

Bridgeville Historical Society

102 S. William Street, P. O. Box 306, Bridgeville, DE 19933

May 2013



TALE OF OIL STRIKE STARTS LAND BOOM

Delaware Farm Prices Soaring as Drillers Report Success Near Bridgeville.

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES

BRIDGEVILLE, Del., May 9. -- A group of employes [sic] of the Cleveland Petroleum Corporation drove into Bridgeville tonight with samples of oil which they said had been struck at a depth of 400 feet on a 1,000-acre farm owned jointly by Senator John G. Townsend and Clayton A. Bunting.

Less than two hours later the adult population of every town and village in Sussex County was in the throes of a boom and farm prices in the vicinity were soaring rapidly skyward.

Telephones in the homes of the owners of land were jingling with the calls of concession hunters. Real estate men were lining up "prospects." Alone of all his neighbors for a radius of twenty-five miles, Mr. Bunting remained calm.

"I've got a lease," he said, "which guarantees me a share of the profits if the well should prove a success. The people drilling tell me the farm lies over a lode of natural gas and oil extending twenty-five miles north of town.

"I am told the company has leased thousands of acres of adjoining lands so that nobody else can cut in on them. At the time our lease was signed we asked if this was a stock-selling proposition. We were told the company has no stock for sale."

Mr. Bunting said he had been told that the company expected to find natural gas at 1,800 feet and oil at lower depths. The drillers told people here that the oil had begun to flow at 400 feet.

All sorts of stories were being circulated here, in Seaford and in Selbyville tonight about the rise in the price of farm lands. One man who had been trying to sell a small holding for a few hundred dollars was offered \$1,500. "I wouldn't take \$4,000 for it now," he said.

May 10, 1934 Copyright © The New York Times

For several years before that 1934 news, the Cleveland Petroleum Company had been quietly buying mineral rights for one dollar and one-eighth share of whatever oil or gas was recovered. That was during The Great Depression and no one really thought seriously about an oil strike in Delaware.

The Cleveland engineers walked into George Lord's gas station/restaurant/store in Bridgeville with a soda pop bottle half filled with "a dark, thick fluid" and dreams of another oil boom reminiscent of early days of the petroleum industry in Texas, Oklahoma, and California was on.

An article from the *Milford Chronicle* the same week added that in Seaford, "merchants were getting together on a plan to build everything from hot dog stands to hotels as near they can to the site."

According to a 1982 geological survey by the University of Delaware, another oil well was drilled one mile from the first 85-ft derrick followed by a third one. The site of the test wells in Bridgeville was the Apple Tree Farm which is used for "Punkin' Chuckin'" activities today.

The Cleveland company transferred their leases to another local group that formed the Milford Oil Company. This company interested Sun Oil Company in more drilling and as many as seven new test wells were driven near Salisbury, Maryland and in New Jersey. Oil and gas flows were not reported in any of the wells.

There is no available information on why the Bridgeville site was originally chosen for oil and gas testing, but it surely provided a bright spot for folks living through such hard times.

"May 14th 1935. This photo taken 5:30 P.M. of Mr. Swan's oil works near Bridgeville, Del" (written on back)



Photograph courtesy of Michael Ballenger

Bridgeville Historical Society

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Next Meeting

Wednesday, May 8, 2013

St. Mary's Parish House
N. William St. - 6:30 p.m.

Bring a covered-dish. Meat and beverages will be supplied by BHS.

Guest Speaker: Thomas J. Ryan
"Delaware During the Civil War"

You may wish to purchase his book, Essays on Delaware During the Civil War: A Political, Military, and Social Perspective and have this author sign it. The cost is \$16.95

In Memoriam

Nance Betze (Patron member)

New Members

Linda Colona Richard & Sally Ray
Joan Morton Curtis & Heidi Spicer

Membership Renewals

Our new fiscal year began on April 1, and therefore it is time to renew your dues. Check your mailing address label and if there is an "R" beside your name, we have not received your dues renewal.

Single \$15.00
Family \$25.00
Patron \$75.00
Life member \$500.00

Dues may be mailed to

Bridgeville Historical Society,
P. O. Box 306, Bridgeville, DE 19933

Bridgeville Dearborn Wagon Gifted



A turn of the century Dearborn wagon commonly called a "Durbin" has been donated to the Society by Mark Williams.

The wagon was purchased in Bridgeville in 1913 by a local farmer, Chauncey Hartzel, and he passed it to Mark in 1966. Mark and his parents, Harold and Roberta Williams, restored the wagon, changing its paint from blue to red.

Dearborns can be pulled by one horse or two and date back to 1821. The original design is attributed to General Henry Dearborn, and had a top and side curtains. Dearborn wagons eventually evolved into light four-wheeled farm wagons.

The significance of this addition to the Society's collection relates to the universal use by local farmers to carry their produce to market or the train depot.



"Other products, cantaloupes, strawberries, fruits and other vegetables were usually hauled into town for the commission merchant to buy.

Stake wagons, referred to as Dearborns (pronounced "durbins"), would line up on Railroad Avenue and buyers would bid on the basis of the quality of the products. After an acceptable price was agreed upon, the produce would be taken on down to reefer (refrigerator) freight cars assigned to the different buyers. The wagon would be unloaded and that evening the car would be sealed and be sent on its way to the eastern market destination." (Koder Collison)



This particular wagon was manufactured in Bridgeville by John E. Harris and the brass plate noting the maker is still on the back end.

John E. Harris was born in Maryland in 1854, but by 1870 his family had moved to Vienna, MD. His father and older brother were blacksmiths and John was a 16 year old apprentice .

He married in 1872 and according to the U. S. census in 1870, he was living in Seaford and working as a blacksmith. By 1900, John and Annie Smith were in Bridgeville and had eleven children. The 1920 U. S. census shows him living on S. Main St. and owning a blacksmith shop.

The 1912 Sanborn insurance map shows a blacksmith and wagon painting shop on corner of Mechanic Street and Union Alley that could have been his.

35th Auction-Social

SAVE THE DATE: Saturday, September 7, 2013

Our annual Auction and Social will be held on that night at the Bridgeville Volunteer Fire Company's banquet room beginning with the social hour at 6:00 p.m. followed by the auction promptly at 7:00 p.m. Frank McGraghan has again consented to be our entertaining auctioneer.

As you know this is a prime fundraiser for our organization, which is dedicated to preserving and celebrating the history of our town and the surrounding communities.

We need our members to donate an article or two of quality or make a monetary donation. It takes all of us to keep the Old Fire House Museum and Cahall Park going.

Our tax number is 51-020-1413.

Members meet at the museum every Tuesday to identify and catalog items in the collection and work to improve the displays and exhibits.

The park is beautiful and enjoyed by many, but your financial support as a member is needed to maintain both places.

We will gladly pick up items from you. Please call me at (302) 337-3347 or call President Hardesty at (302)337-8595 if you have something that you would like to donate to make this auction a success. Mark your calendar and plan to attend this fundraiser. It is really a fun night!

Eleanor H. Bennett Co-Chairperson

BHS Cemetery Project

There are numerous monuments in the Bridgeville Cemetery that need repairs and cleaning. Some of those stones belong to Bridgeville families that no longer have living descendants in the area and some are war veterans

The Board of Directors has voted to pay for repairs and/or re-alignment of several of those stones.



On **Saturday, May 11, at 10:00 a.m.** volunteers will meet in the cemetery and begin cleaning moss and mildew off some of the older monuments.

If you can help, join the volunteers at 10:00 a.m. at the St. Mary's Church gate.

Wear old clothes as bleach will be used.

ICE CREAM Fundraiser



Wed. & Thur. May 22-23 12-7p.m.

Fri., May 24, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Visit **Vanderwende's Farm Creamery** on the above dates and have some of their delicious farm-fresh ice cream treats.

The Society will receive 20% of your purchase. Just present a flyer that will given out at the meeting on May 8. Flyers will also be emailed to local members or can be obtained from any officer or Board member.



4003 Seashore Highway (Rt. 404) - Bridgeville, DE
(About 4 miles northwest of Bridgeville)

Museum & Park Matters

Maintaining the Old Fire House Museum and Cahall Park is a constant and sometimes expensive undertaking. Water leaching into the building has been an on-going problem, so waterproof paint has been applied to some of the inside walls. Guttering has been installed for the first time to keep water away from the museum.

A new pump had to be installed in the park's pond. Fertilizer has been applied this spring and now the weekly mowing has begun. The park proves to be a beautiful place for weddings and quite a few have been booked for this year.

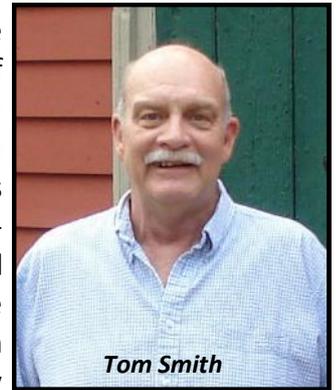
The Society depends on your dues and financial support to keep these places looking their best.

Museum Openings

The Old Fire House Museum and the Davis Building are open on the first Sunday of each month from May to November from 11:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. Visitors are also welcomed each Tuesday morning from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Group visits can be arranged by calling 337-7600

Not so long ago...

I grew up in Bridgeville and my grandparents had a farm near Delaware Route 404 and the Marshy Hope Creek Bridge, get out your Delaware map! Some of my earliest recollections were of their farmhouse, especially the kitchen. When I would visit in the winter I slept in the kitchen because it was the warmest room in the house. There was NO heat upstairs. The centerpiece of their kitchen was a giant woodstove that provided not only warmth, but this is where my grandmother cooked three substantial meals...EVERYDAY. Breakfast was always a real treat...fresh eggs, pancakes, scrapple or sausage and biscuits...all fresh from the farm. If the food were any fresher, the hen would have come into the kitchen and laid the eggs in the frying pan. Sleeping in that warm kitchen while my grandparents slept in an unheated, winter-chilled bedroom...cooking on a woodstove...foods so fresh and delicious that even today I can remember them...that is the way it was, not so long ago.



Bridgeville native, Thomas G. Smith, is the owner of the Delaware Made General Store on Loockerman Street in Dover, DE. For almost twenty years he has written short articles about his memories of growing up in Bridgeville for his store's newsletters. With his permission, some of those stories will be retold in this publication. The editor hopes Tom's writings will encourage others to begin recording their own memories of life in our town. Grab a blank notebook, get out an audio or video recorder and start saving your stories. Future generations will love you for doing it.



Bridgeville Historical Society

P. O. Box 306

Bridgeville, DE 19933

Remember the Dates

May 8, 2013

General Membership Meeting

Covered-dish

St. Mary's Parish House - 6:30 p.m.

Program: *Thomas J. Ryan*

"Delaware During the Civil War"

May 5, June 2, July 7, Aug. 4

Museum Open

11:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

May 11

Cemetery Project 10:00 a.m.

May 22-24

Vanderwende's Farm

Creamery Fundraiser

Sept. 7, 2013

**** Annual Auction-Social ****

Social Hour 6:00 p.m.- Auction 7:00 p.m.

Bridgeville Vol. Fire Co.