

# Jenkins Journal

LANSDALE, PA

NOVEMBER, 2012

## An endless trail of revitalization

Nov. 13 program describes efforts to save downtown

What can be done to infuse new life into Lansdale's downtown district?

That's a question Lansdale's leaders have tried to answer for more than half a century.

There has never been a shortage of ideas. Numerous redevelopment plans were attempted over the years but all fell short of expectations. Others sparked nothing more than conversation.

The Lansdale Historical Society's Tuesday, Nov. 13 community program, *Revitalization Down Through the Years*, will examine some of these efforts to update the shopping district in the face of changing times. The show will also provide a glimpse how these attempts reshaped the downtown area as it exists today.

Some of the ideas resulted in action:

-An old mill was torn down and a large municipal parking lot was built to meet the transportation demands of the 1950s.

-A private organization, the Lansdale Community Improvement Association, was formed which ultimately resulted in



A 1960s RENDERING OF THE TRAIN STATION-RESTAURANT.

the demolition of more than 60 older downtown buildings in the 1960s.

-The town's one and only commercial mid-rise building was erected. It was hoped it would help the downtown district re-energize so it could compete with the arrival of a shopping mall nearby.

Unfortunately, many of the most interesting ideas never got past the drawing board. Among them:

-A glass-enclosed restaurant at the

SEPTA station.

-Building a new station south of the Broad Street crossing.

-A commercial retail center and parking garage on the Madison parking lot which was suggested more than 25 years ago.

-A downtown hotel that would include the buildings that now house Chantilly Floral and the Junction House.

--A new municipal building with

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## Open the holidays with John and Sarah Jenkins



BOB GLEASON

In what has become an annual tradition, the Lansdale Historical Society will host a holiday open house, Saturday, December 1, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Jenkins Homestead.

On hand to greet our visitors will be John and Sarah Jenkins who will invite their guests to what Mr. Jenkins referred to as his mansion in the late 1700s.

Playing the role of John Jenkins I will

be Bob Gleason, an acclaimed member of the American Historical Theatre troupe, who has performed in such venues as the White House Visitors Center, Ford's Theatre, the Smithsonian, Independence Hall, Constitution Hall and the National Constitution Center. This will be his second appearance as John Jenkins at the homestead.

Joining him will be Pat Jordan in the

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PAT JORDAN

# Paratrooper's tales captivate capacity audience

A standing-room-only crowd fell silent as paratrooper Tony Zanzinger told of his World War II experiences at the society's October community program.

Zanzinger, of Abington, described in great detail what it was like to live life minute to minute as a member of the 501<sup>st</sup> Airborne Infantry Regiment as he and his colleagues were dispatched behind enemy lines at Normandy and the Netherlands. He also fought at Bastogne and took part in the capture of Hitler's mountain home at Berchtesgaden.

The former sergeant described how he reacted to the sight of fellow para-troopers cut down by enemy fire or in

hand-to-hand combat. And he mixed in battlefield humor, like an opportunity to sit on Hitler's toilet and take in the view of the surround-

ing countryside after allied forces stormed the Nazi leader's retreat.

Now 88, Zanzinger brought with him an extensive collection

of World War II and 1950s memorabilia which was displayed throughout the Lansdale Parks and Recreation Building.



**LIKE MANY** North Penn area residents the historical society was not spared the wrath of Hurricane Sandy. Two very old trees on the far southeast corner of the Jenkins Complex did not survive near-hurricane-speed winds that whipped through Lansdale. One of the trees broke in two and sent a 60-foot section into the other as it crashed to the ground. The debris spread across Jenkins Avenue. But compared to the problems other people faced from Sandy, we can consider ourselves fortunate.



THE JENKINS HOMESTEAD

## Jenkins Homestead and Historical Research Center

•137 Jenkins Ave., Lansdale, PA 19446.

•Hours: Wednesdays, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Saturdays, 9 a.m. to noon. (Tuesdays 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. by appointment).

•Telephone: (215) 855-1872; (215) 393-8919 (fax).

•E-mail: info@lansdalehistory.org

•Please send mail correspondence to 137 Jenkins Ave., Lansdale, PA 19446.

•Website: www.lansdalehistory.org.

## Volunteers needed for research center project

Thanks to the efforts of volunteer Chris Cooke, the society's long-awaited launch of our PastPerfect museum collection software initiative is under way.

Eventually, PastPerfect will enable us to unify all of our donated artifacts, books, reference material, photographs, membership rolls and financials in a single software program that will make the information easier to track and locate.

To date, Chris has migrated more than 11,000 acquisitions from past years into the system and

Larry O'Malley has moved our membership information into PastPerfect.

There is still plenty to be done and we will be in immediate need of one or two additional volunteers who have at least basic computer skills and an obvious interest in history to help us speed up this important process.

If you can help at least one day a week, please call Clarence Kinsey at (215) 855-1872. It is our goal to have PastPerfect fully implemented during 2013.

## The long road to downtown revitalization

(Continued from page 1)

rental space for private businesses on Main Street.

-Three-story condominiums on Richardson Avenue.

-Elimination of the downtown rail crossings by elevating or lowering the train tracks in an effort to improve traffic flow.

-Closing off West Main Street to vehicular traffic, replacing it with a two-story enclosed

mall.

Dick Shearer and Steve Moyer will narrate the program which includes many vintage photos that illustrate the various plans.

It will be held at the Lansdale Parks and Recreation Building, Seventh St. and Lansdale Ave., beginning at 7:30 p.m. There is no admission charge but donations are appreciated.

# In January, the next edition of 'Then & Now'

The society will resume its community program schedule after the holidays on Monday, January 8, with the sixth installment of our popular *Then and Now* series.

Program chairman Steve Moyer will narrate the show which uses a series of vintage and present-day photographs to illustrate how much our landscape has changed over the years.

Other winter and spring programs and events will include:

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12: *RE-WIND 1963*.** A look back to one of the most compelling years in our history. Locally we followed we followed teen singer Peggy March to the top of the record charts, but on a November afternoon we reached the depths of despair with the death of a President.

**TUESDAY, MARCH 12: *LIFE IS A LARK...AT WILLOW GROVE PARK*.** The biggest of the region's amusement parks provided decades of recreation and entertainment for generations of area residents.

erations of area residents.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 9:** The society's annual banquet features the presentation of the Edwin G. Holl Historic Achievement Award. William Penn Inn, 6 p.m.

**TUESDAY, MAY 14: *RELIGION COMES TO LANSDALE*.** The first of a new series on the history of Lansdale's churches beginning with the oldest congregations.

All programs except the annual banquet will be held at the Lansdale Parks and Recreation Building, Seventh St. and Lansdale Ave., beginning at 7:30 p.m. There is no admission charge but donations are appreciated.

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In the event of inclement weather an announcement will be made on WNPV 1440 Radio during the afternoon of the scheduled show. An announcement will also be posted on the society's website, [www.lansdalehistory.org](http://www.lansdalehistory.org).

## Between newsletters, check our website

Want to learn more about Lansdale history?

Check out our website, [www.lansdalehistory.org](http://www.lansdalehistory.org), for additional information you won't find in the *Jenkins Journal*, including the Back in Time series which features stories about the Lansdale Theatre, the Hotel Tremont, Winfield Scott Hancock's unsuccessful run for President

and many more.

You'll also find previews of up-coming programs, membership information and updates on the society's events as well as links to other related sites. And yes, back issues of the newsletter can be found there, too.

The unsung hero of our website is Larry O'Malley, who has manned the controls since its inception eight years ago.

**Lansdale Historical Society**

**Membership Application**

**Year** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Town:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State** \_\_\_\_\_ **ZIP** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-Mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

### PLEASE CHECK

**INDIVIDUAL: Single \$20** \_\_\_\_\_ **Couple \$25** \_\_\_\_\_ **Patron \$40** \_\_\_\_\_

**Sustaining \$55** \_\_\_\_\_ **Business \$100** \_\_\_\_\_

**LIFETIME: 55 or older (Single) \$300** \_\_\_\_\_ **(Couple) \$500** \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Donation \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**Don't Mail Newsletter** \_\_\_\_\_

*Make checks payable to: Lansdale Historical Society, 137 Jenkins Ave., Lansdale, PA 19446*

# John and Sarah to host holiday open house

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role of Sarah Hoxworth Jenkins, also a member of the American Historical Theatre, who is an accomplished actor, operatic singer and historian. Like Bob Gleason, she has appeared at the White House Visitors Center, the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian, and the National Constitution Center as well as the National Portrait Gallery and Mount Vernon.

Mr. Jenkins will be showing off his new assessor's office which opened this summer, and will describe what it was like being a farmer, landowner, father and tax assessor for Gwynedd Township during the Revolutionary War period.

Mrs. Jenkins will welcome visitors in the keeping room and explain the many responsibilities of a Welsh farmer's wife.

John came to the colonies from Wales in 1729 at the age of 10 and settled in Hatfield Township with his father, Jenkin Jenkin. Sarah was born in England in 1720 and came with her family to Hatfield



BOB GLEASON AS JOHN JENKINS I

Township in 1741.

She and John married at age 21 and had eight children, including John II, who later succeeded his father as master of the mansion. Sarah died in 1794, John in 1803 only two years before John II. His son, John III, resided at the homestead until after the Civil War.

The homestead will be decorated in traditional holiday fare and guides will be stationed in each room to assist visitors.

The museum room in the adjacent research center will feature a variety of displays including a toy collection and remembrances of Lansdale Christmases through the years.

In keeping with the society's tradition, the holiday open house is free to the public however donations are encouraged to defray the cost of this event.

## Lansdale Historical Society 137 Jenkins Ave., Lansdale, PA 19446



The Jenkins Historic Complex



# Lansdale Historical Society

The Jenkins Homestead  
and Historical Research Center

## Message from the President

November, 2012

This year as we approach the holiday season, I would like to take a few minutes to address a serious concern that needs to be brought to the attention of our membership.

The society continues to play an important role as conservator of Lansdale and North Penn area history as it has for the past 40 years. Our organization remains financially sound and we are blessed with an outstanding corps of volunteers who are the ones truly responsible for our success. Much credit is also due the Borough of Lansdale which has supported and encouraged our efforts in so many ways over the decades.

Also, requests from the public for our services have increased significantly in recent years as more people have become aware of our organization and its resources by way of the media and the internet.

However, I must report that over the past two years we've witnessed a disturbing trend. In 2011 for the first time in at least six years our membership numbers were flat, and this year we experienced a decrease – not a big one, but a loss nonetheless.

Why? I suggest there are a number of reasons:

- Our membership is aging and like many historical societies and other civic organizations, it has become more difficult to attract younger members.
- We have turned to the internet, specifically our website, as the primary source of information about the society's activities. The newsletter, updates on our Community Programs and *Back In Time* columns are available there free of charge for members and non-members alike.

- Finally – and most disturbing from my standpoint – has been the de-emphasis on teaching history in our schools in recent decades. Those of us over 55 remember how American history had a respected place in our classrooms. Not so these days. The result is that fewer of our citizens have a basic knowledge or appreciation of history in general – let alone local history – and that makes attracting younger members all the more difficult.

Please excuse my rant but it is leading somewhere. We are embarking on our **2013 membership renewal drive which runs through January 31**. As always, we are depending on your financial support so that we can preserve our region's rich past for future generations to enjoy. If you can, please consider raising your membership level to the Patron or Sustaining level. Those few extra dollars do make a big difference to us.

Now I'm going to get greedy and ask for something else. Talk up the society and what we do with family members – perhaps a son or grandson, a daughter or granddaughter - and encourage them to get involved. Bring them to one of our Community Programs. Show them the homestead and research center – we'll be glad to give them a personal tour. Maybe you have a neighbor or co-worker who asks a lot of history-related questions: Steer them in our direction. You could also go the extra mile and encourage them with a one-year trial membership.

My point is this annual campaign should be a “membership drive”, not a “membership *renewal* drive”. Yes, it is extremely important to retain all of our present members year after year, but to remain strong the society must attract younger members who will become active volunteers and eventually our leaders of the future.

You, my friends, must be the recruiters.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Dick', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Dick Shearer

**The annual dues form can be found on page 3 of this newsletter.**