

# Chester County Ledger

The Newsletter of the Chester County Historic Preservation Network

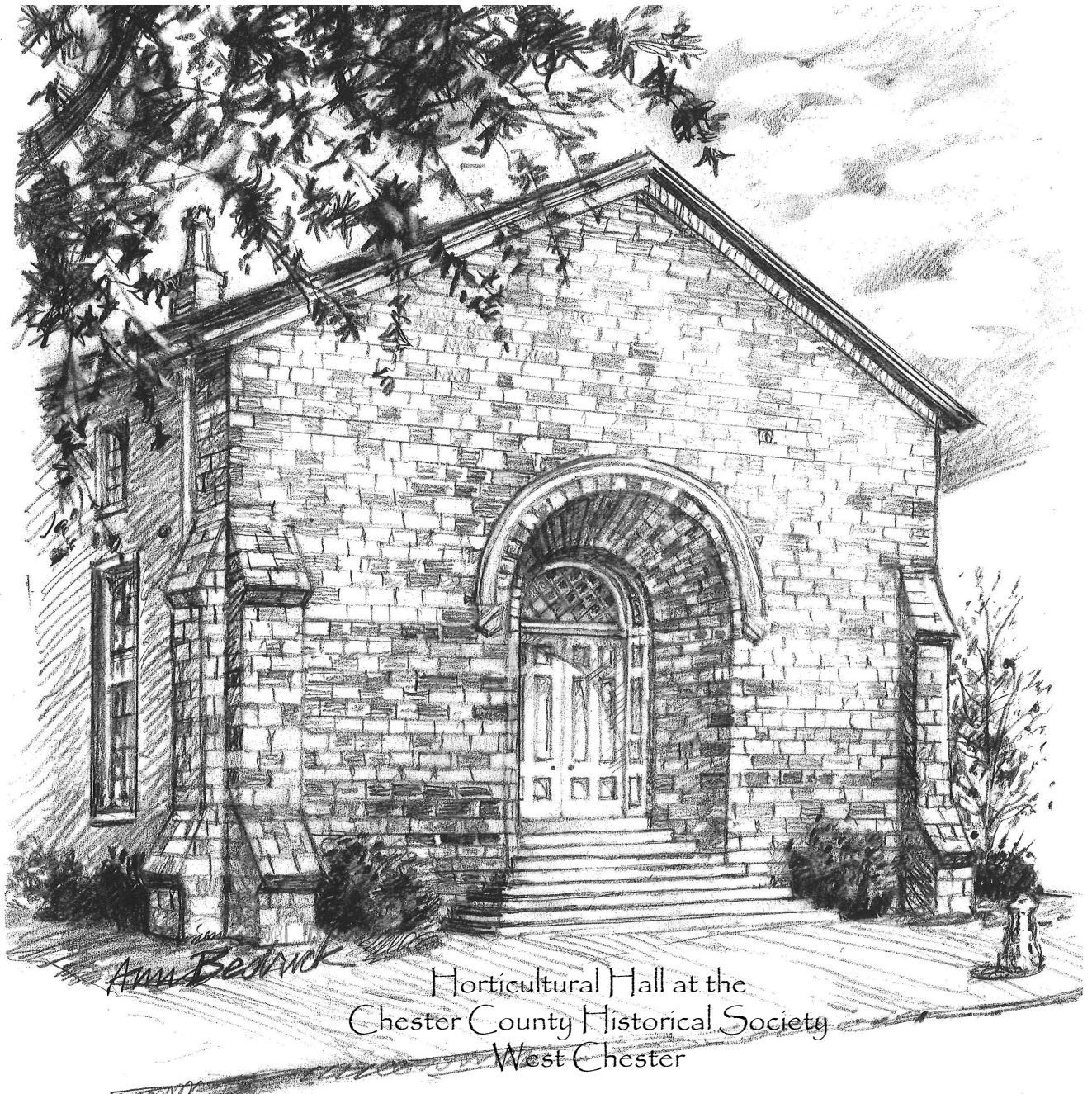
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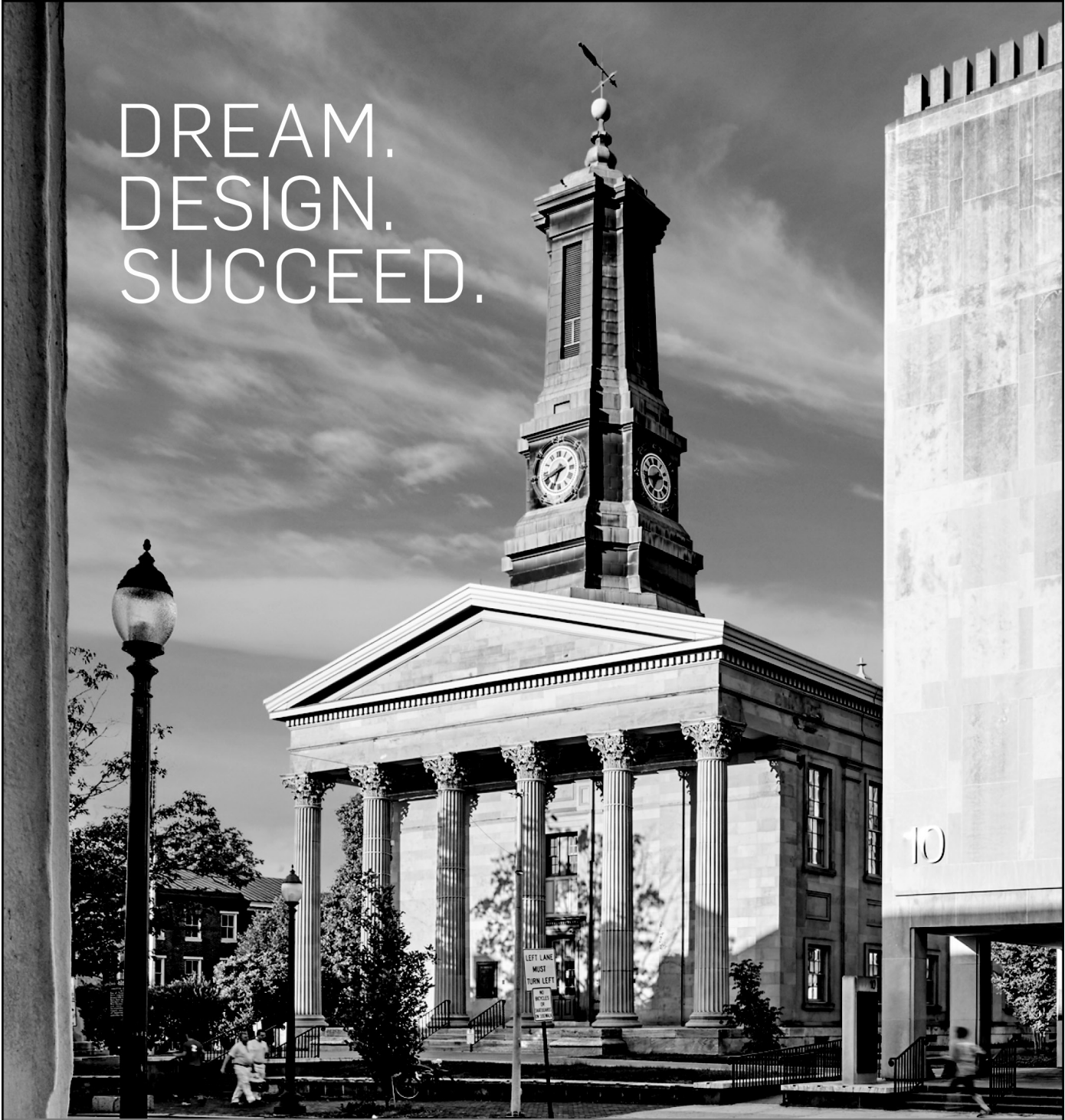
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## United We Stand: The Contributions of African-Americans and Women





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# THE PRESIDENT’S LETTER:



*James B. Garrison*

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History is about people, places, things, and ideas. What part does place play in bringing these topics to life? Often the places associated with great events don’t have a particularly distinctive character, and if the events occurred deep in the past, the context of the place might be completely different now. These days, the preservation of places is meant to convey an “authentic experience.” With every passing day, however, authenticity seems harder and harder to define, especially if the place has radically changed.

Going back to the roots of the preservation movement in the United States, one can see that meaning and interpretation were changeable overlays to the original places and things. They could change with the times, even if attempts were made to freeze the places and objects in time. In the mid-19th Century, saving Mount Vernon was as much about preserving the ideals of the Founding Fathers as maintaining a tactile relationship with the place inhabited by George Washington. Later, more ambitious preservation efforts like Colonial Williamsburg relied on total immersion with buildings, activities, and re-enactors to represent a particular view of colonial life.

Here in Chester County, our whole environment has the ingredients for an immersive experience in history on a more subtle level. The fact that history is all-encompassing and subtle makes it fragile. Change is constant. It occurs at different rates in different places, but all changes ultimately become part of the environment experienced by residents and visitors. A resident may also have a different point of view and time perspective than a visitor, but we all share in the opportunity to derive meaning and inspiration from our surroundings.

At the Network, we share in the stewardship of the heritage of the county. That means being part of an inclusive process that recognizes the power of ideas as much as places. When ideas and places come together, we’re a step closer to the authenticity of an experience. The aesthetic value of places and artifacts will always have a resonance with some people, but by preserving and presenting history as incomplete and evolving, we open the opportunities for more interpretations and involvement.

Interpretation and involvement are what make historic preservation a vital force. History is as much about imagination as it is about facts and artifacts. To increase involvement and engagement requires making history more immediate by creating links from the past to the present through interpretation. The interpretive overlays make the people, places, and ideas relevant and important now. When we understand that history is a constantly evolving continuum, we create the opportunity for engagement with the authentic experience.

Places, people, and ideas make history where the significance might not be immediately apparent in the present physical context. The authenticity we seek might be as much in the present interpretation as in previous narratives. In the coming decade, let’s strive to increase engagement and involvement, so there can be a greater appreciation of the extraordinary place many of us call home.

**James B. Garrison, President**

**CCHPN  
MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission statement of CCHPN is to connect local governments, organizations, and individuals in their efforts to protect, preserve, and promote the historic resources and cultural landscapes of Chester County through communication and education.

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Direct all queries, please, to: The Editor, CCHPN, P.O. Box 174, West Chester, PA 19381. Letters to the Editor and articles for the *Chester County Ledger* are welcome. There is no guarantee, however, that submissions will be published. CCHPN does not necessarily endorse the content of advertisements herein.

**A WORD FROM THE EDITOR:**

At least once a year, we like to offer a themed issue of the *Ledger*. We decided that this issue, which was laid out in February and published in March, would be perfect for a dual theme of Black History Month and Women's History Month. These months celebrate the contributions and achievements of two groups of our society who are usually under-represented in most history textbooks even though they have contributed just as much to our history as the more traditionally represented groups. Because they are under represented, the historic resources that represent the physical evidence of both their existence and their contributions tends to be neglected and are often the first resources to be removed – forever. Therefore, our goal was to highlight some of the resources associated with one or both groups in hopes of raising awareness of their existence and their plight as neglected historic resources in the preservation field.

We are, again, fortunate to have a diverse group of authors for this issue, including Jane Kennedy, newly elected Caln Township Commissioner, who highlights her successful nomination of Carver Court to the National Register of Historic Places; Christopher Densmore, a regionally well-known Quaker historian, who has spotlighted the interconnectedness of the fight to end slavery and the fight for women's right to vote; and Brian O'Leary, Executive Director of the Chester County Planning Commission, who wrote a very thoughtful article about the planning profession's social justice and social equity responsibilities. In addition, CCHPN Board member Carolyn Roland reminds us in her "From the Board" column that history knows no geo-political boundaries, that, in fact, Chester County's history is connected on many levels to the histories of our neighbors to the south and east.

All of these authors have expertise in the fields of African-American History or Women's History, whether it be in as broad a topic as women's rights or as focused a topic as the history of a residential development constructed specifically for African-Americans. They have willingly put their expertise and knowledge at our disposal. I want to thank them all for taking the time out of their very busy schedules to do just that.

You will notice in this *Ledger* that we have a variety of illustrations. In the past, we have relied on our staff photographer (Jim Buczala) and staff illustrator (Ann Bedrick) for our illustrations. In this issue, in addition to photographs and illustrations from Jim and Ann, several of our authors, including Laurie Rofini, Director of the Chester County Archives and Records Services, have provided us with copies of historic documents and photographs from either the Chester County Archives or the Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection at Temple University Libraries.

As always, I would be delighted to hear from you about possible articles and submissions as well as any questions or comments you may have about the Ledger. And we are ALWAYS looking for advertisers. To contact me, send an e-mail to : jeditorhspv@gmail.com.

**Jane E. Dorchester, Editor**



## **FROM THE CCHPN BOARD:**

### ***CHESTER COUNTY LEDGER*** **Mission Statement**

As the official newsletter of the Chester County Historic Preservation Network (CCHPN), the purpose of the Chester County Ledger is to raise awareness of Chester County's history and historic character, to encourage the public to preserve the physical evidence of that history, and to educate the public and members of municipal historical organizations in best preservation practices

### **An Explanation of Our Cover and Other Illustrations.**

For this issue, most of the illustrations are of resources that either illuminate moments in African-American history or women's history or represent the physical evidence of African-American history or women's history. In the case of the illustration on page 11, Longwood Progressive Friends Meetinghouse (East Marlborough Township) represents both African-American AND women's histories. In the case of our cover illustration of "Horticultural Hall," located in West Chester Borough, it was the site of the first Woman's (as it was termed then) Rights Convention in 1852. The only exception is the illustration of Coventry Forge Inn.

Legends and lore, facts and stories — all of these surround me when I look into the history of the areas I cover as a member of the Board of the Chester County Historic Preservation Network. An important element of the history of this area is the understanding of how we still are affected by slavery, the motivation behind the War Between the States.

The earliest black settler came to Delaware with the Dutch in 1639. When we talk about our history, it becomes clear that there is no dividing line that says, "Now, that is all in the past." One still hears tall tales of tunnels in Wilmington as well as in the governor's house in Dover, perhaps created to explain ingenious slave escapes. Homes in Chester County have concealed areas in the basement or barn which could easily fit the description of "runaway slave hiding place." Although Pennsylvania was a free state, bounty hunters were present.

Looming large in these stories is Harriet Tubman, who not only escaped from her slave masters in Dorchester, Maryland, on the eastern shore, but returned again and again to guide others to freedom, crossing the slave states of Maryland and Delaware.

Maryland now has the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park and a Harriet Tubman Byway that joins Delaware's Harriet Tubman Byway. Wilmington marks the home of Underground Railroad Stationmaster Thomas Garrett, a Quaker who helped escaping slaves, connecting them to "conductors" who could lead them north to Pennsylvania or across the Delaware River to New Jersey. Garrett corresponded with William Still, chairman of the Vigilance Committee of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia, about ways to help his "passengers". Still carefully recorded each person who had made it safely to his office. Some continued on to Albany, New York, and thence to Canada. Individuals in the African-American community and churches played a big role in guiding these travelers northward. The Brandywine Valley Scenic Byway marks the way on Route 52 to the Longwood Progressive Friends Meetinghouse. After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, Canada became the only choice for escapees wishing to be safe from pursuing slave owners.

Sadly, African-Americans still suffer from more recent discrimination, such as the Federal government discriminating against Blacks in the armed services, housing, and unfair attention from law enforcement authorities - the list is still long. A Pew Research Center study in 2016 found that about four-in-ten (43%) Blacks are skeptical that the country will ever make the changes needed for Blacks to achieve equal rights with Whites. So, our past is not really in the past. Anyone who believes that the study of history is not important could not be more wrong. Written in 1787, the Preamble to the U. S. Constitution sets a goal — "to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty..." — that goal has yet to be fulfilled.

**Carolyn Roland, CCHPN Board Member**

## **FOR THE RECORD:**

### **Planning History and Social Equity**

**by Brian O’Leary, Executive Director, Chester County Planning Commission**

Although planning is primarily focused on the built and natural environments, specific planning decisions, from where to put a highway to how many homes to allow on a property, have social impacts and broader implications for the public as a whole. This has long been recognized in the planning profession. In fact, both the ethics code for the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and the American Planning Association Ethical Principles in Planning note that planning exists to serve the public interest, needs to be conscious of the rights of others, and must provide opportunity for public involvement. The Ethical Principles recognize a special responsibility to plan for the needs of disadvantaged groups and persons, while the AICP Code of Ethics directly references social justice.

If you were to look back through the history of planning, however, you would find instances where the profession, professional planners, and others involved in planning processes were standing on the sidelines or the wrong side of social justice and social equity. Examples range from interstate highways splitting minority or low-income neighborhoods from the rest of their communities to zoning codes enabling placement of heavy industry in minority or low-income neighborhoods.

Chester County has its own history of community planning and activism affecting, positively and negatively, minority or disadvantaged communities, with the results evident in our buildings, neighborhoods, and stories.

Chester County’s location on the border between a free state (Pennsylvania) and two slave states (Maryland and Delaware) certainly left its mark, from individual structures and families that played a role in the Underground Railroad to the migration of African-Americans north after the Civil War. There is a continuing need to preserve and share the resources and stories of the Underground Railroad, such as the Eusebius Barnard home in Pocopson Township.



Illustration of the Eusebius Barnard House, Pocopson Township, courtesy of Ann Bedrick.

Seeking out the stories of those fleeing slavery is also imperative. Those stories are increasingly more accessible, and can be found as part of the Harriett Tubman Underground Railroad Byway as it winds through Maryland and Delaware, and perhaps someday into Pennsylvania. The stories and their associated structures cast light on our racial history, and provide context for today’s communities.

Carver Court in Caln Township is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but only recently so (2016). This residential development was designed by architects Louis Kahn, Oskar Stonorov, and George Howe for steel workers during World War II. The National Register nomination for Carver Court details how the importance of Coatesville’s steel mills to the war effort drew federal funds for housing construction, and how the Carver Court homes were intended to not only serve a short-term purpose but also “...as models for working- and

## **FOR THE RECORD:** Planning History and Social Equity, Continued

middle-class family housing.”

The initial proposal for an integrated neighborhood with 100 homes for African-American families and 300 for white families met with resistance. In 1942, architect Oskar Stonorov noted in a letter intended to advance the project “...how stupid such a policy would be to create a racial issue for a mere hundred housing units, the colored situation being notoriously bad in Chester County, as everybody knows.” (Louis Kahn Collection, box AA:DBB.3, folder 0110, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.)

The nomination calls out the efforts of Coatesville’s housing council and the Progressive League in Coatesville for support of Carver Court. In 1942, Coatesville City Council passed a resolution to urge construction of housing at two separate locations to provide for African-American families and white families. In the end, the federal government did just that, and after World War II, the homes in Carver Court were offered for purchase. The neighborhood remains intact today.\*

A different part of racial history in Chester County is reflected in Passtown Elementary School (often referred to as Pass School) in Valley Township. A historically segregated school, the two-room school building was constructed in 1923 and expanded in 1950. Determined eligible for inclusion on the National Register in 2017, the nomination identifies the school as a critical educational and social center for the Hayti community, an African-American community immediately west of Coatesville. In its time, the school hosted dances and festivals, provided a community playground, and served as a polling location, and as a temporary church when the local church burned down.

Through local newspaper reports, the National Register nomination details the collaborative efforts of the African-American and white families to find a way to accomplish integration. Multiple meetings were held within the local community in 1957 to determine the best plan to integrate Passtown School. Classes continued at the building into the 1960s. The former Passtown School is currently in use by Valley Township as their municipal building, but will soon be vacated. Local residents have been active in investigating options to keep the building in use and appropriately reflect its importance to the community.

These examples of historic resources intersecting with planning and social equity are but a few of those found in Chester County. Community planning includes a diversity of perspectives, but particularly so when



The Passtown School (Valley Township Building), Valley Township, courtesy of James Buczala.

viewed under the umbrella of the history of planning. As we look across Chester County’s history, it is clear that providing space for the voices of disadvantaged communities and working to ensure that all community members have a path to influence policies and programs has better community outcomes. Planning with an ongoing goal of social equity and justice is complex work that evolves over time, but it is most worthy of our time and effort.

*\*Editor’s Note: For another perspective on the nomination of Carver Court to the National Register of Historic Places, please see Jane Kennedy’s article, “Carver Court”, on page 8.*

## FOR THE RECORD:

### Carver Court by Jane Kennedy

In 1942, prominent Philadelphia-based architects Louis Kahn, Oscar Stonorov, and George Howe were commissioned by the United Steel Workers of America (USWA) in collaboration with the Federal Public Housing Authority (FPHA) to respond to the housing shortage caused by both African-American and white workers pouring into Coatesville to work at Lukens Steel in response to the war effort. Because of racial tensions in the Coatesville area, the architects were asked to provide plans for two permanent housing projects, the Foundry Street Defense Housing Project for African-Americans and the Brandywine Heights Defense Housing Project for Whites. The Foundry Street Project, which was later nicknamed Carver Court, consisted of 100 housing units of one and two-story homes, and was erected on a 66-acre farm once owned by the Horace Scott Family. All three architects promoted the concept that public housing should be of good quality, affordable, modern, and equitable. Based on this concept, they designed the houses in Carver Court to be functional yet comfortable, which contradicted the normal practice for government housing projects which provided the bare essentials and not much else. In addition, the houses in Carver Court were laid out in such a way as to provide a variety of spaces to meet the needs of the occupants, including storage spaces inside and recreation and leisure-time spaces outside.

In January 1943 the sound of bulldozers and heavy earth-moving equipment signaled the beginning of the preparations for construction. Ironically, the Foundry Street Defense Housing Project and the Brandywine Heights Defense Housing Project, were separated by the Gardner-Beale Farm, which had strong Quaker ties and served in the Underground Railroad. A Gardner-Beale farmhouse from 1811 survives and is presently used as a

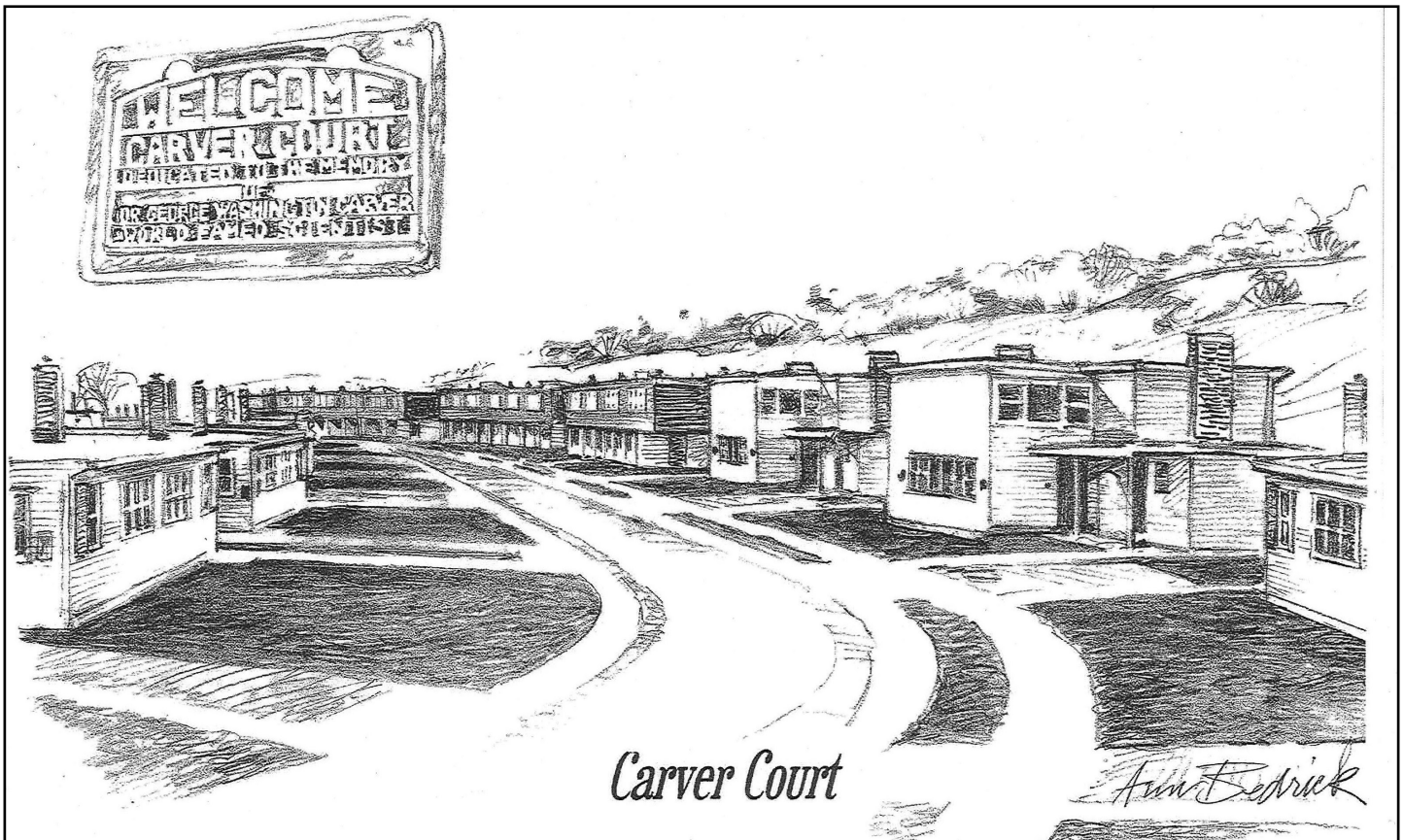


Illustration of Carver Court, Caln Township, courtesy of Ann Bedrick.

## **FOR THE RECORD: Carver Court, Continued**

classroom in the Coatesville Area School District.

The Foundry Street Housing Project was nicknamed, and is still affectionately known as, “Carver Court” after a student from the historic James Adams School, which many of the children from the housing project attended, won a writing contest to name the new African-American housing project. The late Russell Devault won the contest to name the housing project with his suggestion to name it in the memory of Dr. George Washington Carver, the famous African-American scientist. The welcome sign that is at the entrance of the development today was designed and hand-crafted by Joseph Bradford, a member of a founding family of Carver Court. He created the sign from scrapes of steel he collected from the Lukens Steel Company, where he worked.

Despite its architectural and social significance, the Foundry Street Defense Housing Project’s historic status was never officially recognized by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. When I saw that the housing project was listed on the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia’s endangered properties list, I realized that it was time to take on the challenge of preparing a National Register of Historic Places nomination for it.

As part of the nomination process, former Pennsylvania State Representative Harry Lewis, Jr., who used to live at the Court, assisted me in organizing oral history interviews with people who lived in the community, including many people from the Lewis family. These interviews proved to be invaluable in establishing the Court’s historical significance. In addition, their personal memories and perspectives were recorded for posterity.

Today, Carver Court stands as one of modern architecture’s forgotten landmarks. The many memories that were shared of its rich heritage and the culture of a self-made community, where today many original World War II defense steel workers’ families still live, reflects the true humanistic concept of Louis Kahn and others’ architectural vision of a community connected by both its foundation of connected concrete and by its families.

Through the nomination researched and presented by me, the subsequent oral history project under the direction of former Pennsylvania State Representative Harry Lewis, Jr., and the ongoing recognition of the Caln Township Historical Commission, Caln Township Historical Society, Chester County Historic Preservation Network, Chester County Historical Society, and the proud family members of the community, Carver Court has earned its rightful place in history and was officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 31, 2016.

### **Tidbits about Carver Court in the 20th and 21st Centuries** **Jane Kennedy**

Here are a few interesting facts about Carver Court:

1. In 1944, the Foundry Street Defense Housing Project was included in an exhibit in New York put on by Elizabeth Mock that featured the architectural design concepts of Louis Kahn. After the exhibit closed in New York, it went on a worldwide tour.
2. On August 11, 2016, Carver Court was featured “walk” as part of the Chester County Planning Commission’s Town Tours and Village Walks Program which is co-sponsored by the Chester County Historic Preservation Network.
3. On September 8, 2016, Governor Tom Wolf visited Carver Court and, as the entrance of the development was filled with local residents, history buffs, members of the media, and many dignitaries, unveiled the historical plaque commemorating the listing of Carver Court on the National Register of Historic Places.



## **FROM THE ARCHIVES:**

### **“When woman’s heart is bleeding shall woman’s voice be hush’d”: Chester County’s Sisterhood of Reforms, 1832-1855 by Christopher Densmore, retired Curator, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College**

This year is the 100th anniversary of the 20th Amendment to the United States Constitution granting suffrage to all women in the United States. The campaign for women’s rights begins, in the usual narrative, in 1848, with the First Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York (now part of the Women’s Rights National Historical Park). But actually, Quaker women had been actively participating in Quaker meetings since the origins of the Religious Society of Friends in the 1640s and 1650s. Quakers did not think this unusual behavior for women, though non-Quakers certainly did. In addition, Quakers were anti-slavery and by the 1830s, Quaker women were becoming increasingly publicly vocal on this matter.

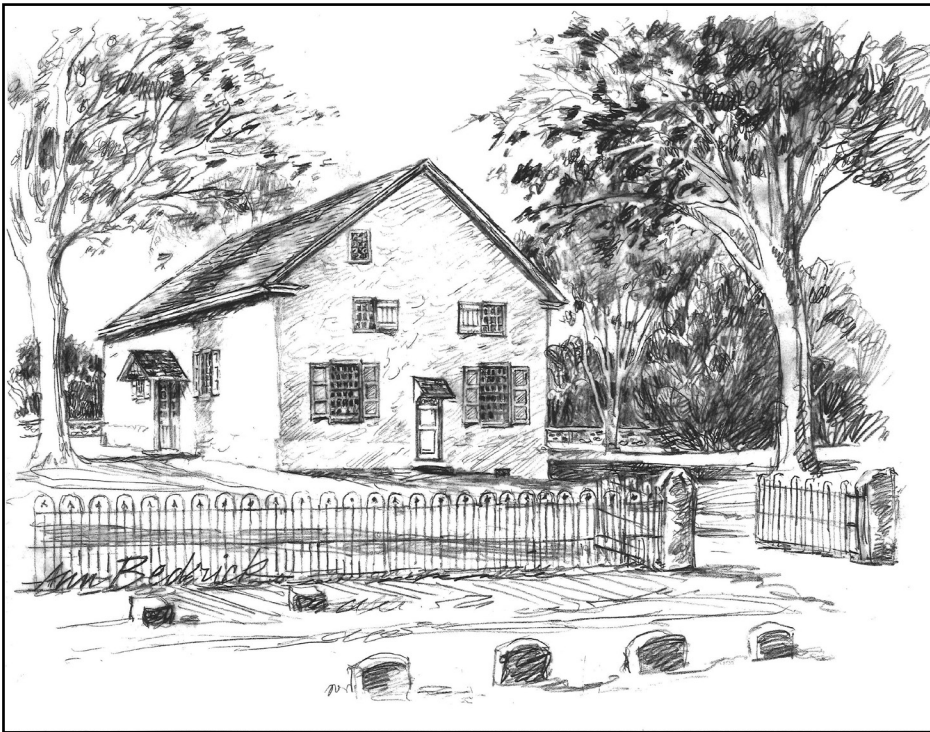


Illustration of Old Kennett Meetinghouse, Kennett Township, courtesy of Ann Bedrick.

stated that “this society is composed of both sexes, who appear to be equally anxious to promote the cause of emancipation, and I think I may justly add, equally active in their endeavours to do so.” The report of their next meeting, in March 1837, began: “The following resolutions were offered (the first three by ladies)...” and particularly noted the participation of females in the discussion at the meeting. In East Fallowfield, anti-slavery meetings were initially held in the Fallowfield Meetinghouse where women abolitionists frequently spoke, including the very radical abolitionist lecturer Lucy Stone.

By the Spring of 1837, the Clarkson, East Fallowfield, Uwchlan, and Kennett Anti-Slavery Associations or Societies, all located in Chester County, included women as officers. The Clarkson Association, at its annual meeting that Spring, took the initiative to call for the creation of a Chester County Anti-Slavery Society. When the formal call for the founding convention was issued in April 1837, women led the list of the names appended to the call by the Clarkson Association and East Fallowfield Society, and a separate “Address to the Female Citizens

The road to women’s right to vote led through the fight to end slavery. For instance, the poet Elizabeth Margaret Chandler (1807-1834) made anti-slavery a woman’s issue: “When woman’s heart is bleeding shall woman’s voice be hush’d?” In 1832, the first anti-slavery association or society in Chester County, the Clarkson Association, was established. Its constitution declared that “All persons shall be eligible for membership, without distinction of sex or color.” This did not necessarily mean that the Association practiced gender equality from the start, but there is strong evidence that women took a lead in the Association soon after its formation. A report on the first meeting of the East Fallowfield Anti-Slavery Society, held in 1836,

## **FROM THE ARCHIVES:** “When woman’s heart is bleeding”, Continued

of Chester County and Parts Adjacent” bore the names of twenty-five women. While the president, vice-presidents, treasurer, and secretary elected at the opening convention of the Chester County Anti-Slavery Society at Coatesville on the 22nd and 23rd of 5th Month (May), 1837 were all men, six of the twelve members of the Board of Managers were women. Clearly, women were playing an increasingly active role in the leadership of Chester County’s anti-slavery organizations.

When the first anniversary meeting of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society was held in January 1838, five of the twenty-one delegates from the Chester County Anti-Slavery Society were women. Only one other county society, Delaware County’s, sent a woman as a delegate. On the other hand, the American Anti-Slavery Society did not resolve its issues with women speaking at its annual meetings and serving on its governing body until 1840.

It would appear from this chronology that by 1836, Chester County was in advance of every other location in Pennsylvania in having women and men working together in the same anti-slavery organizations and thus giving women the chance to have an equal voice with men in the formation of public policy.

By the mid-1840s, women began to take the initiative on a commercial basis. For instance, Sarah Townsend Harvey Pearson ran a Free Produce store in Hamorton from about 1844 to 1858. Free Produce stores sold only goods made without the use of enslaved labor, including cottons, brown sugar, rice, coffee, tea, and other goods. In a time when few women owned property, Townsend owned the property outright. The store still stands and now houses the Encore Shop.

Emboldened by their success in helping to run Chester County’s anti-slavery organizations, reformers put out a call in 1852 for the first woman’s rights convention to be held at Horticultural Hall in West Chester. That building now houses the Chester County Historical Society. It had been twenty years since the establishment of the Clarkson Association. Both men and women responded to the call for the convention, and many of them were veterans of the anti-slavery struggle with many, perhaps most of them, having worked on the Underground Railroad. For instance, Ann Preston, who was an active member of the Clarkson Association and had become one of the very first women to receive a medical degree, signed up to participate in the convention.

In 1853, in response to the women’s rights convention, a call went out for a General Religious Conference to be held in Old Kennett Meetinghouse. As a result of that conference, the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of

Progressive Friends was formed. Unlike earlier meetings, which focused on a single issue, the first meeting of the Progressive Friends discussed and adopted testimonies on temperance, slavery, the “rights and wrongs of women,” tobacco use, and capital punishment. In 1855, they opened the Longwood Progressive Friends Meetinghouse. They held reform meetings there in which women played active parts until the meeting was finally laid down (the congregation dispersed) in 1940. The meetinghouse now houses the Chester County Visitors Bureau but the Longwood Burial Ground is still in use.



Illustration of Longwood Progressive Meetinghouse, East Marlborough, courtesy of Ann Bedrick.

## FROM THE ARCHIVES:

Whereas my late Wife Hannah Pennell did on or about the fourth day of January last make & publish a Writing purporting to be her last Will & Testament thereby devising sundry Legacies to divers Persons therein named and thereof appointed a certain William Fell to be sole Executor Now these are to Certify & make known that I the Subscriber do give my full & free Consent that the sd. Writing shall & may be proved & established in due form of Law & that the Executor aforesd. taking upon him the Trust in him thereby reposed shall & may have receive take & appropriately dispend the Goods & therein mentioned to the Purposes thereby directed Given under my Hand & Seal this twentieth day of October A.D. 1771

Sealed & Delivered in the Presence of us

Joshua Pennell

John Shaw  
Edu. Bettle

Statement of Joshua Pennell, courtesy of the Chester County Archives.

my late Wife Hannah Pennell did . . . make & publish . . . her last Will & Testament thereby devising sundry Legacies . . . and thereof appointed a certain William Fell to be sole Executor Now these are to certify & make known that I the Subscriber do give my full & free Consent that the sd. Writing shall & may be proved & established in due form of Law” (W&A file #2653).

In 1771, under normal circumstances, married women in Pennsylvania could not write a valid will. If a woman was in the middle or upper class, and thus had property, marital status was the determining factor in whether or not there were estate proceedings. There were probate filings for wealthy single or widowed women, but rarely for married women. Before the Married Women’s Property Act was passed in 1848, it was extremely unusual for there to be an estate filing for a married woman. The exceptions occurred when, as in Hannah Pennell’s case, the husband agreed, or the wife held property that had been legally placed out of her husband’s control, such as with a trust or prenuptial agreement. This means that before 1848, a property researcher is unlikely to find a will or administration file for a married woman, even if she had purchased or inherited land before her marriage. Without the safeguard of a premarital agreement or trust, that land would have been controlled by the husband.

What happened to married women who went ahead and wrote wills without the permission of their husbands? Elizabeth Worrell’s 1784 will, in which she gave directions about her real estate, some of which she had inherited from her mother, was ruled “Void in Law” (W&A file #3668). Elizabeth Irwin wrote her will in 1830, when her husband was still alive. She left various bequests, including land to her son John, whom she also named as one of her executors. When she died in 1836 as a widow, her son Nathaniel filed a caveat, or protest, against the will. In requesting a hearing on the will, John wrote the court that he “offers for probate the will of Elizabeth Irwin devising certain real estate; admitting that at the date thereof, she was feme covert [a married woman], but averring the fact that the will was in truth confirmed by her after the death of her husband, and thus legally published at a time when she was competent to execute it” (W&A file #9429). The will was ruled invalid, however, so her estate was treated as if she had died intestate (without a will). Her two eldest sons declined to serve as administrators;

## A Will of One’s Own by Laurie A. Rofini, Director, Chester County Archives and Records Services

Sometimes what appears typical at first glance is actually quite extraordinary. Take the will of Hannah Pennell, which she wrote in 1771: “I Hannah Pennell of Marple in the County of Chester & Province of Pennsylvania Being weak in Body But of Sound Mind & Memory do Make this my last will & Testament . . . I give & Bequeath To My Husband Joshua Pennell the Sum of Fifty Shillings out of the Money arising from the Sale of Lands Left to me By My Mother . . . I Likewise Leave My Said Husband the Feather Bed & Bed Cloathes which was My Mothers during his Natural Life” (Wills and Administrations [W&A] file #2653).

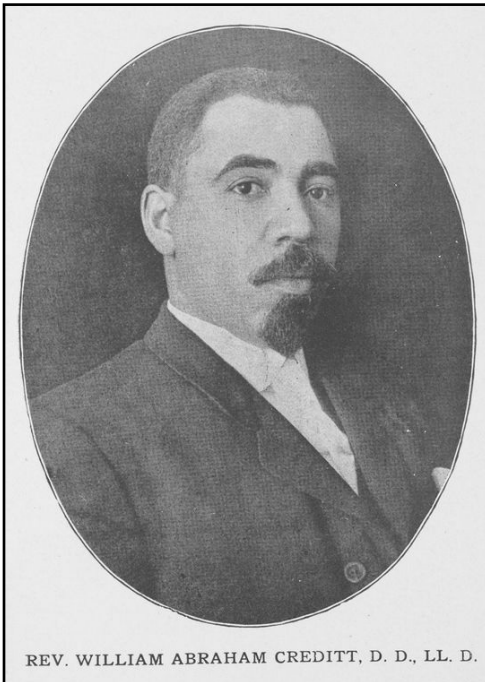
Why is this will so unusual? It was written by a married woman in 1771, and was only accepted as valid because of her husband’s consent. In a statement, Joshua Pennell, Hannah’s husband, wrote: “Whereas

## **FROM THE ARCHIVES:** A Will of One's Own, Continued

instead they requested that Nathaniel be appointed. Elizabeth's stated wishes were thwarted by her children. John not only lost his sole claim to the land that his mother wished him to have, but he was not put in charge of settling the estate.

It wasn't until the 1848 Married Women's Property Act that married women in Pennsylvania were given the authority to write wills (see 1848, April 11, P.L. 536, § 6 to 10). The act was limited in scope, however, as it only allowed married women to control and dispose of property that they held separately. Property owned jointly with their husbands did not fall under the act. This limitation meant that it still remained unusual for a married woman to leave a will. The 1848 act was just one of a series of property acts that were passed in Pennsylvania and other states. Later Pennsylvania statutes clarified and expanded the rights of married women to separately control property and to write wills. Today "any person 18 or more years of age who is of sound mind may make a will" (20 Pa.C.S.A. § 2501).

*Author's Notes: You can read an overview of the history of Married Women's Property Acts on the Library of Congress website at [https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awlaw3/property\\_law.html](https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awlaw3/property_law.html). All wills cited in this article are from the collection of the Chester County Archives and Records Services (CCARS), which is administered for the County of Chester by the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA. This article originally appeared as the March 2019 CCARS blog post. For more information on the Chester County Archives, see [www.chesco.org/archives](http://www.chesco.org/archives).*



REV. WILLIAM ABRAHAM CREDITT, D. D., LL. D.

Portrait of Rev. William Abraham Creditt, D.D., LL.D., Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection at Temple University Libraries.

### **The Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School, A Forgotten Piece of History by James Buczala and Carol Schmidt**

Nestled in the rolling hills of East Brandywine Township in Chester County, Pennsylvania, sits the site of a significant piece of history that focused on the education of African-Americans. In 1905, the Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School was established through the encouragement of William A. Creditt, Pastor of Philadelphia's First African Baptist Church. Creditt was inspired by the work of Booker T. Washington and his founding of the Tuskegee Institute of Alabama in 1881; he felt that a similar school should be created in Pennsylvania. The mission of the school was to help students develop skills to earn a livelihood through teaching agriculture, mechanical trades, and domestic arts, along with basic education.

The initial benefactor in establishing the school was John Trower, a member of Creditt's church and considered one of the wealthiest African-Americans in the United States; he shared Creditt's vision for the school. His success in the catering business enabled him to purchase, around 1900, the McFarland Farm, 110 acres on the north side of Horse-

shoe Pike. The school opened with 30 students (both male and female) in grades 6 through 12, with Rev. Creditt serving as its first principal. The teachers and students lived on campus utilizing the original farmhouse (Founder's Hall) to start. The school adopted the philosophy of self-help through self-work.

In addition to academics, classes were offered in carpentry, plumbing, auto mechanics, home economics,

## **FROM THE ARCHIVES:** Downingtown I&A School, Continued



John S. Trower, Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection at Temple University Libraries.

typing, and business training. Most of the food – fruits and vegetables, as well as chickens and cows, with milk and egg production – was raised on campus and collected and tended by the students under the supervision of the farm manager and instructors. Sports programs developed in the late-twenties along with programs to aid in poise and self-assurance and in preparation for public speaking, proper grooming, scouting, chorus, and public debate. During the war years, students received instruction in first aid, military drill, and civil defense.

The school was unique and significant, drawing visitations of such historic figures as Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Joseph Douglas (grandson of Frederick Douglas), and W. E. B. DuBois, all of whom had been invited by the faculty in order to enrich the experience of the students. In addition, at least one student, Cab Calloway, went on to make a name for himself. Calloway attended the school in 1921 and 1922.

The atmosphere of the school was nicely summarized by Mr. DuBois when he wrote after his visit:

“Downingtown is different. . . In most schools there is a lack of real human touch and acquaintanship (sic) and the distance between teacher and student so wide . . . At Downingtown there were few students, good teachers . . . If any colored parent has a child that needs a teacher’s personal acquaintance and guidance, I suggest Dowingtown to them.”

This summary by Mr. DuBois coined for the school the slogan: “The School with the Personal Touch”.



Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School Building, Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University Libraries.



## **FROM THE ARCHIVES:** Downingtown I&A School, Continued



Audience for event at Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School, Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University Libraries.

its Downingtown Campus. Although the tradition of education at this site continues today, not much remains of the Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School because most of the school was removed to make way for the new college campus buildings.

Mr. Credit served as the school's principal until his death in 1921, working tirelessly to raise funds and support the fledgling institution. J. H. N. Waring, Jr. served as principal from 1924 until his retirement in 1965, and was significant in guiding its program. Another significant educational personality at the school was Raymond A. Lemmon, who was an instructor from 1927 through 1980; during this period, Mr. Lemmon also taught at such colleges and universities as Howard University, Delaware State University, Ohio State University, and the University of Cincinnati. Additionally, in 1931, Mr. Lemmon established Boy Scout Troop 75 at the school to extend Scouting to the African-American boys of Chester County. Also, he ran a private camp for African-American boys at the school (one of three of its kind in the country).

In 1966, the school was licensed as a private academic secondary school. In 1981, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare approved the school as a child-caring institute which led to a series of challenges, as it changed the model for the school. In the end, the students remaining at the school were those that were referred there by the Philadelphia Department of Human Services; they had histories of truancy, drug abuse, and disciplinary problems. The school closed in 1993 due to inadequate staffing, poorly maintained buildings, and health code violations. The school property was purchased by the Delaware County Community College in 2002 to establish



Image of coin with inscription, "Am I Not a Woman & a Sister, 1838," courtesy of Christopher Densmore.

### **An Anecdotal History of African-Americans in Chester County, 1849-1860 by Christopher Densmore, retired Curator, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College**

According to the 1860 Federal Census, 2% of Pennsylvania residents were black or mulatto. In Chester County, almost 8% of the residents were people of color. Looking at the township data, the portion ran from 29.3% in Pocopson Township to less than 1% in some of the northern townships. This population included the descendants of people freed by Quakers in the 1700s and of those freed under Pennsylvania's Gradual Emancipation Act of 1780. Some came looking for work and others were freedom seekers who had taken the Underground Railroad. The ultimate goal was not

## **FROM THE ARCHIVES:** An Anecdotal History, Continued



Photograph of school integration, c.1900, courtesy of Christopher Densmore.

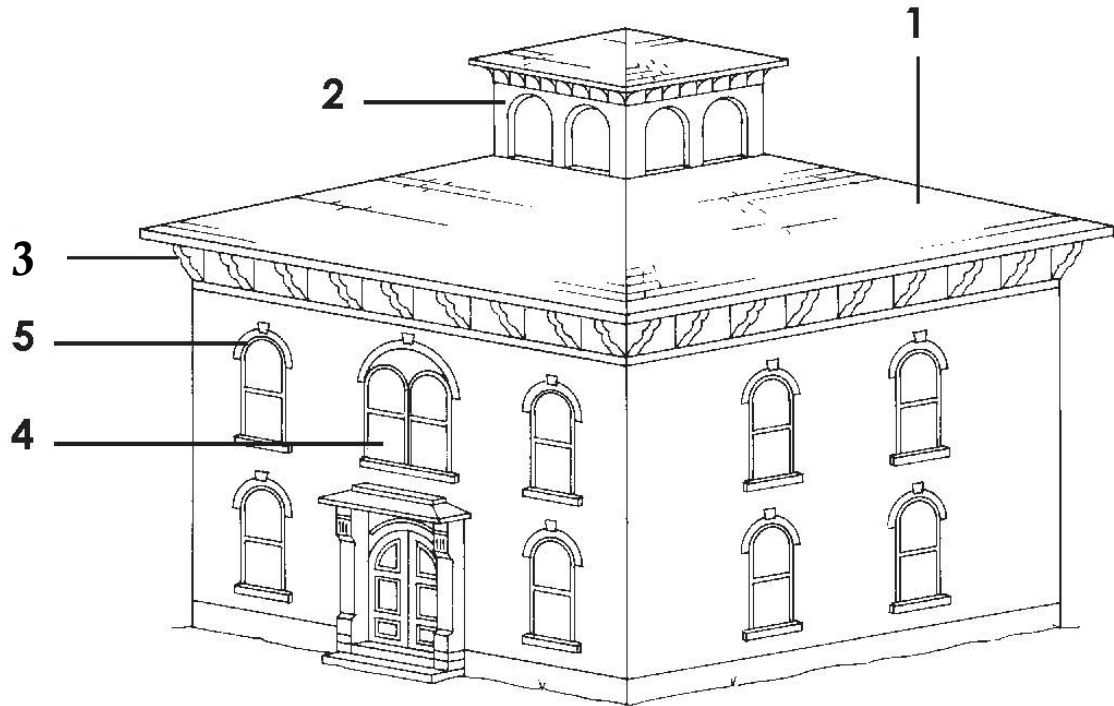
necessarily to reach Canada, but to find a place of relative safety, free from slave catchers and kidnapers, where there were paying jobs for the adults and basic education for the children. Members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and other churches, mostly the Union Church of African Members\*, provided assistance to the African-American community. Unfortunately, this assistance was not always effective. For example, in 1849, a young man living near Taggert's Corners north of Kennett Square was captured by slave hunters who carried him off to Maryland and ultimately to Baltimore where he was sold as a slave.

So, why did escaping slaves risk living only a few miles from the slave state of Maryland when they could go on to Canada for assured freedom? The answer seems to have to do with the support system in place in Chester County. For instance, looking at former slave Thomas Mitchell's world, he had found employment as a hired man and had a support network that included Quaker farmers and the African Union and American Methodist Episcopal churches. When he was kidnapped, his neighbors went in pursuit and in the end raised the money to purchase Mitchell's freedom. By the time Mitchell died, he owned a small piece of land and a house in Kennett Township.

The southern townships of adjacent Lancaster County were also home to many freedom seekers. On September 11, 1851, a U. S. Marshall, in seeking to aid the Gorsuch family in their attempt to recover their human property, showed up outside a small house near Christiana, Lancaster County. The local African-American population, however, was prepared to deal with the slave catchers and mounted a successful armed defense. Their defense was at first labeled the Christiana Riot, but is now known as the Christiana Resistance. The federal government unsuccessfully tried the rescuers for treason against the United States but they were acquitted. One of the participants was Castner Hanway who was living in Christiana at the time of the resistance, but who later moved to Kennett Square and was buried in Longwood Burial Ground.

*\*Unfortunately, most of the African churches that were built before the Civil War no longer exist. One of the earliest ones which is still extant and was the site of public discussions about abolition as well as being, reputedly, a stop on the Underground Railroad is the Hossanna African Union Methodist Protestant Church (1845), located next to Lincoln University.*

## **ITEMS OF INTEREST:** Architectural Style Guide: Italianate



### **ITALIANATE: 1840-1885**

- 1 Low pitched hipped or flat roof with overhanging eaves
- 2 Square cupola or belvedere
- 3 Highly decorated cornice with brackets under overhanging eaves
- 4 Tall, narrow windows (may be paired) with segmental or round arches
- 5 Distinctive window hoods

#### Other Features:

- Two or more stories
- Porches
- Commercial buildings with cast-iron facades

(Excerpted from the Chester County Planning Commission's 1998 Preserving Our Places: Historic Preservation Manual for the Chester County Communities- <http://pa-chestercounty.civicplus.com/DocumentCenter/View/3756>.)

**ITEMS OF INTEREST:** Leadership Luncheon

The Third Annual Preservation Leadership Luncheon was held on February 15, 2020 at the Government Services Center from 8 AM to 12:30 PM. A joint planning effort by the Chester County Planning Commission (CCPC) and the Chester County Historic Preservation Network (CCHPN), the chairs of the county’s historical commissions, committees, and HARBs were invited to learn from each other and the preservation professionals who were present. Of the 73 municipalities in Chester County, there are currently 60 active municipal historical planning entities and 44 were represented at the luncheon. The 62 participants were seated regionally based upon the Municipal Service Areas (MuSA) under which the CCHPN Board is organized. Two case studies were presented, the first by Bill Friedrich, Chairman, Easttown Historical Commission; and the second by Lynn Sinclair, Vice-Chairman, New Garden Historical Commission and Jeannine Speirs, Senior Community Planner, CCPC. In addition, Cory Kegerise, Eastern Region Community Preservation Coordinator, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), presented a brief update of happenings at PHMC, including the formation of the 1776-2026 State Committee. Karen Marshall, Heritage Preservation Coordinator, CCPC, acted as MC while Brian O’Leary, Executive Director, CCPC, welcomed the participants and James Garrison, President, CCHPN, announced that a “Meet and Greet” to discuss how municipal owned historic resources are faring was scheduled for February 26, 2020. He also announced the need for an increase in membership dues and membership levels. Fellowship, leadership training, and sharing ideas is the objective of this annual event.



Attendees at Leadership Luncheon.



Bill Friedrich, Chairman, Easttown Historical Commission, giving presentation.



Lynn Sinclair, Vice-Chairman, New Garden Historical Commission (left) and Jeannine Speirs, Senior Community Planner (right), giving presentation.



James B. Garrison, President, CCHPN, announcing upcoming “Meet and Greet” event at Marshallton Inn.

**BULLETIN BOARD:**

**Honoring Our Beacons of Pride  
Town Tours and Village Walks 2020  
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The Chester County Commissioners, through the Chester County Planning Commission, Westtown Township, and our sponsors, announce the 26th Annual Town Tours and Village Walks Program. This program is a series of free summer strolls through historic neighborhoods, hamlets, villages, and sites. Each tour is designed to inform, entertain, and increase awareness of Chester County's rich heritage and historic landscape. For more information, please contact Karen Marshall, Heritage Preservation Coordinator at 610-344-6923 or [kmarshall@chesco.org](mailto:kmarshall@chesco.org) for a brochure. The 2020 Town Tours and Village Walks are as follows:

**Thursday, June 11**

Town Tour Kick-Off at the Chester County Historical Society  
Tour of the West Chester Northwest Quadrant  
*Architecture and Authority*

**Thursday, June 18**

Hibernia Park and Mansion  
*Untold Mansion Tales*

**Thursday, June 25**

Historic Yellow Springs  
*Artistic Expression and Architecture*

**Thursday, July 2 and Thursday, July 9: No Tours****Thursday, July 16**

Phoenixville Borough, Heritage Center and Historical Society  
*Art & Architecture in Phoenixville*

**Thursday, July 23**

Willistown Historical Commission  
*Discover Radnor Hunt and Willistown by Bus*

**Thursday, July 30**

North Coventry Historical Commission  
*A Park's Past from Lenni Lenape to the early Iron Industry to "Free Love Valley"*

**Thursday, August 6**

Armchair Lecture and Supper at Historic Yellow Springs  
Topic to be announced

**Thursday, August 13**

London Britain Township  
*A Mansion in the Wilderness*

**Thursday, August 20**

Back by Popular Demand - West Marlborough Township  
*Tour King Ranch by Bus*

**Thursday, September 10**

*Special Added Event!*  
*Kennett Square Occupation Day*



**BULLETIN BOARD:**

**PAY ATTENTION HISTORICAL COMMISSION AND HARB MEMBERS!**

**AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT FROM STATE SENATOR ANDY DINNIMAN:  
February 19, 2020**

I am currently working to develop and plan a meeting with historical committees and commissions to establish stable funding for future projects and development. This meeting is scheduled to occur later in the Spring. If you are a member of a historical committee in Chester County, and interested in joining this discussion, please call my office at 610-696-2112, and I will be happy to provide additional information.

**SAVE THE DATE!**

The 2020 Chester County Historic Preservation Network Volunteer Recognition Celebration will be held this year on Wednesday, June 24, 2020 at the Coatesville Country Club.

Please come out and help us honor those in the forefront of our efforts to preserve the physical evidence of our shared heritage.

More information and your invitation will be forthcoming this Spring – keep an eye out!



Illustration of the Coventry Forge Inn, South Coventry Township, courtesy of Ann Bedrick.

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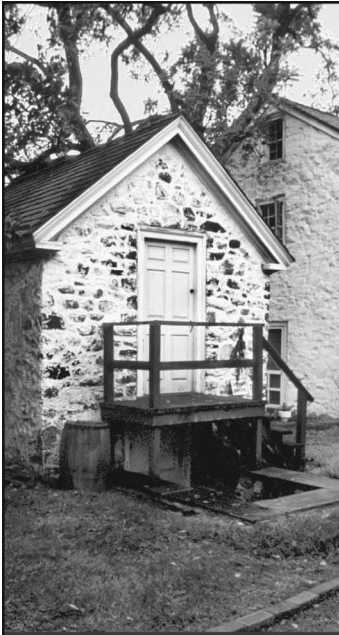


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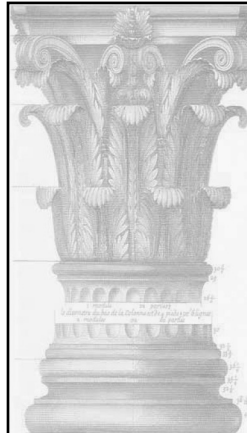


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