



NANTICOKE LEGACY

A PUBLICATION OF THE NANTICOKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SAMANTHA MILL HOUSE – 495 EAST MAIN STREET, NANTICOKE, PA – 570-258-1367

March 2026

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Former Pennsylvania Governor John S. Fine collection on loan from the Nanticoke Historical Society.

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OUR WEBSITE

www.nanticokehistoryonline.org

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Secretary/Membership Coordinator: Charlotte Dudkowski

Activity and Events Coordinator: Tania Gronkowski

Archivist: John Sherrick

Director of Operations : John Telencho

Nanticoke Legacy Editor News and Stories. Website : Judith L. Minsavage

Building and Grounds: Mike Passetti

President Emerita – Julianna Zarzycki

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:

Deborah Kmetz

Earth Conservancy - Ashley

Thank you to all those who have renewed their membership, we appreciate your support.

**ANNOUNCING OUR UPCOMING BASKET
RAFFLE FUNDRAISER**



**Saturday, May 23 at the Cultural Centre of St. Faustina, 38 West Church Street,
Nanticoke.**

Please Consider a donation to our biggest fundraiser of the year. This fundraiser enables us to continue serving our community and maintaining the historic Samantha Mill House for the enjoyment of all who live in or visit our city. Please send your check to Nanticoke Historical Society, 495 East Main Street, Nanticoke, PA 18634. Or donate online at our website www.nanticokehistoryonline.org We are truly appreciative of any help you can give us to make this fundraiser a success. We are a 501 (c)(3) organization. Donations are tax deductible.

**THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING DONERS WHO HAVE GIVEN SO
GENEROUSLY TO SUPPORT THE NANTICOKE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Your generous donations enable us to preserve and maintain the Samantha Mill House, home to our offices, valuable archival documents, and historical artifacts as well as funding dedicated to the Nanticoke Historical Society Scholarship Program. Your support ensures that the legacy and history of our community remain accessible for generations to come

We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Your donations are tax-deductible.

Diamond

John Tomko

Stephanie Shern

Philip Shern

Andrew Sherbine

Mike Hill

JoAnn Grout

Platinum

John Gregorowicz

Shelly Jones

Jonathan Hill

Scott Holton

Karen Acosta

Silver

Deborah Kmetz

Earth Conservancy – Ashley, PA

**Donation Given by Jonathan Hill – on Behalf of Joan
Sulewski, Daughter of Zigmund and Catherine Sulewski**

GNA Scholarship Awards to be presented in May



The Nanticoke Historical Society is proud to announce that, this May, we will sponsor two \$1,000 scholarships for exceptional students at Greater Nanticoke Area High School—one recognizing academic achievement and the other honoring excellence in vocational-technical studies. These scholarships are made possible through the generous donations of our supporters, whose commitment to our mission enables us to invest in the promise and potential of our community's youth. We are deeply honored to support the next generation of leaders and innovators, and it is our sincere hope that these scholarships will inspire the recipients to pursue their dreams and achieve continued success in all their future endeavors. The names of the recipients will be revealed in the next issue of Nanticoke Legacy and on our website.

2026 Society Events

We are excited to announce our upcoming events for 2026. Please mark your calendars and join us for these special occasions:

May 23 – Annual Basket Raffle & Bake Sale

Location: Cultural Centre of St. Faustina, 38 West Church Street, Nanticoke

Highlights: Basket raffle, bake sale, display of new artifacts, maps, and memorabilia, plus a video presentation, many more surprises.

June 27 – City of Nanticoke – Big Bang 250th Anniversary Celebration.

More Details to come as Nanticoke also Celebrates its 100th anniversary as a city.

July 4 – Wyoming Massacre Memorial Event

Location: The Wyoming Monument, Wyoming Avenue, Forty Fort

Details: The Society will participate in this historic commemoration. More information to follow.

August 15 – Pysanky Egg Demonstration

Artist: Stephanie Jennings

Location: West Side Park – 389 W. Grand Street, Nanticoke

Make 2 eggs 1 guided pattern and 1 of your own pattern. Brief history of pysanky. Pysanky available to purchase

Fee: \$40 per person

Extras: Pysanky books available for purchase

September – Annual Society Potluck Picnic

Location: Samantha Mill House, 495 East Main Street, Nanticoke

Date: To be announced

Details: Bring a Dish to Share - Enjoy delicious food, baked goods, and fun activities. The exact date will be announced soon.

October 24 – Tealeaf Reading Workshop

Location: Samantha Mill House- 495 East Main Street, Nanticoke

Fee: \$40 per person

Details: Tealeaf reading workshop. Learn how to read tea leaves. Brief history of Tasseography. Reading your own leaves in a group setting. Taught by Dr. Genel Gronkowski

December - Christmas Party

Date: To be announced

Guests are kindly asked to cover the cost of their own meals.

Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers:

This year we will be celebrating the 250th anniversary of the birth of our nation giving us the opportunity to take a look at how far we've come from the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. No matter where our ancestors came from, when they stepped foot on this ground, they brought with them their heritage and religious beliefs. In our small cities and towns as well as large urban areas, remnants of those values remain. In earlier generations, people in towns like ours identified strongly as Polish, Irish, Italian, German, or Slovak. These identities shaped neighborhoods, churches, and friendships.

Today, many of us carry a mixture of these heritages. We no longer fit neatly into a single category. Rather, we reflect a blend of culture showing that our community has long been made up of diverse influences coming together. In the city of Nanticoke, we must have pride in those things that cement a community. It is a time to honor those who built this city. Who worked hard and made a life for themselves and their families. Small business owners, miners, factory workers, families working together. A lot of us reside in houses constructed back in the 1800s. Many churches and other buildings constructed during that period are still standing today. We pass by them daily, without thinking of their historic value. This year as we celebrated the city's 100th anniversary, let's take time to learn more about our community and remember those who came before us. It's time we look back; our history is important to pass on to our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The Nanticoke Historical Society is here to tell the stories.....There was a time, a time when.....

Judy Minsavage, Editor

The President's Corner

By Chet Zaremba

Our **Nanticoke Stove** is one of the jewels in the Nanticoke Historical Society's collection of artifacts. The dial of the thermometer indicates that the stove was manufactured in Royersford, Pennsylvania circa 1915. A second plate on the stove is inscribed "C. H. Lecher, Nanticoke, PA," obviously referring to Lecher's Hardware as the place to which the stove would have been shipped and then subsequently purchased.

Visitors to our facility usually comment about remembering such a stove but seldom recognize the significance of this simple item and how it ties in with the history of coal in Nanticoke.



Nanticoke Historical Society President Chet Zaremba



The Nanticoke Stove at the Samantha Mill House.

The open wood burning hearth of the eighteenth century gave way to the cast iron stove between 1820 and 1850. The development of the stove changed

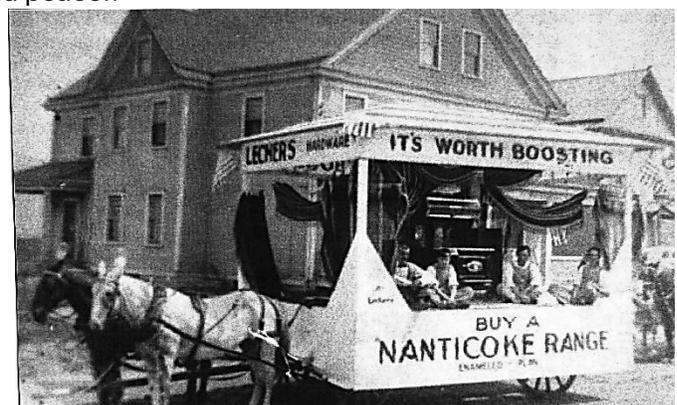


Nanticoke inscribed on front plate.

American life. It was said that the impact of the stove on the nineteenth century can be compared to the impact of the automobile in the twentieth. One writer, Ruth S. Cowan, said that "the cast iron cooking stove could well serve as the single most important domestic symbol of the nineteenth century. Mary S. Patterson called the kitchen stove "the pivot around which people live" and declared it the greatest influence over family health and peace..

The sharp rise in stove sales was due to coal becoming more popular than wood and more available and plentiful.

Manufacturers began to concentrate on the stove being more for cooking than heating. The new designs made coal stoves irresistible and became a mainstay of virtually every home in America from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century. On your next visit to the Samantha Mill House, take another look at our stove and appreciate its place in our history and how that history was fueled by Nanticoke coal. 🇺🇸



This undated photo show a float constructed by Lecher's Hardware showcasing the Nanticoke Stove during a city parade

Nanticoke Conservation Club Invites Society to speak at event

The Nanticoke Historical Society extends a sincere thank you to Gary Gronkowski, President of the Nanticoke Conservation Club, for inviting us to speak at the Club's annual Fish and Game Dinner held in February at the American Legion on West Broad Street.



NANTICOKE CONSERVATION CLUB - A wonderful evening of celebrating community, citizenship and great food



From left, Judy Minsavage, Vice President, Nanticoke Historical Society, Gary Gronkowski, President, Nanticoke Conservation Club, and Tania Gronkowski, Nanticoke Historical Society Director of Events and Activities

The meal, prepared with care by Club members, was absolutely delicious, and the evening offered a wonderful chance to reconnect with longtime friends and neighbors. We were grateful for the opportunity to share with members of the organization the Society's ongoing work to preserve the archival history of our city: its people, its stories, and the places that continue to shape our collective memory.

The event also allowed us to highlight several exciting programs and initiatives being planned by the Society in the year ahead. We look forward to welcoming the community to these upcoming events.

The Nanticoke Conservation Club remains a true asset to our city. We encourage everyone to support their efforts and the important work they do for our community. You can contact them through their website, nanticokeconservationclub.com

WE CAN HELP

DO YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE HISTORY OF YOUR FAMILY, CLUBS, ASSOCIATIONS, BUSINESSES, AND MORE? WE ARE YOUR GO TO PLACE TO RESEARCH NANTICOKE'S PAST.

OUR OFFICE HOURS ARE MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY 9 A.M. TO 2 P.M.

NOW OFFERING EVENINGS AND SATURDAYS BY APPOINTMENT

CALL US AT 570-258-1367

To obtain a research request form go to www.nanticokehistoryonline.org and find our quick links at the top of our home page.

It was a Fine Day

By Judy Minsavage

Set on a beautiful plateau with a twenty-five-mile view of the foothills of the Endless Mountains, the Governor's Place Bed and Breakfast is located at 354 Loyalville Road in Dallas, PA. Beyond its spectacular scenery, the home welcomes guests into an inviting atmosphere of walls painted in soft hues, relaxing seating areas, exquisitely decorated bedrooms, gracious dining spaces, and the lasting history of John S. Fine, the 35th Governor of Pennsylvania, who served from 1951 to 1955.



A portrait of John S. Fine hangs in the commemorative office of the Governor's Place Bed and Breakfast

What, you may ask is the connection between this beautiful facility and our historical society?

First a little history

Upon his retirement Governor Fine, who was born and raised in Nanticoke, searched for a quiet place to build a home and enjoy life leaving the rigors of politics behind. He chose the Loyalville Road location in Dallas and in the 1950s had the home constructed by Sordoni Construction Company. Governor Fine passed away May 21, 1978. Mr. and Mrs. William Hall of New Jersey purchased the home and according to family history spent forty "happy" years at the location.

Over the last two years, the remaining family members undertook the creation of a refined retreat where guests could experience tranquility and breathtaking views of the Endless Mountains while also preserving the rich memories established during the Hall family's many years of residence. They also wanted to acknowledge Fine and his place in Pennsylvania history.

Enter the Nanticoke Historical Society

In 2025, when the home was being renovated, Society President Chet Zaremba received an invitation to tour the facility. "It is absolutely beautiful" Zaremba said returning from the trip. During his visit, the family asked as to the availability of any historic photos, documents, artifacts that may be available to use as a backdrop that

would reflect the life and times of John S. Fine.

Zaremba invited

them to look over the many artifacts that we had received from the Fine Family as a donation a few years ago.



Chet Zaremba, President of the Nanticoke Historical Society met with officers of the Governor's Place Bed and Breakfast. From left Maria Hall, Part owner, and Operations Manager, Judy Minsavage, V.P. Nanticoke Historical Society, Zaremba, Linda Austen, General Manager



Photos from the John S. Fine Collection adorn the walls

In October, Linda Austen, General Manager and Maria Hall, co-owner and Operations Manager of the facility visited the Society offices and met with Zaremba. They were amazed at the number of items in the Society archives.

After choosing books, framed photos, some family photos, certificates and personal items belonging to the former governor, Austen, Hall and Zaremba signed A permanent Loan agreement.

Key features of a Permanent Loan Agreement:

A Permanent Loan Agreement allows the Nanticoke Historical Society to retain legal ownership of the items. The representatives of The Governor’s Place agree to care for and display the items responsibly. If every condition is met, no particular end date applies. This provides the Hall Family to display the items ensuring their protection and proper use while on display.



Personal items and memorabilia from the Society’s Gov. John S. Fine Collection on display



Plaque awarded to Governor John S. Fine 1951

distinctive experience, with thoughtfully decorated bedrooms and gracious dining and sitting areas. Guests can settle into a cozy, peaceful environment where they can enjoy a tasty breakfast, take in sweeping views, unwind by a crackling fire, or play pool on a custom-made table.



Desk Set from the Society’s Gov. John S. Fine Collection and Book written by Chet Zaremba, Images of America, Nanticoke

The Governor’s Place provides a truly distinctive experience, with thoughtfully decorated bedrooms and gracious dining and sitting areas. Guests can settle into a cozy, peaceful environment where they can enjoy a tasty breakfast, take in sweeping views, unwind by a crackling fire, or play pool on a custom-made table.



Certificates and memorabilia from the Society’s Gov. John S. Fine Collection

The Nanticoke Historical Society is always ready to provide historical information for our community and others interested in our city’s impact on history. From the people who mined the coal and raised their families in challenging times to the men and women who have shaped society through their ideas and service, we are here to tell their stories.



Plaque giving credit to the Nanticoke Historical Society as owners of the John S. Fine Collection



Visitor inspects a Time Magazine Cover photo of Pennsylvania’s 35th Governor, John S. Fine.

More on the Society's Tour of Retreat State Correctional Facility

By Tania Gronkowski

Artwork at Retreat SCI

When humans are denied the freedom to be outside in nature for extended periods of time, they feel a need to bring nature inside to them.

The inmates of Retreat SCI exhibited this through their artwork. Murals on the walls helped to take their minds somewhere else, somewhere out of their cells, out of reality to a peaceful place. It surely helped them retain sanity in their incarceration. The talent shown in their artwork is admirable and we can see that they lacked the correct brushes and paints by looking closely at their brushwork and color choices. We assume that their ideas had to be approved before they were allowed to paint and wonder just how long it took for them to accomplish their scenes.



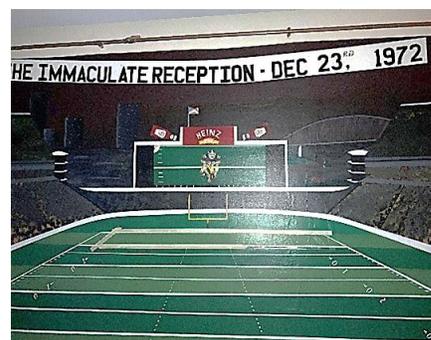
The artwork was a pleasant surprise as we toured the administration

building and visitor area and even the elevators were adorned with bucolic scenes. One of the saddest moments we faced was seeing a series of four cells in a below ground area that faced a wall. Imagine being locked away without anything to ease the mind, with only a tiny slit of window at the ceiling level that



looked out at the ground. Thankfully someone painted three windows on the wall facing those cells. Each window showed a different view to allow a visual escape or maybe a happy memory.

There were many marine scenes, and we guessed that an artist must have been fond of aquariums. One of the artists was clever in hiding figures of women in the waves and clouds in the paintings. You have to look for them, but once you see it, it is obvious. There is a mural in the basement level celebrating The Immaculate Reception – something for the football fans. The floral scenes were lighthearted, and the flora looked as if it was painted from a memory not a reference picture.



We wonder if the inmates with this talent had pursued art, would they have had a different life. These artists will forever be anonymous as they were not allowed to sign their work. We are grateful for the chance to see these artworks and share them with you. 📷

Forever Our Polka King

John “Stanky” Stankovic

By Judy Minsavage

John Stankovic was a polka music maestro, accordionist, songwriter, television producer and personality, author, Polka Hall of Famer, a Marquis-Who’s Who inductee, and don’t forget, a world-traveled entertainer. When you heard polka music, Stankey was definitely in the house making people smile and dancing taking us away from our everyday life. In addition to his accomplishments and fame he also has been honored as having sixty years of service as a Nanticoke Hose Co. #4 firefighter. Most notably he was a devoted husband and father. John “Stanky”



John “Stanky” Stankovic

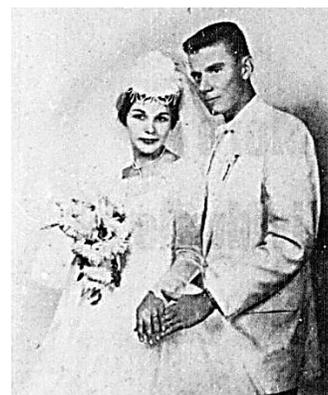
Stankovic passed away on Christmas Day, 2025, leaving a distinguished legacy defined by dedication, talent, and accomplishment. We will always remember his impact and feel a profound sense of loss in his absence.



John & Dorothy Stankovic; Debbie, Vince & Ashley Horoschock; Kim, Tom & Alexandra Bukowski

40s and 50s he went through neighborhoods performing an early form of recycling, collecting rags, metal and other disposable items for repurpose. His first band, Stanky and the Tip-Toppers, formed in 1950. Because several band members were coal miners, and to honor his father, who immigrated from Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic) at age 16 and worked in the mines, the group adopted the name 'Stanky and the Coalminers.'

In his many interviews over the years, “Stanky” as he was affectionately known, stated that on the advice of his father, he began taking lessons from accordionist Joe Gurka while working as a self-described “ragman.” In the



Dottie and John on their wedding day



1962 -(pictured in no particular order) John Stankey, Leonard Petroski, Joe Stankovic, Jimmy Steinkirchner, Joe Vensheski, Mike Nornick,

In 1962, Stanky married Dorothy Wegrzynowicz, (Dottie) his wife of 63 years, and started recording in New York City. Dottie was not only his life partner but accompanied him on his daily collection routine and later joined his band playing bells, or the violin. In later years their daughters, Debbie Stanky Horoschock, played trumpet and Kim Stanky Butkowski the saxophone, clarinet and drums, with Vince Horoschock on bass and Mark Steinkirchner on trumpet. Among those who performed with the Coalminers were drummers Scott Safka, Tom Novakowski, Norbie Iesnewski, Jerry Gillis and Charles Syroid; Joe

Olejniak and Ralph Kotsur, sax and clarinet; Frank Casty, clarinet; Joe Faux, bass; Fred Kitchen, accordion and piano and Joe Vensheski, piano.

In one of the many articles written about Stanky's life, he reminisced about the first night his six-piece band played at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Luzerne. The winter storm prevented a packed house, but Stanky and his



John and Dottie hosting WVIA's Pennsylvania Polka

band were determined to give the few people in attendance a terrific show. He relates that, in the audience was local travel agent Barry Tenenbaum who asked if they would like to headline a polka cruise. By 2017 he and his band had gone on 156 polka cruises and performed in China, Australia, South Korea, Japan, England, France, Holland, Germany, Spain and Canada.

John and Dottie hosted WVIA's Pennsylvania Polka. Stanky managed the band schedule and kept an eye out for small problems during filming, which were later edited out.



John Stankovic Inducted into the International Polka Association's Hall of Fame

In 2019, Stanky was inducted into the International Polka Association's Hall of Fame and listed in Marquis- Who's Who in America, a prestigious biographical directory that highlights

accomplished individuals and their contributions to society.



In 2022, fellow Nanticoke City Firefighters gave Stanky a surprise when they honored him for his sixty years as a volunteer firefighter. Receiving a plaque and proclamation read by Nanticoke City Mayor Kevin Coughlin.



Nanticoke Mayor, Kevin Coughlin, presenting a plaque for sixty years as a volunteer firefighter

Through his music, John Stankey and his band brought joy not only to the people of Nanticoke and the Wyoming Valley, but also to audiences around the world, sharing their passion and uplifting spirits wherever they performed. He was dedicated to, as he did that blustery winter's night at the Knights of Columbus Hall, giving his audience the best show possible. 🎵

About the Series: *In Honor and Memory*

By John S. Tomko, Jr.

I write *In Honor and Memory* because some stories should be kept whole.

History often moves quickly to summaries. Names turn into lists, lives become just dates, and experiences fade into the background. What we often lose is the human side—how people really lived, made choices, raised families, served others, and were known in their communities.

This series is meant to slow that process.

I did not plan to write formal biographies or complete histories. My goal is simpler and, I think, more important: to keep a sense of presence. Each profile tries to show who someone was in their family, work, service, and community—not as an idea, but as a real person.

The people in *In Honor and Memory* were not chosen for being famous or extraordinary in the usual way. They are here because their lives mattered, and their contributions—whether in uniform, public service, or quiet community work—are part of Nanticoke's story. Together, these lives show the character and strength of the community.

From my own experience, I've learned that if we don't tend to memory, it gets replaced by summaries or feelings. When that happens, we lose more than just details—we lose real understanding. Writing these profiles is my way of protecting against that loss. It's an act of care, not just nostalgia.

This series is not meant to elevate, reinterpret, or find lessons where there are none. Its purpose is to remember people honestly and respectfully, without adding extra details. Each story is shared as it is, so readers can meet the person, not just a symbol.

At its heart, In Honor and Memory is a promise: to remember our neighbors as they lived, to keep their place in our community's record, and to make sure time does not erase what should be remembered.

IN HONOR AND MEMORY

By John S. Tomko, Jr.

IN HONOR AND MEMORY is a feature profiling the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines who lived in or around Nanticoke and who served during World War I and World War II.

Ambrose Tkatch (1914-1989)

Photo courtesy of Andrea (Tkatch) Josefowicz)

Ambrose Andrew Tkatch (pronounced Kotch) was born on December 8, 1914. A date shared with Floyd Tillman, an American country music pioneer who introduced the swing and honky-tonk genres. Tillman's



Ambrose Tkatch

contributions to music were recognized with his induction into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1970 and the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1984.

Ambrose is the son of John Tkatch and Mary Zipaj Tkatch. He had four brothers and three sisters. Two of his brothers were killed in action during World War II: Pvt. Joseph M. Kotch, August 14, 1944, and Pvt. George, J. Kotch, April 17, 1945. His father, John, is a former Nanticoke chief of police. Ambrose attended Nanticoke High School. At age nineteen, he left school and was eventually drafted.

In 1935, Ambrose married Helen Sotack. They were married for forty years and had six children: Shirley, Sylvia, Gerald, Thomas, Andrea, and Stephen.

After his induction into the Armed Forces on January 21, 1944, Ambrose underwent training at various locations. He completed initial training assigned to company 546 at U.S. Naval Training Center, Sampson, New York, and specialized training in amphibious landings at Camp Bradford, Virginia. This camp, which was originally a training center for U.S. Navy Seabees, transitioned to become a training center for landing ship tank (LST) crews in 1943. Today, it is part of the Joint Expeditionary Base-Little Creek (JEB-LC).



Ambridge PA Shipyards 1945

In May 1944, he trained at Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He then traveled to the American Bridge Company's Ambridge Shipyards, in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, where he joined the Newport Class USS LST-669, his home away from home until September 1945. Ambrose and his shipmates on the USS LST-669 sailed down the Mississippi River to New Orleans, where the ship was commissioned.

The USS LST-669 was commissioned on May 27, 1944. It was 327 feet long and 50 feet wide. When fully loaded, it displaced 4,080 tons. It reached a top speed of 10.8 knots, powered by diesel engines and twin screws. It was armed with one 3-inch 50-caliber dual-purpose gun, one 40MM anti-aircraft gun, and six 20MM guns. It had a crew complement of seven officers and two hundred and four enlisted sailors. The LST-669 carried smaller craft topside and had a tunnel-like hold for tanks, vehicles, guns, and cargo.

According to his war diary, after a brief shakedown cruise, the LST-669 departed New Orleans and arrived at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. During the transit to the Panama Canal, he observed numerous German submarines operating in what was then called the Gulf of Mexico. A tanker in the convoy was sunk. Arriving in San Diego, California, the crew had liberty in Tijuana, Mexico. After transiting the Pacific, the USS LST-669 arrived at Pearl Harbor in Kaneohe Bay. Remnants of the wreckage from December 7, 1941, were still evident.



LST669 unloading troops and supplies before the Leyte Invasion

Departing Pearl Harbor, LST-669 transited the Pacific to the Admiralty Islands, where it embarked troops for MacArthur's invasion of the Philippines at Leyte. For four days, Ambrose and his shipmates shuttled troops and supplies to shore. Doing so under constant fire from the shore and Japanese aircraft from above. Ambrose had a personal acquaintance with the latter, downing a "Jap bomber" by "painting her belly full of holes." He got credit for the kill but "was scared as hell." His war diary tells of multiple harrowing experiences from aircraft and submarines as the LST-669 transited the area between New Guinea and the Philippines and in and around the Philippine Islands. All told, the ship made five landings in Leyte.

But the war wasn't over. The 669 was involved in the Okinawa invasion, where the Japanese took suicide attacks to the next level. Easter Sunday. "Lots of ships lost, plenty of bombs dropped also. Plenty of suicide planes,

one hit close to our ship and spread destruction over our ship. Two more Jap planes. Lots of action every day. No rest. Also Jap subs.”

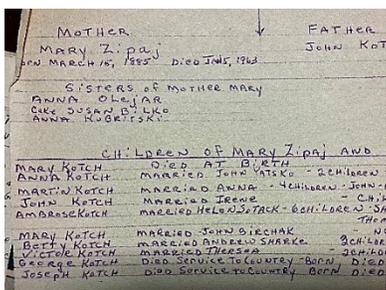
On September 1, 1945, Ambrose’s war was essentially over when the 669 arrived at Treasure Island in the San Francisco Bay. After three days, Ambrose, on a thirty-day leave, departed for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he was honorably discharged from the U.S. Navy. Thus, the next chapter in his life began.



USS LST-669 in San Francisco Bay, circa 1945-46 Photo Naval History and Heritage Command,

Ambrose worked for the Susquehanna Colliery for twenty-three years and the City of Nanticoke as a heavy machinery operator for twenty years. In retirement, Ambrose created models of coal mine scenes, three of which were donated to the Nanticoke Historical Society by the family. The donations are the subject of a May 2025 article in the Nanticoke Legacy, which is available to read on the Society website www.nanticokehistoryonline.org on the Events and Stories Page.

Ambrose’s daughter Andrea remembers her father as “...a great father, husband...[who] worked very hard for his family—supported all we did...” There was the fishing and the “rides on Sunday for ice cream” and most importantly, “Spending time with his children.”



In this tribute, we’ll end with a further loving remembrance from Andrea. “What brought me joy, after my mother’s death was spending time with him. After his stroke he lived with me -so glad- He told me many stories about his life and friends during the war and places he went. He was my dad, my friend, who was most loved.”

A page from the journal of the Tkatch-Kotch Family

WONDERING WHAT TO DO WITH OLD PHOTOS AND MEMORABILIA?

Our loved ones have a history. Their life stories are deeply rooted in their community as residents, veterans, business owners, teachers, members of organizations and so much more. The Nanticoke Historical Society realizes and respects how important each person's story is to their relatives and friends as well as the community in which they lived. That is why the Society respectfully asks those who have lost a loved one to consider the historical society when taking stock of memorabilia and photos.

The Society may already have pieces of a family's history in its vast database to which pictures of an old homestead, business, rare family photos or writings can be added completing a genealogical picture in tribute to those who have passed.

We sometimes find ourselves with memorabilia or photos passed down through generations. Certain photographs may depict historical scenes of Nanticoke, including streets or buildings that have since been demolished or altered. Society archivists will scan and, if requested, return items to families. We may decline items we cannot use or store; however, we can help families sort through old photos or memorabilia that could hold historical value for the city.

For more information or to donate items Contact the Historical Society at 570-258-1367 or email: nhs63@comcast.net

Think of this section as your backstage pass to the quirky, surprising, and downright entertaining stories from our city's past. These tales are guaranteed to make you laugh, scratch your head in wonder, and maybe even question reality (just a little).

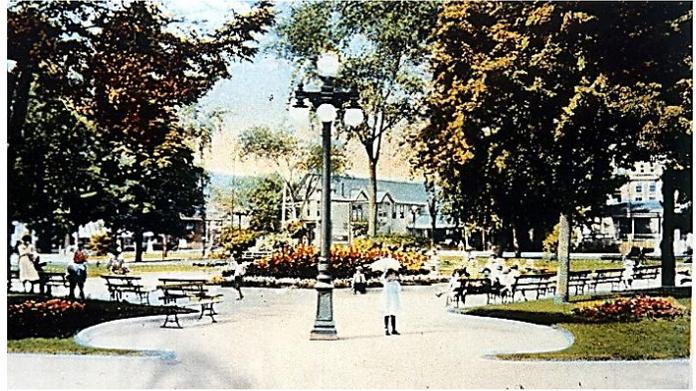
From mysterious happenings to laughable moments, each story is handpicked to keep you guessing and grinning. So, buckle up and prepare to be entertained—because history isn't just about dates and facts; sometimes, it's about the stories you never saw coming.

We hope you'll enjoy this new feature as much as we enjoyed digging up these forgotten gems.

Forgotten Tales of Nanticoke.

The Ironman – Nanticoke's Slasher

By Tania Gronkowski



Nanticoke's Central Park in 1913

Our story begins on October 5, 1914, as a man was noticed flourishing a razor in Nanticoke's Central Park. At first, people were not alarmed just curious - until the violence began. The maniac rushed up to Walter Tushala and quickly slashed his throat, severing his jugular vein. It took 13 stitches to close the wound and fortunately, he survived the attack. The crazed man ran a few feet to attack the next victim, John Keefer, who defended himself but was cut across the face and neck. A large crowd gathered, surrounding the enraged man, and at the sight of the injured men, several in the crowd fainted. The demented creature stood with the razor playing a circle around his head and shouted, "Come on boys!"

An unarmed patrolman, William David Roberts, heard the attack and hurried to aid the injured men. He circled around the crowd and got behind the crazy fiend. Roberts bludgeoned the fiend with his club dealing him a big cut which only enraged him. The fiend turned and grappled with Patrolman Roberts, slashing out with his razor and sliced Roberts's coat in four places. Roberts struck him in the head again so hard the impact was heard across the street, but it had no effect on the man. The enraged man slashed at Roberts's face ripping a gash under one eye, almost cutting it out, and another gash was dealt to the policeman's nose. Roberts, blinded with blood and pain, had to withdraw. The crazed man then moved toward Market Street where a little girl stood in his path. Adolph Leventhal, owner of a clothing store at 180 South Market street, stooped to pick up his daughter, Lillian. As he was rising with her in his arms, he was attacked. Before he could stand, his scalp was opened with two hacking slashes of the razor.



*Hill's Drug Store on
Market Street*

Constable Thomas Jones, who had only one arm, came to the aid of Leventhal. The slasher then turned his attack on Jones, who was unarmed. Roy Link, a sailor home on furlough, stepped in to help the crippled constable. He stepped between the two, armed only with his fists, but his blows had no effect upon the assailant. Link suffered a deep incision above the eye from the crazed man.

The maniac escaped from the crowd again and dashed toward Dr. Hill's Drug Store at 188 South Market Street. The clerk saw the man coming, slammed and locked the door.



Constable Thomas Jones

The maniac turned and attempted to enter Gustav Kuhlman's Barber Shop at 186 South Market Street, but the door was locked just in time.

Hobart Thomas was coming up the street carrying a piece of lead pipe and as the maniac came at him, he struck the slasher in the head with all his strength. Thomas hit him so hard that the pipe bent double (earning the slasher the name Ironman) but this didn't phase the crazy man. Thomas hit him again but lost the pipe as it slipped out of his hand. The lunatic picked up the pipe and calmly started to hone his razor on it. As he was sharpening his razor, Daniel Thomas snuck behind him. Thomas threw a brick which struck the back of the lunatic's head at the base of the brain. This also had no visible effect and the lunatic continued down the street.

The crazed man reached Gingher's Barber Shop at 148 South Market Street and leaped through the door. He stalked toward Mr. Gingher who put a revolving chair between them. The man tried to reach him with the razor and hacked violently at the barber's hands, ripping the chair to pieces. Gingher dashed through a door in the back of the room just as the maniac reached him and locked it.

John G. Freed, an elderly civil War Veteran, saw the attack and ran into the shop to help the barber. The maniac was infuriated by the barber's escape and turned on the old man. The first slash of the razor laid open a huge cut on Freed's hand; the second slash took off his nose. The nose hung over Freed's mouth by a small thread of flesh.

Mrs. Mary Gingher, who had been in the rear of the house, heard the commotion and rushed to the front of the shop. She saw Mr. Freed, bleeding profusely, run from the shop. She didn't know what had happened but walked up to the maniac and scolded him to keep quiet. He brandished the razor towards her and was about to attack again. Constable Jones, now armed with a gun, came through the door. The noise of his arrival diverted the maniac's attention from Mrs. Gingher and saved her life. The maniac hurled a shaving mug at Constable Jones which struck him on the arm.

The maniac's frenzy doubled in violence. He grabbed shaving mugs, bay rum bottles and everything he could get his hands on and hurled them around in a wild chaos. He smashed the heavy plate glass windows in the shop front to pieces.

The police station sent armed reinforcements, and they gathered in front of the shop. They dared not fire for fear of hitting Mrs. Gingher, who was still in the shop. She finally escaped through the rear door and the police opened fire. More than fifteen rounds were fired into the shop. One round hit the crazed man in the arm, breaking it, and he dropped the razor. Before he could regain the weapon, the police surged into the shop and overpowered him.

He was placed in Dr. Fred Davis's car and taken to Nanticoke State Hospital. Once on the examination table, the doctor found he had three bullets in the abdomen, one in the cheek, two in the back, one in the shoulder and one in the arm. While disrobing him, another bullet dropped from under his vest. He had several lacerations on the scalp inflicted from the blows of club, pipe and brick. Four cuts upon his neck from the razor appear to have been self-inflicted as a suicide attempt when cornered by police. He was restrained overnight and seemed to be unnaturally strong. When conscious, it was reported that he raved for long periods of time. If he gains sufficient strength, he will be treated and taken to the insane asylum.



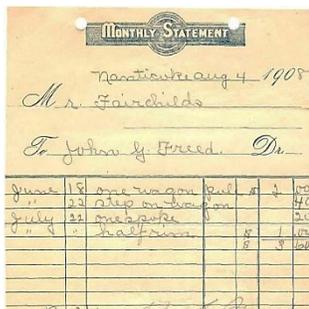
Intersection of Market and West Broad Streets. Hill's Drug Store is on the left

He told police his name was Peter Zudacheck, 35. As to why he committed the crimes, he stated that he had trouble with a man in the mines and wanted to get even. He also stated that he was in the woods the day before and saw street cars and automobiles running around the trees.

Upon investigation, the ticket agent at the Pennsylvania Railroad Station identified the man as one who inquired about rates to Indiana and Pittsburg. He told the agent he only had \$3 and asked if he could be shipped as freight. He left the station leaving his baggage behind. He was in Nanticoke for three days and answers the description of a man wanted for rape in Sugar Notch.

On October 16, 1914, Peter Zudacheck was improving in the hospital. He was able to sit up for brief interval but suffered severe pain from the injuries to his right arm. Doctors did not remove the eight bullets from his body. He had two men from Honey Pot visit him. They were employed by the Pa. Railroad and knew him from Fort Wayne, Indiana where his wife and daughter were living. They didn't believe him to be insane but knew him to act crazy after imbibing the slightest drink of liquor. There was no evidence that Zudacheck had been drinking when he was admitted to the hospital and he still had \$3 on him. His behavior in the hospital does not indicate insanity but no one wants to give him his freedom. The case will be turned over to the police and town officials.

On October 25, 1914, it was reported that Officer W.D. Roberts was recovering in the hospital. His eyesight was endangered but will be saved.



Our Babe Ruth

The legend of Steve Bilko

By Judy Minsavage

In October of 1976 writer, producer, Gaylon H. White found himself sitting at the Tilbury Inn on Route 11 In West Nanticoke. As he describes it in his book, *The Bilko Athletic Club*, published in 2014, “Willie Nelson whined “Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain” on the jukebox A man with a thick Irish accent sat down next to him at the bar and asked, “What are you doing here on a Friday night,” to which White replied “I’m in town to see Steve Bilko.” Thus started the long journey White would travel to uncover the life of Bilko and his experiences in the minor and major leagues.



Steve Bilko with the LA Angels

Barrel chested 6’1” and weighing 230-pound Steve Bilko was undoubtedly one of largest men ever to play minor league and professional baseball. That fact was all but forgotten when his powerhouse swing connected with the ball. Amazed players and fans knew they had never seen anyone, even Babe Ruth, blast a ball over the wall like Bilko. Stephen Bilko was born on November 13, 1928, and lived in the Honey Pot Section of Nanticoke. In 1943, while playing football, Bilko earned All-Scholastic honors as a freshman at Nanticoke High School, that first and only student in the history of the school to earn that honor.

At 17, he impressed Cardinal’s and Phillies’ scouts, playing on local ball fields surrounded by slag dumps. He was drafted in 1949 as an outfielder by the St. Louis Cardinals.

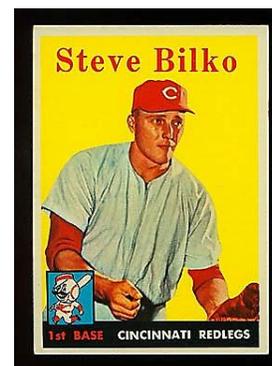
By 1954, with a batting average of .420 local newspapers covered Bilko’s every move. Calling him as “hot as a burning house.” In January of 1955, determined to stay in St. Louis, he and Card’s outfielder, Rip Repulski, purchased The Shamrock, a cocktail lounge. Both men moved their families to Missouri.

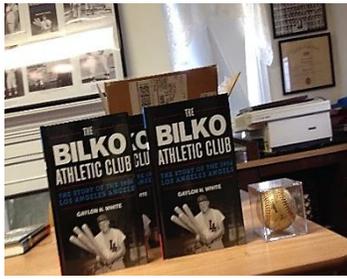


After Bilko was picked up by the Chicago Cubs in 1954, he was transferred to the Los Angeles Pacific Coast League, where he joined the Angels, considered one of the top one hundred minor league teams of all time. While Steve Bilko believed he deserved more time with the Cubs, joining the Angels provided him greater opportunities to play. At Los Angeles’s ‘Little Wrigley,’ a scaled-down replica of Chicago’s iconic ballpark, he quickly established himself as a clutch hitter.

In addition to the Angels, Bilko played for the Cincinnati Redleg’s (1958), Los Angeles Dodgers (1958), Detroit Tigers (1960) and the American League's Los Angeles Angels (1961–1962),

In 1957, while Bilko was still with the Angels, he spent the Fall and Winter in Nanticoke, attending a widely publicized testimonial dinner at the 400 Club. In 1960 Bilko was with the Detroit Tigers, several Nanticoke Firemen traveled to New York to see the champ play against the Yankees. After the game Yankee’s pitcher Bobby Shantz claimed” Bilko batted the hardest hit ball anybody ever got off me.” In 1961 the Angels joined the American League and Bilko was back. He batted .279 with twenty home runs and 81 RBIs. Then in ‘62 Bilko suffered a broken leg and retired from the game returning to the place he loved Nanticoke and Honey Pot. Bilko spent 10 years in the big leagues.





***Bilko Athletic Club - Gaylon H. White
Author***

Steve Bilko received recognition in 2003 when he was elected to the Pacific Coast Baseball League Hall of Fame and also became a member of the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame. The only player in PCL history to win the league's MVP award in three consecutive seasons (1955-57). He was the PCL Batting Champion in 1956 with a .360 batting average. Had the most home runs in three consecutive seasons between 1955 and 1957 as well. Played in six hundred Major League games between 1949 and 1962.

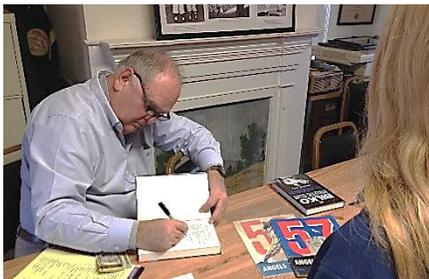
In 1976, author California resident Gaylon H. White visited Nanticoke to interview Bilko, known as one of the strongest hitters nationwide. White's book *The Bilko Athletic Club* came out in 2014, the title reflects a term that came out of the Los Angeles Angels winning seasons. White who first saw Bilko play as a 9-year-old. stated. "He was our Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle and Ted Williams rolled into one. There was no major league team west of Kansas City in '56." The Angels created excitement, Bilko and his bat were like heroes. White stated in an article published in the *Citizen's Voice* at the time, "Phil Silvers named the lead character on popular CBS sitcom *Sgt. Bilko* after the Nanticoke slugger."

Gaylon White, in a detailed chapter in his book, describes traveling to West Nanticoke and stopping at the Tilbury Inn. That's where he encountered Pat the bartender and other Bilko fans. Upon his declaration he was in town to meet the baseball hero, the men shared stories of Bilko's days in Nanticoke and stints with the minors. After some time, White drove to Honey Pot where he was greeted by Bilko and his wife Mary. After a few hours reminiscing, they took off in Bilko's 1972 Buick LA Sabre traveling to Yeager's Noble Café in Nanticoke, There a man named Joe told of the time Bilko "hit a ball that went more than 400 feet from Lincoln School into the stadium" and another time hit a ball over 300 feet in a softball game in Hanover Section of Nanticoke. The bar's owner, Albert" Pug" Yeager, told of a game where the other team quit once Bilko was added into the lineup.



***In 1976 this location was Yeager's
Noble Café - Now Pizza Bella***

Bilko said during his interview with White, "I didn't want to be a big celebrity. I was satisfied with doing a good job, being with my family and stuff like that." In 2014, Gaylon H. White visited the offices of the Nanticoke Historical Society as part of his book signing tour. There he autographed books for fans of Nanticoke's favorite son. His book *The Bilko Athletic Club* is available on Amazon.



***Author, Gaylon White autographing his
book, *The Bilko Athletic Club* at the
Nanticoke Historical Society Offices***

In 2015, White joined Bilko's family as he was posthumously honored and inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame Museum in Southern California. In a game between the Boston Red Sox and Los Angeles Angels at Anaheim Stadium Bilko's son Stephen, a former Nanticoke High School sports star, threw out the first pitch to honor his father. Ten other family members joined the celebration. Both sons played baseball, football and basketball. Stephen signed with the Cleveland Browns, but an injury ended

his career. Tom Bilko, an orthopedic surgeon worked with various sport surgeons and also a team doctor for the New England Patriots and Boston Bruins.

on March 7, 1978 at the age of 49 Steve Bilko passed away leaving his wife Mary, daughter Sharon, sons Stephen and Thomas, He was laid to rest at the St. Joseph Catholic Church Cemetery in Nanticoke, In baseball history he is forever remembered for his ability to hit the long ball, but in Nanticoke, he is remembered as one of the city's most cherished heroes. 🇺🇸

Built on Faith

First Presbyterian Church

The Legacy of Nanticoke's Early Worshipping Communities

By Judy Minsavage

The history of the churches that served the people populating the area that is now known as Newport Township and the city of Nanticoke is extensive. Prior to the settling of Nanticoke, traveling clergy, ministered to those living in the region. The Moravian missionaries were the first to visit the valley and minister to various settlements as well as the Nanticoke and Shawnee. The early Connecticut settlers brought Baptist Ministers, one of which the Reverend William Marsh lost his life during the Yankee-Pennamite conflict on October 15, 1763.

After Nanticoke became a borough, numerous cultures settled in the area, leading to the construction of churches representing various religions throughout the 1800s. Although many have been demolished, stand empty, or serve new purposes, some of these places of worship still continue to welcome congregants today. In upcoming

issues of Nanticoke Legacy, we will share the stories behind each of these churches. Our goal is to promote the historical significance of these places of worship. Whether you live in Nanticoke or are visiting the area, take time to appreciate the rich heritage they represent.



The Keithline Schoolhouse

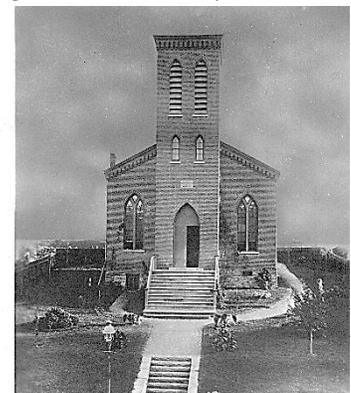
Those of the Presbyterian faith first met in the Keithline schoolhouse between Middle Road and Kosciuszko Street. According to the Nanticoke City 200th Anniversary Booklet, in 1774 a frame church was built in the Hanover Green Cemetery. Lazarus Stewart created the plot. This site marks the resting place of Nanticoke's first settlers, including members of the Mill, Lee, Oplinger, Stewart, and Pensyl families, among others.

By 1829 eighteen members of the Congregational Church of Wilkes-Barre organized the Presbyterian Church of Hanover and Newport. They were John, Sarah and Christine Schleppy, Anderson Dana, Jr., Henry Styer, Elizabeth Fairchild, Margaret Fairchild, Mary Line, Mary Leuder, Anna and Elizabeth R. Styer, John Sorber, Solomon Hill, Abraham Arnold, Clara Sorber, Elizabeth J. Thomas, Rachel Whipple, and Lorenda Dilly. John Schleppy, Anderson Dana, Jr. and Henry Styer were the first ruling elders. J. Schleppy served as deacon. Rev. Gildersleeve officiated as minister in charge. By 1860, the church was known as The Presbyterian Church of Nanticoke.

The Church became incorporated in 1863, and that same year, a modest church building was constructed on East Main Street. This original building was



First Presbyterian Church



The Presbyterian Church of Nanticoke constructed on East Main Street 1863.

located between the current church and the manse (clergy home). The church bell purchased through designated subscriptions and donations was the first in Nanticoke.

The Nanticoke Church became the First Presbyterian Church 1866 and was granted its charter. In 1893, with K.O. Goodling as pastor, board members visited nearby churches to determine the best design for a new "more attractive" building. The budget being \$6,000.



Rev. K.O. Goodling, Pastor 1892-1894

The following is an account of a fundraiser held in 1894 for an elaborate musical at the Wernet Hotel at 33 E. Main Street, under the auspices of the ladies of the church. The program is as follows: Piano solo (Prof. Heller of Wapwallopen), Vocal solo (Ada Varner), piano solo (Florence Bache), duet (Miss Stackhouse of Shickshinny and Miss Hirschberger of Plymouth), bass solo (Samuel Biedleman), piano solo (Prof. Evans), solo (Miss Ruth Hoover of WB), piano (Miss Westover), vocal solo (Nellie Glanville), banjo solo (Joseph Burleigh), piano solo (Miss Stackhouse), double quartet (ME Choir); one half hour intermission, cake and ice cream served in the dining room; solo (Miss Hirschberger), piano solo (Prof. Heller), baritone solo (Dr. Goltman), piano solo (Miss Westover), soprano solo (Mrs. Dr. Dodson), piano solo (Miss Hirschberger), soprano solo (Mrs. SC Beidleman), duet (Miss Stackhouse and Miss Hirschberger), vocal solo (Miss Ruth Hoover), piano solo (Prof. Heller). Two months later Pastor Goodling passed away .

Although construction of the main church hall was still unfinished, by August 1894 services took place in a Sunday School room with the congregation's new pastor, Rev. Charles Walker presiding. The main auditorium was 43 x 42 feet with a Sunday School addition and seating for 250 at the cost of \$11,000. Included were three large memorial windows dedicated to William Boyd, John Fairchild, and Rev. Goodling. Soon after, the Ladies' Aid, Men's and the Young People's Societies were sponsoring events to benefit the church. There was even a Swastika Club. Smithsonian Magazine explains that there was no reason to worry—historically, the swastika had a spiritual meaning in Eastern cultures and a lucky charm in Western societies, long before Adolf Hitler adopted it for the Nazi party.

On December 4, 1906, the Church burned its mortgage. Rev. William S. Day of Luzerne borough reminisced



1965 - 135th Anniversary dinner

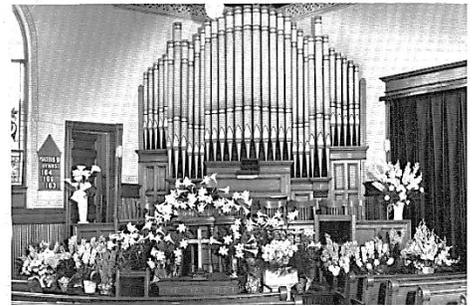
about many of the people and places he knew. Among them were the old Gruver farm, famous then for its cherries, Mother Hawk's farm in Newport Township where you could purchase the best blackberries, and the Reuben Keiser farm in Hanover Section where you could obtain the best currents. He also recalled the great charity of John Fairchild and mentioned many other names of former residents, including John Solomon, Abram Fairchild; Abram, Henry, John and Samuel Line; Andrew, Stephen, and Col. Washington Lee; William, Hiram and Samuel George; Silas Alexander, Daniel Buckley, Xavier Wernet, Dr. Lape, John, Alvin and Mrs. Lape; Peter Mills and family, Dr. Harry Hakes, Jacob and John Learch; Matthias Petty and family, and many others.

Throughout the years the various auxiliary groups sponsored concerts, teas, bingo, dinners, children's events, fashion shows.

In 1954 the church celebrated its 125th anniversary.

In May of 1965, the church held a celebration for its 135th anniversary.

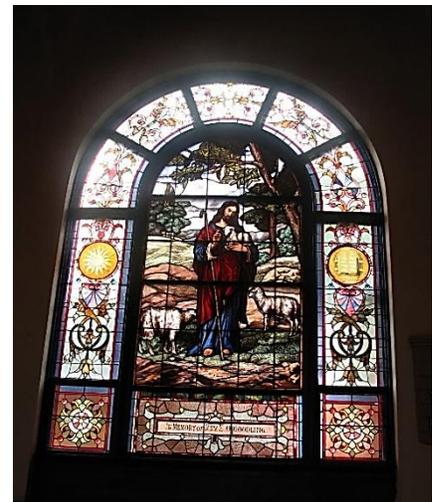
In 2029, the First Presbyterian Church will celebrate its 200th anniversary. As we go by the church on East Main Street, imagine when Nanticoke was just fields and frontier trails, a period when Moravian missionaries came to the valley and Connecticut settlers gathered for worship in schoolhouses. It is important to acknowledge the early families who established their traditions and religious practices, enabling us to recognize and value the many churches that supported their congregations in Nanticoke. 📷



Undated photo Interior of the First Presbyterian Church



1954 - 50 YEAR MEMBERS – Seated from left, Charles Fairchild, Grace Thomas Fairchild, David Mackie, Mary Challenger Griffith, Anna Campbell Vandermark, Mary L. Jackson. Standing, Lettie Dietrick Jonathon, Clara Lerner Bellas, June Thomas Reese, Delbert Oplinger, Adelva Oplinger Mundy, Hattie Morgan Macgann.



Reverend Goodling - Memorial Stained-Glass Window



Photo 1

Photo 2

Undated photos of First Presbyterian Church celebrations. If you can name any of those pictured in these photos, please email us at nhs63@comcast.net

Author Joan Gill – A Life of Service

By Judy Minsavage

Any writer will tell you there is nothing more satisfying and exciting than seeing your name printed on a book cover. Your dream realized as your creation is published and ready for the public to enjoy. As a young girl, such was the dream of Joan Gill.

Born and raised In Nanticoke, Gill graduated Nanticoke High School in 1942. During her high school years, she served as an editor for the Ram's Horn School Newspaper. After graduating Gill went on to study at King's County Hospital School of Nursing in Brooklyn, NY. And after graduation in 1945 she went on to do private duty nursing. Her writing dream was still foremost in her mind. After many years of dedication, in 1947, she went to work for Knickerbocker Biological Inc., which later became Pfizer and Co.

But in 1964, Joan decided it was time to retire and do what she felt she was born to do, write. In 1968, her first children's book, Hush Jon, was published. Aimed at children up to age eight, the book follows Jon, a young boy learning to make the most of his summer vacation while his mother cares for his new baby sister. Gill later continued her storytelling with a second book, Sara's Granny and the Groodle. At the publication of her first book, Gill was considered one of the most promising of the new writers for children's books. She commented, "I had years of practice, where I would sit down in my room and work out these stories." Used copies of the books can be found on Amazon.

As of this writing, a search does not show Gill had written any more books. But in her obituary dated September 15, 2003, it states she continued to write songs and poetry, working with writers' groups at Carnegie Hall helping others to achieve their dreams. Included in her obituary, A poem that was said to express her love of her birthplace Nanticoke, Pennsylvania.

ONCE UPON A SUMMER

Once upon a summer I lived in Pennsylvania

A child who played the kind of games

That happy children know.

Where do children go?

I can still remember the easy sound of laughter

that rang across the field of green and soared to meet the sky

When does the laughter die?

Now that I've played every game

They all seem the same.

Hide and seek is over

Now I'm wiser and sadly I'm older

But once upon a summer I knew a world of wonder

My eyes were not betrayed by time

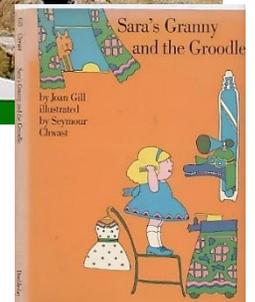
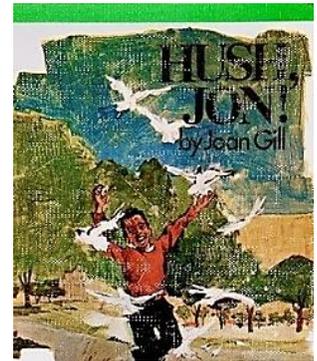
And I was free to see.

Was that really me that?

Will there be another ?

Is the laughter gone forever?

Joan surely could have gone on to write more books or even found wider recognition, but the quiet legacy she built in the lives of her patients, and in her service to humanity was likely the accomplishment she cherished most. 



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Are you passionate about preserving local history?

Whether you're a dedicated historian, a genealogist, or simply someone who loves learning about the people, places and things that make up the story of Nanticoke, Nanticoke Legacy will be a treasured resource. Don't miss out on the opportunity to connect with our heritage and keep these stories alive for future generations to share.

A subscription to Nanticoke Legacy will ensure that you receive a hard copy of each issue directly to your mailbox. It is the perfect way to enrich your library, personal collection or to share stories, photographs, and insights from Nanticoke's vibrant past. Each issue offers a unique window into the lives, businesses, and events that shaped our community.

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WE ARE EXTREMELY PROUD TO BE THE CARETAKERS OF THE HISTORIC MILL HOME

Did You Know

In 1802, Patriarch John Mill arrived in Nanticoke and purchased land from Matthias Hollenback. He became the first occupant of the homestead on E. Main Street. Most of the 600 acres he acquired in the next several years was used for farming, 1¼ miles south of Main Street, next to the Keithline homestead, and 1/3 of a mile along Main Street.

The Mill family owned nearly all of the real estate in Nanticoke (still Hanover Township), as well as a majority portion in Newport Township. Their lands extended from the banks of the Susquehanna River to Nuangola Mountain. At that time there were only 14 buildings on the north side of Main Street and only six on the south side. The latter included the Presbyterian Church, the Old Church, and Old Nanticoke School Building, and 3 other dwellings. Most of the wealth of the Mill family came from its extensive land holdings, with most of the property leased to the Susquehanna Coal Company, and a smaller portion leased to the Glen Alden Coal Company. Coal deposits accounted for much of the wealth. (From Mill Estate papers.)



*The Historic Mill Home - Home of the
Nanticoke Historical Society*

On Sally's Corner

My memories of Easter

By Sally Gorgas

I remember the Easter Season mainly from going to St. Mary's School. The nuns taught all the classes with emphasis on religion. We went all the Easter masses, starting with Holy Thursday, Good Friday, (don't eat meat!) Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. Holy Week was a solemn occasion. We spent a lot of time praying and learning what Holy Week



to



Easter Procession - From left, Joanne Korman, me, Barbara Repotski, Nancy Shiffka

meant. The story of Jesus' life and death was told during the Holy Week masses. I remember processions from the school to the church, carrying potted lilies, (heavy). The church was decorated with an area where the statue of Jesus lay in repose. It was sad to see. Many lilies and hyacinths decorated the area. The scent was wonderful!

Of course, we had new dresses, shoes and don't forget new hats! At that time, you were required to wear hats to church. I remember one Easter, my dad decided to order clothes from the Montgomery Ward catalogue. I was about 13 years old. I loved my lime green and blue (what a color combo) top and skirt.



Me at the age of two in an orange and white Easter outfit.

My youngest sister, Bonnie and I were the only ones satisfied with our outfits. Something was wrong with my mom's coat and dress and also with Pat and Roses outfits. No more clothes from the catalogue after that.



In our Easter dresses, are my sisters from right, Rosie and Pattie and me

The Easter bunny always arrived when we were asleep. Imagine that. As we got older, my mom always made us Easter baskets full of chocolate and many goodies. To this day I still miss that. 🐰

Research is our middle name

By John Sherrick, Archivist, Nanticoke Historical Society



Over the years we've often talked about the humble beginnings of the Nanticoke Historical Society (two filing cabinets of documents) and wondered if we were going to be around in the next six months. It's been thirty years now and we are getting stronger than any of us could have imagined.

In that quarter of a century and counting we have diligently amassed a respectable data base of information that covers newspaper articles on Nanticoke and surrounding areas from 1890 to the 1970's, a growing collection of deeds and land grants for nearly every property in the city over the last 150 years and genealogical discoveries of hundreds of Nanticoke families, many of whom would be lost to history without someone combing through thousands of pages of documents, hoping to find even a tiny mention in the middle of a newspaper that may no longer exist.

No area has been left out, from the coal mines to the police and fire departments, merchants, medical and legal professions and an extensive recording of every business from the large department stores to the mom-and-pop groceries and confectioneries that flourished on nearly every street in town. Churches and public schools fill volumes on our shelves.

Our journey through the history of Nanticoke has uncovered stories of drama, comedy and even tragedy, each a testament to the resilience of the immigrants and founders who came together to create and perpetuate a community for the unborn generations they would never know.

We often refer to ourselves as detectives picking up clues to a mystery, fully aware that all the mysteries will never be completely solved. There will always be more clues, but there will never be a final conclusion.

The daunting task before us now is filling in the dark spaces of an incomplete puzzle and connecting what we know to what we have yet to discover, the evolution of a comprehensive history of Nanticoke City for future generations seeking their ancestors and for a broader audience curious about a place and an era that has faded with time.

We couldn't have done it without the generous participation of families here, across the country and, yes, even overseas, many of whom have not returned to the city in years yet retain affectionate memories for the places they left behind.

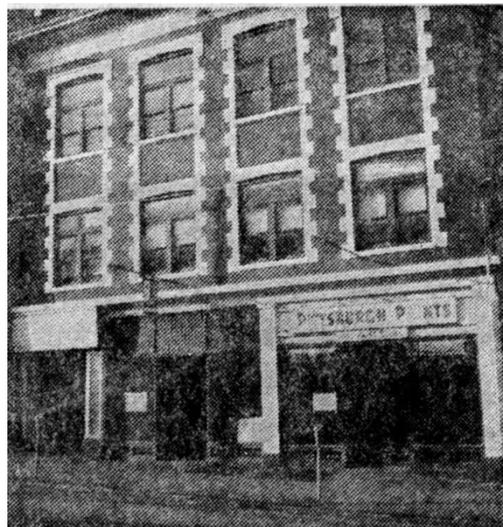
The last thirty years has been an amazing voyage of discovery. We are looking toward the next thirty with great anticipation and hope to see everyone there. 🇺🇸

Answer to the Last Mystery Question

Do you recognize this building?

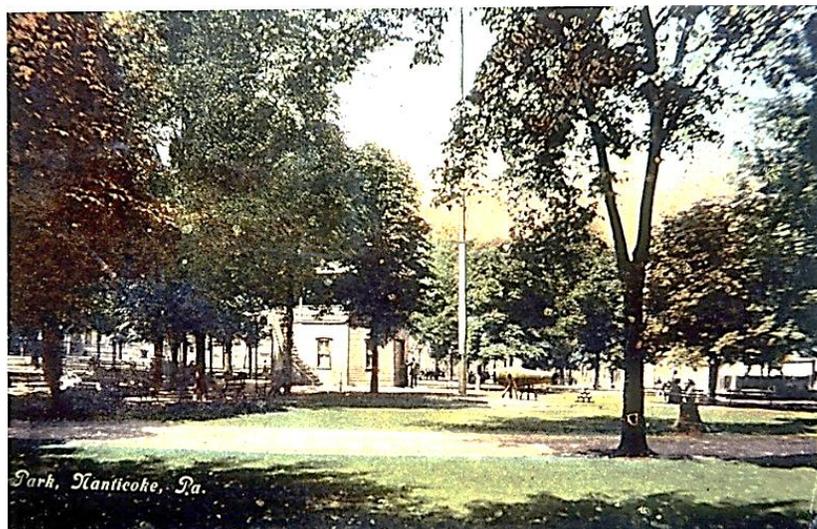
As shown in the photo, the Rex Theatre stood on the left side of the Hill Building on Market Street. In 1911, Governor Robert B. Glenn spoke at the theatre during a program sponsored by a national organization called “Men and Religion Forward Movement. It was reported that attendance required large spaces as the movement was popular in the region.

In our next issue of Legacy we will tell the story of the Rex Theatre and the transitions it went through during its years of operation.



Our New Mystery Question

This postcard shows Nanticoke Central Park in 1911 - what is today Patriot Park. We have two questions for you to answer in this issue. What was the building behind the trees used for? And what happened to the cannon and cannon balls standing in the center of the park?



We hope you enjoyed this issue of the Nanticoke Historical Society’s publication of Nanticoke Legacy. Please let us know your thoughts, email us nhs63@comcast.net or call our office 570-258-1367.