

THIS IS MY HISTORY



Member artists of the Octoraro Art Association celebrating Independence weekend

Octoraro Water Co. pump house
Chester Water Authority
Charles X. Carlson Octoraro Art Association
5965 Forge Road
Tax Parcel # 56-7-3
1904

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Photos and descriptions appear on flickr

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/patrailsofhistory/sets/72157627058363685/>



Pine Grove Covered Bridge; pump house studio in background

HISTORY OF THE STONE PUMP HOUSE AND ART STUDIO

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the Pennsylvania Railroad determined a need for water to support its operations in Coatesville. They created the Octoraro Water Company to supply the water. The Octoraro Water Company built a small stone dam and pump station on the Octoraro Creek at Pine Grove and a second station, the McCrea Station, on the West Branch of the Octoraro in 1904. The Pine Grove station pumped water to the McCrea Station, then from there the water flowed through Parkesburg and on to Coatesville by gravity. In 1906 after they built the pump stations, the Octoraro Water Company built two houses, one at each station location, for the station operators. Both houses were sold much later by the Chester Water Authority. The Pine Grove house was disassembled for parts in 2003, and the other house was moved to another location.

Early on, the city of Chester's waterworks had built a pumping station on the Delaware River to supply water to its citizens. As the city grew, the private water company could not expand to fill the need. So, in 1939 the Chester Municipal Authority (CMA) was created to raise the funds necessary to keep up with demand. Also during that period, the water quality of the Delaware River had deteriorated so much that another source had to be found. In their search, they discovered the Octoraro Water Company's facility on the Octoraro Creek. The water rights of the Octoraro, the pump house and the land around the creek were purchased from the Pennsylvania Railroad for an impoundment. When the diesel electric locomotive was developed and brought into service, the need for water diminished, so the PRR was eager to sell the rights. Originally, the PRR purchased these water rights in 1905 for a little more than \$350,000; by 1946, they valued the rights at more than \$600,000 but sold to CMA for \$233,000. By late 1949, a new, larger dam upstream from the existing small dam and a filtration plant were being built at a cost of nearly \$1.5 million each. In the meantime, rights of way were purchased and construction of the pipeline to Chester at a cost of nearly \$5 million was also completed. Before the gates could be closed, the land which would be underwater had to be cleared of all structures and trees cut to one foot or removed. The gates were closed in the spring of 1951, and the lake began to fill. On Thanksgiving Day in 1951, the system came on line. The old pump house was abandoned.

During the first years of existence (1948-1952), the Octoraro Art Association (OAA) under the founders and leadership of renowned artist, Charles X. Carlson, and Oxford businessman, John W. Roberts, met in temporary quarters in the Oxford area, first in the Demonstration Room of the Oil and Gas Products Office,² then in private homes, then in the Kindergarten Room of the Grange Hall. When the U.S. Post Office took over the Grange Hall in 1949, the OAA bounced around among private homes before finding space in the Union Fire Company hall. In 1953 the OAA was evicted from the fire hall and into another search for a studio and meeting place.

After a very long search for a permanent home for the OAA, CX Carlson noticed that the Octoraro Water Company pump house might become available. In September 1953, he contacted the CMA about that pump house. Carlson suggested that it would be good public relations for the CMA if they were to make that building available for the OAA. After some discussion about this issue, CMA Executive Manager Clarence L. Connor brought the issue before the CMA Board of Directors. In a letter to Carlson, Connor reported the results of his discussions with the Board and listed some stipulations for a lease, which would be drawn up after agreement between Connor and Carlson on the terms. One of the stipulations was the annual rental fee of \$1.00. Other stipulations were safety and liability issues. A meeting between the parties following the letter resulted in a formal lease.

Finally on October 1, 1953, Professor William Cole, President of the OAA, and Clarence Connor, for the CMA, signed the lease for the use of the abandoned pump house as a meeting place and art studio. The lease put the annual cost to OAA at one original painting per year instead of \$1. This lease is still in force and the cost is still one original painting per year. After the CMA Nottingham Plant manager, Ken Armstrong retired, he and his wife, Donna, joined the OAA, and later he was elected our 15th President.

Initially, the building was pretty bare, and heat was provided by an iron potbelly stove. In 1975, the Chester Water Authority (CWA) (renamed so in 1965,¹) upgraded the facility, to include installation of a false ceiling with lights embedded, lining the walls with seasoned old barn boards, painting the floors, and placing a portable potty behind the building. Later the CWA installed a security fence to block direct access to the dam and creek from in back of the studio and upgraded the windows on the south side of the building. In 1999, the CWA upgraded the electrical system to provide additional circuits and to accommodate the installation of a kiln for ceramics. In 2007, the CWA had a new roof installed on the studio. In 2008, the CWA had the leaking north wall sealed.

Over the years, the OAA has turned the facility into a real art studio. There is a permanent collection of paintings hanging on the walls; equipment and materials have been purchased to facilitate meetings and art classes and workshops. Over the years, the relationship between the executives and employees of the CWA and the officers and members of the OAA has become very close.

Also under the terms of the lease, the Executives of the CWA meet in the studio on the last Sunday of September to select an original work of art provided by one of the artists of the OAA as payment. The annual meeting, called "Picture of the Year," is hosted by the OAA, and its members provide a selection of art from which the CWA will choose one. Over the years, these winning Pictures of the Year have been hung in the offices of the CWA in Chester and the plant in Nottingham.