

DURHAM

P E N N S Y L V A N I A

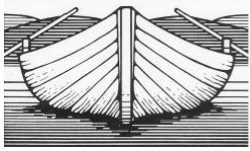
Historical Society

DURHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

As President of the Durham Historical Society, I am pleased to report that the state of the Society is strong. We ended 2024 having accomplished much with very little. This was possible through the generosity of our members who through a variety of donations (time, money, and materials) provided what was needed to accomplish our mission. With a growing interest in the Native American contributions to the area's history, we made a change to our mission statement to include this important part of our heritage. Although we did not have as many presentations as we normally hold over a year's time, we did increase the number of tours that were given to individuals and small groups who requested information about the mill and Durham Furnace. Included among these tours were visits from members of the Anthony Morris family. Mr. Morris was an influential merchant in Philadelphia during the 18th century and had a financial interest in the Durham Furnace. His descendants were interested in seeing the remains of the furnace and hearing about its history and we were happy to assist them. The George Taylor chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution requested a tour as well and we were able to satisfy their request. In addition, during our open houses, we were pleased to have visitors from as far away as Ukraine, Ecuador, and Paraguay visit the mill. As we did the previous two years, we participated in Passport to History Day and gave tours to about 50 people. This was in addition to the tours for the many visitors who took part in this year's Durham Day celebration. We were able to present one well-attended program concerning the rise and subsequent fall of the village of Uhlersville just north of Riegelsville.

As worthwhile as these endeavors were, we are more proud of the accomplishments concerning upkeep and repairs that we were able to make to the property. Through a grant, we were able to hire an individual who reconstructed the gates to the distribution box in the mill. This box is instrumental in directing water over the water wheel and its repair was necessary if the wheel is ever to turn again. In line with this project, Society members, with the help of some township assistance removed over three tons of dirt and debris from under the wheel, preparing it for the future. The wheel was examined and record made of the condition. An outside expert was engaged in checking out the wheel and gave us an estimate of the cost for sand blasting and repainting it. Construction of a new framework and gate for the sluice gate took place and construction and installation of a new gate at the tail race was accomplished. We engaged the services of an expert to go through the mill and highlight the areas where it would be beneficial to have signage placed to better understand the workings of the mill and the furnace. His report will serve as a guideline for the future. Amy Hollander, a local historian assisted us in getting our artifacts listed on CatalogIt, a site that is shared among many museums across the country.

All the projects concerning the refurbishment of the mill take time and money. To the latter end, we applied for three separate grants and are awaiting word on whether or not we were successful. The township's discovery of an underground structure, prompted us to search for an archaeologist to do some research. We were successful in finding Mathew Bielecki, a professor



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of Archaeology at two colleges, who is planning to conduct a survey early next year. We have begun planning for a “Founders Day” to be celebrated on June 7, 2025, to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Township’s creation. As part of those efforts, we have made arrangements for some seldom seen items from the Mercer Museum to be put on display. These include a collection of stove plates and the original 1727 date stone from the Durham Furnace. Clint Flack, a curator at the museum and who was recently featured on Discovery’s “Expedition Unknown” special on the Doan Gang has agreed to present a program during the celebration. Also commemorating a 250th anniversary is the Nation’s Sesquicentennial, scheduled for 2026. In line with that celebration, the Society is researching the role one of the township’s most worthy residents, George Taylor, played in the founding of the United States. The research will be incorporated into a 20 minute video and also in a possible book to be published in the next year or two.

The Durham Boat’s steering oar was damaged by the weather and age so the Society found a craftsman who offered to repair or replace it. We participated in two trash pickups along Durham Road and also took an active role in the Cooks Creek Watershed’s Creek and River Festival by offering information about the mill and the furnace and demonstrating grain grinding techniques to the children that attended. Realizing the importance of building strong relationships with other organizations, we partnered with the Riegelsville Library in hosting three of their monthly children’s reading groups at the mill, and also we offered partnership resources to the teachers at the Palisades School district in making the mill available to student visits.

Two of our benefactors provided us with artist prints of French and Indian War scenes and a collection of historic books. We are in the process, in accordance with their wishes, to sell them and use the proceeds to further the mission of the Society. In addition, we have contracted with a local expert in researching the deeds concerning the tract of land that the discovered underground chamber is located upon. This will give us a better understanding of what this area looked like 150 years ago.

All in all, we are proud of our accomplishments over the past year and look forward to continue our important work into the future.

Respectfully submitted,

David Oleksa, President