



PO Box 79
Hilltown PA. 18927
Hilltownhistory1@yahoo.com
Hilltownhistory.org

Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

April 2025

Ahhh, Spring is here. It seems that every winter is more bothersome than the one before. Why is that? Are the winters getting colder, or maybe my advancing age makes the temperature more intolerable? Either way, the future looks bleak. One little factoid: According to the US Census Bureau, the average age in Florida is 42.6 years, while Pennsylvania comes in at 40.6. Almost a 5% differential. Understandable.

You may have seen some changes at the Strassburger Farmstead recently, specifically, the removal of portions of the white picket fence that surrounds the red brick building and portions of the yard. That fence consists of thousands of white pickets, thousands of feet of rails and posts. For years, it has been a major undertaking, painting and replacing rotted portions. All of the pickets were handmade, adding to this burden. This fence also made the mowing and weed whacking more difficult. Several photographs in our archives showed us that this fence did not exist in the early 20th century. A low stone wall along Keystone Drive and Bethlehem Pike survives, but there was not a picket fence on top of it. There is a porch along Bethlehem Pike, the entrance to

Strassburger's Store in the 1800s. The white fence would have prevented customers from entering the store or parking their horses or wagons.

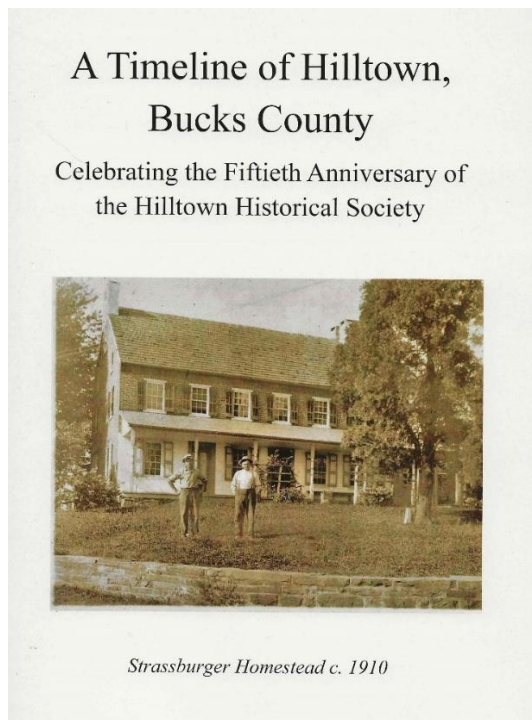
We think that this burdensome white picket fence was installed in the late 1930s by Ralph Beaver Strassburger, president of the Pennsylvania German Society. He wanted to use this building as the headquarters of this group and many improvements were made. This may have been one of those improvements. Some data on that fence: There are about 1,940 pickets, 1,600 feet of horizontal rails, and 106 posts.

Not all the fences will be removed. Certain sections contain gates and openings will remain, providing a sense of remembrance.



We have mentioned our 50th anniversary book several times. It is available merely for the asking. (and an \$18 donation) Visit our website or email from the top of this page. Call 215-285-6265. It can be delivered at no cost or mailed for \$4.65 additional. I believe it is also available at the Treasure Trove in

Perkasie and the Factory Antiques store in Silverdale. This publication begins here several thousand years ago, covers the European immigration, early education with a brief look into the future.



Note the missing fence on top of the low stone wall. Finally, if there are any volunteers to help with this demolition, feel free to contact us.



Our official anniversary event will take place during the weekend of September 20 and 21 this year. We continue to improve and work on this. On Sunday, Sept 21, the acclaimed Jeff Marshall will be our speaker. Mr. Marshall spent four decades with the Heritage Conservancy, ten years as its president. He is the author of six books, including *Barns of Bucks County* and *Farmhouses of Bucks County*. His presentation is not one to miss. He will speak at 11:00AM.

History by Witnesses

There may be no better way to learn history than to read the words written years ago, of those witnessing firsthand the events occurring. Philadelphia Quaker Elizabeth Drinker wrote a journal covering the years from 1758 to 1807. This carried through the revolution, including the British occupation in her home city. Elizabeth and Henry, her husband lived on Front St, near Race St. In italics are the words put on paper by the indomitable Elizabeth Drinker herself.

Every school child knows the significance of the date July 4, 1776. On the first anniversary, in 1777, Elizabeth wrote "*The town illuminated and a great numbers of windows broke on the anniversary of independence and freedom.*" Some Quaker shopkeepers refused to close their shops on holidays like July 4, or days appointed to celebrate American military victories. In retaliation, some Philadelphians broke the windows of many Quaker shops.

Elizabeth and her husband Henry were both Quakers, and as such tried to remain neutral during the revolutionary war. He was a very successful businessman and was respected in the Quaker community. Her writings also described hardships and events prior to the British occupation of the city. **Aug. 14.** *One George Spangler was executed today for some assistance he had given to ye British army. He has left a wife and several children.* General Washington's loss at Brandywine, and the threat of the British Army entering Philadelphia, caused the arrests of some Quakers due to their neutrality and lack of support to the cause. On September 4, 1777, three men barged into the Drinker household and arrested him for treason. He and about 35 others were taken and held in the Masonic Hall on Second Street, near the old City

Tavern. There were no arrest warrants, no official charges or trials. The Continental Congress felt that these men were inclined to share intelligence with the enemy. On September 11, Elizabeth wrote about hearing much gunfire below the city, as the armies battled. This was the Battle of Brandywine she heard. Also, British warships were seen heading up the Delaware River. The Battle of Brandywine occurred on September 11, with a huge number of wounded American soldiers flooding into the city, spilling blood and dropping their muskets in the street.

On September 12, she wrote in her journal *"...this has been a day of great confusion to many in the city"*. The day before, the Quaker prisoners were taken away in wagons.

Sept 15 – *"Last night I heard several Friends having lost their horses, having been taken from their stables. – For which reason I ordered our horse and cow to be placed into the washhouse"*.

On September 19, the Continental Congress, anticipating the fall of the city, left for Lancaster.

On September 26, the British troops entered Philadelphia, unopposed. Elizabeth wrote that day, *"Well, here are the English in earnest, about 2,000 or 3,000 came in through Second Street, without opposition or interruption."*

On October 6, a British officer arrived at the Drinker household, asking if a wounded British Captain could convalesce at her house. Elizabeth wrote *"I put him off by saying, that as my Husband was from me, I should be pleased if he could provide some other convenient place. He hoped he had given no offence and departed"*. Quite a polite exchange in an occupied city.

Two weeks later, another British officer arrived, requesting if a General Grant be quartered in her house. Her journal entry read

"I told him my husband was from me, and a number of young children around me; I should be glad to be excused. He replied, as I desired it, it should be so."

November 1: *Ye Hessians go on plundering at a great rate; such things as wood, potatoes, turnips &c. Provisions are scarce among us.*

In December, a British Major requested quarters at the household. Being a polite man, and the fact that many of her friends were quartering officers, she allowed Major Carmen into the household.

In late December, a British officer took Elizabeth's servant Ann for his own use. Mrs. Drinker demanded money from him for the loss of her servant, quite loud and outside. The officer, not used to this manner of scolding, went away, seemingly confused.

Jan 19, 1778 – *Our officer moved his lodgings from a chamber to the little front parlor, so that he has the two front parlors, a chamber up two flights of stairs for his luggage, and the stable wholly to himself, besides the use of the kitchen, his camp bed is put up"...* He also came with a staff of his own servants.

In February, she wrote that the Quaker prisoners were offered their release if they would sign an Oath of Allegiance to Pennsylvania, becoming good and faithful subjects. They refused.

March 25 – *"Our hay is out and I believe I must sell the poor cow"*.

March 28 – *Our little Henry (young son) swallowed a pin yesterday which adds something to his uneasiness.*

Henry Drinker Sr. was transported from Philadelphia to Pottstown, Reading, Harrisburg and Lancaster. In April 1778, Elizabeth and some wives of the prisoners set off to Lancaster to petition the Pennsylvania Assembly to release the men. Surprisingly,

they met with Martha Washington and were introduced to General Washington. She described Martha Washington as “a sociable pretty kind of woman”. After an elegant meal with the Washingtons and 15 Colonial officers, the women were informed by the General that he would not release the prisoners. Washington did allow the women to visit the men in their prison and provided them passes

Some confusion existed where the men were. They were given a pass to a Lancaster prison, but then they were told they should go to Shippensburg.

On April 14, she wrote *“in our journey today, we found the roads so bad that we walked part of the way and climbed 3 fences to get clear of the mud”*. More confusion and denials blocked the release until Henry and Elizabeth were united on April 25. The next day, the remainder of the Philadelphia Friends taken with Henry were released and started their journey back to Philadelphia.

June 18, 1778 – *“last night it was said that there was 9,000 of the British troops left in town, 11,000 in the Jerseys; This morning when we arose, there was not one redcoat to be seen in town”*.

Thus, the occupation was over. Elizabeth Drinker’s journal went on until her death in 1807.



A Century Ago

The 1925 Central News tells a story of life a century ago. **“Looking back - Jan 1886”** – “The new Pike between Dublin and Souderton is rapidly being completed and when finished, will be a first-class highway.”

The Plaza Theater in Perkasio was a busy place in 1925. Harold Lloyd starred in *“Girl Shy”* on Jan 10, while four days later, Rudolph Valentino starred in the movie *“A*

Sainted Devil”. In 1950, the theater sustained fire damage, ending the movie business. In 1953, A&P opened a grocery store in the building. Several other businesses followed at this site, which is now home to Perkasio Pizza and Pasta.

This local newspaper served many of the local farmers with livestock and crop advice in 1925. Headlines consisted of “Minerals for Beef Cattle Favored, Horses Feet need Good Care in Severe Winter, Ruptured Pigs are not Suitable for Breeding, Practical Suggestions in Care of a Herd Boar”. These headlines all occurred in the February 1925 issue.

Perkasio Grocer H. S. Roedel advertised his grocery prices. Sugar was 6 ½ cents per pound. Brooms were 43 cents each. Baked beans were 3 cans for 25 cents. Rice was 10 cents per pound.



We thank Hilltown Township for their generous donation to the Hilltown Historical Society, helping us with the cost of publishing our anniversary book. Can we all give them three cheers?



Here we have another undated photograph of the Strassburger Farmstead. As I mentioned

earlier, note the lack of the picket fence on top of the low stone wall. The dirt road running left and right is Keystone Drive, and to the far left is Bethlehem Pike. The posts in the foreground seemingly support a fence around the vacant lot that we use for parking. Currently, there is a hand dug well about 12' from the front porch, but I see no sign of that in this photograph. We had a huge tree removed several years ago in this front yard, yet there is no sign of it here. This image appears in the "History of the Strassburger Families", published by Ralph Beaver Strassburger in the 1930s.

Bucks County's Union Academy

In the spring of 1835, the trustees of the Union Academy in Doylestown hired Silas Andrews to take charge of educating the pupils. It started slowly, with only one pupil showing up on day one. Slowly, it grew until the class size grew into the 20s by winter. This school was a private entity, with tuition paid by the families. It started out as a financial mistake. By 1837, it turned into a boarding school in Mr. Andrew's dwelling, to include books, meals, washing, and the required attendance of students at public worship on the sabbath. The boarding school was located at the northwest corner of State and Broad Streets. (street names were established in the borough in June 1838).

Once underway, the students were given certain additional tasks, as voted on by the student body weekly. A *Regulator* took charge of the school starting at the proper time, as well as keeping track of recess times. A *Monitor* instructed the class in arithmetic and prepared the students for tests. Another *Monitor* was later elected, this new one handled Grammar. A Committee of two criticized the students' compositions. The

Journalist was to keep detailed records of issues of the school. The notes of the journalist provided much of the content of this particular book. As you can see, Mr. Andrews had quite a bit of help during the school year.

This information comes from the publication "Mr. Andrews School 1837-1842", primarily transcribed from the notes of the journalists. A transcription was done by Ellen Swartzlander in 1958, published by the Bucks County Historical Society.

Fights between the boys were quite common and filled much of the journal's pages. On May 3, 1837, the journalist wrote "A slight skirmish took place between James Neff and Robert Heazlitt. Sticks of firewood and stones were the missiles used by both parties, to which James added a drawn knife. Both were to be placed in the attic until teatime after they promised to keep the peace in the future". The elected Regulator was thus given the task of reporting to Mr. Andrews any misbehavior occurring during his absence. Fights between the students were common. A second common offence noted was whispering in the classroom. Desks were moved to combat that crime, but generally to no avail.

In June, it became necessary to also elect deputies to the original elected posts. A new post was established, that of *Aquator* and a deputy to obtain water, four times a day. Another new committee was formed to report on the state of the desks, named, not surprisingly, "*The Committee of Desks*". It seemed weekly, new rules were required to keep these boys' behavior in check. For some reason, common sense was not something the boys were acquainted with. On June 24, a new rule was put into effect and documented by the journalist: "The throwing of chewed paper balls in the school be expressly

forbidden". Previous poor behavior was exhibited by pupils, in opening desks of others. This act was the duty of the Committee of Desks only. To prevent this, the boys could have locks installed on their desks. This led to the anticipated problem that the keys would get lost (accidentally or on purpose?) leaving the student unable to do his schoolwork. To combat this, locks could be installed on the desk by a carpenter (at the student's cost) and the key would remain in the hands of the teacher.

In July, Robert Heazlet fought with Charles Neff, described as "close and desperate combat" by the journalist. This time, punishment consisted of beating the boys on their backs, with their jackets removed. The teacher's weapon was described as "a measuring rod", maybe a ruler or yardstick? It seemed that Mr. Andrews was getting less tolerant with this type of behavior. A new rule was established that day "against having an insatiable desire for catching flies, sweeping them from the floor with his hand".

It was reported that during the next week, John Neff assaulted Robert Heazlet, requiring Neff's punishment with a beating from Mr. Andrews. It seems that the number of Neff boys had quite an issue with poor Robert Heazlet. The journalist reported that the "Aquator" had been derelict in his duties in returning from the well pump with the bucket only 1/6 full. The teacher ended up carrying the water bucket himself.

Some of the more typical punishments were staying in for recess or being sent to the attic, sometimes with meals withheld. Staying in the classroom after school was another punishment. Remember, this was a boarding school, so the other students could go to their rooms, outside or gather in other areas. At times, Mr. Andrews felt the need to "box the ears" of an offender. At one point, James Neff misbehaved, requiring him to receive a

"fillip" to his nose. Google tells me this is a flick with one's finger. His brother John was relegated to stand in a closet at one point. For a more durable weapon for Mr. Andrews to use, he began using a small riding whip on the boys when needed. The further into this journal I read, the more punishments are described. Did the punishment always fit the crime? One day, Charles Neff was caught throwing sticks, stones and old shoes at his schoolmates, and was attempting to bite the ear off Moses Warner. He was merely sent to the attic.

There were no limits to the punishments Mr. Andrews used. Once, James Neff was made to sit on a sharp stone. Mr. Andrews could also be a kind teacher. In June of 1837, the students put a petition to their teacher: "*We the undersigned respectfully request Thursday the next 21st of June to go fishing to the Neshaminy.*" *"Signed by the scholars.*" The petition was granted.

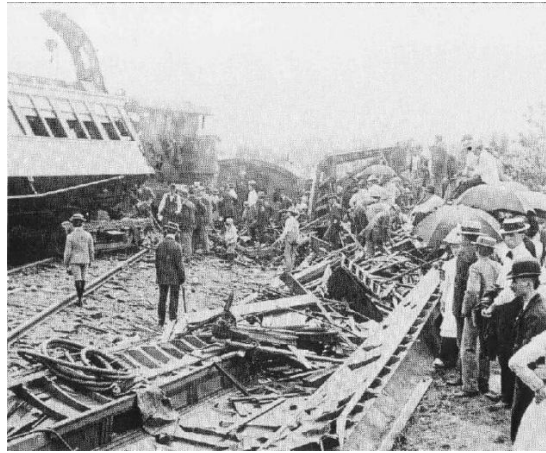
Mr. Andrews ended this school in 1842, due to health reasons. You must have seen the surname Neff in these descriptions of behavior, three brothers attending this school. Charles Neff was involved often. In September of 1841, he left to enter the Freshman Class at Amherst University. One of the students graduated from Princeton University. Others became quite successful in their fields, doctors, lawyers, newspapermen and authors. This transcription of handwritten notes allows us to get a glimpse of a Bucks County school almost 200 years ago.



Take note of our upcoming events. On April 23 at the Township building, we will hear about the disastrous Hatfield train wreck. On May 4 at our homestead, we will help Plumstead Township celebrate their 300th anniversary.

Hilltown Historical Society Upcoming Events

Wednesday, April 23



Lawrence Stevens, president of the Hatfield Historical Society, will present a program on the devastating train wreck of 1900. The most tragic accident in Hatfield's history took place on Labor Day weekend when an Atlantic City bound express train plowed into the back of a milk train stopped at the Hatfield station. This collision resulted in over 13 deaths and more than 90 injuries; His book will be available to purchase

7:00 PM Hilltown Township Building – 13 W. Creamery Rd & Rte. 152, Hilltown

Sunday, May 4



“History Lives On” Celebrating Plumstead Township's 300th Anniversary by Thomas Upton. Tom Upton of the Plumstead Historical Society will show his recently completed documentary "History Lives On" Celebrating Plumstead Township's 300th anniversary. In addition, he has a Power Point presentation of additional historic photos.

**Open House at our Strassburger
Farmstead 1:30-4:00 w/speaker @ 2:00**

Home to the Plumstead Historical Society



Historical Society of Hilltown Township
PO Box 79
Hilltown PA. 18927

April Showers, please! – We certainly need as much of these showers as possible! Our drought is still in effect, evidenced by a number of dry wells in the area. I am reminded of a song “April Showers”, going all the way back to 1921. I always thought the words were in a simple rhyme “April showers bring May flowers”, but the song April Flowers puts it a little different. It was Al Jolson who sang this, the phrase being “Though April showers may come your way, they bring the flowers that bloom in May”. This was recorded by a great number of artists, including Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland and Cab Calloway. Anyway, we are grateful for any amount of moisture that falls from the sky.