

The Doylestown Correspondent



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DOYLESTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Inside:

- Page 1: Beneficial Society to
Masonic Hall
- Page 2: Collections
- Page 3: Pieces of History
President's Message
- Page 4: Society Activities
- Page 6: Featured Volunteers
- Page 7: New Acquisitions
Then & Now
- Page 8: Officers, Board & Staff
Museum Shop

Editor's Note

Our Newsletter's name is a derivative of the first Doylestown newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Correspondent*, established in 1804, predecessor to *The Intelligencer*, and one of the few newspapers in the country in continual publication for more than 200 years.

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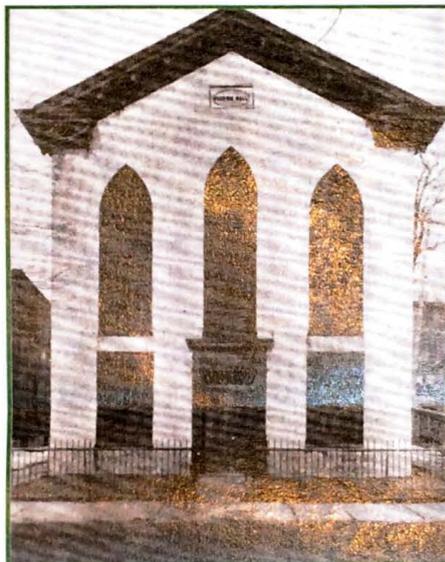
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Museum open Saturdays
11:00 am–3:00 pm,
or by appointment

doylestownhistorical.org
and look for us on Facebook



BENEFICIAL SOCIETY → MASONIC HALL



The Doylestown Beneficial Society of Pennsylvania was organized in September 1832 and incorporated in January 1834 by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. A beneficial society existed for the mutual relief of its members during times of hardship, including sickness or disability, which prevented a member from pursuing his occupation. Such associations also provided companionship and social activities for their members. Admission fees ranged from \$1.00 at 21 years of age to \$5.00 for ages 40 to 50 years.

Early members included then Colonel W.W.H. Davis, General William T. Rogers, and John S. Bryan, publisher of the *Doylestown Democrat*. There is no record where the Society members first convened but it is believed they may have

met in the first Bucks County Court House as there was no local venue, other than churches, for public meetings. The property located at 55 East State Street was owned by Charles H. Mann (1809-1892). Mann, who served as Doylestown Postmaster from 1839-1841 and Sheriff from 1844-1856, sold this land to the Society for \$1.00. In September, 1844 they began construction of a building.

The structure was dedicated on December 24, 1844 in the presence of a large audience. According to General Davis in *Doylestown Old and New*, "The hall was handsomely decorated and lighted with a chandelier suspended from the center of the ceiling having six large globe lamps with elegantly gilded Gothic shades and drops of spangles reflecting all colors of the rainbow." The main room had a seating capacity of about 300 persons.

There, on May 4, 1849 General Tom Thumb employed by P.T. Barnum made his first and only appearance before a Doylestown audience. In subsequent years, many other gatherings and exhibitions of various kinds were held in the hall including the local brass band concert, held on March 12, 1845 to benefit the Society. The Society arranged for a series of lectures. One such talk entitled "Our Country and its People" was delivered on November 22, 1845, by Colonel John W. Forney, author and journalist. On July 28, 1851 a lecture on "Electromagnetism" with various experiments was given by G. L. Swift; and a program of magic was given by Signor Blitz (Antonio VanSant) magician and ventriloquist, with his dummy, Bobby, on June 23, 1851.

The Society was quite prosperous until 1856 when, due to declining membership (approximately 77) and without the addition of new members, the Society decided to close its doors. It finally disbanded the following year.

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The mission of the Doylestown Historical Society is to preserve and celebrate the creative and historic significance of Doylestown and its neighboring communities.