The Newsletter of The Haycock Historical Society • Fall 2019

# THE PALMERS, GUTTMANS, WWW & THE HAYCOCK BLOCK WORKS

Reprinted from the HHS book *Our Lost Tohickon Valley*By Pamela Varkony with comments by M. David Guttman and Nancy Stemler

ndrew Palmer immigrated to the United States from Germany in the early part of the Twentieth Century at the age of 12. As many boys did at the time, he left school after the eighth grade to go to work. By 16, Palmer was employed at the bustling Haycock Saw Mill: The job cost him his right arm. Before the advent of arthroscopic surgery and high-tech prostheses, such a tragedy might have ruined the life of a less determined man, but it did not stop Andrew Palmer from marrying his sweetheart, Cora Smell of Applebachsville, and becoming a successful dairy farmer.

The Palmer farm was comprised of 120 acres planted mostly in corn to help feed up to 60 Guernsey cows, and one very ornery bull. When harvest time came, everyone pitched in according to their age and abilities.



Grandpop Smell with Dave (standing) and Bill Guttman, harvesting corn, Fall 1951. Photo courtesy of Dave Guttman

The property also included a large three story barn. As the farm became more successful, outbuildings were constructed as were additions to the main house.

Running an operation that size was a sun-up to sun-down job, especially for a man with one arm. Palmer hired a strapping young helper, named Mike Guttman, as a farm hand.



The original farm house was a two story wooden frame home located at the end of a long dirt lane off Old Bethlehem Road.

Circa early 1930's Photos courtesy of Dave Guttman

Guttman understood hard work and Palmer's German determination to succeed. Mike had also immigrated to the United States at a young age from what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His father, Stephan Guttman, had come to Pennsylvania seeking a better life for his family. Six years later, when he felt he had found it, he sent for his wife and two sons and they settled in Kintnersville, a small town along the banks of the Delaware River, in Upper Bucks County. Mike Guttman was 8 years old when he first saw America in 1929; he was 17 when he first saw Naomi Palmer...the farmer's daughter.

In 1941 Mike and Naomi married. They settled in to farm life and began to raise a family; by 1950 they were the parents of Nancy, David, Bill, and Shirley.

Three generations of Palmers and Guttmans lived and worked on the farm. And there was lots of work to do. From a young age, everyone had chores.



Grandmom Cora Smell Palmer with Nancy, Dave & Bill, Summer 1946 Photos courtesy of Dave Guttman



Dave & Nancy churn butter, 1947

But there was also time for adventures, and there was no lack of those on the Palmer farm. On the crest of a bluff that led down to the Tohickon Creek, was a large charcoal pit approximately 6' x 15'. Legend has it that it was where the Indians smoked and stored their meat when they camped nearby. Careful digging in the area often yielded arrow heads and bits of pottery. And there was always the creek where paddling around on inner tubes on a hot summer day or trying to catch "sunnies" with a night crawler skewered on a hook, were childhood delights straight out of Huck Finn.

The farm became a regular supplier to Lehigh Valley Dairy whose processing plant was located in Allentown. The dairy herd grew, thanks in part to that very aggressive bull. Palmer and Guttman continued to increase productivity by employing the latest feeding and milking methods. The operation required additional space. And it was here that fate intervened.

As told by Dave Guttman, previously printed in the HHS Newsletter, Fall, 2009

You've heard the old adage, "Necessity is the mother of invention"? That's how my family's business, Haycock Block Works, later incorporated with the name Palmer Concrete Products, Inc., came into being.

In 1949, my grandfather, Andrew Palmer, had need of a new outbuilding on his farm. Instead of using wood, he decided on concrete block. There was no one in the area that sold such a thing, so he bought a small machine that made two blocks at a time. He persevered and built his out-building. A neighbor saw it and asked if my grandfather would make blocks for him. He agreed, and soon a business was born.

Eventually, it got to the point where my grandfather and my father couldn't run a dairy farm and a block business at the same time. So they decided to focus on the block business and sell the dairy farm. It was a hard decision: But looking to the future, the three, together, set out to build the block business. My mother worked in the office, as well as raising 4 children, and my father took care of the actual labor of making cement blocks.

The company found ways to innovate, making lighter blocks with more insulation value by adding an ingredient called Waylite. Waylite, a by-product of making steel, was considered a waste product by nearby Bethlehem Steel, so they were only too happy to have us haul it away...for a price.

Business flourished and the block plant had to hire more men. There were about six to eight employees working at the plant. Dad had the same men working with him for the entire life of the business: No one ever quit. There were no insurance plans back then, so my dad would pay for the medical needs of his men and their families. It was a tight knit group.

My brother, Bill, and I worked at the plant beginning at the age of 12. We worked after school, weekends and in the summer. We weren't forced to, we wanted to. Dad paid us "wages" and put them in the bank. When I turned 15, in 1959, those savings allowed me to purchase my first car for \$600. That was a lot of money in those days.

On my 16th birthday, I took my driver's test and passed. When I got home, there was a load of blocks on a truck ready for me to deliver. I did every job at the plant. Dad said that was how you learned to run a business and how to appreciate and understand the work your employees do.

In 1954, when the block business began to take precedence over the farm, Andrew Palmer made the difficult decision to sell it to the Werner family who in addition to the dairy cows, turned it in to a horse farm and training facility, called the Haycock Riding Stables. Palmer kept a parcel of 50 acres for the block plant and new homesteads for the family. By 1957, Haycock Block Works had become Palmer Concrete

Products, Inc. and Mike and Naomi had moved their family By the late 1950's Palmer Concrete became mechanized with into a home that was a modern marvel; a house completely machines that used automatic feeds to make four blocks at a built of concrete block with radiant heat in the floors. The time; kilns that cured the blocks ran 18 hours a day. Large open house party they threw for friends and neighbors was metal racks held the blocks while they cooled, after which what city folk refer to as the "social event of the season". they were split and stacked. Andrew and Cora Palmer built a smaller concrete block home nearby.

The company now had eight full-time employees, and an inventory of over 1 million blocks, which they shipped from New York to Delaware to Ohio.



An employee of the Palmer Block Works, taking blocks from the new machines in which they were made and placing them on a rack. When the rack was full it was rolled in to the kiln, circa 1957. Photo courtesy of Dave Guttman



Mike Guttman with Pepper, surrounded by Palmer Concrete Inc. extensive inventory in June 1955, dressed for **Quakertown's Centennial Celebration.** Photo Courtesy of Dave Guttman

#### Dave Guttman:

In 1963, the State of Pennsylvania took my family's business under the Eminent Domain Act for the Nockamixon State Park. The block plant still stands; the park uses it as their maintenance headquarters. My parent's home was moved to a location along the new Rt. 563 where it is in use to this day. The site around the block plant looks much as it did in the 50's and 60's. But the beautiful meadows where cows grazed are now parking lots and the long slopping woods down to the creek have been reconfigured to accommodate the rising waters of Lake Nockamixon. For my family, visiting there is like stepping back in time...always emotional.

The block plant represents our family's history, and part of the History of Haycock Township. It is important that it be remembered and preserved for those who follow. We appreciate that the park administration shares that view and allows us to visit frequently.

#### The Women of the Family

Whether it was managing the household or helping to run the Palmer Dairy Farm, or later, supervising the office of the family's new venture, the Palmer Block Works, the Palmer/ Guttman women always played an important role in the family's success.

Nancy Guttman Stemler remembers when she was very young taking over many of her mother's household chores so that Mrs. Guttman was free to spend time at the blockworks. A growing manufacturing business needs not only reliable employees but also reliable and accurate bookkeeping and clerical practices.

By the time Nancy turned 16, the Palmer Blockworks was shipping their product up and down the east coast. Keeping up with orders became more important than keeping up with housework: Nancy went to work in the office after school and during the summers.

When Nancy graduated from high school, she became a fullfledged employee of the family business working there full

"I answered the phone, took orders, typed invoices, and did the banking," she says. My mom continued to be responsible for the bookkeeping. You have to remember that this was sixty-plus years ago when there were no computers so everything was done by hand. There was no online banking and no electric typewriters."

Even though the Palmer Blockworks, later named Palmer Concrete Products, Inc. no longer exists, having been surrendered to the State of Pennsylvania for Nockamixon State Park, remnants of one of Haycock's most successful businesses remain.

Palmer blocks can be found in structures throughout the

township, including the park's maintenance building which secretarial jobs." But history shows that the contributions the Guttman home which was moved from its original that is still remembered. location and now sits along Mountain View Drive, across from Becker's restaurant.

family legacy by modestly saying, "I simply did the usual

was the original blockworks manufacturing plant, as well as made by the women of the family helped to build a legacy

The original article may be found in our book, Our Lost Nancy Guttman Stemler sums up her contribution to the Tohickon Valley. Additional thoughts by Pamela Varkony and Nancy Stemler have been added.



FAIR, a superb blending of talent and history.

and samples of Latvian foods through Inta's business as a Latvian Foods Caterer - http://www.theambertable.com Inta Gulbis and Karina Rilling, (current and former Haycock residents), also were extremely helpful, providing recipes, desserts, displays of knit items, amber jewelry for purchase, plus DP camps.

The highlight of the event, against the backdrop of the Through support of our members, we hope to organize many beautiful Stokes house and clear blue summer skies, was the more such events in the future! Philadelphia Latvian Concert Choir, led by Gunta Plostnieks.

Thanks to all those who made "Oh Latvia," - Historical af- Dressed in traditional Latvian folk attire, the troupe provided a superb and beautifully animated performance. The outdoor We were fortunate to have the input and help from many of event exceeded expectation and had many last-minute ticket our Latvian friends and neighbors. We are grateful to Andris purchasers. It was the first time the society used and Inta Grunde, who provided posters, artwork, video clips an online ticketing service, EventBrite, to secure seating and it was extremely helpful.

We are also thankful for Ralf Augstroze's posting of "Concise History of the Latvian Community in Haycock," in our Winter 2017 edition of the newsletter, which was available in hard copy during the event, and for donating a video samples of Latvian handiwork and relics of the experiences in compilation of Latvia as it exists, through an excellent collection of short clips.

## MICHAEL F. KEHS – 2019 KRINGLE FEATURED ARTIST

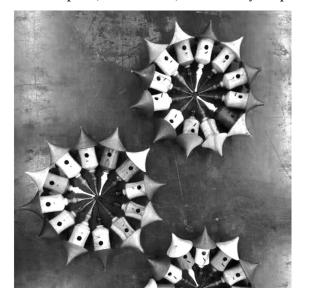
#### **By Chris Handschin**

Kehs, woodworking sculptor, as our featured artist son has accomplished. this year. We are proud to list him as one of our local talents with national acclaim.

Michael was raised along with a healthy amount of siblings in the little village of Rich Hill, nestled along side of Old Bethlehem Pike between Sellersville and Quakertown. He credits his father with inspiring him to love woodworking and his mother with giving him the abundance of positive reinforcement to grow from a curious adolescent into an accomplished woodworker, husband, and father of three now-adult children, and grandfather of three.

By all accounts, 58-year old Michael is a devoted family man. Cherishing the upbringing he had in Rich Hill, Michael affectionately describes his early memories; the pleasant smell of cut walnut, as his father and he built birdhouses to give as gifts to relatives. He recalls the great satisfaction he got from working with his hands. Although his father was not a master woodworker himself, he understood the wisdom of parental encouragement! When Michael was asked what he thought was

photo of a gift he had given his parents many years ago. The and creativity, learning something from each job. He joined photo depicts a spoon shaped wall hanging. A lion's head is wood-working clubs and met lifelong friends and mentors at the top of the handle, signifying his father as the head of the through this involvement. Although he did not attend college, household, with a vine coming from under the lion's head and in those early years, Michael took courses that piqued his inwrapping around a heart just below, signifying his mother as terests. Among them was a course taught by famed Franklin the heart of the home. The vine extends its roots down onto Mint sculptor, Eugene Daub. Daub's classic heroic style of the bowl of the spoon, -the children, nourished by the parents, sculpting, innovative technique and attention to detail had a



ringle Christmas Shoppe, Haycock Historical Socie- going out into the world to grow and nourish future generaty's annual fundraiser, is honored to have Michael F. tions. His father, now 89, must be very proud to see all his

Michael finds the most enjoyment mastering the chal-

lenges he sets for himself. For a short time after they married, Michael and his wife, Jean, lived in the nearby village of California before purchasing an 11 acre wooded lot in 1985, just a few miles away. He set to work clearing the timber and carving out a 1000+ foot driveway through the woods. He followed up shortly afterward by building his own home, as well as an expansive wood shop, in a small clearing he had carved out of the wood lot. Nature surrounds the homestead on all sides so it is easy to see Michael's favorite recreational activities all involve being close to nature, whether biking, hiking, boating or caving.

After having spent 28 years as a stone mason, a driving

passion for creating with wood had Michael spending increasing amounts of time pursuing those Along the way, he interests. his greatest accomplishment, he dug out a black and white took on varied woodworking jobs as challenges to his abilities lasting impact. Being a perfectionist himself, Michael is ever thinking of better ways to do whatever project he is working on. He doesn't become attached to his work. His enjoyment comes more from mastering the challenge than admiring the finished project. He prefers to let viewers arrive at their own

> On display at Kringle in 2019 will be a piece he created for a recent invitational exhibition to commemorate the lives of the nine victims of recent gun violence in Charleston, South Carolina. This sculpture, "Searching for Peace." is comprised of 9 white painted lilies with brilliant yellow/ orange centers, twisting and turning, as emerging from a dark burl, their bright centers, searching for the light of their creator. The complexity and mastery of technique alone is aweinspiring.

> conclusions about his creative works and their meanings as

each person perceives art differently.

Looking around his expansive shop, one can easily see there are many different projects going on simultaneously.



Michael F. Kehs

wheels and reconstructed missing parts to other treasured heir- of its uneven texture while butternut is excellent for carving." looms. Almost anything imaginable seems doable in his shop. Ultimately, each type of wood is favored for different reasons His creative expressions or "want to" wood projects have and applications. evolved greatly over the years. Often, they are specific to an exhibition invitation or challenge. Some of Michael's work is currently on display at the Center for Art in Wood in Philadelphia as part of their permanent collection. He also has a piece in the online themed gallery show, "Small Treasures." https://www.woodsymphony.com/small-treasures-2019 No longer strictly wood turning, he also carves and embellishes. His latest creative endeavor involves adding metal to his wood projects. Recent pieces are adorned with repousser & chasing patterns. (The French art of repousser & chasing refers to pushing thin non-ferrous metal plating such as copper, tin or aluminum into a bed of pitch to create a pattern, then turning it to chase the pockets made into deeper recesses of the design without warping the plate). Examples of Michael's incorpo-



rations are on display in recent exhibits and shows he regularly participates in as well as online at his website: www.MichaelKehsWoodwork. With the advent of computer galleries and auctions, this has become his preferred method of selling as a piece is not released until it has been purchased online. A recent online gallery themed "Teapots" had thing he sees along the way may trigger a thought and that him creating his very unique vision of a tea pot, a realistic may trigger the desire to make a physical representation of wasp's nest as the pot with branches as the handle and spout that thought. Michael jokingly refers to these creative ideas and including a tiny carved wasp resting inside the removable floating around in his head as his "Little Demons"-- The only lid. It was sold at an online auction for \$5,200 to a California way to exorcize them is to make the idea a reality! collector.

-week wood-working classes in his shop every Wednesday content to live for what challenge today brings. While he afternoon with occasional week-end workshops throughout would love the notoriety of a famous furniture designer such the year. He reflects that much of his greatest satisfaction as Sam Maloof, he has perfected his own great way to make a comes from teaching and experiencing that moment when the living while expelling those fabulous demons.

At this point, the wood shop has evolved into his full-time job. students understand and go on to create great things on their He aptly divides his time between the "have to" consignments own. He has written a number of articles published in woodfrom his customers and the "want to" wood turnings, carvings working enthusiast's magazines such as "Woodcraft Magaand myriads of complex wood projects for exhibitions and zine," "American Woodturner," journal of the "Association shows he attends from coast to coast. Consignments could be of Wood Turning" and "Woodturning Magazine" (England). anything from replacing and recreating a missing drawer to an When asked what his favorite wood to work with was, he exantique dresser to making a slab wood table from someone's plained that different woods respond differently to different treasured tree. He has repaired broken antique spinning applications. "You wouldn't use fir to make a table because



After establishing the theme of a project, he explains his creative process is a matter of subtracting all that is not relevant and narrowing the idea down to the most basic constructs, then building from that. For example, recently a group of woodworkers were asked to create something representing a Celebration. Celebrating is toasting, raising a glass, a flask... His thought process went back to his lineage and earliest recorded history, - his Gaelic ancestors would have raised a bull horn filled with mead, perhaps the most ornate of which would have been reserved for a nobleman and for the finest celebration. His finished work became an intricately turned and carved bull horn. Once, while driving, the idea stuck with him of his horn shapes, sitting up on a platform twisting toward each other and hovering over a smaller horn in the center. He would go on to title the piece "Precious."

He went on to explain that he gets many of his creative ideas while driving. Some of them have stayed with him for years while others are more recent. A song on the radio or some-

When asked where he sees his work going in the fu-All of this Michael accomplishes while conducting 10 ture, he explains that he rarely thinks about the future and is



IN MEMORY OF
Ann Bauer Reichert
1940—2019

#### **THANK YOU**

Our sincere thanks and appreciation to Nancy Janyszeski, for the many years she has spent, professionally creating and maintaining our website, and for the service provided on the board of Officers of the Haycock Historical Society, in the many and varied positions held over the years. We will miss her and her contributions to our board.



#### **FALL CLEAN UP DAY**

Ken, Clayton, and Linda Fox kept our grounds beautiful again this year. They were joined by a nice crew of volunteers to prepare for winter by removing the numerous walnuts from the lawn. We appreciate all the work that goes into keeping our Headquarters so nice.



Dr. Robert Leight and Thomas Moll

Gave us an interesting presentation on Haycock Township History at our October meeting. Their new book will be available soon.



"One-Room-Schoolers" Still Making History

#### By Cecelia Johnson Casey

The Stover's School/Haycock "One-room 'Schoolhousers'," a community of unique individuals who were fortunate enough to attend and experience a one-room schoolhouse environment in the Haycock Township school system, met at noon on Saturday, September 7th 2019 at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Applebachsville to celebrate their 70th anniversary reunion. Richard Landgreen, sitting president of the organization, presided over the activities. The Reunion theme was: "Home of the Free, Because of the Brave" - honoring our veterans. Veterans in attendance were Clayton Fox, Kenneth Fox, Barry Grim, Larry Grim, Kenny Horne, Richard Landgreen, Eddie Schwartz and Joe Schwartz.

Six locations around the township were designated for these stalwart institutions that initiated education from grades one through eight – all housed in one room (no partitions) - presided over and taught by one dedicated individual who taught each of the grade-level curriculums. The locations of these six schools were: Stover's School, located at Old Bethlehem Road and Route 563; New Harrisburg School, located on Harrisburg School Road; Mt. Airy School, located

at Thatcher and Creamery Roads; Applebachsville school, located at Old Bethlehem and Sawmill Roads; Dunlap School, located at Roundhouse and Stoney Garden Roads; Hickory Grove School, originally located on Ridge Road, just east of and outside of Nockamixon State Park. It was demolished by the private owners.

Some of the teachers who became an essential part of that "dynasty of educators" were: Florence Fluck; Edna Wirebach; Ellen Werner; Meda Thatcher; Irma Koehler; Frances Cramp; Edith Mann, Phyllis Stempkowski, etc. Attendees at the reunion reminisced and shared stories of their very own experiences while students - including stories about "rubber hose" disciplinary action for unruly students! The one-room-schoolhouse educational system ended in Haycock in 1955 with the opening of Haycock Elementary School, which housed grades one through six in separate classrooms. Haycock Elementary School is now the Haycock Community Center.

If you missed the gathering, or know of any one-room-schoolers who may not know about the reunions, or for general information, please contact Richard Landgreen (215/206-8563) or Jane (Clayton) Cope (215/536-4747).

#### **EVENTS**

Kringle Christmas Shoppe

Fri. Dec. 6, 10:00am-7:00pm Sat. Dec. 7, 10:00am-6:00pm Sun. Dec. 8, 10:00am- 4:00pm

At the Haycock Township Community Center

Please visit our updated Kringle site at: http://www.KringleChristmasShoppe.org

**Members**—Do you want to help with Kringle just a little but don't want to join a committee? Please contact us and tell us what you would be able to commit to and/or when: **kringleshoppe**@gmail.com

#### THANK YOU

cookies for Kringle.

#### 2020 DUES REMINDER

Our annual dues for 2020 are due by the end of December. If you have an annual membership you should find a renewal form with this newsletter. Please note any changes in your information and return with your dues. Thank You.

Past years' issues of our Newsletter are available on our web site. www.haycockhistoricalsociety.org

"Our Lost Tohickon Valley" and "Haycock Township and Eddie Bauer" are available as E-Books on Amazon

#### PRINT VERSIONS

"Haycock Township and Eddie Bauer" is available at Stokes Headquarters, Haycock Township Building, and Margie Fulp

"Our Lost Tohickon Valley" is available at Sines 5&10, Stokes Headquarters, Haycock Township Building, The Treasure Trove in Perkasie, and Margie Fulp

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## **MEETINGS**

Thursday, November 21, 7 p.m. "Dangerous Journeys to Freedom." Rodney Henry will discuss his soon-to-be released compilation of stories from local Latvian "DP's," or displaced persons, from directly after WWII.

Thursday, March 19, 2020: 7 p.m To be announced

Thursday, April 16, 2020: 7 p.m. To be announced

Thursday, May 21, 2020: 7 p.m. .. To be announced

Third Thursday meetings are held at the Haycock Community Center, formerly the Haycock Elementary Peggy Lewis for her generous donation of 100 dozen School, at Old Bethlehem Road and Sawmill Road, in Applebachsville. The meeting room is Community Room West.

The meetings begin at 7 p.m.

## **OFFICERS**

President: David Long cadklong@verizon.net

V. Pres: Andrea Silvestri asilvestri@haycocktownship.com

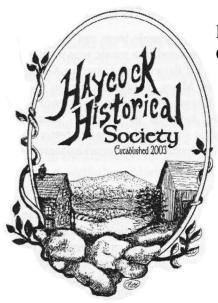
Secretary: Nancy Stemler grandmom42@comcast.net

Treasurer: Chris Bauer cbauer@haycocktownship.com

Ad Hoc:: Pat DeWald wdewald@verizon.net

Ad Hoc: Chris Handschin chandschin@verizon.net

Please submit material for the newsletter or suggestions for interviews to Margie Fulp. (215-257-7472) or m fulp@hotmail.com



P.O. Box 715 Quakertown, PA 18951

www.haycockhistoricalsociety.org

AN INVITATION TO MEMBERSHIP
YES, ENROLL ME AS A MEMBER OF THE HAYCOCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY!
WANT TO BE PART OF RECLAIMING OUR HISTORY AND PRESERVING IT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.
☐ Individual Membership -\$20/year
Receive quarterly newsletter and attend all special functions this year – Jan. thru Dec.
Family Membership (Parents & Children in household) - \$30/year
Receive quarterly newsletter and attend all special functions this year – Jan. thru Dec.
Corporate Sponsor - \$100/year
Gain advertisement in our newsletter by yearly sponsorship (ad size smaller than business card)
☐ Corporate Patron - \$200/year
Gain advertisement in our newsletter by yearly sponsorship (ad is full business card size)
☐ Lifetime Individual Membership - \$200
Receive honorary lifetime status, receive quarterly newsletters and attend all special functions
☐ Lifetime Household Couple Membership - \$250
For just \$50 more, join as a household and enjoy all the benefits of lifetime membership
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SEND APPLICATION ALONG WITH CHECK MADE PAYABLE TO HAYCOCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO: P.O. Box 715, Quakertown, PA 18951