



Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

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April 2021

Hello! It seems that lately, every newsletter begins with a Covid-19 update. Our next scheduled speakers' program will **NOT** be held at the township building, but will now be a Zoom presentation. It is set to occur on April 28, Wednesday evening at 7:00 PM. The speaker will be Robin Robinson, the Bucks County Recorder of Deeds. She will discuss the discovery of the deteriorating Deed Books dating back to 1684. A major undertaking is underway, restoring these historic treasures. Robin will tell us how these books can be used for genealogical studies and talk about some of Bucks County's historical buildings. She will then entertain us with some fun stories of some celebrities who live in Bucks County.

To view the Zoom program, please contact Nicole Douglas at **NMDOUGLAS@Buckscounty.org** by Monday, April 26th. She will then respond with the Zoom information. If you haven't viewed a Zoom program yet, now is the time! It really is quite easy. Email the Historical Society if you have any questions.

On May 2, our program will be at the Strassburger Farmstead. Enjoy the open house, visit the museum, and listen to Jason

Searock tell us of the history of our state. The Walking Purchase will be explained, as well as the war with the Connecticut trespassers! Jason is a superb story-teller.

Yet another Open House speakers' program will occur on Sunday, June 13. Mike Jesberger will fill us in on the life of a Civil War Soldier. Visuals and artifacts will be on hand. Again, the buildings will be open.

Keeping with his Civil War themed program, one of the stories contained within this newsletter is a transcription of my great-great grandfather's letter home from camp in Virginia in 1863. He was a soldier in the 132nd Pennsylvania Volunteers.

You may have noticed a bit of a change in the format of this newsletter. It has doubled in size, so the pressure is on us to fill these eight pages with content. We think we are up to the task.

Bricklayer Wanted

During a recent winter storm, about a half dozen bricks from a chimney on our museum fell to the ground. Does anyone know a mason or bricklayer who could perform the repairs needed? Please email us at **Hilltownhistory1@yahoo.com**, or call Bill at 215-822-8256.

The Hucksters of Silverdale

Who remembers the hucksters? I grew up hearing about my Great Uncle Lloyd Kramer's huckster route in Philadelphia. I was always intrigued by this, especially because our surname, Kramer, translates to "peddler" in German. Recently, I contacted his daughters to learn more about it. According to Uncle Lloyd's memoirs, he started huckstering in 1940 at age 22 after working as a deliveryman for local merchants. He purchased the huckster route from a chicken farmer for \$500 and bought a used truck for \$250 to get started. He bought a new 1942 Ford panel truck a week before war was declared on December 6th, 1941. After several years, he took on his father-in-law's route as well, running routes up to four days a week. Eventually, his brothers Clarence and Paul and brother-in-law David Jones took on routes as well. Together, they expanded their routes, gaining new customers by word of mouth and trading customers to make the most efficient routes in the greater Philadelphia and Norristown areas.

The routine of the Silverdale huckster was hard.

- On Monday and Tuesday, they collected and processed their wares, which may have varied by individual huckster and by season. Uncle Lloyd's business included live chickens and eggs from the local farmer, butter from the Ottsville creamery, meats from C.D.Moyer's or Fehl's, produce from Cassel's or local farmers, and even ice cream in the latter years delivered by Lehigh Valley Dairy. The family made some contributions as well.

- Around the holidays, Lloyd's wife Tina would bake 9 fruitcakes at a time, selling up to 300 fruitcakes in one season. His daughters raised parsley and his nephew grew zucchini's which he sold to Uncle Lloyd for 15 cents. Lloyd's nephew Clyde raised corn and sold it to Lloyd to raise money while he was in college. My mother remembers helping to candle the eggs to ensure their quality.
- The routes were Wednesday through Friday and the days were often long, picking up meats at C.D.Moyer's before breakfast, leaving for Philadelphia by 6:30am and arriving home around 6:00pm to reload the truck. Sometimes Uncle Lloyd took his daughters or a nephew along in the summer to help out. He would carry a basket of items to the door, knowing what each customer usually bought, meeting with the housewife or sometimes interacting with the hired help, and making sales from the basket and occasionally retrieving other items from the truck. Sometimes he was invited in by the customer for a cup of coffee. Other times there was just a note on the door indicating what was needed, which Lloyd would leave on the step or inside an unlocked door.

Here are some additional recollections of Uncle Lloyd's huckster business from his daughters, nieces and nephews.

- Marlene and Doris, Uncle Lloyd's daughters, fondly remembered the good meals they had when high-quality meats like roasts and sirloin steaks didn't sell. They would often



invite friends or relatives to share in these special meals - a real treat in those days.

- They also recalled the stress when a new truck was needed because they had to keep the old truck going while waiting for the configuration and lettering on the new truck.
- Doris remembers going to school and being asked her father's occupation. She only knew it as "huckster" but also knew that historically, the term had a negative connotation. Her father told her she could say he was a Commission Merchant.
- Marlene remembers going along with her dad on the route in the winter. They ended up stuck in a snowstorm, roads were blocked and they got home very late.
- Barry Hinkle, Lloyd's nephew and my uncle, remembers accompanying his uncle on the huckster route and his amused reaction to one customer's note which started out "Dear Farmer".

Even though the food they sold was "farm fresh", these hucksters were not farmers. He also remembers a chicken plucking machine in the barn, and seeing it used on at least one occasion when Lloyd and his brothers would buy live chickens, which they then slaughtered, plucked and prepared for sale.

- Janice Kramer, his niece and my mother, remembers times when the customers, who bought their children baby chicks, ducklings and bunnies for Easter, would send the now unwanted larger animals home with Uncle Lloyd who would donate them to her family's backyard farm.

As you can imagine, refrigeration was very important for these day-long trips from Silverdale to Philadelphia. Initially, the iceman would deliver 2'x2'x2' blocks of ice to Uncle Lloyd's house. Some would go in the truck "freezer" and the remainder would go in the concrete-lined room in the barn where meat and produce were stored. Over time, the barn and the truck were outfitted with electrical refrigeration.

You might think of Uncle Lloyd as an independent, enterprising individual. And in fact, he was. He had the perfect outgoing personality for the job. But the hucksters of the area, also referred to as "butter and egg men" or "commission men" were organized under the name Butter and Eggman's Association. According to Uncle Lloyd's notes, there were about 15 hucksters from Silverdale from 1940-1959 and other accounts indicate that there were upwards of 60 members in the Hilltown and Perkasio greater area. The association even offered the hucksters group rates health insurance. They

sometimes met at the R&S Diner for breakfast and at the Silverdale Fire House where the Hucksters' Dinner was hosted.

Uncle Lloyd continued his butter and egg business into the 1960's. The end of the hucksters was probably caused by the advent of supermarkets, making fresh produce more accessible to the city residents. In addition, the permitting process in Philadelphia became more complex and housewives, the primary huckster customers, began working outside the home in larger numbers.

I hope you enjoyed the article! If you'd like to share your memories about the Silverdale Hucksters, please email me at usavaged@gmail.com. I'd be happy to compile a sequel including a larger perspective.



Lloyd Kramer

Contributed by Donna (Kramer) Usavage in 2021 with input from family members Marlene (Kramer) Fidler, Doris (Kramer) Bossert, Barry Hinkle and Janice (Hinkle) Kramer.

Civil War Letter 1862

We are scheduled to have a speaker on the Civil War in June. On this theme, I am adding this piece to our newsletter.

My great-great grandfather Joshua Butler wrote the following letter from Falmouth, Virginia, the Union Army winter camp during the Civil War. He signed up for a nine-month enlistment in August 1862 with the 132nd Pennsylvania Volunteers. He was discharged right before his unit fought at Gettysburg in July 1863. Although he missed that major battle, he took part in Antietam, only 1 month after his enlistment. He also fought at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. The bold italicized items are my comments.

Va. Jan 27/'63

near Falmouth

Dear Sister,

I take this chance in informing you that I am well at present & hope these few lines will find you & your family in the same state of health, we came very near having a heavy Battle last week, but it commenced raining while the army was on the move & rained 3 days & made the roads so bad that the Artillery, Ammunition and Supply trains could not move one mile in one day.

This description above refers to the famous "Mud March" ordered by General Burnside. President Lincoln replaced Burnside with General Hooker on January 26 1863.

So you see the fight did not come off, the order of the move forward was countermanded & the troops all marched back to their old quarters the corps de army that we are in did not move from our quarters, but we were under marching orders for weeks & had things packed for the grand move, we were a glad party to be so lucky as not to strike tents in the storm & leave our

comfortable quarters behind, but I suppose as soon as the roads get in good condition again there will be another grand forward move, but in what direction I cannot say as Burnside has not yet informed me of his plan of attack but I hope it will not be on the Fredericksburg plan for our army was taken in a Slaughter Pen as some of the soldiers called it, but slaughter pen or not our men were shot down by the thousands for had you seen the field of battle and the dead & wounded laying there or you could have formed some idea of the horrors of war. Some had their legs shot off, some had their heads split open by pieces of shells striking them. Some their arms shot off, you could see a great many sad sights if you had been here, but thank God you are in a place of peace and I hope that it will not spread its wide desolation over our State as it has here in Dixie, for their part of the country is played out.

In the battle of Fredericksburg, the Union troops suffered 15,000 casualties, thus the name "Slaughter Pen"

I have not time to give you all the particulars of my experience in the art of war but if I am spared to return home again, I will tell you about the hardships and easyships of a soldier's life. For I have went through one or two courses and I feel better at this present time and I am getting fat as a hog. I hope that I will continue on so until the end of my time. I was very near a goner at Harpers Ferry, I was sick for one month but I would not go to the hospital when the regiment moved from there, I got the doctor's pass & fall to the rear and followed up the crowd. I did not see the regiment for sometimes 2 days as I was so weak, I could not keep up. When we left the Ferry, I weighed 120 lbs. & now I weigh 150 lbs. so you see I have gained a little. I ate the last of the sausage you sent me this morning for breakfast & it was so good that I wished I

had a few pounds more of the same sort but it will not do for Uncle Sam's boys to live too high or he could not do anything with them. I will offer no excuses for not writing sooner but I know you are a very good-natured sister & will excuse me without asking you to. I saw Brother William at Harpers Ferry, he had been sick but had got well again, he

Disease during the Civil War was the number one killer of soldiers. For every man killed in battle, two died from disease. Brother William is not in our family tree. We think he was a church member from home.

is driving an ambulance for carrying the dead and wounded soldiers from the field after a battle had been fought, it is a good job for he has no fighting to do. Give Johnty my best respects and tell him I would like to have him out here for the next 3 months & then our time will be nearly out for I think he could see a great deal in three months, but tell him not to be over-anxious to come out for he might get his feet muddy for the mud is only about 8 in deep on the pike. Tell Josy I will bring him a dead rebel home to play with. I saw some of them laying in the streets of Fredericksburg, dead enough. Give my best respects to all friends enquiring. I send my love to you but do not tell Johnty but it don't make much difference as him & I are good friends. Tell him to write to me & if you please, I wish you would answer this letter soon for I would like to hear from you all, no more at the present.

Best remain your Brother,
Corp Joshua K Butler
So, goodbye until my next,

Several days before Cpl Butler wrote this letter, he was promoted to Sgt. It may have taken a bit of time to let him know

Coincidentally, another of my great-great grandfathers, Frederick Hort fought with the 72nd Pennsylvania Volunteers. He also wintered at Falmouth VA at the same time, and fought in Fredericksburg. Could they have met? Fortunately for me, they both survived!

Bill Stahl



We wish to welcome a new life member, Paul Mattias, of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Paul has a big interest in Hilltown Township, as an ancestor of his emigrated from Wales, and ended up in Hilltown in 1722. He has enjoyed tracing his genealogy from Hilltown Township.

Eastertide

Easter is behind us, but as long as my Easter candy remains, it is still the Easter season. I wanted to share some unusual Easter customs from the book “Eastertide in Pennsylvania”, by Alfred Shoemaker. There was once a custom called picking eggs. On Easter, or shortly after, boys would gather on the street with their new hard boiled decorated Easter eggs. They would challenge each other to “pick”. The boys would test the strength of

the egg shells by striking the ends of the eggs against each other. The boy with the broken shell would have to give up his egg to the winner. This custom was considered an Easter sporting event, or quite possibly, a form of gambling. On Easter no less! It has been said that some boys played this game dishonestly with decorated wood or ceramic eggs, guaranteeing them a bagful of hard-boiled eggs. And there were egg shells everywhere.

The German influence in this area cannot be ignored. It provided us with the Easter Rabbit. Children were told that the Easter Rabbit would bring colored eggs if they had behaved. Sometimes the children would build nests for the Rabbit to deposit the eggs. It might be placed in a secret place, or if they lived in the country, somewhere outside. A hat would also suffice.

Another German custom is the Easter egg tree. In this case, the eggs were blown, then decorated, and hung from a tree. This tree would be inside, displayed on a stand, most likely on a table. During the year, children would collect a variety of bird’s eggs to decorate the tree. Hanging baskets, colored paper and banners were used. It seems like a colorful way to welcome Spring as well.

Historical Society of Hilltown Township

2021 Calendar of Events

For Information, call 267-614-9174

<u>Wednesday, April 28</u> <i>A Zoom Presentation</i>	“Deed Preservation Project of Bucks County” , by Robin Robinson, Recorder of Deeds. Robin will explain her Deed Preservation Project, finding those old books dating back to 1684 deteriorating in a warehouse, and the restoration of them in Vermont. She will tell stories about local historical properties that are in the deed books, followed by some fun stories about celebrities living in Bucks County. This will be a Zoom presentation. Please contact <u>NMDOUGLAS@Buckscounty.org</u> by April 26 for details and access. You can also contact our Society with questions about Zoom presentations.
<u>Sunday, May 2</u>	“Formation of Pennsylvania with Indians and the Walking Purchase” , by Jay Searock. Mr. Searock will discuss how the state of Pennsylvania came to be, as well as the famous “Walking Purchase”. Also, he will provide us with the story of the war with the Connecticut trespassers! Open House at the Strassburger Homestead 1:30-4:00 PM. Speakers’ Program at 2:00
<u>Sunday, June 13</u>	“Life of a Civil War Soldier and Life at Home” , by Mike Jesberger. Mike will share his knowledge of how Civil War soldiers lived – a very hard life. You will be treated to an interactive presentation of visuals and artifacts. Open House at the Strassburger Homestead 1:30-4:00 PM. Speakers’ Program at 2:00
<u>Saturday, September 18</u>	13th Annual Fall Festival & Open House . From 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM, Rain or Shine. At the Strassburger Homestead
<u>Wednesday, October 27</u>	“Nearly Forgotten Artists of Hilltown Township” , by Ivan Jurin. One of the best-known local artists was John Falter, who illustrated more than 100 magazine covers from 1940 to the early 1950s. A silent auction and raffle of original Saturday Evening Post issues with Falter covers will be held, benefitting the Historical Society of Hilltown Township. Speakers’ Program at the Hilltown Township Building – 7:00 PM
<u>Sunday, November 14</u>	“Hilltown Township through Postcards” , by Aaron Heckler. In a power point presentation, we will learn how picture postcards began in America. We will see numerous then and now comparisons between old postcards and modern-day sites in Hilltown and Silverdale. Strassburger Homestead 1:30-4:00 PM. Program @ 2:00

**Strassburger Farmstead
407 Keystone Drive
Sellersville PA 18960**