

IN MEMORIAM

C. Herbert Fry

On August 11, 2018 the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society suffered a significant loss with the death of its former president, and its very good friend, Herb Fry, aged 92.

It was in 2001 that my wife Carol, a librarian at Easttown Library, told me about a noteworthy local historian named Herb Fry who frequently used the library's research assets, and with whom she had become well acquainted. She mentioned to me that Herb was the president of a local organization called the Tredyffrin Easttown History Club. Intrigued, I arranged a meeting with Herb. Though he was old enough to be my father, we immediately hit it off and soon thereafter, at his invitation, I became a member of the "Club." Through his encouragement I began my first local history project with Herb's promise: "If you ever need help, just ask me." He was always good to that promise.

As we got to know one another, I learned that Herb had been born in Pottstown, PA on June 27, 1926, the son of farmers Clarence and Rosa Fry. Money was always tight in this farming family, and in high school his parents encouraged Herb to pursue an Industrial Arts curriculum rather than the Liberal Arts program because they would never be able to afford a college education for their son. But Herb instead pursued academic excellence, graduating as class Valedictorian in June 1944. WWII was reaching a crescendo, and he immediately entered the U.S. Army. By late 1944, 19-year-old Pvt. Herb Fry had joined the new 69th Infantry Division in England in preparation for its movement into combat in January 1945. Herb served as an infantryman with that division as they moved into Germany through the final months of the European war, especially during the costly Liberation of Leipzig in April 1945.

Returning home in 1946, the new G.I. Bill of Rights allowed Herb to fulfill his dream of a college education, and he enrolled at Syracuse University's satellite campus, Triple Cities College, in Binghamton, NY. While at Triple Cities he met a young woman, a fellow student from Binghamton, named Barbara McGuire. Their friendship blossomed, and Herb and Barbara remained at the Binghamton campus for two years before transferring to the main Syracuse University campus to finish their baccalaureate work



(LEFT) Bill Fritz (RIGHT) Herb Fry. On June 16, 2016, Herb Fry and Roger Thorne interviewed Bill and Howard Fritz, the fourth and fifth Fritz generations to run the legendary family-owned lumber and materials business in Berwyn until its closing later that year after 153 years. Herb and Bill had been acquainted for over six decades, long before any local history connections, when Herb and Barbara first moved to Berwyn in 1953. Herb recalled that, as was often the case in post-war home construction, the second-floor of their new house was only partially finished as an economy measure, and Herb had much to learn about finish carpentry. He remembered back to those early years when Bill Fritz could always be counted on by so many new homeowners not only to sell the right building materials, but to provide much needed, and much appreciated, advice. In 2018, both of these legends have passed from our community. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*

together in 1950. Herb graduated with an accounting degree and a CPA certification, and immediately after graduation Herb and Barbara were married—a marriage they would share for 52 years until her death in January 2003. Herb had been recruited by the prestigious "Big Four" auditing firm Peat Marwick Mitchell & Company, and the newly-married couple soon moved to Philadelphia. In 1953, the Fry's—Barbara, Herb, and one-year old Jim—moved into their new house in Easttown Woods, Berwyn's first postwar housing development. Jim and his three siblings yet to arrive would all complete their educations in the T-E schools.

After several years "living out of a suitcase" as a traveling auditor, Herb was invited to join Acme Markets / American Stores, then headquartered in Philadelphia, where he rose to the position of Vice President for Finance and Corporate Controller. He would remain with Acme until his retirement in 1992.

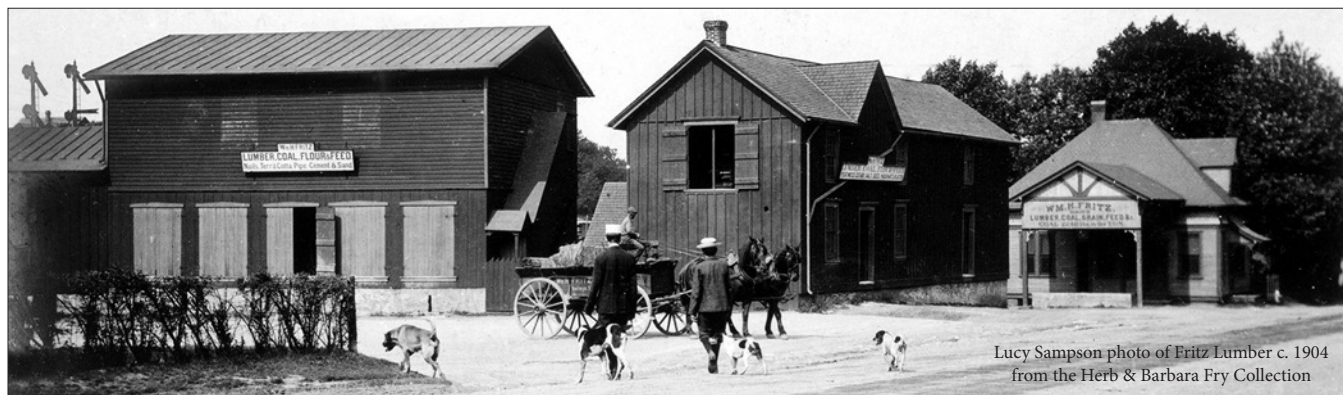
Herb was a man of many interests, all eagerly pursued: car racing, bowling, studying his own family history and genealogy which traced back to the 17th-century founding of Pennsylvania. But arguably his most avid passion became Upper Main Line history, which he pursued with the same tenacity and attention to detail that he applied to his professional life. During the 1980s, Barbara became acquainted with legendary Tredyffrin Easttown History Club leader Bob Goshorn, and through Bob's influence, Herb and Barbara joined the History Club in the late '80s. They both became avid researchers and prolific writers on many local projects, and published scores of scholarly articles in the Club's *History Quarterly*. Herb served as president of the Tredyffrin Easttown History Club (1992–1995) and editor of the *History Quarterly* (1996–2003). He authored a book published in 2004 entitled *Easttown: Old in History, Young in Spirit, 1704-2004*, and in 2012, Herb completed and published a definitive book begun by his late wife entitled *Trinity Remembers - A 150th Anniversary History of Trinity Presbyterian Church of Berwyn, Pennsylvania, 1863-2013*. Herb and Barbara were members and leaders in that church for decades, and at his death, Herb had been a member of Trinity for 65 years.

I have so many memories of my friend Herb, and will share but two. In 2004, on the occasion of its Tricentennial, Berwyn was hosting a series of Village Walks, intended to highlight some dozen historic places within the town, accompanied by trained docents, and open to residents and visitors alike. Naturally, Herb headed the project, and he asked me to volunteer as a docent. Still being new to our local history and feeling somewhat unqualified, I agreed on one condition: that Herb and I would together walk the designated route, and he would explain the significance of each place to me in depth. Herb loved to walk, and readily agreed to my proposal. So with me listening attentively and taking copious notes, Herb, the master docent, taught me about Berwyn in depth. That two-hour "walk-about" calmed my uncertainties, and through his gentle leadership I was able to confidently do my part in sharing our past with others.

A second memory occurred a decade later during the summer of 2014. Herb was increasingly concerned about what would become, after his passing, of the many collections of local historical images and objects which he and Barbara had lovingly accumulated. I stated that while the physical objects were certainly invaluable, his knowledge of this local area was equally valuable, and **must** be codified. We therefore conceived a project whereby, once a week for what turned out to be that entire summer, I would visit his house and, around his kitchen table, I would scan in high-resolution 15 images and postcards per session while he described in great detail everything he knew about each object. His commentaries were recorded at these sessions and then transcribed for posterity and future research. In this way, using Herb's direct research and recollections, we processed Barbara and Herb's extensive image collection of late 19th-century local historian and photographer Julius Sachse, and that of early 20th-century Berwyn photographer Lucy Sampson, as well as many other collections. In December 2014, the Society published a special double-issue of the *History Quarterly* entitled "The Changing Face of Berwyn" containing a "Then and Now" retrospective of Berwyn using some of the images from the Herb and Barbara Fry Collection (always attributed to them) coupled with descriptive detail that would have been most difficult to accrue without Herb's collaborative efforts. Interestingly, just weeks before his passing, Herb once again invited me to his home to review some "new" materials that I had never seen before. That collaboration over 15 years had continued until the very end. I will miss him greatly!

Herb Fry is survived by his daughter Ann; his sons James, David, and Joel; his three grandchildren David, Jared and Marrah; and his three great-grandchildren Dylan, Jordan, and Cora. A memorial service commemorating the life of this good man was held on November 4, 2018 at 2:00 pm at Trinity Presbyterian Church, 640 Berwyn Avenue, in Berwyn.

— Roger D. Thorne, past President and current Board Chair,
Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society



Lucy Sampson photo of Fritz Lumber c. 1904
from the Herb & Barbara Fry Collection