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Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

December 2025

Greetings! Our year comes to a close and we look forward to the big national anniversary next year. What events will occur? It will clearly be special. This past year, the Hilltown Historical Society celebrated our 50th anniversary. We had some great programs, along with our anniversary event in September. It was more of a history-oriented weekend, sharing our archives, two speakers, and complimentary cupcakes! Our 50th anniversary book was published. (Still available to purchase) New this year were slate coasters with the image of the Historic Strassburger farmstead etched on them. They too are still available to purchase.

But this talk of anniversaries got me thinking: Are these special years really considered birthdays? Our country was founded (born?) 250 years ago. Our Society was founded (born?) 50 years ago. Our book is published and printed with the word *anniversary* on the cover, so we cannot change it at this point.

Enclosed with the year-end newsletter is the dues/donation request. We have added a few options to it. If you would like a copy of the 50th anniversary book or the Strassburger farmstead coaster made of slate, indicate it on the enclosed form and we will get the items

to you. We accept good old cash, checks, and PayPal. Our PayPal ID is our email address – **Hilltownhistory1@yahoo.com**. We will figure out a way to get these items to you.

I wanted to show an image of the slate coasters here, but since they are made of black roofing slate, the representation doesn't show up well. The etched Strassburger homestead building is quite stunning, however.

The dues and donations we receive from you allow us to keep our organization going. We pay to heat and light the buildings, perform a multitude of repairs, and keep the place in an orderly manner. I hope you have noticed a difference in the appearance of the site this past year.

This mailed newsletter is only sent to members. It keeps you informed not only of upcoming events but also provides local history stories. Your generosity allows us to thrive, maintain the buildings (both a blessing and a curse!), and share our local history with all. Help us with our obligations.

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The year 2025 kept us busy, but we are proud of our accomplishments. With help from the Bucks County Foundation, we finally finished painting the barn red. Not only does it look wonderful, but the wood siding is preserved. The white picket fence was in horrible condition, with rotted pickets, posts and rails. Maintaining it was a never-ending chore. We had established that the fence was installed in the late 1930s, when it was being spruced up to serve as the base of operations for the Pennsylvania German Society. With the help of the Bucks County Intermediate Unit, we removed over 90% of that fence, leaving only sections that contain a gate, or a corner. It now just provides a glimpse of the old fence. And it makes the property so much easier when cutting the lawn. With help again from the Intermediate unit, we cleared out a large space in the barn, which was filled with junk. The barn was spruced up enough that we had two speakers' programs in the barn in September. One was Jeffrey Marshall, who spoke of local barns, and David Kimmerly, who spoke of his efforts in getting our Strassburger Farmstead listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The barn was certainly an appropriate venue for the talks. During the winter of 2024-25, the gas furnace for the first floor of the homestead building ceased functioning. As it was deemed terminal, we contracted with Garner Bros. to install a new one in September. Maybe this will be more efficient than the old one.

The c.1830 summer kitchen was spruced up. We hope to replace one wall during the summer of 2026. Barn siding needs to be secured in areas. And the barn cleanout project will continue. Water is creeping into the homestead basement, so yet another project is on the books. We debate whether this is something we can tackle on our own. Yes, 2026 will be a busy year. If you have a

desire to help with any of these projects, let us know by phone (215-285-6265), email or mail. The speakers' program committee is hard at work, lining up some great activities.

How can you be kept informed about these events? All dues paying members receive these timely newsletters, announcing the specifics. \.

Christmas Tales

In the book "Christmas in Pennsylvania", there are a few unusual tales and customs. One has to do with the belief that animals talk to each other in the barn between the hours of 11:00 PM and midnight on Christmas Eve. A special gift allows humans to hear and understand the animal's conversations. It is said that a person who is born between 11:00 and midnight on Christmas Eve possesses that gift.

A story goes that one night, a farmer went to his barn at that magic hour, and heard his horses talking that before long, they would be pulling the body of that farmer to his cemetery. Horrified, the farmer ran back to his farmhouse and in his hurry, tripped and broke his leg. In time, that injury caused his death. Those horses then pulled the body of the farmer to his grave in a casket.

It was said by a local farmer that the gift to listen could be obtained by following a specific set of instructions. "Sit by lamplight at exactly 8:00 PM on Christmas Eve and begin reading the Bible from Genesis. Read for three hours straight without looking up. At exactly 11:00 PM, cut a piece of round rye bread, sprinkle with salt (no butter) and eat it. This gives someone the gift of understanding the language of the barnyard animals.

Christmas Dew

Dew that falls on Christmas Eve is supposed to have special powers. People laid out three pieces of bread on Christmas Eve, away from any animals, and this bread was collected in the morning, Christmas Day. The bread, moistened by the dew, would then be fed to the family members. This ritual prevented the family from getting fevers well past the next Christmas.

Some farmers would throw hay from the barn out into the barnyard over Christmas Eve. The next morning, they would bring the dew damped hay into the barn to feed their animals. It was said that by eating this hay, the animals would not die until at least after the next Christmas. These stories mention



a Christmas dew, but nothing about a Christmas frost.

Fortune Telling

A young girl could attempt to discover the trade of the man she would marry. During a freezing Christmas night, she would put out a bucket of water. Just before midnight, she would go outside with a lantern to study the

configuration of the ice in the bucket. By making out the shape of a tool in the ice, that would be the trade of her future husband.

Also, in the time between Christmas and the New Year, some believed they should not wash or change their underwear. If one did, it was believed they would become full of boils.



Sadly, we recently lost a dedicated volunteer in Ginny Bergey. Ginny spent many hours working in our archive room. She organized our books and created a searchable database for surveyed maps of Hilltown residents, some dating back into the 1700s. She just started a project examining some of our older documents and adding them to our searchable index. She was always on the lookout for anything “Bergey”. Ginny will be missed.



Are you ready for this Holiday season? Are your trees up? Like clockwork, my trees go up the day after Thanksgiving. I am one of the few of my friends that use an artificial tree. Yes, I do feel a bit guilty, but there are advantages. Longevity is one. My trees are up from Thanksgiving to the second week of January, with no watering or dropped needles. Another is cost. My trees are about ten years old. Now I am not a cheapskate by any means, but for some, the thought of not having to shell out \$80 for a tree that lasts merely a matter of weeks is a good thing. Finally, my artificial trees are packed away in boxes in my garage. For me, there is no driving around to the Christmas tree stands, looking for the perfect tree.

We have several trees, some themed. We have a four-foot tree, decorated with ornaments purchased while on vacations. The larger tree in the living room is a traditionally decorated tree with lights and ornaments. It seems every year, I purchase more lights. I don't know why. I just need more lights!

Finally, just before Christmas Eve, I pile gifts under the tree, the bigger the pile, the better. My shopping is well under way before Halloween. This extends my Christmas holiday season for months. Finally, when our house returns to normal in January, I am ready for the simplicity of normalcy.

There are many approaches to the season. Some folks cannot be bothered with this work. I can appreciate that. It is work. Others decorate their homes with large collections of the Byers Choice Carolers. I knew a couple who decorated their large tree with all Christopher Radko ornaments. And nothing else. Yet another couple kept a tree up all year long, just changing the decorations to fit the seasons. Easter, Summer, Fall, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Winter. And of course, Christmas. I wonder how these homes will be decorated next year, during the 250th anniversary of the United States of America.

Bucks County Genealogy newsletters

Recently, a member donated twelve newsletters from the above organization. We had a substantial number of issues prior to this, however, I hadn't the time to scrutinize the contents. I did so with the recent donation and found them to contain very interesting local history. To me, history is "people based". In one issue, it listed local Civil War pensioners, along with the reason and monthly amount. In 1883, Jessee Winkler of Dublin was awarded a monthly pension of \$24, as his right arm was amputated. Tobias Althouse of Dublin was awarded \$12, the

cause was epilepsy. Widow Hannah Martin of Dublin was awarded \$8 per month. Hannah Eckhart of Dublin was the mother of a soldier and was awarded an \$8 per month pension.

Pensions were awarded to two women from New Britain in 1883. They were both widowed during the War of 1812. These were Margaret James and Ann Tanner. The pension was \$8 per month.

Yet another issue contained listings of Mercantile Taxes for the year 1853. Some notes or abbreviations follow the names of the businesses. The following businesses are from the township of Hilltown. Surprisingly, our own Reuben Strassburger was listed as iron and an additional listing noted only as "L". Strassburger was a store owner along Bethlehem Pike. I have been unable to determine what that "L" meant. . John Moyer – lumber. Samuel Loux – refreshments etc. Henry Albright – lumber. Jacob Bachman – lumber. Benj. Frick – feed. Abraham Reiff – lumber. Joseph Rosemberger – feed and lumber. George Snyder – food etc.

Hilltown Glassworks

There is no doubt that Hilltown has changed since the 1700s. Today, as you drive on Minsi Trail, you may see a nice ranch house. Quite a common site in the area. This site, however, was once a glasshouse, or a factory where glass bottles, windows and glassware were made in our colonial days.

There are not a lot of references about this glasshouse in old documents, but the quantity of glass remnants in the fields over the years tell a story of their own. Some scant information caused historian Dr. Rudolph Hommel to search for this long-lost site. Around 1947, Hommel arrived at a home where he felt the glassworks might once have been. He asked a housewife who answered

the door the same question he had asked many times before in search of the site. "Did any of your menfolk ever plow up bits of broken glass in your fields?" She replied that she had never heard of such a thing. Hommel then asked where her husband may be, since he would be the one to do the plowing. The wife replied "Why, my husband is in the glass field, hoeing". Hommel replied "What, did you say glass field?" "That's right" said the wife, "you did say something about broken glass". She directed Hommel to the field where her husband was working.

Hommel hurried to the farmer, who explained that at every plowing, pieces of slag, glass, and glazed pottery came up. Because of that, they called it the glass field as long as he could remember. Hommel asked the farmer if he could put aside some of these pieces at the next plowing. Hommel did one better and was on hand the next time the field was plowed. He came away with baskets of materials that left no doubt that this was the location of the old Hilltown glassworks.

Most of the pieces were dark green in color, with pieces of square bottomed bottles. Also found were pieces of melting pots and gall, the scum of molten glass that was discarded. Further searches in the 1960s by others came up with pieces of flat window glass, a piece of the tile roof, and some finer pieces of glassware, stems of goblets and pieces of wineglasses.

How did Hommel learn of a Hilltown glassworks? In the church records of the Tohickon Union Reformed Church, it was noted "George Musse, the old glass blower died and was buried the 21 of June 1760". Musse emigrated to America in 1750 on the ship *Nancy*, from Rotterdam to develop a glass house in Bucks County. The glassworks was completed in 1752, and the first blow was in January 1753.

In a July 1769 issue of the "Pennsylvania Chronicle" Jacob Barge advertised for a load of broken flint glass to be worked up at a "New Glass House"; however no location was given. In the 1790 census, however, a Jacob Barge (born in Franconia in 1758, died 1836 in Bucks County) was listed as a Hilltown resident.

In a German newspaper in August 27, 1776, it was announced that a German servant by the name of Eberhard Meyer had run away for the sixth time from his master Peter Mason at the glass house in Bucks County. Peter Mason was listed as a resident of Hilltown from 1779-1884. The 1781 list reads "Hilltown Township – Peter Mason, Glassworks, five horses, no acres, two cattle, no servants". At the time, between 1775-1794, Henry Wismer owned the property, so Peter Mason either rented the land, or ran the glasshouse for Wismer.

Prior to the construction of the current house on the site, our founder Jack Fox spent a day and a half casually digging and uncovered the remains of at least seven structures but failed to find the actual furnace. In our barn are three five-gallon buckets of glass slag, gall and melting pot remnants, the result of Jack's digging.

Let's fast forward to the early 21st century, December 2002 and January 2003. PennDot wanted to replace a bridge on Minsi Trail over a tributary of Morris Run. Over 3,000 artifacts relating to glassmaking were found. Other remnants not related to this trade were found also, allowing the approximate dating of the glass items.

Yet another survey of the land was conducted in 2006, using highly technical means. This allowed the group to "see" beneath the surface of the ground using ground penetrating radar. Spot holes were dug uncovering a multitude of items. Ultimately, stone foundations were

discovered, and over 4,000 artifacts related to the glass industry were identified. A burnt brick surface appeared to be the floor of the glasshouse. Pieces of charcoal were found. When this glasshouse was first built, this was a heavily forested area, and wood was a major resource used in heating the glass. Curiously, in addition to the glass making artifacts, a small number of prehistoric artifacts were found, dating from the Late Archaic period. Stone tools dating from 4,000 to 1,000 BC suggested the site may have been used by Native Americans.

Writing this article had me wondering exactly how glass was made in colonial times. I knew sand had something to do with it. I'll now share with you some research into the old process, just in case you too were wondering. Three basic ingredients were used; sand 75% (silica), soda ash 15% (could be produced by burning seaweed), and limestone 10%. Glassblowers were talented scientists whose formulas were guarded. In a crucible (melting pot) made of sandstone or ceramic clay, the ingredients were thrown together until the proper viscosity was obtained. The glass object, whether it was a bottle, cup, or even a windowpane was blown by the glassblower. The product is then slowly cooled (annealed) to prevent a rapid cooling that would cause the glass item to break. That is the simple explanation!

To me, some of the most interesting artifacts are the crucible, a white material, and a pale green glass spilled over it during the glassmaking task. How many other sites lie beneath the ground in Hilltown?

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church

Much of Hilltown's early history had connections with the early churches or parishes in the township. In our 50th anniversary book, we wrote of some of the

first: Hilltown Baptist, Blooming Glen Mennonite, St. Peter's Lutheran and Reformed, and the Line Lexington Mennonite Churches. Hilltown's Catholic Church came along much later, but let us share with you the story of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church.

The Parish was established by the Archbishop of Philadelphia in 1919. Edward and Anna DuMee donated the land for the church and rectory, along with funds for construction. DuMee was a wool merchant and a benefactor to the Philadelphia Archdiocese. The first Mass in Hilltown was held in the DuMee house to see if there were enough Catholics in the area to support a church. This occurred a year prior to the establishment of the Parish.

Apparently, attendance was substantial. The first Mass at the official new three-day old Parish was held on Easter Sunday, April 20, 1919.



First Official Mass at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, 1919

The first Pastor was Rev. Charles J. H. Knittel, who born and raised in Holland. Surprisingly, the first Mass and Sermons were in German. Church records were also written in German. Many in attendance were

unable to understand the services. Catholics were in a minority in the Hilltown area and anti-Catholicism was openly practiced. Some people refused to even walk by the church. But the church grew.

Property was arranged for a cemetery the next year. Father Knittel fought to expand the parish. He went to the far corners of the area, to encourage parishioners to move closer to the church. In some cases, he searched for properties that may be appropriate for them. Still, the lack of funds caused hardships. It was said that Father Knittel had one of the lady parishioners sift through the stove ashes, looking for coals that could be reused.

Illness caused Father Knittel to step down in 1925 and was replaced by Rev. John N. Wachter. Under his leadership, a new school building was built, with over eighty pupils entering in 1927. A second story to the church was also added. Maybe due to his successes, Father Wachter was reassigned elsewhere, and his post in Hilltown was taken over by Rev. William E. Campbell in 1928. Father Campbell spent the next fifteen years at the helm, steering the parish through the depression and the early years of WWII.

In 1943, Father Campbell was reassigned to full time teaching, and the reins were handed to Rev. Joseph Muldoon. Father Muldoon was instructed to close the parish, but he convinced Cardinal Dougherty to allow him to try to save the Hilltown congregation. The Cardinal relented and Father Muldoon got to work. He performed manual labor, drove the school bus, and borrowed money. Somehow, he convinced the Cardinal to approve the purchase of seven acres of land in Dublin at the site of an old garage. It served as a mission to the church, benefiting those constituents at the far end of the township. It was named St. Patrick's Mission, and its first Mass occurred on Christmas day, 1944. The

building also served as a social center, hosting dinners, dances, and movies.

After the war, the Parish grew, and expansion was needed. Rev. John Morley was next at bat. He took over the parish in 1954. Improvements were made and additional land was purchased. A new school building opened in 1957.

In 1973, Rev. Charles Domboy took over. A new church building was needed, so the St. Patrick Mission was sold to a developer who build a shopping center. It was a difficult decision. The First Mass in the new church was held on Christmas Eve, 1979. More expansion took place with a kitchen, gymnasium, more classrooms, and a cafeteria. (I bought a spaghetti dinner here several months ago). Improvements continued at a rapid pace. The students attending St. Agnes Church in Sellersville started their 2013 school year in Hilltown.

The church has come an exceptionally long way since the first Mass was celebrated by a visiting Reverend, meant to gauge interest in forming a rural parish. Fortunately, the decision was made to create the Parish of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Many dedicated individuals were involved in the success of the parish. In the future, we may review histories of some other places of worship within our township.

The directors of the Historical Society of Hilltown Township wish a happy holiday season for all of our friends. Please remember to visit our webpage and Facebook page for information and updates. Feel free to contact us with ideas, criticisms, or questions. And of course, please forward your dues/donations for the upcoming year. Our anniversary books and coasters make superb Christmas gifts!

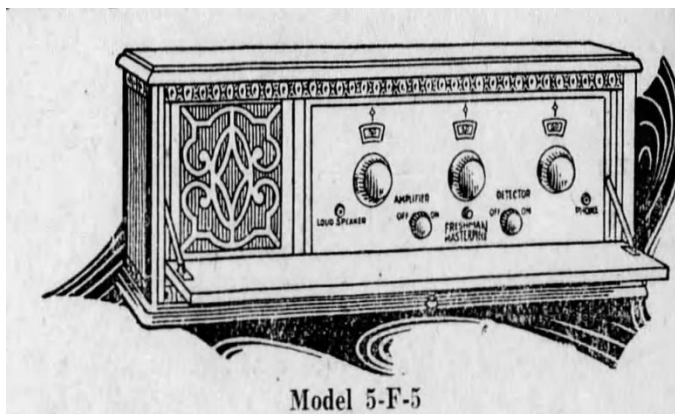
Bill Stahl



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Christmas, 1925



c. 1925 radio

Browsing through the old newspapers of 100 years is like a step back in a time machine. The local stores were offering their Christmas events and sales. A highly advertised item was the “modern” radio. Buckner & Son in Dublin advertised radios ranging from \$9.60 to \$460! Cope’s Music House in Perkasio advertised units starting at \$95. For a radio! At the same time, a new Ford Coupe was being offered at a cost of \$520. Without a radio, of course. There are not a lot of things that have decreased so much over the past 100 years. And to be honest, how many of you actually listen to a radio? My Alexa entertains me just fine.