

A Reminder: Free guided tours of the St. Thomas Historic Campus and the Willcox Homestead are offered on the 4th Sunday of the months June through October, from 1 to 4 pm. Last tour begins at 3:30 pm.

St. John Neumann, 4th Bishop of Philadelphia

Here at St. Thomas we have a special connection to this holy man who blessed the cornerstone of our church, the only church in Delaware County to have this distinction and the only Catholic church to be built in this county during his tenure as bishop. He also ordained two of our former pastors: Rev. Nicholas Walsh in 1855 and Rev. William Cook in 1857.

Since the 1720's Catholic services had been held in the Willcox home at Ivy Mills. In the mid 1800's increasing numbers of European immigrants were settling in this area to work in the many nearby mills. By the early 1850's the Ivy Mills homestead was no longer adequate for the large number of worshipers. James Willcox donated land on which a new church, St. Thomas the Apostle at Ivy Mills, was to be built, the title having been conveyed from the former owner, Nicholas Walter, directly to Bishop Neumann, in trust and dated August 26, 1852.

The August 26, 1852 issue of the **Catholic Herald** states *"that in consequence of the rain, the ceremony of laying of the corner-stone at St. Thomas at Ivy Mills, Delaware County did not take place last Sunday. It will be laid on next Sunday the 29th, instead, at the same hour 3 PM."* We do not know how many people attended the laying of the cornerstone at St. Thomas by Bishop Neumann, but we do know he also administered the sacrament of Confirmation to 24 people in St. Mary's Chapel in the Willcox home. Regarding St. Thomas Church, written in Neumann's personal note book is this description; **"Ivy Mills: St. Thomas Ap. 60' x 40' stone."**

In a short historical account of old Saint Thomas, Mary Brackett Willcox (wife of James) writes: *"Now we may say another era has commenced. Our good Bishop Kenrick having been removed to Balt [sic] as Archbishop—and Bishop Neumann filling his place for 8 years—seeing the increase of catholicity in this place as we having a Church deem'd it necessary to supply the necessities of the congregation now amounting to 500-600 members to send a resident pastor in the person of the Rev. Maugin."* Interestingly, although originally ordained as a secular priest, Neumann was given permission to enter the Redemptorists

and took his final vows of the order in 1842.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) required that each parish should be visited once every two years by the presiding Bishop. Neumann made it a point to observe this edict as best he could. When he arrived in Philadelphia the diocese had 170,000 Catholics residing in over 35,000 square miles. When he made these visitations, he not only had to review the parish property, financial accounts and parish registers but he made it a point to work by preaching, hearing confessions, conferring sacraments and visiting the sick. No matter the assignment, others' needs were always his primary concern.

Catholic Education was a priority for Bishop Neumann and he organized a Catholic Diocesan school board and promoted the establishment of a parochial school system. He invited various religious orders to come and teach in the schools and he founded the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Francis at Glen Riddle (who, we know, in the 20th century taught "Sunday School" for youngsters at Saint Thomas). By 1860 there were one hundred schools and records show that more than eighty churches were begun or completed during his tenure of less than eight years.

Bishop Neumann's material accomplishments were secondary to his main objective, the spiritual welfare of his people. He was the first bishop to organize Forty Hours Devotion on a diocesan-wide basis. Our parish's current weekly Adoration in the 1852 church is a wonderful reminder of our special connection to Neumann. He also actively promoted devotion to the Blessed Mother in every parish. He was the first to propose that the Feast of the Immaculate Conception be made a Holy Day of Obligation in the U.S.

There are a number of questions we are not able to answer yet: How often did Neumann visit Ivy Mills? Who accompanied him? Who decided, and how, what the new church was to look like? Is the 1852 church of standard design? Research resources at the Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center (PAHRC) may be able to provide answers to these and other questions.

By 1859, Bishop Neumann was not well and on January 5, 1860 he collapsed on Vine Street and was carried into a nearby residence, where he died. His body lay in state for five days and thousands came to bid him farewell. It was his wish to be laid to rest at St. Peter's, a Redemptorist Church in Philadelphia.

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Memberships and the Honor and Memorial Programs are the PRIMARY SOURCES OF INCOME for the Friends. The monies derived from these programs enable **FOST** to continue to care for and maintain the 1852 church, 1874 rectory and outbuildings. Why not join **FOST** today? Fill out the membership form and mail with your check to the address listed below. Participating in the Memorial and Honor programs honors or memorializes individuals. For donations of \$25 or more, individuals or groups may enroll the name of a living or deceased person in the Old Saint Thomas Memorial Book, a part of our permanent archives which is displayed on special occasions. Recipients are notified by mail and donors receive a receipt.

The Friends of Old Saint Thomas at Ivy Mills, PO Box 19, Chester Heights, PA 19017

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For donors only: please check one:

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5/09

THE FRIENDS OF OLD SAINT THOMAS
at Ivy Mills

Volume 16, No. 2

Fall/Winter 2009

NEWSLETTER

Why We Do It...And Our Greatest Need

As a US citizen, if you were asked about your American Heritage, you might recall important events that secured our freedom and influenced the founding of our country. Most of us know the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia at Independence Hall; that George Washington led soldiers into battle against the British and held them together during the harsh conditions they encountered at Valley Forge. The Liberty Bell was rung to announce a new country. Many of us have visited these sites. Why? We want that connection; seeing is powerful and helps us to understand and connect with the places that are historically important to us.

American Catholics are not as familiar with the events that influenced and determined the outcome of the Church in this new country. Here at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish we have a rich history whose roots precede the founding of the United States. Catholicism was forbidden in other colonies, but the exception was Pennsylvania due to William Penn's policy of religious toleration. Right here in Ivy Mills, three groups: Catholics, Episcopalians and Quakers made a conscious effort to live and work in a peaceful atmosphere in Concord Township's "Toleration Triangle." Far too often, discrimination against Catholics was commonplace elsewhere. The success of the community surrounding Ivy Mills did not go unnoticed; in all probability, its example influenced the first amendment in the Bill of Rights, guaranteeing all citizens freedom of religion. The "Toleration Triangle" contributed an essential element to what became the unique American value of religious freedom.

Our Pennsylvania Catholic heritage started with a handful of the faithful in the Willcox house and continued into a parish that today counts several thousand members. Six neighboring parishes were missions started by priests serving at St. Thomas the Apostle. Today, 280 years later, the Philadelphia Archdiocese has over 1,450,000 Catholics.

The Willcox home and grounds, our historic 1852 Church, 1874 rectory, carriage house, horse shed, and church cemeteries are all important artifacts that tell the story not only of our parish, but also of the evolution of Catholicism in Pennsylvania. St. Thomas the Apostle Parish has the distinction of being the oldest Roman

Catholic Parish in Pennsylvania. **FOST** promotes tours of these significant sites to put into context the importance this small community played in the development of this nation and its rightful place as part of the American experience.

The Story of St. Thomas is ongoing. As parish members, we too are a part of parish history. What we do today...our words, deeds and actions will be the legacy we leave to future generations. So we (**FOST**) do all we do to keep our parish site as available to the public as Independence Hall and Valley Forge. That's our legacy to the future.

What's our greatest need? **HELP!** More volunteers! For tasks, administration, research, school programs, and so on. Please consider the stakes, and please think about becoming an active **FOST-er**. See www.fost.us or call 610-459-8392 for more information.

A-caroling We Go

Each year **FOST** hosts a special event for members. This year we are inviting members, their families and guests (children are welcome) to partake in a memorable holiday get-together at the Ivy Mills Homestead. **FOST** is turning back the clock to capture that special time when friends and neighbors came together during the holidays to socialize, be entertained and sing Christmas Carols.

This stately home will be decorated for the season similar to the way one would find it in the 1850s. Holiday greenery and soft candlelight will set the mood for the evening. Professional musicians will be playing for your listening pleasure and to accompany the singing. Father Christmas will be making an appearance and another special guest will be present.

Judith Ilika is chairing this committee of Guides & Event Helpers. A great deal of thought and research has taken place to make this an unforgettable experience. Bakers have volunteered to make hundreds of home-made cookies, some from old, treasured recipes. Years ago, wassail and cider were the special beverages served to "company" during the Christmas season. Judith and the committee have worked hard to develop the best-tasting beverages, wassail and cider among them.

Save the date: Sunday evening, December 6th ongoing from 6:30 to 8:30 pm. Members' invitations have been mailed. We are limited to a restricted number of guests so be sure to respond early. This is a holiday party you don't want to miss! Not a member? Join now.

Volunteer Appreciation

The FOST committee hosted a breakfast on Saturday, October 31 in the 1874 rectory to thank our dedicated volunteers for their service this past year. To our Tour Guides, Gardeners, Church Cleaners, Event Helpers, Wedding Coordinator and Archives Assistant who consistently share your time and talent for FOST endeavors, THANK YOU!

Donating to the Church in 1910

In 1910, the pastor, Father Mullin wrote the following concerning the Block Collection. "There are few living-out* people in this parish, most of them living here only four or five months in the year, yet they contributed out of their slender means nearly one fourth of the whole amount of \$490.00 God bless them!"

**Term used to describe servants employed & living in private residences.*

FOST Meetings

All are invited to attend FOST meetings on the 4th Tuesday of the month at 2:00 pm in the 1874 Rectory. Your suggestions and ideas are welcome.

Eagle Scout Projects

The Boy Scouts have helped FOST in many ways over the years. They have successfully undertaken several projects that enhance the appearance of the historic district or assisted with research. Their contributions of time and hard work are very much appreciated. We would like to recognize the following:

- **Cole Brown and Peter Gbur** for installing Belgian blocks on the sides of the church and around the rectory.
- **Jim Gannon** for installing pavers in the horse shed.
- **Doug Ralph** for installing a new base for Mary's statue and work in the Marian garden.
- **Anthony Lizza and Stephen Iacobucci** for removing underbrush and clearing trees along the cemetery border.
- **Patrick Hammer** for research and production of an up-to-date plot plan for a portion of the cemetery.
- **Matt Glessner** for repairing the driveway stone wall.

FOST would also like to thank Mr. and Mrs. Brown (Cole's parents) for their donation of materials and installation of new basement doors for the 1852 Church.

A Reminder: As the Christmas season approaches, you may want to consider enrolling living or deceased relatives or friends in the St. Thomas Honor and Memorial Program. Their names will be inscribed in the St. Thomas Memorial Book, a part of our permanent archives which is displayed on various occasions and tour dates.

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Please make checks payable to FOST and mail to address above. Thank you.