

SPRINGFIELD SUN

A Montgomery Newspaper dedicated to the service of Springfield Township

www.springfieldsun.com

Oreland, PA, December 14 - 20, 2000

To subscribe: 215-646-6465
Price: 50 cents

Discovered paper mill topic of discussion

The township historical commission listened to a presentation Dec. 7 about the newly found ruins of an 18th century paper mill in Springfield.

By Chris Lilienthal
Staff Writer

The Wissahickon Creek and its tributaries sustained more than 75 milling complexes in the 18th and early 19th centuries, and although most of them have disappeared over the years, the remains of some continue to garner the interest of local historical organizations today.

The ruins of one 18th century paper mill, recently discovered in Springfield, was the subject of a special presentation of the Springfield Township Historical Society on Dec. 7.

After months of archival research, T. Scott Kreilick, an architectural conservator and metallurgist from Oreland, presented his findings on the ruins, defining them as the one-time paper mill of the Swiss-born clergyman Michael Schlatter.

Schlatter, a German Reformed clergyman, was born in St. Gall, Switzerland, in 1716. He settled in Philadelphia in 1746, traveling throughout Southeastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland and Virginia to provide assistance to struggling congregations of the German Reformed Church and to help organize new ones.

He married Maria Henrica Schleydorn in 1747, and together they had nine children.

After a successful yet tumultuous career with the church, Schlatter resigned his duties as clergyman in 1755 following a disagreement with church officials. He was subsequently involved with the Charity Schools and the British Royal American Regiment as chaplain.

In 1759, Schlatter acquired from his father-in-law, Henry Schleydorn, the 135-acre site in Springfield, on which he constructed his milling operation.

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Cynthia Hamilton, a member of the historical society, was alerted to the ruins of the paper mill by a township resident earlier this year. After investigating the site with Kreilick, Hamilton, a preservation consultant, immediately recognized its historical significance.

"It was quite chilling to see these ruins," she said. "I have had the opportunity to work on 18th century milling ruins in my work. When I first saw it, I knew it was a milling site. If you see what is there, you know how truly significant it is."

"It was cool," added Kreilick.

Hamilton was instrumental in obtaining the local history grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Grant Program that allowed the historical society to retain Kreilick's services in conducting the archival research.

The ruins of the milling complex include a dam, raceway, sluiceway, waterwheel and other structures. Although Kreilick did visit the site, most of his presentation was on the archival research he performed to document the mill and its owner.

"Whenever I do a building or a sculpture, the first step in the process is archival research."

Kreilick said of his work as an architectural conservator.

The next step would be an archaeological investigation of the site — a project the historical society hopes to undertake in the near future. Historical society President Dick Buck estimated the cost around \$20,000.

In the meantime, the historical society is emphasizing that no one should attempt to seek out the milling site, as it is now on private property and archaeologically sensitive.

"The site is not very accessible, and no matter what route you take, you're going on private property," Kreilick said.

The location was not disclosed.



T. Scott Kreilick, an architectural conservator and metallurgist from Oreland, addressed the community on his research findings into the paper mill ruins discovered recently in Springfield Township.