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Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

August 2024

We are in the dog days of summer. Let's hope your air conditioning is working! Despite the summer weather, we have had a great deal of work done this year at the Strassburger Farmstead, a lot of it by volunteers. First, in the spring we had another visit from Hilltown Boy Scout Troop 67. The energy they bring is incredible. Their main task was yardwork. Fallen tree branches are everywhere.

We were the beneficiaries of mulch from Shelly's Mulch in Hilltown. Susan Goeltz took the role of gardener on the site, beautifying it like I have never seen.

Bonny Forbes and Ginny Bergey spent many hours working in the archives. What are they doing up there? We receive many requests from members about ancestors or their Hilltown properties. Our searchable database can help some with this type of information. Unfortunately, we don't have records of every property or every past Hilltown citizen. But try us.

Thanks go out to all these volunteers!

By now, you must realize that our annual Fall Festival is right around the corner. (September 21st) It is our biggest fundraising event of the year, so we hope for good

weather and good attendance. We always try to promote this event as Hilltown's **BEST** free family event. A Silent Auction, 50/50 raffle, baked goods for sale, food available to purchase from Boy Scout Troop 67, antiques and interesting books for sale, craft demonstrations are all going on. The three pre-Civil War buildings will be open. A slide show of either old local photographs or the formation of Lake Nockamixon will be running non-stop. I am sure I forgot a few things.



Going through the many boxes of archives, we found a receipt from Walter E. Baum, indicating he received funds from the Hilltown High School Class of 1951, to purchase his 21" x 30" painting "The Tree". This painting was presented to the school as a gift. Wouldn't you like to know where that painting is now, 73 years later?

We have a fine collection of Hilltown High School yearbooks, the first one from 1925. Even though there were graduating classes prior to that, apparently yearbooks weren't

published due to the small class size. The 1925 book is printed as No. 1, Vol. 1.

A Victorian Bike Ride Through Hilltown

In the late 1800s, the Philadelphia Inquirer published scenic (or otherwise) bicycle journeys, sometimes with an accompanying map. One such tour was published in the August 14, 1898, issue. It was a journey from Philadelphia to Bethlehem, quite an ambitious trip to pedal! These trips could have been done on horseback or by carriage, but the author referred to his group of cyclists, apparently of the high wheel type. These bicycles were also known as penny-farthings. The name came from the British penny and farthing coins, the penny being much larger than the farthing, so that the side view of the bicycle resembles a larger penny (the front wheel) leading a smaller farthing (the rear wheel). I suppose these bicycles could travel at a speedy rate of speed, given that the high wheel in the front was the drive wheel. They were replaced with the “safety bicycle” model, with the two wheels similar in size. Since this new style was closer to the ground, they were considered safer! Tolls for horses were a bit higher than the cyclists. In 1898, the toll from Spring House to Fairhill Road was 10 1/2 cents for a bicycle and 15 cents for a horse. This road was considered the Spring House Hilltown Turnpike Company.

The journey described here begins on Bethlehem Pike just outside of Spring House, where a 2-cent toll is collected. At Montgomeryville, another 2 cents are collected. Thus begins a roadway where the cyclists are made to dismount to pay their tolls. The writer complained bitterly about the number of times he had to dismount just to pay the toll. Considering the seats were

above the oversized front wheel (some as high as 5'), mounting was a bit difficult and burdensome. He noted that it was fortunate that railroads didn't function in this manner.

The next stop was Colmar, yet another 2 cents. He claims there is a scent of delicious milk from the area dairies here, just what is needed during hot weather. Trewigtown is next, requiring another dismount, toll to pay, then mount again. A stop at the Eagle Hotel in Line Lexington is next, then he turns, as he describes, “*bear left on the County Line between Montgomery and Bucks, and we leave the Bethlehem Pike*”. Yes, in 1898, Bethlehem Pike continued on to what we now call Hilltown Pike. Confusion exists as Hilltown Pike was once known as The Great Road, Bethlehem Road, the Great Bethlehem Road, or the Old Bethlehem Road. The Bethlehem Pike that connects Hilltown to Sellersville was also known as the New Bethlehem Road.



The author turned onto County Line Road in Line Lexington because he knew that what we call Hilltown Pike was untravellable within a few miles. Mud, rocks and ruts. The next toll was at a spot that seemed to be where Mill Rd comes down on the right. Another discount, but he discovered that long distance

travelers did not have to pay. Back up onto the high wheel!

He mentions the “*Unionville Hotel 1863*”, now long gone (at Unionville Pike). He travels up a bit more and turns right onto the “road to Hilltown” (today’s Bethlehem Pike), leaving the County Line. This would be near where Bergey Road comes in on the left. At the split in the two roads, he pays another 2-cent toll. He mentions in his commentary that Hilltown was named for Richard Hill, the mayor of Philadelphia in the very early 1700s. That is one of a few versions. He mentions a steep hill, so high that he dismounts to admire the view around him. Could this be where the Indian Valley Camping Center is? I believe there are more trees blocking views today, since in 1898, trees were cleared for crops and used to cook, heat, and build.

He pedals on towards Sellersville. Just as the town comes into view, so does another tollhouse, collection 1 cent this time. Another dismount and mount. I believe the author (rider?) got a bit mixed up or scrambled his notes. He pays a toll at the road that takes you to Lawndale (Silverdale) on the right and Telford on the left. This probably was at Route 113. He hits a new tollhouse next in a village called Bean. This became more known as Pennville, site of the Sundae School ice cream parlor at the intersection of School House Rod. Yet another penny toll.

He recalls that it was not that long ago when this village of Sellersville was just known for Sellers Tavern, on the left side. On his journey he notes a good number of cigar factories. Crossing through Sellersville, he climbs the steep long hill heading up to Ridge Road. He clues us in that he did not ride this hill. He noted that by walking, you could pick apples from the trees along the road. His logic is that if the apple lies outside of a fenced

area, it’s there for public picking. The view is spectacular, so he dismounts to admire the view. Or to rest!

His journey continued through Quakertown, Coopersburg, Center Valley to Allentown, then on to Bethlehem. And back! As an option to paying tolls at each station, an option existed where at the beginning of the Spring House/Hilltown Turnpike, a ticket could be purchased for 10 ½ cents, but a rider would still have to dismount to have his ticket punched.



The Class of ‘25

Soon, students will start to attend a new school year. Those seniors will graduate in June 2025 and will be considered the Class of ’25. Their stories, achievements, goals and dreams may be shared in their yearbooks. These are heavy books, with many photographs, not only of the seniors, but of the many sports teams, clubs, and faculty. The graduation ceremony will last for hours, honoring the students as well as the high achievers.

Let us look back to another Class of ’25, the graduates of Hilltown High School in 1925. Although it was not the first graduating class of Hilltown High School, it was the first to have a yearbook. All of Hilltown’s yearbooks were titled “The Echo”. On the cover is printed “Vol. 1 No. 1”. Fifteen students graduated that year. Anna Baum, Arthur Baum, Elsie Boesenhofer, Margaret Bowen, Alice Curley, Jacob Fretz, Asher Gottschalk, Anna Hinkle, Kathryn Hockman, A. Laura Kratz, Irene Kulp, Cameron Mosser, Russel Rickert, Marcus Seitz, and Ruth Teasdale. The size of the graduating class allowed for a photograph of all fifteen together. I wish I

could identify the fellow wearing the letter H on his sweater. Must have been quite the athlete!

A photo and writeup for the basketball team explains the reasons for a season with no wins. They were forced to practice outside, until the weather put a stop to that. There were no indoor areas to practice until the Sellersville Scout floor became available. Even in their losses, they looked sharp in the new uniforms provided by the Alumni Association. The number of students (or actually the lack of students) made it impossible to field a baseball or football team.

Hilltown High School even had a school song. It had no title, and was written by Ruth Gottschalk, class of 1916. Several pages were filled with jokes. Character sketches were provided for each pupil. When questioned, none had future plans to be a farmer. I wonder about the reality in this. It was noted that Anna Baum came to High School in a buckboard.

In this yearbook, there were 30 pages dedicated to the students, with another 18 pages of advertising by local businesses. That was quite interesting. Some are familiar names: Bishop Dry Goods of Blooming Glen, H. R. Shaddinger, also of Blooming Glen. Benner's Bakery of Blooming Glen, The Eagle Hotel in Line Lexington (always something good to eat), now the site of a Sunoco Gas Station and the Line Lexington Fire Company. The Lapp Company, makers of harnesses. I would think that by 1925, his business would be dwindling. The Silverdale Pool Room. I am reminded of the movie "The Music Man" the song "*You Got Trouble*". Oh, we got trouble, right here in River City, Trouble with a T, that rhymes with P that stands for pool! Wm. Wismer, Trouser Manufacturer, now the site of the Factory

Antiques Store. I. G. Rosenberger of Silverdale, selling John Deere implements.

Do you recognize any of these students? Let us know if you would like to see the entire character sketch for any individual. For any year. They provide us with a look back. What were your grandparents or great grandparents like in their late teens? A few girls were described as flappers!



The year 2025 has a special significance for us. It marks the 50th anniversary of the Historical Society of Hilltown Township. It all started with Jack Fox's dream in 1975. We are working hard to come up with an event worthy of those 50 years. In earlier newsletters, you may have read about our early archives. They stay hidden away in a climate-controlled room. For our celebration, we are going to display some of the most interesting or historic items.

We have a number of volumes of local family histories. Page through them, hunting down your ancestors. The Hilltown High School yearbooks will be out for examination, dating back to 1925. Can you find your grandmother's high school photo?

A book will be available to purchase early in 2025. It is titled, "A Timeline of Hilltown, Bucks County". It will run to about 100 pages, with a lot of early photos. And get this – there will be no pages filled with advertisements! In our December newsletter, we will begin to take orders. The sale of this book will benefit our organization. Stay tuned for further updates.



Biography of Hilltown Dr. Titus Albright

We get many requests from members to provide information on their ancestors who lived in Hilltown. Sometimes we are successful, other times we are not. A book written in 1887 by J. H. Battle titled "History of Bucks County, Pennsylvania" is a good source of information. This shouldn't be confused with the book "History of Bucks County" written in three volumes by General William W. H. Davis in the 1850s.

Battle's book contains a section of Biographical Sketches of well-known Bucks County figures. Contained here is the first one of Hilltown, Dr. Titus Albright. The information here is exactly as Battle wrote it in 1887.

Physician, P.O. Hatfield, Montgomery County, was born in 1861. His grandfather, Daniel Albright was born in Germany, crossed the ocean with his parents at the age of 7 years, settled in Lehigh County, and eventually settled in Hilltown Township, this county and remained here until his death, which occurred when he was 84 years of age. He was three times married. The second wife was the mother of six children, of whom Henry was the first son, born in 1818. He was 18 years old when his father settled in Hilltown. He was reared on his father's farm, and married Catherine High. He was engaged in the real estate business and conveyancing for a period of twenty-five years. He was justice of the peace in the township, and in his time was held in high esteem. He died in 1874. His widow is still living, aged 66 years. They were the parents of twelve children, ten of whom are living. Dr. Titus Albright was the youngest of the family and from the age of six to sixteen,

attended the public schools, after which he attended the normal school at Millersville for two years and was one of the teachers of the Hilltown Public schools for three years. In the spring of 1883, he commenced the study of medicine, Dr. Kratz of Doylestown being his precipitator. In the autumn of 1883, he entered the University of Pennsylvania and graduated in three years. Dr. Albright was married in 1883 to Lizzie, daughter of Leidy and Mary (Lewis) Eckel of Hilltown township. They have had two children, Eva and Blanche. The doctor located at his present home soon after graduating. His ability as a physician and his genial manners have enable him to build up a lucrative practice which will no doubt increase as he becomes better known. He is a Democrat politically.

Most likely, Dr. Albright himself wrote the glowing short biography, should we refer to this as an autobiography? In future newsletters, we will present more of these well-known people of Hilltown.



PayPal Now Accepted

For certain items at our Sept 21 festival, PayPal will be an accepted form of payment. These items are antiques, books, donations and new memberships. Also, to help boost our 50/50 raffle sales, the purchase of the tickets can be made in advance with PayPal in your living room! Remember, you do not have to be there to win. The procedure is this:

First - Open your PayPal app on your phone or computer.

Next - Our PayPal ID is Hilltownhistory1@yahoo.com.

Last - Note if the payment is for a donation, ticket, or sale of an item.

Easy as pie. Raffle ticket purchases can be made immediately, but we have a deadline of Sunday, September 15 for PayPal purchases. This allows enough time for us to create your raffle ticket and place it in the glass bowl for the end of event drawing. You will be notified by email, or in person if you attend. Half of the total raffle income is the grand prize.



Postal Service Reminder

Our historic Strassburger Farmstead can be found via GPS devices by using the address of 407 Keystone Dr, Sellersville PA. Since no one lives there, our mailing address is PO Box 79, Hilltown PA. 18927. Dues, donations and all written correspondence should be mailed to our Hilltown PO Box. Thank you!



The Doan Gang

We invite you to our October 23 speakers' program at the township building. The talk will cover the notorious gang of the American Revolution, the Doans. So much has been written and researched on these men. They stole money from colonial tax collectors. Was it for their personal benefit or was it to support the English during the war. Enjoy the lecture that covers the thrilling history of the Doan gang's activities in Bucks County. Their most famous crime was the theft of the Bucks County treasury in 1781. It has been reported that those funds were never recovered. Or did they carry it to Canada? Hear the truth from Doan gang experts

affiliated with the Mercer Museum, where a Doan exhibit runs to December 31, 2026. The exhibit is titled "The Doan Gang: Outlaws of the Revolution".

This free program will take place at the Hilltown Township building, 13 West Creamery Rd, Hilltown on Wednesday October 23 at 7:00 PM.



The first anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence brought a bit of terror to some Philadelphia Quakers. According to the Diary of Elizabeth Drinker, on July 4th, 1777, Quaker shopkeepers who did not close their stores on such military themed holidays had their store windows broken. Stores were also urged to close in honor of American military victories

Her notations of the British occupation are quite eye-opening. She described the theft of Ann, her servant girl, by a drunken British officer. When Elizabeth happened to run into this officer some time later, she demanded money for the loss of her servant. In September 1778, Elizabeth noted "We are reduced from five servants to one."

Troubles continued even after the British left Philadelphia. She wrote that she "had to dismiss her maid Catey Paterson on her return home, after 2 or 3 days frolicking".

Elizabeth was the wife of Quaker Henry Drinker, who was jailed for his lack of support for the American revolution. Her strength is evident throughout her writings.

Her diary that spans the years 1758 to 1807 may be the most extraordinary personal perspective of a woman in eighteenth century life. Her diary consisted of over two thousand pages.

Bill Stahl

The Historical Society of Hilltown Township Invites You to our Fall Festival and Open House



Saturday, September 21, 2024

10 AM to 4 PM * Free Admission! Rain or Shine

**Keystone Drive & Bethlehem Pike, Sellersville
(407 Keystone Drive, Sellersville)**

Local Artisans and crafts ~ Antique Vendors ~ Farm Animals ~
Buildings Will be Open
Books & Historical Map Sale ~ Bake Sale
Silent Auction ~ 50/50 Raffle
A Great Family Event

Much More

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At our Fall Festival this year, we will have a representative from the Bucks County Recorder of Deeds. They have been heavily involved with the project of preserving, digitizing and protecting the early county deed books, some dating back to 1664. The office is having 700 of the oldest books treated and rebound, adding up to 250 years to the life of the documents. William Penn himself signed some of the early deeds. Check out a sample book and discover the variety of tasks this county organization is responsible for.