

Wissahickon Valley

historical society

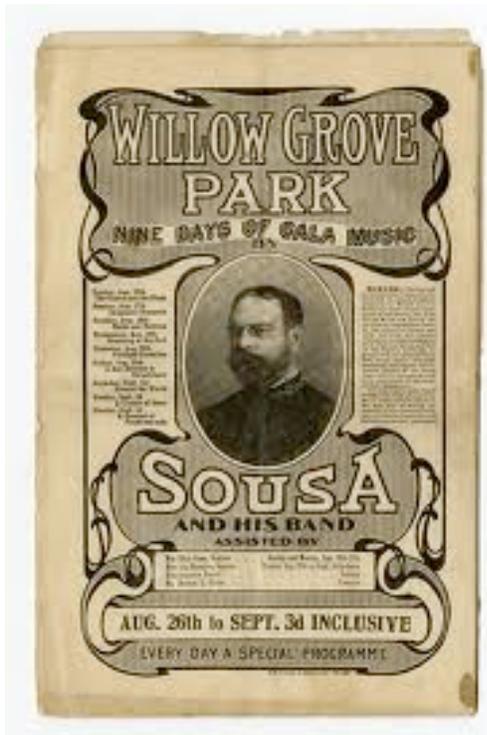
Ambler
Lower Gwynedd
Whitpain

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February 2012, Volume 13, Issue 6

Please join us for the Feb. 13 meeting
7:30 p.m. at the 1895 Schoolhouse



Music of Willow Grove Park
a program of visuals and music presented by Richard Karschner, former band director at Upper Dublin High School

**From the President's Desk:
by Russ Bellavance**

Happy New Year to all. Your Society has lots of activities and programs planned for the rest of the year. We also continue to coordinate our efforts with other institutions with similar goals.

A recent example was a meeting which three Board members (Peg Johnston, MaryLou McFarland and I) attended at the Lower Merion Historical Society. The meeting was led by Martin Cohen from the Cultural Planning Group. The goal was to elicit input from cultural institutions in Montgomery County concerned with historical issues. This is part

of a larger process (funded by the William Penn Foundation) to develop a Cultural Plan for Montgomery County. The process of developing the Cultural Plan includes seeking input from many kinds of cultural institutions and organizations as well as individuals in Montgomery County.

This is where we come in. The steering committee for developing the plan (chaired by the President of Montgomery County Community College) has created both a website and a survey. The website is at <http://creativemontco.org/>, and the survey will be coming to you soon.

We encourage all of our members to let their voices be heard. You may be sure that MaryLou, Peg, and I let our voices be heard at the meeting - pushing for greater communication and information flow among all of the historical societies in Montgomery County. Our hope is to encourage greater sharing of opportunities and programs.

We also have received confirmation of the second (making it biennial so far) joint program among many Montgomery County historical societies. It will take place on Saturday, September 22 from 9 to 5 at the Augustus Lutheran Church in Trappe. The event is called the Montgomery County History Fair. We participated two years ago - sharing space with the Historical Society of Whitpain. There will be lots of activities and re-enactments. The Board will address our participation at the February meeting, but we hope that many members become involved and attend.

I hope to see you all soon! Regard, Russ Bellavance

Finally, the promised recipe for ginger snaps as served at the holiday party:

Ginger Snaps from Jean Bellavance

- ¾ cup shortening
- 1 cup sugar
- 4 tablespoons molasses
- 1 egg
- 2 cups flour
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon cloves
- 1 teaspoon ginger



Mix all – roll in cherry size balls, roll in sugar. Bake at 375° for 10 minutes.

Remembering the “Pig and Whistle” by Fran Treisbach

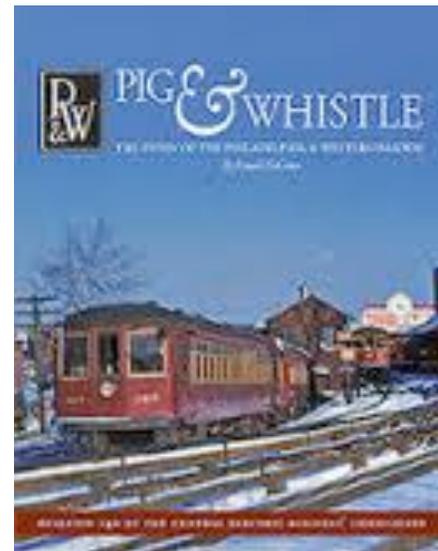
1912 was a special year for the Morris family. It was the year that my grandfather, Courtlandt S. Morris, married my grandmother, Frances Brower Morgan of Fairview Village, bringing his bride to the house he purchased in Centre Square, and the year that Philadelphia and Western (the P & W, colloquially known as the “Pig and Whistle”) trolley service began operating on its Norristown branch with service between Allentown and 69th Street in West Philadelphia and running through the western section of Whitpain Township. While one event was totally independent of the other, the quality of life for my grandmother and her neighbors was very dependent upon the P & W. The P & W connected them to people and services well beyond the rural village that was Centre Square at that time.

Long before the Norristown service was inaugurated, trolley service was being provided by a number of small, independent traction companies. The very earliest services were provided with horse car service as early as 1858 in Philadelphia, 1867 in Easton, 1868 in Allentown, and 1885 in Norristown. Electric car service began in 1888 in Easton with Allentown, Bethlehem and Philadelphia following in rapid succession. The major problem with these services was their independence. They provided service to one community, but it was difficult to connect to services in other communities.

The Inland Traction Company inaugurated service from Perkasie to Lansdale and North Wales in 1900 and, thus, provided service to the rural areas between these towns. Two years later in 1902 the Philadelphia and Lehigh Valley Traction Company began interurban service between Allentown and Quakertown. These additional services planted the seeds for joint operations among the various transit providers in the area, and many of these operations serviced the Wissahickon Valley.

The impetus for expanding and improving trolley service came through the Pennsylvania trolley freight law which was passed in 1907 and allowed freight, as well as passengers, to be transported via trolley. Merchants and farmer could use the available trolley service to send their goods, produce and milk to their customers. That same year the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company and the Lehigh Valley Transit Company opened a joint station in Erdenheim on the line operating from Allentown and passing through Lansdale, North Wales and Ambler and finally to Chestnut Hill. The following year, 1908, summer excursion services were begun from Chestnut Hill to the Delaware Water Gap.

Unlike many of the earlier services, the P & W’s Norristown line was unique in that it utilized rights-of-way through private property to provide a fairly straight line of service from Lansdale to Norristown. The earlier services’ tracks ran on streets and roads. Passing through private property allowed for faster service from one community



to the next and also provided on-site services to many farms and businesses along the way. The term “milk run” is apt because dairy farmers often utilized the trolley to send raw milk in cans to the dairy for processing with the dairy returning the empty cans to the farm via a later trolley. Acorn station just north of Centre Square was one such stop.

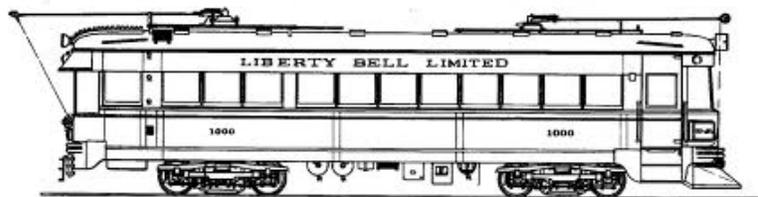


Conversely, merchants could send good to outlying areas via trolley for pickup by the buyer without the cost of a private delivery service.

How did the P & W affect the quality of life along its route? I use my Grandmother Morris as an example. She did not drive a car, although she did know how to handle a horse and wagon. When she moved to Centre Square from Fairview Village, she would have found herself rather isolated from her family were it not the P & W. She used the P & W to visit her sisters and brothers in Norristown and Philadelphia. She used the P & W to see her dentist in

North Wales and, later, after her Centre Square doctor passed away, her new doctor in Norristown. With the P & W she was able to shop in Norristown or Lansdale and visit her Morris/Haag in-laws in North Wales. Without the P & W, all this would have been very difficult. It allowed her an independence not available to many people in rural Pennsylvania communities.

The P & W's Norristown line was known officially as the “Liberty Bell Route” and it was successful for many years. It allowed riders to connect to various rail passenger lines to Philadelphia, Norristown, North Wales, Lansdale, and Allentown with a major transfer point being Lansdale at the Reading Company's train station. It connected with Market-Frankford Elevated Line at 69th Street and, thus, to all other transit services throughout southeastern Pennsylvania including the Port of Philadelphia with its transoceanic passenger ships. It supported Norristown and other communities with its access to shops and businesses.



The “Liberty Bell Route” was abandoned in 1951 and replaced with bus service which was later discontinued in 1956. With post-war housing development and the expectation that every family would own a car, the bus service became impractical as families used their personal automobiles whenever they could. Public transit was not available in the communities it served for many years thereafter. SEPTA has begun to fill this lack of service with several bus routes, but these services are still in development as transportation needs change.

Historical Source: Lehigh Valley Transit Company's Liberty Bell Route, by William J. McKelvey, Jr., pub. Canal Captain's Press, 1989
MANY THANKS, Fran, for an interesting article with a personal touch. Articles with local and personal connections are always welcome. The Society owns several DVDs about the local trolley system that can be borrowed. Contact Peg Johnston at 215-542-7753.

Mark Your Calendar

February 13 - Monthly meeting - 1895 Schoolhouse - 7:30 p.m. Program: Music of Willow Grove Park presented by Richard Karschner

February 19 - Open House - 1895 Schoolhouse - 1 to 4 p.m.

February 19 - Historical Society of Mont. County - Norristown - 2 p.m. meeting - Program: Saving the Revolution - Lafayette's Escape

February 27 - Board meeting - 7:30 p.m. - Bellavance home

March 12 - Monthly meeting - 1895 Schoolhouse - 7:30 p.m. Program: The Mysterious Milton Bean - a prolific local architect

March 26 - "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" presented by Ted Turner, long time baseball aficionado - SpringHouse Estates, 728 Norristown Rd. - a fund raiser for SpringHouse Questers - funds to support new shades for the 1895 Schoolhouse.

Check out the website of Philadelphia's Rosenbach Museum. A new primary source document from the Civil War era is posted each day under "Today in the Civil War".

A few members still owe dues for 2011-2012 period. Please forward to

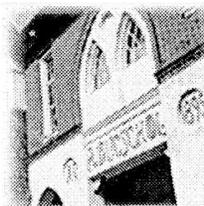
MaryLou McFarland

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We have been lucky with the milder weather this year, but building and collection upkeep and outreach work continue. Thanks to John Simon, Bob Whittock, and John Stoller for systems' maintenance.

The 1895 Schoolhouse is open Thursday from 10 to noon for research and for work on the collection. We welcome members to help catalogue our collection of artifacts and books.



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