

HAYCOCK HISTORICAL NEWS

The Newsletter of The Haycock Historical Society • Spring 2026

MEMORIES OF THE BUCKS COUNTY

LATVIAN BAPTIST CHURCH

IN APPLEBACHSVILLE, HAYCOCK TOWNSHIP, PA

Memories by Karina Sturman Rilling and Ilze Celmina Diaz

ENDING OF AN ERA-OUR CHURCH

By Karina Sturman Rilling

A church based on a shared language cannot survive but a few generations. Our beloved Bucks County Latvian Baptist Church is in that position. The final sale of the church property is scheduled for April 16, 2026. Our congregation has whittled down to 12 regular attendees and cannot sustain the necessary maintenance costs. Goodbye to an institution that guided many of us to productive happy lives- jobs in trades and professions. It is bittersweet, a necessity, but still a sad erasure of our guiding beacon.

How was it possible to organize this thriving institution that lasted for over 100 years in a vast English-speaking nation? How could a tiny Latvian corner in Applebachsville survive maintaining a regular Christian message, a physical structure, even a Saturday school to teach youngsters of varying ages about their ethnic roots, their history, and native language?

In 1950 after living in Germany for 5 years in a Displaced Persons camp, the Sturman family of 6 arrived in Boston (sponsored by the American Baptist Churches). With the end of the Korean War and discharge of military personnel, there were few jobs in the Boston area. Our mother, Fannija, was homesick for her native tongue and a place to again enjoy and share her musical abilities. Our parents knew of the Latvian Baptist community and decided to move to Bucks County, a rural area, to raise their 4 children – Meta age 8, Karina 7, Jerry 5, and Inta 3.

Within a short time over 100 Latvians (most of them newly arrived refugees) were now attending this small rural church, it needed an expansion. Our father, Valentine Sturman, a mechanical engineer, oversaw and helped plan the

addition of the large meeting room, kitchen, restrooms, landscaping and paved parking area. Although he was not a Baptist (an outsider at the time) he was given the green light by the church council. Years later, when Dad was in his 40s, he was baptized and became a church member. He remained an active and devoted participant his whole life.

Our childhood and adolescence revolved around church activities. - Sunday School, Church choir, holiday programs, and plain fun- playing on the boulders, among the pines and huge trees. There was no better place for hide and seek and there were children of all ages to share the fun.

As we grew into our teen years, we officially became

members of the church after instructional religious classes and baptisms. Babies were dedicated in the Church- my children. Marriages took place including mine to David in 1972 (Latvian style no father giving away the bride but walking hand in hand to the altar with the fiancée).

When I was a young teen, my father established a Saturday School to teach children and teens some formalities about Latvia- its history, geography, grammar and language skills. Teachers were volunteers each

with a different focus. The school lasted for many years. My little sister Inta learned to write in Latvian correctly including all its diacritical marks.

During the 1950s, our teen years, families usually owned only one car so there were few free rides into 'town' for entertainment. We learned to amuse ourselves at the Church playing Ping-Pong late into Saturday evenings. The older teens and twenty-somethings were already proficient in the game, continuing to play into mature adulthood. Charlie Grikmanis continued participating in senior ping-pong tournaments in competitions as far away as Harrisburg.



Haycock Historical Society artistic rendering by Chris Handschin

And then there were the church concerts and singing! How we waited for our mother on Sunday afternoons to come home and make dinner, but her passion was music and she seemed to always be lingering at church accompanying the practicing choir on the piano (under the director Ernests Keris) for what seemed like hours on end.

Unfortunately, I was not blessed with a voice but still acquiesced when our determined mother commanded me and my siblings to join the choir. During Christmas programs, our mother had her private piano students performing to the best of their abilities, even her own reluctant children.



Ilze on the left, her sister Dace on the right, singing in their native costumes.

The weekly schedule for the Latvian children growing up in the village was Saturday School, followed by regular church meetings complete with sermon and choir, choir practice, Wednesday evening prayer meeting, and Friday night youth fellowship. We were immersed in our local religious upbringing and the socializing that was a byproduct. All the church activity called for some minor mischief, too. Inta and Jerry always found an empty back pew where they could draw Battleship grids on graph paper and lose themselves in the exploding mines and dreadnoughts- parents unaware.

Not only births and weddings but also tragic events were commemorated – untimely deaths and burials -tears and grief at the deaths of Guntis Rozukalns (age 18) and Andris Klaupiks (age 28).

We said goodbye to our grandmother Katrine, our father Valentins, and mother Fannija in this Church.

As I write these reflections, I am bidding a final goodbye to the Church and all those it has touched. It will no longer function as a religious institution but will be converted into apartments. My hope is that the next owners are enveloped in the spiritual goodness we all received over the past 76 years.

MEMORIES, PRECIOUS AND SAD

By Ilze Celmina Diaz

These days, I am astonished by what I'm experiencing: Sadness, loss, confusion, as well as a persistent mountain of memories. The Bucks County Latvian Baptist Church building in Applebachsville has been sold, changing owners! My whole childhood has been rooted in and around this caring and beautifully maintained structure. This change is hard....

We arrived to the USA in 1950 to this restful rural village with clumsy suitcases and baggage. The nearby Latvian Baptist church community warmly welcomed, helped, and guided us on how to live in this foreign land. It's hard to separate the church family from the building since this is where we usually gathered. It was like coming home, a much-needed safe place. In this place we received not just godly, spiritual guidance but also so much cultural affirmation. Here we made friends who understood who we were, who encouraged our growth, who cried and laughed with us. In this building we enjoyed the ethnic foods we were used to (sauerkraut & sausage, multi-layered *tortes*, bacon-filled *piragi*, etc.). We performed and listened to music close to our hearts. We practiced the old-world traditions that were important to us. In this building, my faith in a good God to loved us came to life. Here I recited poems and sang at programs, tried to sing alto in the choir, and even got married. I more than once have shared a message from the pulpit, and I've attended countless memorial services for family members and many others. (Interestingly, funeral directors usually led us through proceedings they apparently thought Latvians wanted, while we assumed this is the way it's done in America!).



The church sanctuary

As a child, I spent a lot of time at the church building. We village kids would gather there (doors not locked) especially during no-school days. We played board games, and competed in ping-pong (I often beat the boys!). Hopping

from boulder to boulder in the rock-filled yard and wooded property was fun. I remember being locked in the tiny outhouse by those annoying boys who loved hearing me scream and threaten. I loved Saturday Latvian culture school, not just to learn language, history and geography, but being with my friends, scribbling on the wooden tables & joking with others while Mr. Sturman and others tried hard to make us Latvian-savvy. And who can forget the excitement of celebrating the church's anniversaries & important gatherings as people came from far away. The church couldn't hold them all, so people sat on outdoor benches listening through open windows. In 1953, over 260 people attended, based on a photo. Applebachsville became little Latvia! Our homes were filled with weekend visitors. At my house, our attic became our bedroom as we gave the best rooms to others.

When my elderly grandfather, Pastor Jekabs Dubelzars, accepted the responsibility of cleaning the church, I would help him, even the restrooms! I dusted every pew, swept the floors, straightened each corner. I knew that building! I climbed into the attic (where I found the old discarded schoolhouse clock that is now at the Stokes House), and entered the basement where old books, Christmas decor and candle holders were stashed. I've washed dishes & pots in the kitchen, and my family even donated our dinnerware to be used for the many social events when we had no need for it.

Yes, it feels sad to say farewell to such an important part of my past. Yet, life is always filled with changes, and we are challenged to accept and be at peace. I am so very grateful for the privilege of having this beautiful, stained-glass building in my past and in my memories. I believe there is a time for all things – a beginning and an end. In God's sovereignty, this too is a new beginning.



Latvian girls



Latvian Saturday School 1956

Ilze's Grandfather & Mr. Sturman front center
Ilze is in the back center, with her arms around Karina in front of her.



Sunday School 1952

Karina is in the back in a darker dress & bow in her hair. Ilze is 5th from the right bottom row



Bucks County Latvian Baptist Church



Haycock Historical Society Covered Dish Picnic at Stokes

Saturday, August 22 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

We will serve Hot Dogs, Corn on the Cob, Ice Tea, Lemonade, Water

You can make the gathering even tastier though if you bring a dish:

Suggestions----

Alphabetically, family names ending in:

A through G - Bring fruit, chips or pretzels,

H through O - Any cold salad to serve 8

P through Z - Any dessert to serve 8

(Rain Date: Sunday, August 23, 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.)

Mark your calendars and come enjoy the day with friends!



THANK YOU

Thank you to Warren and Donna Milligan for paintings by Florence Fluck of flowers and her home, a songbook used in the Haycock one-room schools and a photograph of Florence and Victor Fluck.



THANK YOU

Thank you Walter and Helen Buck for this pottery. The piece on the right was made by Webster Singer of Haycock Township in the 1920's. The crock on the left was made in Philadelphia



Michael Cuba gave our April presentation on How to Maintain Your Old Buildings.

EVENTS

Haycock Heroes of the Revolutionary War

Sunday, July 19, 2026, 1p.m. to 5 p.m.

Haycock Township Community Center

See flyer for details

Haycock Historical Society Covered Dish Picnic at Stokes

Saturday, August 22, 2026 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

See page 4 for details

FREE ACCESS TO PENNSYLVANIA RECORDS ON ANCESTRY

<https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Ancestry-PA.aspx>

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 Perkasio, and Margie Fulp

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Susan Greenwood
REALTOR®

C: 267.262.9025
O: 267.703.5050
sgrealtor888@gmail.com
www.GreenwoodRealEstate.net
405 Farm Lane, Doylestown, PA 18901

OF
DOYLESTOWN



MEETINGS

September 17, 2026: 7 p.m.

October 15, 2026: 7 p.m. David Bretz will speak about lottery lands.

November 19, 2026: 7 p.m.

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.

FRIDAY MORNING COFFEE

Friday coffee at Stokes will continue each Friday from 10 a.m. until noon, through the last Friday of October 2026. Members and visitors are all welcome.

OFFICERS

President:	David Guttman	daveguttman401@gmail.com
V. Pres:	Michael Cuba	michael@transomhpc.com
Secretary:	Nancy Stemler	grandmom42@comcast.net
Treasurer:	Charles Fulp	chasfulp@gmail.com
Ad Hoc:	Joseph Cappella	alleppac@verizon.net
Ad Hoc:	Virginia Cuba	virg917@gmail.com
Ad Hoc:	Chris Handschin	chandschin@verizon.net
Ad Hoc:	Marla Burke	marlaburke@yahoo.com
Ad Hoc:	Andrea Silvestri	asilvestri@haycocktownship.com

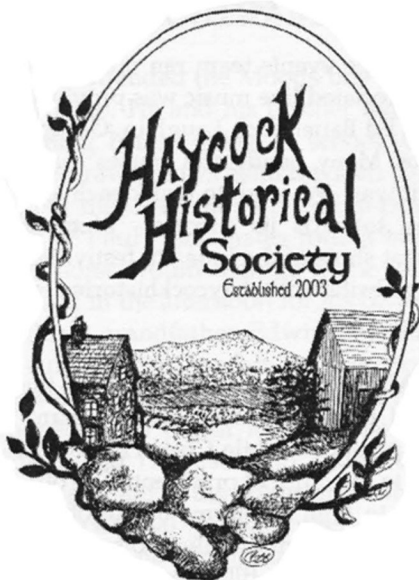
Please submit material for the newsletter or suggestions for interviews to Margie Fulp. (267-772-0711) or margiefulp@gmail.com

CORDES LAW LLC

ANDREW J. CORDES
Attorney at Law

27 SOUTH STATE STREET
NEWTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA
18940
WEBSITE cordeslawllc.com

PHONE 215-968-2248
FAX 215-968-4568
E-MAIL a.cordes@cordeslawllc.com
E-MAIL cordeslawllc@gmail.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!

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)
- ☐ **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

DATE _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

PHONE _____ E-MAIL _____

SEND APPLICATION ALONG WITH CHECK MADE PAYABLE TO HAYCOCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO:

P.O. Box 715, Quakertown, PA 18951