

# In the Spotlight

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## LIVING HISTORY



by Gene  
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### Nottingham: A rich heritage of Quakers, minerals and a local park

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The area around Nottingham in the southwestern corner of Chester County can boast some of the earliest Quakers in the region. These Quakers fled religious prejudice to find a better life for themselves and their families. More than three centuries ago, William Penn allotted land here to settlers willing to develop it. In 1701, the Nottingham Lots accounting for 18,000 acres were parceled out to those willing to pay “8 pounds for every 100 acres within one year of date hereof, and one shilling for a yearly quit-rent...” Thus began the major settlement of the area which today encompasses East and West Nottingham Townships, the name believed to come from the region of Nottinghamshire in England.

The East Nottingham Township website notes that Chester County identifies the year of separation for East and West Nottingham Townships based on information in the tax records. A May 27, 1718 meeting of the Quarter Session of Chester County called for Nottingham Township to be divided in East and West. The East Nottingham Township Historical Commission proposed to the Board of Supervisors that they officially adopt that date as the township’s date of establishment and separation from Nottingham Township.

People who purchased lots in this area of Penn’s colony hoped to take advantage of the region’s rich natural resources. Robert Warwick Day in “The Nottingham Lots and the Early Quaker Families” described the region as holding forests containing chestnut, walnut, oak and hickory suitable for building. A land dispute with the Calvert family of Maryland would disrupt things—of the original 18,000 acres locally allotted, only 1,300 of

those remained in Chester County after the Mason-Dixon Line was drawn.

In the next century, the region would be mined for ore deposits. In 1826, William Scott received title for property along what was called the Philadelphia-Baltimore Post Road, where he began extracting chromite, used extensively in paints and pigments. In the 1830s, industrial chemist Isaac Tyson, Jr. purchased the mineral rights to the area. Tyson would go on to become a major producer of chromite, local extraction of which continued up through the latter part of the 19th century.

The same geological feature which contained the chromite deposits was also responsible for a unique landform: serpentine barrens. The barrens got their name because most plants and shrubs could not exist there, the mineral content of the soil inhibiting growth. One flower, the serpentine aster, actually thrives in this type of environment and nowhere else on Earth. Several different mineral species including feldspar, magnesite and others were extracted in this region—the State Line Serpentine District—for decades. You can see the familiar olive-green serpentine throughout Chester County in the walls of numerous houses, most derived from local quarries, including the now abandoned Goat Hill Quarry.

The Hopewell Historic District in East Nottingham and Lower Oxford Townships encompasses 26 buildings and other structures in the former borough of Hopewell. Most of them are stone and brick homes and other buildings constructed between 1810 and 1914. Notable properties include the Colonel David Dickey House-Hopewell Academy (circa 1814), the Samuel Dickey Farm, Schoolhouse/Lyceum Building (1888) and the Lower Mill (circa 1815).

Dedicated in September 1963, Nottingham



One of the many pavilions amidst the scenic landscape of Nottingham County Park.



The entrance to Nottingham County Park in southwestern Chester County.



Herr's snack food plant in Nottingham.

Park was the first park in Chester County. Nottingham offers a wide variety of options for visitors, including nine pavilions, an 18-station fitness trail and handicapped accessible playgrounds. The 731-acre park sits on a large outcrop of serpentine, making it one of the biggest serpentine barrens on the East Coast. It contains abandoned feldspar and serpentine quarries, as well as spots where chromite was extracted. Due to its unique features and conservation efforts, the National Park Service named Nottingham Park as a National Natural Landmark in 2008. If you enjoy getting out in the fresh air for a hike, Nottingham County Park

is a wonderful place to do that. It offers a variety of trails with interesting features nearby, including the Doe Trail, Feldspar Trail, Buck Trail, the Serpentine Barrens Heritage Hike and others.

Snack lovers may not know that one of their favorite foods is made nearby. In 1946, Jim Herr purchased a small potato chip manufacturer in Lancaster. Initial sales were fairly limited, so over the years Herr decided to try some new things. In 1958, the company introduced flavored potato chips. Growth in the snack food industry prompted an expansion in the variety of products manufactured. Jim Herr passed away on April 5, 2012 at age 87 after

having made his company a major player in the mid-Atlantic snack food market. Herr’s produces potato chips, pretzels, popcorn, cheese curls, tortilla chips and onion rings as well as other offerings, including more than three dozen potato chip varieties at their plant in Nottingham. The Herr’s Visitors’ Center was constructed in 1989 adjacent to the plant. Take a tour—and enjoy some chips.

Whether you’re interested in delving into local history, seeing some interesting landscapes on a hike or wanting a tasty snack and a tour of a longtime local favorite company, the Nottingham area has many things to offer which should be fun for the entire family.



A couple enjoying the beauty of Nottingham County Park.

Gene Pisasale is an historian, author and lecturer based in Kennett Square. His ten books focus mostly on the Chester County/mid-Atlantic area. His latest book is “Forgotten Founding Fathers: Pennsylvania and Delaware in the American Revolution.” His books can be found on his website at [www.GenePisasale.com](http://www.GenePisasale.com) and on [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com). Gene can be reached via e-mail at [Gene@GenePisasale.com](mailto:Gene@GenePisasale.com).



Chromite



The Serpentine barrens.