



HISTORIA

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 1

NORTHAMPTON TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MARCH, 1997



PHILADELPHIA ARCHITECTURE

Topic of March Meeting

Robert M. Skaler, a Forensic Architect from Cheltenham will present a talk on Philadelphia architecture at our March meeting. Mr. Skaler specializes in the Victorian period of Philadelphia. He has collected over 4000 postcards depicting the buildings and streets of Philadelphia and nearby Bucks and Montgomery counties. His talk will include slides of many of the postcards.

Mr. Skaler used the postcards and research to assist in the renovation of the Loraine Hotel on Broad Street. He also does extensive research into the history and safety of steps and railings, testifying as an expert witness in litigation. Please plan to attend this interesting talk.

SPREAD EAGLE PRINTS NOW ON SALE

The Northampton Township Historical Society is offering for sale prints of a watercolor by Ranulph Bye of the Spread Eagle Inn, Richboro. Two sizes are available. A full size (18" x 24") reproduction that is signed and numbered by Mr. Bye. There are 500 in the series. This print will sell for \$90 (\$75 to Historical Society members). A half size (7" x 11") print will be available for \$30 (\$25 to Society members). A booklet titled "The History of the Spread Eagle" by Roe Blumenthal published by the Historical Society will accompany each print.

The prints will be on sale exclusively at the Crafters Gallery at Northampton Nursery in Richboro. The Gallery is located at 100 Almshouse Road, behind the Spread Eagle. Please show your membership card for discounts. The gallery's phone number is 364-7040.

**For more Spread Eagle stories
please turn to page 5**

NEWS FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy Spring and welcome to a new year for the Historical Society. It has been four months since our last meeting but we have been busy. The Spread Eagle situation prompted a special meeting in January that was well attended. Thank you for your support. A summary of that meeting can be found in an article by Roe Blumenthal in this issue.

We have also been busy preparing the Spread Eagle prints by Ranulph Bye which are about ready for sale. We have selected the Crafters Gallery in Richboro to represent us in selling the prints. Discounts for Historical Society members will be available. Please bring your membership card for the discount. If you have lost your card contact Fred Holzwarth for a replacement.

On that note - 1997 membership is now due. Please check your mailing label for the year. If it is marked in RED and does not show '97' your membership has expired. Use the form on the lower part of the last page of this HISTORIA to renew your membership. We appreciate your support.

Our March 26 meeting will feature Robert Skaler, a forensic architect. He will speak on Philadelphia architecture, with an emphasis on Victorian. Mr. Skaler has collected thousand of postcards showing Philadelphia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It should be a very interesting talk. Please plan to attend and bring a friend!

This year marks the 275th anniversary of Northampton Township. We will hear more about this in the coming months. There will be a special Northampton Days celebration on September 14. I am looking for ways that we can be involved. If you have any ideas please contact me.

For those of you who have computers and use the Internet I continue to expand out web page. I now have many of the back issues of the HISTORIA online using a format called 'PDF' or portable document format. This allows you to view the document on your screen exactly as it looks in printed form. We also have a 'Spread Eagle' page with information on meetings and current actions regarding the Amoco development. You can access our site at: <http://www.resuba.com/bucks> This site has links to many other Bucks County resources.

Email (electronic mail) is a good way to forward articles and information to me. Our address is: nhhs@crompton.com I get queries from around the world requesting information about our area.

Please watch the local cable channel, our web site, the newspaper or call one of the board members to find out about the next meeting regarding the Spread Eagle. We need your support.

Douglas J. Crompton

Third Annual Bucks County Old House Expo

At BCCC Campus On April 5

Information on resources and services to restore older homes can be found at the third annual Bucks County Old House Restoration Exposition on Saturday, April 5, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the BCCC Gymnasium

Over 50 representatives of specialized building trades such as hardware, masonry, timber frame construction and custom woodwork will be present. Restoration professionals, contractors, artisans, vendors and speakers from the Delaware and Lehigh valleys also will be featured.

Back by popular demand is "Archi-Talk: Consultants with a Professional," sponsored by the Bucks County Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Architects and architectural historians will be available for 25-minute appointments to discuss issues specific to your house. Advanced reservations can be made by calling (215) 348-9461. Appointments also will be available the day of the Expo. The registration fee is \$10 per session

Lectures on preservation and home restoration topics will be offered throughout the day in Founder's Hall near the gymnasium. The keynote speaker, Thomas Hylton, will present "Save Our Land, Save Our Towns: A Plan for Pennsylvania." In 1990, Hylton received a Pulitzer Prize for his articles advocating the preservation of farmland and open space in southeastern Pennsylvania.

The Exposition is sponsored by the Fonthill Museum of the Bucks County Historical Society and the BCCC Historic Preservation Department. Proceeds will benefit Fonthill, the home of Henry Mercer

Admission is \$6 for adults, \$4 for seniors, \$3 for students ages six to 17, and free for children under age six.

The Historic Preservation Department at Bucks County Community College is looking for small old buildings (such as springhouses) to restore for its Restoration Workshop class.

If you have such a structure, or know someone who would be willing to let students work onsite to do restoration work, please contact Lyle Rosenberger, Director of Historic Preservation at the college, at (215) 968-8286.

How Old is Your House?

Clues to deciphering the History of Old Houses

by Dave Gauntt

Determining the age of an old house may appear easy but actually it can be very difficult. In fact, if one can nail it down to within a decade or two, it's considered a yeoman effort. Property deeds can help considerably, but can be misleading, so do research the deed history of the property but don't rely solely on what you think you find. Plot dimensions and structures on them often change and can be difficult or impossible to follow. A "message," or dwelling house, described on the property in, say 1780, may not be the same structure or in the same location as one referenced in a later deed of, say 1920. The risk of fire was very great in the past, taking a good percentage of the houses over the course of a century or two. Even with only one house ever mentioned in the trail of deeds, it is not unusual for them to be describing two or more different successive dwellings.

So where do you go from there? We hope you have all looked for date stones, both outside at the Gable ends or quoins, and inside on lintels over the fireplace. Also look for dates chiseled in beams or other wooden under-structure.

But wait - there's a caveat here, too. Older houses that were partially destroyed by fire, storm, or neglect, often served as salvage for a replacement structure with dated beams and stone reused in the new or renovated building. Sometimes an addition or major renovation was signed in carvings on support beams by the master carpenter responsible, and thus the date may refer to this secondary work. And if you are lucky, it can be very revealing. For example; "This 'L' added by Joseph Campbell, 1795."

Check around the house for trash pits, old wells, cisterns, and stone walls that served as repositories for refuse that can also give clues. The opposite side of a stone wall nearest the house, or a hillside or depression as far as 50 yards away can be treasure troves of artifacts.

Having done that, now look at the roof, both outside and in the attic. What is the oldest type roofing and understructure? Tin plated roofing was the choice of those who could afford it from the 1600s to the early 1800s. After that, "terne" roofing replaced the tin plate. Terne referred to a lead/tin plating used for about the next one hundred years. Early slate roofs were thick - 5/8" to 3/4" thick. After the mid-19th century they thinned down to today's dimensions.

Wood shingle or shake roofs date from the first settlers, but no exterior shingles would survive more than approximately 50 years. So look for early material that may have been left and covered when re-roofing. In the 18th century, shingles were split, shaped, and then tooled smooth with a draw knife. Shakes were always thick, irregular, textured and unfinished. Machine made shingles date from the mid-19th century to today. Check the sub-roof. Boards running across the rafters that are irregular and not square cut (varying with the contours of the tree from which they were sawn or split) indicate the house probably predates 1850. However, tin roofs don't hold to that rule, since one who could afford tin could afford trimmed sub-roofs as well.

Siding follows the roofing concepts, but there is confusion between sources on the spacing of the boards. Hugh Howard's book How Old is this House? says clapboards with more closely spaced boards at the bottom, widening toward the top indicate 17th and 18th century. Eric Sloane's America on the other hand says the opposite - smaller at the top to give the effect of height (I tend to agree with the latter). Incidentally, the name clapboard comes from the German *Klappen-holz* from *klappen* - to place or fit, and *holz* - wood. The length of the clapboards gives a clue of age, too. A predominance of 4' to 6' boards indicates they were made before 1830. The boards are generally longer after that due to the appearance of circular saws in sawmills which made thin cutting easier. Hence, another dating tool. Circular saw marks date a board after 1830 or so. "Butt" joints are common after 1825. "Scarfe" joints - overlapping tapered joints - were used before that.

While we're outside, how about the trim? Gingerbread is definitely Victorian (1830-1900), right? More like - probably, since many older houses were updated in the Victorian era to match the popular style. So how can you tell? Some clues can be found by examining the surrounding structure to see if alterations were made. Look at the overall structure. Does it have the typical Victorian relationships? Examine trim and adjacents to see if the paint accumulation is similar. More paint around the trim than on the trim itself indicates that the trim is newer wood. Sanding or shaving the paint at a shallow angle will reveal how many coats of paint are hidden. (A word of caution here, don't breathe the dust. Older paints are lead based.)

Georgian and Greek revival homes have characteristic doorways. Are there sidelights or a fan sash? Fan shaped architraves, elliptical attic openings and Palladian windows identify Federal style (1780-1820). Greek revival ran from 1820-1860 and is generally recognizable as mimicking the Parthenon in some ways. The roof slope is shallow and the lower ends form a pediment supported by columns or pilasters. The trim is wide just beneath the roof and dormers are rare.

If you can, check the plaster lath. Accordion laths were used from about the 1730s to 1830s. Riven (hand split) laths, accordion and plain, were used up to about 1820. Sawn laths prevail after 1850.

Hardware can be an excellent benchmark, if authentic. "H" and "H&L" hinges went out of fashion from 1810-1820. Cast butt hinges were common in the U.S. by 1800 and earlier ones had fixed pins. Stamped hinges arrived about 1830 and loose butt hinges prevailed from the Civil War era to about 1900. Strap hinges for large doors were made by local blacksmiths and were common from the 1600s to the latter 19th century. Closely examine the hardware and the surrounding paint and wood to determine if they are replacement fixtures.

Common latches from the late 1600s to about 1825, called Suffolk latches, made with no back plates, were manufactured in Suffolk, England. Norfolk latches, with a backplate, replaced the Suffolk style about 1800-1820 and were common in Greek revival homes, fading out about 1850. A reliable clue is the Blake's Patent Latch - patented in 1840 of cast iron, not wrought, used up to about 1920. It was a mass produced backless hand grip latch, like the Suffolk, but much

Please turn to page 4

Old House from page 3

heavier and less refined. Rim locks, the iron square boxes mounted on the outside of the door instead of mortising in the door, (and commonly adorned with doorknobs instead of latches), date from the 1840s to about 1925. Any doorknob, iron or brass, indicates a date after 1840.

Any screws? From the 1700s to about 1840, screws were either flat or roundheaded, with flat bottoms, and no taper to the shaft. They had hand sawn grooves across the head. About 1840 the shafts were tapered but still with a flat bottom, and after 1846 the pointed tapered screw that we know today appeared.

Old nails can be a clue, also. Blacksmith's apprentices made innumerable nails on the anvil. Hand-wrought nails, made mainly until about 1800, can be identified by verifying all four sides as being tapered. If only two sides are tapered, they are cut nails - cut from a flat sheet of iron. Manually cut nails were made from about 1790 to 1825. Cut nails with machine made heads were made from 1825 to 1890. Wire nails (the modern round type) have been made since about 1800. Incidentally, the designation of nail size (3 penny, 8 penny, etc.) comes from the ancient price assigned to a quantity of 100 nails of that size. That was a lot of money in the those days, as illustrated by an old Virginia ordinance of 1645 prohibiting the burning of buildings to salvage the nails.

Bricks and the pattern of bricklaying can indicate age to some extent. Prior to 1830 brick dimensions varied considerably according to who made them. By 1830 most bricks were made to the standard of 2-1/2" x 4" x 8." In bricklaying, the English bond pattern (header and stretcher courses alternating) prevailed in the 1600s and returned during the Federal period (1780-1820). Flemish bond (headers and stretchers alternating in each course) was popular from 1700 - 1820. Common, or American bond, is also called running bond (all courses are stretchers only) and is the most common one used today. If you demolish and find the brick maker's name in the top or bottom of the brick, it was probably made after 1850.

Foundations? A general rule is that the earlier the house, the less cellar, since they were hand dug. A fieldstone foundation probably predates our century. Concrete or block indicates the 20th century, but may not if it is applied over a stone foundation. Dry stone may be older than mortared stone.

Earliest shutters were made of solid boards. Paneled shutters showed up by 1720 in Dutch houses. Georgian houses sprouted louvered shutters, and the ones with louvers that moved arrived about 1835.

Overall, you can get an indicator of the age of a house from its style. Style identification may involve some library study, or purchase of a book. Some general types are:

English Medieval (1603-1800), the saltbox is a subspecies of this one; Dutch Colonial, identified by the Gambrel roof (1625-1820); Georgian (1720-1800); Federal (1780-1820); Greek Revival (1820-1860); Victorian (1830-1900); American Gothic (1840-1875); American Bracket (1840-1880); Octagon (1850-1865); Second

Empire (1860-1890); Stick Style (1860-1890); Queen Anne (1870-1900); Shingle Style (1880-1900); Bungalow (1903-1930); and Colonial Revival (1890-present). Please bear in mind that anyone can build any house of any style at any time, but these were the "heyday years" for the styles listed. The more collateral evidence one accumulates, the more solid is the judgment of the age.

Maybe now you are inspired to take a closer look at your favorite house and possibly learn something to relate to us all. I now live in Maryland, over 200 miles away, in a six-year-old house that I will soon research. Yes, that's right, I'll research the property of a six-year-old house. I formerly lived in a brand new house in Jamison, PA and I researched that deed back through 23 owners to William Penn - in fact to the three Indian Chiefs he purchased the land from. So don't think this house research can't apply to you. Why not take a trip or two to the courthouse to try a deed search? It can be very enjoyable and educational as well. It's also a nice thing to pass on to the next owner. ***

I want to thank Dave for his continuing support from 200 miles away! His articles are always great and appreciated by our readers. Hopefully he will settle back in Bucks County someday. Ed

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 26 - Northampton Township Historical Society
General meeting - Philadelphia Architecture

March 30 - Easter Day tours - Fonthill - Noon - 5PM

April 5 - Bucks County Old House Restoration Exposition
Saturday 10AM - 5PM Bucks County Community College

April 19 - Northampton Lions - 39th Annual Roast Beef Dinner
4-8 PM - \$8.50 Adult / \$4.00 under 12 - Fred Stewart - 355-5259

April 21 - Reminiscing on Growing up in Featerville
Southampton Historical Society - 7:30PM - 357-2086

May 10/11 - Mothers day Folk Fest - Mercer Museum grounds

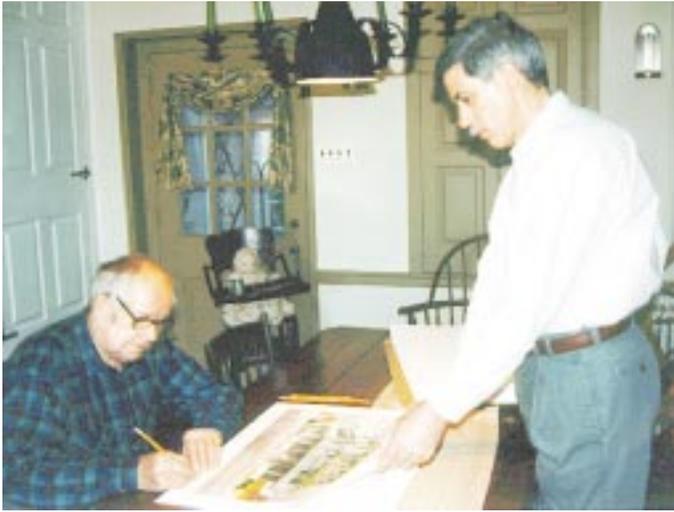
May 6 - Northampton Lions - Meeting - Jim Breans
Talk on Barns - contact Fred Stewart

May 19 - Putting your house on the National Register
State and local level - Southampton Historical Society

June 16 - Southampton Historical Society



**DON'T FORGET
TO RENEW
YOUR
MEMBERSHIP!**



Adelaide and I had the the opportunity to spend many days with Mr. Bye at our home. On his first visit to begin signing the 500 prints he observed our walk-in fireplace in the dining room and asked us if he could paint it. Ranulph painted many days over a two week period. It was great to visit with him. He told us many stories as we sat and had tea. Adelaide was so excited for the opportunity to see Ranulph's painting techniques.

I want to thank Mr. Bye on behalf of the Historical Society for his generosity in taking the time to sign our prints.

Ranulph DeBayeux Bye - Artist, teacher and writer was born in Princeton, New Jersey in 1916. Since 1953 he has painted more than 3000 watercolors and oils, most of which are in private collections. His works are also in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian Institution, Temple University, Moore College of Art, the Reading Museum and William Penn Memorial Museum in Harrisburg.

Bye is a graduate of the Philadelphia College of Art and attended the Art Students League in New York. Now retired from the Moore College of Art, where he taught for thirty years, Bye devotes most of his time painting in and around his native Bucks County Pennsylvania home.

Mr. Bye has, over the years, captured with extraordinary sensitivity and skill, the rich heritage of Bucks County. His own heritage in the area began with a land grant from William Penn to his family, and continues into the present. His heritage in art is similarly deep, his father having been a painter as well as an art historian and restorer.

His interest in preservation has inspired him to write and illustrate four books; *The Vanishing Depot*, a collection of early American railroad stations, first published in 1973 and has been reprinted for the third time in August, 1994; *Victorian Sketchbook*, *Nineteenth Century Architecture*, in collaboration with his sister, art historian, Margaret Bye Richie; *Ranulph Bye's Bucks County*, a selection of 100 paintings by the artist and Mr. Bye's fourth book titled *Painting Buildings in Watercolor* was published by North Light in 1994.

He exhibits regularly in the Annual Exhibitions of the National Academy of Design, Allied Artists of America, Philadelphia Watercolor Club, Salmagundi Club and the American Watercolor Society. In the latter he has been awarded the Dolphin Fellowship after winning his fifth prize in the organization.



Roe Blumenthal and Ranulph Bye pose with his watercolor in front of the Spread Eagle. Roe authored the booklet "History of the Spread Eagle Inn", which will accompany each print.

SPREAD EAGLE UPDATE

A Synopsis of the January 21 Meeting

By ROE DeLUCA BLUMENTHAL

Early this year, the fight to save the Spread Eagle Inn was rejuvenated.

Those of us working to save the Spread attended a Town Meeting on January 21 organized by Historical Society President Doug Crompton. The meeting was organized as a forum for Amoco and other interested parties to present their case as the Historical Society continues the long battle to prevent the Spread from being demolished. Happily, around 100 residents showed up to voice their opposition to tearing down the Spread.

On display at the meeting was the watercolor painting by noted Bucks County artist Ranulph Bye that was based on turn-of-the-century photos of the Spread. Doug and Adelaide Crompton commissioned the painting and have agreed to let the Historical Society make prints of the painting to sell as a fundraiser.

To go along with the painting, I have written a history of the Spread Eagle Inn entitled "Endangered White Bear: A History of the Spread Eagle Inn." An early passage notes, among other things, that in the early 19th Century, the town of Richboro was actually referred to as "Beartown" or "the Bears" for its two inns, the White Bear Hotel (now known as the Spread Eagle Inn) and the Black Bear Hotel, which stood at the corner of Bustleton and Second Street Pikes, where Davis Used Cars now stands, but was torn down in the 1950s and replaced by a smaller house). An overview of "Endangered White Bear" was presented at the Town Meeting with the intent of educating residents, Historical Society members, Amoco, and township officials that if the Spread Eagle Inn is demolished, Richboro will lose its identity.

David MacDonald, property development manager for Amoco, represents the company in its pursuit of tearing down the building to make way for a gas station and "upgraded convenience store" that the company plans to call Split Second. Mr. MacDonald presented architectural drawings of Amoco's concept for the corner, which includes leasing adjoining land to ensure that there is proper space for the gas station and mini-mart. Mr. MacDonald pointed out that Amoco does not own the property outright; the company has an agreement to purchase the property only if it receives approval to build all its facilities.

Mr. MacDonald said Amoco has done its own research on the building, which mainly focused on the possibility of moving the Spread Eagle Inn to another site. He noted that the building was built in four sections, with three sections added long after the original building's circa 1810 date. According to Amoco, any attempts to move the original part of the building would be next to impossible, due to the fragility of construction. He said the inn, built of Pennsylvania fieldstone, is capable of breaking apart. In addition, the building is so heavy that it would probably crush the

road. (Amoco has in the past also pointed out that the township wants to put a right-hand turn lane at that corner, which would further require that the building be demolished.)

Jeff Marshall, director of Historic Preservation for the Heritage Conservancy, followed up by stating that for preservation to work, all parties must work together. "They (Amoco) are not in the business of saving old buildings," he said. "Our job is to make our feelings known and transfer that belief to the decision-makers."

Historical Society President Doug Crompton suggested that all parties involved explore the possibility of leaving the building at its current location. He, and other residents who spoke up at the meeting, asked Amoco to consider using the original part of the building as its convenience store. Mr. MacDonald indicated that the idea did not appeal to Amoco because the building would obstruct the view of its gasoline islands. Later, however, a member of the Northampton Township Planning Commission told attendees that the commission has already asked Amoco to submit plans that incorporate the Spread building into its proposal but that this request has not yet been met.

Regarding the contention that a right-hand turn lane needs to be built where the Spread stands, Doug noted that such a move would not be a cure-all for problems at the intersection of Almshouse Road and Second Street Pike. Much of the problem of traffic congestion, he said, could be better solved by improving signalization of the traffic light, citing figures of projected traffic flow up until the year 2000 found in a township study conducted back in 1982.

During the question-and-answer session that followed, a number of residents stood up and voiced their dismay at the possibility of a third gas station at the corner. Many even threatened to boycott the Amoco station if they tear down the building.

While Doug and others who have been working hard to save the Spread were heartened by the town's response, the Historical Society knows the fight is long from over. We must continue to speak out against the demolition of the only significant landmark left in our community. It is our hope that Amoco will present new plans that include use of the original part of the Spread Eagle Inn. Please check the Planning Commission's agenda each month to see when Amoco will appear again before the commission. (The commission meets the first Tuesday of every month. Call the township building the day before that month's meeting for the agenda.) **Be sure to attend the meeting that evening to help us Save the Spread!**

"Let the metropolis of Northampton be known ecclesiastically as Addisville, politically as Richboro, and popularly as the Bear to the end of time."

—William W.H. Davis,
A History of Bucks County, Pennsylvania



NORTHAMPTON TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PO BOX 732, RICHBORO, PENNSYLVANIA 18954-0732

WEBSITE: <http://www.resuba.com/bucks> EMAIL: nhhs@crompton.com

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	Richboro, PA 18954	

HISTORIA is published quarterly by the Northampton Township Historical Society. The Society meets four times each year at the Northampton Township Cultural Center, Upper Holland Road, Richboro. Everyone is welcome at our meetings. Meetings start at **7:30 PM** with refreshments, general meeting, and a featured speaker.

Meeting Dates for 1997

March 26	General Meeting	7:30 PM
May 21	General Meeting	7:30 PM
September 24	General Meeting	7:30 PM
November 19	Dinner Meeting	6:30 PM

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION AND RENEWAL CLASSIFICATIONS

PATRON:	Extra support for the society	\$35.00
FAMILY:	All members of one family	\$15.00
SINGLE:	Adult individual membership	\$10.00
SENIOR CITIZEN:	Age 65 years or older	\$5.00

This will be your membership for the calendar year of 1997 (January 1997 to December 1997)

Note - Applications received after October 31 will be credited for the following year.

This application is sent with all editions of the HISTORIA. Please check your mailing label for the expiration year.

Normal renewal time is in the first quarter of the year or when the March HISTORIA is received.

If your membership is current, please pass this application on to others who may be interested in our society.

Please consider a contribution of more than the minimum membership to help defray increasing society costs.

Send to : **Northampton Township Historical Society**
PO BOX 732
Richboro, PA 18954-0732

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____

STATE: _____

ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____

DUES ENCLOSED: \$ _____

May we count on you to serve on one of our committees ? : Y ___ N ___ MAYBE ___

Please give us your ideas for speakers at future meetings : _____

Would you be willing to write an article for the HISTORIA _____

Your comments and suggestions are welcomed : _____