss one of the region’s great horticultural and environmental botanical garden assets, and how its story began in 1968 as a loving gift that envisioned the property as a public space for everyone to explore a naturalistic botanical garden. Encompassing 48 acres of diverse plant collections, it is home to nationally accredited rhododendrons, azaleas, mountain laurels and eastern North American plants. A tour of Tyler Gardens will follow the lecture.

Tom Smarr



Tyler Formal Gardens & Landscaping Lecture (cont'd)

Mr. Smarr has worked for numerous horticultural institutions from Longwood to west coast botanic gardens and led the early establishment of horticultural programs at newly opened parks such as the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway in Boston; the High Line in New York City; and the Parklands of Floyds Fork in Louisville, Kentucky.

The lecture will occur on **Saturday, April 27th, 2024, at 10:00 a.m.** It will be held in the Zlock Performing Arts Center at the Newtown Campus of BCCC, 275 Swamp Road, Newtown, PA. Tickets are \$10 (veterans and Bucks alumni) and \$15 (general admission). It is free for students with ID. Register online at www.bucks.edu/foundation/event.

All proceeds from the event benefit the Stella Elkins Tyler Gardens Endowment and the Historic Preservation Program at BCCC. For more information, please send an email to lyle.rosenberger@bucks.edu.

Court Inn Improvements

The NHA Buildings and Grounds Committee continues to stay busy. It should come as no surprise. Buildings, especially old ones, require ongoing care and maintenance.

Renovations to the Half-moon (Court) Inn second-floor bathroom are completed (new toilet, faucet, shut off valves, and floor tiles), and the painting of the Innkeeper Room is finished. It all looks great!



Callahan Research Center Improvements

Besides the Court Inn, the NHA Buildings and Grounds Committee has responsibility for the Callahan Research Center, too.

The two attic windows and the two alley-side windows have been replaced.



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.



Annual Spring Garden Cocktail Party

Save the date for the Newtown Historic Association's annual Spring Garden Cocktail Party on **Saturday, May 18th, 2024, from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.** at the Half-moon (Court) Inn.

Join your neighbors and friends as you wander among the gardens of the Inn. Hors d'oeuvres, wine, beer, and cocktails will be served.

Raffle tickets will be sold for Craig Hackett prints and a few baskets of cheer.

Tickets are \$45 a person for members and \$50 a person for non-members. All proceeds will go towards continuing maintenance of the Half-moon (Court) Inn. You can purchase your tickets online at www.newtownhistoric.org/cocktailparty.

George is Back in Town

The prominent Newtown painter, Edward Hicks (1780 – 1849), is widely known for his *Peaceable Kingdoms* painting. Did you know that he also painted a portrait of George Washington?

A quarter length portrait of Washington, the first president of the United States, remained in the Hick's family collection until it was recently acquired at auction by the NHA.

In Hick's painting, Washington is depicted in a characteristic black velvet jacket and a white shirt with a linen ruffle against a neutral dark background. This painting now hangs on the second floor of the Half-moon (Court) Inn, in the Edward Hick's room.

Welcome back to Newtown, George!

Tribute to Local Veterans

The Newtown Historic Association will hold its annual Memorial Day tribute to honor local military veterans of World War II, Korea, and Viet Nam on **Memorial Day, Monday, May 27th, 2024, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.** at the Callahan Research Center.

Come see over 100 pictures of local soldiers who fought in these wars. This collection was created by Mike Donovan, a past NHA member and history buff.



Also on display will be letters written by soldiers containing their private thoughts and moments as they experienced war. In addition, more than 300 World War II military shoulder patches from the U.S. Army, Army Air Force, Marines, Navy and Coast Guard will be on display. They represent a variety of battles and war campaigns that took place across Europe and Asia. A special focus is provided through the eyes of 12 Newtown natives and soldiers, not all of them coming home.



There is no admission charge for this event.

Annual Garden Walk

We are seeking proud garden owners who would love to include their garden in the NHA Annual Garden Walk. If you are interested, please contact Mary Jo Garner at (215) 858-0939 (or maryjogarner1@verizon.net) or Keyna Crawford at (267) 679-9287 (or keynawcrawford@gmail.com) by May 1st, 2024.

This year's Garden Walk will occur on **Saturday, June 1st, 2024**. The check-in time at the Half-moon (Court) Inn will begin at 8:00 a.m. The walk will commence at 9:00 a.m. We expect the event to last between 2 to 3 hours.

Tickets are \$20 and can be purchased at the Half-moon (Court) Inn on the morning of the Walk or online at <https://www.newtownhistoric.org/event/nhas-annual-garden-walk/>. Proceeds will go towards maintenance and improvements to the Boone Garden, which is owned by the NHA and located on Court Street directly across from the Half-moon Inn. It will again be featured on the Garden Walk.



There will be NHA promotional articles for sale. Please join us for a view of some very special gardens

and to meet the very talented gardeners who created them. We hope to see you then!

Elementary School Walking Tour

The Newtown Historic Association will conduct its annual Elementary School Walking Tour on **Thursday, June 6th, 2024**. The tour begins at 9:30 am and runs until approximately noon. (The rain date is Friday, June 7th.)

About 200 children from Goodnoe Elementary School and Newtown Elementary School will take a self-guided walking tour through 5 historic sites in the Borough: Half-moon (Court) Inn, Newtown Library Company, Newtown Fire Association, Newtown Borough Hall, and Newtown Movie Theatre. The Newtown Historic Association has run this tour for over 45 years. This has proved to be a very popular event with the children and enables them to learn about their heritage.

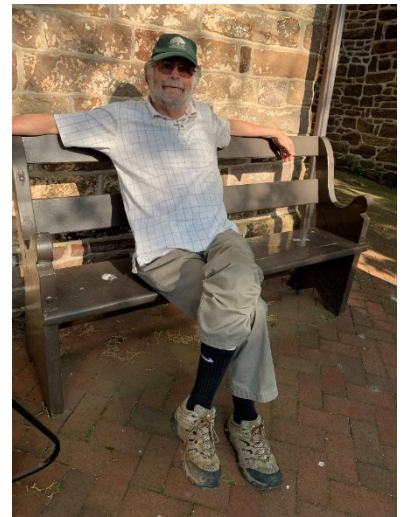
If you have any questions or for additional information, please contact Dan Griffin at (215) 205-2058.



Historic Walking Tour

This year's Historic Walking Tour of Newtown will take place on **Friday, June 21st, 2024, starting at 6:00 p.m.** in front of the Half-moon (Court) Inn. The tour will be led by Jeff Marshall, historic architecture author, past-president of the Heritage Conservancy, and NHA Board member.

Jeff Marshall



Jeff will share his wealth of knowledge and passion for the history of Newtown, and provide an enjoyable stroll through town.

The tour route is typically determined by Jeff and the attendees, and will feature architecturally-significant Newtown buildings in the Borough.

Come, bring a friend, wear comfortable shoes, and learn something new about Newtown's interesting buildings and history. No reservations necessary. A "good will" donation of \$5.00 would be appreciated.



September General Meeting

The NHA is hosting local author and historian Scott Bomboy for our September general meeting, which will take place on **September 16th, 2024, at 7:30 p.m. at the Half-moon (Court) Inn.** The title of the presentation is "The Lost Covered Bridges of the Neshaminy Creek."

R. Scott Bomboy



Bomboy will take a look back at the network of covered bridges that once spanned the lower Neshaminy Creek, featuring rare photos and local newspaper accounts.

At one time, six covered bridges spanned the creek from Bristol Township to Wrightstown: the Chain bridge, Worthington's Mill bridge, Schofield Ford bridge, Spring Garden Mill bridge, Oakford bridge, and Newportville bridge. Many bridges were associated with mills, which were critical to the local economy. Today, only one covered bridge remains on the creek, in Tyler State Park.

Each bridge has an interesting story to be told, as key players in the growth of lower Bucks County. And each was lost in a different way. A question-and-answer

session will follow the presentation.

This event is free for members. Non-members are also welcome to attend, and donations are always appreciated.

Tyler State Park Self-Guided Historical Walking Tour

The NHA will hold the next Tyler State Park self-guided historical walking tour on **Sunday, September 22nd, 2024, starting at 10:00 a.m. at the Tyler Park boathouse dam.** It will begin with an historical overview of the Tyler family, mansion, and park properties by Brian Rounsavill and a representative from the park.



If you don't already have a copy, please purchase the "History of Tyler State Park" book on the [NHA website](#)—preferably in advance of the event although copies will be available for sale at the event (\$16). This book provides you with the details on the self-paced and self-guided walking tour of the many historic Tyler State Park properties.

Once the overview concludes, you will be free to tour the park on your own with your book at your own pace.

Since there are so many interesting and historic sites scattered throughout the park, it is likely that it will take you more than one day to visit all the sites.

Corporate Members

We are proud to highlight our corporate members:

- A Love for Life
- ALP Supply Inc.
- DeFrehn Roofing Services
- Mary Dinneen, Realtor
- First National Bank & Trust of Newtown
- Fred Beans Automotive Group
- Gilded Home Furnishings Consignment
- Harold Beck & Sons, Inc.
- Johnson, Kendall & Johnson, Inc.
- Lin Bethman Auto Center, 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

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/>.





Wagons traveling along a plank road; source unknown.

Newtown's Boardwalk: The Yardleyville & Newtown Plank Road Company

Researched by David Callahan and Rick Speranza

Written by Brian Rounsavill

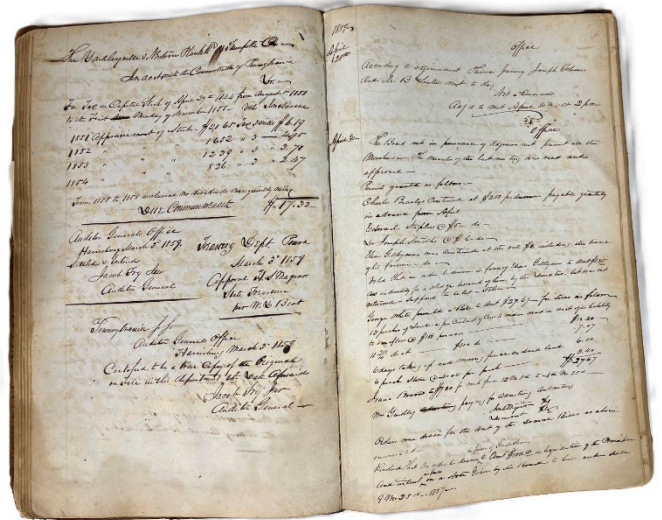
A well-worn, brown leather-bound journal contains the little-known, and long-forgotten, story of The Yardleyville and Newtown Plank Road Company. Tucked inside the front cover is a single, loose-leaf note with the following inscription:

The Minutes Book of the Annual and Special Stockholders Meetings of The Yardleyville and Newtown Plank Road Company, incorporated by an Act of Assembly passed on April 5, 1842.

These minutes cover the company's meetings from March 30, 1851, through October 24, 1905, when business was closed. They were presented to the Newtown Historic Association, Inc. by the First National Bank & Trust Company of Newtown in May of 1983.

It is hard to believe that a wooden road, similar to a wider, modern-day boardwalk, connected Newtown and Yardley. However, leafing through the worn ledger pages, one learns quickly that the plank road did exist, and it was in fact a major industry on a very important

thoroughfare for the Newtown community. With a little research, it became evident that not only could plank roads be found in Newtown, but they were also common throughout the country in the mid-19th century. Locally, there are records of the Bridgetown and Newtown Plank Road, as well as the Frankford and Oxford Plank Road in the area. In 1849, the "Newtown and Rockville Turnpike or Plank Road Company," was organized to locate and construct a turnpike or plank road on the bed of the present public road, known as the New Buck Road, leading from the Borough of Newtown to the Buck Tavern, in Southampton Township, Bucks County.



Minutes Book of the Annual and Special Stockholders Meetings of the Yardleyville and Newtown Plank Road Company, Newtown Historic Association, 1851-1905.

From the mid-1840s to mid-1850s, the United States experienced the plank road boom, and a subsequent bust. Many of our nation's roadways were once simple dirt and mud paths until the early to mid-1800s. However, a modern movement at that time called for the building of wooden roads, which was a great improvement in transportation.

The plank road boom was also an economic boom in the United States that lasted from 1844 to the mid-1850s, largely in the eastern United States and New York. In the span of ten years, over 3,500 miles (5,600 km) of plank roads were built in New York—enough road to go from Manhattan to California—and more than 10,000 miles (16,000 km) of plank roads were built countrywide.



Newtown's Boardwalk: The Yardleyville & Newtown Plank Road Company (cont'd)

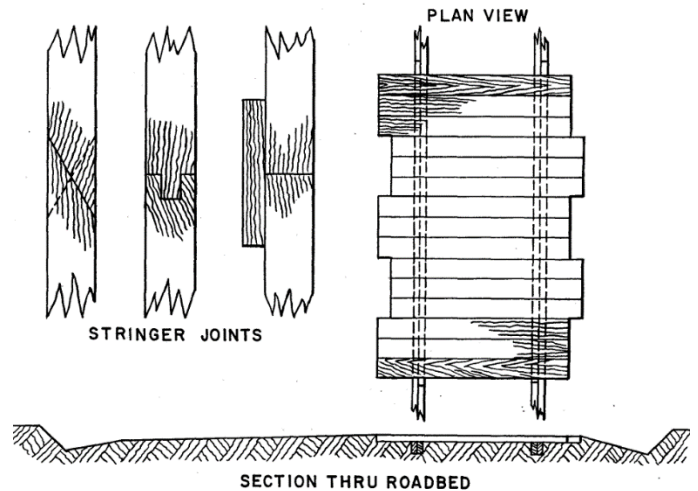
Plank roads, like their predecessor turnpikes, were toll roads built by local, small, stock companies and businesses in the towns they served. Usually they were short in distance, low in cost, assumed to be self-sustaining roads that permitted produce to be profitably transported from farms to nearby towns. For this reason, they became known as the "farmer's railroads."

In addition to being cheaper to construct than railroads, wood was readily available in the surrounding area. According to an incomplete advertisement for the Yardleyville and Newtown Plank Road, hemlock was the wood selected for its construction because of its abundance and low cost. Furthermore, plank roads were easy to make. Planks were laid down on log foundations that ran parallel with the dirt road. Then, longer and thicker planks were placed on top across the base planks. The edges of these planks were covered with dirt to keep them in place.



Making of plank road, Osborne Park, 1913-14 (courtesy of the Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia (3239B_61)). This image shows how a typical plank road was constructed.

Maintenance involved digging ditches on each side of the plank road to drain the water and keep mud from accumulating under and over the planks. By doing this, wagons loaded with merchandise and agricultural products-and the animals pulling them-were not slowed or stopped by mud, but could enjoy a hazard free ride once they reached a plank road.



Source: The Newtown Railroad Reel, 1850, Richard Mansley.

In the early to mid-1800s, over 100 plank road companies were organized, constructing miles of timber laid paths throughout our nation. Many plank roads, like the ones in Newtown, had toll houses to generate revenue for the needed upkeep of the wooden pathways. For example, there was a toll house located on each end of the Yardleyville and Newtown Plank Road, one in Newtown and one in Yardleyville, and each toll house was occupied by a different toll keeper. In 1873, records indicate that the Bridgetown and Newtown Plank Road was about three miles long, had one toll gate, and received \$949.84 in tolls that year.

The Minutes Book contains a description of the toll house that was situated on the Yardleyville end of the road. The toll house was 16' x 22' and one and one-half stories high, with a basement. There were three rooms on the first floor and two on the second floor. There were six 12-pane glass windows on the first floor and three 6-pane glass windows on the second floor. The toll house had two doors, one to attend to the plank road, the other for the family of the toll keeper.

The minutes reveal that the Yardleyville toll keeper was paid \$100 per year, plus he was able to live rent-free in the toll house and was provided an oil lamp and enough oil to last for the entire year. In 1877, the Yardleyville and Newtown Plank Road office was moved from the Yardleyville Library building to a location north of the Continental Tavern.



Newtown's Boardwalk: The Yardleyville & Newtown Plank Road Company (cont'd)

Tolls varied according to items being transported. At the discretion of the toll-keeper, fees could be waived for those attending church, going to court or heading to a military parade, for example.

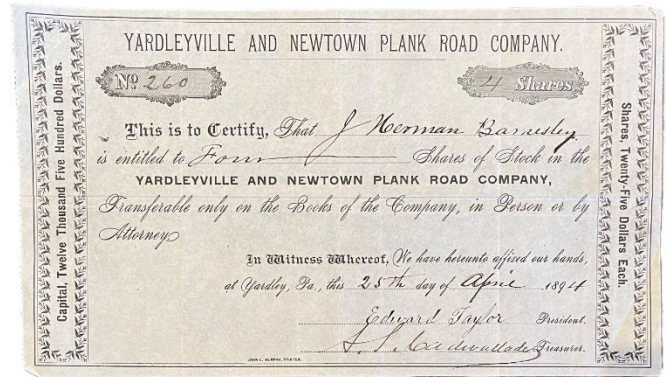
Inside the ledger book, the following toll schedule was listed:

- 10 cents = cattle
- 30 cents = mules
- 3 cents = sheep
- 5 cents = hogs
- 3 cents = horse-drawn sleigh
- 2 cents = lead horse
- 3 cents = riding horse
- 18 cents = 4-horse drawn wagon
- 15 cents = 3-horse-drawn carriage
- 10 cents = 2-horse-drawn carriage
- 4 cents = each additional horse, mule or ox

Note: Those who dodged toll gates by taking a side path and skipped paying their toll were labeled, "shunpikes." A "Shun Pike" is another name for a side road taken instead of a turnpike or expressway to avoid tolls.

Plank roads were a short-lived era in Newtown, as the plentiful planks soon rotted and warped. Hot summers and long winters made the wood rot quickly. This, paired with a high volume of travel from farmers and travelers, meant that the roads needed serious repairs much sooner than expected.

For example, the plank road from Newtown to Yardley, which opened in 1851, was used so much that the planks were soon worn out and a macadamized stone roadbed was installed by 1902. According to a 1903 article in the Newtown Enterprise, evidence of the old plank road that led from Newtown to Yardley was still able to be seen at several points out near Silver Lake.



Yardleyville and Newtown Plank Road Company Stock Certificate, 1894.

Like many inventions, the plank road was a progressive idea and enhanced local travel tremendously. However, the money collected at toll houses proved to be insufficient for all the repairs that were needed. As a result, many owners stopped paying for repairs. When this happened, the state government took ownership of the roads, making them public roads.

Some attempted to fix the rotting roads by filling them with dirt, but after a period of about fifty years (1851-1905), coupled with the advent of the automobile, most of the plank roads had turned back into the dirt roads they replaced. Gravel was often laid on top of the planks to provide a more sturdy surface. Most of these roads were later paved and are still in use today.

So, the next time you travel on Newtown-Yardley Road, picture yourself "down the shore," riding the boards, only you will be actually traveling the path of Newtown's very own boardwalk, otherwise known as the Yardleyville and Newtown Plank Road.



Bridgetown and Newtown Turnpike or Plank Road Company Stock Certificate, 1853.

Newtown's Boardwalk: The Yardleyville & Newtown Plank Road Company (cont'd)

Sources:

- The Minutes Book of the Annual and Special Stockholders Meetings of The Yardleyville and Newtown Plank Road Company, Newtown Historic Association, 1851-1905.
- The Newtown Railroad Reel, 1850, Richard Mansley, p. 389-391.
- Newtown Enterprise, November 8, 1873; December 22, 1877; June 28, 1902; May 9, 1903.
- Newtown Historic Association, Miscellaneous Archives.
- Wisconsin 101: Plank Roads, 2016.
- U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Back in Time, Plank Roads, R. Longfellow.
- <https://www.restless-viking.com/2022/08/09/plank-roads-a-short-era-in-history/>

Annual Membership Renewal

Our membership year is April 1st to March 31st. Memberships help cover our operating and maintenance costs. You should have received your 2024 - 2025 membership renewal letter in March.

If you have already renewed your membership, thank you! It is much appreciated. If you did not receive or have misplaced your membership renewal letter, the easiest way to renew your membership is online via the NHA website at <https://www.newtownhistoric.org/join-us/membership/>.

If you are not a member, you are welcome to become a member and join the fun! Please use the same website link to join: <https://www.newtownhistoric.org/join-us/membership/>.

If you have any questions or would like further information about membership renewal, your membership status, or becoming a member, please contact us at (215) 968-4004 or send an email to office@newtownhistoric.org.



Message From Our New President

Fellow members:

It is an honor to serve as President of the Newtown Historic Association!

Please let me know if you have thoughts or ideas about the NHA by sending an email to info@newtownhistoric.org.

Thank you and see you around town!

Dan Griffin
President, Newtown Historic Association

