

HAYCOCK HISTORICAL NEWS

The Newsletter of The Haycock Historical Society • Summer 2018

STERNER'S MILL

by J. Thomas Brown

I lived at Sterner's Mill, on the Tohickon Creek near Weisel, Pa., with my parents, sister, and brother for a few years until I was about nine. I didn't fully understand at the time what was happening when the Tohickon Valley was taken by eminent domain to create Nockamixon State Park and Recreational Lake. We were told to go in the fall of 1958 and left in October of 1959. At some point we probably would have moved anyway when the project at Bethlehem Steel my father was working on ended. He had the wanderlust and his work took us overseas and up and down the East Coast of the United States.

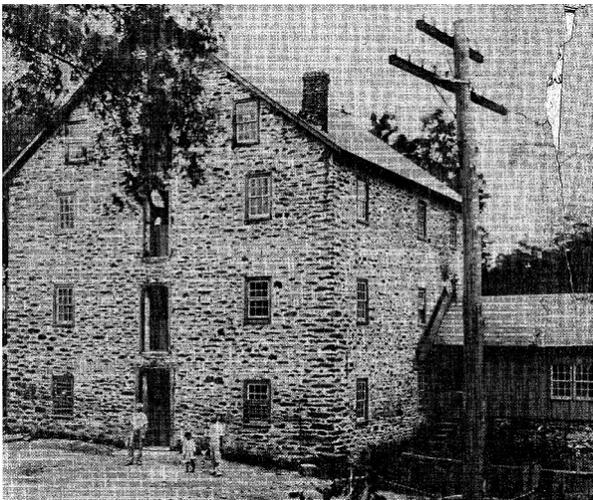


Figure 1 Sterner's Mill about 1919,
Courtesy of Daily Intelligencer

It wasn't until many years had passed that I returned to live in Quakertown with a wife and children of my own. That was about 1977, after the algae had dissipated from Lake Nockamixon and the park was in full operation. Sterner's Mill Road ended in the woods near the shoreline and the house and mill were gone.

Over the years we moved to Spinnerstown, then Richland. I sometimes passed by the lake on the way home from work and I started thinking about the history that lay eighty or ninety feet below the surface. When you drive by, you would think it had always been there and would never guess that there had once been a community that had lived there for generations down below. It didn't seem right to let the Tohickon Valley be forgotten, so I decided to write about it. I'll tell you what I can still remember about living at Sterner's Mill, then some of the mill's history from my research.



Figure 2 Ruth and Tom Brown and Bonnie.

The sound of water spilling down the millrace pervaded the air about the mill and the miller's house where we lived. Sometimes we would come home in our '57 Chevy station wagon from the Starlight Drive-In Theater at Trainer's Corner, Quakertown, or the Willow Grove Amusement Park, and we would get out of the car and hear the drone of insects and the sound of the Tohickon Creek. The Tohickon was used to create a millpond and feed the millrace. The water made an effervescent sound as it flowed down the race and over the remains of the large wooden waterwheel on the backside of the mill, then continuing and falling down a well into a rusted, long defunct turbine. The millpond spilled over a dam and spread out over the rocks below. It gave the place a peaceful feeling and a sense of permanence, like it had been there forever.

Chris and Kurt Lenniger were friends my age who visited often. We rode our bikes all over the valley. There were a lot of bridges and we would fish off them and catch some that were pretty big. There were eels in the millpond. Sometimes I would be dropped off at Bill Knauss's farm. His father owned Knauss's Dried Beef and raised cattle. We built forts out of hay bales in the barn. I remember falling through the trap door over the horse stalls and breaking my arm. These were the years when boys kind of disappear from the world of grownups. It was good to be a kid in the Tohickon Valley.

It was thickly wooded along the creek and there were big boulders that we climbed on. I remember wild blueberries and raspberries in the field behind our house and

snake skins in the paths. One time a rattler reared up and shook its tail when I went to pick berries near some outbuildings by the creek. I backed away and hightailed it back to the house.

Copperheads were found there, too. One day my sister, Lydia, and I went on a hike down the creek to the Tohickon Quarry. The creek was shallow and wide where it passed by the quarry, and a snake started swimming from a point upstream and headed through the water toward us. A man came out of nowhere and killed it with a shovel.

"It's a copperhead," he yelled. "You kids stay out of here or you'll get hurt." He followed us home and spoke to our mother. They were going to do some blasting and it was too dangerous for children to be walking around there.

One day they set off a big blast that cracked a window in our dining room. After a blast, they would run the rock crusher for a few days to make gravel, then it would be quiet for a few weeks.

My sister, brother Jeffery, and I were told not to go in the mill. James and Douglas Sterner had purchased it in 1901 from William Bartholomew and ran it as a grist and feed mill until 1936 according to the Doylestown Daily Intelligencer from a story printed March 26, 1959: "Sterner's Mill to Become County Park." It had been shut down long before we arrived, and my brother and sister and I were forbidden to go in. The roof leaked and some of the floor boards were rotten. The entrance was a Dutch door with a padlock. I was not exactly a perfect kid and discovered that the bolt on the bottom half was not working and was able to squeeze through. I recall it being spooky. It was huge and damp. Part of the wall in the back had rotted off and a section of the water wheel could be seen from the inside. There were cog gears, wooden axles, leather belts, conveyor belts, and hoppers. Ladder stairs led to the second and third floors where I saw tool chests and chutes. Rodents were a problem in gristmills. I read later that the ladders would be pulled up at the end of the day to keep them out. Often cats were left in the mills overnight. I thought it was really cool.

My mother was right, it was dangerous, but I was careful. I told Lydia about it and talked her into going in on a later secret exploration. I know, we could have fallen through the floor. I never told our mother until last year. She's ninety-one now. It's my fault.

We lived in the miller's house which we rented from William Krebs. The walls were thick, about eighteen inches. Many homes from this period were built with Bucks County fieldstone, but we couldn't be sure because the exterior was stucco and the interior had been plastered. The window sills were deep, and I used the ones in my bedroom as shelves for books. The floors were wide planked. There was a large stone fireplace in the living room on the first floor and another in the second kitchen downstairs below ground level. The lower level kitchen was in a state of disrepair, but the walls were still whitewashed. This was probably an important room at one time. The rear wall was partially below ground level but had one window for light. A Dutch door in the exposed end wall on the side of the house facing the mill served as the entrance.

The kitchen floor was brick and the fireplace contained a built-in wall oven. A storage room could be entered through a door in the back of the kitchen.

Millers in the past took a ten percent portion of flour ground at the mill as pay. The flour could be stored in the back room and also used to feed the family and guests by baking bread in the fireplace oven. Extra bread and flour would be sold or bartered to generate income. Millers were usually well off and were often important members of the community.



Figure 3 Sterner's Mill by Ruth C. Brown

The house was three stories and the third floor had six small bedrooms. When farmers brought their grain to be ground at the mill, they would sometimes stay for two or three days and sleep on the third floor. I can imagine the miller's wife feeding them in the basement kitchen. The bread made from fresh local grains baking in the oven must have smelled good.

There was a flagstone terrace off the back and we had picnics there or in the back yard in the summer. My aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents came often. My cousin Susan Watkins was there and painted a book cover reminiscent of the Tohickon and mill for me many years later. People liked to visit. My Aunt Lydia, my sister's namesake, would play hymns on the piano, and my grandmother and mother would play Broadway tunes. Everyone sang along.

Like the other hundreds of inhabitants of the Tohickon Valley, we had to leave. Years later, Iva Lenniger, a friend of my mother, wrote that the stones and gears and other parts of the mill had been labelled and disassembled. The mill was to be put in storage, but the house had been razed. The Tohickon Valley was denuded and prepared by the Army Corps of Engineers to hold the waters of three creeks: the Tohickon, Haycock Run, and Three Mile Run. The dam was finished in 1973 and the valley flooded in six months. Eighteenth century Tohickon Village, farms, barns, gristmills, a general store; all gone. But not the history of the land.



Indian Cave explored by Dr. Henry Mercer now under Lake Nockamixon

Figure 4 The Indian Cave. Photo
by Dr. Henry Mercer 1890

The First People, the Lenape, had been forced to leave in 1737 through the Penn family's scheme called *The Walking Purchase*. Two hundred twenty years later, many local residents of the Tohickon Valley were left unclear about the purpose of the proposed lake and felt angry. The impression was created that it was to be used as a water reservoir for Perkasio, which was untrue. It is a recreational lake. (There is a comprehensive article by Carl LaVO, columnist for *The Bucks County Courier Times*, posted on Mar 13, 2017, with more information on this subject: Tohickon, the village beneath the waves of Lake Nockamixon.)



Figure 5a Sterner's Mill and House in 1960s
courtesy of Hilltown Historical Society

Six years ago, I made phone calls to the Pennsylvania State Park Service, hoping the mill was still in storage or had been reassembled somewhere else. I was told it may have been taken to Reading, but no one knew anything about it. Recently, Marjorie Fulp, co-author of *Our Lost Tohickon Valley*, informed me that the shoreline of the lake didn't reach the miller's house or the mill and they were to remain. I wondered why they had been demolished and speculated that it was difficult to estimate how high the water would rise or

just where the shoreline would end up when flooding the valley. It would be a shame if they were destroyed for no reason. While writing this article I asked my mother about this. She said she and my father were told the house would be left intact to be used as a park administrative office. It is a shame.



Figure 5b Sterner's Mill and House in 1960s
courtesy of Hilltown Historical Society

I decided to write a historical fiction novel set in the Tohickon Valley in the 1790s and called it *The Land of Three Houses*. The Nockamixon State Park website says that Nockamixon is a Lenape word meaning *place of soft soil*. I had found another interpretation: *place of three lodges*. *Neke* means three in Lenape, and that sounds similar to *nocka*. I decided to create a 1790s world around *The Land of Three Houses*.

A visit to the Bucks County Historical Society Library in the Mercer Museum to research gristmills proved fruitful. The librarian was extremely helpful and knowledgeable. Sterner's Mill could be distinguished from the records of other mills by the chain of ownership. Some of the owners had other mills in Bucks County as well. Not all mills were gristmills. Some were linseed, fulling (wool), or sawmills. There was a mention that Sterner's Mill used donkey power for a while. When we lived there, the three-story stone main building of the mill had a fifteen-foot wooden waterwheel in the back. The long frame building attached to the side was used as a sawmill, then later as a cider press. It was powered by a water turbine. I saw what I believed to be rusted textile machines inside.

The original mill may have been a two-wheel mill made of logs. The original house was also probably log with a separate log kitchen behind the house. Mills were often upgraded periodically to maintain their competitiveness with other mills. In the 1790s some upgraded to Oliver Evans's patented automated milling system which greatly reduced spoilage by rodents and increased yield and productivity. George Washington was among the first to use it at Mount Vernon. Castle Valley Mills in Doylestown is a good example of the Evans system.

There had been many owners during Sterner's Mill's long history. Ownership of the land was deeded from the Penn brothers to Peter Sheppard in 1757. In 1773: Sheppard

to John Heany. In 1777, a gristmill appeared in the records: Heany to George Philips. In 1781 no mill was mentioned, but ownership changed from Philips to Tobias Shull. 1781: Shull to Heany; 1830: Heany to Jonas Stover; 1892: Stover to William Bartholomew. In 1901 the namesake appears: Bartholomew to James and Douglas Sterner. In 1937: Sterner to Dorothy C. Millard; 1940: Millard to Howard B. Brown (no relation to me); 1942: Brown to Fannie Mottzman; 1944: Mottzman to George Sellett; 1957: Sellett to William V. Krebs.

Pennsylvania was among the wealthiest, if not the wealthiest of the states. Philadelphia was the capital during the 1790s for a short period and ranked as one of the major ports of the world along with London and Livorno. It might have continued to be so had it not been for the Yellow Fever epidemic that haunted it during the fall periods. Bucks County and the Tohickon Valley were affluent and there was abundant water power for the numerous mills along the many creeks. A desirable soft-shelled wheat grew well in Bucks County and became known as Pennsylvania Red Wheat. It was milled and shipped to other states and overseas. The flour industry was the basis of wealth for Levi Hollingsworth and Stephen Girard and other prominent Philadelphia families.

This was a time when people began to develop a unique identity as Americans and ceased to think of themselves as British subjects. We think of the present as turbulent and unsettling, but people faced unrest and uncertainty back then, too. We had to take care of ourselves. Our merchant ships trading overseas lost the protection of the British Royal Navy after the Revolutionary war. The United States had no navy of its own and subsequently had to rely on the French Navy for protection. American merchants began to make inroads into foreign trade until King Louis XIV was deposed and the US made the decision not to pay its war debt to France. Tensions arose with our greatest ally. The New French Republic began to take American merchant ships and their cargoes to sell as restitution for the \$300,000,000 defaulted loan owed to them for aid in the American Revolution. A disgruntled citizen fired shots into the French Ambassador's office window in Philadelphia. A new ambassador was appointed.

President John Adams initiated a property tax to finance an American navy for the Quasi War against France and to provide our own military protection. Vice President Thomas Jefferson opposed it and so did a Bucks County local, John Fries, who organized an armed tax rebellion. Adams sent in the militia and captured him in nearby Milford. Fries was sentenced to be hung in Philadelphia, but public outcries caused him to be pardoned by the president. The adventure continues today. The good news is, we are still here.

Despite the beauty of Lake Nockamixon and the pleasure it gives, I wish Sterner's Mill and the Tohickon Valley were left to remain. The Haycock Historical Society is doing an important job by preserving its history. The story is still alive today.



J. Thomas Brown

J. Thomas Brown is a novelist currently living in Richmond, Virginia. His book, *The Land of Three Houses*, begins where he lived as a boy with his family at Sterner's Mill, Bucks County Pennsylvania, where much of the story takes place. His home was taken by eminent domain to create Lake Nockamixon, and the now empty site is close to the lake's shoreline. Below the surface of the lake lie the sites of stone farmhouses, settlers' graves, and the Indian Cave. *The Land of Three Houses* travels back in time to the Tohickon Valley and the land beneath the lake in the 1790s.

Mr. Brown has coproduced local TV writing shows and coordinated poetry readings at the Richmond Public Library, Richmond, Virginia. His short stories have appeared in *The Zoo Fence* and the *Scarlet Leaf Review* and will appear in *Everywhere Stories: Short Fiction from a Small Planet, Volume III*. He has contributed poems to the *River City Poets Anthology: Lingering in the Margins* (fall of 2018). His novel, *The Land of Three Houses*, was released March 30th of 2018. A second novel that takes place in Xinjiang, China, called *The Hole in the Bone*, is forthcoming.

He is a member of James River Writers in Richmond, Virginia, Virginia Writers Club, and WriterHouse in Charlottesville, Virginia.

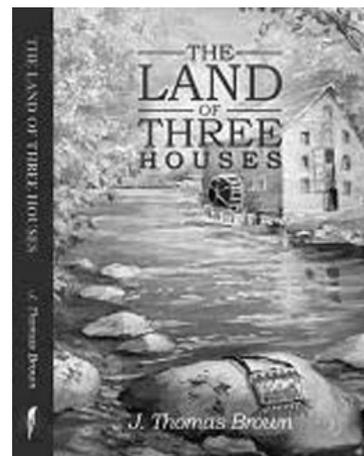
The Land of Three Houses

A novel by author J. Thomas Brown. William Sterner's story begins in the late 1700's on the Tohickon Creek in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. His quest for wealth leads him to Livorno, Tuscany, during the Napoleonic wars. He is making some mistakes along his way, and must learn from his Lenape friend, Charles Durham, what matters most in life.

J. Thomas Brown will be at the Bucks County Book Festival, October 14, 2018.

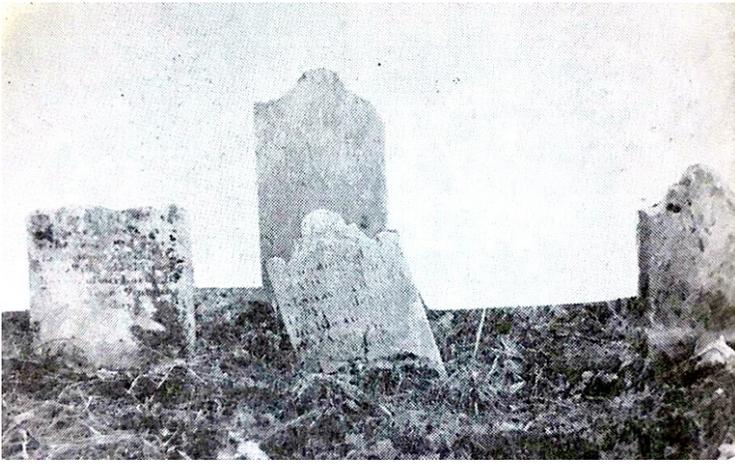
For more information:

(<http://www.landofthreehouses.com>)



Artwork on the book cover by Susan Watkins

(<http://susanwatkinsfineart.com>)



ETERNAL VIGILANCE

From *Bucks County Traveler*, December 1950

On the road leading from Applebachsville to Quakertown, half a mile west of the former place on the farm of Charles Hafler is the old Bryan graveyard, that belonged to the Baptist congregation organized at the settlement of the township. In it are six graves of the Bryan family, including the final resting-place of its Bucks County founder, William, born 1708, died May 17, 1784; his wife, Rebekah, born 1718, died July 22, 1796, and son William, born February 6, 1739, died February 10, 1819, whose wife Alivia, died in 1822, in her eightieth year. The oldest marked grave is that of Eleanor Morgan, wife of James Morgan, who died December 12, 1764. The earliest burial was in 1747, but the name cut on the rough stone cannot be deciphered. The last person buried there about 95 years ago was named Crassly.

When death came in the 1700's and the last rites were to be performed, relatives and friends gathered at the house of mourning; from over the countryside in numbers, indicating their sympathy and respect for the departed one. In most instances, the tradition demanded that the hospitality of the home should be exercised to its limit on these mournful occasions and it was usual for the relatives and friends to be entertained not with "cold meats" but with the best food the home could furnish.

Professional grave diggers did not exist in the early days, but graves were generally dug by neighbors at the request of the family and these same men also acted as pall-bearers.

The Bryan Cemetery

This cemetery is located on the farm owned by Charles Isaac. When they acquired the property, Charles and Joanne preserved the stones, saving them after years of inattention.

Tammy E. Schane

Tammy E. Schane is a public historian and development specialist who has worked very hard for and volunteered with non-profits for more than 10 years.

She worked for the American Cancer Society in the communities of Lower Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. She also worked for Heritage Conservancy in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, as the membership coordinator and lead docent of tours of historic Aldie Mansion. Currently, she works for the American Association for Cancer Research in Philadelphia, PA.

She volunteers as a tour guide at Doylestown Cemetery and has researched and written the tour about the site's 19th-century tombstone symbols and their meanings. In 2016, she published a book called, "Engraved: The Meanings Behind 19th-Century Tombstone Symbols."

Tammy E. Schane holds a B.S. from Syracuse University in Journalism and History, and recently completed her M.A. in Public History from LaSalle University. She is married with three beautiful and talented cats and lives in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. She is an amateur photographer with a strong interest in capturing images of forest mushrooms and fungi. And she will always, always brake for a cemetery.

Tammy will present a program : *It Was Only the Flu: A look at the 100th Anniversary of the 1918-1920 Spanish Influenza Pandemic through the experiences of Philadelphians*, at our October 18th meeting.





IN MEMORY OF
Helen Anderson
October 1, 1919 to July 3, 2018

VOLUNTEER NEEDED

We need a volunteer to make Bayberry Candles for HHS to sell at Kringle. Pat Dewald will show you how to do this.

Hugh Boyle

Hugh Boyle is president and Executive Director of the Grand Army of the Republic Civil War Museum and Library. He is co-founder of the Delaware Valley Civil War Round Table and the April 1865 Society. He serves on the faculty of the Civil War Institute at Manor College in Jenkintown, where he teaches courses on Abraham Lincoln's life and assassination, and other Civil War topics. He is on the board of directors of the annual Bensalem Reenactments. He is also a member of the Lincoln Forum and book reviewer for Lincoln Herald Magazine. He is a member of the Surratt Society, the General Meade Society and the Abraham Lincoln Association. He is the former publisher and book reviewer editor of the "Civil War Brigadier" newspaper. He has given lectures all around on the Civil War and on the life of Abraham Lincoln. He is now retired from his position as National Sales Manager of Roadpro 12 volt electronics and lives with his wife Rose in Bensalem, Pennsylvania.

Our group enjoyed Hugh's presentation on Abraham Lincoln at our May meeting. He will return this fall to give a presentation on General Dan Sickles: Congressman, General, adulator and murderer.

General Paul Applebach Accident in 1856

From the book *Applebachsville* by Rollin Smith

"Along with his political and real estate interests, the General continued his occupation as a drover. When returning from Canada with a drove of horses, he met with an accident at Shimersville, Northhampton County, on Monday the 26th (of May 1856). He was riding in a buggy having four horses tied to the rear of his vehicle and a string of horses in advance of him, when some of them, becoming frightened, turned around and upset the buggy and threw everything into a general wreck. Gen. Applebach was mixed up among the horses and was considerably injured. His escape from very serious injury seemed to be almost a miracle."

(The Intelligencer, June 5, 1856)

THANK YOU

Mary Shafer for the paper supplies and other items of interest to HHS.

THANK YOU

Janice Peischel for her generous donation to HHS.

THANK YOU

Volunteer **Kimberlee Nentwig** did a beautiful cleaning of the large mural painted by Chief One Star. The mural is looking much brighter and more defined. It can be seen on display at the Stokes House.

STOKES HOUSE OPEN FRIDAYS

Stokes will be open for visiting and snacks every Friday morning 10 a.m. to Noon through the end of October.

Thursday, October 4, 2018: 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. “Our Lost Tohickon Valley.” A power point presentation at the **Haycock Township Community Center**: Margie Fulp and Pamela Varkony will give this presentation which is sponsored by the Nockamixon State Park Education Center.

Saturday, October 6, 2018: 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. **Haycock Township Community Day at the Haycock Community Center.**

Historic Hike Along the Delaware Canal

Saturday, October 6, 2018: 10 a.m. Meet at the Parking lot at **Tinicum Park, Rt. 32** at 10 a.m. We will walk as far as the Homestead Store, Upper Black Eddy.

Led by Susan French - 610-847-5709

December 7,8,9, 2018: Kringle Christmas Shoppe

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, Perkasio and Margie Fulp

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MEETINGS

Sunday, Sept. 9, 2018: 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the Stokes House Headquarters: SETTLERS' DAY: Presentation by **Steve Applegate**. Steve will cook a stew over an open fire. In addition, Steve will provide the opportunity for attendees to fire his muzzle loaders and to shoot hand-made wooden bows. There will be NO Thursday meeting in September.

Thursday, Oct. 18, 2018: 7 p.m. Tammy Schane will do a presentation on *It Was Only the Flu*: A look at the 100th Anniversary of the 1918-1920 Spanish Influenza Pandemic through the experiences of Philadelphians. Tammy will also bring books to sell at \$15.00 each, titled: *Engraved: The Meanings Behind 19th-Century Tombstone Symbols*.

Thursday, Nov. 15, 2018: 7 p.m. Hugh Boyle will give a presentation on **General Dan Sickles: Congressman, General, adulterator and murderer.**

Third Thursday meetings are held at the Haycock Community Center, formerly the Haycock Elementary 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

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Secretary: Nancy Stemler grandmom42@comcast.net

Treasurer: Chris Bauer cbauer@haycocktownship.com

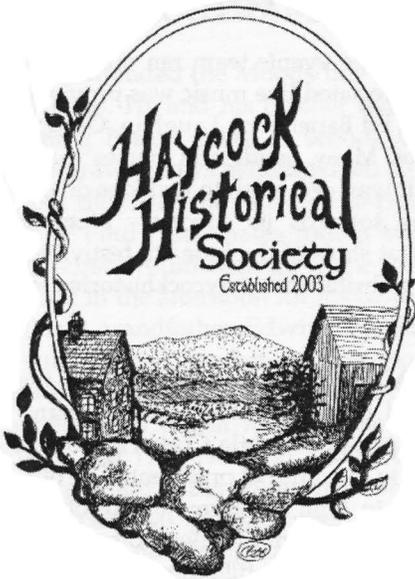
Ad Hoc:: Pat DeWald wdewald@verizon.net

Ad Hoc: Chris Handschin chandschin@verizon.net

Ad Hoc: Nancy Janyszeski ncj@epix.net

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

HHD USA



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!

I 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)
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Receive honorary lifetime status, receive quarterly newsletters and attend all special functions
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