

History in West Caln Township – Part 3

Hibernia Mansion

In a series of articles, The West Caln Township Historical Commission is presenting a brief portrayal of history in the Township. This third article is about Hibernia Mansion located in Hibernia County Park. The time frame of this portrayal is during the Revolutionary War period.

The first deed to the land on which the Mansion sits can be traced back to 1765, when it was owned by George Harrison, a Quaker, but not the mop-topped guitarist for the Fab Four. In the late 1700's Samuel Downing built the first forge on the property to convert pig iron into bar iron; part of the start of the Iron and Steel heritage associated with this area. Charles Brooke purchased the property in 1821 and began purchasing the surrounding land, possibly including a 287 acre tract formerly owned by another notorious Tory (British sympathizer), Richard Swanwick. Swanwick made no secret of his support of the monarchy. When he refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States, he was sent to the prison in Virginia. He escaped, returned to Pennsylvania and volunteered his services to the British. He subsequently worked as a guide for the British Army at the battles of Brandywine and Paoli. After a fellow Tory guide, John Roberts, was captured by the Patriots and hanged for treason, Swanwick settled safely behind British lines in New York City. In 1778 his West Caln farm was confiscated and sold by the State Executive Council. With the American victory in 1783, Swanwick, separated from his wife and financially ruined, returned to Shropshire, England where he lived, supported in part by his son and in part by a government pension, until his death in 1795.

The inhabitants of the Mansion have seen many more events shaping America since the Revolution, including the Civil War in the 1860's.

Recently, Chester County celebrated the 50th anniversary of Hibernia becoming a County Park (1964). Due to the diligent efforts of the County Commissioners, Friends of Hibernia, and Park personnel, citizens can enjoy the beauty and history of this amazing gem in our Township.