

# **Chester Heights CampMeeting Association records**

**01**

**Finding aid prepared by Sarah Leu and Anastasia Matijkiw  
through the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden  
Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories.**

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Last updated on September 22, 2016.

Chester Heights CampMeeting Association

## Table of Contents

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Summary Information.....	3
Biography/History.....	4
Scope and Contents.....	5
Administrative Information.....	6
Controlled Access Headings.....	7

## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	Chester Heights CampMeeting Association
<b>Creator</b>	Chester Heights CampMeeting Association (Chester Heights, Pa.)
<b>Title</b>	Chester Heights CampMeeting Association records
<b>Call number</b>	01
<b>Date [bulk]</b>	1920-2015
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1812-2015
<b>Extent</b>	12 linear feet
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Chester Heights CampMeeting Association (CHCMA), located in Chester Heights, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, is a non-profit, parachurch, interdenominational, religious organization dedicated to the evangelical ministry of proclaiming Christianity to the world. Chartered in 1872, the Association was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2001 and, as of 2015, continues to host an annual summer concert series, as well as walking tours, membership meetings, banquets, and annual service days. The Chester Heights CampMeeting Association records, 1812-2015 (bulk 1920-2015), consist of administrative and financial records, legal documents, photographs, scrapbooks, and other materials relating to the CHCMA. There is also a small portion of research, reference materials, printed matter, and other documents related to camp meetings and camp meeting organizations.</p>

## Biography/History

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Chester Heights CampMeeting Association (CHCMA), located in Chester Heights, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, is a non-profit, parachurch, interdenominational, religious organization dedicated to the evangelical ministry of proclaiming Christianity to the world.

Chester Heights CampMeeting Association was chartered in 1872 as the Philadelphia Camp Meeting and Excursion Society. Two years prior, a group of clergymen attending the Philadelphia Preacher's Meeting of the Methodist Episcopal Church expressed interest in purchasing a grove in the countryside for the religious and social use of the city's churches and Sunday schools. To this end, the farm of Joshua and James Williamson in Aston Township (Delaware County) was purchased due to its close proximity to Philadelphia as well as its accessibility by rail transportation. The farm, consisting of 148 acres, nearly 50 of which were woodland, was cleared in time for the first excursion of nearly 500 people led by the Ladies Aid Society of the Old Folks Home in June 1872. Another excursion of over 700 children was led in August 1872 by John Wanamaker, the Sunday school superintendent from Bethany Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Attendees typically arrived by rail, and many camped onsite in tents. In the camp's first year, over forty excursions were held, with nearly 18,000 people attending.

As the camp continued to grow in popularity, services and business began to develop nearby to supply both the camp and its attendees, including a post office, sawmill, and general store. The Baltimore Central Railroad built a train station northwest of the camp grounds. In 1873, a large restaurant was built onsite at the camp, as well as boardwalks, tent platforms, and over three hundred feet of stables. That same year, plans were made for the creation of a "cottage division," so that attendees could live in cottages rather than tents. 1890 was the last season that tents were in use, except for the large canopy where services were held; this tent remained in use until 1944. The cottages were built between 1874 and the early 1900s, predominately in the Victorian style. Electric lights were added in 1915, and electric water pumps and plumbing was added in 1966.

In 1945, the area in which the Camp Meeting is located split from Aston Township and became incorporated as the Borough of Chester Heights. In 2001, the Chester Heights Camp Meeting site was added to the National Register for Historic Places as an historic district. Several cottages and buildings, including the Tabernacle, were destroyed in two separate arson fires in 2011 and 2012. As of 2015, the land of Chester Heights CampMeeting Association has decreased to roughly one third of its original size. It continues to host an annual summer concert series, as well as walking tours, membership meetings, banquets, and annual service days.

### **Bibliography:**

Chester Heights Camp Meeting Association. "History." Accessed December 3, 2015. <http://www.ch-campmeeting.org/history.htm>.

## Scope and Contents

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This collection consists of the records of the Chester Heights CampMeeting Association, including administrative and financial records, legal documents, photographs, scrapbooks, and other materials related to the CHCMA. There is also a small portion of research, reference materials, printed matter, and other documents related to camp meetings and camp meeting organizations.

Administrative materials from the Chester Heights CampMeeting Association include documents such as by-laws, camp rules and regulations, and strategic planning materials; board of managers and directors' meeting minutes, 1892-1916, 1997-2015; president's reports; membership materials such as member lists and a small number of membership certificates; and correspondence relating to the renovation of camp buildings, rentals, and other topics. A large portion of the correspondence, circa 1990s, is between the Association and the Delaware County Historical Society and the Chester Heights Historical Society in relation to event planning. Additional materials relating to events include event programs, planning materials, and typed transcripts from talks given at the camp. There are also some materials relating to the cottages, including technical drawings, structural assessments, cottage handbooks, photocopies of images of cottages, maps of the camp, cottage lease agreements, a record book of leases, 1875-1944, and a copy of Melissa D. Buchanan's thesis, "Fairy Imitations of the Mimic City': Sacred Victorian Cottages at Chester Heights Camp Meeting."

Financial records include treasurer reports, 1990s-2014; a treasurer's account book, 1872-1926; and fundraising materials. Property and legal records in the collection include several deeds for the camp property, 1812-1872, a copy of the incorporation documents, 1873, stock certificates, and court materials relating to the fires on the Association's property in 2011 and 2012.

The photographs in the collection date from the 19th century to 2014 and depict camp cottages, events, people involved in the Association, and other subjects. A majority of the photographs are in photograph albums, but some of the photographs are framed, mounted on poster board, or loose. There is a self-published photo book, circa 2012, consisting of historic and modern images of the camp and related documents.

There are several scrapbooks in the collection documenting the camp and its activities. The scrapbooks, 1920s-2013, consist of photographs, letters, newspaper clippings, ephemera, and other materials relating to the Association. One scrapbook documents a fire at the camp grounds in 2012 and includes photographs and newspaper clippings.

Other materials in the collection from the Chester Heights CampMeeting Association include documents related to a Delaware County site preservation award received by the Association in 2011; materials from the Association's application to the National Register of Historic Places; several binders containing histories of and research about the Chester Heights Camp Meeting; and printed matter such as camp calendars, newsletters, 1990s-2000s, and programs for events and camp seasons, 1920-2000s.

There is a small portion of materials that relate to other camp meetings and camp meeting organizations, including notes, agendas, and pamphlets from the Camp Meeting Leaders Summit, a conference for camp

meeting organizations; research and reference materials relating to camp meetings; and printed matter from other camp meetings.

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## **Administrative Information**

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Chester Heights CampMeeting Association

Finding aid prepared by Sarah Leu and Anastasia Matijkiw through the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories.

### **Sponsor**

This preliminary finding aid was created as part of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories. The HCI-PSAR project was made possible by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

### **Access Restrictions**

Contact Chester Heights CampMeeting Association for information about accessing this collection.

### **Processing Information Note**

Summary descriptive information on this collection was compiled in 2014-2016 as part of a project conducted by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania to make better known and more accessible the largely hidden collections of small, primarily volunteer run repositories in the Philadelphia area. The Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories (HCI-PSAR) was funded by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

This is a preliminary finding aid. No physical processing, rehousing, reorganizing, or folder listing was accomplished during the HCI-PSAR project.

In some cases, more detailed inventories or finding aids may be available on-site at the repository where this collection is held; please contact Chester Heights CampMeeting Association directly for more information.

## Controlled Access Headings

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### Corporate Name(s)

- Chester Heights CampMeeting Association (Chester Heights, Pa.)

### Geographic Name(s)

- Chester Heights (Pa.)
- Delaware County (Pa.)

### Subject(s)

- Architecture, Victorian
- Camp meetings
- Spiritual retreats