



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

Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

December 2022

Wow! On September 17th, the sun was out, and it was a beautiful day for our 14th Fall Festival. We had a lot of visitors who enjoyed themselves. This event is our primary fundraiser, and we thank those of you who helped the cause of our Society. For such an event, we need a lot of help. A standard comment is that there were too many to mention here. But I will mention just about everyone! We had volunteers, Boy Scouts, our directors, vendors, crafters, and an assortment of animals. We always advertise this event as a fun, free family event. We will see you next year.

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Our yearly dues and donation form is enclosed. Three cheers to those who are lifetime members. We depend heavily on the generosity of our members, and we haven't been disappointed. Please help us again in our goals of preserving our site and educating the public with our programs. Maintaining our three buildings is a major expense!

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We are always happy to share our buildings and displays. All you have to do is ask! Quester groups have always enjoyed the tours. Any type of group, even a family is

welcome. There is no charge, we just hope for donations. Contact us via email for details.

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Several years ago, we began a project of going through the many boxes of archives just to see and record what we have. This aspect of the archives is almost complete. Our next phase is organizing like documents together. We have a shelf for local family histories. Another shelf consists of Hilltown High School yearbooks. A mystery has come up. Although the High School was in existence from the first decade of the twentieth century, the first yearbook is dated 1925, Volume 1, Number 1. Presumably, the earlier graduating classes were too small to have a yearbook published. There is a gap, however, between 1933 and 1944. This was a difficult time in America, from the depression to near the end of World War II. We have a fair number of yearbooks from 1944 into the 1950s. The 1944 yearbook has no number or volume assigned to it. Did yearbooks exist in this ten-year span? Does anyone out there have them? We would love to complete the collection of our High School yearbooks!

Another publication we have is called the Key. It started out as a publication of Hilltown High School, and in the 1950s, it was a publication of Deep Run High School. It was basically a student published item with help from the faculty. In our possession are

some issues that range from 1938 to 1953. We are missing many, probably because the quality was so poor. It was mimeographed paper contained within a construction paper cover. One year, the students commented on how excited they were to find new desks in the schools. They were also pleased to have new playground equipment. The playground equipment was funded by the children selling Christmas cards. Teachers of each one room schoolhouse provided a brief report of the school's activities. Poetry and short stories authored by the students were published here. Do you have any copies of the Key? We would love to add it to our collection. And our collection is available to view. In future newsletters, we will share some of the thoughts of the students and teachers from that era.



“My First Day in High School” - Lonnie Osman started 9th grade at the Hilltown High School in Blooming Glen in 1912. At the time, students graduating 8th grade had to take and pass an examination that would allow them to proceed into the High School. 8th grade was as high as they could go in a one-room schoolhouse.

“I did not start to go to High School until September the twenty third, which was three weeks after the schools in Hilltown Township started. I passed the examination in the Spring, which we were required to pass to enter High School but had not quite decided to go until about a week before school started. I came to school in time the first morning and received my books before school was called. School was called at half past eight. The opening exercises consisted of the singing of a song by the school, a selection from the Bible read by the teacher, followed by the Lord's Prayer.

In the morning, we had algebra, agriculture, and composition and in the afternoon, we had penmanship, German, Latin and Civil Government. Our other studies are Classics and Grammar.”

It was very important to study agriculture, as Hilltown was primarily a farming area. German was also important. Some church services were still being held in German and the German immigrants in the late 19th century spoke the language.



Our 14th Fall Festival went off without a hitch, except one of our directors was home with Covid! We couldn't have done without the help of the volunteers, crafters, donors, and participants. Our thanks go out to each of you!

Those who deserve our gratitude!

Hilltown Nursery
Joe Fisher
Lucy Walsh & Aggie Harris
Walter Facht
Barbara Hohenwarter “The Loom Room”
Rhea & Dan Paci
Kathy Histan
Michelle Chang
Betsy Boone
Terry Posky
Bessie Rodeheaver
Carol & Mark McCoy
“Travelin Hotdogs”-Frank & Sheila Dyer
Yolanda Fine
Susan Grasso
Kathy Anthony
Ed Tice
Gary Elsing
Chris Markley
John Wright
Gary Miller
Rich Zedrejko

Dean Bickel
Tom & Rose Sutkins
Miranda Rullman
Bill Wilson
Petrona Charles
Krystal & Kristine Weibel
Robert & Julie Hermann
Cindy Gery
Byer's Choice
Bucks County Biscotti
SAGA Smoking Guild
Ludlow Farms
Angela Horner
Ginny Bergey
Beth Taylor
Joanne Friday
Jesse Keller
Carol & Ivan Jurin
Boy Scout Troop 67
Elsie & Scott Tagg
Donna King
Alicia & Roy Snyder
Scott Fischer
Bob Chope
Washington House
Local's Pizza
Images Salon & Spa
Freedom Valley Harley Davidson
Plasterer Equipment
Smocking Guild
Callowhill Farm Alpacas
Hilltown Nursery
Line Lexington Veterinary Hospital
Byer's Choice
Sapori Italian Restaurant
Blooming Glen Pork
Dam Good Café
Davis Feed of Bucks County
Quakertown National Bank
Sundae School
Giant Foods
Key Bank
Simon Art Gallery
Reese's Garage

Home Depot
Bishop Estate Winery
Harleysville National Bank
Pasqualina's Italian Market
Don Nace
Hawg House Gift Basket
Deerwood Alpacas
Main Street Salon
MacDonalds of Souderton
Fredericks Flowers
Philadelphia Glider Council
Fretz R.V. Service
Factory Antiques
Queens Health Center
Bruce Markley
Pino's Pizza
CoCo Nails & Spa

Without your help, we could not have had such a successful Fall Festival. Many, many thanks, and we'll see you next year!

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Covid has wreaked havoc on all our lives. It is still around us, but the latest version is not as dangerous. Jean Skeath Stahl took an old holiday poem, "Twas the Night Before Christmas", and put her own twist on it to reflect the past several years.

The Night before New Year's

'Twas the night before New Year's
And all around town
All the people were dancing
With nary a frown.

The dogs were all barking
The children of great cheer
Everyone was shouting
"Let's get rid of this year!"

That Covid was real tough
We're afraid to breathe

No hugging, no kissing
It makes us all seethe.

Restrictions and masking
No touching at all
When can we be normal?
Will it be by next Fall?

These past years
Were not very kind
It's changed the game
Makes us crazy in the mind.

Shots here, boosters there
They play a big role.
We've become human pincushions
See all my arm holes?

So, hang in there, baby
We hope it can be:
That we'll expect BIG relief
From the year twenty-three.

~

Christmas Customs

Christmas in the year 2022 is certainly celebrated in a different manner than those in the past. How did the customs develop? What will evolve in the coming years? Only time will tell.

The Puritans in New England did not celebrate Christmas for their initial two centuries in America. In fact, it was illegal to celebrate Christmas in Massachusetts from 1659 to 1681. A five-shilling fine was the punishment for those who were caught.

In 1687, Increase Mather, a Massachusetts clergy and president of Harvard University complained bitterly that the day of Christmas, was not celebrated as a holy day, but instead, one of gambling, drinking to excess, and "mad mirth". His son Cotton Mather stated in 1712 "The feast of Christ's nativity is spent

in reveling, dicing, carding, masking, and in all licentious liberty, by lewd gaming, by mad mirth, by long eating by hard drinking, by rude reveling.",

Further south however in Virginia, the celebrations could be quite lavish. It was the end of the fall plowing; the crops were harvested, and the tobacco was gathered and stored. The great homes were decorated, and guests came and went as they pleased. Christmas wasn't just one day, but a long season. This was merely a description of the upper classes, not the servants or slaves. How different must have their Christmas been?

As America grew into the 1800s, it became a land of a hundred different Christmases. The immigrants brought to this land the customs of their origins. Moravians brought the "Putz" to America, an extensive version of the manger scene. Dutch children hoped to see their wooden shoes filled with treats, brought by Saint Nicholas who rode a white horse. Eventually, the Irish custom of placing candles in windows took hold. The Germans brought the custom of the Christmas tree; however, some say the first German Christmas tree was set up by the Hessian soldiers in Trenton in 1776, before George Washington's famous crossing of the Delaware River during the Revolutionary War.

In time, these customs merged and morphed into how we celebrate today, although there is still no universal American style celebration. We have come from gifts of fruit, carved toys, and corn husk dolls to an X-Box and Legos. I recall going through a Sears catalog and circling those items (toys) I hoped for at Christmas. However, it is celebrated, Christmas is not going away.

One Hundred Fifty Years Ago - 1872

Those who went to sleep early Christmas night in Philadelphia, and awoke late, were amazed at the amount of snow that had accumulated during their slumber. Drifts of up to two and three feet created a pretty winter scene but created horrors for the milkmen and bakers trying to make their regular rounds. Sweepers were used to clear railroad tracks.

A Correction?

A legend about Hilltown pioneer and Baptist Reverend William Thomas, involves his behavior during the French and Indian War in the 1750s. It has been written extensively that when he preached at the pulpit, he carried his loaded musket and sword, ready for an attack by the Native Americans coming down from above the Blue Mountains. The men would also bring their weapons and stack them by the door. There were no records of an attack in Hilltown.

I've written about this in a previous newsletter as well as in a recent speaker's program about legends of Hilltown.

I've been reading a book about the "Swamp Fox", Francis Marion, the Revolutionary War Patriot who gave the British fits in South Carolina. His battle techniques were more Indian style, a guerilla warfare against the formal British manner. He fought with the British during the French and Indian Wars. During this time, the men would drill after church, since it was a time of the week when they were all gathered. This would explain bringing the weapons to church, not for protection, but for practice. Many times, once a story is written, it becomes repeated so many times until it is believed to be factual. I think the Swamp Fox version of weapons at

church makes more sense than the version of William Thomas trying to protect his flock!

~

William Collier – "The Vanishing Beauties Around Us"

On display in our museum building is a slideshow of about 120 images that document the construction of Lake Nockamixon during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It shows many of the buildings that were demolished to clear the ground needed for the park. William Collier, a Haycock Township historian, was responsible for creating this photographic record. He took over 900 images of the lake project and the Hilltown Historical Society had the difficult task of narrowing it down to the current 120 images for display.

He typed index cards that were dated and described each photograph. Thankfully, the collection has been digitized. Mr. Collier not only documented Lake Nockamixon, but his collection of what he called "The Vanishing Beauties Around Us" also includes old mills, one-room schools, barns, stone and steel bridges, covered bridges, log homes, Delaware Canal, and many others. A total of 49 subjects were documented in the collection of approximately 5,000 images.

His color slides range in time from 1966 to about 1975. Who was Mr. Collier? He was so many things. He was born in Philadelphia in 1902, and while a young boy his family came to East Rockhill. In East Rockhill, he became accustomed to farm work. He attended one room schoolhouses and at the age of 15, left school and went to work in a print shop in Philadelphia where his father also worked. In 1924, Collier became an apprentice plasterer, and four years later he became a journeyman in that trade. This exposed William to the building trades. In the 1930s, he was helping

the state of Pennsylvania implement the new Social Security program. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, he became a union organizer, at times working with John L. Lewis and the United Mineworkers. In 1952, William Collier was the president of the National Federation of American Workers. In addition to his detailed collection of area images and notes, he created boxes of documents outlining his career in the labor industry.

In the 1950s, he purchased ten acres on Stover Mill Rd and became immersed in serving the local communities. He joined the Bucks County Historical Society, Haycock Historical Society, the Haycock Fire Company, and was active in the American Indian Society. The damming of the Tohickon Creek to create Lake Nockamixon saddened Mr. Collier, a Haycock resident, a great deal. Homes and barns were taken by the state of Pennsylvania by eminent domain. Over 200 properties were affected. Buildings were demolished, and the ruins lie at the bottom of the lake, in places, 90' deep. It was a time of turmoil in the 1960s. In some of his typed descriptions of this project, he commented on "The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the great destroyer". Today, the lake provides enjoyment for so many people, many of whom are unaware of the turbulent past.

Mr. Colliers' collection of color slides offer us a view of this area from about a half century ago. A good deal of the subject matter in this collection is gone. Some have been repurposed. Some remain in dilapidated condition. It is no wonder he called his photographic collection, "Vanishing Beauties Around Us".

In his own words "*This collection of color slides of Bucks County scenes began in 1966 and fulfills a desire I had to preserve in picture form, many of the relics of a past way*

of life that are rapidly being removed from the countryside. These pictures show bridges, barns, homes, one-room schools, creameries, mills etc. as they exist today. Many have been converted to other uses than the purpose for which they were built and of course, are shown accordingly.

My ramblings in pursuit of this hobby, or is the hobby pursuing me?.....has taken me on field trips to all parts of the county and brought me in contact with a host of fine people, the kindness in permitting me to take pictures of buildings owned by them and giving me information that led to other locations and objects, being an enjoyable and memorable experience.

The lectures and talks that I give wherever and whenever requested on the material I am collecting is called "The Vanishing Beauties Around Us"

Much of the information here has been taken from a 2012 Haycock Historical Society article written by Charles Fulp. Our thanks go out to that organization. For more information about the formation of Lake Nockamixon and a sense what was lost, I recommend the book "Our Lost Tohickon Valley - Haycock Township Bucks County - Pennsylvania", written by Marjorie Goldthorp Fulp and Pamela Feist Varkony.



As you drive around Bucks County, you may have noticed an abundance of dead trees. Our Strassburger Farmstead has fallen victim to this problem as well. If you attended our September Festival, you may have noticed a huge branch in the front yard that had fallen. We were forced to surround that tree with caution tape. Four more dead trees are leaning over Keystone Drive, a danger to all. Much of our work is done by volunteers, but

we decided that tree work is best left to the professionals.

Thanks to a grant from the Bucks County Foundation and La-Mel Garden Fund, we can have this tree work done. We can all breathe a sigh of relief and a thanks to the generosity of the Foundation.

This organization also provided the funds to us last year, which allowed us to rebuild the top of a chimney on our museum.



Thanks to the Mennonite Central Committee, we were able to copy a transcription of a journal of Henry Kratz of Hilltown Township. His diary started in 1870 and his last entry was in 1909. It provides a clear picture of social, farming, and religious life in Hilltown towards the end of the 19th century. The following is one story. We will revisit Henry Kratz in future newsletters.

Forest Park Accident

Farming can be a dangerous profession. Tragedies struck this rural community, but the death of Charlie Slifer stands out.

Around 1900, Henry Kratz began mentioning Charley Slifer in his journal. Typically, he described work they did together. Cut down some cherry trees, went together to various sales, planted potatoes together, made hay, visited neighbors together, taking cows to pasture together. They went to camp meeting at Highland Park and went to church together. Slaughtered and dressed hogs together. It seems they were close friends as well as neighbors.

The Forest Park in Chalfont provided much fun and enjoyment to the area residents. I came upon an incident that occurred there in 1907. It is documented in the diary of Henry Kratz of Hilltown. His journal ran from 1870 to 1911. His entries are as follows:

June 22, 1907 – Charley Slifer was seriously injured at Forest Park when he was thrown 2from the Merry-Go-Round. Internal injuries.

June 25, 1907 – At Slifer’s last night. Charley rested but had severe pains at times.

June 29, 1907 - Went to see Charley Slifer. He is improving and sitting on a chair

July 6, 1907 – Charley had a hemorrhage today and pain.

July 7, 1907 – Charley had severe pains last night. I went for Dr. Buchler.

July 8, 1907 – At Slifer’s this evening, he had severe pain.

July 15, 1907 – Helped make hay at Slifer’s.

July 28, 1907 – Charley is very sick

July 30, 1907 – Charley Slifer died last night of peritonitis. At Slifer’s this evening, made arrangements for funeral.

August 3, 1907 – All at funeral of Charles B. Slifer.

August 19, 1907 – Sale of Slifer’s property, large attendance.

August 22, 1907 – Took a load of Julianne Slifer’s (Charley’s wife) goods to Telford

September 3, 1907 – Helped Harvey Baum move into Slifer’s place.

Charley’s accident affected Henry Kratz deeply. When his own father died, he spent no more than a dozen words in his journal of it.

Charley had an unfortunate family life. He was only 32 when he died. His first wife Catherine died at the age of 21 in 1894. Shortly afterwards, he married Julianne. They had an infant daughter who died in 1902. Julianne never remarried and died in 1962. All four names are on one headstone in the St Peter’s Union Cemetery.



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George Washington's Eggnog Recipe

This potent holiday drink was a favorite of the General's. It is made in Virginia to this day, in exactly the same proportions. This recipe makes about three quarts.

1 pint brandy
½ pint rye whiskey
4 ounces sherry
4 ounces rum
12 eggs, separated
¾ cup sugar
1 quart milk
1 quart cream

2Combine liquor. Beat egg yolks in a large bowl until thick, then beat in sugar. Gradually add sugar, then milk and cream while continuing to beat. Beat egg whites to thick, not dry, peaks: fold into liquid mixture. Cover and refrigerate for at least 5 days before serving.

*Recipe from "Christmas in Colonial and
Early America by World Book Encyclopedia*