Welcome Message

Welcome to the Winter, 2022 edition of the East Whiteland Township Historical Commission Newsletter. Our goal is to raise awareness of our township’s history and to encourage the preservation of our cultural character and the physical evidence of that history.

About the Commission

The Historical Commission has been instrumental in identifying historic properties and in spearheading efforts to protect the Township’s historic resources. Although many of these resources are located in developed areas, future development and change could continue to threaten the historical sites.

Integration of these structures into the community’s changing landscape is the key to preserving the historic resources.

Commission Members

Jeffrey Dore, Chair
Nicholas Groch
Sylvia Baker
Nancy Dore
Mark Keilbaugh
Peter Spengeman, Secretary

Contact the Commission

We encourage public participation in our efforts. You may contact the Historical Commission through the township website at:
www.eastwhiteland.org

Handmade Quilt Covers
East Whiteland’s Past

In 1982, 30 East Whiteland residents worked to create a quilt to commemorate the township’s tricentennial. The quilt, on display at the township building features 20 individual panels of a historic landmark or monument of living, past or present in the township. Some of the panels include: Hooper House, the railroad, Gunkle’s Mill, K.D. Markley School, the White Horse Inn, a 1880 map of the township, a conestoga wagon, Immaculata College, the Frazer Mennonite Church, St. Peters Church and the People’s Light and Theater Company.
The Gunkle’s Mill wheel dedication ceremony took place on November 13, 2021. The new wheel is just a part of the ongoing efforts championed by the Historical Commission. Future enhancements will include: building stabilization and ADA (public access).

Clockwise: New Mill brochure, Supervisor Scott Lambert reading the dedication, crowd viewing the dedication, Historical Commission members; Nicholas Groch, Jeffrey Dore, Sylvia Baker, Mark Keilbaugh, Nancy Dore.
AME Church & Cemetery

The ruins of a stone building still stands on Bacton Hill Road, 500 feet from Route 401, the former Conestoga Turnpike. The Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church, built in 1832 was attended by African Americans who lived and worked on Bacton Hill, known at the time as “Backtown.” Early tax records for Chester County show listings for “free men.” These former slaves ran small farms while working during the day timbering the surrounding woods and carting lumber down to the Great Valley for the lime kilns. The grave stones around the church date back to the 1830’s. There are African American graves of men who fought in the Civil War. There are over 60 graves surrounding the church. The preservation efforts for the church have been ongoing for many years.

Currently, the Historical Commission has begun robust efforts to preserve the site. Spearheaded by commission member Nicholas Groch in conjunction with the church elders of the Mt. Zion AME Church in Devon, PA, these efforts include removing trees and undergrowth from the interior of the church which threaten the stone foundation and preserving and documenting the grave markers. Plans are underway with the University of Pennsylvania Archaeological Department to conduct ground-penetrating radar to locate those graves not visible in the adjoining area. Further plans call for stabilizing the existing walls and historical signage marking the site. The preservation of the church marks an important era in the township and an important piece of African American history.

Photos: Top left: The church as it stands today. Bottom left: The church in 1940. Right: Grave marker, 1887.
New Township History Book

A new township history book has been published. Researched and written by Susan E. Evans and Theresa M. Schatz, this is a retelling of the facts as well as an historical narrative of the East Whiteland Township community in Chester County, PA. It is the authors’ hope that the younger generation will be inspired to continue the important work of preserving historic sites and structures in East Whiteland, many of which trace their origins to the early 1700s before the birth of our nation.

Illustrated with archival photos and illustrations, the book offers a comprehensive study of the history of the township as well as some interesting anecdotes from the people who helped make the township what it is today.

The book is available for purchase online from the Masthof Press at: www.masthof.com

East Whiteland Township Historical Commission

One relatively obscure, yet accomplished township figure is poetess and writer Myrtle L. (Barger) Swanenberg, who lived at the White Horse Tavern property with her family. For the better part of the 20th century, the tavern property was owned by John and Christine Swanenberg who had emigrated from Holland in 1894. In 1923, Myrtle created an advertising campaign for the National Dairy Council featuring the children’s nursery rhyme “Why the Cow Jumped Over the Moon.” She often signed as Myrtle Barger and also wrote poems and plays. Some of her writings were published in the popular American Women’s magazine Pictorial Review, published from 1899 to 1939.

Left: Booklet by Myrtle Barger for the National Dairy Council.