

# EAST FALLS HISTORICAL SOCIETY: 2020 REPORT

*Despite the pandemic, East Falls Historical Society (EFHS) remained active. This report summarizes our activities in 2020 and provides a snapshot of our status as of mid-December.*

## Programs

Our customary lectures and walking tours have been on hold because of the Covid pandemic; the suspension of the latter is a serious blow to our revenue. However, EFHS has stayed busy.

- Not long before the suspension of in-person events, EFHS hosted a lecture by preservation historian David Young, based on his book *The Battles of Germantown: Effective Public History in America*.
- Steven Peitzman, who is a mostly retired physician and also a medical historian, provided a virtual walking tour of sites in early Philadelphia associated with the horrific 1793 Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic, with some comments on the flood of refugees to our neighboring community, Germantown (17 June 2020).
- Later, when a scheduled speaker had to cancel, Steve virtually reprised and added to a tour of “architectural gems” of upper East Falls originally created and led (on foot) by Steve and our late friend and board member Ken Hinde (14 October 2020).
- Justin Spivey, PE, a preservation engineer and authority on the Schuylkill River bridges in Philadelphia spoke via Zoom on the “The Falls Bridge: Structure and



*Preservation Engineer Justin Spivey*

History,” yielding an audience extending well beyond the Falls. This lecture helped mark the beloved Bridge’s 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

- Another Zoomed program, centered on the histories of our Old Academy and of the Concord Schoolhouse nearby in Germantown, in conjunction with the Concord site and Old Academy Players, is tentatively scheduled for February.

Plans for the Spring season are ongoing. If the health situation improves, in-person walking tours may resume. Suggestions from members are welcome.

## Acquisitions

In February, donor Tom Clayton gave five objects to EFHS – a quilt from the 1890’s with the embroidered names of members of the First Methodist Episcopal Church at 3580 Indian Queen Lane, a framed picture of the 1899 East Falls Baseball Club with the players’ names and positions played, a wedding book, a trophy won by a local Boy Scouts troop, and an unframed picture of an unknown young girl.

EFHS is undertaking efforts to develop a photographic record of the quilt, which is in fragile shape, and is also seeking expert advice on physical preservation.

Also in February, Marvin Keenze donated 11 black and white glossy photographs of various East Falls sights, taken in the Spring of 1983.

In March, Anne Farnese donated a “Princess Grace” plate from the Hamilton Collection produced by Violeta. The firing date of the plate was March 26, 1983.

In April, Kathy Petrone donated a parish monthly calendar from St. Bridget’s church, a 14-page booklet from February 1946. It lists parishoners by street with notations of their monthly donations. It also contains a list of advertisers.



In May, Friends of the Falls of Schuylkill Library (Margaret Sadler, president) donated an original manuscript in two sections. The first is a log of overdue library fines recorded in 1848 from the Falls Library Association. The second section is a history of the Sorber family, an East Falls/Germantown family that emigrated from Sweden in 1732.

In September, Janet Calaianni donated a photograph of the 3400 block of West Penn Street taken after a snowfall.

## Archives

The acquired items and many others are held in the EFHS Archives. Unfortunately, the archives are inaccessible because of pandemic restrictions. The archives currently are housed within the Falls Library and at our previous office on Midvale Avenue but will be moved to our new office space when the pandemic eases.

## Historic sites

EFHS was highly active in this area during 2020.



- Members Nancy Pontone and Steven Peitzman successfully nominated 3625 McMichael Street, the former Manor Sunday School Association (1916), later Chapel of the Good Shepherd, Park Congregational Church, and finally a Ken-Crest facility, to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. They conferred with the architect about several alterations. The successful outcome is a two-residence re-use which has transformed a locus of discord into a handsome addition to East Falls.

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- Nancy has also submitted a nomination for the c.1850s stone “Gothic Cottage” on Coulter Street and Stokely, a rare survivor from the era of estates and farms. Steve completed a nomination for 5151 Wissahickon Avenue, the striking 1905 Tudor house (now an American Legion Post) by a once noted architect named Robeson Lea Perot. Although the structure is on the Germantown side of Wissahickon Avenue, it is very visible from the upper reaches of Queen Lane in East Falls.
- Board member Rich Lampert prepared a proposal to create a Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission historic marker for Dobson Mills, the massive manufacturer of wool blankets, garments, and carpets, some of whose surviving buildings, now under new uses, can be seen from Ridge Avenue and Scotts Lane.
- EFHS enrolled as a “consulting” organization as plans develop for renovation of the Falls Bridge and engaged noted preservation engineer Justin Spivey to assess the eventual project with us. Of course, we wish to preserve its historic appearance and as much original fabric as feasible.

### **Oral History**

EFHS conducts an ongoing series of interviews with longtime East Falls residents, coordinated by Board members Wendy Moody, Lyda Doyle, and Ellen Sheehan. While the pandemic has curtailed new face-to-face interviews, this project moved forward on a number of fronts.

- EFHS volunteers completed transcribing all previously recorded interviews with individuals and groups.
- Copies of all the transcriptions, along with photographs of the interview subjects, are now housed in two locations – the archives inside Falls Library, and the new EFHS office space in the recently built New Courtland facility on Henry Avenue. (More about the office space below.)
- All 50 individual oral histories and seven group interviews are now available through the EFHS website. (More about the website below.)
- Our member Ted Cheek transcribed audio CD’s from audiotapes of older interviews and also produced duplicate CD’s of more recent interviews.
- The October 2020 EFHS column in East Falls NOW drew on primary source memories of Dobson Mills in our oral history collection.

We will resume face-to-face interviews as soon as it is medically safe to do so.

### **Articles in East Falls NOW**

We are grateful to East Falls Community Council and the editors of *East Falls NOW* for allowing EFHS to sustain a series of monthly articles about East Falls history that appeared for many years in *The Fallser*. Articles in 2020 were written and researched by a variety of members; they included topics such as street names in East Falls; Dobson Mills (in two parts); the move of the Woman’s Medical College of Pennsylvania

to East Falls; our lost baseball fields; growing up in the Falls and dangerous childhood explorations; the evolution of a building on McMichael Street from chapel to Ken Crest and now residences, and more.

### **Office space**

New Courtland Senior Services graciously provided a designated room near the main entrance of The Apartments at Henry Avenue at 3232 Henry Avenue. While the space is still being organized, within a few months it will house the Grace Kelly Gallery (see below), the EFHS Archives, and EFHS organizational records.

### **Grace Kelly Gallery**

Thanks to the generosity of the New Courtland, EFHS is now able to display our collection of Grace Kelly memorabilia in a well-lit space. The gallery will be open to visitors by appointment once pandemic-related restrictions have been eased.

Two display cases contain flower linens, scarves, and plates designed by Grace Kelly, objects related to the Kelly family in East Falls, “Kelly for Brickwork” memorabilia, Christmas cards sent from the royal family of Monaco over the years, and other artifacts from Monaco. There is a doll collection, as well, to be housed soon in a new display case.

Photos related to Grace Kelly were professionally hung by New Courtland staff, and a display case for dolls is under construction.

### **Research services**

Through our website, we invite questions from any interested person about any aspect of East Falls history. Questions can be sent to [eastfallshistory@gmail.com](mailto:eastfallshistory@gmail.com). While we often have discussed questions face to face with interested parties, at this time we are replying via email. Most of the queries are handled by our members Joe Terry, Wendy Moody, and Ellen Sheehan, and other EFHS members may become involved as well.

In early December, EFHS received a request from a documentary film maker in the UK who is developing a program about Grace Kelly and is seeking information about her early days in Philadelphia. Ellen Sheehan is following up.

### **Website**

Our website, [www.eastfallshistoricalsociety.org](http://www.eastfallshistoricalsociety.org), moved to a new platform and was greatly reorganized and expanded during 2020, thanks to our webmaster Roger Marsh. The site provides access to a wealth of information, including transcriptions of oral histories, a photograph collection, information about sites in East Falls that are listed on



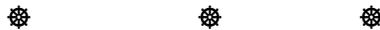
*From Library of Congress, p.d.*

the National Register of Historic Places and/or the Philadelphia Register, and/or the list of historical sites maintained by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, EFHS columns from the community newspapers *The Fallser* and *East Falls NOW*, and the Chadwick Papers, a 37-volume set of scrapbooks assembled by Alexander Cox Chadwick (1890-1857), a newspaper publisher active in East Falls and Roxborough.

### The organizational details

- As of early December, EFHS has 106 members. We have just begun our annual membership campaign aimed at businesses and nonprofits, and in May we conduct our annual campaign for new and renewing individual members.
- As of December 1, our treasury holds some \$20, 809.61.

The above information was compiled by Rich Lampert from reports of activity leaders, with some embellishment by Steve Peitzman, December, 2020



**INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MEMBER (IF YOU ARE NOT)?**

**FIND THE MEMBERSHIP FORM ON THIS WEBSITE,  
DOWNLOAD IT, AND SEND IT IN WITH A CHECK. MINIMAL  
DUES IS ONLY \$15. SUPPORT OUR EFFORTS TO UNCOVER,  
HONOR, AND MAKE KNOWN THE HISTORICAL  
FOUNDATION OF THIS WONDERFUL NEIGHBORHOOD.**