

HERMITS GLEN GAZETTE

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A Fable of Fairmount

by Alvin Holm, AIA

Once upon a time in a land across the ocean from Old Europe there was a small and lovely mountain between two graceful rivers that the people revered as holy. The Original People, for so they called themselves, believed this hill was where the mother earth could speak directly to her daughters and her sons and they could speak to her. Here the people's praises could be heard, their quarrels could be mediated, and their celebrations undertaken with the full participation of the land from which they sprung and to which they would return.

It was a beautiful hill outstanding on the saddle of land between the curving rivers at the point of their closest approach, and perhaps because of its singular beauty it was kept holy. Or perhaps it was the energies that conspicuously crisscrossed the place that the Leni-Lenape perceived and that led them to make their consecration here. In any case it came to be a place of awe and wonder and it engen-

dered legends that persisted well into the era of the European occupation of these lands. It was a place of refuge where hunted men would not be pursued. It was a trysting place for star-crossed lovers and a final haven for the outcast of any tribe. It was a promontory sacred to the Elemental Earth, now widely known as Fairmount in the City of Brotherly Love.

And then the Swedish settlers came and brought their festivals along. It took them little time to find the perfect place to celebrate their European Solstice rites. They built their bonfires high at least two times a year, the longest and the shortest days, and fused those ancient practices upon the native culture that they found. With the advent of the Swedes, the holy hill became a shrine to Elemental Fire. An early map in French identifies the site as "Montagne du Feu," and from this designation Fire Mount, our present name derives, corrupted in Fair Mount and naively attributed to William Penn's ap-



Fairmount today. Photo by Michael Murphy.

praisal of the hill when first he came upon it.

By the time the German Pietists arrived in 1694 under the leadership of Johannes Kelpius it was evidently widely known that European Summer Solstice ceremonies were to be found in Fairmount. So when the monks and sisters came to port along the Delaware at Philadelphia on the 23rd of June, on the eve of the Feast of St. John, they immediately made their way across the town to Fairmount where they participated in the bonfire dances, running through the flames and kicking the glowing coals down hill as millions of Europeans had done since time immemorial and still do in parts of Germany, France and Sweden today.

The Earth Hill yielded to the Fire Mount, but in the middle of the 19th Century another major shift occurred. A great waterworks was built above a new dam across the Schuylkill River and an elevated reservoir was needed from which the water could be directed to Center Square and then from which it would be pumped throughout the city. To this end, the holy hill of Fairmount was hollowed out and transformed into a reservoir. Large wooden tubes were installed along a diagonal path to Center Square where Benjamin Latrobe designed an elegant Neoclassical pump house that would serve all quadrants of the expanding city. So now the hill, from Earth and Fire, had finally become a shrine to Elementary Water. The deep wooden tubes for over 50 years conveyed the waters

of life to Center Square like a great Aorta that even today is marked by gushing fountains at three points along the way.

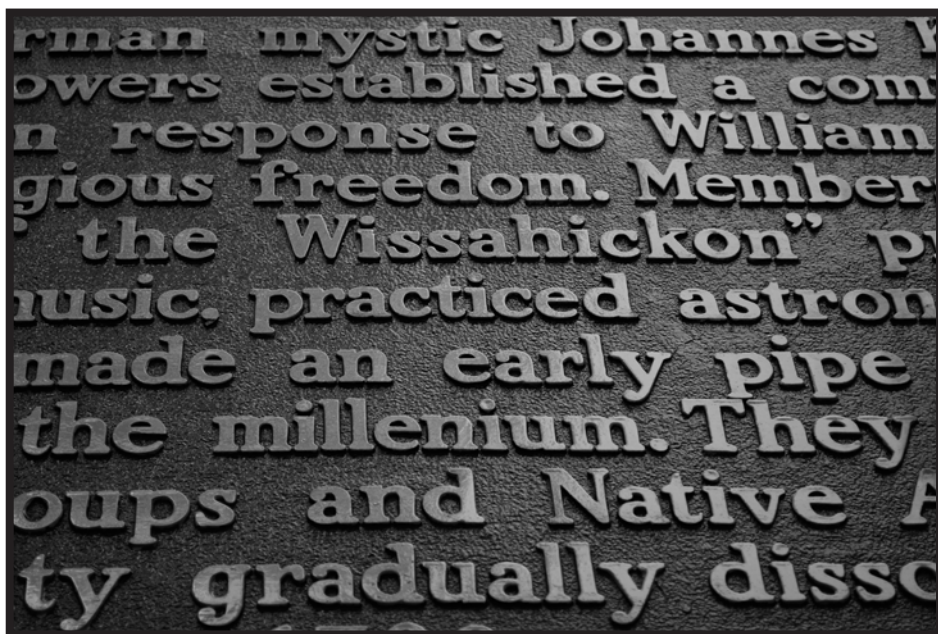
Toward the end of the 19th Century the Parkway was conceived to link the center of the city to the parklands stretching out along the schuylkill. A gleaming City Hall with the tallest tower ever built was envisioned for Center Square and at the opposite end a famous museum astride Fair Mount as if upon a new Acropolis. City Hall was complete at the turn of the century and in another 20 years the land had been cleared to accommodate the mighty Benjamin Franklin Parkway, along the subterranean path of the old wooden water pipes. Concurrent with the rise of the first great modern skyscraper, PSFS, at 12th and Market, the magnificent classical museum was being built upon the summit of Fairmount. The temple-form of the museum was emphatically Greek, harking back to the Olympian Gods and the Sky Pantheon of the Fifth Century,

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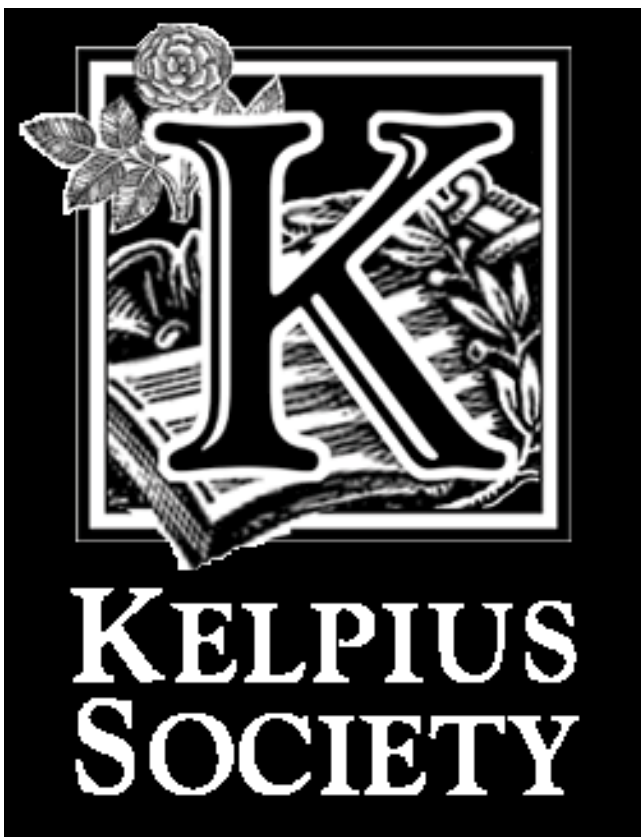
Having originally been sacred to the Elemental Earth, in the 17th Century the mount became a shrine to Elemental Fire. The fire was quenched by Elemental Water 200 years later. And by the first quarter of the 20th Century Fairmount came to raise up a temple to the Elemental Air, where the Muses reside to this day to display our highest artistic achievement.

Earth, Fire, Water and Air. We have completed the cycles of the ancient Four Elements. It is now our cultural responsibility to preserve and revere this splendid urban ensemble and to embellish it with passion and love in the manner it was begun. Our investment will be rewarded only so long as we honor the place as others have always done.

This article was first published in the Spring 2001 issue of the Friends of Philadelphia Parks newsletter.



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Dear Kelpius Society Member,

I'm pleased to report that our work at TKS is proceeding apace, thanks to the interest and most especially, the sustained efforts of our membership since the time of our last publication. In June 2010, the Kelpius Society partnered with the Philadelphia Archaeological Forum (PAF) to present our first Archaeology Road Show at Journey's Way Senior Center in Roxborough. Area residents were invited to attend and bring artifacts they had found or dug up in the area for identification by a team of professional archaeologists. Both PAF and the Roxborough Historical Association were partners in this program, the first of what I hope will be many productive collaborations. Many thanks to Anita McKelvey for coming up with the Road Show idea, and facilitating the link with PAF.

TKS will begin research and planning to establish an historically authentic recreation of the Kelpius community's medicinal herb garden.

Meanwhile, archaeological work at the Kelpius site

NEW WEB SITE LAUNCHES

Visit our new home on the web at **www.kelpius.org** !

The redesigned web site features upcoming events and a list of our Kelpius-related publications. We welcome your ideas and feedback!

SUMMER HIATUS

Please note that the Kelpius Society is not holding monthly meetings over the summer.

has yielded important preliminary information, with more mapping and digging scheduled for as early as Fall 2010. Raymond Thompson is completing his report on work accomplished to date, which should be available soon. TKS members Nick Bucci and Don Sloan have been instrumental in supporting and facilitating Raymond's work, which, by the way, represents yet another significant collaboration, in this case between TKS, Temple University, and the Fairmount Park administration.

In coming months, under the leadership of Al Holm, TKS will begin research and planning to establish an historically authentic recreation of the Kelpius community's medicinal herb garden. The herb garden is a very important part of our collective history. The garden will be situated near the site originally established by the Kelpius settlers, most likely on or near the grounds of the present-day Hermitage. Please check our new website, at www.kelpius.org, for updates on this and all other TKS projects. Many thanks to TKS member Jacque Brough for her creativity and hard work in designing and building the website, and to Del Conner for his work on the new TKS logo, which

is nearing completion. The logo can also be viewed on page three and on the new website.

The operative word in all of this is ‘Membership’. None of this splendid work would be possible without the active collaboration of members. Thanks to their efforts, TKS is finding ever more creative ways to present the Kelpius history to the larger community, even as we build significant relationships with other organizations in the Philadelphia region. As our membership rolls continue to grow, active participation in TKS is growing too. Thanks again to all of you for your support. If you are not already actively involved in our work, please consider becoming involved. We’d welcome the chance to work more closely with you, as we look forward with shared optimism to a bountiful and productive year.

Sincere Regards,

Thomas Carroll, PhD
President



MYSTERY HILL: AMERICA'S STONEHENGE

Kelpius Society member Anita McKelvey has raised awareness of an intriguing archaeoastronomical site in Salem, New Hampshire. Called “Mystery Hill,” the site itself is a maze of stone structures that were clearly used to mark solar and lunar events. But who created it? Some believe that Mystery Hill was originally used by Native Americans, while other theories hold that Celtic migrants positioned the rocks. The site appears to be over 3,000 years old, featuring inscriptions in the Ogham, Iberian Punic and Phoenician languages.

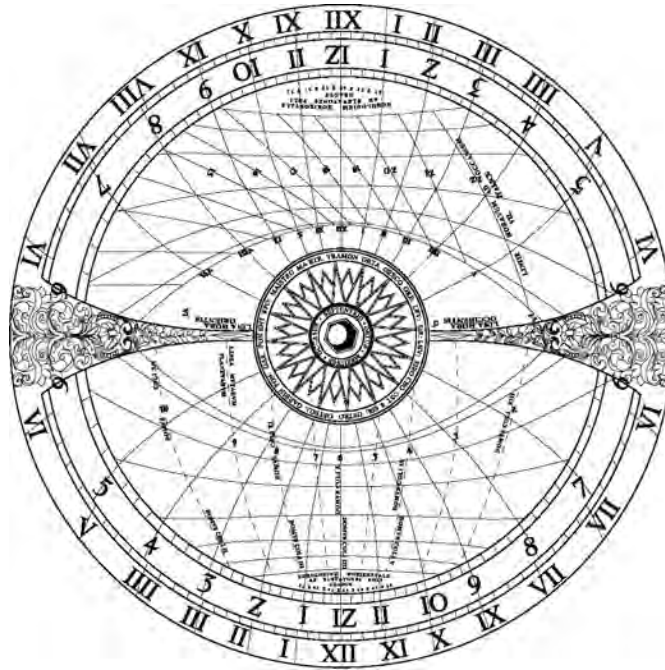


In the 19th century, the ruins may have served as a hideout along the Underground Railroad. Shackles have been excavated, and the landowners were rumored to have been abolitionists.

Mystery Hill is open year-round, with a special event at the summer solstice. To learn more visit **www.stonehengeusa.com**!

Mysteries of the Horologium Achaz Hydrographicum

by Jonathan Scott • Part Two of Two • Continued from January 2010 Issue



Was our timekeeping device simply a novelty? Here's one possible clue:

The noted 18th century traveler and chronicler Zacharias von Uffenbach apparently came across someone who knew about this device. He wrote about it twice in his memoirs. One reference seems to have been stricken from the text – not without good cause – that the reason for this, and the reason for the bowl's trick – was to tie the instrument to a Biblical story, thus diverting attention from its real use as an astronomical – and therefore heretical – device. If you recall your history, you'll remember the trouble that Galileo, Copernicus and Kepler got into during the same century.

So what might those other uses have been? The markings on the upper bowl suggest a more complicated geometry than simply keeping track of the hours of the day.

Around the rim of the upper bowl are reliefs of the familiar zodiacal signs: the goat, the crab, the centaur, etc. It is very possible that the Horologium was used in the casting of horoscopes. This explains why oral tradition has it, according to Julius Sachse, that by using the instrument it's user could know not only the hour of the day by sun, but also the hour of the night by the moon, the position of the planets, sun, and moon in the houses of the zodiac, the sun's perigee and apogee, its height

above the horizon, the length of the day, and perhaps much more.

We will remember that astrology was still part of the mainstream of both religious and scientific endeavors at the time the instrument was crafted. (*Continued, pg. 6*) There is an oral tradition that connects the device with Johann Jacob Zimmerman, a famous German astronomer who was reputedly a member of the Royal Society of London, was a man who was deeply interested in both subjects, as well as astrology. But it is very unlikely that a man of Zimmerman's achievements in astronomy—his ability to predict comets for instance—would use such a sophisticated device merely for astrology.

There's simply no way of knowing where the Horologium was for a hundred years.

But how did Zimmerman, who lived a hundred years after the craftsman Christopher Schissler, obtain the instrument and learn how to use it? As we in the twenty-first century can't figure it out, it either came with an interesting instruction booklet, or more likely, the secret was passed from master to disciple.

There's simply no way of knowing that or where the Horologium was for a hundred years. Christopher Schissler was a craftsman of some repute. He called himself a Geometer and an Astronomer. He created many other interesting sundials and devices, but no one has been able to find a trace or even a suggestion that he made anything else like the Horologium. We can only assume that the instrument was obtained only at tremendous time, effort, and expense. It might be safe to assume that it was in its day the equivalent of the Hubble Space Telescope. And from what

we know of Zimmerman, he wasn't a man of unlimited means.

And for what reason did he have it, assuming he did? For scientific research? Probably. For the casting of horoscopes? Maybe. For some occult endeavor? Possibly.

There are other questions that we are left with. Why the figure of Arabic man? We know that for centuries the Arabic world was the repository of knowledge of astronomy and mathematics. They might have also fully understood the principles of refraction.

One other thing: the Islamic world was the ultimate source of mystical and so-called occult knowledge in medieval Europe. Was there a connection between the culture suggested by the figure and mystical societies in 16th century Germany?

And now for the last mystery. How did such a thing end up in a cabinet in a museum in Philadelphia? The fact is that no one knows how it got there. There are no records of the device ever being acquired by the institution, nor any records of anyone donating it.

It is part of the story of Kelpius that he was interested in astronomy. It is said that the Kelpius Community had one of the country's first telescopes that were used to search and note celestial movements from a tower. Kelpius was a student, and follower, of Johann Jacob Zimmerman, the noted astronomer.

How did such a thing end up in a cabinet in a museum in Philadelphia?

In the early 18th century, the Englishman named Christopher Witt likely fell heir to the artifacts of the Kelpius Community after it disbanded. (*Continued, pg. 7*)

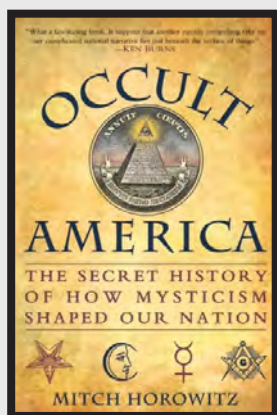
Christopher Witt in his old age became acquainted with a bright young man from Philadelphia named Benjamin Franklin who, as you might or might not know, founded the American Philosophical Society.

This, like almost everything connected with the Horologium Achaz Hydrographicum, is speculation. But they are all educated guesses and

they all combine to make an intriguing and fascinating story that rivals anything Dan Brown has written.

Image of the Schissler disk courtesy the American Philosophical Society:

RECENT BOOK FEATURES THE KELPIUS COMMUNITY!



Occult America: The Secret History of How Mysticism Shaped Our Nation by Mitch Horowitz (Bantam, 2009) opens with a description of Johannes Kelpius' arrival in America. "News drifted back to the Old World: A land existed where mystical thinkers and mystery religions--remnants of esoteric movements that had thrived during the Renaissance and were later harassed--could find safe harbor. And so began a revolution in religious life that was eventually felt around the earth."

Horowitz surveys the history and impact of American mysticism through the present day, touching on subjects like dime horoscopes, Theosophy, hoodoo and Spiritualism. While the book rarely provides in-depth information on any one topic, it does introduce a range of fascinating personages and philosophies, each of which is worthy of its own 300-page volume.

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