



PO Box 79
Hilltown PA. 18927
Hilltownhistory1@yahoo.com
Hilltownhistory.org

Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

December 2021

Enclosed within this newsletter is the yearly dues request. If you are already a life member, we thank you. Please pass the membership application on to a friend. The dues and donations are our life blood. It allows us to maintain and preserve our pre-Civil War site and buildings. This is quite an expensive undertaking. We also preserve our archives and building furnishings, some dating back into the 1700s. Feel free to add a donation to your dues. We would be grateful for any amount.

Again, we are hopeful for being able to present a full slate of speakers' programs and Open House events in 2022. The pandemic presented challenges to us all, and we did cancel some programs over the past two years.

One event in 2021 was our Annual Fall Festival. It was a smashing success. We had splendid weather and a great crowd. A lot of smiling faces. Many guests I spoke with were attending for the first time and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. We owe so many people for the success of this event. You, the attendees, the crafters and vendors, and the many, many volunteers who worked hard to present this festival. Thanks to all, as we take a breath before planning next year's festival.

~

For quite some time, we've listed our upcoming events on our Facebook page. It is also a source for images and local history blurbs. New this year is our Website. The address is listed on the top of this newsletter. In addition to the calendar of events (yet to be determined for 2022), there is a history of the three buildings, some old Hilltown photographs, previous newsletters, and a listing of interesting things to do in our township as well as some places to eat. We receive many questions about old Hilltown. Some we can answer, some we can't. We will be posting some of these questions on the webpage, asking for your help. We then invite viewers to respond to our email address. We can publish your thoughts. Thanks go out to those who made this possible.

~

Recently, we have opened our buildings to groups for meetings, gatherings, Quester events and reunions. It's a perfect setting in the Spring, Summer or Fall. Contact us if you might be interested. Tours can also be arranged.

**A great number of people helped make our
2021 Fall Festival a success. Thank you!!
Apologies to anyone we missed**

Deerwood Alpacas
Harleysville Bank
Plasterer, Inc
Great American Popcorn Works
Bucks County Biscotti
Frederick's Flowers
Auto Plus
Asher's Candy
Pino's Pizza
Home Depot
Master Craft Kitchen & Bath
Franconia Café & Market
Quakertown National Bank
Callowhill Farm Alpacas
Washington House
Sapori Restaurant
Café at the Mill
Landis Market
Advanced Auto Parts
Jean Martin
CJE Leather Craft
Johnny Roc's Pizza Plus
Chris Markley Photography
Philadelphia Glider Council
Bishop Estates Winery
Mary Shelly
Hannum's Harley Davidson
Breakfast Tea Time
Giant Supermarket
Sundae School Ice Cream
Hilltown Nursery
Lisa Labb
Blooming Glen Pork & Catering
Energy Station
Parma John's

Factory Antiques
Main Street Salon
Brenda Bolsker
Free Will Brewing
Jim & Elaine Garis
Broad Street Pizza
Queens Health Center
Mark McCoy
Bill Stahl
Pearl Buck International
Pasqualina's Italian Deli
Jane Ramsey
Davis Feed
Alicia & Roy Snyder
Reese's Garage
Perkasie Hair Cattery
Dublin Agway
CoCo Nails
Bonny Forbes
Elsie & Scott Tagg
Donna King
Dan Paci
Bob Chope
Beverly Slifer
Angler's Pro Shop
Bruce Markley
Boy Scout Troop 67
Local's Pizza
Petrona Charles
A & N Diner
Chiaro's Pizza
Energy Station
J T Bankers
Jeanne Scanlon
Carol and Ivan Jurin
Boy Scout Troop 67
Ludlow Farms

Christmas

One of the most well-known Christmas songs is “Silent Night”. It was written as a poem in 1816 by Joseph Mohr, a young Austrian priest, shortly after the end of the Napoleonic Wars involving dozens of countries. Joseph was on a walk and looked out over a quiet snow-covered town.

On Christmas Eve, 1818, Joseph Mohr performed his song while playing his guitar. He was accompanied by Franz Gruber, who wrote the melody. At the time, it was known as “Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht”. An organ builder and repair man working at the church took a copy of the six-verse song to his home village. From there, it was picked up by traveling folk-singers who performed in northern Europe. In 1834, the Strasser family performed it for the King of Prussia. In 1839, the Rainer family of singers debuted the carol outside Trinity Church in New York.

In time, the composition evolved, and was translated into over 300 languages. Until 1859, it was sung in German, until an assistant minister at Trinity Church translated a version into English. During a World War I truce on Christmas Eve 1914, the song was sung simultaneously by French, German, English and Scottish troops in a battlefield of Flanders, Belgium. This after they put down their weapons and removed their helmets. Sadly, this was followed by another four years.

Philadelphia’s Carnival of Horns

In a large contrast to the Silent Night saga, we can explore the outrageous custom in the city of Philadelphia known as the Carnival of Horns. There was nothing silent about this.

It occurred on Christmas Eve during the mid-1800s. Boys and young men took to the streets with as many noise-makers as they could. The local newspapers described this behavior in great detail. Beginning in the 1830s, the instruments of the unpleasant disturbances were tin horns, pots and pans, drums, shouting, whistles, and horse fiddles. And what in the world is a horse fiddle? After a quantity of ground resin was poured on a wooden crate, another piece of wood was drawn across it, making what has been described as Satanic noise.

In addition to these noise-makers, it was reported that many of these revelers dressed in outrageous costumes and masks. Clowns, Indians and men dressed as women were common. Pity the helpless women walking on the streets during this night. These young men were known to pull the women’s bonnets down, crinolines were smashed, and an occasional kiss. All this on Christmas Eve!

This custom was first outlawed by Mayor Fox on December 23, 1868. He outlawed masquerading and tin horn blowing. On Christmas Eve, 1868, police made 185 arrests for the offenders. This was effective for some years, but this behavior was revived and continued until 1881, when Mayor King prohibited the blowing of horns on city streets. The streets became silent for good.



Information about the Carnival of Horns came from the book "Christmas in Pennsylvania", written by Alfred Shoemaker in 1959.



Happy Birthday Hilltown?

I was preparing to write a birthday column for Hilltown Township, as most common knowledge places it's official beginning in 1722, a quite impressive birthday of 300 years. Published by the Bucks County Historical Society in 1942, and written by George MacReynolds, the book of Place Names in Bucks County explains the origins of Hilltown Township as follows - In 1722, 13 local citizens of this area, wrote to Justice Jeramiah Langhorn asking for a road petition from this area to a local mill. In this road petition, the letter writers asked that this township be named Aberystwith, unless it be of offense to Justice Langhorn. The 13 letter writers were well known as citizens in this area, having last names of Thomas, Griffith, Evans, Lewis, Kelly etc.

It was thought that this letter was the beginning of the township we know now as Hilltown, although the name Aberystwith remains a mystery.

But wait! Going through some of our old records, a facsimile document appeared. It is a survey for lands labeled in "Hillton Township", Bucks County, a square lot containing 500 acres. A map of the survey indicate that this property joins lands of George Baol on one side (Southeast) and Charles Brogdon and Charles Baldwin on a second side (Northeast). The other two sides are identified as vacant land.

This survey began at a white oak, going next to a hickory tree, then to another hickory tree, then finally to a black oak tree. Written within the 500 acre parcel is Jeramiah Langhorn's name.

This document shows a 500 acre plot, yet the document reads that this survey is for a 1,000 plot of a 3,000 acre plot. Yes, somewhat confusing, This document indicates that the surveyor, John Cutler performed the survey on orders of Jeramiah Langhorn. It was dated **March 12, 1717**, five years earlier than the 1722 presumed origin!

In the book "The History of Bucks County, Pennsylvania....", written in the 1880s by William Watts Hart Davis, he identifies one of the original Hilltown landowners as Israel Pemberton, in October, 1716. His two thousand acre tract was awarded to him by the Commissioners of Property.

So, I am sorry Hilltown, your 300th birthday was missed, I'll try to do a better job for your 400th.



There has been a lot of new interest in the Doan Gang of Bucks County lately. These were the Loyalists who robbed tax collectors during the Revolutionary War. They were also considered horse thieves, murderers and bandits during and after the war. To some, they supported the British, to others, they were nothing better than common thugs. The Bucks County Historical Group produced some very nice presentations on the Doans. There is talk of a mini-series being filmed for television.

There is even a Doan Distillery in Quakertown! I want to just touch on the subject how it relates specifically to Hilltown Township. At some point in 1783, the gang ended up at a tavern in Dublin, owned by a Colonel Robinson. The gang beat Robinson and his wife, demanding the location of any hidden money. A neighbor, Patrick Mechlin, heard the commotion, raced over and shouted warnings to the gang.

(Patrick Mechlin was well known in the area for his loud voice) The Doans thought other neighbors were coming, so they left the tavern. When Mechlin entered, he found Joseph Doane Jr. in the cellar, still looking for money. Alarmed and chased out by Mechlin, Doan hopped on his horse, while Mechlin gave chase on his. The chase extended down Hilltown Pike, where Mechlin took a shot at Doan, and hit him in his face. Doane kept riding until he fell off his horse and was captured in Montgomeryville then shipped to Philadelphia. Mechlin found several of Doan's teeth on the road, and kept them for souvenirs. I can't find in any version that said he actually rode down Hilltown Pike, however it is my opinion that this is the way to get from the tavern in Dublin down to Montgomeryville.

Doan was jailed, but broke out of the prison in Newtown. He moved to New Jersey, where he changed his name to Grover, teaching in a school for a year or so, before disappearing for good.

My apologies to the real experts on the Doan gang, who have access to a greater wealth of true information than I. Many versions and anecdotes exist about the Doans and I was in a position to pick and choose which set of facts to share with you!

Chestnut Ridge School

On Callowhill Street, near Broad Street in Hilltown rests a stone residence, once known as the Chestnut Ridge School. It was one of the many one-room schoolhouses in the area. It was described in detail in 1915. How did this differ from your schools? As other one-room schools in Hilltown, it housed grades one through eight. Melvin Rickert described this school, he was the son of Emma and Pete Rickert. Emma attended this same school starting in 1896 and not much had changed since then. This is what Melvin saw on his first day of school.

Inside were 6 rows of desks. The teacher directed him to a row on the right, where the desks were smaller, and just the right size for a first grader. In each desktop was a groove for pencils and a well for a container of ink. The top of each desk was hinged to cover a space for papers and books. The enrollment for this school was usually between 25 and 40, depending on the number of children living on the 21 farms served by this school.

Every day, the teacher sent two children to a neighbor's house for water. They took a pole and a water bucket. After filling the bucket from a well, it hung on the pole with each student holding on to the two ends. Arriving back at the school, the water was poured into a crock with a spout at the bottom.

The building had a porch on the south side with a door in the middle. On the north end was an eight inch high platform on which stood the teachers desk.

A blackboard extended from wall to wall. Three large windows emitted light on the east and west side. The only other furniture was a table with a few chairs, a closet for supplies, a few shelves for books, and a large stove to burn wood and coal. On either side of the door at the rear of the building were hooks for “wraps”. There was a loft that could be reached by a trap door at the rear of the building as well as through a hinged door on the south wall, over the porch roof. On the two sides of the porch, the toilet rooms were constructed. The building also had a bell tower. The bell was rung to signal the beginning of the day and to call the students from recess and lunch periods. There was no electricity.

Grace Kramer was a student at the Gehman School in Hilltown in the late 1910s and early 1920s. She wrote a report on the schools of Hilltown Township in 1925. Her thoughts on the porch toilets at Chestnut Ridge are as follows: “This school is the smallest in number of pupils, and is the only one that has no sense of manner, because it has the toilets on the porch, instead of out back of the school. It looks as if the pupils are very lazy. I think it would be better if they had the toilets in back of the school or somewhere else instead of on the porch”. So says 13 year old Grace!

~

The Society’s Strassburger Farmstead and Homestead is commemorated with a marker for being listed on the **National Register of Historic Places** (NRHP). The NRHP marker is no longer presented as part of being listed. The marker and its post would have been a

major expense for the Society. Fortunately, we learned that the William G. Pomeroy Foundation awards markers to NRHP sites at no cost. After surviving Acute Myeloid Leukemia Mr. Pomeroy decided to help others, first by supporting the expansion of the bone marrow donor registry so anyone, from any ethnic background, could find a matched donor. He then initiated grant programs so that communities can celebrate their history through signage such as NRHP markers. The Pomeroy Foundation also awards markers for historical sites related to: National Women’s Suffrage, Legends and Lore, Historic Transportation Canals, and several state historical sites. Our Society was gifted the marker and post by providing proof of being listed on the NRHP and our financial need. The marker has been erected in front of the Homestead at the intersection of Route 309 and Keystone Drive. The Society greatly appreciates this donation by the Pomeroy Foundation.

The Society plans to have a formal dedication of the marker during 2022 with the specific date still to be determined. The ceremony will be announced on our website hilltownhistory.org and in the newsletter.



The early history of Hilltown township goes hand-in-hand with the early history of the Hilltown Baptist Church. The initial Baptist Church building was built in 1737 by Elder William Thomas. He emigrated to America with his wife and son in 1712, and ended up purchasing land in Hilltown from Jeremiah Langhorne in 1718. He built the “Lower” church by hand, consisting of logs. It was on land he owned. The site is on Chalfont Road, a few hundred yards below Hilltown Pike. Although a church building no longer exists at this site, the cemetery does.

We are in possession of typed transcriptions of the business meetings and occurrences of the church from 1782 to 1885. This tedious project was performed in 1978 by Vivian Taylor. I know first-hand how difficult it is, trying to read original documents two hundred years old. She did a tremendous job, allowing us to easily read the business of a local religious society dating back to just after the Revolutionary War. In time, we will share some of the business of the church and community.

Church collections in recent history involved passing a collection plate up and down the pews. Not always however. In a Hilltown Baptist Church Deacons meeting in January 1808, it was requested that Phillip Miller make and provide long poles and bags for the purpose of collecting the offering. Apparently, a Deacon would hold the long pole out to the church attendees to collect the donation. At the time, services were held alternatively in the Upper and Lower churches. The Upper Church exists today, not surprisingly on Upper Church Road, while the lower Church is the one that is gone. Mr.

Miller was directed to supply 3 poles and bags for the upper church and 2 poles and bags for the lower church.

Church Baptism involved total immersion in a local waterway. Many of these took place at a mill or a ford across the creek. Here is one entry:

“On January 19, 1823, Jonathon Jones, Sarah Troxal, Mary Jones, and Rebekah Griffith met near the water at Mr. Steers, where they were immersed into the liquid grave (the ice having been removed for that purpose) and the same day. They were then received into the fellowship of the church.”

I think if that was me, I would have waited until July!

Our next newsletter will be published in February. We certainly hope to provide you with a full calendar of events for the upcoming year. We now have a backlog of potential speakers’ programs and we are looking forward to yet another fall Festival in September.

Don’t forget to check in with our webpage for announcements or just some interesting facts or photos that we come up with. Also, we post regularly on our Facebook page. Tune in!

Hilltownhistory.org

Please consider the upcoming dues and possible donations request. We receive no Federal, State or Local government funding, so we work very hard trying to keep us with these buildings. As you know, we are a purely volunteer organization.

We close this newsletter with hopes for the upcoming year. Enjoy this Holiday season.



Historical Society of Hilltown Township
PO Box 79
Hilltown PA. 18927

Hilltownhistory1@yahoo.com

Hilltownhistory.org

Christmas Trees



One of the most beloved Christmas traditions, especially in America, is decorating a Christmas tree. Most people think it's been around, well, forever. But the Christmas tree is actually a pretty recent holiday tradition. German immigrants brought the tradition here in the mid-18th century, yet 100 years later it still hadn't really caught on. In fact, it was downright controversial. The New York Times wrote an editorial against the practice in the 1880s, and when Teddy Roosevelt was president in the early 1900s, he railed against cutting down trees for Christmas, saying it was a waste of good timber. The tradition, of course, took hold regardless.

Credit to Melanie Radzicki McManus