

A Timeline of Bucks County History 1600-1990

1600s

1609 - The Lenape tribe greeted the first European explorers, traders, and settlers. The Lenape, also referred to as the Lenni Lenape, were the native people of the Delaware Valley and their name translated to “original people” or “common people.”

The first European who the tribe encountered was Henry Hudson, who was sailing up the Delaware Bay. Hudson, an Englishman, sailed under the Dutch flag.

Right: A prehistoric pot (reconstructed from fragments), dating 500 B.C.E. to 1100 C.E., was found in a rock shelter in northern Bucks County. This clay vessel, likely intended for storage, was made by ancestors of the Lenape in the Delaware Valley. Mercer Museum Collection.



1633 - English Captain Thomas Yong tried to explore the wilderness that later became known as Bucks County.

However, he only got as far as the Falls of the Delaware River, known today as Morrisville.

1640 - Portions of lower Bucks County fell within the bounds of land purchased from the Lenape by the Swedes, and a handful of Swedish settlers began building log houses and other structures in the region.

1664 - An island in the Delaware River, called *Sankhickans*, was the first documented grant of land to a European, Samuel Edsall, within the boundaries of Bucks County.

1668 - The first grant of land resulting in a settlement in Bucks County was made to Peter Alrichs. This grant was for two islands in the Delaware River.

1679 - Crewcorne, the first Bucks County village, was founded on the present-day site of Morrisville. The village was built by a dozen families (mostly English Quakers). This original village has completely vanished and its name no longer appears on a map.

1681 - William Penn asked King Charles II of England for an area of unexplored wilderness in the New World in exchange for the 16,000 pounds the King owed the Penn Estate. Penn becomes the sole proprietor of the largest piece of land ever owned by a British Citizen. The territory became known as Pennsylvania, meaning “Penn’s Woods,” though Penn had originally preferred the name “New Wales.”

August 3, 1682 - William Penn sent his cousin, William Markham, to explore and govern the newly acquired territory. Markham was ordered to summon a council that included existing inhabitants (mostly Swedish and Dutch with a few Finns and English) marking the formal beginning of the colonial government.

July 15, 1682 - William Markham negotiated Penn’s first purchase of land from the Lenape tribe. The purchase included all of present-day Bristol, Falls, Middletown, Lower and Upper Makefield, Newtown, and some of Wrightstown – over 8,000 acres.

October 1682 - William Penn arrived in Pennsylvania, and viewed the site chosen for his manor house of “Pennsbury” in Bucks County.

November 1682 - William Penn made his Treaty of Friendship with the Lenape tribe under the “Great Elm Tree” at Shackamaxon (now the Kensington section of Philadelphia).



Left: “William Penn’s Treaty with the Indians,” Edward Hicks, Newtown, Bucks County, 1840-1845, Mercer Museum Collection.

November 1682 - Penn divided his land into three original counties: Bucks, Philadelphia and Chester. Bucks County received its name from Buckinghamshire, the county in England where Penn’s family seat was located.

1683 - William Penn began construction on his home, Pennsbury Manor, along the Delaware River in Falls Township.



Left: A small surviving remnant of Penn’s manor, “Pennsbury.” This is a wooden baluster or pendant—an architectural fragment from the manor house. Virtually nothing else original remains of Penn’s original home along the Delaware River. Mercer Museum Collection.

May 2, 1683 - The first Monthly Meeting of Friends (Quakers) in Falls was held. This was the first official Quaker meeting held in Bucks County. As Quakerism was rapidly growing in the region, soon Philadelphia and Middletown Township established meetings as well.

1700s

1718 - William Penn dies in England, leaving the colony of Pennsylvania to his sons Thomas and John Penn.

1720s - The “Log College” was built and ran by William Tennent. At the time, it was the only higher education institute in Pennsylvania. While the institute only lasts 20 years, it had great influence.

1727 - The Durham Iron Company was formed, which operated one of the earliest blast furnaces in Pennsylvania. The extraction of iron from ore and the production of cast iron became Bucks County’s first full-scale industry. Durham produced plates for stoves and various domestic implements as well as pig iron, which was the raw material for iron casting or conversion into wrought iron.

Right: Cornerstone from the Durham Iron Furnace, Durham Twp., Bucks County, 1727. Mercer Museum Collection.

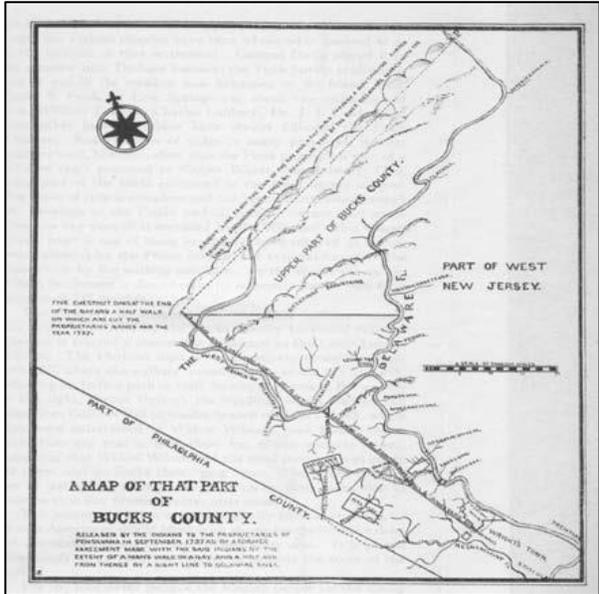


1737 - Agents for the sons of William Penn negotiate a questionable land transaction, known as the “The Walking Purchase,” with the Lenape tribe. This resulted in a huge swath of southeastern Pennsylvania being open to European

settlement. The Lenape believed that they were cheated out of their most valuable remaining lands along the Delaware River.

Right: Map of the “Walking Purchase,” showing the area of Pennsylvania extending from Wrightstown to present-day Port Jervis on the New York border that was taken from the Lenape tribe.

1754-1763 - Bucks County suffered little direct impact from the French and Indian War, which was waged in America between the global powers Britain and France and their Native American allies. However, it was the Bucks County event, the “Walking Purchase,” that had a significant influence on the War.



The Lenape people, who had been displaced by what they saw as the theft of their ancestral lands, were now openly hostile to the British and more than willing to fight with the French. During the War, the family of Edward Marshall, who had been a part of the “Walking Purchase” Treaty, was attacked repeatedly. At their homestead in Tinicum Township, Marshall’s wife and two children were killed in these reprisals.

Below: The rifle of Edward Marshall, made in Christians Spring, Pa., c. 1760. Marshall, one of the participants in the “Walking Purchase” of 1737, was alleged to have used this rifle to help defend himself and his family from attacks by Native Americans in the latter years of the French and Indian War. Mercer Museum Collection.



July 1774 - A public meeting was held in Newtown in response to the Boston Tea Party. Most Bucks County citizens agreed that the British Parliament was making laws that affected the colonies without the colonies' consent. Still, there was a strong conservative base in the government and Quakers were resistant to aggressive opposition to the English crown.

October 1774 - The Continental Congress produced the "Association of 1774," which called upon the colonies to unite in refusing imports, export, or consuming British goods. It also authorized counties and localities to elect committees to ensure these provisions were carried out.

June 1775 - Following the first shots of the Revolution at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, the Continental Army is formed. George Washington was elected Commander-in-Chief.

October 1775 - Augustine Willett of Bensalem Township, Bucks County, became a captain to one of the Pennsylvania Battalion companies. His company was sent to take part in the American offensive against Canada. Later, Willett rose to the rank of Brigadier General of the militia.



Left: Uniform Coat of Gen. Augustine Willett, 1780s, Mercer Museum Collection.

July 1776 - At the Pennsylvania State House ("Independence Hall") in Philadelphia, the Continental Congress declared its Independence from Great Britain.

Three people who signed the Declaration have Bucks County connections: Gregory Taylor, who worked at Durham Ironworks as early 1754 and was Colonel of the Bucks County Associators, Robert Morris, who was a famed financier of the Revolution and owned land in Falls Township, and George Clymer, who was a prosperous merchant who lived in Morrisville.

December 25, 1776 - On Christmas night, George Washington led his army across the Delaware River to make a surprise assault on the Hessian garrison at Trenton. The attack was successful and helped revive the American cause.

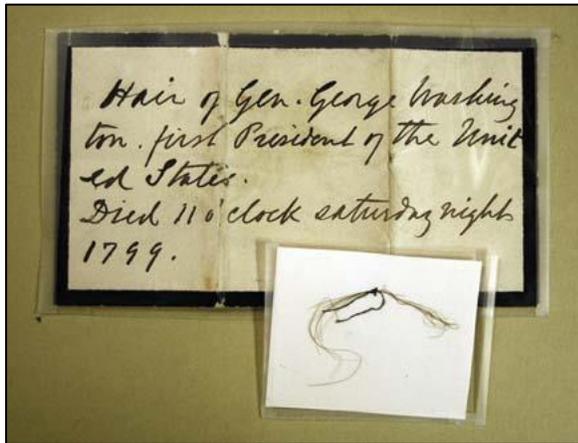
Right: "Washington at the Delaware," Edward Hicks, Newtown, Bucks County, c. 1840. Mercer Museum Collection.



August 1777 - George Washington's army, a total of 11,000 men, encamped in Warwick Township, Bucks County. Washington made his headquarters in the home of Hannah Moland and was joined there for the first time by the Marquis de Lafayette and the Polish nobleman Casimir Pulaski, both of whom came to play important roles in the American cause.

May 1, 1778 - The Battle of Crooked Billet - Named after a tavern and tavern sign in the village now known as Hatboro, this engagement was a British victory. Troops under American general John Lacey were taken by surprise and forced back deeper into Bucks County.

June 20, 1778 - Washington's army passed through Doylestown, a stop in his last march through Bucks County on his way to defend Philadelphia. Washington stayed one night in Jonathan Fell's house, about a mile east from the center of town.



Left: An alleged strand of hair from George Washington, apparently taken while on his death bed in 1799. Mercer Museum Library Collection.

March 1, 1780 - Pennsylvania's Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery was passed by the General Assembly. This is the first legislative act that abolished slavery anywhere in the United States, and it was signed by Thomas Paine (author of *Common Sense* who, at the time, was Clerk of the General Assembly).

This act required slave owners to register their slaves with the county governments. Under the law, the importation of slaves into Pennsylvania was banned, and the children of slaves became indentured servants required to work for their masters until they reached the age of 28, when they would be free. The 1790 Federal Census recorded 581 free and 261 enslaved Black people among Bucks County's more than 25,000 citizens. By 1810, only eleven remained enslaved in the county.

Owner Name	Slaves	Sex	Year Old
Charles Garrison	Arim	Male	30
	Stace	Male	20
	Tom	Male	7
Richard Leedom	Hannah	Female	8
Gerardus Wynkoop	Floa	Female	14
Adam Barr	Catharine	Female	29
	Rachel	Female	5
	Sam	Male	1
	John Solomon	A Slave for	
Thomas West	Jean	Female	4
John Ramsay	Matt	Female	44
	Patt	Female	8
	Peter	Male	6
	Hannah	Female	2

Right: Bucks County Register of Slaves, 1783-1830, Bucks County Archives, collections of the Mercer Museum.

November 21, 1787 - Pennsylvania voted to ratify the Constitution. Bucks County residents Gerardus Wynkoop, John Chapman, Valentine Opp, and Samuel Foulke joined with other Pennsylvanians to approve the document establishing the new American government.

1781-1788 - A group of British sympathizers and outlaws who terrorized southeastern Pennsylvania, known as the Doan Gang, operated for several years toward the end of the Revolution and afterward. The gang originated in and often returned to Bucks County. Involved in a string of robberies with targets that included tax collectors, militia officers, and government treasuries, most gang members were eventually rounded up, killed, hanged or exiled to Canada.



Right: Powder Horn of Moses Doan, 1771, Collection of the Mercer Museum. Moses served as one of the influential ringleaders of the Doan Gang.

August 22, 1787 - Bucks County resident John Fitch demonstrated the first full-sized steamboat on the Delaware River. However, it is Robert Fulton, with his line of commercially successful steamboats on the Hudson River, who eventually gained widespread recognition for the invention.

Left: Model of John Fitch's Steamboat, Nobel F. Beacham, Lahaska, Bucks County, 1960s, Collection of the Mercer Museum.



1798-99 – “Fries’ Rebellion” - Opposition to the assessment of a direct federal tax on individual citizens leads to a militant challenge to the authority of the new national government in northwestern Bucks County. Led by John Fries and others, the uprising is eventually put down by federal

troops, and the trial and conviction of its ringleaders.

1800s

May 19, 1800 - Joseph and Robert Smith, brothers belonging to a Quaker family in Buckingham Township, invented and patented a plow with a cast-iron moldboard. The moldboard is the part of a plow that cuts into the soil and turns it over, which was typically made of wood. This invention helped to revolutionize farming as wood boards stuck into the soil and had to be cleaned frequently.

1804 - Asher Miner began publishing the *Pennsylvania Correspondent and Farmer's Advertiser* in Doylestown. In 1824, it became the *Bucks County Patriot*, and in 1827, the *Bucks County Intelligencer*, the ancestor of today's *Intelligencer* newspaper.

December 1808 - Construction began on the Bucks County “Poorhouse,” now the Neshaminy Manor complex on South Easton and Almshouse Roads.

1809 - The first black church in Bucks County was formed in a community called Washington Village, now part of Langhorne. The church still exists today and is called the Bethlehem African Methodist Episcopal Church.

May 12, 1810 - Doylestown was selected as the location of the new County Seat. Three years later, after construction on the courthouse was finished, the county government was transferred from Newtown to Doylestown.

August 7, 1813 - A meeting in Newtown called for a company of men to be raised to battle the British in the War of 1812.

1815 - Edward Hicks, an ornamental painter and Quaker preacher, painted his first *Peaceable Kingdom* in Newtown, Bucks County. He created more than sixty variations on this same theme before his death in 1849, which helped to make him one of America's most celebrated folk artists.



Left: "The Peaceable Kingdom," Edward Hicks, Newtown, Bucks County, c. 1837. Mercer Museum Collection.

1827 - Ground is broken for Bucks County's first canal water route along the Delaware Division of the Pennsylvania Canal. Its waterway runs from Bristol to Easton. In 1830, the work was finished, and the canal opened.

1833 - Bucks County's first section of railway, constructed by the Philadelphia and Trenton Railroad Company, was built between Morrisville and Bristol.

1837 - The Bucks County Anti-Slavery Society held its first meeting. Many members of the Society were Quakers opposed to slavery.

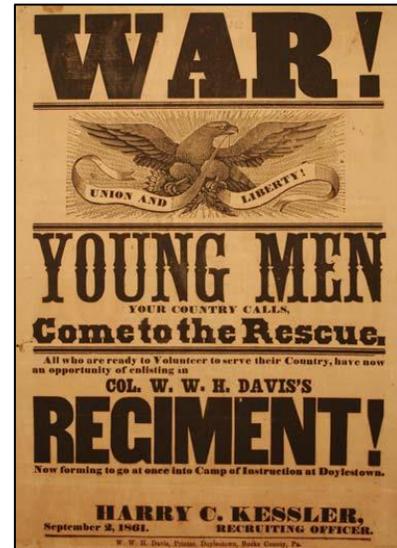
1850 - Women's Medical College of Philadelphia was instituted with the help of Bucks County residents Joseph and Thomas Longshore. Many Bucks County women graduated from this institution, including Hannah Longshore (Thomas' wife), Susan Parry of Buckingham, and Lettie A. Smith of Newtown.

1852-56 - The North Pennsylvania Railroad is constructed with the intention of linking all of the coal-producing regions of northeastern Pennsylvania. The construction of the railroad was the last large-scale public improvement project in Bucks County to take place before the outbreak of the Civil War.

1856 - Henry Chapman Mercer was born to William and Mary Mercer in Doylestown.

1861 - The Civil War erupted. Camp Lacy was established in Doylestown to train recruits for the “Bucks County Regiment,” the 104th Pennsylvania Volunteers. Bucks County men also enlisted in the 3rd Pa. Reserves, the 128th and 138th Pa. Infantry, the 1st New Jersey Cavalry, and many other outfits. Local men saw action in every theater of the war, while area women organized “ladies’ aid societies” to send supplies and items of comfort to soldiers in the field.

Right: Recruiting poster for the “Ringgold Regiment,” later known as the “Bucks County Regiment” or 104th Pa. Volunteers. The unit was commanded by Col. William Watts Hart Davis, editor of the *Doylestown Democrat* newspaper and later the founder of the Bucks County Historical Society. Mercer Museum Library Collection.



1862-1863 - In an effort to raise more troops for the Union war effort, conscription or the draft was instituted. Some Bucks Countians went willingly into drafted regiments like the 174th Pa. Infantry, while others resisted or deserted.

1863 - Black citizens were permitted to enlist and serve in the Union Army. Abolitionist Frederick Douglas spoke at several locations in Bucks County to encourage Black people to join regiments of “colored troops” and organize at Camp William Penn in the “Chelton Hills” outside of Philadelphia.



Left: Muster certificate of Thomas Dye of Bucks County in the 6th United States Colored Troops, August 1863. Mercer Museum Library Collection.

1870s - Though Bucks County remained heavily agricultural, some industries began to boom in the region. In Bristol, the textile and iron industries brought new workers to the small community causing the population to swell. In

Upper Bucks, the expansion of cigar manufacturing made the county the third-largest producer of “stogies” in the state.

1878 - The construction of Bucks County's second courthouse is completed. The stone structure, designed by architect Addison Hutton, sports a dramatic clock tower that can be seen for miles.

1881 - The Pennsylvania Railroad is extended through Wrightstown, Buckingham, and Solebury Townships to New Hope on the Delaware River.

1896 - Bucks County's first trolley route is constructed—a railway less than two miles long in Langhorne. The years that followed saw an explosion of trolley lines and routes linking the communities of Bucks and those of neighboring counties.

Right: In this postcard view from the early 1900s, a trolley crosses over the Tohickon Creek in Bedminster Township, Bucks County. Mercer Museum Library Collection.



1898 - The painter William L. Lathrop rented and later bought Phillip's Mill in Solebury Township, making his new home the focal point of what would become known as the New Hope "Artist Colony."

1900s

1900-1930s - The artistic movement that later became known as "Pennsylvania Impressionism" developed around New Hope Borough and the Phillip's Mill Community in Solebury Township. Artists such as William L. Lathrop, Daniel Garber, Robert Spencer, R. Sloan Bredin, George Sotter, and Charles Rosen reveled in painting the Bucks County countryside in its varying moods and seasons.

Right: “October,” by Daniel Garber, Solebury Twp., Bucks County, c. 1918. Mercer Museum Collection.

1906 - Tile manufacturer Henry C. Mercer was asked to design and install the floor for the new Pennsylvania State Capitol in Harrisburg. This commission helped launch Mercer on a successful career as a tile maker in the Arts & Crafts era.

1907-1912 - Henry Mercer designed and constructed Fonthill Castle, his home and showplace, which he lived in from 1912 until his death in 1930. At this castle, Mercer designed tiles, wrote extensively about early tools and technologies, and developed his varied collections of prints, foreign tiles, and pre-industrial hand tools and objects of everyday life in early America.

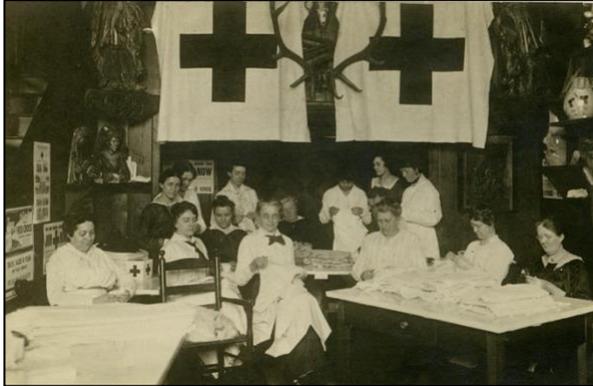


1913–1916 - With a crew of eight men and a horse named Lucy, Henry Mercer planned and directed the construction of the new museum of the Bucks County Historical Society, or “Colonial Museum,” in Doylestown. This castle-like building, which was eventually renamed in Mercer’s honor following his death, housed the Society’s collection of tools connected with pre-industrial crafts and trades and agricultural labors. Additionally, the museum housed artifacts and documents of local and family history.

1916 - Company G of Pennsylvania’s National Guard, headquartered in Bucks County, was among the units sent to El Paso, Texas to patrol the Rio Grande, while other troops were sent into Mexico in pursuit of the Mexican outlaw Pancho Villa.

1917 - Pennsylvania created the Washington Crossing Park Commission, which designated the area where George Washington led his troops across the Delaware River a state historic park.

1917-1918 - The Pennsylvania National Guard is reorganized into the 111th Regiment, a unit within the 28th Infantry “Keystone” Division. Units of the 28th Division, which included Bucks County’s Company G, are called to fight as America enters World War I. Local troops engaged in battles across France at Chateau-Thierry and Montfaucon. In late September 1918, they joined in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, which was the final push that won the war for the Allies.



Left: Members of Doylestown's American Red Cross prepared bandages and other supplies for the European war in 1918. Mercer Museum Library Collection.

Fall 1918 - The Spanish Influenza epidemic hit Bucks County with 9,500 cases reported. Throughout the United States, 350,000 people were killed by the virus.

1930s - The Great Depression struck the United States, including Bucks County. Nine federal relief projects, established by the Roosevelt Administration, are initiated in the county. These include a new waterworks in Sellersville, an addition to the high school in Bristol, and the reconstruction of William Penn's manor house at Pennsbury.

1931 - Pennsylvania Governor Gifford Pinchot signed the Delaware Canal Bill to preserve around forty miles of the former Delaware Division Canals for a public park, which had previously fallen into disuse. The signing marked the beginning of the continued efforts to preserve and maintain the canal's towpath and right of way for public recreation and sightseeing. In 1933, citizens formed the Delaware Valley Protective Association to help oversee these efforts.

1930s-1940s - Bucks County established a reputation as a haven and second home for novelists, playwrights, actors, songwriters, poets, and other cultural artists. Ex-urban migrants from the New York metropolitan area found inexpensive land and romantic landscapes in Bucks County's aging farms and historic farmhouses. Especially popular among these artists and writers were New Hope and the surrounding countryside.

1939 - The Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope opened with its first season. Well-known actors and actresses of stage and screen performed in "Summer Stock" productions on the New Hope stage.



Left: Postcard view of the Bucks County Playhouse, c. 1940. Mercer Museum Library Collection.

1941-1945 - With the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, the United States entered the Second World War. Two Bucks County soldiers died in the Pearl Harbor assault. On the Homefront, Bucks County made many contributions through wartime

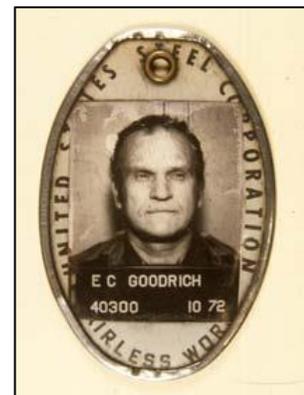
industries. The Brewster Aeronautical Corporation established a plant in Warminster that produced military aircraft and employed around 6,800 workers at its peak. The Fleetwings Company in Bristol and several smaller firms throughout the county were also engaged in war production.

1951 - William Levitt's company began construction of its second "Levittown" (the first was on Long Island) on former farmland in lower Bucks County. The last Levitt houses in the development were erected in 1958. At the time, Pennsylvania's Levittown was the largest suburban planned community in the United States, attracting many first-time homebuyers with low prices, safe streets, and community amenities including pools, churches, ball fields, schools, a shopping center, and a movie theater.

1952 - The United States Steel Corporation completed the construction of the Fairless Works plant along the Delaware River in Falls Township. By the next year, the facility employed nearly 8,000 workers in the main plant and adjacent shops, with the intent of producing 1.8 million tons of steel annually. Another planned community and housing development constructed by a subsidiary of U.S. Steel, now known as Fairless Hills, was built to help house the industrial workers who flooded into the area from western and northern Pennsylvania.

Right: Employee Badge of Ed. C. Goodrich, a worker at the Fairless Steel Plant, 1972. Mercer Museum Collection.

1954 - Pennsylvania Turnpike is completed through Bucks County, with the Valley Forge to Bristol segment opened. The bridge carrying the Turnpike over the Delaware River into New Jersey is finished two years later. The Turnpike helped pioneer various aspects of modern superhighway design.



1955 - Hurricanes Connie and Diane, which struck the East Coast within days of each other, produced a major flood on the Delaware River and inundated Bucks County towns from Riegelsville to Yardley. The River rose twenty-four feet above normal. Towns and villages along Neshaminy Creek were also devastated.

1960 - The old Bucks County Courthouse was demolished to make way for a new courthouse structure. Population growth had made the old 1878 building inadequate for modern government, though many lamented the loss of the Victorian landmark. The present Courthouse was dedicated in 1962.

Right: The clock tower of the 1878 Doylestown Courthouse remained standing—though not for much longer—as demolition was underway to make room for a new Courthouse complex in 1960.

1967 - The Bucks County Parks Foundation changed its name to the Bucks County Conservancy. Now the Heritage Conservancy, this non-profit group continues to spearhead efforts for open space and historic preservation in the County. In 1975, the organization established the Bucks County Register of Historic Places.

1980-1986 - One of the major political battles of the late twentieth century pitted environmentalists against governmental entities, utilities, and development advocates. The so-called “Pump” controversy centered on whether billions of gallons of water should be diverted from the Delaware River to meet the needs of a nuclear power facility and suburban development in northern Montgomery County. In the end, the facility was built despite the efforts of an environmental group calling itself “Del-AWARE.”

