



PO Box 79
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Hilltownhistory.org

Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

February 2026

Is there anyone out there who actually prefers winter over summer? I am so ready for June! I suppose as we age, winter takes more of a toll on our bodies than the summer. Many Pennsylvanians retire to the warmer climates. Have you ever heard of a Floridian retiring to New York? Very few. Ok, enough of my complaining. Down to business. In early December, we mailed our newsletter along with a membership dues/donation request. If you are a lifetime member, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. If you have paid your yearly dues, we thank you as well. If you forgot, here is a gentle reminder. Below are the types of memberships we offer:

Type of Membership	
Family	\$25
Individual	\$15
Senior	\$10
Patron	\$50
Business	\$100
Life	\$250

Payments may be mailed to PO Box 79,
Hilltown PA. 18927. PayPal payments can

be sent to us at our email address:
Hilltownhistory1@yahoo.com.

We have also been offering our 50th anniversary book for \$18. It's titled "A Timeline of Hilltown, Bucks County". And don't forget about our commemorative slate coasters, engraved with an image of the Strassburger Farmstead. They are \$5 each. Check, cash, or PayPal again!



We are offering something new this year, since it is such an important year in America's history. On page 5 of this newsletter are the rules and prizes of an essay contest open to individuals who fit into the two noted categories. Give it your best! We can't wait to read your thoughts.



Some of our stories this coming year will concern America, 250 years ago, several about our country's flag. Let's get started with the myth of Betsy Ross and our first flag. No, Betsy Ross had no part in this. The

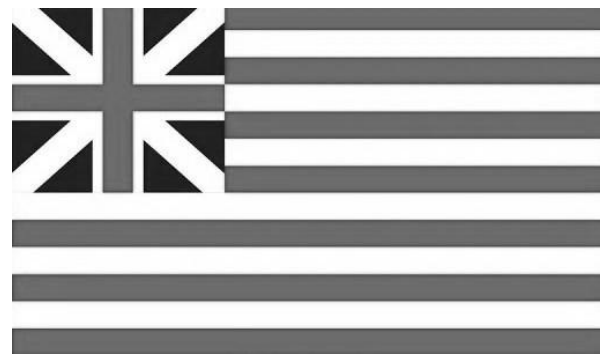
legend says that George Washington, Robert Morris and George Ross visited Betsy in 1776 with a rough sketch of a flag they wished for her to make. She noted the fact that the stars were six-pointed. Deftly, she took her scissors and showed the men that making a five-pointed star was easier. Pure fiction. This story came from her grandson William Canby around the time of the 1876 Centennial held in Philadelphia. He claimed the tale was passed down verbally and he presented it as fact in a paper presented to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Betsy was an upholsterer in Philadelphia, making uniforms, tents, and yes, flags for ships and military installations. What about the famous Betsy Ross house? It is located at 239 Arch St in Philadelphia. It is quite possible that Betsy never lived there. Many years ago, surviving family members pointed out that house as belonging to Betsy. Restoration was performed and adjoining buildings were removed to help stabilize the "Betsy Ross House". In 1937, it was discovered that the building torn down could actually have been the home of our dear Elizabeth Ross. The building left standing is still one of Philadelphia's most popular tourist attractions, so whether actually or symbolically an American icon doesn't really matter.

The famous painting of Betsy shows her sewing the iconic "Old Glory" flag. So, who sewed America's first flag?

Rebecca Young was a seamstress in Philadelphia at the same time. She is credited with making the first flag of our country in 1775. That flag was known as the Continental Union Flag, with thirteen strips of red and white and a British Union Jack in the upper left corner. It was first flown on December 3, 1775, by John Paul Jones (then a Continental Navy lieutenant) on the ship Alfred in

Philadelphia. That flag was also raised by General Washington on January 1, 1776, at Prospect Hill in Massachusetts to boost the morale of his troops, but also to encourage re-enlistment which was to expire at the end of 1775.

This flag was a forerunner of "Old Glory". The Union Jack was replaced by the famous circle of thirteen stars in 1777. On June 14, 1777, Congress adopted the flag with the ringing words: "Resolved: that the flag of the United States be 13 stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be 13 stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation. Many still refer to this design as the Betsy Ross flag, but like the Betsy Ross House, is it really important who the credit goes to? We could even call it the "Philadelphia Flag". It is our flag today, even if the facts of 250 years ago are a bit fuzzy.



Red & white stripes with a red, white and blue Union Jack. First American flag.

Folklore of Pennsylvania Germans

I recently purchased a reprint of a book titled "The Folklore of the Pennsylvania Germans". It was information about this subject presented at a Pennsylvania German Society meeting in 1910. I thought it may contain a wealth of information about old German customs from our area. Maybe even some magic spells?

Much of the “spells” were in German, so I remain powerless in that respect, but some interesting ones came up.

There is a charm for bees that must be spoken as one would approach the nest: ”Humler, Brumler, stech mich net.No holt dich aw, der Deivel net.” Google tells me it reads in English, “*Humler, Brumler, don’t stab me. No one will get you, the devil won’t.*”

To charm a mean dog, one must, when approaching the house, reverse one of the rails of the fence and repeat the following before the dog becomes aware of you: “Hund, hald die Mund, Mich hart Gott erschaffen, Dich hart er werden lassen”. We again ask Google to clarify, “Dog, *shut your mouth, God created me hard, He made you hard too.*

Another odd one is said when a child is injured while playing: In English, it reads as “If you get away with it, you get away with it; if you die, you die.”. A bit rough, I think. 90% of this book is in German, so I’ll leave the rest to sit in our archives.

The King Family

Many years ago, Jack Fox, founder of the Hilltown Historical Society, was on the hunt for directors to serve on the board. Al King caught his eye early on. Al joined the board early on and served until his death in 2005. Somebody had to step up and take his place. Who better than Donna King, Al’s wife? Donna has served on the Board of Directors for twenty years. She recently informed us of her desire to step down. She served admirably for two decades. We thank her for her service and will miss her!

Fastnacht Day

This annual event is right around the corner, celebrated on February 17th this year. The Pennsylvania Dutch refer to this as Fastnacht Day, while others may refer to this day as Shrove Tuesday or even Fat Tuesday. . Yet others call it Fat Tuesday or even celebrate Mardi Gras. It occurs the day before Ash Wednesday which begins at Lent. Thus, for many, forty days of some sort of fasting or minor sacrifice, ending on Easter Sunday.

To many however, Fastnacht Day is celebrated by eating the famous fastnachts. It is a raised donut, with some variations that may include mashed potatoes. Many variations of the recipe exist for such a simple item. But they are delicious, even if they weigh heavy in your stomach. I imagine that almost everyone reading this newsletter is familiar with these treats. Some German traditions include that the last person up on Shrove Tuesday was called the "Fastnacht" and teased all day for being late for breakfast. In the same way, the last person up on Ash Wednesday was also teased and called the "Ashepuddle." This person's chore for the day was to carry the ashes in the stoves and ovens outside to the ash pile.

I must complain about an experience I had on Fastnacht Day several years

ago. I went to Dunkin Donuts in Silverdale and asked for a half dozen fastnachts. They had no clue what I was talking about. I tried to spell it for them, but it seemed as if I was speaking a different language. I left empty-handed. I suppose it was my own fault. Going to a national chain for such a regional delicacy. I left, traveled a few hundred yards, and had Bolton's fill my order to my satisfaction.



I am trying to keep an America history theme in this newsletter, but let us see how many of our readers can identify these famous opening sentences or quotes from famous people without Google. The answers will not be noted here, as your phone can do it. **First:** *"When in the Course of human events"*.

Second: *"These are the times that try men's souls"*.

Third: *"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union"*

Fourth: *"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent"*

Fifth: *"Ich bin Ei Berliner"*.

Sixth: *"Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy....."*.

Seventh: *The rights of Citizens of the untied States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex"*.

Eighth: *Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country?*

Ninth: *"I have a dream....."*

Tenth: *"You are about to embark on the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months"*.

These historic documents provided a blueprint forming laws for this new country. They were not written without arguments, debates, and hard feelings. The early Continental Congresses laid the groundwork for this nation. The ability for change was important. Case in point, is the 18th amendment to the Constitution – Prohibiting the manufacture, sale, and transportation of liquor.

1926

Maybe I can fill this last column with content from the Central News publication from 1926. (Sort of a lazy approach, and I do apologize). At the Plaza Theater, the movie "Below the Line" would be showing. The star was Rin-Tin-Tin. Ironically, it was a silent film, with the star being unable to speak anyway.

There was a three-car accident at the intersection of Bethlehem Pike and Keystone Drive. Now the Hilltown Historical Society claims its headquarters at the Strassberger Homestead at this intersection. On several occasions within the past decade, accidents here have crashed through the picket fence, damaged the side porch and damaged the low stone wall along Bethlehem Pike. Some things never change.

Mrs. Reichley, of South Perkasio, was in her cellar when she heard a crash above her. Apparently, a pig had escaped from a load that Mr. Fehl was hauling. It crashed through a window of her house, falling about five feet into the cellar. This story appeared on page one of the Perkasio Central news, so I won't apologize for placing it on page four on ours.

Bill Stahl

Local History Essay Contest

Our Society is inviting those with an interest in local history, that fall within our guidelines, to submit essays under 1,000 words in length themed “Echoes of the Past: Exploring the Rich History of Hilltown Township and Upper Bucks County”.

We will be considering those in two categories: Students from grades 7-12 who reside within the following school districts: Pennridge, Quakertown, North Penn, Souderton, Palisades and Central Bucks. Also, essays will be accepted from those attending private, parochial and technical schools within those areas.

The second category will be for adults, 18 and older, again residing within the above-mentioned areas.

Guidelines: Essays are to be typed, double spaced and emailed to Hilltownhistory1@yahoo.com, or mailed to Hilltown Historical Society, PO Box 79, Hilltown PA. 18927. Contained with the submitted essay should be name, age, email and physical address, and school if applicable. A bibliography of sources used will be required.

Possible Topics:

- 1) Hilltown Township’s early settlers and their cultural background.
- 2) Significance of the Minsi Trail
- 3) Important local landmarks or villages
- 4) Hilltown during certain war years.
- 5) Important Hilltown residents.
- 6) Any topic of your choosing that fits within the general theme.

Submission Deadline – May 15, 2026

Winners Will be Notified via Email on July 4, 2026.

Awards for each category: **First Prize** \$100, publication in the Newsletter of the Hilltown Historical Society and Society website, gift of Hilltown Historical Society’s 50th anniversary book and commentative Strassburger Farmstead slate coaster.

Second Prize \$50, publication on the Society website and, gift of Hilltown Historical Society’s 50th anniversary book, gift of Hilltown Historical Society’s 50th anniversary book. book and commentative Strassburger Farmstead slate coaster.

Third Prize \$25, publication on the Society website and gift of Hilltown Historical Society’s 50th anniversary book and commentative Strassburger Farmstead slate coaster.

By submitting an essay, you allow the Society to publish it, giving credit to the author.

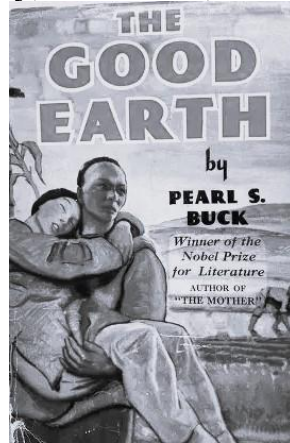
~ All participants will receive a limited subscription to the Hilltown Historical Society emailed newsletter. ~

Judging criteria: Historical accuracy, relevance, creativity, clarity, personal insight, reflection and organization.

Judging will be conducted by the members of the Board of Directors of the Historical Society of Hilltown Township.

Hilltown Historical Society Upcoming Events

Wednesday, March 25, 2026, 7:00 PM



Samantha Freise of the Pearl S. Buck Foundation will explore the FBI file of Pearl Buck. The file presents an interesting look into her activism and life's work from 1938-1973. Her commitment to racial justice and association with many activist groups made her a dangerous character in the eyes of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Suspicion of communist ties permeates the file. Join us as we discover the truth behind the suspicion.

Hilltown Township Building, 13 W. Creamery Rd, 7:00 PM

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. 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. African American women with the army will also be featured, as well as a brief discussion of the U. S military's 19th century transformation from inclusion to segregation.

Hilltown Township Building, 13 W. Creamery Rd

All events are free! Donations happily accepted!

Hilltownhistory.org

Hilltown Historical Society Events for 2026

Wednesday, March 25 ~ Samantha Freise, Curator and historic house director at Pearl S. Buck National Historic Landmark will explore the FBI file of Pearl S. Buck. The file presents an interesting look into her activism and life's work from 1938-1973. Her commitment to racial justice and association with many activist groups made her a dangerous character in the eyes of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Suspicion of communist ties permeates the file. Join us as we discover the truth behind the suspicion.

Hilltown Township Building 7:00 PM

Wednesday, April 22 ~ 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 7:00 PM

Wednesday, May 27 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 7:00 PM

Sunday, June 14 – *“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. Feel free to share your memories.

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

Saturday, September 19 ~ *There was no better time to hook a 1776-inspired hooked rug than for our country's 250th commemoration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. This exhibit will showcase the talent and dedication of the Hunterdon County Rug Artisans Guild (HCRAG) of New Jersey, who for an entire year were busy hooking rugs representing the colonial period. Subjects include patriotism, independence, life in the time, regimental flags, slogans, historic people, places, and more!*

10 AM to 3 PM Open House at the Strassburger Farmstead 407 Keystone Dr Sellersville

Saturday, October 17 – Bill Stahl will lead a walking tour through the Hilltown Lower Baptist Church Cemetery. It is the oldest in the township. Meet some historic and interesting figures, hear local folklore, and learn why this site is so important to Hilltown's history. This cemetery is on Chalfont Road, several hundred yards below Hilltown Pike. ***Lower Hilltown Baptist Church Cemetery at 1:00 PM. Chalfont Road, off of Hilltown Pike***

Wednesday, October 28 ~ Renowned historian Jeffrey Marshall explain why the American Revolution is arguably one of the most important events in the nation's history. Learn about some of the stories of how those times affected the local population and how local citizens influenced history. ***Hilltown Township Building 7:00 PM***



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Gen. Von Steuben

During our Revolution, an out-of-work Prussian military man found himself in need of a job. Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben passed muster with the American Congress and found himself at Valley Forge as temporary Inspector General of the Continental Army. Appalled by the state of U.S. forces, Steuben took the lead in teaching soldiers the essentials of military drills, tactics, and discipline based on Prussian techniques. He devised a fifteen-step process for priming and loading a musket. And he drilled, drilled, and drilled some more. It was said that his efforts paid off in the battles that occurred after the winter of Valley Forge. He is honored with a statue in New York, Valley Forge, as well as Washington DC.



Gen Von Steuben in Milwaukee