

**Franklin Township
Historical Commission and
Historical Architectural Review Board
Combined Hybrid Meeting**

Tuesday, May 2, 2023, 7 PM

Minutes

I. Call to Order – Paul Lagassé called the meeting to order at 7:15 PM. Also in attendance were Sally Gallagher (HC only), Nan Latimer, Lou Mandich, and Chuck Phillips. No members of the public were present.

II. Public Comment – There was none.

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes – On a motion from Mr. Mandich, seconded by Ms. Latimer, the minutes of the HC-HARB Meeting of January 10, 2023 were unanimously approved.

IV. Old Business

A. Updating Historic Resource Surveys and PHMC Data from Map – Mr. Lagassé reported that this project remains on hold.

B. Church Hill African Church Cemetery – Cleanup Update – Crystal Crampton now has the lead, but a series of family events have kept her busy. A cleanup plan will be developed, most likely in conjunction with Galilee UAME Church in Avondale; the information we have collected on the persons buried there will also be turned over at that time. Mr. Lagassé regularly texts Bob Maknis of the FSA to let him know what's up. Mr. Lagassé noted that he wants everyone to take proper precautions against ticks when working in the cemetery, as the lone-star tick, which can cause an allergy to mammalian food products (meat, milk, butter) has migrated into the region.

C. Other Township Cemeteries – Continuing Topic – Mt. Olivet – Thanks to Mr. Phillips' downsizing of the PDF of the scans of the church's record book, it is now online.

D. Mason-Dixon/Arc Corner Connectivity Project – Continuing Topic – At the London Britain Township's Historical Commission meeting in April, Mr. Lagassé learned some of the reasons why the project has been slow to begin. Before and since the grant was approved – after extensive work by London Britain on defining and clarifying the project scope of work and assigned responsibilities – the Brandywine Conservancy, which will be managing the project for the Townships (LB, Franklin, Elk, and New Garden), has had to devote some of its efforts to continuing to recover from damage it suffered to its offices in the 2021 flooding in Chadds Ford. It also has suffered personnel losses related to the project; both Sheila Fleming, the original expected manager, and Mila Carter, her successor, are no longer there. London Britain is pushing forward with getting the project started.

Mr. Lagassé also reported that at a Chester County Historic Preservation Network meeting in mid-March the focus was on the semiquincentennial of the founding of the United States in 2026, whose celebration is known as America250. Peter Benton of Heritage Strategies, LLC (and formerly of John Milner Associates, where he was a main planner; he has worked on such projects as the Brandywine Valley Scenic Byway in Delaware) presented info on the Chester County Heritage Tourism

Plan that is currently being developed. He indicated to Mr. Lagassé in a conversation that the committee preparing the county's America250 tourism plan and the County Planning Commission are interested in a Mason-Dixon trail and the Mason-Dixon region as a potential tourism focus. (At the county level, the tourism plans emphasize locations that will be available to visitors on a regular, near daily basis, so a trail that might also have educational/informational signage fits the bill.)

Mr. Lagassé speculated that it would not be unreasonable to suppose that this sort of interest on the part of the county might lead to financial help underwriting such things as trails or informational signs, should the work on such be undertaken in such a way that they would be ready in time for America250.

He also reported that he learned more that morning at the LBTHC meeting, where Aileen Parrish reported that she had been in further talks with the Brandywine Conservancy. Although Ms. Carter has not yet been replaced, the Conservancy is now interviewing candidates for her post, as well as for Ms. Fleming's position. They are hoping to get underway in early May, and they are also looking to contract out with Peter Benton to have him help shepherd the project, at no charge to the municipalities. So it is possible that the project will end up better assisted and better connected than it would have as a result of enduring this delay.

E. 896 Roadwork & a Walkable Kemblesville – Mr. Phillips reported that the taskforce working on making the roads more walkable had somewhat stalled at the moment, but meetings were continuing. He expected that any plan would involve gradual changes, and pointed out that any plan would have no effect on state-maintained roads, which represent about 50% of all nondevelopment roads in the Township. Mr. Lagassé reported that the gateway islands had been removed from the plans for 896 in Kemblesville due to concerns that they could impact farm equipment moving on the road. The current expectation is that planned stop signs in the village will act to provide enough traffic calming.

F. Raising Awareness of Kemblesville & Franklin History – Mason-Dixon and History Brochures – Mr. Lagassé is intermittently working on these brochures.

G. HC Website – Mr. Lagassé noted (as above) that the Mt. Olivet Church record book had been added.

H. Township History – Mr. Lagassé said that he hoped to scan Township pictures that Tim Richards has, and will be looking into get voice-to-text software for transcribing oral history interviews. He recently found an interview with the late Betty Lysle McDowell, who grew up in Kemblesville, and conducted an interview the prior week with Frances Siple Barrett and Joan Mote Whiteside, who also grew up in Kemblesville.

He also reported that he had received a scan from Fran Barrett of a letter to C. H. Plummer, an elder of Mt. Olivet Church, from someone in Philadelphia who had visited the congregation in Kemblesville, and that he had received various documents, mostly school attendance and grade books from Franklin School from the late 1930s to mid-1940s (not complete), from Mrs. McDowell's daughter.

I. Talks and Training – Mr. Mandich reported that the Kennett Trolley talk was well attended and very interesting; the trolley ran from West Chester to near Unionville, into Kennett Square, then had two spurs, to West Grove-Oxford and Yorklyn. There will be a talk entitled "Forgotten Founding

Fathers,” by Gene Pisasale on May 11 at 7 PM in New London; it is cosponsored by the Franklin Township Historical Commission and the New London Area Historical Society. It is on the foundations of the American republic, with a special emphasis on the key roles played by ten men from Pennsylvania and Delaware – including Robert Morris, John Dickinson, Caesar Rodney, Thomas McKean, and George Read. Mr. Lagassé also reported that the PA Hallowed Grounds Project session “How to Organize a Cemetery Cleanup” is available as an online recording. On May 17, there will be talk at Oxford on the Grange at 7 PM; Sara Beth Kohut will be a co-presenter. It will also be streamed live.

J. Revisions to the Historic District Ordinance – Comments on the ordinance came back from the Solicitor; they seem generally minor, but also include recommendations for changes to wording that will be definite improvements.

V. New Business

A. Multi-Municipal Identification of Historic Resources in the Big Elk Creek State Park – Mr. Lagassé said that he had recently received a DCNR stakeholder update email noting that the new Big Elk Creek State Park now has a separate planning process. The expectation is “to develop the Big Elk Creek State Park for more dedicated and active recreation, while White Clay Creek Preserve will remain low-impact recreation. We have just begun working with a consultant to start the planning process of the new park, so stay tuned for more updates with that as we move ahead.” The shift to a state park will presumably have significant effects that will be of interest to the Township and to our residents who live near the park.

Ms. Latimer reported that from her conversations with Rob Campion, who is the designated manager for the Big Elk, that she believes that nothing will happen soon; they are still in the very beginnings of the developing a plan for the park.

Mr. Lagassé noted that he had previously prepared a rough guide to historic ruins in the Franklin portion of Big Elk for the White Clay master plan, after visiting the ruins with Ms. Latimer and Ms. Gallagher; some of that info has now been superseded by research and more legwork. He is in discussions with individuals in Elk Township concerning preparing a more comprehensive and improved historic site guide to the entire park, and is attempting to contact Rob Campion at the park to see if there is interest in this. Susan Moon, chair of London Britain’s HC has expressed interest in helping, as did Ms. Latimer and Mr. Phillips.

Mr. Mandich reported that he had walked the New London side of the creek some years ago, and that there were mill ruins there.

B. Annual Report – On a motion by Mr. Mandich, seconded by Ms. Latimer, the Annual Report was unanimously approved as submitted. It will be forwarded to the Supervisors.

VI. Public Comment – There was none.

VII. Adjournment – The meeting as adjourned at 8:50 PM.

Approved August 1, 2023