

Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter



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April 2023

At times within some past newsletters, I've mentioned names of some locals for one reason or another. You may recall a brief article about the small graduating class of 1928 Hilltown High School. It contained merely three students, 2 men and a woman. Shortly thereafter, a member contacted me to inform that the two men were his ancestors, one a surgeon affiliated with Grandview Hospital. Also, recently, I was contacted by another member who informed me that the sole female graduate in 1929 was her mother. She enjoyed reading her mother's yearbook and taking a number of photographs to share with her family.

Do you recall a recent article in the February newsletter written by a Hilltown High School student about "Too Many Dates"? It was published in the 1952 Key publication of the Hilltown students. Well, I recently received a phone call from yet another member who told me that her sister wrote that. The sisters graduated from Hilltown High School in 1951 and 1952. She couldn't wait to share the newsletter with her!

These local responses inspire me to keep telling these tales of Hilltown.

Check out the information contained within this newsletter about our next programs, one each in April and May. Jay Searock will talk about law enforcement in the 1700s. Did you know there was a witch trial in Philadelphia in 1693 which William Penn was the presiding judge? Mark Cuba will talk about the science of dendrochronology (tree ring dating). We have a number of logs being stored in our barn, which we believe date from around 1737. During the porch renovation last year, we uncovered a deteriorated log joist that may date back to the original construction of the homestead. And next, on September 16th will be our annual Fall Festival!

Thank You!

Hilltown Boy Scout Troop 67 spent time at the Strassburger Farmstead doing some Spring cleanup, painting, and other chores. They seemed to have unlimited energy!

One of the projects this year is a new roof on our museum entrance. ABC Supply, America's largest roofing supply company, provided us with the shingles needed to get this job done. Thank you, ABC!

Hilltown's Young Family

John Young of Hilltown, died on April 14, 1815, at the age of 55. He had married Mary Mathias in New Britain in 1795. He left behind his wife Mary and six children, three of them were under the age of 14. John died intestate, or leaving no will. It seemed as if the property owned by John Young was seized and sold to help defray the cost of raising his six children, with Mary allowed to live there rent free for two years.

With no way to support her young family, she needed help. The following information comes from the original documents in our archives.

In came the brothers John and Joseph Mathias, well known and respected men in Hilltown. Joseph was the Reverend of the Hilltown Baptist Church. In November 1815, they petitioned the Bucks County Orphans Court to be named guardians of the three children under the age of 14, namely, George, Hervey and Nathan. The three older boys were Mathias, Charles and John. The Mathias Brothers were tasked to care for their "person and property".

Isaac Hines was appointed co-administrator of the estate, along with Mary, the widow. The balance of the estate was \$1,553.41. Mary was given one third, or \$517.81. This left a remainder of \$1,035.63 for the six children, or \$172.60 each. This amount was given to the older three boys, while the amount for the youngest three were given to John and Joseph Mathias, guardians. Apparently, there was a cash shortfall, so the widow had to pay the guardians \$160.53. This situation was common for the Mathias brothers, and they acted as guardians for many minor children in Hilltown in the early 1800s.

Mary asked to keep all six children for an additional three years, so she was given three years interest on the legacy amounts.

In May of 1820, Charles reached the age of 21. He received his "legacy" of \$160 principal and \$37.30 interest totaling \$197.30.

In August of 1825, George reached the age of 21. He received his "legacy" of \$150 principal and an unstated amount of interest.

In February of 1829, Hervey reached the age of 21. He received his "legacy" of \$135 principal and an unstated amount of interest.

As you can see, in time, the legacy was reduced by deductions by their guardians.

What happened to the Young family after that?

John Young, the father is buried in the Lower Hilltown Baptist Cemetery. Hervey died in 1845 at the age of 37 and is buried next to his father. Mary moved to Montgomeryville, where her sons operated a store.

This type of arrangement was not uncommon for the Mathias brothers. In 1808, an agreement was signed between John Mathias and Joseph Mathias, guardians, and a widow (Margaret Mathias). She was allowed to live in her house rent free for two years in exchange for the Mathias brothers clothing, schooling, and boarding her children.

Also, early in the 19th century, John Mathias had an agreement with the Philadelphia Orphans Court to care for a boy, feeding him, clothing him and educating him in the "mysteries of agriculture", until he reached his majority. He was paid for this task.

The 1777 Occupation of Philadelphia

In a prior newsletter, I wrote about the travels of the Liberty Bell prior to the British Army's arrival in Philadelphia, which was our new nation's Capital. This story is about that occupation. In 1777, after General Washington's loss in the Battle of Brandywine, General Howe's British army, consisting of 15,000 soldiers set their sights on nearby Philadelphia. An exodus of patriots began to the countryside. The Continental Congress itself headed west to Lancaster, and then York. In addition to the people, a concern existed that the British would confiscate church bells to melt down into cannonballs and shot. An effort began to rescue these bells, including the large one at the State House. 11 bells were taken, including the 2,000-pound bell at the State House. We call that the Liberty Bell. These bells were lowered and packed in manure and hay in Conestoga Wagons. On September 12, a train of 700 wagons headed north. It was guarded by 200 soldiers. No doubt a great many evacuating Philadelphia citizens and their possessions made up this group.

What sort of city did these people leave behind? Most of the remaining population consisted of Quakers, loyalists, and the poor. Shortly after the exodus, the British Army appeared, putting on a quite a show. The first to enter the city was the calvary, followed by the infantry, led by General Cornwallis. A band accompanied Cornwallis, playing the tune "God save Great George our King". More soldiers appeared, followed by the artillery, then the Hessian grenadiers. Another band played, just not as precise as the first one. Bringing up the rear were the wagons, Hessian women, horses, cows, goats, and mules. Loyalists lined the streets and cheered the parade. Quite an impressive

entrance into the now occupied capitol of the new United States of America.

One of the first problems was were to quarter these 15,000 troops. Initially, requests were made at fine houses by officers. As time went on, these requests became much less polite. A problem existed that an English officer typically traveled with some sort of entourage. Servants, staff, and animals required space. Many ended up sleeping in taverns or aboard ships. New laws were put into effect. Shortages of rugs and blankets existed and were not to be sold unless with permission of the Commander-in-Chief. Attempts were made to control quality and the sale of liquor. Residents' carts and wagons were used by the military. Homes and businesses were ransacked or destroyed. Firewood was especially rare, with the British preparing for the winter. On the outskirts of the city, most wood fences were taken to be used as firewood. Old wood buildings were destroyed. An eight o'clock curfew was enacted for people out without a lantern. Upon the arrival of the British, many of the wounded were placed in the Pennsylvania Hospital, to the chagrin of a Dr. Parker. Hospitalized Philadelphians were placed elsewhere. Sadly, wounded American Soldiers in the Walnut Street jail were starved, beaten, and were provided with no heat.

While Washington's Army suffered and starved in Valley Forge, the British Army ate, drank, and partied in Philadelphia. There were few tasks for them. With any group of 15,000, behavior was varied. One Philadelphia woman complained that a British officer carried away her servant girl. Ads were placed in the newspaper, officers looking for live-in women, extravagant wages, no character needed. Horses, wagons,

and livestock went missing. Gambling was popular, especially cockfighting. Horse racing and cricket were some of the sporting events. Soldiers also raced on a three-mile course, in full uniform and equipment. Amateur theater took place, using soldiers as well as citizens of the city. The Southwark Theater on South St, near Fourth once sold 660 tickets for one of these shows. The proceeds from these shows went to local charitable purposes.

Violence between the army and the citizens was minimal. Many of the Whig (Patriot) families left the city. The population during this occupation was primarily Tories (Loyalists to the Crown). Some aspects of life stayed the same. One woman noted that she paid her yearly premium to renew the insurance on her house. Education, music lessons, bookstores and a library kept busy.

During the occupation, great attempts were made to recruit the locals into the British Army and Navy. At the same time, a heavy influx of deserters from Washington's troops in Valley Forge was reported. British Army recruiting posters offered a \$5 bounty plus arms and clothing for an enlistment of two years or the duration of the rebellion. Offers were given of 50 acres of land in the county of their choice. Officers received more. It was unfortunate for those who accepted this deal, when the British finally surrendered several years later. There was no promised land to give.

In October 1777, General Washington issued a proclamation, part of which reads "Whereas, sundry soldiers, belonging to the armies of the said states, having deserted from the same: These are to make known to all those, who have so offended, and who shall return to their respective corps, or surrender themselves to the officers appointed to receive recruits and deserters in their several states, or to any continental

commissioned officer, before the first day of January next, that they will receive a full and free pardon". Awkward phrasing, but these are Washington's own words.

By June of 1778, the British army, along with 3,000 loyalists left Philadelphia and headed for New York City, now lead by General Henry Clinton. Their bigger concern at this point was the defense of New York. The city was finally abandoned on June 18 and George Washington sent Major General Benedict Arnold, who had not yet committed his act of treason, into the city to become its temporary military commander. Congress returned shortly after. Life slowly began again, never the same.



In an attempt to keep our museum fresh, two new displays have been set up. One shows some John Falter Saturday Evening Post covers, all of Hilltown scenes. Another display upstairs shares some of our early archives, dating as far back as the mid-1700s. One piece is a breakdown of work performed by Silas Hough for Benjamin McVaugh in 1822 and 1823. McVaugh died in 1823 and is buried in the abandoned cemetery on Green St. Some of the work listed is 20 days of quarrying at 62 ½ cents per day. **Digging rocks at 62 ½ cents per day!** Hough also took 9 ¼ days to dig a well for \$9.25. His list of chores seems to have been presented to an executor of Benjamin McVaugh shortly after his death. We hope Silas Hough was paid for his labors!



From the Desk of the Bucks County Cultural Society:

Over 135 years ago, Hilltown was hit with the Blizzard of 1888. Far from a localized weather event, it impacted many residents and travelers along the East Coast. Starting on March 11th and ending on March 14th of 1888, the Blizzard began with rain that eventually changed over to snow. Some dubbed it, “The Great White Hurricane.”

But the Blizzard of 1888 was not just an inconvenience; it was downright deadly, as the severe storm is estimated to have claimed the lives of hundreds of people. Even New York’s Senator, Roscoe Conkling, a colleague of Pennsylvania’s powerful Senator Matthew Quay, wasn’t spared the storm’s wrath—he fell into a snowbank and later died of pneumonia.

Having brought virtually all business to a halt in New York City, the Blizzard demonstrated nature’s ability to paralyze a modern metropolis, while simultaneously impairing travel and communications across numerous states. It disabled telegraph, telephone, and power lines that were above ground and forced many people to shelter in place. Among other effects, this prompted changes in our country’s communication infrastructure. It also helped impress upon the citizens of New York a need for developing a reliable and publicly accessible mode of underground transportation—one within the city (as well as the surrounding area) that would not be as susceptible to disruption from inclement weather.

With the passage of time, the Blizzard of 1888 gradually faded into the annals of distant history. But it was not destined to stay relegated to dusty books, newspapers, and photographs. For instance, in 1954 the Blizzard found its way onto Topps Scoop trading card number 48. Lucky card owners

could scratch off two black strips, revealing an artist’s colorful rendition of the storm as it swept through New York. Further into 20th century, accounts can be found of gatherings held by some of the survivors of the Blizzard into the 1960’s.



The blizzard of ‘88

March 22, 1888, article appearing in The Central News of Perkasio commented on the impact of the Blizzard on rural Hilltown. It reported, “in our locality no lives have been lost.” Still, a chilling description of the storm is gleaned from the following two lines of that same article:

“The razor-edged blasts swept these small particles of snow into one’s face like fine shot from a gun. It beat the breath back into the nostrils, benumbed the hands and feet and bewildered the head.”

In 1915 Charles W. Baum acquired The Central News from Charles M. Meredith. As publisher, Charles W. Baum’s first trip to the office was during a blizzard. Mr. Baum described the blizzard as, “approximating the time-honored Blizzard of 1888.” He wrote about this in a March 2, 1939 article that appeared in The Central News.

While the exact location of the picture that accompanies my article remains unidentified, it gives an idea of the severity of the Blizzard

of 1888. The caption on the mat that frames the photo reads the following: SCENE OF THE GREAT SNOW STORM, MARCH 12, 1888. Acquired in Buckingham and now part of our archives, this image likely depicts a location in Bucks County.

Jonathan Neuber is the President of the Bucks County Cultural Society, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the history of Bucks County. He can be reached at: jneuber@buckscountyculturalsociety.org

The Civic Park

Behind the Crossroads Tavern is a very nice 14-acre park. The almost ½ mile walking track is always in use when the weather is tolerable. A baseball field, soccer field, basketball courts and children's playground are all contained within the track. Several small grandstands exist for watching or just resting. A pavilion and picnic tables under roof provide a place to sit or eat, escaping a hot sun. This is the Hilltown Civic Association Park along Route 152.

On September 7, 1949, the Hilltown Township Civic Association took title to that 14-acre parcel with the intent of turning it into a park that could be enjoyed by all residents of Hilltown. Years prior, this parcel contained a ½ mile horse racetrack that attracted large crowds in season. It was purchased for the sum of \$4,000 from Mr. and Mrs. Mickelitis. Apparently, Mr. Mickelitis also owned the tavern at the time. On a map that accompanied the deed transfer in 1949, Route 152 was labeled "Pleasant Road". We now call the road Barringer Ave,

or just Route 152. At a time, the tavern was known as the Mt. Pleasant Hotel, then the Hilltown Hotel in the small village of Mt. Pleasant.

How was this amount of money raised? The organization ran shows, sold cookbooks, had a ham dinner, rummage sales, collected dues, held a dance and a cake sale, a pet show and other events. In 1954, a dog show brought in 368 dogs.

By the mid-1950s, a well had been installed and the pump was working. New quoit courts were installed, and an ice-skating rink was being planned. After the rink was laid out and filled with water, it was realized that due to the drainage of the area, the water ran off.

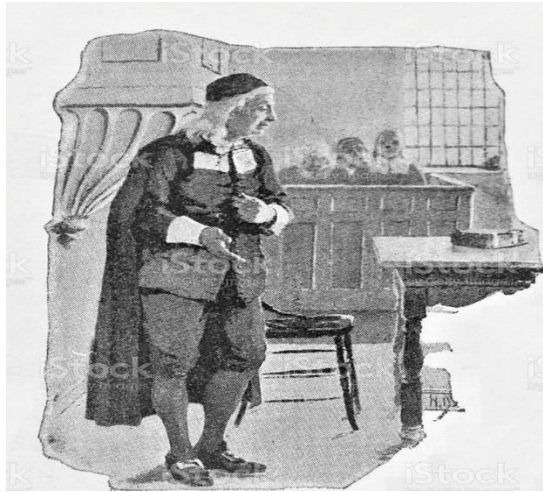
For the past 32 years, Hilltown Township has owned the park, with many improvements since then. Truly a remarkable effort. Over 70 years later, the people of Hilltown are still enjoying that park that the Hilltown Township Civic Association had the foresight to plan and worked so hard to create. Credit for this park goes out to the Civic Association as well as Hilltown Township government.

Old Newspapers

Reading content from old local newspapers, even in the 20th century, the gossip contained within them is eye-opening. The reader was informed of who is suffering from what malady or injury. Who is visiting or had visitors. Who is having their house painted. Who had a baby and how big was he or she. Who was getting married and who was getting divorced. What kind of car did someone buy. Maybe today that kind of information sharing might be an invasion of privacy? But I bet this information was the most popular section of the newspaper for many.

Hilltown Historical Society Upcoming Events Spring 2023

Wednesday, April 26 @ 7:00 PM



Jay Searock will speak of law enforcement from Provincial Pennsylvania and will give some examples of local cases from the 1700s. Speakers' Program at the Hilltown Township Building, 7:00 PM **Hilltown Township Building – 17 W. Creamery Rd & Rte. 152, Silverdale**

Sunday, May 7: Strassburger Open House and Speakers' Program



Michael Cuba, founder of Knobb Hill Joinery, will explore the science of dendrochronology (tree ring dating) and its use in dating and interpreting historic structures. While this science can offer conclusive felling dates for timbers used in building, interpretation and context for this information relies on both documentary and physical evidence and will underscore the importance of documentation in preservation work.

Open House at the **Strassburger Homestead 1:30-4:00 PM. Speakers' Program at 2:00**
407 Keystone Dr & Bethlehem Pike, Sellersville
All events are free! Donations happily accepted.



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Keeping a Garden Journal

It's planting time. Do you remember what you did and when you did it last year? The year before? What were those tomatoes that did so well? Or so poorly? How many plants did I put in last year? Were they too crowded? When did I start the seeds inside? What about mulching or fertilizing? Such a multitude of questions. A surefire way to keep this information is the use of a garden journal. This information can be kept in a fancy notebook, or a plain tablet or wall calendar. It will pay dividends year after year!

From Jean Skeath Stahl's "The Garden Log"