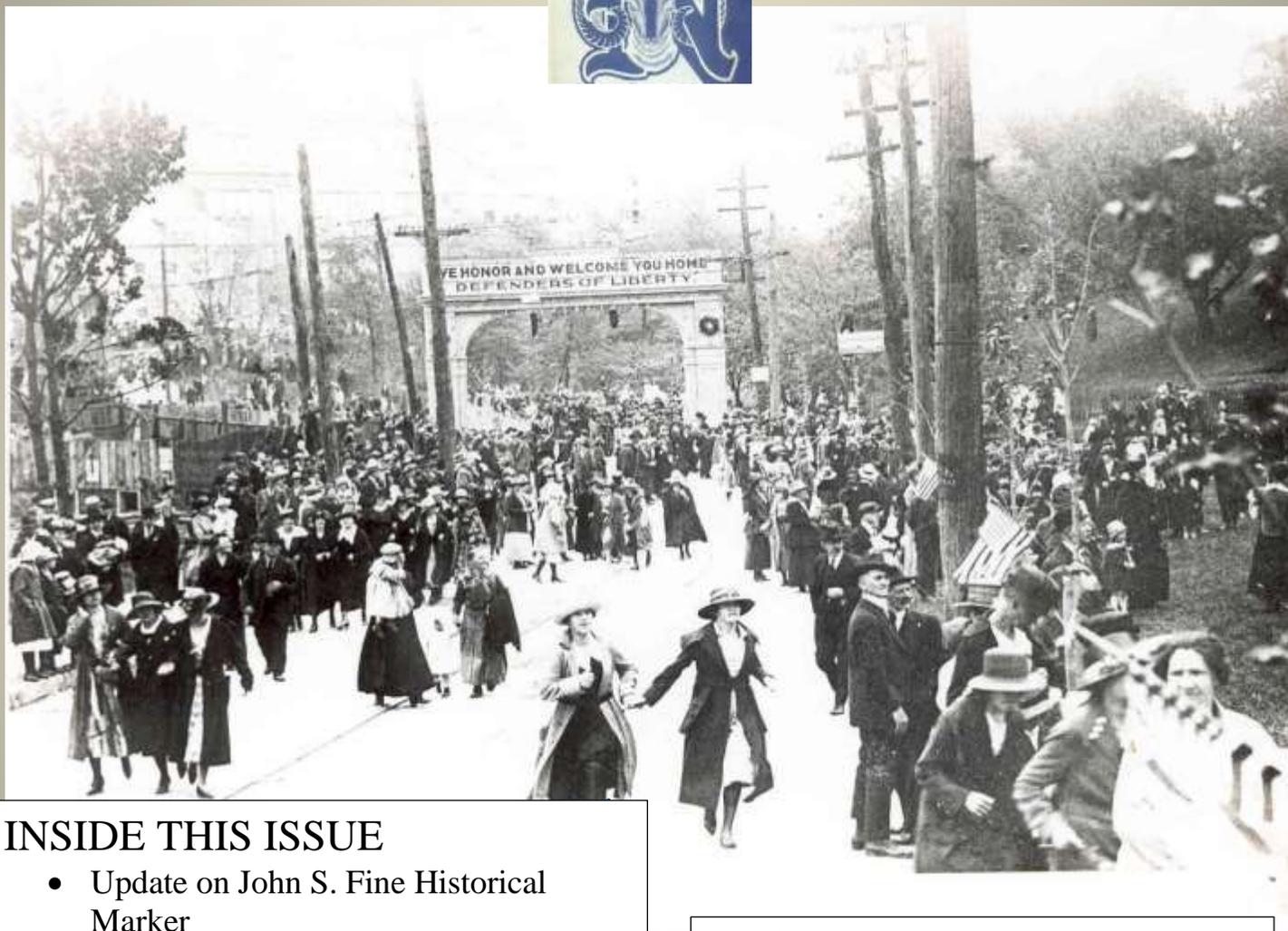


NANTICOKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Samantha Mill House, 495 E. Main Street, Nanticoke, PA – 570-258-1367



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In 1918, at the conclusion of World War I, the city and its residents welcomed home returning soldiers. The photo was taken on East Main Street at the base of the Mill Homestead.

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***IN MEMORIAM**

NANTICOKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY MISSION STATEMENT:

*The object of this society is for educational, charitable,
and literary purposes with a primary focus to research,
preserve, develop and disseminate the history of
Nanticoke, Pennsylvania.*

*To collect artifacts, memorabilia and historical
documents and facts of Nanticoke, Pennsylvania and to
store such items in a central location or specific area
where these articles may be preserved, appreciated and
used by the citizens of Nanticoke to enhance their
heritage*

NANTICOKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Samantha Mill House

(Next to the Mill Memorial Library)

Off of Kosciuszko Street

495 East Main Street

Nanticoke, PA 18634

570-258-1367

Web Site

www.nanticokehistoryonline.org

Email

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history@nanticokehistoryonline.org

OFFICERS

President: Julianna Zarzycki

Vice President/Corresponding Secretary/Treasurer:

Chester Zaremba

NEWSLETTER

Judith L. Minsavage

MEMBERSHIP FEES

Individual \$20

Family \$30

Lifetime \$100.00 Individual

Please advise us of any changes in email or home mailing address

RESEARCH FEE \$20- For the first hour – By Appointment

Editor's Note

As you can see we have changed the design of our newsletter. The Nanticoke Historical Society is growing in membership and in research material everyday so we felt it was time for an update. We're proud of the accomplishments of our information officers. We have several ongoing projects, some of which are highlighted in this edition. Hours upon hours are dedicated to archiving photographs and documents in our Past Perfect software, and tagging and labeling books, and memorabilia donated to the society from family collections.

We're grateful for those donations because we're dedicated to fulfilling our mission statement which states, our main purpose is "to store such items in a central location or specific area where these articles may be preserved, appreciated and used by the citizens of Nanticoke to enhance their heritage." What greater gift can we leave to future generations who will one day want to find their roots? We hope you enjoy this and future editions of our newsletter.

Judy Minsavage, Newsletter editor

SOCIETY NEWS

OVER 10,000 PHOTOS IN OUR ARCHIVES!

"But who's counting," is what Chet Zaremba, vice president of the Nanticoke Historical Society said regarding his ongoing project of documenting the over 10,000 photos in the society archives. He added, "As I am making my way through everything that we have accumulated over the past 21 years, I find that we have a lot of pictures that do not fall within the scope of our regular photo library. I have therefore set up additional photo files which I am currently "feeding."

Here's an update of the process by which Zaremba is archiving the photos that are available to anyone who is searching for their family history.



A big sale at the Ben Franklin Store in 1964 -

We're available 24 hours a day!

Like our Facebook page and enjoy all the news regarding the Nanticoke Historical Society.

Log on to nanticokehistoryonline.org and enjoy stories, past issued of our newsletter and even more photos.

PHOTOS

Continued on page 2

- An individual and family photo file is assigned to a category, is identified when possible and then numbered and entered into the Past Perfect software photo indexing program. Photos are filed numerically by the first letter of the last name of the family.
- Many large photos that are needed to be stored flat are housed in a filing cabinet. Photos that can be identified are in the top drawer. The second drawer contains identified photos that can be filed upright alphabetically. The third drawer is unidentified photos for flat storage. The bottom drawer is for stand up storage of unidentified.
- Another filing cabinet located in the society's board/meeting room has unidentified smaller photos filed by subject, i.e. brides, wedding, family, photos, portraits, and children.

Gov. John S. Fine Historical Marker Update

The final go-ahead from the Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission for the Governor John S. Fine historical marker is expected this month. Fine, the 35th governor of Pennsylvania was born in Nanticoke and graduated from the Nanticoke High School. Now, the process of manufacturing and installing the marker will begin.

The site for installation of the marker is set for the front of the Greater Nanticoke Education Center. An event sponsored by the historical society which will include the Greater Nanticoke School District and the city of Nanticoke is being planned for the unveiling of the marker. More details will be available closer to the event, which is tentatively scheduled for late 2016. 

The strange case of Abram I. Eckert

Murder on Main Street

Judith Minsavage

Nanticoke resident, Abram I. Eckert, was scheduled to die on the gallows at Luzerne County Prison on December 8, 1896. The night before, he calmly kissed and hugged his wife and 7 children, and said goodbye to his brother Daniel, sisters Almedia O'Rourke, May Lockhard and Mary Hess, and niece Mary Baker her husband George and another niece, Mary Case.

Eckert watched as his grieving family walked reluctantly down the long corridor toward guards waiting to usher them out of the prison. He was served his last meal. A prison guard remembered that Eckert seemed to enjoy it more than would be expected of a condemned man with only hours to live. Eckert laid down on his cot, a guard was posted outside of his cell. Other death row prisoners turned in as well, all expected a quiet night. It was 9 p.m.

In Cold Blood

Months before this scene played out, Eckert, murdered his boss, Frederick T. Bittenbender in front of several witnesses on a hot July 6 afternoon in 1895. Bittenbender, a Nanticoke school director, had given Eckert a job at the State Street School. He'd stopped at the school and found Eckert not at his post, which Bittenbender had been informed by others, had been occurring with increasing frequency. Bittenbender along with fellow school director George W. Gruver went to Eckert's home and found him working in his garden. Bittenbender chastised Eckert for missing so much work and warned him that he was in danger of losing his job if he continued to disregard his responsibilities. Eckert seemed compliant, saying he would report to work

Society Meeting Schedule:

All meetings take place at the Samantha Mill House located next to the Mill Memorial Library.

Enter the parking lot off of Kosciuszko Street. To get directions call the society office at 570-258-1367

April 28 – 7 p.m.

May 26 – 7 p.m.

June 30 – 7 p.m.

Upcoming Events

“INVESTIGATING THE SHEPPTON MYTHOLOGY” AND BOOK SIGNING

DATE: SATURDAY, MAY 28

TIME 1 p.m.

PLACE: THE CULTURAL CENTER OF ST. FAUSTINA 38 W. CHURCH ST. NANTICOKE.

PRESENTED BY AUTHOR – MAXIM FUREK

SEE PAGE 8 FOR MORE DETAILS ON THIS FASCINATING STORY.....

immediately.

At approximately 12:15 p.m. Bittenbender, along with his father Elias and George W. Flack pulled up in a wagon in front of First National Bank at 136 E. Main Street, across the street from Callary's Grocery store. The men saw Eckert standing on the sidewalk. According to court records, Eckert was heard to say, “See here Fred, I want to speak to you. From the way you talked to me this morning it begins to look as if you had a grudge against me. What do you mean talking to me in the way you did this morning?” Bittenbender answered, “You are paid to look after the work and we expect you to do it. If you don't like the work, why don't you get out and let someone else do it.” It would be the last words Bittenbender would utter, as Eckert stepped back, pulled out a gun and began firing. One of the three bullets fired hit Bittenbender in the forehead. Those that were witness to the heated exchange were shocked, as now, on the street in front of the bank of which Bittenbender was an officer, he lay dead. Eckert turned and yelled to store owner T.R. Callary, “take me to the lock up for protection.” Callary did so, and later in the day Eckert was transferred to the county prison.

The Trial – Eckert's wife Shocks attorneys

The murder trial of Abram I. Eckert began on September 17, 1895. Lewis Dewart of Sunbury, E.F. McGovern of Wilkes-Barre, John O'Neill and P.R. Thornton were the attorneys for the defense. it was also reported those serving on the jury were Morgan Boyle, Charles A. Croop, William Walters, James Hanahan, George Cutler, John M. White, William A. Culver, Anthony Kane, J.B. Austin, William Jenkins, John Cawley, and Edward A. Allen. Witnesses for the prosecution included T.R. Callary, James Fisher, R.C. Hitchler, Patrick Noonan, George Winterstein, W. Gruver and Dr. Goltman.

Thank you to our benefactors

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

Gene Danowski – Life Member

Donated an internet network card which solved an internet connection problem. Thank you Gene, everything is working well now.

Sally Gorgas – Life Member

Donated a large number of Nanticoke memorabilia collected by her family over the years, some obtained during the time that her father, John Haydock, served as Mayor of Nanticoke. Those items will be indexed and placed into various collections.

Joyce Hecht Hulslander - Member,

Donation in memory of the Hecht, Maynard, Williams, Beidleman families.

Nanticoke Mayor Richard & Wendy Wiaterowski

Donated their Easter raffle prize money back to the society.

Thank you all for your generosity.

ECKERT

Continued from page 4



An artist's sketch of Abram I. Eckert as it appeared in the Wilkes-Barre Record during his murder trial in 1895

As reported in the Wilkes-Barre Record, the courtroom "was crowded to the doors." Taking the stand was Bittenbender's father Elias, who gave a heartbreaking minute by minute account of the murder of his son.

But most captivating was Eckert testifying, on his own behalf, as to his account of the murder. Eckert's testimony began with a story of a head injury obtained while digging a well, which led to "periodical attacks of insanity." The day of the murder he had taken two tablespoons of whiskey as medicine. It brought about a "peculiar condition of the mind" saying he did not know what he was doing when he fired the fatal shot. He went on to testify that after talking with Bittenbender, he ate his dinner and started toward the Centennial school, "I generally went down Walnut to Broad and out Chestnut and down Shea's Alley to the school. I found myself wandering on Green Street and do not know what happened after that until I was in the lock up." When asked how he came by the revolver used in the shooting, he related that he had to pass through woods where men were always lying around; he put the revolver in his pocket for protection.

ECKERT

Continued on page 6



This undated file photo shows the T.R. Callary Grocery Store sign being repaired at a local blacksmith shop. Callary and his store location figured prominently in the Eckert murder trial.

FIND YOUR ROOTS IN OUR EXTENSIVE ARCHIVES

The Nanticoke Historical Society is constantly updating their database of information. At present information officer, John Sherrick, is working on three major projects. The society is in the possession of Nanticoke High School yearbooks from 1946 to 2006. He is making digital copies of each page in each edition. Currently he is working on 1992. The society is interested in obtaining yearbooks from 2007 to present.

Sherrick has photographed every home and business in the city over the last several years, completing the major part of the project in 2010. As those properties change, he is re-photographing those properties as buildings are renovated, demolished or new structures erected. Those, he adds to previous photographs obtained by donations thus giving a complete photographic history of the location. This helps those trying to find their family home, or business and seeing how it has changed over the years.

The third project began with Sherrick visiting the Osterhout Library to view microfilm articles from the Wilkes-Barre Record, Times Leader and Sunday Independent including a few rare copies of newspaper that ceased publication. Sherrick meticulously copied every news column dealing with Nanticoke from 1891 to 1975. These items include news, social columns, obituaries, marriages, police calls, school, church and activities. Each item is currently being extracted from those copies and placed in its proper file. Many of these articles reveal family names and relationships, burial plot locations and give biographic information, and give a flavor of what life was like during that time period. It offers a treasure trove of information.

ECKERT

Continued from page 5

Further adding to the mystique of the case was the actions of Eckert's wife. After Eckert's testimony, Attorney Thornton stood and announced, "Mrs. Eckert, take the stand." But to the surprise and all in the courtroom, Eckert's wife, looking rather frail, shook her head. After several minutes pleading with the woman to testify, Eckert's attorneys announced, "the defense is in". Closing arguments then began. On September 18, 1895 Eckert was found guilty of first degree murder.

Will Abram I. Eckert's death sentence be carried out?

Read Part II in our next newsletter.

King's College Student helps to organize John S. Fine memorabilia

Tim Hands, a senior at Kings College is interning at the Nanticoke Historical Society. His main focus is to organize artifacts that were obtained from the Fine family late last year. He has dedicated many hours referencing and arranging a number of documents, photographs and books. His long-range plan is to organize the John S. Fine reading room located on the second floor of the society offices.

Among the collection in this room is an extensive law library which will be available to those who are interested in researching past cases. Tim is also organizing Fine artifacts, readying some for display and storing others for future exhibition. Tim, who will be graduating from Kings with a degree in History, reminds us that volunteerism is essential to historical organizations. The officers and members of the society are thankful that he has decided to choose the Nanticoke Historical Society to dedicate his valuable time and efforts.

ROOTS

Continued on page 7

The result of Sherrick's years-long dedicated work will be a detailed, comprehensive history of the city that can be accessed at one location. Even with that, Sherrick admits, "The information stored at the Nanticoke Historical Society is a grain of sand taken from the overwhelming amount of material yet to be unearthed."

"Time has not been kind to the city of Nanticoke, Sherrick adds, "What has been lost is irretrievable. What has been gained is an awareness of the past and the generations who created, built and guided this amazing city through good and bad times over the last 150 years. Family genealogy is a journey in search of the beginning of the self and cannot be separated from the history of the place in which it was formed. The Nanticoke Historical Society is dedicated to preserving that history in the hope that it may add background and insight in the quest for one's personal answers to the questions of the past." 

DID YOU KNOW?

According to a February 8, 1911 article published in the Pittston Gazette, there were 157 applications for liquor licenses throughout Nanticoke's 11 wards.

In 1949, The Department of the Army announced the nomination by President Harry Truman of **Eleanor P. Abbott** of Nanticoke as captain in the Women's Regular Army Corps. The appointment would bring the total number of women selected for commission in the regular Army to 333. Abbott had been with the WACs for seven years, three of which were spent in Germany. Abbott was a graduate of Nanticoke High School. (Wilkes-Barre Record 7/25, 1949)

The grounds on which Mill Memorial Library now stands was designated in 1955, by the City of Nanticoke to contain an auditorium, gymnasium and indoor swimming pool. The project initiated by the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 290, was approved by the city, but at a meeting the reading of Samantha Mill's will clearly stated, "Miss Mill intended to have a library built and established with the remainder of the land to be a memorial park beautified and maintained at the expense of the city." More study of the issue was agreed upon. (Times Leader Evening News, 3/14/1955)

The Nanticoke Historical Society Welcomes New Members:

Can you help them in their search for information on surnames?

Beverly A. Camp-Mugford

Surnames - Fairchild, Alden, Gress, Thompson

Ed Tomko

Surnames - Tomko, Gorski, Lazur, Machung

Richard Raspin

Surnames - Raspin, (Rosipany) Ponko, (Pankuch)

Nancy Heyrich

Surnames - Heyrich, Kaminski, Griffiths, Hawley, Howell

Leonard John Strong

Surnames - Strong, Dobrowelski, Smith

John S. Tomko, Jr.

Surnames - Tomko, Bunor, Blockus, Howell, McDonald, Bezdecki, Ulitoski.

If you would like to become a member, please give us call at 570-258-1367.

Purchase a gift subscription for a family member or friend.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS OF OUR 2016 EASTER DRAWING:

1st prize - **Kathleen Talipan**

2nd prize - **Martha Price**

3rd prize - Nanticoke Mayor **Richard & Wendy Wiaterowski.** (donated)

THE NANTICOKE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
PRESENTS:

**“INVESTIGATING THE
SHEPPTON MYTHOLOGY” AND
BOOK SIGNING**

DATE: SATURDAY, MAY 28

**TIME: 40 minute program and book signing
PROGRAM STARTS AT 1 P.M.**

**PLACE: THE CULTURAL CENTER OF ST.
FAUSTINA
38 W. CHURCH ST. NANTICOKE.**

**PRESENTED BY AUTHOR –
MAXIM W. FUREK**

<http://shepptonmyth.com/>

**The Sheppton
Mythology...**

“In 1963, three miners were entombed more than 300 feet underground near remote Sheppton, Pennsylvania. Although two were eventually rescued, the other simply disappeared.

Something fantastic happened in that soulless place devoid of forgiveness and light. It was a black hell, a total darkness where the ability to see depth or movement was eradicated. Vision was painfully ripped away by powerful forces and yet, even without the gift of sight, the trapped men were somehow able to see.

While confined, the miners saw bizarre humanoid creatures and stairwells leading to a Golden City. They claimed to have been in the presence of his Holiness Pope John XXIII.



Author – Maxim W. Furek

JUST SOME OF THE BOOK REVIEWS:

JAMES E. HIZA:

This talented author’s obvious intensive research is fully rewarding, his knowledge of “Coal Region” events is extensive and accurate. One of my biggest rewards in reading this book was knowing that history will be preserved for future generations. Author leaves conclusion on Mythology for reader to decide and, the music connection adds another layer of flavor to the mix. Was a book you couldn’t put down, read from start to finish. Excellent reading, fascinating, interesting, highly recommend!

THOMAS JAMES:

Well researched, well written chronicle of a nearly forgotten event. The author explores the factual, spiritual, psychological, political, and economic issues of a coal mining disaster and of the Pennsylvania mining industry of the mid-twentieth century. Fascinating read.

MICHAEL REIGEL:

Fascinating read! I grew up in the Coal Region of Pennsylvania and knew of the Sheppton incident but not many details. The author’s extensive research is evident as he delves into the possibilities of what really happened deep underground in Sheppton. Highly recommended not only for mining history buffs, but also those with an interest in the supernatural.

To Learn More –and read more reviews: Log
On To **<http://shepptonmyth.com/>**

IN REMEMBRANCE

OF DECEASED MEMBERS OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Len Chapura, Nanticoke
Barry Littleford, Nanticoke
Nicholas Paulus, Bristol
Nick Pucinio, Nanticoke
John Stolarick, Wyoming

WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED THIS ISSUE AND UPDATED LOOK OF THE NANTICOKE NEWSLETTER:

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE:

**THE INTRODUCTION OF OUR NEW FEATURE:
FAMILY FOCUS AND WHERE ARE THEY NOW?**

**PART II OF THE STRANGE CASE OF ABRAM I.
ECKERT**

UPDATE ON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

A SAMPLING AS TO WHAT'S IN OUR ARCHIVES

FUN FACTS

AND MUCH MORE!

**Keep up to date on everything that is
happening at the society –**

**** log on to our Facebook page and
enjoy postings of photos from our
archives.....**

****log on to our website
nanticokehistoryonline.org**

DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH PHOTOS AND MEMORABILIA – CALL US!

Items in your attic could be an important part of our community history. Most families gather memorabilia, newspapers, certificates and photographs that represent a moment in their lives. But those items could someday be a very important piece of a puzzle for someone researching their genealogy. The Nanticoke Historical Society is amassing records that follow the history of the homes and businesses and the people that populated the city from its early beginnings. Some of the items that may be important to the historical society are:

- Memoirs/reminiscences
- Letters
- Diaries
- Scrapbooks
- Professional papers
- Genealogical information
- Speeches/lectures
- Articles/essays
- Subject files
- Legal documents
- Minutes/reports
- Brochures and fliers
- Awards/certificates
- Photographs with subjects and locations identified if possible
- Films/videos/audio tapes (including identifying information)
- Also of interest are files relating to an individual's civic, business, religious, political, and social activities.

If the family would like to retain possession of the articles they may lend them to society for copying purposes and then will be returned. Call our office at 570-258-1367 for more information. 