



About New Garden's Lyceum

Lyceums and kindred societies were established for the discussion of questions of public interest. In a copy of "Proceedings of the Chester County Education Convention, preparatory to organizing throughout the county Township Lyceums, held at West Chester September 12, 1835," it is found that the convention not only proposed that a County lyceum be formed, but provided a constitution for it, and organized the society by electing officers which included Dr. Ezra Michener as one of the Vice Presidents.



The New Garden Lyceum (1853). Originally located at the intersection of New Garden road & Newport-Gap Pike this exceptional Chester County building now resides in the Township Park next to another historic Township structure, the Lamborn House (1817).

Lyceums were formed off and on for several years thereafter. They are not to be confused with the buildings called "The Lyceum" or "Lyceum House," for a lyceum is both a course of instruction by means of lectures, concerts, etc., and a building used for such purposes. There was a Lyceum House in Landenberg, but Landenberg was not particularly noted for its interest in literary matters, and it was sold within a year. Another Lyceum House was dedicated in Pemberton in September 1886. The one which remained in longest use was built about 1852 on a quarter acre of ground donated by Enoch Lewis and stood nearly opposite his gateway. Spirited debates, lectures,

educational gatherings, and social functions were held there for many years. At one meeting held in 1853, the following resolution was offered by John S. Walker, Esq.:

"Resolved that the use of Tobacco and Rum is not only useless, but in every way pernicious, causing an incalculable amount of evil. That we have a right to resort to all human, lawful, and divine means to banish the use (except for medicinal, artistical, and mechanical purposes, etc.)"

Medicinal purposes we are familiar with, but he didn't explain how they were used for artistical or mechanical purposes! He dealt in great detail, however, on its banishment, and it all boiled down to giving women the right to vote.

"The Mutual Improvement Association of New Garden and West Grove" met there, and later, the "New Garden Mutual Improvement Organization." They discussed such matters as "How is Hail in Warm Weather Accounted For," and "Should Women Have the Right of Elective Franchise." One paper, "Are we Justified Under any Circumstances in Doing Evil in Order that Good may Come?" caused an animated discussion. The New Garden Lyceum House was one of the most famous of its kind in the County - headquarters of abolitionists before the Civil War; a station on the Underground Railroad; the site of great political meetings. Prohibitionist speakers rocked the walls with fiery oration, and every attempt was made by its many lecturers to improve the minds and morals of those who met there.

It had been written in the Deed to the property that the Board of Supervisors had the right to meet there on Township business, and the building was finally conveyed to them on February 19, 1884. It remained in their possession for 82 years. When scheduled for public sale on November 17, 1966, action by various members of the community who recognized its historical importance delayed the auction for three years. It was finally sold, however, to Charles B. Williams whose home adjoins the property.

(In 2012 the Lyceum House was relocated from its original location to the Township Park. [Click here for more information about this move.](#))