

Kennett Township Historical Commission oral histories

05

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

Last updated on December 11, 2014.

Kennett Township Historical Commission

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Summary Information

Repository	Kennett Township Historical Commission
Creator	Kennett Township Historical Commission
Title	Kennett Township Historical Commission oral histories
Call number	05
Date [inclusive]	1987-2013
Extent	2 linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	<p>The first recorded mention of "Kennett Township" in Chester County, Pennsylvania is from 1705. An abolitionist stronghold, Kennett was popular with freedom-seekers escaping slavery prior to the Civil War due to the presence of progressive Quakers and a community of free blacks that was established as early as 1830. Later, the Kennett area became known for producing more than half of the mushrooms consumed in the United States. The Kennett Township Historical Commission oral histories, 1987-2013, consist of cassette tape recordings of the recollections of about thirty members of the Kennett Township community.</p>

Biography/History

The area that is now Kennett Township in Chester County, Pennsylvania was inhabited by the Lenni-Lenape people when the land was acquired by William Penn in 1681. The first recorded mention of the name "Kennett Township" was in 1705. The Borough of Kennett Square, which is surrounded on all sides by Kennett Township, but has its own separate governing body, was incorporated in 1855.

Kennett Township has a strong Quaker heritage, since many early settlers were members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). The area was a popular stop along the "Underground Railroad" for freedom-seekers escaping slavery prior to the Civil War, due to the presence of abolitionist Quakers such as John and Hannah Cox, Dinah and Isaac Mendenhall, and Dr. Bartholomew Fussell, as well as a community of free blacks that was established as early as 1830. The Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends, an activist Quaker off-shoot dedicated to progressive issues including abolitionism, women's rights, and temperance, was formed in the township prior to 1850.

The Kennett area was primarily agricultural for most of its history, but over the course of the 20th century it came to specialize in one particular food: mushrooms. William Swayne, a florist from Kennett Square, imported mushroom spores from England about 1885 and built the first mushroom house in the area. The venture was successful, and with the expansion of Swayne's and similar operations, the Kennett area became world renowned for its mushrooms. As of 2014, over 65 percent of the mushrooms consumed in the United States are grown in Southern Chester County.

Many properties in Kennett Township are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including: Old Kennett Meetinghouse, built in 1710 by members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers); Harlan Log House, an English-style log cabin built about 1715; and the Hamorton Historic District, laid out in 1830s and developed by Pierre S. du Pont into a company town in the early 20th century. Also on the National Register of Historic Places is Longwood Gardens, one of the most popular attractions in Southern Chester County (Pennsylvania) with over 1,000 acres of landscaped gardens, greenhouses, and plant collections. About one-third of the property is located in Kennett Township.

Bibliography:

Kennett Township. "History of Kennett Township." Condensed from 1971 comprehensive plan. Accessed July 9, 2014. <http://kennett.pa.us/visitors/history-of-kennett-township/>.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of cassette tapes and one CD of oral histories recorded with about thirty members of the Kennett Township community, as well as a binder with transcriptions and supporting documents such as photographs (photocopied), newspaper clippings, and obituaries. Margaret Woodward Ostrom

conducted most of the interviews from 1987 to 2005. Copies of these oral histories are also available at the Chester County Historical Society.

Interviewees include:

- William Buffington (1929-2007)
- Joseph D. Cloud (1906-2012)
- Wayne Coyle (1912-2009)
- Edward B. Darlington (1907-1997)
- Edward Fahey (1928-
- Harold E. Groves (1919-2006)
- Joseph Cloud Hannum (1921-1997)
- Edward Thomas Hannum (1924-2009)
- Kay Hanway (1905-
- Emily Buffington Ironside (1906-2002)
- Oreste Leto (1921-2006)
- Bette Bengé Leto (1922-2011)
- Valadia Macareth (1917-?)
- M. Elizabeth McCord (1909-2009)
- Jay Roland Minshall (1920-
- Dorothea Cloud Morse (1918-2008)
- Margaret Woodward Ostrom (1934-
- Herbert S. Plankinton (1920-2003)
- Frances Richards Pyle (1915-2009)
- Frances Cloud Taylor (1921-
- Horace Thompson Woodward (1908-2006)
- J. Robert (Jimmy) Woodward (1914-2004)
- Ruth Way Woodward (1916-1997)

Administrative Information

Kennett Township Historical Commission

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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 Kennett Township Historical Commission for information about accessing this collection.

Immediate Source of Acquisition Note

Oral histories recorded by the Kennett Township Historical Commission.

Processing Information Note

Summary descriptive information on this collection was compiled in 2012-2014 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 Kennett Township Historical Commission directly for more information.

Controlled Access Headings

Geographic Name(s)

- Chester County (Pa.)
- Kennett (Pa. : Township)

Subject(s)

- Local history
- Oral history