



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

Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

February 2025

This year, 2025, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Historical Society of Hilltown Township. It was in 1975 that Jack Fox took the bull by the horns and willed this organization to be born. We have some special events this year, keep tuned in to our webpage or Facebook page.



Sadly, we are announcing the end of our September Fall Festival. For 15 years, we have opened our buildings, given craftspeople a place to show off their talents, sold old books and antiques, baked goods, silent auctions and shared the local history. The effort was immense, and the public thoroughly enjoyed it. We thank you, the public, for your support in these festivals. We will continue to share speakers' programs at the township building and the Strassburger Farmstead site. We can also provide programs for private groups. Ask for details. Would you like a tour of the Strassburger Farmstead buildings? Just ask. We have taken groups consisting of a busload to merely a few family members. We exist to share this site.

Hilltown's Thomas Family

William Thomas, a Welsh immigrant, has been pretty much established as one of Hilltown's first pioneers. He entered Philadelphia in 1712, eventually becoming a landowner in Hilltown. His first purchase was 440 acres, and when he died, owned land encompassing over 1,200 acres. It is said that he built the Lower Hilltown Baptist Church single handedly on land he donated. Many generations of the Thomas family made their homes here, but seemingly as the Germans came in the Welsh moved on. Our membership list carries no one with the name of Thomas, but that doesn't mean there are no more descendants of old William in our area. Let us know! Are you descended from William Thomas? Did you know that a book was written in the 1880s outlining the genealogy of that Thomas family? What is your connection to Hilltown's founding pioneer?



Manure

We all know the waste product of any farm animal is considered manure. This product is then used to fertilize fields of crops. Local auctions in Hilltown advertised manure in

addition to furniture, tools, buildings, livestock, and grains. It would follow that manure had value. Different types of manure were sold, that of hogs, chickens and the like. In 1884, manure was being sold here for \$40/ton. In 1895, a farm was auctioned off which contained a manure shed. Such was life in rural Hilltown during the late 19th century.

Apparently, manure was not considered an item with value in the urban areas. I found an article from a Facebook page of *History Addicts*, titled “The Horse Manure Problem of 1894”: It follows:

The 15 to 30 pounds of manure produced daily by each beast multiplied by the 150,000+ horses in New York city resulted in more than three million pounds of horse manure per day that somehow needed to be disposed of. That’s not to mention the daily 40,000 gallons of horse urine.

In other words, cities reeked. The “stench was omnipresent.” Here are some fun bits from an article at that time:

Urban streets were minefields that needed to be navigated with the greatest care. “Crossing sweepers” stood on street corners; for a fee they would clear a path through the mire for pedestrians. Wet weather turned the streets into swamps and rivers of muck, but dry weather brought little improvement; the manure turned to dust, which was then whipped up by the wind, choking pedestrians and coating buildings.

. . . even when it had been removed from the streets the manure piled up faster than it could be disposed of . . . early in the century farmers were happy to pay good money for the manure, by the end of the 1800s stable owners had to pay to have it carted off. As a result of this glut . . . vacant lots in cities across America became piled high with manure; in New York these sometimes rose to forty and even sixty feet.

We need to remind ourselves that horse manure is an ideal breeding ground for flies, which spread disease. It is reported that deadly outbreaks of typhoid and “infant diarrheal diseases can be traced to spikes in the fly population.”

The railroad was a viable option to transport the masses of manure from a city to the country, where it had value. Could fortunes have been made? It can be difficult looking back 125 years to try to make a business plan work.

Bob Moyer

Another local legend has passed away. Bob Moyer, born in Sellersville, took over the family business of Blooming Glen Pork. Bob was a Pennridge graduate. Our society had Bob as a guest speaker several years ago at the township building. He spoke on early Blooming Glen memories. The building was packed, with some having to park in a development close by. On Saturdays, who hasn’t paid a visit to Bob’s BBQ? He will be missed.

~

The latest census taken tells us that the population of our township is now 16,288. Sometimes driving up Hilltown Pike or Route 113, it seems like much more. Reported in 1840, the census count in Hilltown was male 942 and female 956, totaling 1,908. No doubt there were more cows and horses than people! Say goodbye to the fields and trees and say hello to the new neighbors

Killer Hill

I am always happy to share stories and memories of people who grew up in the Hilltown area, since I did not. This comes from Jennie Ruth Sperling, who grew up on Swartley Road. She remembers sledding on a wild hill just off Hilltown Pike, opposite Keystone Drive. This was next to the old Swartley Quarry. It was said that stones from this now abandoned quarry were used to build the Lutheran and Reformed Union Church at Church Rd and Hilltown Pike in 1805. The journey from the quarry to the church is about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, all uphill! Those poor animals that pulled every single stone up that long hill. In more modern times, it was said that defective tiles from the American Olean Company in Lansdale were used to help fill it in. That hill went by the name of "Killer Hill". No, no one died sledding down this treacherous slope, but the potential for human carnage existed.

The hill was so popular that people came from afar to take their chances here. If they drove, they parked along Keystone Drive and dragged their sleds across Hilltown Pike. This slope started down a long hill, perpendicular to Hilltown Pike. About halfway down, a stand of trees existed, so the sledder, who was already traveling at a high rate of speed, had to navigate through them. A successful journey through these trees took that sledder into an open area. Relief at this point was only temporary, as the ride became wild and bumpy. People became airborne and sleds broke. Sled remnants remained on the slope. Who wanted to carry a broken sled home? The ride ended in yet another grove of trees.

Jennie remembers one year, some boys made a tunnel on the hill that the sledders could drive through. I suppose you had to be somewhat in control of the sled to do this.

Night sledding took place here, as wood piles were set on fire. Maybe remnants of the broken sleds? She also remembers a time when a family allowed her to use their skis on her journey down the hill. Jennie had a proud sense as she traveled down "killer hill", but she didn't specify whether her trip down was interrupted by a fall.

Years ago, members of the Line Lexington Church Youth would take their chances sledding down the "killer hill". One injury that was noted was a child sledding down the hill who hit a tree and broke their collarbone. Given the description of the hill, I am sure many others occurred. Her story covered the decades of the 1950s and 60s, when I was also an avid sledder. We lived on a steep hill in Abington that the township just closed to traffic after a snowstorm. Film still exists of me sledding down that steep hill, with my two feet dragging. Half a century later, is sledding still a major activity for the Hilltown youths?

Membership

Contained in our December newsletter was a reminder (and plea!) for our yearly dues/donations. If you haven't acted on that, no fear, it is not too late. Simply mail a check to PO Box 79, Hilltown Pa, 18927. You can view the appropriate amount on our webpage – Hilltownhistory.org. The only way to receive our newsletters is to be a dues paying member. If we have your email address, we can still contact you about upcoming events and announcements. Help us to try to keep up with building repairs and other costs. Anyone with an old building knows how difficult and expensive it can be for upkeep. We own three of these! We thank you in advance.

The new Hilltown Book

Did you purchase our 50th anniversary book yet? Titled “A Timeline of Hilltown, Bucks County PA”, it begins thousands of years ago, ends with a brief glance forward, and contains a lot of information about Hilltown in between. Villages, education, early churches, our Revolutionary War citizens, and much more. It contains some interesting photos. It cost \$18, and all proceeds benefit the Hilltown Historical Society. Email us at Hilltownhistory1@yahoo.com or call at 215-285-6265.

A Timeline of Hilltown, Bucks County

Celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Hilltown Historical Society



Strassburger Homestead c. 1910

Address clarification – for correspondence, use PO Box 79, Hilltown Pa. 18927. The physical address of the Strassburger Farmstead is 407 Keystone Dr, Sellersville Pa. 18960. Speakers’ programs at the township building are at 13 West Creamery Rd, Hilltown Pa.

Perkasie - What’s in a Name?

According to Wikipedia, both the town of Perkasie and Pocasie Creek derive their name from the Lenape Unami phrase *Pèhpahkàsink/Poekskossing*, which translates to “*One who goes to the place to crack nuts*”. The Dutch/Swedish (before the British settlements) pronounced the word with an r and it stuck. Wikipedia is a heck of a place to do historic research, and I apologize.

According to a book titled, “Place Names in Bucks County, Pennsylvania”, compiled by George MacReynolds in 1942, and published by the Bucks County Historical Society, he provides several possibilities. One was that is an anglicized version of the family name of Bargansee. Another possibility is that the name came from the family name of Perquise, who once dwelled there.

According to George MacReynolds, the name Perkasie is a corruption of the Lenape word or phrase *Poekskos-sing*, meaning “*where hickory nuts were cracked*”. This isn’t far off from the Wikipedia version. So many variations in the spelling exist, probably due to dialects of a variety of European immigrants. A common old spelling is Perkasey, and it shows up in many historic documents.

Several other theories existed, however. William Buck, writing in 1855, said the word “Perkasie” meant “Perkiomen.” And in 1836, the Rev. John Heckewelder, who did missionary work with the Lenape, said the word “Poquesing” meant “area teaming with mice. Yikes!

Wait! We have a new version. Perkasie historian Scott Bomboy recently wrote that according to scholar Raymond Whritenour, it means “A Place of Peaches”. Whritenour studied the dialect of the Lenape for three

decades. He was involved with Robert Grumet on a study of Lenape names. Whritenour was also involved with a project “*the Lenape Talking Dictionary*,” Both men were well known authorities on the Lenape way of life. Whritenour wrote that the name “*pilgussink*” means “place of peaches”.

So, do we go with the hickory nut version, the peach version, or the teaming with mice version? Take your pick.

Hilltown’s Penn Oak Tree

Around the 1680s, an acorn sprouted into an oak tree in an area known now as Hilltown Township. This occurred about 200 feet from an ancient Lenape trail. The speed limit on this Native American trail is now 45 mph. We call it Hilltown Pike. An oak tree dating back to the days of William Penn is identified as a *Penn Oak*. The side street of Chalfont Road connects Hilltown Pike to the Penn Oak. In May of 1683, William Penn left Philadelphia to negotiate a land treaty with some Lenape Chiefs in an area in the vicinity of the current Philadelphia Glider Council on Route 152 in Hilltown Township.

This newly sprouting oak was on the site of the original Hilltown Baptist Church, built in 1737 on land donated by pioneer Welsh Reverend William Thomas. In time, two more churches were built on this site until finally, in 1970, this Lower Hilltown Baptist Church was demolished. Services continue to this day at the Upper Hilltown Baptist Church in the old “Nace’s Corner”. The cemetery at the Lower Church site remains and is carefully tended to by the Hilltown Baptist Church. Burials date back to the 1700s. Some unmarked graves are said to be for Native Americans. Veterans of the Revolutionary War and Civil War are also buried here.

The tree was a hardy specimen, until storms damaged the heavy branches in recent years.

Finally, its long life ended. It has been cut down, providing tons of firewood. Some people felt that this was the last of Bucks County Penn Oak Trees. It also was a tree that was within yards of William Penn’s journey in Hilltown. Might a fallen acorn from this behemoth extend its legacy, just as our children and grandchildren extend ours? If so, this tree does have a future.



Please note the following page, listing all our 2025 events and programs. The program committee worked extremely hard to bring such a variety to you. Keep it, tape it to your refrigerator! The range of topics is wide. Remember, the events at the Strassburger Farmstead feature an open house for all three buildings.



Although the Fall Festival as it was will not be at the homestead, we are planning the Society’s 50th anniversary event at the farmstead on the 3rd weekend of September. It will be a Hilltown history themed event, sharing our archives with you. See a great Lenape artifact display. We have hundreds of old Hilltown deeds, some dating from the 1700s. Check out the old Hilltown High School yearbooks, dating back to 1925. Are your ancestors in them? We have hundreds of old area photographs, both in albums and slideshows. We have catalogued thousands of old local documents in a searchable database. We have many copies of land draughts, indexed, again some dating back to the 1700s. Come to view what has been hidden for decades.

Bill Stahl

Hilltown Historical Society Upcoming Events

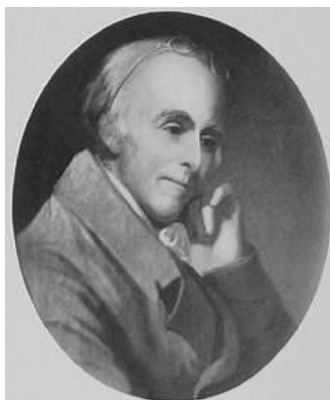
Wednesday, March 26, 2025



Samantha Friese, Curator and historic house director at Pearl S. Buck National Historic Landmark, will present a program on Pearl S. Buck, a Pulitzer and Nobel Award-winning author, a humanitarian and an activist. This talk will cover the life of Pearl Buck in China and the United States.

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

Sunday, April 6, 2025



James Miller will present a program on Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration. He was also the leading physician in Philadelphia during the Yellow Fever outbreak. Become a 'patient' and participate in the medical practices performed during this 18th century epidemic. During the Revolution, he even served as a battlefield surgeon.

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

407 Keystone Dr, Sellersville

All events are free! Donations happily accepted!

Hilltown Historical Society Events for 2025

Wednesday, March 26 ~ Samantha Freise, Curator and historic house director at Pearl S. Buck National Historic Landmark will present a program on Pearl S. Buck, a Pulitzer and Nobel Award-winning author, a humanitarian and an activist. This talk will cover the life of Pearl Buck in China and the United States.

Hilltown Township Building 7:00 PM

Sunday, April 6 ~ James Miller, Ph.D. an active volunteer at Graeme Park, will present a program on Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration. He was also the leading physician in Philadelphia during the Yellow Fever outbreak in 1793, a feared disease because no one knew what caused it nor how it was spread. Become a 'patient' and participate in the medical practices performed during this 18th century epidemic.

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

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.

Hilltown Township Building 7:00 PM

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 the Strassburger Farmstead 407 Keystone Dr Sellersville 1:30-4:00 w/speaker @ 2:00

Wednesday, May 28 ~ A brief nostalgic history of Chalfont showing the transformation from a farming community to a suburb by John Abbott with a video of old time Filling Stations in Chalfont Borough and a video of the Forest Amusement Park. Question & Answer session with John Abbott and John Malack.

Hilltown Township Building 7:00 PM

Saturday & Sunday September 20 & 21 ~ The Hilltown Historical Society celebrates its 50th anniversary. It is now time to open our until-now hidden archives. Page through Hilltown High School yearbooks. Check out our family history books. Read transcriptions of life in Hilltown from years ago. See our historic Hilltown documents, many from the 1700s. Have a seat to view hundreds of old local photographs. See old auction documents from Hilltown. The Nockamixon Lake slideshow project will be running. Another one will run, containing old Hilltown images. Search our database for names on documents, deeds etc. It's time to see what has been hidden!!

Open House at the Strassburger Farmstead 407 Keystone Dr Sellersville 10:00 – 3:00

Sunday, October 12 ~ Bruce Hentschel, a field walking Arrowhead hunter, searches fields and streams for pre-European occupation sites in the Delaware Valley. He will discuss the physical conditions and artifacts found in fields and on campsite locations from the Delaware River to the Schuylkill River. Artifacts will be on display. Have you found an artifact? Bring it to share.

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

Wednesday, October 22 ~ Outlaws in the Underworld: Bucks County Caves and the Doan Gang. by Clint Flack. Clint is an exhibit specialist at the Mercer Museum and well-known expert on the Doans. A different take on the Doan's gang of Bucks County, during the Revolutionary War era. We've been asked to provide a different view on the Doans, so we called Clint, here he is again. For those who missed his last talk, catch up on this one.

Hilltown Township Building 7:00 PM



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Candy Hearts – I have previously written about these sweet Valentine conversational hearts, and I absolutely love them. Did you know that the sayings stamped on them are reviewed yearly, with some being dropped and new ones added? The classic “LOVE YOU” will probably stand the forever test of time. I believe “TICKLE ME” is long gone. Some of the more current sayings are “GOAT” (greatest of all time), “LOL”, “TEXT ME”, and “BFF” (Best Friend Forever). NECCO began printing the sayings for NECCO candy in the 1860s. The candy became popular at weddings, where there were sayings like "Married in satin, love will not be lasting" and "Married in white, you have chosen right. Either tiny print or large candy!

