

Welcome to a Walk Through Time.....

The West Nantmeal Historical Commission was founded in 1998 by local residents who wanted a way to preserve the township's past. The mission of the commission is to gather and maintain historical records for the township; identify historical structures and encourage their preservation and restoration; and promote community awareness and appreciation for the historic nature of West Nantmeal. Over the years, the Commission has undertaken several projects to document the history of the township structures and properties, as well as historic events in the township. Our monthly meetings are open for all to attend. We are always looking for new members and anyone is welcome to join. Our group is small but POWERFUL!

Some of West Nantmeal Historical Commission activities have been:

- Silent auctions, dinners, filmed oral interviews with residents of West Nantmeal,
- In - house work days to organize our files,
- Created and sold local calendars, mugs, note cards depicting historical highlights of the township,
- Dry stone building workshops,
- Hosting Chester County town walks (on tractor- pulled wagons),
- Stabilizing existing stone walls as they date back to 1894,
- Applied for Langoma (St. Mary's- former home of Joseph D. Potts - founder of Isabella Furnace) to be added to the State Historical Registry and that application was accepted,
- Isabella Furnace (which is already on the National Historical Registry),
- Involvement in the reconstruction of the Glenn Gable Bridge built in 1914 on Lewis Mills Rd. with Penn Dot,
- Various talks on topics such as railroads, genealogy, and World War II plane crash in the township,
- Suggested to township supervisors to purchase an electronic sign to inform people about township events,
- Consultations with Bob Wise and Seth Hinshaw (Cultural resource consultants specializing in Architectural History and Archeology),
- World War II plaque honoring the soldiers that were on the plane when it crashed in WN township,
- Partnership with the National Iron and Steel Museum in Coatesville,
- 5 and 10 K runs.
- The West Nantmeal Historical Commission is a member of the Chester County Historical Society and the Chester County Historic Preservation Network. We have also partnered with both and attended workshops seeking answers to some of our historical concerns.

Tidbits (answers on second page)

1. Back in 1904, how much did one acre of land sell for?
2. What group of people worked on farms in West Nantmeal during World War II?

Baskets, Balls, and Bows

Back around 1900, when children were free to run and play, to fish and swim in the summer, word spread of a place surrounded by wild pink roses called Rose Cottage. Mrs. Potts and neighborhood women entertained as many as 235 children from the cottage to the adjacent Perkins Run. This fallen down house had been repaired to become a place where boys and girls could go on Wednesday mornings in the summer to learn and enjoy a treat of sugar cookies. In their separate buildings girls were taught embroidery, sewing, cooking, and basketry while the boys were making baseballs and learning woodworking. These children came by foot, horseback, wagon, and even by train from Downingtown and Honey Brook for these special days. Many memories were made during these wonderful summer days thanks to the generosity of the Potts family. The school closed in 1920 and the vacant building fell into disrepair until Mr. Elmer Fisher purchased it in 1970 and had it beautifully restored as a private residence.

From Our Newspaper Clipping Files

That work in an iron furnace during the 19th Century was hazardous, is illustrated in the following news report:

June 9th 1885 The Daily New Era (Lancaster)

Particulars of the Horrible Death of William Buller

The death of William Buller, an employee, by the explosion of gas at Isabella Furnace, Chester County, on last Thursday night was an unusually sorrowful one. For some reason the furnace, which had been fired over a week previous had refused to work properly up to 11 o'clock on Thursday night, when suddenly and without warning there was a frightful explosion, which tore out the entire top of the furnace and hurled bricks, stone and other debris a distance of many yards in all directions. Following the explosion was a great sheet of flame that shot upward from the furnace for many feet and enveloped William Buller, who was working near the top. Although assistance hastened to him as soon as possible, he was so frightfully burned before he could be reached that he lived only until four o'clock of the following morning when death ended his suffering. Not a particle of clothing, not even his shoes, remained on his body when found, the fire having burned all of them off, and when he was removed to his home, some of the flesh dropped loose from his bones.

The Future Begins Here with Chalk Boards and Primers

Back in the early 1800’s a common school movement was started by Horace Mann of Massachusetts, which became the standard for teaching all children of any age or background. Since there were no elementary, middle or high school all the students were in one room, no matter what age or gender. Since the girls were needed at home to help in the house and the boys were needed for planting and harvesting many rural schools had just winter and a summer sessions. Children were taught reading, writing, math, geography and history. Group lessons were frequent while older children helped younger children when the teacher was conducting a group of older students. School year averaged approximately 132 days which is shorter than the 180 that is required now.

Allen School was one of the first schools in our township and was started by Ephraim and Sara Allen who had the one room school house (circa 1799) to educate their children and was opened to any children in the area who wanted an education. There are records at the Chester County Historical Society showing payments in 1836 were made for maintenance and tutoring for this school that was located on the Allen’s property at North Manor and Bollinger Roads.

Central School a 2 story building located on N. Manor Rd (Route 82) when it first opened the first floor was used by elementary students and the second floor for high school. Almost all of the children walked to school. Heating the building was most likely done by coal and bathrooms were not installed until 1958 so using the facilities meant going out to the outhouse no matter the weather. Teacher Miss Mary Turner kept a potty under her desk so that the younger children didn’t have to go out during inclement weather. One of the residents that attended this school remembers a baseball team was formed. There were no coaches and they played Franklin and Elverson Schools. After the building was no longer used as a school it was purchased by West Nantmeal Township and now used as the township’s municipal building.

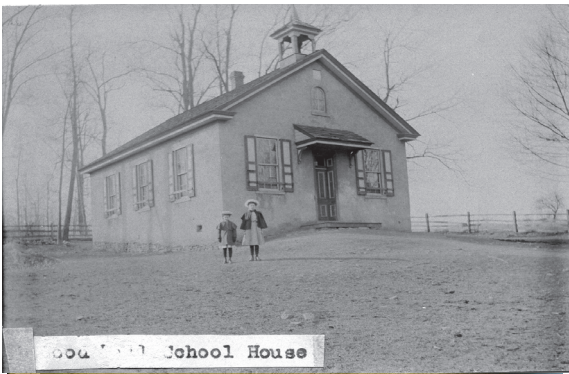
Franklin School located on Wyebrooke Road and built by the Potts family. At the time it was built all eight grades met in the first floor class rooms. Pennsylvania School Journal, Volume 44 stated “A large number of books have been added to Franklin School library in West Nantmeal Township. It is now probably the largest rural school library in the county (Chester)”. The Wyebrooke Grange, #1307 used the second floor from 1906 to 1927. When no longer used as a school, Wyebrooke Missionary Baptist Church held services there from 1968 to when they constructed their new church on New Road. In the 1970 the building was sold as a private residence.

Central and Franklin Schools closed in 1966. We still have residents that attended these schools living in the township who have many interesting stories.

Other schools in the area were Rose Cottage (operated for 20 years), Goodwill School (built prior to 1826), Howard Academy (1848—1862), West Nantmeal Seminary, Springfield School, Happersett/Franklin School. Franklin School, Rose Cottage, Goodwill School, and Howard Academy are now private homes. In 1852 West Nantmeal Seminary became part of Wallace Township and in 1911 Springfield became part of Elverson Borough.



Franklin School (left)



Goodwill School (right)

Tidbits answers

- 1. \$50
- 2. German prisoners of war from Reading Airport prisoner of war camp

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