

## The Lansdale Historical Society

# Jenkins Journal

LANSDALE, PA

MAY, 2013

## Program on early churches May 14

Like many small towns in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Lansdale grew in a variety of ways once the railroad cut through its pristine farm land.

Trains brought new residents searching for jobs and an improved quality of life allowing them to escape dirty cities and foreign countries that offered limited opportunities for advancement.

Once they settled in these citizens and Lansdale's founding fathers quickly realized that long-term development required new schools, cultural facilities and churches.

The society will spotlight four congregations that were part of the town's early development. *Faith of Our Founders, The History of Lansdale's Earliest*

*Churches* will be the subject of the society's final Community Program of the season Tuesday, May 14, 7:30 p.m. at the Lansdale Parks and Recreation Building.

Lansdale Methodist Church, St. John's United Church of Christ, St. Stanislaus Roman Catholic Church

(Continued on page 4)

### INSIDE: The formation of Lansdale's first houses of worship



**JOHN RUTH** receives the annual Edwin G. Holl Historic Achievement Award from Society President Dick Shearer.

## John Ruth receives Annual Holl Award

John L. Ruth, writer, historian, lecturer, filmmaker and man of many talents, was given the Edwin G. Holl Historic Achievement Award at the society's annual banquet April 8, at William Penn Inn.

Ruth, of Lower Salford, was honored for a lifetime body of work that has been centered in and around the Indian Valley area and his Mennonite heritage.

In making the presentation, society President Dick Shearer said, "There are few people who have contributed so much to preserving history and helping to explain it for others to understand. Choosing Mr. Ruth for this award was an easy task for our selection committee."

The annual President's Award, given to a society volunteer, was presented to First Vice President Clarence Kinsey for the many tasks he has undertaken in recent years.

Seventy-five persons attended this year's banquet, the largest turnout in three years. The program included a video presentation on Ruth's accomplishments by Steve Moyer. Jennifer Valentine was in charge of banquet arrangements.

## A word of explanation...

Because of on-going problems with the society's computer system, this edition of the *Jenkins Journal* is issued in abbreviated form. As a result, several stories that we planned to publish had to be omitted.

Instead, in anticipation of our final Community Program of the season on May 14, we are including a spe-

cial Back In Time column written by Pat Rieker who will narrate the show.

The next newsletter is scheduled for mid-summer and will include information on next season's Community Programs and a preview of Lansdale's Founders Day on Aug. 24.

## BACK IN TIME

# Churches: Mainstays of Lansdale

By PAT RIEKER

When William Penn established the colony of Pennsylvania in 1682 as a haven of religious tolerance, Quakers and members of other religious groups who were persecuted for their beliefs emigrated from Europe to this area. A number of Welsh Quakers settled



**Trinity Lutheran Church**

in Gwynedd, and by 1700 they built a meetinghouse at the corner of Dekalb Pike and Sumneytown Pike.

Other Welsh families who were of the Baptist faith also came to this area around 1700. Among them was the family of John Jenkins, who would make their home on a farmstead in the present Borough of Lansdale. The Jenkins family and other Baptist families in the area worshipped in each other's homes until Montgomery Baptist Church was built along Bethlehem Pike in 1719.

Until the mid-1850s, the area we know as Lansdale was rural with only a small number of homes scattered around the dirt Welsh Road. Then, in 1856, the North Penn Rail-

road arrived, and the village of Lansdale grew at the junction of the Doylestown and Bethlehem rail lines.

By 1870, numerous businesses had been established as well as a school, post office and bank. Forward-thinking citizens wanted to promote the sale of property for homes to be built. These citizens, among them Dr. John Jacobs and businessmen Isaac and William Heebner, realized that a church would be needed to attract families to the community.

Dr. Jacobs contacted the Methodist circuit preacher about beginning a new church in Lansdale, and in 1871 the Lansdale Methodist-Episcopal Church was constructed at Third and Walnut Streets.

For four years, the Methodist-Episcopal Church was the only church in Lansdale. Members of other Protestant denominations attended a Union Sunday School at the church where there were classes for all ages. This church would later become the Lansdale United Methodist Church, now located at Third and Broad Streets. The original church building still stands, though it has been modified over the years to accommodate business occupants.

*(Continued on page 3)*



**St. Stanislaus Roman Catholic Church**

# Churches are mainstays of Lansdale

*(Continued from page 2)*

In 1875, Grace Evangelical Church was constructed on West Mt. Vernon Street near South Broad Street. During its nearly 140-year history, the church building has been home to various congregations as well as businesses. At present, the congregation of Grace Christian Church worships at the location. The congregation that built the church no longer exists, but the Immanuel Church of the Nazarene is a branch of the original Evangelical congregation.

In Lansdale's early days, Catholic families often hosted travelling priests and gathered in private homes to worship. The nearest Catholic churches were in Doylestown and Norristown, a long journey by horse and wagon.

In 1876, land was purchased on Welsh Road east of Lansdale as a site for a mission church to be built. Though only 10 Catholic families resided in Lansdale, the site for the church was chosen because of its proximity to the railroad. The following year, the church building was completed at the corner of Main St. and Lansdale Ave. Today, the members of St. Stanislaus Parish worship at the same vicinity, though the present church building is the third since 1876. The original church was dismantled in 1925, and the building materials were used to construct the parish school, now Little Flower Hall, on Lansdale Avenue.

In the same year that the Catholic congregation was building a church on the east end of Lansdale, a German Reformed congregation was planning to build a church on the west end of town. St. John's Reformed Church was officially organized in 1876, and a lot was purchased at the corner of W. Main St. and Richardson Ave. as a site on which to erect a church.

When the red brick church was dedicated

in 1878, sermons were preached in both English and German. In the 1920s, the property on the opposite corner was purchased and a Sunday School building was constructed. A new church adjoining the Sunday School was built in the 1950s and continues to be used for worship today. The first church building was razed in 1965, but the parsonage that once adjoined the church still stands.

The congregation of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church first met in 1881 at Freed's Hall on West Main Street. In 1886, Lansdale's original schoolhouse on East Main Street was purchased and consecrated as a church. Four years later, construction began on a new edifice to be built next to the existing church, which was then converted into a parsonage.

A Sunday School building or parish house, as it was called, was added to the Second Street side of the church in 1924. Following World War II, church membership grew rapidly and plans were made to relocate the church to a more spacious property at 1000 W. Main Street. Today the church includes a sanctuary, chapel, Sunday School, and recreation area. The former church and parsonage on East Main Street have been demolished and replaced by a bank.

Of the first five churches to be built in Lansdale, four congregations continue worship in the borough. By the generosity and devotion of church members and the visionary leadership of pastors and priests, these churches have thrived and grown, even through hard times and World Wars. Today a new generation continues the tradition of faith that the founders of these churches began.

*Pat Rieker is a member of the society's board of trustees.*

## Jenkins Homestead And 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 correspon-  
dence to 137 Jenkins Ave.,  
Lansdale, PA 19446.

• **Website:**  
www.lansdalehistory.org.

## LHS scores well in regional archives study

The society received high marks in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories conducted last November.

The results – delivered to the society recently – ranked the research center's archives near the top in organization and pres-

ervation of its accessions.

The project, conducted over the past 18 months, includes history-related organizations throughout the greater Philadelphia area.

To date more than 50 groups have been surveyed. The initiative is funded by a grant from the Mellon Foundation.

## Churches played key role in early Lansdale

*(Continued from page 1)*

and Trinity Lutheran Church were organized soon after the borough was incorporated. They quickly established themselves as pillars of the community.

The program will be narrated by society board member Pat Rieker with assistance from members of the four congregations. It will include a video presentation culled from the churches' archives.

Future Community Programs will feature other area churches that played key roles in the lives of Lansdale residents before and after the town was incorporated in 1872.

The Lansdale Parks and Recreation Building is located at Seventh Street and Lansdale Avenue. There is no admission charge but donations are appreciated.

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



The Jenkins Historic Complex