



HAYCOCK HISTORICAL NEWS

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A CONCISE HISTORY OF LATVIANS IN HAYCOCK TOWNSHIP



By Ralf W. Augstroze

The very first Latvian settlers in this region emigrated from Latvia prior to the 1900s simply out of an adventurous desire to come to the United States. The next group of Latvians came here in 1905 after they were exiled from the unsuccessful Latvian uprising against the Russian Bolsheviks. After successfully resisting simultaneous attempts by Bolshevik and German armies to invade their land, the Latvian republic entered into a treaty with the U.S.S.R. on August 11, 1920. The second group of refugees came here just prior to this date.

The first Latvian family of Juris and Julia Burse arrived in this community in 1907 and set their hands to farming. They were members of the Latvian Baptist church in Philadelphia. They came here to get away from the city, in search of a country community similar in appearance and character to that which they left behind in Latvia. Soon other families from Philadelphia learned of the Burse's satisfaction with their newly established pastoral life in the Haycock countryside, and followed in their footsteps. By 1909, eleven Latvian farms were in operation in this community. The Latvian community numbered about forty by then, and they gathered weekly in one of their homes to worship and pray.

During this time, these families were still considered members of the Philadelphia Latvian Baptist church, which is why the pastor from that church began to come to this area monthly to serve and lead the worship. In the beginning this was Pastor Neibuks, but beginning in 1909 it was Rev. Kvietins, who soon also became enamored with this area and purchased a local farm.

On Aug. 31, 1913, this group of the faithful agreed to formally consider itself an independent Christian collective. It wasn't long before they began to desire a building specifically for worship, so a fund drive began soon thereafter. In 1918, this group purchased a large parcel of land with several buildings in Haycock Township, at the intersection of Sawmill and Old School roads, for \$1,650 and where the congregation met for twelve years. They decided to sell that property in 1930.

Because several of the families making up the congregation lived in Applebachsville, on Jan. 23, 1933, the congregation purchased a 2-1/2 acre parcel of land on Apple Road. A building committee was formed and church mem-

bers began construction Jan. 31 and completed the church 2-1/2 months later. On Easter morning, April 16, 1933, the original church building, containing the sanctuary largely as it is today, opened and was dedicated. From this beginning until 1948 the church was under the spiritual care of the pastor from the Latvian Baptist church in Philadelphia. The church was formally led by several successive lay leaders, superintendents and elders from the congregation.

In 1948, the church hired its first fulltime pastor. This first pastor was the Rev. Janis Zeltins, who served in this position until 1950, when he was replaced by the Rev. Fridrichs Cukurs, my grandfather.

When World War II ended, members of this congregation, by then U.S. citizens, began sponsoring and vouching for Latvian refugees, preparing places for them here in the U.S. 1948 was a unique year for this church when several hundred Latvian Baptist war refugees came to the United States from displaced persons camps in Europe. This sudden influx of Latvians caused a resurgence in the population and activity of Latvian Baptist churches in the United States, most dramatically here in Applebachsville. They came to this area primarily because of the established church coupled with the similar characteristics of this region to the Latvian countryside.

When the Latvian refugees first fled Latvia in peril of the communist onslaught, it was fully their intention to wait out the war, and then return to Latvia when the allies had thrown the communists out of the Baltics. In no one's wildest dreams did they imagine that World War II would effectively make a present of Latvia to the Soviet Union. This emotionally crushed the refugees strewn across Europe who realized that returning to Latvia was an improbability.

Their desire to come together here, in the Latvia-like countryside, with their own Latvian Baptist brethren was the overriding factor and sentiment that drove these families to eventually pickup from wherever they had landed after the war, and travel to Haycock to join this congregation. When all the post-war resettlement ended around 1950, this church was about one hundred fifty members strong. The following fifty years would constitute the church's heyday, with the congregation growing to almost two hundred members in 1961.

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LATVIANS *continued from page 1*

During that period, Applebachsville was truly a Latvian village. The vast majority of homes in the village proper – as it is bordered today by the "Village of Applebachsville" signs – were owned and occupied by Latvian families.

As the church now had grown in size and independence, there arose the need for adequate facilities. In 1952 the congregation erected a fellowship hall, kitchen, men's and women's rest rooms, and a front and rear vestibule – largely, the facility as you see it today. Subsequently the parking lot was asphalted, cement sidewalks added and finer landscaping cultivated. This fellowship hall was further expanded two decades later to accommodate more spacious events and an expanded front vestibule was also constructed. The land directly behind the church, originally covered by forest and the massive rocks that dominate this area, was cleaned and groomed to become a park-like setting, with grass, benches and an outdoor sanctuary area. In 1994 beautifully designed stained glass windows were installed in the sanctuary, depicting elements of the Gospel, as well as Latvian ethnicity – a gift from Latvian glass artist Leonids Linauts of Reading.

Song, and especially choral singing are a Latvian tradition that has not been lost on our church. This church has had a formal choir practically since its inception, and the choir's activity continues today, typically with three songs sung at each Sunday morning service. Church worship services continue to this day in the Latvian language.

We are one of the longest practicing ethnic churches in this entire region.

In 1954, the Latvian school was established under the church. The school operated for about ten years every Saturday morning during the school year, where Latvian children and adults could learn the Latvian language, culture, literature, and geography.

Had the church not experienced the fortuitous influx of Latvians after World War II, this church may have ceased its Latvian language worship long ago. This influx was a miraculous event, as it suddenly reenergized a church in such a dramatic way as rarely happens in the typical flow of time. Since World War II this community has not seen anything similar to that invasion, and, hence, our congregation has experienced what some would call the fate that befalls any ethnic church in a nation and culture as vast and pervasive as that of the United States. In a sense, it is almost a miracle that our church has been successful in maintaining its ethnic face, language and traditions this long. And so, it is impossible for an English-speaking American to routinely worship with us, because of the language barrier, and our congregation is doomed to extinction.

However, looking back at almost one hundred years of history, it is awe-inspiring to realize the impact, influence and relevance this small country church has had on its community.

In our fall 2007 newsletter, we featured an old class photo from the New Harrisburg School. Members were asked if they could identify missing names, and Margie (Goldthorp) Fulp and Eddie Bauer responded with the following additions.

According to Margie Fulp, the boy (no. 10) in the back row could be David Landis.

Margie said the picture is of students in the first, third and fourth grades,

and the school year was 1949-1950. It was taken the year

before she started school, but her brother and cousin are in the photo as third graders. Dick Landgreen (top row #9), was a year ahead of her brother, so he was a fourth grader at the time. She is not sure if other grades are represented.

The Harrisburg School closed in June 1955. The next school year, 1955-1956, started in the newly built Haycock School.



Top Row (L-R)

- Teacher : Meda Thatcher
 2. Benita Zeltins
 7. Larisa Michail
 8. Luke Beidler
 12. Maris Asaris

Middle Row (L-R)

5. Diane Mayo
 7. Mara Znotens
 8. Ruth Freimanis
 13. Andris Klaupiks
 14. Vilnis Reinis

Bottom Row (L-R)

1. Faith Beidler
 2. Janice Moyer
 4. _____ Freimanis
 5. Mikel Znotens
 6. & 7. Keeler twins, Ralph and Robert
 9. Ernest Detweiler
 11. Faye Wirebach
 12. Evelyn Detweiler

MT. AIRY SCHOOL

FEBRUARY 3, 1903

Submitted by Harry Hinkel



Front Row:

2nd from left: Mark Thatcher
3rd from left: Harrison Thatcher
4th from left: Robert Clark

Second Row:

4th from left: Naomi Clark
5th from left: Ruth Clark

Back Row:

3rd from left: James Clark
7th from left: Meda Ahlum



Located at Creamery and Thatcher roads, this photo of Mt. Airy School was taken in 1954 by Warren Buck. The building exists today as a private residence. The Landis School, erected in 1849 on or near this spot, was Haycock Township's first schoolhouse.

BARREL-VAULTED ROOT CELLAR

By Greg Siefert & Laura DiDonato

In 1998, Laura and I purchased a neglected thirty-six acre farm on Woodbine Lane. During our visits with a realtor, I noted a cluster of trees and bushes that was near a hand pump water well. Upon further inspection, we discovered a hole in the ground that appeared to have a collapsed entryway. Closer inspection revealed the hole to be an 8' x 10' stone "bunker" with an eight foot arched ceiling covered with sod.

Because of initial considerations to bring the farm, which we now call Mountain Pride Farm, back to life, the root cellar was left untouched with the exception of clearing the bushes and trees that hid its location.

During August 2007, I cleared the debris from the entry way to the root cellar and discovered that there were four steps intact, sitting on hand-laid stone footers. The stonework, without the aid of cement, spoke volumes of the craftsmanship of the individuals who set the stones years earlier.

The root cellar is an 8' x 10' stone room, below the ground level with an eight foot arched stone ceiling. The floor is hand-laid brick to allow the water table to rise and fall. The entryway "cellar type" door has long been off, but during my excavation of the debris, I found the old hand forged handle. Hanging from the ceiling are forged metal hooks where smoked meats once hung. Along the walls are the remains of wooden supports that held up shelves. When the water table is high enough, there is approximately one foot of clear cold water on the floor to set milk cans or jars for refrigeration

purposes.

I hired two young Mennonite brothers who are masons and they rebuilt the entryway, adding two more steps to bring the first step up to ground level. I hope to complete the entryway door before this winter.

We recently invited Jeff Marshall from the Heritage Conservancy to look at our barn and other structures on the property. In 1801, shortly after Jacob Strawn died, one of his sons, Abel Strawn, obtained 133 acres from the original family tract of 348 acres. The court documents, which included a partition map drafted on March 25, 1801, indicate that this tract contained two "tenements" or houses "now in the tenure of Abel Strawn." Our farm and the farm that Charles and Joanne Isaac reside in at the entrance to Strawntown Road from Apple Road, are believed to be the two tenements within the 133-acre parcel.

Jeff Marshall noted the close proximity of our root cellar to a hand pump well and smoke house, containing a beehive oven. He believes that a log home structure would have been located near these facilities during the early 1800s, and not where our stone house currently sits.

The direct tax records of 1798 revealed that on Jacob Strawn's property there were one stone house, three log homes and four log barns. It is believed that a log house and barn were located near the barrel-vaulted root cellar when Abel Strawn took possession of his 133 acres in 1801.



Photos by Greg Siefert



SOCIETY NEWS

SOCIAL COMMITTEE

The fourth annual Kringle Christmas Shoppe, organized by the Social Events Committee, was held the second weekend in Dec. 2007. The three-day event was held for the first time at the Bucks County Latvian Baptist Church on Apple Road and included live music and horse drawn carriage rides provided by Haycock resident, Greg Siefert. The society thanks members of the Latvian Baptist Church for allowing us to hold the event in their church. Also, thanks to the choir who sang carols in Latvian, making Kringle a true community effort.

Local businesses also donated gift certificates for baskets that were raffled off. They were: A Snip in Thyme Hair Salon, Alcamo's Pizza, Paula Applegate, Authentic Philly Pretzels, Pat Bleam's Hair Salon, Cafe on the Way, Cappie's Park Tavern, Dennis Gerhart Design Studio, Haycock Township Supervisors, Harrow Station Car Wash, Ottsville Horse & Rider Tack Shop, Jack's Pizzeria, G. Krause Construction, Nature's Way Canoe & Kayak Rental, NAPA Auto Parts, Valley Auto Supply, Inc., Przyuski's Family Restaurant, Quaker Village Bakery, Revere Video, Revere Dry Cleaners, Richlandtown Inn, Rolling Pin Pastries, Saylor's Valley Brook Farm, Top of the Mall Deli, Vera's Country Cafe. Winners of the raffle baskets were: #1.-M. Shaw, #2.-N.Scott, #3.-B Wehrung, #4.R.Wagner, #5.- N.Fatrik. A framed pen and ink drawing of the White Hall Hotel, donated by artist Dennis Gerhart, was won by Jane Nase, who bid \$150.00.

A sincere thanks to Chris Handschin for her role in this successful fund raising event. Her energy and motivation, along with the efforts of many others, contributed to Kringle's success. The event would not have been possible without the dedication of the Kringle "elves" who worked many hours before, during and after the fundraiser. HHS extends its heartfelt appreciation to the artisans and all who participated in the event. Nearly \$5,000 was raised through sales, donations and raffles—an increase of \$2,000 from the previous year.

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

New members are always welcome. Feel free to contact Pat DeWald at (215) 804-0216 if you'd like to join. The research committee meets to gather information about Haycock. They archive their research, provide information to the newsletter and can give you the opportunity to create your own research project.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

If you are an annual member, your membership expired 12/31/07.

Contact Sue Kleiner-Grew at 215-538-1613 or SKG@relaxatiocreation.com, or go to the HHS website at www.haycockhistoricalsociety.org and click on "membership." Print out the renewal form, complete and mail in.

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

We will continue to feature the Haycock One room schools in the newsletter in the coming year. If you have any classroom photos of students, please contact Sue Kleiner-Grew at 215-538-3613 or SKG@relaxatiocreation.com. Again, we ask for your help in identifying students in the photos.

NOTES OF THANKS

Our deep appreciation goes out to Chuck Malinchak. Chuck was the editor for the newsletter from its inception in 2003 until spring 2007. Chuck's expertise and hard work made the newsletter a document that can be enjoyed as well as provide a historical record of the Haycock area. We wish to express our thanks for his involvement in the development of the newsletter.

Congratulations and thanks for a job well done to Heather Radick who created this year's society calendar. The theme of the calendar is "A Year in Our One-Room Schools" which features black and white photographs of one-room school houses in Haycock Township.

As a way of thanking our active members, each member will receive one of Heather's calendars in the mail as a gift from HHS. We hope you will enjoy it. Please know that your membership keeps the society growing. There will be additional calendars available for sale this month. The cost is \$10.00 and proceeds benefit the Haycock Historical Society. Call or e-mail Sue Kleiner-Grew to order.

SOCIETY MEETINGS

The first public meeting this spring will be held on March 20, 2008. Helen Heinz will speak on the early history of the Catholic Church.

On April 17, Jeff Marshall from the Nature Conservancy will speak on old barns and how to tell the date of construction.

If you know someone who would like to be a presenter at one of our public meetings, get in touch with Chris Handschin at 215-536-0364. The presenter can focus on our area or topics of historical interest.

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