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Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

December 2023

Whew! Another fall festival is behind us, so we have the opportunity to rest for a bit. But not too much. We had a lot to put away, prepare for the art show in October, then get ready for winter. How did we do at the festival? Any ideas or reactions? Let's give a shout out to JoAnn Palmer, the grand prize winner of the scavenger hunt. We are hard at work preparing the speakers' programs for next year, so stay tuned. Remember, our programs are all free, donations happily accepted.



As usual in the December newsletter, is a dues/donation form and a return envelope. If you are a life member, please pass the brochure along. It seems that our biggest expense every year is the cost to heat two of the buildings. We keep the thermostats low, but you know the cost of oil and natural gas keep going up. It is also difficult to maintain these three pre-Civil War buildings.

Although membership categories are defined, any amount above that would be appreciated. Remember, we are a non-profit organization. Your donation may be tax deductible.

Volunteerism is also a big help for us. Yardwork, landscaping, painting, and gardening top the list.

Do you have any old Hilltown area items you no longer want? Our displays show this area from a long time ago. Our Hilltown archives contain much dating back from as early as the mid-1700s. They include old schoolwork, deeds, art, store records and local turnpike ledgers. We would love to add to this important archival collection. Email us at the address above.

The winner of the 50/50 auction was Donna Usavage, who generously donated her winnings back to the Society.

We possess a great deal of archives relating to early Hilltown and vicinity. The first step we undertook (and is almost done) is to see what we have and document it. We have 27 bankers' boxes, 21 archival boxes, 400 books, mostly pertaining to local history, and close to 500 historical periodicals. The content is available on searchable databases, just not online.

Contact us if you are looking for information. Many thanks go out to Ginny Bergey, Bonny Forbes, Donna Usavage and Joan Aichelle. This is a project that the Society's founder Jack Fox always wanted to make available.

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Before we provide a list of those who helped us during the festival, let's give a huge cheer to the Society Board of Directors. These folks worked tirelessly before, during and after the event. Yes, it was a fundraiser and of course we benefit from this, but the festival allows us to interact with the people of the area and provide a day of fun for hundreds.

~

Directors

Dan Paci
Ivan Jurin
Alicia Snyder
Cindy Gery
Bill Stahl
Donna King
Bob Chope
Mark McCoy
Scott Fischer

Thanks to the Following

Groff Tractor & Equipment
Barbara Hohenwarter
Locals Pizza Co.
Treasure Trove
Jane Ramsey, Artist
Mary Shelly
H. S. Gery
Ed Tice

Phila Glider Council
R. Herrmann
Angela Horner
A & N Diner
Pasqualina's Italian Market
Giant Supermarket
Hilltown Nursery
Roy Snyder
Angler's Pro Shop
Davis Feed of Bucks County
Hickory Stick Ice Cream
Blooming Glen Pork
Coco Nails
Fredericks Flowers
Factory Antiques
Hawg House
Jesse Keller
Sapori Italian Restaurant
Joel Anderson
Reese's Garage
QNB Bank
Washinton House Restaurant
Brenda Bolster
Byer's Choice
Jenn Sinnwell
Buff City Soap
Chiaro's Pizza
Images Salon & Spa
Sundae House Ice Cream
Bucks County Biscotti
Aggie HCRA
Ludlow Farms
Civil War 71st Infantry & Women's
Sanitary Commission
Carol Clark
Beth Taylor
Ida Fabian
Joe Fisher
Lucy Walsh
Aggie Harris
Karl Gimber
Lisa Patti
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Travelin' Hot Dogs
Yolanda Fine
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Bucks County Cultural Society
Chris Markley
John Wright
Gary Miller
Rich Zedrejko
Dean Bickel
Tom & Rose Sutkins
Rene Bergere
Krystal Weibel
Robert & Julie Herrmann
Dublin Agway

**Members And Leaders of Hilltown Boy
Scout Troop 67**

Dan Chekay
John King
Jeff Crozier
Mi2chael Lechniak
Adam Lechniak
Charlie King
Danny Chekay
Reece Crozier
Nathan Ritting

~

The 1830 Tornado in Hilltown?

**Reported in the Intelligencer on June 14,
1840; Destructive Storm – On Sunday**

afternoon, on the 6th instant, a violent storm of wind, rain, and hail passed through Hilltown Township in the County, and prostrated almost everything in its course, which had the least elevation above the ground. It commenced at the northeast corner of the township passing to the southeast; and its course may be tracked for a distance of 7 or 8 miles, occupying a breadth of 200 to 600 yards. The destruction of fences, orchards and forest trees is immense and some of the fields of grain and grass have been very much injured, and others almost totally destroyed. John Allebach's large stone barn containing a considerable quantity of grain and hay was totally destroyed. His loss will not fall much of \$1,000. The barns of Abel Miller, Abraham Snable and Mary Myers were entirely blown down. Mr. Miller's barn was unroofed, George Snyder's barn unroofed, and his wagon house and about 100 fine apple trees blown down. Mr. Snyder's loss is about \$1,000. Peter Frantz' house unroofed, and John Gottschalk's somewhat injured. Besides these, number of buildings belonging to others have been much damaged, but to what extent we have not yet been informed. Providentially, not a single life was lost that we have heard of. In Mr. Allebach's barn were a number of horses but the gable end near where they stood fell over from the barn and they were extricated from the ruins without much injury. To give us some idea of the force of the winds, our informant assures us that a wagon body was lifted off its wheels and carried 150 yards before it appeared to have touched the ground and dashed into pieces; and the roofs of some buildings were carried across one or two fields before they fell to the ground. From the appearance of the trees, it would seem that there was a considerable whirlwind also, as the trees are

piled upon another in every direction. The loss of property is very great and some individuals are scarcely able to sustain the sudden and unlooked for misfortune. I hope some plan will be adopted by their neighbors to replace the injury they have sustained.

The above has been taken word for word from the June 14th newspaper. I cannot improve the description reported by first person accounts almost 200 years ago.

~

General Davis

One of the most heralded Bucks County historic citizens is Henry Chaman Mercer. After all, who hasn't heard of the "Mercer Mile"? We have the Mercer Museum, his home of Fonthill and the Tile Works. His accomplishments could go on forever.

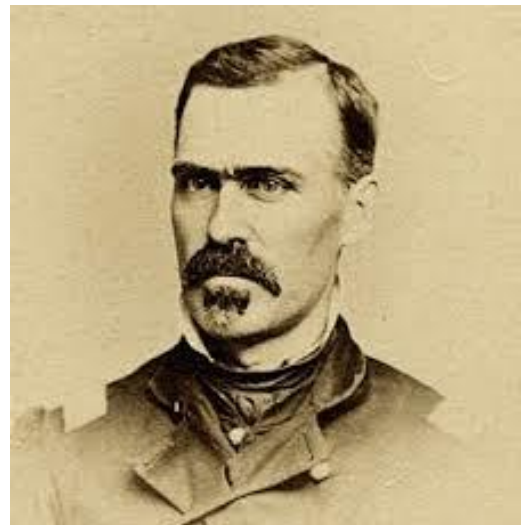
Let us hear about another, but much lesser-known man, General William W. H. Davis. He was born in Southampton, Bucks County in 1820, into a military family. His grandfather fought in the Revolutionary War and suffered at Valley Forge, and his father, Major General Davis served in the War of 1812.

While studying law at Harvard in 1846, he answered a call to arms and fought in the Mexican War. Mustering out as a captain in 1848, he returned to Bucks County where he married. Davis then returned to New Mexico where he helped organize the territorial government. While there, he published a newspaper in Santa Fe. He returned home to Bucks County in 1857 and purchased the Doylestown Democrat newspaper.

In 1861, under orders from the Secretary of War, he organized the PA 104th Volunteers as a Colonel. The rescue of the regiment's colors at the Battle of Fair Oaks, outside

Richmond, was a famous incident. It was painted by Trego, and for a time hung on the Buck County Historical Society's walls. At this battle, Davis was wounded. Later in the war, in action on St. John's Island, he was wounded again, when shrapnel blew off three fingers. At the end of the war, he was discharged as a Brigadier General, due to his valiant service. He served for a time as Pension agent in Philadelphia as well as a commissioner to the Paris Exposition in 1878.

An exhaustive researcher and writer, Davis published such works as "The Spanish Conquest of New Mexico", "New Mexico and Her People", "The Fries Rebellion", "The History of the 104th Regiment PA Volunteers", "History of the Battle of Crooked Billet", "Sketch and the Life and Character of John Lacey: a Brigadier General in the Revolutionary Army", "The History of the Hart (his mother's) Family", and "The History of Bucks County Pennsylvania: From the Discovery of the Delaware to the Present Time".



Gen. William W. H. Davis

His greatest achievement was the development of the Bucks County Historical Society. It was founded in 1880 by Davis

along with several of his friends, including a 23-year-old Henry Chapman Mercer, who at the time was a student at the University of Pennsylvania. Davis served as Bucks County's leading historian until his death at the age of 90 in 1910. He served as the president of the Society for thirty years. Upon General Davis's death, Henry Chapman Mercer became the president of the Bucks County Historical Society.

Local Christmas in 1923

Taking a look at the local Perkasio newspaper of 100 years ago provides us with a glimpse of life a century ago. At Cope's Music House in Perkasio, Christmas records were individually listed with the artist, title of the album, the size (10" or 12") along with the prices, ranging from \$1.25 to \$2.00.

Christmas Seals were introduced in this country in 1907, sold in Post Offices and initially sold for a penny each. Proceeds went to help fund a variety of health organizations in the US. They were advertised heavily in the local newspapers.



1923 Christmas Seal (b&w)

In Perkasio, Franklin Kramer was selling Ford Four Door Sedans for \$695. In addition to the cars, Kramer also sold trucks and

tractors. A local competitor, Muth's Garage, was selling Studebakers for a bit more money. Below Kramer's ad, Crouthamels Brothers in Silverdale advertised their services of repairing all types of automobiles. They noted that they were in Wm. Wismer's old factory.

Apfelbaums Men's Shop advertised that they were giving our Christmas gifts to every man and woman who entered his shop. (I was born 100 years too late!) The H.D. Moyer store in South Perkasio had a big December ad, providing shoppers with ideas for Christmas gifts. Included were: Flexible Flyer sleds, a 150 shot Daisy air rifle for a dollar, Florida oranges, candy, and an oak finished chest with 26 pieces of silver plate for the princely sum of \$15.75. Most of the Christmas sales were from local establishments, but Hess' Brothers in Allentown spent quite a sum advertising in the local Perkasio paper.

The Perkasio Electric Company was recommending that the proper Christmas gift for your wife would be a Hoover vacuum cleaner.

In Hatfield, an auction was announced for 1,000 plump turkeys. These weren't the type you would buy today at the supermarket. They came alive, with feathers. And at Fehl's Meats in Blooming Glen, they were advertising to buy 100 fat pigs.

An observation: In many Christmas ads, the holiday is referred to "Xmas". Apparently, it was quite a common practice, as it was also seen on many old Christmas cards. You certainly would not see that in any 21st century holiday references.

It is with sadness that we pass along the fact that Edna M. Lewis Loux has passed. She was born in Hilltown and the area was always close to her. She wrote "A Walk Down Memory Lane", a history of the Hilltown Baptist Church, as well as "Blooming Glen Remembered", a history and retrospective of that village. Her contributions to the goals of our Society are remembered.

Did you attend our October art show? If not, you missed a fine event. A variety of local artists displayed their work, and some were sold to the public. And as usual, it was a beautiful day at the Strassburger Farmstead. Our program on Oct 25 about Dr. Frank Boston was very informative. He lived on Fairhill Rd.

Reading old documents can be puzzling to me sometimes. A local man, William Morris was a "cordwainer" in the 1700s. Google helped me out on this one. A cordwainer is one who makes new shoes with new leather. This is different from a cobbler, who repairs shoes. In all honesty, however, I would think their occupations would actually overlap. William Morris was the brother to the well-known clock maker Benjamin Morris.

Martha Smith of Bucks County

We have come into possession of a book published in 1844, "Letters of Martha Smith". She was born Martha Brown in Plumsteadville (at the time it was simply known as Plumstead) in 1787, and a member of the Society of Friends. Around 1819, she was encouraged to give testimony "but her mind expanded beyond those boundaries set by those who were appointed judges in that

manner ". In 1827, at the Philadelphia yearly meeting, she was finally acknowledged as minister when the separation of Society of Friends occurred. Until her death in 1841, she travelled into many mid-Atlantic States professing her faith. She wrote of her travels by steamboat and stagecoach.

Some of her letters describe her travels and adventures during this time. Apparently, Martha was outspoken in her thoughts and views, and possibly not totally in sync with some of the Elders. In February 1824, while attending meeting at Pine Street in Philadelphia, four elders detained her in the meeting house and stated to her that in their opinion, she was not in unity with her friends (fellow Quakers) at home, in Solebury and that she made considerable disturbances at meeting in Rhode Island. She was advised to return home to take care of her family. (Martha was a wife with children back in Solebury). Martha wrote "Three of the elders were in pursuit of me in the afternoon, and called twice at my lodging, but I unknowingly escaped them". This treatment only made her more determined in her cause.

Many times, at meetings, she expected to be disciplined, and actually looked forward to such a conflict. In April 1824 in Philadelphia, she stood and in her own words "had some uncouth observations to make". At the second sitting, she stood and testified as to her opinion of superficial formality of that meeting. She was interrupted by name and told to sit down by an elder of Buckingham. From her letter "Third day I attended, and on rising to speak, was pulled by the skirts to sit down, but fairly got through before I obeyed.

Her letters are mainly religious in nature but do contain things like her seasickness on the steamships and her narrow escape from a burning building in New York. While in a New Bedford meeting, she thought it comical

that a dozen attendees rose in succession to prevent her friend M. Rose from speaking. Ultimately, this M. Rose left the meeting, silenced. Maybe this woman had views or thoughts unpopular to the others.

In the Plumstead meeting, she was asked to stay after for a meeting with the elders. Martha was informed by them that her travels and opinions were not in conforming with the Plumstead Friends, and that she should stay at home more to watch over her children. Martha wrote about this in an 1825 letter and stated that she enjoyed the company of people of the world. This meeting went on for several hours, with (at least in her letter) Martha parrying their accusations quite well.

Attending meeting in Newport, Rhode Island in 1826, Martha once again got into some hot water. She describes the circumstances in a letter to her brother. "Some friends came to us as we were on the porch of the boarding house that evening and told us it was the sense of the meeting that we should be silent among them, on which condition they had no objection to our sitting in the meetings". Her friend "P." agreed to those conditions. The next day, they again attended a meeting.

Martha stood and spoke, as did her friend, P.

"A great bustle agitated our boardinghouse the next morning. Continued groups of Quakers and Quakeresses were seen whispering in one part or another. At length, we were solemnly summoned into the passage". They were informed that they were not allowed in the meeting house if they intended to speak. They would be bodily dragged out if they didn't comply. Martha marched on to the meeting house, only to have the door latched from the inside, with her outside. These meeting houses had both a Men's and Woman's entrance. She tried the Men's door, but found it too was latched from

the inside. After sitting outside for some hours, she returned to the boarding house.

At one point during this time, Martha spent several weeks at home with her family. While she enjoyed their company, she admitted in a letter that she had become restless, and wanted to visit other meeting houses once again.

Even in her home Buckingham meeting house, Martha was chastised for attending meetings away from home. Heated discussions occurred why that behavior was not in accordance with Society. Martha maintained that the elders could never support their point of view.

In a meeting in October 1826 in Bucks County, a charge against Martha was read aloud. "Martha Smith has travelled as a minister, contrary to discipline, and frequently disturbed a distant yearly meeting, by introducing unsavory views and sentiments". Of course, Martha replied that she was not a minister (that would come later), and she spoke as a friend, not a minister.

In 1827 in Philadelphia, a division occurred within the Society of Friends, called the Hicksite-Orthodox separation. Elias Hicks was a travelling Quaker minister that drove this separation. He was an older cousin of American artist Edward Hicks, of Peaceable Kingdom fame. It was a heated dispute that drove this separation. This separation spread to other states as well as Canada. After this split, Martha became a Hicksite minister, and continued her travels from New England to Maryland and west as far as Indiana. His letters home contained no more issues with her behavior. No one could argue that Martha was not a passionate believer of her faith. On her deathbed in Solebury in 1841, she convinced a workman at her home to stop drinking. He said later that he saw the light and ceased his drink. Martha died that night.



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Christmas Night 1776 - 247 years ago, Gen. Washington led his troops across a half-frozen Delaware River in an attempt to surprise the sleeping and groggy Hessian soldiers in and around Trenton. Only about half of Washington's troops were able to make the river crossing in time, but a victory occurred anyway, taking almost 1,000 Hessians prisoners. Since Washington's full army did not make the crossing, the Patriots were forced to withdraw. The importance of this battle was that it raised the spirits of the colonists, many of whom did not believe the Continental Army was capable of victory. A story goes that local traitor Moses Doan slipped a Hessian officer a note reading "Washington is coming". The note was found in the pocket of that dead officer later, apparently unread.