

# THE FRIENDS OF OLD ST. THOMAS at Ivy Mills

Volume 7, No. 1

Spring, 2000

## NEWSLETTER

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### FOST Members Address Congregation

In April FOST members, Marianne Squyres and Mark Willcox, III appreciated the opportunity to address fellow parishioners at each Mass and outline our goals and future plans. The text of their presentation is included on our website [www.delcohistory.org/fost](http://www.delcohistory.org/fost)

The Friends of Old St. Thomas is a parish ministry dedicated to fostering awareness of our parish history, so that Catholics can enrich their faith, and all who visit can deepen their historical understanding. The Friends' objectives include restoration, preservation, education and the collection of parish memorabilia.

Our parish is the oldest in Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Its founding antedates 1729. In 1852 St. John Neumann blessed the cornerstone of the church building.

The Delaware County Planning Department after reviewing the Historic Resources District (includes the old church, rectory, ice house, horse shed, carriage house and surrounding grounds) declared it an "intact Victorian Gothic complex" worthy of historical recognition.

In the near future plans are to begin work on the old rectory, ice house, and horse shed so that all three buildings will be improved. At minimum cost to FOST and no cost to the parish, the buildings will be preserved and converted into valuable assets for parish use. The Friends will continue to maintain the old church which was recently reopened for weddings.

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### Historic District Action Plan

FOST has financial and administrative responsibility for the renovation, rehabilitation and restoration of the parish historic district for the benefit of St. Thomas Parish. Thus, while the old church remains our primary focus, the group is working toward using the former rectory for meeting space, a museum and archives, and offices. Restoration of the ice house and horse shed are imminent, since both are much less complicated than either the church or the former rectory, and the restoration will improve the appearance of the complex. At the same time, we are working toward occupancy of the former rectory, which requires safety and electricity improvements. As those projects approach completion, restoration work on the old church will continue.

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### Finances

Since its founding in 1990, FOST has raised and spent about \$15,000 on maintaining the old church, which is our primary focus. An additional \$25,000 has been set aside for future use from the Memorial and Honor Program, donations, foundation/estate grants, three Sunday second collections, craft classes, card sales and investments. Qualifications for most grants include the availability of matching funds.

### Honor/Memorial and Donor Program

By participating in the Honor and Memorial Gift Program, you can honor living or memorialize deceased family/friends and also support the work of the Friends of Old St. Thomas.

For donations of \$10.00 or more individuals or groups may enroll the name of a living or deceased person in the St. Thomas Memorial Book. A notification card is sent to the recipient and the donor receives an acknowledgment/receipt. The St. Thomas Memorial Book is displayed on special occasions and is part of the permanent archives of FOST.

The Donor Gift Program recognizes \$25.00 or more gifts to the work of the Friends by recording the donor's name in a special section of the St. Thomas Memorial Book. Gifts of \$1000. or more are acknowledged on the donor plaque in the old church.

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### Your Help Can Make A Difference!

The Friends need your prayers, moral support, financial help, and volunteer effort. Any kind of help is most welcome. We urge all parishioners to support FOST. The application is on the reverse side of this sheet. Family memberships are only \$10.00 a year and your contribution will be instrumental in preserving our unique heritage for future generations.

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### Out and About With the Friends

In April, Marianne Squyres attended the annual conference of the Federation of Museums and Historical Organizations, representing FOST. Held in State College this year, the conference provides organizations an opportunity to keep up to date in all aspects of historical site administration.

The Friends of Old St. Thomas is included in the newest edition of *Keystone Treasures: A Guide to Museums and Historical Organizations in Pennsylvania* published by the Federation. To order a copy call the PA Historical & Museum Commission Publications office at 1-800-747-7790.

Marianne also found time to share her knowledge of parish history with Mrs. Shields' seventh grade class.

Joe Dragon represented FOST at the Antiques and Appraisal Day sponsored by the Delaware County Historical Society on April 30<sup>th</sup>.

FOST's website host, Rick Nicholson, who operates [www.delcohistory.org](http://www.delcohistory.org) received an award for his contribution to the history of Delaware County from the Delaware County Heritage Commission in May.

The Friends are currently applying for a roadside historic state marker. Such a marker would continually inform passersby of the significance of St. Thomas the Apostle Church at Ivy Mills.

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### Outdoor Maintenance

On April 30<sup>th</sup> members met to clean up the grounds, prune bushes, and remove debris. Thanks to all who participated. We would like to thank members of the Fair Committee who emptied the horse shed in preparation for bid inspections.

We are grateful to Mark Willcox, III for covering the roof of the ice house with a tarp and securing the access door. An assessment was done on this building prior to the erection of the construction fence. The roof is in need of replacement but the building is structurally sound. The target date for completion of this project is early fall, however, work is contingent on the school contractor's schedule.

An architectural rendering by Terry Squyres of the ice house restoration project is posted in the entryway of the new church.

### The Friends Social

This past December members of FOST gathered at the Willcox Homestead for our annual social. The Homestead and Ivy Mills, a National Register District, is also a U.S. "Save America's Treasures" site. Our thanks to the Willcox family for inviting us back.

### Craft Classes

For the past several years FOST has sponsored craft workshops to raise funds for operating expenses. We are grateful to all the crafters who attend these events. Two classes are scheduled for the fall. Tentative dates are October 19<sup>th</sup> and November 30<sup>th</sup>. If you have suggestions or ideas for upcoming classes we would like to hear from you. Contact Kathy McNichol at 610-558-0182.

Thanks to Beverly Schmitt for volunteering her time and talent to help with the craft program.

### The Friends of Old St. Thomas at Ivy Mills

#### MEMBERSHIP

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....Zip.....

Family: \$10.00 (yearly) \_\_\_\_\_

Individual \$ 5.00 (yearly) \_\_\_\_\_

Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail your check and completed form to

The Friends of Old St. Thomas  
at Ivy Mills  
P.O. Box 19  
Chester Heights, PA 19017

Thank you

6/00

The Friends of Old St. Thomas wishes to acknowledge and thank the following members and donors for their financial support during the calendar year from May, 1999 through April, 2000.

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Archer  
Ms. Regina C. Abernethy  
Mr. & Mrs. Donald Berlin  
Mr. & Mrs. Gilbert Bardsley  
Mr. Walter Basher  
Ms. Noreen Burke  
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Mr. Mark Willcox, Jr.  
Mr. Mark Willcox, III  
Mr. & Mrs. Roy H. Willcox  
Mr. Samuel Ward, Jr.

# THE FRIENDS OF OLD ST. THOMAS at Ivy Mills

Volume 7, No. 2

Fall, 2000

## NEWSLETTER

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### **The Legacy of Pope Leo XIII**

In 1893, the United States attracted the attention and admiration of Pope Leo XIII. The Chicago Exposition was held to commemorate the 4<sup>th</sup> centenary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. Pope Leo, who was keenly aware of the importance of history, loaned valuable relics and artifacts to this exhibition.

Ten years earlier in August of 1883, Pope Leo recognized the significance of preserving history and issued *Saepenumero considerantes*, which encouraged Catholic historical studies and opened the Vatican archives to historians.

As a direct result of Pope Leo XIII's plea, the Bishops at the Third Council of Baltimore appealed for the cultivation of the history of the Catholic faith in the United States.

Meeting in Philadelphia in July of 1884, priests and laymen came together for the purpose of establishing an organization to pursue the goals initiated by the Pope and Bishops' appeal. The result was **The American Catholic Historical Society**, the oldest Catholic historical society in the United States. One of the goals of the society is to make the truth known about Catholic history. The Friends of Old St. Thomas embraced this philosophy when our ministry was formed in 1991. Preservation of the old church and outbuildings, the collection of parish memorabilia, historical research, educational programs and special events are some of the ways we perpetuate the Ivy Mills legacy.

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### **What Happened to the Ice House?**

The 125 year old ice house adjacent to the 1874 rectory was demolished in late August as a result of new school construction. Despite the best efforts of the Friends of Old St. Thomas, this rare 19<sup>th</sup> century building was deemed incompatible with school needs, and thus fell to the wrecking ball. Some elements of the building were saved, however, such as the unique cupola, the entryway, and stones from the 9' deep interior. FOST plans to use them so that in some fashion yet to be determined the ice house will continue to inform visitors to the site.

The graceful statue of Saint Francis of Assisi was also destroyed during the construction process. Fortunately, the statue of the Blessed Mother that stood near St. Francis atop the slope to the right of the old rectory was able to be saved and will be permanently relocated to a suitable site in the Historic District.

Other construction-process damage to the dry-lay wall and the steps to the old church will be repaired soon.

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### **Horses Next?**

The restoration of the horse shed, in the planning for the last year, was completed just in time for the 2000 Fair. The foundation timbers were replaced along with sections of the upright supporting beams. To preserve the integrity of the

structure we were able to secure aged, authentic barn wood, generously donated by Louis Bodo of Media. This wood was also used for the shelving built especially for use by "Grandma's Attic" during the fair and much remains for use in other projects.

Many thanks to Mark Willcox, III, leader of the team, John Dunay, Marty McCormack, Joe Dragon, Fred Glessner and Matt Glessner for transporting the wood to our site. They also contributed much of the manual labor prior to the arrival of the Amish contractors and are responsible for erecting the shelving needed for the fair.

We are seeking the advice of restoration experts regarding the final finishing of the horse shed floor and the exterior painting, and expect to complete the project soon.

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### **And the Work Goes On...**

As with most on-going operations, there are many projects involving the Friends that take considerable time but are not readily apparent to everyone else. For example, while the school construction was in progress, temporary electric service was in place for the historic district, but it was necessary to disconnect the water, hence there was no heat there for 11 months. FOST continually checked on the church and rectory, and in October worked with Ennis Oil and George Ormsby to re-start the heating system. Great thanks to both of them for their help, which continues. For years, FOST member Phil Popiel has been working on the electric system in the church, and is now preparing plans for upgrading it. An especial thank you to Phil for installing the spot lights used for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

An old building needs constant care. Many thanks are due to restoration specialist John Carey, who repaired the separation problem on the front doors of the old church; the choir loft floor had to be reinforced, gutters cleaned, trees and bushes pruned and electrical lighting problems rectified. A continuing condition is the moisture problem, made worse this past year because of the lack of heat in winter. In summer, when windows are left open on humid/rainy days, mildew forms. It's a day's work to wipe the walls down. We have been advised this problem can be controlled if fans are used during rainy or humid weather rather than opening the windows.

The old rectory is an underused parish asset. Once restored, the building will serve important uses for parish ministries in need of accessible, economical meeting space. We are cognizant of the high cost of heating or air conditioning the social hall or school for small groups. The old rectory is an ideal site for small ministry meetings, and especially for small groups involving senior citizens. When restoration is complete, the old rectory will also be used to house parish historical artifacts, an historical library, and much-needed FOST office space. FOST is working now toward code compliance for occupancy, and will then begin the process of making the building suitable for those uses.

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**The Importance of Being Earnest**

The Friends will seek grants for some of the necessary restoration work in the historic complex. We must assure potential grantors that the existing buildings will not be demolished, and will be used appropriately. A master plan defining the status of present-day structures and future projections may be required. Most grant-givers expect not only matching funds, but also the unequivocal support of the parish community.

**Historical Marker**

We are still engaged in the process of applying for a State Historical Marker for the old church. This is a time-consuming task and requires documentation that must meet the criteria outlined by the PA Historical and Museum Commission. Our research confirms that Old St. Thomas Church is the oldest, original Catholic parish church in continuous use in Delaware County. Currently, the only functions taking place there are Saturday Mass, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and Rosary Devotions on Mondays, and occasional funerals and weddings. Considering the economic and historic realities, it is our hope that daily Mass will once again be said in the old church.

**Congratulations to the Winners**

The Friends of Old St. Thomas Spirit Award recognizes an eighth grade parishioner for carrying out the parish tradition of Catholic, Christian values in the parish and in the community.

This year the award was given to Casey Devine. Casey was honored for donating his time and talents to the CCD program, the Caring and Sharing committee, the Parish Fair and for the many hours he spends working in the rectory and with the school faculty. On June 22, 2000 The Friends presented Casey with a \$100 savings bond and his name was engraved on the commemorative plaque that hangs in the social hall.

Also, for the first time the award committee decided to present a Special Recognition Award. It went to Heather Ann Miller, also of St. Thomas School. A \$50 savings bond and certificate of merit were given to Heather in recognition of the significant amount of time and devotion she spent in assisting with the care of a critically ill relative. Heather still found time to participate in school activities and hold a part-time job.

FOST will be looking for Spirit Award nominees this coming spring. If you know an eighth grade parishioner who exemplifies the characteristics recognized by this award, please take time to nominate the student. Forms will be available in the narthex in March, 2001.

**History for Kids at St. Thomas**

FOST donated funds to the St. Thomas School Library for the purchase of 5 volumes on the colonies of Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland and Virginia. FOST intends to continue to help augment the history collection in the future.

**Founding Family Returns**

The first Willcox Family Reunion took place at the Ivy Mills homestead in September. They came, 100+ strong, from as far away as New England and Georgia. FOST was there to help, by conducting tours around the Historic Resources District and at the homestead, recording the event on film, and assisting in host duties. St. Thomas gained new friends through the event, adding to the untold numbers of parish "alumni" around the world.

**Looking Ahead**

Although we were able to rebuild the horse shed, FOST is keenly aware that the other buildings and part of the grounds in the historic district are in need of major repairs and better maintenance. Funds for the horse shed and rectory have been generated from FOST craft classes and donations given for these specific projects.

FOST is responsible for raising all the funds to address these problems and for the maintenance and preservation of the old church. A daunting task! We have a dedicated core group of people who actively participate in our ministry but we must have more staffing support as well as financial support if our ministry is to achieve its goals.

The history of St. Thomas the Apostle parish and the historic complex should be preserved for future generations. Will it? In the final analysis, you will decide. You can help by volunteering, making a financial contribution, joining FOST, participating in the Honor and Memorial program or attending a craft class.

Simply stated...**OUR FUTURE DEPENDS ON YOU!**

**SUPPORT THE ONGOING WORK OF FOST**

**BECOME A FRIEND AND HELP PRESERVE OUR HISTORY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS!**

**Annual Membership**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Individual Membership \$ 5.00 yearly \_\_\_\_\_

Family Membership \$10.00 yearly \_\_\_\_\_

This year I would like to make a special contribution to aid the Friends in their work. \_\_\_\_\_

Please contact me, I would like information about volunteering. I can be reached at (Phone #) \_\_\_\_\_

Mail your check, payable to FOST to PO Box 19, Chester Heights, PA 19017