

Wrightstown Township Historical Commission

Minutes

4 September 2025

Call to Order: Chair Betty Davis called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m.

Present: Chair Betty Davis, Mary Lee Johnson, Beverly Wilson, and Karl Niederer. Absent: Jane DelBianco. Guest: Jane Magne, Township Supervisor (arrived 1:20 p.m.).

Agenda: Additions and Changes - None.

Approval of Minutes: 7 August 2025 meeting, APPROVED.

Treasurer's Report: No report presented. The Commission would like the George Donat memorial fund donation of \$1,310.00 referenced in the 7 August 2025 minutes to become a line item in the Treasurer's report in the future. Karl reported that Jane Magne will have a line for the Donat memorial in the 2026 budget and accounts for easier tracking of the funds.

Old Business:

1. **Quaker History Exhibit** — Karl reported that he is working with David Dutko, the Township's volunteer IT consultant, on plans to upload the expanded version of the exhibit on the Township's web site. He said the online virtual exhibit will include items selected for display that will not fit into the Township's exhibit case. Township Administrative Assistant Karen Sadovy informed the Commission that she has observed several visitors who have come to the building specifically to see the exhibit.
2. **Octagonal School** —
 - **Open Houses** — Assignments update:
 - **Sunday, 21 September**—Mary Lee and Karl (1:00-3:00); Betty and Izzy (3:00-5:00); Karl and Mary Lee will stay after 3:00 if necessary for the special event.
 - Featured event will be the County Recorder of Deeds exhibit of original deed books and remarks by Daniel J. McPhillips. Jane Magne will ask Supervisors Chester Pogonowski and Rob Lloyd to appear at the event. Karl will coordinate program roles and sequence with the officials.
 - Mary Lee reported that she has distributed notices of the Open House and special event to eleven local media outlets.
 - Karl presented a trifold brochure to publicize the event; 100 copies will be printed for distribution. (See ATTACHMENT A.)
 - Work session on Monday, 8 September, 1:00 p.m. to prepare Octagonal School for the event. Public Works will deliver folding tables to the site.
 - **Sunday, 19 October**—Mary Lee and Karl (1:00-3:00); Betty and Izzy (3:00-5:00)
 - Featured event will be an early-19th century musical performance by Marti and Bob Stevens and Nancy and Forest Deal. Set-up outside near benches as last year weather-permitting; otherwise, set-up inside.
 - Township Building will be unlocked during the event for restroom access.
 - **Franklinia tree** — Bart Wilson has obtained a replacement tree from Gasper Landscapes. Jane Magne has the tree and will arrange for its planting along the well-drained hillside near the school.

- **Parking solution** —
 - Relocation of main parking area is needed due to sharply increased visitation to Open Houses, creating congestion in Second Street Pike parking area.
 - Jane Magne reported that Twining Construction Co. will install a gravel parking area in the field adjacent accessed via the Swamp Road curb cut. Township Engineer Cindy Van Hise is securing a permit from PennDOT. It will not be completed in time for the remaining 2025 Open Houses, however.
 - Interim parking solution will be roping off current entrance and lot; Karl will design and order up to four corrugated plastic directional signs for posting along Second Street Pike and Swamp Road to adjacent field parking; cost will be charged to Commission's supplies and materials account.
- 3. **Commission Report to Township Supervisors** — No report in August. Next report to the Supervisors by Karl at their 20 October meeting.
- 4. **Placing Prints in Township Building** — Mary Lee reported having hung several of the Commission's historic prints in the Township office suite and rehung in new locations others already there. Karl still needs to install captions for the prints displayed in the Public Meeting Room.
- 5. **Mega Way Development History** — Work on project will resume in October.
- 6. **Wrightstown Historical Information Scanning Project** — Karl reported that Lisa (Loeffler) Fee has begun scanning the Historic Sites file on a weekly basis. She has created a spreadsheet inventory of file contents with embedded images of the scanned documents and photos. Lisa and Karl will consult with archivists at Hopewell Valley Historical Society in Pennington, NJ on 22 September to fine-tune project methods.
- 7. **Gaine House Documents** — Betty and Mary Lee completed inventorying the Gaine documents in August. Mary Lee reported that she had given copies of items relating to the 1921 Bryn Athyn train wreck to Old York Road Historical Society President David Rowland. (Wrightstown resident Mabel S. Gaine survived the wreck.)

New Business:

1. **793 Penns Park Road, Tax Parcel 53-014-027.** The Commission discussed the property at this address (corner of Penns Park Road and Second Street Pike), now under renovation to house offices and two apartments. The owner, Tommy Coates, recently appeared before the Board of Supervisors to present plans for the commercial property. Part of the Penns Park Historic District, the Commission would like to advise the owner on exterior treatment of the building that will preserve its historic integrity.
2. **Donation received.** John Behrle donated to the Commission's library a copy of *Bucks County: Photographs of Early Architecture*, by Aaron Siskind (1974). Karl will send a note thanking Mr. Behrle for his generous gift.

Next Meeting: Thursday, 2 October 2025.

Adjournment: 3:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



—Karl J. Niederer, Secretary



BUCKS COUNTY'S
ONLY SURVIVING
EIGHT-SIDED
SCHOOL

ADOPT-A-BOOK PROGRAM

*SAVING BUCKS COUNTY'S
HISTORIC DEED BOOKS*

Bucks County Recorder of Deeds Dan McPhillips continues the effort to save the county's historic deed books spanning 335 years, since 1684. Many of these books are ink-faded, stained, frayed and in some cases, even moldy. While all have been microfilmed, the original books are still requested on a regular basis.

The Recorder of Deeds is dedicated to preserving the rich documentary heritage of Bucks County. To that end, the office is having 700 of the oldest deed books treated and rebound, which will extend their life by at least 250 years.

The Adopt-a-Book program invites the community to become part of the process. For a contribution as small as \$10, friends of Bucks County heritage can adopt a deed book to help the preservation of history in Bucks County. For more information visit:

<https://www.buckscounty.gov/416/Adopt-A-Book>

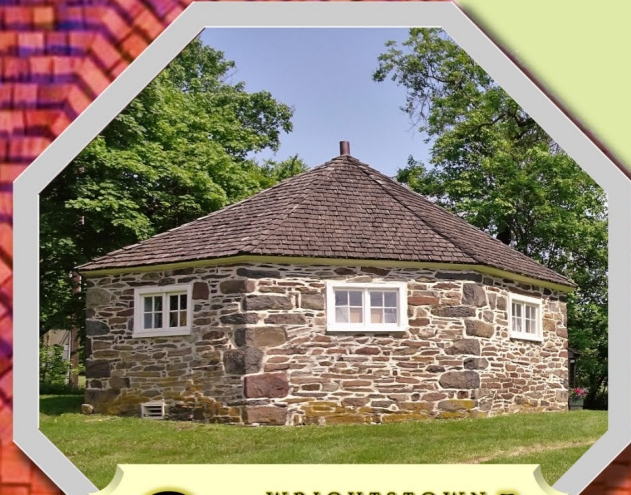


WRIGHTSTOWN
**Octagonal
SCHOOLHOUSE**

A National Historic
Register site operated by
Wrightstown Township
Historical Commission

2091 Second Street Pike
Wrightstown, PA 18940

<http://www.wrightstownpa.org>
history@wrightstownpa.org



WRIGHTSTOWN
**Octagonal
SCHOOLHOUSE**

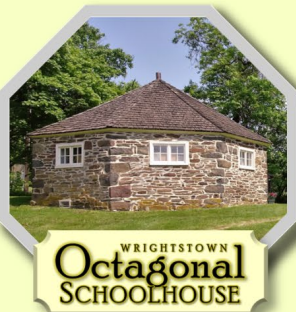
1802-1850

OPEN HOUSE

FEATURING

A display of original Deed Books
relating to the Octagonal School and
other historic places in
Wrightstown Township

Sunday, September 21, 2025
1:00—5:00 p.m.



Education has always been a high priority in the township. The early settlers were mainly Quakers, who believed strongly in the education of the children. Schools have existed here since circa 1721. These early

schools were organized by a board of trustees and parents paid a tuition for their children to attend.

In 1802 a group of residents banded together to lease the land at the corner of Swamp Road and Second Street Pike for 99 years from Joseph Burson.

They built a stone octagonal structure—considered ideal for classroom use. Its eight sides allowed maximum light to enter at all times of the day. Artificial light, so common today, was not as efficient in 1802. Oil lamps (long before the days of kerosene lamps and electricity) and candles provided only meager light for young eyes. In winter, a small, centrally located stove distributed warmth evenly throughout the room. Interior walls were usually whitewashed to give a cleaner, lighter environment.

In the mid-1800s, Pennsylvania mandated its local communities to provide basic education and township school districts were formed to build and maintain schools, hire teachers and provide an education for all children in the area. The private, subscription schools were no longer needed.

After its life as a school ended, the building served various purposes—as a toll-keeper's home and even as a chicken coop!

The Octagonal Schoolhouse has been restored by Wrightstown Township. Now under the stewardship of the Historical Commission, it is open to the public on certain dates. For more information please email history@wrightstownpa.org or call the Township Office on 215-598-3313 ext. 100.

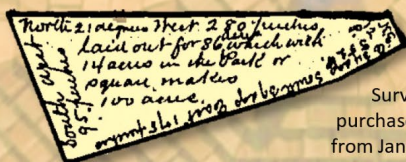
FEATURED EXHIBITION: IN WORD AND DEED:

Wrightstown history in original
Bucks County Deed Books

The Wrightstown Township Historical Commission is deeply grateful to Bucks County Recorder of Deeds Dan McPhillips for allowing the display of two restored original deed books containing historic Wrightstown land transactions at the September 21st Octagonal School Open House. The preserved books will be displayed only on this date.

CHAPMAN-SMITH DEED, 1697

Wrightstown's first English settlers were John and Jane Chapman, among the wave of Quakers escaping religious persecution to settle in William Penn's namesake colony in America in 1684. The Chapman's original land patent comprised 500 acres.



Survey of 100-acre tract
purchased by William Smith
from Jane Chapman in 1697.

John died in 1694, and three years later his widow Jane sold a 100-acre parcel to William Smith. Recorded in Book 2, page 267, Smith's tract lay at intersection of modern-day Penns Park and Mud roads. His log cabin home, built years before the deed, is the oldest dwelling in Wrightstown.



William Smith House, Mud Road
Charles Arnold postcard, early 20th century

OCTAGONAL SCHOOL LOT, 1802

Bucks County Deed Book 33, pages 404-5 records the 99-year lease of the lot on which the Octagonal School was constructed. On April 1, 1802, Wrightstown farmer Joseph Burson, "in Consideration of Having a School kept for the benefit and advantage of himself and others of the Neighborhood," leased 34 perches (about 12,500 square feet) of land at the corner of his property to Hugh Thompson, James Dungan, Wilson Wilding, Joseph Sackett, George Chapman, John Thompson, Thomas Thompson, Amos Wisner, Ebenezer Cunnard, Thomas Gain, and Jesse Anderson—the trustees of the proposed school. Burson stipulated that the lease was given "for the Special use and purpose above mentioned and for no other purpose whatever."



UNRESTORED DEED BOOKS

Years of neglect left hundreds of Bucks County deed books in deplorable condition. The County Recorder of Deeds Office has begun a program to preserve these books. See *over for information on Adopt-a-Book Program.*