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Upcoming Programs: Spies to Canon Balls

Throughout World War II, a group of fearless and committed patriots risked their lives to achieve victory in Europe. They were the women of Britain's SOE (Special Operations Executive) and the United States' OSS (Office of Strategic Services). Women such as Virginia Hall, considered America's greatest female spy, and Christine Granville, Churchill's favorite spy, were crucial to the war effort, yet their stories as well as others' have only recently been revealed. "The Lady Was a Spy" focuses on the lives and experiences of these brave women, many of whom died in completing their missions, to highlight their unconventional contributions to victory in World War II.

Dr. Linda De Roche will present her program about female spies in WW II on Sunday, March 31, 3 pm at the David Library of the American Revolution sponsored by LMHS.

On Sunday afternoon, April 28, 3 pm. Dr. Helen Heinze will present a Prickett lecture about the historical journey of the first settlers and the events leading to the establishment of Lower Makefield Township up to the Revolutionary War. She will include the history of prominent early families and their legacy. This program will also be held at the DLAR. Call 215-493-6776 x100 or e.mail your reservations to rsvp@dlar.org for either or both of these Prickett lectures at the DLAR.

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Thanks to Grace Godshalk

Our thanks and recognition to Board Member Grace Godshalk who passed away in late December for all of her contributions to the preservation of Township history and for helping found the LMHS in 1979.

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Facebook Stimulating Interest in Local History

Board member Christa McConaghy, who also chairs the Lower Makefield Historical Commission, and LMHS President Pat Miller have been engaged in having the two groups work together in several ways during the past year.

Lauching a joint Facebook page has proven very successful and stimulated on-line interest in Township history. Photographs of historic homes and the Slate Hill Cemetery have been featured. Newspaper articles reporting the death of the watchman when the Stetson Hat Factory burned in Roelofs as a possible murder drew interest as have other news clippings and photos from our archives. The map showing original land grantees elicited questions.

Long-time residents and newcomers have logged on, made comments, and asked questions about local history which is our goal. Look for Lower Makefield History on Facebook and like us.

What disease took the lives of the original Yardley family?

What product did the historic Yardley home on Dolington Road produce during the early 1900's?

What historic Township home is on Moyer Road? Who built and lived in it originally?

What do you know about Henry H. Roelofs?





Corn Husk Doll Making Reflects Early Culture

Native American and early settlers in Lower Makefield used materials more fully than we do today. At the fall LMT Pride Day and at Makefield Elementary School Colonial Days, Jennifer Hauck and volunteers from our community have engaged youngsters in Corn Husk Doll making.

They explored how dried corn husks were soaked and used to create dolls with which youngsters played at a time when they did not go to stores to purchase pre-made toys. They talked about how corn was fully used not just the kernels for food and flour.

Women braided corn husks for rope and twine and coiled them into containers and mats. Shredded husks made good kindling and filling for pillows and mattresses. Corncobs served as bottle stoppers, scrubbing brushes, and fuel. Corn silk was used to make hair for corn husk dolls.

Making corn husk dolls was adopted by early settlers from native Americans from whom corn agriculture was learned. Corn husk doll making is now practiced as a link to Native American culture and the arts and crafts of early settlers.

At the fall Township event, members of both the LMT Historical Commission and the LMHS Board of Directors participated together and shared information about their work. Many residents had the opportunity to locate where they live on a Township map and discover who owned their property in 1798. Wonder what it would have been like to have lived here then? Wonder what crops would have been grown? Wonder which farmers might have grown corn and how they used their corn crop? Wonder if some of the children learned to make traditional corn husk dolls with which to play during the cold and dark winter days.



Edgewood Farm House on Stoney Hill Road Reflects Local & U.S. History

The fine old fieldstone home at 930 Stoney Hill Road was originally built by John Brown as his home on his 220-acre farm in 1731 (originally part of the 550 acres deeded to Thomas Janney in 1689) It was one of the original plantations listed under the village of Edgewood. John Brown died in 1753 and rests in Slate Hill Cemetery. The Brown farm extended eastward almost to the current Mirror Lake Road. The small section of this house dates from the middle of the 18th century and the larger, three-bay Federal addition from the first quarter of the 19th century. This home remained in the Brown family until 1807, then passed to the Janney family until 1858 when the Taylors absorbed it as they expanded across Stoney Hill Road.

John Exton, of the famous Trenton Cracker Company, bought the property in 1933. Exton established it as a place to buy antiques. He laid out brick paths, planted boxwood hedges, and restored the outbuildings.

Purchased in 1962 by the Pricketts, the buildings have reflected continued care and attention. They carried on a tradition of beautiful and meticulous preservation. The dining room which was the original kitchen retains a walk-in fireplace and open beam ceiling. The property also has the original barn, carriage house, old well and spring house with root cellar. The house has a total of six fireplaces. The Pricketts, noted for their fine American antiques, established and expanded their antique dealership at this location. (Laura and Clarence, family and friends supported the LMHS with the Prickett lecture series in their memory.)

Berm Bank Sits Amidst Changes of I-95 Construction on Woodside Road

The small, stone Federal-style house called Berm Bank sits along the Canal on Woodside Road. Originally part of the Pownall grant, the land was acquired by the Paff family who sold most of the land to the Yardleys before 1798, but retained a small estate of about 10 acres where they built this house between 1799-1821.

The Canal construction took most of the property. But the house was saved as the canal passed just 25 feet from its rear walls. Once again, transportation construction surrounds Berm Bank with the construction of the new Scudder Falls Bridge. The promise is that the house will be preserved.

Local tradition gives the home a colorful past. Legends describe the house as a station on the underground railroad. During prohibition, it was rumored that large truckloads of sugar were stored in the barn for use in liquor stills hidden in the nearby woods. This may also have been the site of a men's poker club in the 1930's. History reflects that the grounds were later used as a camp for children from Blessed Sacrament Church in Trenton.

Prospect Farm Rebuilt in 1725

The original Yardley home – Prospect Farm on Dolington Road in Lower Makefield – was rebuilt in 1725. William Yardley and his family died of smallpox in the early 1700's and their original home was burned to eradicate the disease. William and his family built and lived in the original home Yardley served in the first Pennsylvania Assembly convened in 1682. He also served as a Justice-of-the-Peace in the late 1680's and presided at the first Bucks County Orphans Court held in Falls Township in 1684. He died in 1693. The stone walls of the original home were incorporated into the new house.



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The Lower Makefield
Historical Society
P.O. Box 228
Yardley, PA 19067

www.lowermakefield
historicalsociety.com

Want to be a “detective”?

History is a Greek word which means, literally, just investigation (Arnold Toynbee). Local historian Helen Heinz shared how she has tried her hand at writing a mystery story set in Lower Makefield years ago. She and others including Ralph Thompson who left us his incredible research into the history of the Township (much of which is organized into our archives now housed with our historical library at the LMT Building on Edgewood Road) are two “detectives” who have learned much about our local history. We are looking forward to learning more about Dr. Heinz’s findings this spring (including seeing the canon ball her son found! Real evidence of past events.)

Our website at www.lowermakefieldhistoricalsociety.com established by Karen Boyd provides information about local history and LMHS programs. Our new Facebook page begun by Christa McConaghy this past summer has engaged individuals in exploring facts about LMT history. Our goal continues to be to stimulate research and an appreciation of local history and culture in Lower Makefield and the greater Bucks County areas.

We believe that our upcoming programs promise to achieve this but are looking for volunteers with fresh ideas and enthusiasm to learn more about the history of Lower Makefield Township and lead in coming years. Contact us with suggestions and volunteer to help with an event or project. Is there information in which you are interested or would like to share? Call Pat at 215-806-2802 or e-mail pmiiller@earthlink.net or write c/o Box 228, Yardley.

Join us on March 31st & April 28th!

