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# NANTICOKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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



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## John S. Fine Historical Marker set for go ahead in April

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The Nanticoke Historical Society is eagerly awaiting the final approval for the acquisition of the Governor John S. Fine Historical Marker that is scheduled to be placed on the Greater Nanticoke Area School District campus. The approval is merely a formality as markers requested for former governors are approved upon nomination, as long as they are no longer living. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission administer the Historical Marker Program and application and approval process. As one can imagine there are specific criteria that the nominating body and marker subject must meet before approval.

### MARKER

### CONTINUED

Some of the most significant are:

1. Each nomination is evaluated for adherence to the criteria.
2. Nomination forms must be completed with supporting documentation with twelve collated copies.
3. Nominations are reviewed by a panel of independent historical experts from across the state.
4. The panel recommendations are presented to the Commissioners at a PHMC meeting.
5. The commissioners review the recommendations and vote on the nomination.
6. Panel's decision is sent to nominators.
7. The PHMC staff works with the nominators to draft content that will appear on the marker to assure historical accuracy. Decisions on fabrication and delivery of the marker are made. A date and site of dedication are arranged.
8. Cost of the marker is the responsibility of the nominator, which in this case is the Nanticoke Historical Society for which donations are greatly appreciated.
9. Dedication ceremonies must occur within a year of their approval.
10. The PHMC assumes all responsibilities for maintaining the marker, once installed.

Talks have been held with GNA School District Superintendent, Dr. Ronald Grevera, as to which location of the marker will best benefit the school and the community.

For more information on how to donate to the marker fund contact the Nanticoke Historical Society at 570-258-1367

# Captain Andrew Lee, Washington's Inside Man

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## Part II

### *Recap:*

When we last left Captain Andrew Lee, in 1775, he was on a dangerous spy mission ordered by General George Washington during the Revolutionary War. It was Lee's mission to discover who enabled a number of British soldiers to escape effortlessly from Lancaster Prison in the dead of night. He was also charged with finding the route taken by the escapees that led back to their military units across the Delaware River. Allowing himself to be imprisoned at Lancaster, Lee noticed a guard leaving his post one rainy night and soon found himself included in a group of British soldiers leaving the compound through a false panel. They hiked to a house occupied by a woman he had seen frequently at the prison. She was one of many Loyalists who provided safe haven for the soldiers. While huddling in a corner of the cottage, Lee recognized a British soldier that as captain in the Revolutionary War, he had once "punished" and who could possibly ruin his mission. The prison alarm was heard in the distance, the soldiers were hastened to move onto their next safe house....

### *Time to make a move*

During the first leg of their journey, The British soldier did not exhibit any recognition of Lee, but on the twelfth night the fugitives were given refuge in a barn. A Tory guide separated Lee and his adversary from the rest of the soldiers. Lee then knew he'd been recognized. Each day the rag tag group edged closer to the banks of the Delaware River, across which laid the British forces. The Tory guide and the soldier would surely gain accolades for handing the American over for execution. Armed with all the information Washington needed to end the prison escapes and close down Loyalist safe houses, Lee starting looking for a means of escape.

ANDREW LEE

CONTINUE PAGE 3

## Thank You to our most recent **BENEFACTORS**

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Those making donations to the Nanticoke Historical Society since the publication of the last newsletter are:

**Sue Reilly**

**Ken and Carol Lada**

**Joseph Guydosh**

**Nanticoke American Legion Post 350**

**Al "Tiger" Wytoshek**

**Diane Marvin**

*Our sincere thanks to these benefactors  
for their support of our mission.*

## Welcome to our new members:

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Judy Grose, Middleburg, PA - Looking for Surnames Griffith

Cynthia Guffey, Madison, AL - Looking for Surnames Bellas, Croop, Womelsdorf

Judy Hritsko, Vermillion, OH - Looking for Surnames Tarasavage/Teresavage/Tarasewicz

Noreen D. Lordan, Hudson, NH - Looking for Surnames Williams

Jay Ruckel, Hunlock Creek, PA - Looking for Surnames Ruckel, Young, Fairchild, Goodwin, Urquhart, Beddett, Pittinger, Bishop, Harvey

**EASTER RAFFLE TICKETS  
AVAILABLE  
SEE PAGE 5 FOR DETAILS**

In the dark of night, As the British escapees reached the banks of the Delaware; they could not find the boats usually made available by Loyalists. The soldiers scattered. to find a means of crossing the river. Lee saw his opportunity to sneak away, but standing in his way was the British soldier Lee recognized days before, the guide's pistol in his hand. The soldier pulled the trigger, but fired-harmlessly, as it was discovered later that the guide's pistol had been loaded only with powder. A knife fight ensued, Lee, small in stature but agile, managed to avoid the assailant's thrusts with the knife until an American patrol alerted by the gunshot arrived.

Captain Lee, and the re-captured British soldiers, were taken before a magistrate, who did not believe Lee's claim to be an American officer. Lee was placed in irons and was taken to Philadelphia. He was released only after he had managed to send a note to General Benjamin Lincoln, who served with Lee prior to his spy mission. Lee retraced the route of the prisoners and exposed the Tory Loyalists who aided in their escape. In essence he was a hero who placed himself in grave danger in order to carry out a mission ordered by General George Washington.

***According to Nanticoke Historical Society archives:***

Captain Andrew Lee married Priscilla Espy, widow of James Stewart (brother of Capt. Lazarus Stewart). They had three children, Washington, James and Priscilla. In 1795, Captain Andrew Lee acquired the rights to the iron industry in Nanticoke from the Alden's, whose forge lay within the Honey Pot area. He transferred these rights to his son, Washington, in 1815. In 1804, Captain Lee moved his family into a newly constructed house in the Honey Pot section of Nanticoke. He lived there until his death in 1821. Children, Washington, James, and Priscilla survived him. Lee's son, Washington, was named after the man under who he served in the Revolutionary War and in 1789, would become the first president of the United States, George Washington.

## JOHN SYDNEY FINE 35<sup>th</sup> Governor of PA

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John Sydney Fine perhaps wasn't sure his future held anything more than living at his "patch town" home in Newport Township. But it is obvious that is where he attained his work ethic. Possibly it was from witnessing the hardships of his father, a miner, which set him on his path.

Fine, the son of Jacob W. Fine and Margaret Croop, graduated from Nanticoke High School and while working on a coal company farm found time to write for a community newspaper.

At 21, he graduated from Dickenson Law School, was admitted to the Luzerne County Bar and practiced law in the Nanticoke area. Already a rising star in political circles, he was named Republican district chairman, Fourth Luzerne District. At 24 he enlisted in the 23rd Army Engineers, during World War I and soon was advanced to sergeant. While stationed in Dublin, Ireland he did post-graduate work and in 1919 returned to Luzerne County to start the law firm of Coughlin and Fine. In 1920, he became secretary of the Republican County Committee, and in 1922, became Luzerne County Republican chairman. By 1927, Fine was a court judge. He caught the attention of Governor Gifford Pinchot who appointed him to the bench of the Court of Common Pleas, Luzerne County. He was re-elected for another ten years in November 1939. At the age of 46, he married Helene Pennebecker Morgan and had two children, John Sydney Jr. and Donald. After serving on the Pennsylvania Superior Court, Fine was chosen by then Governor of Pennsylvania James Duff as the favorite son to be the next governor. With the staunch support of Duff, Fine won the election.

### ***TRAGEDY BEFALLS FINE***

While on the campaign trail in October 1950, Fine's wife fell from a platform and began experiencing headaches. Fine won the election in November, but Helene's condition worsened. In December she underwent brain surgery. Several months later, a second surgery proved unsuccessful and in April of 1951, Helene passed away. Fine did not return to the governor's mansion but set up residence at Indiantown Gap. Those who knew him as a force in politics found him now to be withdrawn and reclusive.

### *Fine moves Pennsylvania forward*

Over time, Fine rallied to take on many of the challenges that faced post war Pennsylvania. A recession left many communities devastated, the education and highway systems needed an overhaul, unemployment figures were high. Fine signed laws in 1951 to provide training for the unemployed, licensing for commercial homes for the elderly, rehabilitation programs for drug users, and safety regulations in the handling of liquid gases.

To overcome a dismal ranking in public health Fine sought to improve Pennsylvania's health care system. He spearheaded the building of the Northeast Extension of the Turnpike. After the General Assembly rejected a one half percent income tax, Fine proposed the state's first permanent sales tax, amounting to one percent, which was passed in 1953.

Fine championed prison reform, and established the Governor's Commission on Race Relations; He opened up the State Police to African Americans and ended segregation in the state divisions of the National Guard. He established vocational rehabilitation centers around the state to retrain injured workers.

### *Playing politics*

Fine's gubernatorial inauguration was the first ever televised which further promoted his popularity. But as the 1952 Republican convention would prove television could make or break in political circles. Fine and the Pennsylvania delegation were earmarked to be the contingent that would most likely push the favorite Republican candidate for president over the top for that Fine chose to appear on the June 30, 1952 cover of Time magazine. Because of indecisiveness on the part of his delegation and some behind the scenes political wrangling, Fine's finest moment was stolen by another delegation. The ever present television camera captured Fine's attempts to get the attention of the chairman of the convention but his attempts were ignored. He finished his term in office in 1955 and returned to the practice of law, while living on a farm in Loyalville.



**Fine was chosen to appear on the cover of Time Magazine prior to the Republican Convention in 1952.**

### **START YOUR JOURNEY TODAY**

**We are inviting you to discover along with many other people locally and nationally who utilize the Nanticoke Historical Society archives to find information on the people, places and events that shaped their lives.**

**We're adding new information to our already extensive database every day. Why not see if we can fill in the blanks on family members, burial locations or perhaps view a photo of a location or family homestead. How about that old high school year book you misplaced. We've got them in our library.**

**Cost for Research - \$20.00**

**To Become a Member of the Nanticoke Historical Society – Or purchase a gift membership.**

**Individual \$20.00**

**Family \$30.00**

**Individual Lifetime \$100.00**

Fine went into partnership with his brother-in-law in coal stripping and construction. In 1957, he made an unsuccessful bid to return to the bench on the Common Pleas Court of Luzerne County.

In 1967, Tragedy struck again as Fine's son Donald, 24, was killed in an automobile accident.

John S. Fine died on May 21, 1978, and is buried in Oak Lawn Cemetery in Wilkes-Barre.

References:

- Nanticoke Historical Society
- Pennsylvania Politics Today and Yesterday: The Tolerable Accommodation, By Paul B. Beers



In 1931 – Prior to his Governorship, John S. Fine purchased and lived in this house on 76 West Main Street in Nanticoke.

## Easter Raffle tickets sent out beginning of January.

**Returns are due March 18.**

**Anyone wanting more tickets to sell can receive them by mail**

**If you just want your name on them, send a check, we can fill them out and send you the stubs.**

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS -2016

**JANUARY 22 7-8:30 P.M. -**

### THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE KNOX MINE DISASTER

“ANTHRACITE’S LABOR WARS AND THE KNOX MINE DISASTER;” WITH WILLIAM HASTIE AND ROBERT WOLENSKY, AND DAVID BROCCA, “THE KNOX MINE DISASTER DOCUMENTARY FILM,”

**CULTURAL CENTRE OF ST. FAUSTINA (38 WEST CHURCH ST., FORMERLY ST. STAN’S CHURCH)**

**REFRESHMENTS SERVED**

### MONTHLY MEETINGS

**7 P.M. THE LAST THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH**

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY OFFICE – 495 E. MAIN ST. (NEXT TO THE MILL MEMORIAL LIBRARY)**

**JANUARY 28**

**FEBRUARY 25**

**MARCH 31**

**APRIL 28**

**AS ALWAYS KEEP UP TO DATE BY FOLLOWING OUR FACEBOOK PAGE**

**AND OUR WEBSITE**

**WWW.NANTICOKEHISTORYONLINE.ORG**

### YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED TO KNOW:

**Emily Post** was an American author who is most famous for her writings on etiquette. She is the founder of *The Emily Post Institute* which continues to promote etiquette and civility in America and around the world. Emily Post’s father was the architect who designed Quebec's famous Château Frontenac. **Captain Andrew Lee**, a 2nd great-grandfather of Emily Post, was a member of the infamous *Paxtang Boys*. A 3rd great-grandfather of Emily Post named **Lazarus Stewart** was one of the leaders of the Paxtang Boys. Lazarus Stewart was killed in the Wyoming massacre in 1778.

## **HISTORICAL SOCIETY WILL PRESENT A PROGRAM ON ANNIVERSARY OF THE KNOX MINE DISASTER**

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Mr. Robert Wolinsky is scheduled to present a program to and for the Nanticoke Historical Society from 7 to 8:30 p.m. on Jan. 22, "Anthracite's Labor Wars and the Knox Mine Disaster;" along with David Brocca, "The Knox Mine Disaster Documentary Film at Cultural Center of St. Faustina, (38 West Church St., formerly St. Stan's Church), refreshments served. Wolinsky, Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin and a Wyoming Valley native, has authored a number of books about the history of anthracite mining in the Valley. Prominent among them are his book on the Knox Mine Disaster and a book on the Avondale Disaster.

## **THE LIFE AND TIMES OF COLONEL WILLIAM T. HARRIS**

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### ***Growing up on State Street***

Plans are under way for a program to examine the life and times of William T. Harris, Nanticoke High School Class of 1935. Harris had a remarkable career in the U.S. Army rising to the rank of full Colonel. He was a life member of our society and a generous benefactor both financially and contributed some amazing stories and details of the days he spent growing up on State Street. Harris passed away in 2013 and was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery. Chet Zaremba, Vice President of the Historical Society, attended the Arlington ceremony and will be delivering the program.

## **IS JOHN S. FINE THE 35<sup>TH</sup> OR 100<sup>TH</sup> GOVERNOR OF PENNSYLVANIA?**

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When the proposed text was submitted to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in Harrisburg, it was noted that John S. Fine served as the 35th Governor of Pennsylvania. Historical Society life member Mike Chimola, who is in charge of the marker project had occasion to visit Governor Fine's grave in the Oak Lawn Cemetery, Hanover Township and noted that the headstone states he was the 100th governor of Pennsylvania.

Further investigation revealed that if one counts from the very first pre-colonial days of Pennsylvania, Fine was indeed the 100th Governor. Prior to 1790 heads of state were listed as proprietors or Presidents of Supreme Executive Council. That list includes William Penn. It was thought for a time to include "100th Governor" on the marker, but to avoid any confusion, PHMC advised that as of this time, they strongly suggest that we omit any reference to which "number" he was as Governor.

*Chet Zaremba,  
Vice President of the Nanticoke Historical Society.*

## ***DONATIONS APPRECIATED***

*The Historical Society will see plans for the John S. Fine Historical Marker finalized this year.*

*The cost of the marker will be approximately \$2,000. Anyone who would like to donate to this project is asked to call our society offices at 570-258-1367. Thank you for your support.*

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**POEM MEMORIALIZES RED ASH  
DISASTER**

*1 Slope Dec. 18, 1885*

*A week before Christmas*

*down in the mine*

*Twenty six men and boys,*

*put in their time.*

*Unknown to them,*

*a glacial pothole above,*

*would soon let go,*

*with a mighty shove.*

*Quicksand and water*

*filled the mine*

*From floor to ceiling,*

*in half hour time.*

*Though a long effort*

*was made for thee,*

*not one body was found,*

*for a loved one to see.*

*No grave to mourn,*

*no marker to see,*

*just a cold damp tomb,*

*for eternity.*

*Few remember, these, terrible times,*

*just another day, down in the mines.*

*You might say a small prayer*

*near Christmas week.*

*For the souls of those who still lie*

*Somewhere beneath our feet.*

*Anonymous*

*2016*

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## Did You Know:

On December 18, 1885, 26 men died in the **Red Ash Vein** at the Colliery of the Susquehanna Coal Company near **West Church and West main Streets**. Their bodies were never recovered.

On January 22, 1959, twelve mineworkers died 69 others escaped the **Knox Mine** as the Susquehanna River broke through and flooded the mine. The bodies of the 12 who died were never recovered. The victims were Samuel Altieri, John Baloga, Benjamin Boyar, Francis Burns, Charles Featherman, Joseph Gizenski, Dominic Kaveliski, Frank Orłowski, Eugene Ostrowski, William Sinclair, Daniel Stefanides, and Herman Zelonis.

To learn more about this event that virtually ended mining in the Wyoming Valley, plan to attend the: **Knox Mine program hosted by the Historical Society from 7 to 8:30 p.m. on January 22, at the Cultural Centre of St. Faustina, 38 W. Church, Street Nanticoke.**

### NANTICOKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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