



HISTORIA

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 3

NORTHAMPTON TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER, 1996

LIFE WAS A LARK AT WILLOW GROVE PARK

*Our September meeting will feature
Frederick P. Williams who will speak
on the The Willow Grove Park
Concerts, 1896 - 1925*

Mr. Williams, a well-known music historian who lives in Chestnut Hill, will show slides of Willow Grove Park acquired from a wide variety of sources, including the Philadelphia Rapid Transportation Company photographs. The recorded music of the Sound and Slide comes from Williams' personal collection of old records.

The program runs over an hour and includes music played, written and directed by Walter Damrosch, John Philip Sousa, Victor Herbert, Frederick Stock and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Arthur Pryor (famed trombonist) and others. It includes the familiar "The Chocolate Soldier", "Willow Grove March" and other well known selections.

Williams has been scheduling and promoting Pastorius Park Concerts for over 30 years and has been head judge for the string bands for the Mummies New Years Day Parade for 15 years. He was one of 5 people and institutions that supplied music and photographs for the public service television show "If You Know Sousa", part of Bill Moyer's American Experience Series.

The meeting is Wednesday, September 25, 7:30 PM at the Northampton Cultural Center, Upper Holland Road, Richboro, adjacent to the library. Visitors are always welcome. Please plan to attend.

The HISTORIA is on the Internet. To Access it set your browser to: <http://www.resuba.com/bucks>

There is information on the Society; how to become a member, meeting dates, HISTORIA online as well as other Bucks County information.

We can also be reached via EMAIL at:
NTHS@crompton.com

AN INTERVIEW WITH JIM McLEAN

By ROSEMARIE BLUMENTHAL

"The little town of Churchville really hasn't changed much. Even today it's still the same. You look out my front door and it's the same as it was back in 1955. But if you go over the hill in any direction, well then, it's all different."

So says Jim McLean, owner of Churchville Hardware. A few months ago, the long-time resident reflected on life in Churchville over the last 36 years — and on his life in general as he battles cancer.

Jim never set out to run a hardware store. When he left the Air Force in 1955, he fully expected to work for Pepsi Cola in Philadelphia, following in his father's footsteps. But his father's path changed. Just before Jim returned to civilian life, his father, who had previously owned Feasterville Hardware, decided to buy the store back and put his son to work.

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Jim takes time out to pose for a picture in his store.

NEWS FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome back. I hope you had a great summer!

Our September meeting speaker is Fred Williams who will speak on the concerts at Willow Grove Park. The concerts were before my time but some of you might remember them or remember parents talking about them. Mr. Williams will have many pictures and documents as well as the actual concert sounds. I am looking forward to a very interesting talk.

Ray Gilbert, a charter member of our Society and first recipient of the Living Tree Award passed away on May 11, 1996 at the age of 90. Ray was a dedicated educator and contributed immensely to our community. He was very active in the Lions and was named a Melvin Jones fellow by the Lions Clubs International Foundation. The Historical Society extends our sympathy to Ray's wife, Mary, and her family.

Membership renewals have been good but we still have quite a few who have not renewed. Please look at the address label on this issue of the HISTORIA. If it says 95 and is marked in red your dues are not current. Our treasurer, Bill Smith and membership director, Fred Holzwarth, will have a table setup at the general meeting to collect membership dues and to accept membership applications.

I hope you enjoy the fine article that Roe Blumenthal has written about Jim McLean. The article was written from a 3 hour video interview I had with him and Doc Wilson a few months ago.

See you at the September meeting. Please bring a friend!



FIFTH ANNUAL FAMILY ANCESTRY FAIR

The Family ancestry fair will be held at Delaware Valley College, Route 202, Doylestown, PA on Saturday, September 28, 10AM - 6PM and on Sunday, September 29, 10AM - 5PM. It will feature speakers and exhibitors. Admission is free. Sunday will be especially devoted to the civil war.

The event is sponsored by the Bucks County Genealogical Society. For more information contact them at 215-230-9410.

LENAPE DISHONORED AGAIN?

Upon reading the very interesting May, 1996 edition of "HISTORIA," I ran across an article that stopped me in my tracks. I feel I must address what I regard as serious misrepresentations of historical fact attributed to Professor Marshall Becker of West Chester University. In the article entitled "Historical Society Members Hear Talk on Lenape Indians" Professor Becker is quoted as saying "(William Penn) began purchasing every square inch of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania... This may be the only state in the nation for which that can be said."

Taken literally, this statement is true - Pennsylvania is the only state in the nation in which William Penn began purchasing land from the Indians. But, the obvious assumption that many people will make from that statement - that Pennsylvania is the only State in the Nation that was honorably obtained from the Indians - is as far from the truth as the integrity the treaties those Indians suffered.

First, William Penn (a man of rare honor was only involved with purchasing, from the local inhabitants, portions of the first three counties - Chester, Philadelphia, and Bucks. Secondly, the "HISTORIA" article indicates that Professor Becker claims William Penn spent 20 years traveling to each Lenape band and negotiating the sale of their lands. In fact, William Penn spent only three years of his entire life in this hemisphere. Most of his last quarter century of life was spent in England fighting to save his holdings in the new world. "Negotiations" here were carried on by unscrupulous representatives, including his sons who later engineered the fallacious scam of the "Walking Purchase," which stole thousands of acres from the Lenape, destroying all remaining good will between the Indians and the whites, and ultimately leading to the rampant hostility and massacres of the French and Indian Wars. Indeed, there was an endless litany of treachery involved with the English settlement of Pennsylvania following the auspicious start by William Penn. One only has to scan the settlement history of the remainder of the State beyond the original settlements to immediately see the turmoil and terror accompanying the westward migrations.

Last, as a former resident of, and historical student of New Jersey, we were taught that New Jersey came closest to being the one state in the nation with the honor of obtaining all its land from the Indians by purchase and respectable treaty, with none obtained by force. I have not encountered any evidence to refute this claim, and indeed found much to support it.

Professor Becker would do well to look beyond his anthropological learning to historical sources before making claims such as were reported in the "HISTORIA" article of May, 1996. Perhaps a visit to the Lenape community here in Bucks County to get it "from the horse's mouth," so to speak, would help to enlighten. I could not let these statements go unchallenged, and I will welcome any rebuttal that can be verified.

Dave Gauntt

INTERVIEW from page 1

Father and son did not always see eye to eye, and so in 1960 the elder McLean opened a branch store in Churchville and sent his son to manage that store. “For five years I ran it for him — not very good but I ran it for him — and then finally got in a position where I had to buy it or quit and find another job,” said Jim.

“As it turned out, it was probably the best thing I ever did,” he added. “At the time it seemed awfully rough.” For three years he struggled with the two stores, and in 1968 he sold the Feasterville store and moved to living quarters above Churchville Hardware.

“We just remodeled it a little bit and made it larger. It’s quite large up there,” he said. “It goes from one end of the building to another. It’s like a big long rancher. It worked out pretty well. There were times when I had the three little kids we were all a little cramped. But we all managed. It wasn’t easy, but we managed.”



Jim takes time from his store for a picture. When he feels well enough he opens the store and enjoys talking to the customers.

It took Jim a while to get to know the people in the area, but eventually he got to know the locals. Farmers and builders alike would come to Jim to buy their supplies. He also sold hunting and fishing licenses. “When I first came to Churchville, you had Harry Gill and Alvin Gill — they were the two brothers that owned Gill Brothers — and they were avid hunters and fishermen, especially Alvin,” Jim said. “Harry used to scare me. He was so big and so tough!”

“Back then on Elm Avenue you had Charlie Wilson (the florist). He had greenhouses. You had Bill Foster, who was a farmer. They were the two that I knew on Elm Avenue. Of course, you had Harry George and Charlie George, they were out on Churchville Lane. And then up on Bustleton Pike, you had Hugo Mailer. He wasn’t a real farmer, but Hugo had a lot of money. I guess he made it in machine shops. ... Now

their place is gone.” The farm is gone; all that remains is a stone fence running along Bustletown Pike just past New Road.

On the other side of the road across from the Mailer farm there were two farms, owned by the Boyces and the Murdochs. Further down was Nelson Pfundt.

There was little competition in those pre-Hechingers days. And single-family developments were in their heyday.

“Back then, Northampton was booming,” Jim said. “The local builders were all doing very well: Mickey Schrenk and Frank Kelly ... and the developments were popping up. And it was good for me, too. They all had accounts with me; the men would all come and buy stuff. Now, I think most of the building is up around Buckingham or farther north. There’s some going on around here, but the big boys have it: Toll Brothers, Orleans, and places like that. The little guys don’t have much of a chance.”

James McLean was born in Abington in 1933. He lived most of his life in Feasterville until he went into the service. His parents have moved 21 times but stayed in the general area, living in such towns as Hartsville, Holland, Huntington Valley, and Ivyland. “I moved once, and once was enough for me!” he said.

After graduating from high school, he immediately went into the service. The Korean Conflict was taking place, and Jim spent four years in the Air Force.

During his commission, he was involved with a combat crew and was heading for Okinawa when the war stopped. That’s when he decided to volunteer for jet engine school. “Little did I know that the Air Force had plans for me down the road,” said Jim. “I graduated from the school, and they sent me to Albuquerque, New Mexico.”

In his last year of service, the Air Force sent him to Las Vegas Nevada. “We were stationed 20 miles west of Las Vegas at a little base called Indian Springs Air Force Base,” said Jim. The base was created for the sole reason of testing atomic bombs.

“We were the only ones who knew what to do with the aircraft (B-57As),” said Jim. “It was the only planes the Air Force had that could climb high enough and fast enough to catch the mushroom. And our outfit — it was a sampling outfit — they took samples. They would fly through the mushroom and the things would open up on the wings and they’d fly through and they would close, and they’d bring them back to the Atomic Energy Commission.”

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Jim never flew on a sampling mission; his work came back at the base when he would wash the planes down and work on the airplanes after testing missions.

He and the other engine crewmen were close enough to experience the atomic bomb tests. "You could hear it, you could feel it, and you could see it," said Jim. "I'd say we were maybe 20 miles from where they were exploding," he added.

"You weren't supposed to look but you looked anyway because you just couldn't stand it, peeking around the building," Jim said. "Most the bomb tests were at ground level. This one test that I was there for, they exploded the bomb at thousands of feet in the air. Of course, when they explode in the air, the mushroom grows, and these planes had to be quick enough and fast enough to catch the mushroom. And that's probably why we were there — for that one test."

They didn't wear any kind of protective gear. "I don't think back in the '50s ... they knew everything they know today." He never thought about the ramifications of his assignment. Jim has since developed cancer, which he believes is related to his exposure to radiation.

Jim has undergone chemotherapy treatment six times. "We're hoping and praying that it's working," he said.

Jim still manages to play cards in a poker group that originated back in the 1940s when the Lion's Club was holding its meetings at the Buck Hotel. Two of the other players in the group are Jim's closest friends, Dr. Cameron Wilson and Norm Turner.

After 36 years of operating Churchville Hardware, Jim has decided to close the store for good. "The sickness made me make up my mind," he said, "but it was time anyway. The handwriting was on the wall."

He notes that business has declined steadily for the last five years, citing competition from big chains such as Hechinger's and Home Depot, declining business from local builders, and a lack of wholesalers.

"I've never made a lot of money, but I made a living," said Jim. "And I'll tell you, when I got sick and I was in the hospital, I didn't realize how many customers and friends I really had. I got Get Well cards from people I hardly knew."

At press-time Jim is back in the hospital and not doing to well. Our thoughts and prayers are with him and his family.



Jim McLean, Doug Crompton, and Cameron "Doc" Wilson videotaped an interview for almost 3 hours this spring. It was a pleasure talking with them. They have an outstanding memory of how things use to be in Northampton Township. Jim and Doc have been good friends for many years, sharing card games, horse races and many other good times together.



HISTORIC HOLLAND HALL TO BE RAZED

The historic Holland Hall, originally built by the Feasters in 1812 is to be razed to make way for expansion at Twining Village. It is constructed of bricks that were used for ballast in ships sailing from England and was the only brick house in the township at the time.

The 1842 insurance records note:

A 2 story brick dwelling, 36 by 26 ft. and a 2 story kitchen, partly brick adjoining, 16 by 15 ft. Value \$3000

A frame barn stone stable 46 by 26 ft with wagon house adjoining on north side. Value \$500

A 2 story frame tenant house 16 by 15 ft., a one story stone kitchen adjoining 24 by 15 ft. Value \$300

GEORGANA FARMS TO BECOME HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Georgana Farms in Churchville soon will be another development of single-family homes.

The farm, off Bustleton Pike, was named for its owners, George and Ana Pfundt. George's son, Nelson, sold the property to Toll Brothers for \$3 million. The house had already been sold and wasn't part of the sale.

Nelson, a former Northampton supervisor and native of the township, has lived in Upper Makefield Township on a 25-acre homestead since 1972, when he sold his 160-acre farm on Lower Holland Road to Torresdale Builders Inc. At that time, Nelson cited skyrocketing taxes for the sale. Between 1959 and 1973, the farm was used to train harness horses. Dr. Cameron Wilson was a partner in the business.

Jim McLean, who owned Churchville Hardware, says the property was in bad shape when George bought it. "He turned this old farm that was rundown into a showplace," said Jim, who noted that Mr. Pfundt had already made a great deal of money during the war and owned General Machine Products Inc. of Trevoese.

"In my time I saw Nelson work for George and then Nelson became president," said Jim. "And then Nelson retired and Billy (one of Nelson's children) is now president.

"Mr. Pfundt was very meticulous," said Doc Wilson, who also worked on George's farm. "When he fixed anything up, it had to be twice as good as it ever needed to be."

George built a lake and there wasn't enough water so he dug a well to pump water into it. The well goes down in the summertime. "He had a little lake in there with goldfish," said Doc Wilson.

Jim noted that George had the driveway paved from Bustleton Pike all the way back to his lake. "And back there, there was room for parking," said Jim. "I think Mr. Pfundt might have had company picnics or family picnics down in there."

Doc Wilson said Mr. Pfundt also had lights and a stone fireplace in the picnic area. "He had a little spring into the little lake," said Doc Wilson. "And he always kept a cup there. And you'd reach under this rock and get a cup full of water which was clear. You might pick up a salamander or something like that. But it was clear and you could drink it without a problem," he added.

"It was a showplace. It was his retreat," said Jim. "He could leave the house and barn and go back there and it was like being in another world."



There is no house at Georgana Farms but the Barn and outbuildings are in excellent condition inside and out. Many horses are still kept in the barn. The buildings and property are just behind the Churchville historic district and there are concerns about the impact that development would have on character of the district.



A beautiful man made lake occupies the Northeast section of the property. The lake was used for fishing and swimming. Water was pumped from wells to fill the lake. Walking around the lake it is hard to believe that it's tranquillity will be replaced with houses and roads.

WEIR BARN DEMOLISHED

The final chapter on the Weir farm was written recently with the demolition of the barn on Almshouse road west of Richboro. The Weir legacy in Richboro is a memory to many but unfortunately nothing remains to mark the spot for future generations. Like much of our Northampton history it just vanished off the face of the earth. We tried unsuccessfully to have a road named in memory of the Weirs a number of years ago. This is a textbook example of how NOT to preserve local history!



Only the foundation of the barn remained in this picture looking Northwest. The stone wall to the left circled this area to form a cattle yard.



Some of the massive beams from the barn.



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



There will be a picnic at the Molland House, Old Easton Road in Warwick on Sunday October 13th starting at noon. A delegation from Paris, France will be visiting. The Warwick Township Historical Society has extended an invitation to our members.



Max Newhart talks on Navy Battleships at our May meeting.



Our May meeting speaker, Max Newhart, displays his collection of Navy hats representing the battleships.



NORTHAMPTON TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PO BOX 732, RICHBORO, PENNSYLVANIA 18954-0732

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Send articles to:	1269 2nd St Pike	
	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 1996/97

September 25	General Meeting	7:30 PM
November 20	Dinner Meeting	6:00 PM
March 26	General Meeting	7:30 PM
May 21	General Meeting	7:30 PM
September 24	General Meeting	7:30 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 1996 (January 1996 to December 1996)

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: _____

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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 : _____