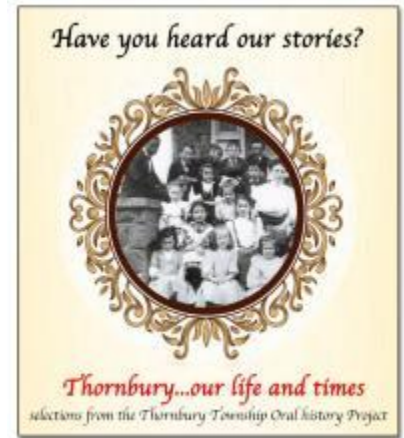


# Oral History Project

[Thornbury...Our Life & Times...](#) is the Thornbury Township Delaware County Oral History Project video compilation of interviews of present and past residents documenting our wonderful history. The interviews took place from 2012 through 2016 and provide a rich archive of the Township as its 20<sup>th</sup> century landscape transitioned from a rural agrarian setting dominated by dairy farms to the largely residential communities that emerged by mid-century. Most of the 27 individual interviewees came to the barn at Sweetwater Farm to share accounts of a broad range of life experiences with connections to Thornbury and its neighboring communities of West Chester and Media. The role of local schools, Cheyney University and the community churches provide insight on the changing lifeways in our home-town through the decades.



The interviews are heart-felt, moving personal accounts that sometimes describe gripping, unforgettable moments, providing emotional connections to the history of this township and its three communities: Thornton, Glen Mills and Cheyney. Some of the stories link to national events such as the impact of the Great Depression, the Civil Rights Movement and the African-American experience in Thornbury and neighboring West Chester, as well as international events such as World War II or the Korean conflict. The Quilting Group interview reveals the strong bond and devotion of the ladies of this community.

These interviews were given the blessing of our Township's Board of Supervisors and were organized and produced by our Historical Commission in association with our Historical Society. Recording and editing was performed by Interpretive Solutions, Inc. of Philadelphia.

Below is a listing of all participants in alphabetical order. To access each person's interview, please click on their name:

1. [Larry Barrett](#) - Larry Barrett describes the open landscape of the Chester Creek valley when he moved to Thornbury in the 1940s. He talks about his concern for protecting the Township's water resources and the many ways in which wetlands are constantly under threat due to development forces. Barrett outlines his work to create a water monitoring system and mentions the honor that he received from Thornbury Township for helping to establish watershed standards.
2. [Richard Beebe](#) - Richard Beebe reflects on growing up in Thornton in the 1940s, farm life and recreation in a rural setting. He offers insights about what marketing at the general

store was like and how square dancing was a form of home grown recreation that was loved by adults and children alike. He talks about school in Glen Mills and comments about community spirit in a rural setting. While it has changed, he finds that it nevertheless is still quite alive in today's Thornbury.

3. [Bill Bonner](#) - Bill Bonner talks about growing up in the woodlands and open meadows of rural Thornbury in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He describes the dairy farms and orchards which dotted the Township's rural landscape at one time. His memories take us to the quarry, "white dust" and its impact on Glen Mills, the fox hunts, open space preservation, and the creation of Bonner Park. He reflects on the joys of country living and the virtues of simpler times.
4. [Curt Cheyney](#) - Curt Cheyney discusses the history of his family and the legacy of Squire Cheyney. He explores the foundational principles of law, family and faith and the lasting contribution of those who served in the American Revolution. He argues that a sense of gratitude is sorely missing today for the sacrifices made by those of earlier generations. He also addresses contemporary development pressures on the Thornbury landscape and the need to preserve old homes and local history.
5. [Frances Coppock](#) - Frances Coppock characterizes the nature of fox hunting in the Thornbury Township area, when farmlands were still open for riding. She describes the traditions, costuming and lore of the fox hunt as it was once practiced. She offers stories about the casting of hounds and explains the functions of key figures in the hunt, including the huntsman, the field master, and the whips. A few personal examples of her daughter's participation in fox hunts are described.
6. [Bob Craig](#) - Bob Craig describes his family's roots near Aberdeen, Scotland and the story of the Craigs and their deep attachment to their Brandywine Valley farmland. He addresses the challenges of life as a dairy farmer and his work as a veterinarian. Craig offers insights about historic Brandywine Battlefield and comments on the demise of dairy farming in the Thornbury area. He discusses the challenges of preserving his farm lands against the pressures of developers.
7. [Cliff DeBaptiste \(with Mike Payton\)](#) - Cliff DeBaptiste looks back at his ties with Thornbury over the years since the early 1940s. He reflects on Lawrence Derry, a successful local builder, who constructed many new homes in the Township. DeBaptiste offers his observations about Cheyney College from his days as a student to his experiences as a university trustee. He remarks on the life and achievements of West Chester's Bayard Rustin and reflects on the realities of segregated life in West Chester during the mid-20th century.
8. [Joan Dehm](#) - Joan Dehm reflects on her early small-town life experiences in Ohio and the parallels that she found in Thornbury Township. She discusses the formative years of the Thornbury Historical Society and its initiatives over the decades. Dehm comments on the Township's Supervisors role in preserving Thornbury's historical and open space assets and outlines the rich history of Sweetwater Farm, the site of the oral history project.

9. [Joe Derry and George Hilton](#) - This interview captures the stories of two African American residents of Thornbury who lived their entire lives in the Township. Joe Derry and George Hilton comment on what growing up was like when school segregation ended. Both gentlemen discuss their school days, careers, recreation, and the importance of the AME Church, both historically and in community life as they grew up. The interviewees reflect on change and the tightly knit nature of the rural community they knew in past decades.
10. [Frank Hash](#) - Frank Hash looks back at the dairy and cattle farms in the Thornbury Township area. He portrays farm life in the 1940s as he was growing up and his experiences from the 1960s and 1970s when he was managing farms. He describes what it was like to milk a herd of dairy cows by hand and to attend a two-room country school house. Hash points out changes in the local landscape as the era of widespread farming ended in the Township.
11. [Pete and Tom Haws](#) - The Haws brothers offer an intimate portrait of daily life, growing up in rural Thornbury. They discuss Cheyney's general store, the open farmlands, a gypsy train on a railroad siding and their family's roots going back to 1856. The Bethlehem United Methodist Church, during the 1950s, is portrayed from a child's perspective. The brothers' participation in the activities of the grange is examined. The impacts of the transition from a farm lifestyle to contemporary urban life are addressed.
12. [William Hilton \(with Mike Payton\)](#) - Recipient of four purple hearts, William Hilton, born in Cheyney, outlines what his childhood years were like growing up in Thornbury Township. At age 16, he and his brother decided to leave home and to join the Army and to serve in the military during the 1950's. Hilton is a Korean War Veteran and served there with the 2nd Infantry.  
Subsequently, he was stationed at Camp Desert Rock in Nevada. He discusses the US military's atmospheric nuclear testing exercises and their impact on him.
13. [Randy Ireson](#) - The Executive Director of Glen Mills Schools discusses the history of the school and its origins as "The Philadelphia House of Refuge." Founded in 1826, the school relocated to its Thornbury Township campus in 1892. The 800 acre campus evolved throughout the 20th century and has achieved national and international recognition. Patterned after a prep school model, its open-campus environment and programs have had significant successes with rehabilitating youthful offenders today.
14. [Lyn and Gloria Jones](#) - This album profiles Lyn Jones' career as a horseman. He reflects on growing up in Cheyney where his mother was the director of a shelter for African American girls. Jones describes his life as the first African-American to train show horses and to win prestigious show horse competitions. Jones' wife, Gloria Stewart Jones, provides additional insights about the girls shelter and the key role that it played supporting Cheyney University's Coppin Lab School.
15. [Linda Kaat](#) - Linda Kaat describes the events leading up to the purchase of Sweetwater Farm and the three year renovation process of the property. She characterizes Sweetwater as a "diamond in the rough" as she details the restoration challenge to make it into a very successful B&B in Thornbury. She also gives accounts of other Pennsylvania restoration

efforts such as the stabilizing of the ruins of Martin's Tavern, restoring the Glen Mills Railroad Station and preserving Brandywine Battlefield.

16. [Chris Levine](#) - Chris Levine discusses the history of Sweetwater Farm and his efforts to develop it into a successful B&B. He talks about the farm's winery and why it was named to honor his sister, Gracie. Levine outlines the ownership of Sweetwater going back to its beginnings in 1734 and comments on his years as part of the Thornbury community. At the conclusion of the interview, Joan Dehm interviews Levine about his efforts in recent years to restore the barn and how it was saved from falling down.
17. [Allen McCann](#) - Allen McCann recalls his childhood years when he moved to Thornton as a 10 year old. He talks about going to the matinee when West Chester had three movie theaters. He describes the general store in Thornton which was the hub of the community. He reflects on Thornton when he could play marbles out on the road in front of the general store without any traffic. As a former Thornbury Planning Commissioner he reflects on the challenges of controlling growth when developers came to the community.
18. [George Morley](#) - talks about his early involvement in politics and his role to create the Township's planning commission. He discusses his efforts to draft ordinances that were needed as the township was transforming into what became a primarily residential community. He looks at critical sectors such as road maintenance, flood plain management, preserving historical properties, management of environmentally sensitive wetlands and building sewerage systems in accordance with state codes.
19. [Lloyd Novosel](#) - describes his childhood growing up in the old paper mill houses of Glen Mills near the quarry and the close friendships he had. He talks about the black families living nearby and the absence of segregation in Glen Mills. After military service during WWII, he works for a number of companies including the quarry in Glen Mills. By 1957 he purchases an Esso station. Novosel also reflects on the baseball team that he starts in Glen Mills and the 6 teams that competed in the area.
20. [Mike Payton](#) - describes his passion for history and teaching. He relates his experiences teaching history on the Amistad and talks about important local figures such as Thomas Hazard and the Shad family who established the Harmony School in West Chester. He relates the story of the quarry and how it provided a livelihood for many families. Cheyney University's mission to produce good teachers is discussed as well. The historical forces that brought African Americans to Thornbury are explained.
21. [Nick Petragani](#) - describes country life in Thornbury and the land that he purchased along Thornton-Cheyney Road in 1954. He reflects on his experiences as a youth when he came out on a trolley along Route 3 from Philadelphia to Thornbury to fish and hunt. Petragani describes the challenges that he faced decades later when as a building inspector for the Township he was faced with failed sewage disposal systems as residential development increased during the 1960s and 1970s.
22. [Renee Thompson-Phillips](#) - Renee Thompson-Phillips describes her family's history in Thornbury since it arrived in 1918. She discusses her school days in Glen Mills and West Chester, the local general stores, square dancing, her work at the post office and her

travels on the train. She also shares memories of Cherrydale Farm, her grandfather's farm on Cheyney Road, and some of the distinctive personalities that she once knew, including teacher Chris Sanderson and Philadelphia children's TV personality Chief Halftown.

23. [Carolyn Whitfield](#) - discusses her life growing up at the Quaker run "Shelter for Colored Orphans" in Cheney which she entered at age 5. She describes the "laboratory school" at Cheyney College which had formal teaching ties with the Shelter. She reflects on the life of Beulah J. Jones, the director of the shelter, who was protective but also gave Whitfield opportunities to grow and learn about the world around her. Whitfield describes country life in rural Thornbury during the 1940s and 1950s.
24. [Don Zang](#) - Donn Zang discusses his childhood on the campus of Glen Mills Schools, grammar school in a 2-room school house and traveling by train to high school in West Chester. He describes farming, the quarry and the Glen Mills community that he knew from the late 1940s and 1950s.
25. [Quilting Group Interviews](#)
26. [Oral History Project Trailer](#)