

The Friends of Old Saint Thomas at Ivy Mills

NEWSLETTER

Volume 23, No. 1
e-mail: fost@friendsofoldstthomas.org

Spring/Summer 2016
www.friendsofoldstthomas.org

The Steeple

Major Project Ahead: Repair and Restoration

The 1852 church is instantly recognizable in large part because of its steeple. According to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, church buildings “are not simply gathering places but signify and make visible the Church living in this place, the dwelling of God with men reconciled and united in Christ.” Old Saint Thomas has been visible to all who pass by for well over 150 years; it is still testifying to the place of God in our daily life.

Seemingly useless building extensions, steeples were most common to English, French and German churches. They were considered essential, though, because they were symbols “of the heavenly aspirations of [the] pious...”, which dominated their lives. Many English churches, especially, are built with simple spires based on designs of famed architect Christopher Wren in the late 17th century, though even Wren’s designs sometimes culminated in domes atop towers. Continental spires, where they exist, tend to be much more ornate.

Given the predominantly English population in western Delaware County early on, it is not surprising that the church built at Ivy Mills in the mid-19th century took on the same look as those in England and New England: rectangular buildings with plain interiors and steeples. And, New England native Mary Brackett Willcox of Ivy Mills undoubtedly had a strong say in the construction of the old church. The contrast with Catholic churches in Philadelphia is striking: while some have steeples, many have domes or adjacent towers, and present a more continental look.

Repair of the old church steeple is FOST’s next major undertaking. Stabilized in 2005, the structure is due for a substantial overhaul. Parishioner John McManus has graciously offered to help determine the scope of work, and has enlisted the aid of a structural engineer with whom he has worked. The project is under preliminary study now. Sure to cost many thousands of dollars, we expect to have firm estimates of total cost by summertime.

A fund-raising campaign will begin once the amount is known. Please consider contributing to this effort as you have so generously supported FOST up to now.

Taking the Tour...

Free Summertime tours have been a staple of the parish schedule for more than ten years. Thousands of visitors have come from all across the country and from local and regional communities. Here they engaged with the past that led to today’s lively parish and school and the vibrant use of a preserved Ivy Mills. Thanks to our knowledgeable and dedicated team of docents, the FOST Guides, our visitors gained a keen understanding of the Saint Thomas/Ivy Mills legacy, itself central to regional and national history.

The time has come, though, to revise the schedule. Beginning this year, ***free public tours of Old Saint Thomas and Ivy Mills will be offered once in the Fall. This year’s date is Sunday, October 2, 2016.*** Watch for reminder *Bulletin* announcements as the date approaches.

Private tours will continue without change, with dates and times arranged individually. The tours include both locations and last 1½ to 2 hours, unless a single site is specifically requested. Either way, a minimum \$25 donation is requested for five persons or fewer.

Please e-mail fost@friendsofoldstthomas.org or phone 610 459-8392 to arrange a private tour.

Thank You!

Driveway Walls Repair, and Then Some

Great thanks to parishioner Patrick Close and fellow students at Williamson College of the Trades in Lima for repairing the front driveway walls in March. Patrick took part in the first-ever Williamson Service Week by organizing and carrying out the four-day project. He could have gone anywhere, but he chose Old Saint Thomas! Not only did the group complete the original repair work, but with time remaining they identified another faulty stone wall and completed that work, too. They also found and fixed two driveway potholes, procuring the necessary supplies on their own. Patrick and his team made productive use of the entire week. Best wishes to a generous and enterprising graduate.

Thank you to members and donors
April 16, 2015 - April 15, 2016

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

Checks payable, please, to FOST
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The Honor & Memorial programs honor the living and memorialize deceased individuals. Donations of \$15.00 or more enroll designated persons in the St Thomas Honor/Memorial Book displayed on special occasions. Recipients are notified by U.S. mail; donors receive a receipt.

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Fall/Winter 2016
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FOST's 25th Anniversary! *Building History at Old Saint Thomas*

The Friends of Old Saint Thomas (FOST) was formed in 1991 to save the 1852 church and to preserve and build awareness of our parish history and its historical setting. With steady support from members and donors, the organization kept the story alive through building maintenance and preservation, through archives and artifact collections, exhibits, numerous tours, lectures and other programs for parishioners, students and visitors.

Old Saint Thomas church, built in 1852, is a local landmark and the home of Pennsylvania's oldest Catholic parish, founded in 1729. It is also the oldest Catholic church building in continuous use in Delaware County, and the only one whose cornerstone was blessed by St. John Neumann who later returned to administer confirmation. It is part of a unique historical area in Concord Township, known as the "Toleration Triangle", where William Penn's policy of religious freedom took root and flourished in the early 18th century, even before it did in Philadelphia. Since the beginning, when worshippers consisted of only a single family, the parish has grown to about 3,000 families.

The 1852 church is of prime importance in teaching all parishioners, visitors and citizens about the fundamental role of religious freedom in local, state and national history. The story is of greater importance than ever, with religious freedom and Western culture under attack around the world and even in our own country.

Our part in getting our fellow Catholics and fellow Americans to understand this story is indeed small. But the story of the founding Catholic parish in the one American colony that successfully implemented religious freedom is exceptional. By doing what we do, the Friends of Old Saint Thomas hope that ever greater numbers of persons can better connect with our own little history here, then with the whole story of Abraham's descendants, with the Catholic Church, and with the founding and flourishing of the U.S.A.

25th Anniversary Restoration/Repair Projects **The Fundraising Campaign**

The Windows, the Steeple and the Heat

Since the Spring "Newsletter", when FOST announced an upcoming major project to repair and restore the steeple, new information has changed our priorities.

We consulted Philadelphia-based steeplejacks and engaged a professional structural engineer from Media to determine the extent of work needed on **the steeple**. As a result, we learned that the 2005 steeple stabilization work was much more substantial than we had thought. While there are some concerns as in any structure, stability is not among them. The siding should be addressed soon, but immediate repair is not called for at this time. Thus, the total steeple restoration project can be deferred for now, along with replacing **the outdated heating system**, which works well enough.

The stained glass windows are another story; they require attention now. Installed in 1898, they have been an outstanding feature of old Saint Thomas church ever since. Eight first floor side windows are German-made, by the Franz Meyer Co. in Munich. Two front windows, two vestibule windows and the major Saint Thomas window are American made. We sought advice on their current status from Cathedral Stained Glass Studios, Inc., a distinguished Cheltenham firm. We learned of several areas of serious concern: leading between the colored pieces is weakening, support bars are bent and rusting, colors are fading, broken glass in a few vent panels weakens them. Further, decades of accumulated grime requires cleaning, and the exterior protective glass, state-of-the-art in 1898, is harming the windows now because of its lack of venting; and its design and discoloration make daytime viewing difficult from the outside. Some exterior framing is rotting, and numerous paint jobs over the decades have left the frames unsightly.

Fundraising for all three projects began in September. Enough was raised so that four north side windows are now complete and fully re-installed. Funds are in hand for two more, slated for work as soon as milder weather returns in

2017. **Great thanks to the generous FOST members and friends** who have so far donated over a third of all the windows' total cost of \$87,000 (the first phase of the Anniversary Projects). An anonymous donor has covered the cost of restoring two side windows, and two additional donors have paid for restoring two more. Over 40 additional donations account for the remainder. We are most grateful.

YOU CAN HELP!

Please consider joining this effort with a financial contribution as a direct cash amount, or perhaps as a stock transfer (which eliminates the capital gains tax for donor and recipient alike, and for which a protocol is already in place). **Use the enclosed form** or call Mike Squyres, Treasurer, 610-459-8392, for additional information or to discuss arrangements that would best suit you. *If you have already given, please pass the form on to a friend with an invitation to help the cause as well.*

Other News

More Colonial Catholics!

Until last February, the only family surname associated with 18th century Ivy Mills Catholics was Willcox, St. Thomas' 1729 parish founders. Research last winter in the Archives of old Saint Joseph's in Philadelphia, however, has revealed dozens of additional surnames.

From the one remaining 18th century book of baptisms registered at Old St. Joseph's, we now know that from 1758 to 1775 at least forty-eight other families who visited Ivy Mills were Catholic, or included one Catholic parent. The records list the baptized, most often – not always infants, along with the parents' and sponsors' names. Almost all baptisms were performed by the illustrious Fr. Ferdinand Farmer, S.J., who visited homes throughout southeastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey. More about this significant find in the next "Newsletter".

"Holy Honey"

You may have seen or heard about the major bee infestation at the 1852 church last summer. The beekeeper who removed the bees reported that about 60,000 bees made their home atop the vestibule, and produced honey that is as good as any found anywhere.

Volunteer Breakfast

FOST's annual volunteer breakfast was held on November 5th this year. Over twenty-five volunteers help to keep all activities underway. It takes all of us, in seven different committees, to do everything. It was particularly nice that those volunteers who could be there went home after the breakfast with some "holy honey", produced by our volunteer cloistered bees.

FOST Honor & Memorial programs honor the living and memorialize deceased individuals. Donations of \$15.00 or more enroll designated persons in the St Thomas Honor/Memorial Book displayed on special occasions. Recipients are notified by U.S. mail; donors receive a receipt.

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