

Rowing Along the River - The Boathouse Row Story

Dotty Brown, a former reporter and editor at the Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper, came to the SRHC in April to present the story and images from her new book: “**Boathouse Row – Waves of Change in the Birthplace of American Rowing**”.

Rowing along the Schuylkill River began in the 1830’s when wealthy families from Philadelphia moved to what were then “suburbs”. They built homes and estates on land near the river that would later become part of Fairmount Park. They also moved to adjacent communities on the east and west banks of the river like Strawberry Mansion and the Belmont plateau. The famous Philadelphia artist, Thomas Eakins, lived on Mt. Vernon Street, just a few blocks away from the river, and he was an avid rower too.

The Schuylkill was once a tidal river with rapids and falls, but a dam was constructed in 1821 to bring water from the waterworks to the city, and this instantly calmed the river in this area which made rowing feasible. Later in the 19th century Fairmount Park was established by the city and this area was dedicated to rowing. Many boathouses were constructed at that time since rowing had become such a popular sport and many boating clubs had been formed. Nicknames for the clubs were very common. For example, the Bachelors Barge Club, established in 1853, is the oldest existing one in the US. John B. Kelly, Grace Kelly’s father, became the “Champion of America” since he won gold medals for rowing at both the 1920 and 1924 Olympics. No women were allowed to row openly since rowing was defined as a manly sport. Although the Women’s Rowing Club in Phila., was founded in 1938, it was kept a secret for many years. Finally, in the 1960’s women were allowed to join the Vesper Club and openly competed.



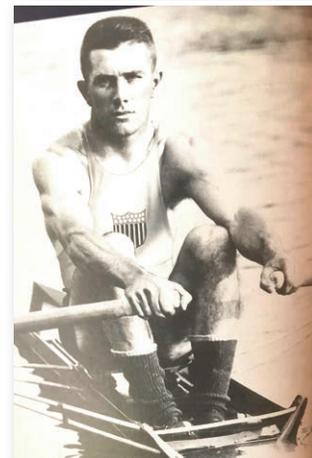
This is a painting by Nicolino Calyo that depicts the first rowing regatta on the Schuylkill River. Seven barges competed on Nov. 12, 1835.



*Pictured here with **Dotty Brown** are SRHC members **Meg Martin & Fred Gerland**.*



Here are a few of the boathouse clubs on the east bank of the Schuylkill River.



This is an archival image of John Kelly, the rowing champion, in his boat.

CELEBRATING PHOENIXVILLE'S HISTORIC LEGACY

In May, the SRHC visitor space was transformed into a gallery display showing the incredible transformative work done by Phoenixville's talented photographer, **Charles Bartholomew**. On view were many archival photographs owned by the Phoenixville Area Historical Society that he spent hundreds of hours retouching. He turned them into high resolution digital files that changed them, with amazing results, into clear crisp images of these historic places! The SRHC thanks and appreciates **Bob Heck and his Steel City Displays team for donating the display panels and also installing them** so that the SRHC could showcase Charles Bartholomew's work!

SRHC member, **June McInerney** also participated in the SRHC program in May. She was a professional writer for financial and scientific clients. She is a long-time Phoenixville resident who has written several novels about Phoenixville; uniquely weaving historic themes about many places in the area in her successful books. These include the history of the Phoenixville Fire Company, the former VF Army hospital, the Colonial Theater, and the Columbia Hotel. She shared facts about these subjects that were very illuminating. For example, there were once 290 German prisoners-of-war held on the grounds of the VF Army Hospital who helped care for the 3,000 patients there. She is currently working on two more novels; one of which will be about the Phoenixville Library.



*Pictured here are (l. to r.) SRHC members **Jack & Nina Mason** and **Arthur and Marjorie Miller** at this special event.*



*Shown here are (l. to r.) **Sharon Ruth**, SRHC member **Barbara Pruyn**, and the featured speakers **Charles Bartholomew** and SRHC member **June McInerney**.*

Charles Bartholomew also digitally transformed an archival photograph of the interior of the Washington Monument portraying the Phoenix Columns supporting its structure that is displayed at the SRHC. Here are BEFORE and AFTER photographs that illustrate the extraordinary quality of his work.

