10 Interesting Facts about Franklin Township's Past

European settlers came to the lands we now call Franklin Township over 300 years ago. The history of the area is reflected in the records and artifacts left behind. Below are a few interesting things learned about life in Franklin Township in the 1700 and 1800s.

1. The irregularity of Franklin Township's borders reflects how the land was randomly settled in the early 1700s. The northeast corner of the Township was originally part of William Penn's 65,000 acres--The London Tract granted in 1699. According to a 1720 advertisement, the London Land Company leased 50 acres to one person, with 10 families required to settle together on 5,000 acres to promote "good neighborhood convenience." The remainder of the land in Franklin's south and east were part of a number of small land grants. The deeds for the land were prepared in England using the metes and bounds technique.

2. When municipalities were formed to provide more effective political representation, Franklin Township was part of the 1724 New London governance. In 1852, Abisha Kimble, George Mackey, David Kimble, and Robert Strickland signed a petition calling for the establishment of Franklin Township in the southeastern portion of New London Township. A public meeting in July of that year was held at the Kemblesville Inn (Tavern) to fix the boundaries. The name Franklin Township was suggested to honor Benjamin Franklin, who owned about 160 acres within the Township. Davis Kimble did the surveying of the new township.

3. The oldest remaining house in Franklin Township is the Susan Fury House on Den Road. The original log cabin structure has had many renovations since the 1700s when it was first built. In March 2005, one of Franklin Township's other examples of log cabins—the Cornelius Lynch House on North Creek Road—was demolished.

The tenant house on the McKean property.

4. There is only one property in Franklin Township on the National Register of Historic Places—the house of Thomas McKean (1734-1817) on Route 896, just north of the intersection with Route 841. McKean was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and the only continuous member of the Continental Congress. He is credited as the author of the Delaware Constitution and served as Delaware's President for a short time. McKean served as Chief Justice of Pennsylvania from 1777 to 1799 and Pennsylvania's governor from 1799-1808. It is believed he was born and spent his younger years at this farmstead. The original house burned in the early 1800s and a tenant house was built on the foundation.

5. The following mills/industries operated in Franklin Township in its early history:
- 1724: Abraham Emmitt operated a grist mill on the Big Elk Creek. John Tweed operated it in the 1890s.
- 1842: Darlington Cope started Cope Pottery.
- 1827: Robert Lysle purchased land in Franklin Township and started a paper mill. Various descendants operated various paper mills in the area. Wilson Lysle obtained a patent for a chemical filter paper. In 1902, it was known as Franklin Mill. The last time the mill was in full operation was 1949.
- 1829: Wickersham Mill/Chandler Mill, grist mill for grinding flour, grain, and feed; sawing was also done.
- 1823: William Schlogle opened a grist, cider, and saw mill in Kemblesville. The Martin family purchased it in the 1890s. Flour from this mill traveled west in Conestoga wagons.
- John K. Steele Mill (Hess Road) was a grist mill and saw mill.

The Emmitt/Tweed Mill along the Big Elk Creek.

10 Interesting Facts about Franklin Township's Past (continued from page 1)

A photo of the Mount Olivet church/school from the early1970s.

6. Franklin Township had four churches in the 19th century:

• The Flint Hill Methodist Church was the first church built in Franklin Township in 1829. The most recent building burned in the 1950s but the graveyard still exists near Flint Hill's intersection with Elbow Lane.

• All that remains of the Mt. Olivet Methodist Church is the cemetery and ruins of the school/church on Walker Road.

• A Presbyterian Church was constructed in Kemblesville in 1852 with one acre of ground being purchased from Samuel Kimble, Sr. In December 1868, permission was granted for the Flint Hill Methodist Church to hold services on the second and fourth Sunday of each month. This congregation became strong in the community and purchased the building from the Presbyterians in 1899. The original building burned in 1990 and was rebuilt with the current church and recent addition.

• The Auburn Baptist Church, on Auburn Road, was built in the mid-1800s and continues to meet today.

7. Franklin Township's elementary-aged students were educated in one-room schoolhouses. The Spencer School House (Old Schoolhouse Road) is the oldest one remaining building. From 1875 to 1956 four schoolhouses were operating: Maple Grove (School House Road), Franklin (Route 896), Mt. Olivet (off Walker Road), and Auburn (Auburn Road).

Youth in seventh through twelfth grades attended the Avon Grove High School (now the Avon Grove Charter School) on State Road, in West Grove.

In 1953 Franklin Township joined the Avon Grove School District. When Kemblesville Elementary School opened in 1956, the Franklin Township one-room schoolhouses were closed.

8. Dr. Frederick West was a noted physician in the village of Kemblesville. His brother, J. G. West served as postmaster from 1862-1887 and operated a drug store from an addition on the house. The first telephone exchange in Franklin Township was established at West's Drug Store.

A sketch of the Dr. West house and drug store. The brick building, now a private residence, faces the curve at the intersection of Route 896 and Appleton Roads.

Inside the Kimblesville Hotel.

9. Inns for weary travelers were usually located near crossroads. The first inn to receive a license in Franklin Township (1758) was the Plow and Harrow Inn (corner of Route 896 and 841). In the village of Fox Chase (now Kemblesville) George McCleave was granted a Tavern License in 1763. Known as the Fox Chase Inn or McCleave Tavern, it operated until the license was revoked and the property was sold as sheriff's sale in 1773.

The property became known as the Kimblesville Inn when Samuel and Sarah Kimble owned the property from 1814 to 1844. Their son Abisha took over ownership and operated the Kimblesville Hotel from 1843 to 1858.

Many others owned and operated the property over the years.

10. Chesterville (corner of Route 841, Chesterville Road, and North Creek Road) was a small bustling community in the mid 1800s. It was along a major traffic corridor, starting at the state line with Maryland, proceeding through West Grove, London Grove and on to Doe Run. In 1848 a post office opened in Sam Byles general store. The William Missimer farm across the street had a wheelwright and blacksmith shop.

Bonus: Kemble vs. Kimble: Family lore states that brothers George and Samuel Kimble had a falling out. After that George changed the spelling of his last name to Kemble. In the cemetery at the Kemblesville United Methodist Church, Samuel Kimble's gravestone stands near George Kemble's. On the other hand, county records of the time show both spellings were used interchangeably, even within the same document. Kemblesville seems to predominate after George's death and it is felt this spelling is used to honor Kembleville's first postmaster.

The Kemble family photo (left) was taken around 1937. Sitting (l to r) James Wesley Kemble, Hester Anne Perry Kilgore Kemble, Harry Ernst Kemble, Sr., Standing (l to r) Harry Ernest Kemble, Jr., Paul Barclay Kemble, and Francis Newlin Kemble.

Sources used to compile this information:
• Avon Grove: 300 Years in the Making, , 1982, Avon Grove School District
• Franklin Township Comprehensive Plan: Historic Resources
• Franklin Township Historical Commission's archives
• Descendants of John J. Kimble (or Kemble) from Kemblesville, PA compiled by Dorothy Mae Kemble Bannar, 2004.