



PO Box 79  
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## Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

### August 2023

We are hard at work planning the September 16 Annual Fall Festival. So much to see and do! We will have books and antiques to sell. The winner of the 50/50 raffle gets to take home half of the proceeds of the raffle. Farm animals will be on hand to delight our visitors. Baked goods are always popular. Don't miss the Pennsylvania Long Rifle demonstration. Crafts and crafters will be displayed. The Silent Auction is one of the favorites. Bid on the items, winners announced at 4:00. You do not need to be present to win an item.

Tour the Homestead building, Museum and Barn at your leisure. New displays are up. View local yearbooks dating back into the 1940s. Are your parents pictured? We are displaying some of our 1700s Hilltown documents. The slide show of the creation of Lake Nockamixon will be running, and flash drives of the program will be available to purchase. We will also have a food vendor on site to satisfy your cravings.

How could this get any better? It is free! It is also a great time to join the Society.

Enclosed with this newsletter is an envelope containing five 50/50 raffle tickets. If you desire, put \$5 in the envelope with the filled-out ticket stub and either mail it back to

us, or simply deliver it when you attend. Again, you don't have to be present to win.

We feel that this is one of Bucks County's best free family events.



### Fall 2023 Speakers' Programs

On Wednesday, October 25<sup>th</sup> at the Township Building, George Whitehair will present a Speakers' Program about Dr. Frank Boston, a Hilltown resident until his death in 1960. He was a special doctor and altruistic man: founding Lansdale Hospital and the Volunteer Medical Service Corps. He made house calls, giving meals to needy families, etc. He is gaining local, state, and national recognition.

On Sunday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, an art show will take place at the Strassburger Farmstead. Local artists Mark McCoy and Jane Ramsey will show their work, along with that of Margaret Jurin. Weather permitting, Mark will demonstrate plein air painting. Prepare to be impressed!

## **R&S Keystone Diner**

This past year, we mourned the passing of the R&S Keystone Diner. A lifetime of 75 years is quite impressive in the restaurant business. Owner Jo Ann Kerr is the daughter of the original owners. The closing must have been a most difficult decision. Our Strassburger Farmstead sits across Bethlehem Pike from the diner and was a landmark we referred to when providing directions to our own site. Did you know that a village known as Keystone was anchored at the intersection of Bethlehem Pike and Keystone Drive?

That explains the Keystone portion of the name. What about the R&S? Those letters were the last names of the two original partners, Clarence (Butch) Ruth and Leroy Smith. After a few years, however, Leroy and his wife Annie Smith decided they wanted a place of their own, so they purchased some land on Bethlehem Pike above Sellersville and set up a hot dog stand. Leroy and Annie Smith called it the Roy Ann Diner.

The original R&S was started in 1948 on Bethlehem Pike near the spot of the car dealer "Car Shop" is on Route 309. At the time, it was a two-lane road. That R&S building was torn down, and a larger restaurant was built, but now that too is long gone, replaced by car dealerships.

In 1960, R&S purchased the existing Keystone Diner in Hilltown and renamed it R&S Keystone Diner. The restaurant has been in the Ruth family since 1970. On Thursday, May 18, the last meal was served at the R&S Keystone. It is our understanding that the building will remain and be remodeled into a dental office for Weaver, Reckner & Reinhart Dental Associates. Hopefully the unique architecture will

remain. In the future, how many times will the "old-timers" point out to their children and grandchildren "I remember when that building was a restaurant!" We will have to provide a new landmark when giving directions.



## **Hilltown Hotel Arrest**

The 18<sup>th</sup> amendment to our Constitution prohibited the production, importation, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages in 1920. This was in effect until the 21<sup>st</sup> amendment overturned the stringent law in 1933.

An episode occurred in Hilltown at what we know as the Crossroads Tavern in 1922.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the place of business was the Mount Pleasant Hotel. It dates back to 1786 when it was a stop on the Philadelphia to Bethlehem stagecoach line. During prohibition, it was known as the Hilltown Hotel. On October 25, 1922, Constable George Seitz and Detective Harry Sturm entered the establishment and asked for liquor. Nicholas Bartle, the proprietor ordered his wife Elizabeth to serve the men. She poured two shots of whiskey and collected a total of fifty cents. Then, they were both promptly arrested.

At their trial in December, both pled guilty. At sentencing, Judge Ryan suspended sentence on Mrs. Ryan. Mr. Ryan was fined \$300. As you enter the Crossroads Tavern today, might you wonder where along the bar this arrest may have occurred?

Another liquor violation occurred just

outside of Hilltown in the village of Hagersville. This would be near Route 313 and Fifth Street. Jacob and Harvey Stinley were charged with selling liquor from their Public House.

State Police investigator Thomas Friel and two companions entered the establishment and were served drinks poured from a quart bottle. The customers complained that the drinks tasted like coal oil, and the owner explained that a funnel may have been used for coal oil first. Despite the foul-tasting drinks, they consumed five of them at 50 cents each. Suddenly Constable Sturm entered the premises and arrested the two Stinley men.

This time, an aggressive defense by their attorney Harry Grim, led he jurors to acquit the men without even leaving the jury box.



*Clayton Kratz*



### **What happened to Clayton Kratz?**

Clayton was a local boy, born on a New Britain farm in 1896. His life ended in Russia in 1920. It was an unlikely ending for a Hilltown High School graduate.

When Clayton was seven years old, his family moved to Blooming Glen. His father died when he was only 16 and a student at Hilltown High School in Blooming Glen. He was baptized into the Blooming Glen Mennonite Church and graduated from High School in 1914. The class consisted of nine young men, but no women. Clayton had the highest grades and was the class valedictorian. Initially, he took some classes at West Chester College, and was teaching here in Hilltown at the Blue School within a year. A year later, he was a student at Goshen University.

This brought us to WWI. A draft was put into effect in 1917, however some common slogans were “Save the farmers for farming”, and “Wars are not fought with just guns, but with food”. Thus, for the most part, farmers were given an exemption from serving. At the time, Clayton did not want to neglect his duty, but his faith was against wars. His brother was already serving in the Army during the war. Clayton did leave school to work on Leidy Smith’s farm in Hilltown.

The war was over on November 11, 1918. Clayton was free to return to college for his Junior year. He thrived there, being elected the president of the campus religious organization Y.P.C.A. and the Christian Workers Band. And of his class, he was voted by girls as most handsome of his class. He was a teaching assistant in botany and agriculture courses. He also volunteered to go overseas with the Student Volunteer Band for a period of up to 2 years, if asked to by the newly created Mennonite Central Committee. He was engaged to his girlfriend

Edie. It would be fair to say that life was good for young Clayton Kratz.

In 1920, life was miserable for the people living in the Ukraine. WWI had depleted their resources and they were starving. The Russian Revolution was happening at this time as well. Clayton was asked to answer the call to help the Mennonites in the region. It came in a telegram sent to him by the Mennonite Central Committee, part of it reading, "Can we depend on you? On September 1, his brother took him to the Souderton train station, the first stop in his journey. He began this trip with two other volunteers (Arthur Slagel and Oriie Miller), ultimately crossing the Atlantic on the ship Providence.

They arrived in Italy, where they played the role of tourists for a bit, sending postcards home to Blooming Glen. The next stop in their journey was to Constantinople (now Istanbul) in the Ottoman Empire, where they boarded a US Destroyer to the southwest tip of Crimea, then a train to Melitopol on the mainland. Here they saw the pure hunger and destitution of the people. Their next destination where the Mennonite community lived in was in Halbstadt. It took a horse and carriage to transport them there. After an inspection tour, Kratz was left at Halbstadt to set up a headquarters while Miller returned to Sevastopol to arrange for the transport of the supplies which Slagel was to bring from Constantinople.

In a letter he wrote home in October, he explained that the Mennonite farming community is the backbone of agriculture, but the battle lines have crossed over this area 18 times during the Russian Revolution. The Bolshevik Red Army was closing in on his area, and while many people were leaving, Clayton wanted to stay to continue his work.

Finally, he saw the danger he was in, and he planned to flee. Unfortunately, he was arrested at 5:00 AM on the day he was to leave. He was released, but then re-arrested a few days later. He was held as a political prisoner of the Red Army, possibly as a suspected American spy. Clayton was never heard from again and pleas to the Russians were ignored. His sacrifice has served as an inspiration for the past 100 years.

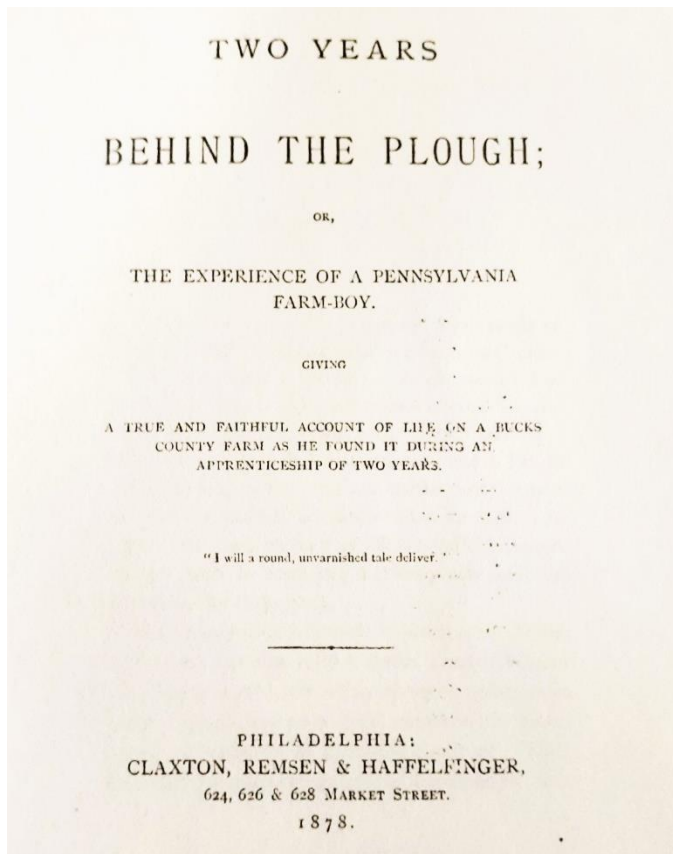
In the cemetery of the Blooming Glen Mennonite congregation stands a memorial marker with a simple inscription: "Clayton Kratz, Nov. 5, 1896. Went to Russia 1920".



### **Two Years Behind the Plough**

A book written in 1878 was meant to be a memoir of a Bucks County farm boy, and his two years spent as an apprentice in the early 1800s. Its title page reads "*Two Years Behind the Plough, or The Experiences of a Pennsylvania Farm Boy, giving a True and Faithful Account of Life on a Bucks County Farm as He Found it during an Apprenticeship of Two Years*". Quite a mouthful! It was authored by Caleb Wright, describing the events of Henry Sellers.

It remains unclear to me the relationship between the author and the protagonist in this book. Non-fiction or fiction?



*Title page*

A Philadelphia boy of fourteen often daydreamed of life in the country. The author lived near Arch Street in Old City. He was approached one day by Caleb Thomas, a Quaker, who asked “Sonny, would thee like to go to the country?” The answer to his prayers. The farmer was near a small village called Friendship, in Bucks County. In the early 1800s, a village of this name existed near Morrisville. With permission from his mother, a six-week trial period was agreed on. At the completion of this term, either party had the option to cancel the agreement. If after the six weeks, a more formal written agreement could be reached.

Much commerce existed between the country farmers and the city, with all goods moving back and forth on wagons. This was before the railroads provided any transportation. The boy, Henry Sellers, had quite a few adjustments coming his way.

After a two-day journey from his city home to Bucks County, he found he had many adjustments to make. The first was the instruction to remove his shoes and socks, as they weren’t needed in the summer. Poor Henry suffered with cuts and blisters until his feet were hard enough to withstand sticks, stones, briars, and even some glass. He quickly learned that there was no play on the farm. Morning to night, it was work all day. He did learn quickly. Drive the oxen, milk the cows, feed the animals, cut the hay, rake the hay, plowing, planting and all the miscellaneous farm chores that were needed.

Henry described his mornings in the winter. Up by Five AM, he would light the kitchen stove and put a pot of water on. Off to find enough firewood for the day, he chopped and split. He owned no gloves, so in the bitter cold mornings, the only thing he could do was to blow on his hands. He owned no underwear or topcoat and the clothes he came with from the city were worn.

After the six-week trial period, Henry and Caleb went to Philadelphia to make his apprenticeship official. Again, it was a two-day journey through Chestnut Hill and Germantown. At a magistrate’s office, a document was prepared, as Henry put it “The document which disposed of my liberty for two years was signed”.

In future newsletters, we will continue the life of Henry Sellers and his adventures as a fourteen-year-old apprentice in Bucks County.

## Hilltown Historical Society Upcoming Events Fall 2023

**Wednesday, October 25 @ 7:00 PM**

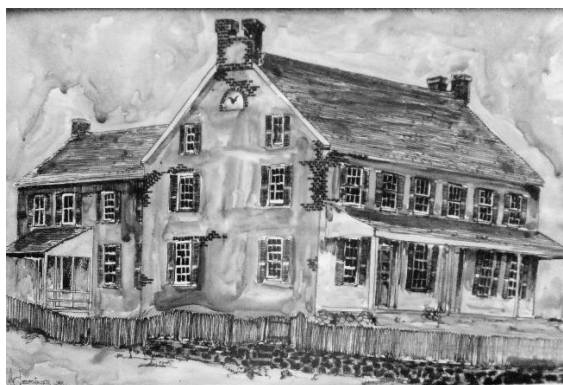


George Whitehair will present a program about Dr. Frank Boston, a Hilltown resident until his death in 1960. He was a WWI Military surgeon, special doctor and altruistic man: founding Lansdale Hospital, and the Volunteer Medical Service Corps. He made house calls, giving meals to needy families, etc. He is gaining local, state, and national recognition.

Speakers' Program at the Hilltown Township Building, 7:00 PM **Hilltown Township Building**  
**13 W. Creamery Rd & Rte. 152, Hilltown**

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**Sunday, October 15: Art Show & Strassburger Open House 12:00-4:00**



On Sunday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, an art show will take place at the Strassburger Farmstead (pictured above). Local artists Mark McCoy and Jane Ramsey will show their work, along with that of Margaret Jurin. Weather permitting, Mark will demonstrate plein air painting. Prepare to be impressed! Some artwork will be available to purchase.

Open House at the **Strassburger Farmstead**  
**407 Keystone Dr & Bethlehem Pike, Sellersville**  
*All events are free! Donations happily accepted.*

# **The Historical Society of Hilltown Township Invites You to our Fall Festival and Open House**



**Saturday, September 16<sup>th</sup> 2023**

**10 AM to 4 PM \* Free Admission! Rain or Shine**

**Keystone Drive & Bethlehem Pike, Sellersville  
(407 keystone Drive, Sellersville)**

**Local Artisans and crafts ~ Antique Vendors ~ Farm  
Animals ~ Buildings Will be Open  
Books & Historical Map Sale ~Bake Sale  
Silent Auction ~50/50 Raffle  
A Great Family Event  
Much More!**

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We seem to have weathered the Covid storm. How will we look back on that? The Historical Society canceled one of our Fall Festivals and more than a few speakers' programs. Movie theaters were closed. Restaurants were only open for take-out. The children learned what on-line learning was. It was quite a challenge for the parents. How many of us became acquainted with ZOOM? Did you get your shots? Were you skeptical? We saw sporting events played before empty stadiums. Has it left your mind completely? How many of us searched far and wide for masks, hand sanitizer, and even toilet paper? And are you still stocked up? And how many of us lost someone dear to us? How will this be looked at years from now?