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Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

April 2026

Greetings, friends. We are grateful that this past bitter winter is over. Our heating bills were certainly higher than previously. One of our gas furnaces in the homestead building was replaced last fall, taking the place of the failed 19-year-old unit. Maybe the new one will burn more efficiently. How many local historical societies have three buildings to maintain? That is our burden, but we wouldn't trade them in for anything!

Spring brings warm weather, flowers, and green everywhere. It also brings baseball, specifically the Philadelphia Phillies. A century ago, the Phillies baseball team started yet another season, with hope. Is it said that hope springs eternal? I think so. Did you know that the Phillies are the only professional team in any sport to lose 10,000 games? In 1926, there existed only sixteen teams, eight in the National League and eight in the American League. (Today there are thirty)

At the end of April 1926, the Phillies were in sixth place out of eight. When the season ended, the Phillies were in last place in the

National League, with a dismal record of 58-93.

Prior to 1903, the championships weren't called "World Series", but merely The World Championship: The Phils were formed in 1883, yet it took them 32 years to find themselves in a World Championship, or the current term, "World Series", only to lose badly against the Boston Red Sox (1915). Yet another 35 years passed until they ended up again in the Fall Classic, (The 1950 Whiz Kids) only to lose to the Yankees. Fast forward another 30 years for their first World Series Championship in 1980. It took 97 years.

During World War II, there was a merger of sorts between the Philadelphia Phillies and the Philadelphia Athletics. The reason behind this was the depleted rosters of the two teams as many players joined the war effort. This didn't help with the standings. By the way, the name of this new team was the Philadelphia Blue Jays.

The championships included the best team in the National League, playing against the best team in the American League. Since their first year in 1883, they have been

eligible for 142 championships or World Series. They played in eight, or not even 6% of the 142 seasons. They have won two World Series in 142 years, or about 1.5% of their total seasons. The numbers are not good.

This year will mark the 143rd year since their founding, with only two championships. Let's go Phillies!



Where Are Hilltown's Railroads?

We see so many old photographs of local train and trolley stations. As Hilltown is the second largest township in Bucks County, area-wise, you may expect miles of train tracks, possibly some old trolley stations. (Hilltown contains about 27 square miles) According to my observations, there is nary a foot of track or an old station.

Perkasie's old train station remains. The old trolley station is home to the Perkasie Historical Society. Hatfield has a fine deli, "The Trolley Stop". A train runs under Main St in Sellersville. Also in Sellersville, a building remains that was a trolley stop, across the street and up from the Fire Department. A rail line running out of Telford in the direction of Perkasie and Quakertown to the north and Souderton and Lansdale to the South, just skirts by Hilltown Township on the way to Perkasie. Souderton had a large

station years ago. It is currently a restaurant. At times, I hear train whistles from the train running from Colmar to Chalfont. It seems that the transportation companies intentionally avoided Hilltown Township. Are our feelings hurt? Maybe, but we can say with confidence that we have never had a train related casualty here.

When railroads were expanding in the 1800s, a rumor of the railroad coming to town put people in a tizzy. Land speculation ran rampant. Businesses popped up with the hopes of transporting their goods easily and cheaply. This was the catalyst for the growth of nearby towns. Not Hilltown.

What makes us so different? I think Hilltown remains more agriculturally oriented than Perkasie, Souderton, Quakertown, Sellersville etc. We have no real town center. Blooming Glen is the closest we have to that. Given our acreage here in Hilltown, I think we have fewer traffic lights than many other localities. Can you count them in your head? Maybe using fingers on one hand? But, trust me, more are coming.

We have an 1876 map of Hilltown, showing proposed railroad tracks. It seemed to originate at Telford station in Montgomery County, then crossing Bethlehem Pike at Keystone Drive. This was the Strassburger Store, the headquarters of our Society. Next, it ran parallel to Route 113 through Silverdale, through the village of Blooming Glen. It finally crossed over Route 313 in Dublin, near Rickert Road. The name of this proposed railway was the "Delaware River Lancaster Railroad". Would this have been a freight line? Passenger line? Would there have been stops at the local villages it passed through? What changes in Hilltown might have occurred if this line was built? Blooming Glen might have a number of

traffic lights, parking areas, factories and professional buildings. And the Strassburger store area? Banks, gas stations, a Wawa and dueling shopping centers? Dublin has had incredible growth recently, but if the railroad came to town in 1876, just imagine how high the buildings would be in this 21st century.

No, we have no cute little repurposed train or trolley stations in Hilltown, but we still have fields, trees, creeks and farms. Can we try to keep them?



We are currently running an essay contest with a deadline of May 15. We published rules and guidelines in our last newsletter. Check out Facebook or contact us via email with any questions or clarifications.

Stogies

This snippet appeared in a recent Baer's Agricultural Almanac: "A stogie is a slang term for a cigar, often one of a lesser quality. The term originated with the drivers of early Conestoga wagons, which were first manufactured in Lancaster County. Apparently, those who drove these wagons were known as cigar smokers. Their cigars were mostly rolled from Pennsylvania tobacco." We all know that this region had a huge cigar industry. These stogies were short for Conestoga!



A project we will tackle this summer is the replacement of a wall of our c.1830 summer kitchen. It is the side that faces the morning sun, and it is in very sad condition. We will be using a 1" x 10" x 12' shiplap board and are considering using the old time nails. This

project is being performed thanks to the generosity of historian Donald B. Lewis. His recent donation will provide us with the needed materials.

Happy 250th America!

You may remember from last month's newsletter, that we had a story about Betsy Ross and the fable of America's first flag. This month, we write another flag story, this time dealing with our Star-Spangled Banner. We all know that our National Anthem was written by Francis Scott Key. What led to this? Key was a successful attorney, poet and author. On September 7, 1814, Key and American Colonel John Skinner dined on the British ship HMS Tonnant, following the burning of Washington DC by the British troops during the War of 1812. Skinner and Key were there to plead for the release of Dr. William Beanes, a friend of Key who had been captured in his home in August. Beanes was accused of aiding in the capture of several British Army stragglers who were ransacking local homes in search of food. Beanes' family begged for the release of Dr. Beanes without success. With permission from President James Madison, Key and Skinner negotiated the release of Beanes, but they were not allowed to go ashore just yet, since they were aware of Britain's plans to attack Baltimore. From his ship of truce, he could only watch the 25-hour bombardment of Fort McHenry. The flag that flew over the fort during the battle of Baltimore measured 17' x 25'. The cannon fire lasted from dawn on September 13 until the next morning. Early in the morning, that flag was replaced with a huge 30' x 42' flag. As the sun rose, Key could see this immense American flag, waving over the fort, signaling the British defeat in the Battle of Baltimore. He began

writing a poem describing this experience on the back of a letter he was carrying.

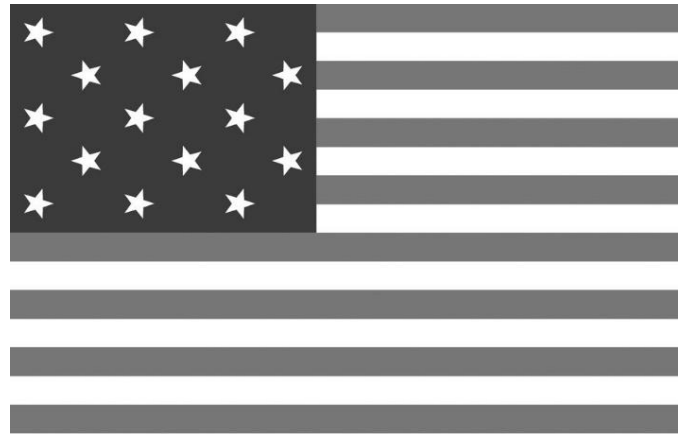
The men were released by the British a few days later and Key finished his work, posting the poem on a broadside titled "Defence of Fort M'Henry" with a notation "Tune - Anacreon in Heaven". That was a popular drinking song in the day. His work was also published in Baltimore newspapers, with the title changed to "The Star-Spangled Banner".

There was already a song that was considered America's unofficial national anthem back then, however. The song was "Hail Columbia". The music for this song was composed for George Washington's first inauguration in 1790 and was initially named "The President's March". Words were put to it in 1798. Throughout the 19th century, this song was considered our national anthem, although no official act by the government stated so. For some reason, in 1931, Congress named the Star-Spangled Banner as the official National Anthem of the United States.

We all know the words and tune of our National Anthem, sung at sporting events and special occasions. Francis Scott Key wrote four verses of his poem, each with the closing line "O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave".

In conclusion, "Hail Columbia" was initially considered the "President's March" until it was replaced by "Hail to the Chief" for some reason. "Hail Columbia" is now considered the Vice-Presidents official personal anthem. So, our President, Vice-President and our country all have their own "Anthems".

Did you know? Francis Scott Key was inducted into the Song Writers Hall of Fame in 1970. Who else has been so honored? Taylor Swift, Paul McCartney, Tony Bennett, Willie Nelson, Bette Midler etc.



*This is the flag that flew over Fort McHenry.
Note the fifteen stripes and fifteen stars*

The Old Strassburger Store

Have you visited the Reuben and Elizabeth Strassburger Farmstead? Today it is owned by the Historical Society of Hilltown Township. It consists of three and a half buildings on a two-acre parcel, and the site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. From 1849 until 1869 Reuben operated a country store along the busy Bethlehem Pike.

A visit today may enlighten you on how such a store operated. Reuben and his wife, Elizabeth Schwenk Strassburger, were children of wealthy parents. They were married on January 21, 1847, by Reuben's father Reverend J. A. Strassburger. Reuben received a gift of \$1,000 from his father and no doubt Elizabeth received a generous dowry from her father Jacob Schwenk of Schwenksville. Shortly after their marriage, they purchased a fine brick building and farm along the Bethlehem Turnpike, at Keystone Drive.

After purchasing the 42-acre farmstead, he quickly had a two-story addition built, attached to the original brick house. This served as the new store. A doorway was cut

into the existing building on the first and second floors. The store itself consisted of one large room, with a new porch facing Bethlehem Pike. At some point, probably in the 1930s, the store was divided into two rooms. Today, in the first room, coming in through the Bethlehem Pike porch, stands an old cabinet with many numbered drawers. We found this piece of furniture in the basement, standing over six feet tall. Some of the metal drawer pulls had rusted away in the damp basement climate. We have no idea how long it sat in the basement. The wood cabinet was falling apart, so a trip to the large barn floor allowed us to reassemble, clamp and glue the cabinet together. The bottom of each drawer had a number written in pencil, indicating where it was located. The design of the many drawers indicated it was of pre-Civil War construction, matching the period when Reuben and his wife set up shop. It appears that several of the smaller drawers contained dye for clothing, as the inside of these drawers are stained black, red and yellow.

Our displays in the first room as you enter from the new porch are a reproduction cobbler's bench and a large display of steel shoe lasts, in many sizes and styles, including heeled boots for very young children. A cobblers shop once occupied this building, after Strassburger sold the property in 1869. Several other displays are shown, not necessarily having to do with the store, but important to Hilltown's history. The windows in this new store are larger than those that exist in the original c. 1830 house, allowing for more light in the store.

The larger of the two divided rooms has a door connecting to the living quarters and a door leading to the back yard. Maybe access to the outhouse? Look up at a round hole in the ceiling. Directly above this in the second

floor and up through the roof is a brick chimney, indicating the placement of a pot belly stove. Can you picture a group of customers sitting around the stove, smoking their cigars, discussing the current events of the day? Especially during the Civil War, when Strassburger owned the store.

The area above the new store was used for storage. A winding staircase provides access to the second floor from the store.

Reuben and Elizabeth's grandson Ralph Beaver Strassburger, wrote of his grandfather's business dealings during the Civil War: "Quantities of supplies consisting of boxes of food, bandages, etc., were forwarded from this Hilltown home to the Union troops and prisoners in the South. In 1869, he disposed of this store to good advantage."

His old property came up for sale again in October 1890. In the newspaper, it was still noted as "formally, R. Y. Strassburger's store". This was 21 years since he left, and 19 years after his death." It was described: "*That nice old store stand and farm of 28 acres of land and 36 perches of land, adjoining lands of Christian Proctor, Andrew S. Hartzell, John Shelly, and Rev. John S. Allebach. The land is highly improved and under good fences. A variety of good fruit, such as apples, pears, grapes etc. The improvements are a large brick dwelling house, with outkitchen attached, all in excellent repair, one large storeroom and four other rooms on the first floor, four rooms on the second floor, garret and large cellar, a nice yard surrounding the house, well shaded with fruit and other trees. Good lasting water at the house and barn. Large barn stone stable high with good stabling for horses and cattle; large wagon house attached to the barn, woodshed, pig sty and corn crib. This is as nicely a located farm and store stand as can be found anywhere, a*

pleasant home in a good neighborhood, fronting on the Hilltown and Sellersville Turnpike, about two miles from Telford and Sellersville stations, N.P.R.R., and will positively be sold, together or in two tracts, the way that will bring in the most money."



Our Constitution

During this important historic year, we are sharing stories that are a little more nationalistic. On September 17, 1787, America's Constitutional Convention met in Independence Hall in Philadelphia, trying to fine tune the rules and laws of our fledgling country. Our independence was declared eleven years prior, now a document referred to as the Constitution was being debated. An agreement was required by the majority of the states represented, however that did not make the document binding. It took a ratification of nine of the thirteen states for that. There were still delegates who refused to sign off on this Constitution.

What is the Constitution? It is considered the supreme laws of our United States. A somewhat flexible document, it has been amended 27 times but requiring Congressional approval of $\frac{3}{4}$ of both the House and Senate. An amendment or change in the laws contained within does not require presidential approval.

George Washington was the president of the Constitutional Convention. Benjamin Franklin was ill yet delivered very passionate speeches pressing for signatures. Who signed this document? James Madison, our 4th president. Benjamin Franklin. Alexander Hamilton, first Secretary of the Treasury. George Washington. Robert Morris, known

as the financier of the American Revolution. Many more. John Adams, our second president was not in attendance, since he was serving as America's ambassador to England at the time. Thomas Jefferson, third American president and author of our Declaration of Independence was also not in attendance, as he was serving as a trade commissioner in France at the time. Several delegates did not sign.

At the end of the convention, Philadelphia socialite Elizabeth Willing Powel asked Benjamin Franklin "Well Dr. Franklin, what have we got? A republic or a monarchy?" Franklin's reply was "A republic, if you can keep it".

239 years after the creation of our Constitution, have we kept it?

A Look Back in Time

One hundred years ago, this area mourned the death of two Perkasio firefighters, killed in a traffic accident along Station Rd in Quakertown. The fire truck was attempting to pass a vehicle, lights on, bell ringing and sirens blasting, but their truck was forced off the road, killing driver Jacob Crouthamel and William Sames. The funeral procession was over a mile long. The vehicle was on its way to a seven-fire company demonstration in Quakertown.

Crime and Punishment

A tramp was sentenced to one year in prison after pleading guilty to "hanging about and annoying people" in Upper Makefield. Maybe he was looking for free room and board for a year?

Bill Stahl

Hilltown Historical Society Upcoming Events

Wednesday, April 22, 2026, 7:00 PM

The role of black Americans, free and enslaved, in the regiments of the Continental Army is not well-known; neither is the fact that relatively large numbers served in southern regiments and that the greatest number served alongside their white comrades in integrated units. John Rees will discuss black soldiers' acceptance, service, and experiences during and after the War for American Independence, focusing on those who served in Continental regiments.

Hilltown Township Building, 13 W. Creamery Rd

Wednesday, May 27, 2026, 7:00 PM

Herb Kaufman will explore the history of the American Revolution and the colonial era, full of lore, myths, half-truths and just plain inaccuracies that have become part of American history.

He will separate fact from fiction, focusing on mysterious, misrepresented and often imagined incidents and events that they never taught you in high school.

Hilltown Township Building, 13 W. Creamery Rd

Sunday, June 14, 2026, 2:00 PM

“Roller coasters to Ruin to Retail “. Bill Stahl will speak of the early days of Willow Grove Park and the changes during its lifetime. A Victorian treasure, it quickly transformed into the Roaring Twenties, survived the Depression, War years and the Baby Boom era. No traces remain. Feel free to share your memories.

Open House at the Strassburger Farmstead 407 Keystone Dr Sellersville 1:30-4:00 speaker @ 2:00

All events are free! Donations happily accepted!



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As we celebrate our 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, and the long-standing Constitution, could we be considered the longest running Democracy? Some could argue against this. At our founding we did not have universal suffrage, not until the 20th century. The Voting Right Act of 1965 furthered our democratic voting laws. Another longstanding and older democracy might be the Iroquois Confederacy. They were a powerful Native American Confederacy that lived primarily in Canada and New York for over 4,000 years. By 1722, they had been known to the new Europeans as the Six Tribes. Hundreds of years prior, the individual tribes had been fighting, raiding, and feuding with one another and were brought together through the efforts of two men and one woman. They designed an

elaborate political system, which included a two-house legislature. The chiefs from the Seneca and Mohawk tribes met in one house, while the Oneida and Cayuga met in the other. The Onondaga broke ties and had the power to veto decisions made by the others. Each tribe had a women's council that took the initiative in all matters of public importance, including the nomination of members of the chief's council. When the American Revolution began in 1775, the Iroquois Confederacy was divided among its tribes. The Oneida and Tuscarora sided with the Americans, while the Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca remained loyal to Great Britain. This marked the first significant split among the Six Nations, and upon Great Britain's loss, the end of the unified Confederacy.