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Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

February 2022

Donations

Lately, we have received some wonderful donations from you, our members. Barry Hewitt donated a Hilltown High School pennant that belonged to his mother, Jeanette Hewitt. She attended Hilltown High School in the late 1940s.

Beth Taylor donated a large old school bell that had been at her family's place since at least the 1920s. Before that, no one knows.

Also, Robert Kulp donated his father's Hilltown High School yearbook from the Class of 1931. He also donated his father's baseball uniform from the Blooming Glen team.

We have been fortunate to receive grants from Quakertown National Bank and the Le-Mal Garden Fund. These funds will go for much needed building repairs and improvements. These include chimney, porch, roof, gutter and driveway repairs. We now wait for Spring to begin the work. Lawrence Owen is a local preservation architect who will provide much needed guidance. Thank you to all!

Included with our December newsletter was our annual dues and membership application. If you misplaced it, a copy is included within this February newsletter. Also included in this newsletter is our schedule of events for the coming year. We are excited to share them with you. They will be quite interesting and entertaining.

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Many of our 2022 speakers' programs will be at the Strassburger Farmstead this year. It is a great opportunity to take a walk through our three buildings. View one of our continuously running slide shows in the museum. Our beautiful grounds also provide for a comfortable picnic setting. Bring some sandwiches, a beverage and a blanket, and sit under some of our large shade trees. (Don't sit under our giant Mulberry tree in June. You will turn purple!) These are can't miss events, and free ones at that. Of course, donations are always happily accepted.

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A question was put to us that we cannot answer, so we now pose it to you. *There used to be a sign in front of the Blooming Glen*

School that listed the names of those who served in the armed forces. I'm not sure whether that would have been the old High School or the two-story school along Route 113. It would definitely be an historic item. Where could it be?

Indentured Servitude in Pennsylvania

Imagine you are a 16 year old male in London, England, wanting a new life filled with opportunity in the New World. Alas, the cost of passage across the ocean is beyond anything available to you. A popular way to solve this problem in the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries was the Indentured Servant system. In a sense, you would sell yourself to a ship's master for the cost of transportation. Upon arriving in America, the ship's master would then sell your labor contract to collect his cost of transportation, making a nice profit. Sometimes an agreement would be reached with a family member or acquaintance already in the New World.

Your purchaser would then enter into a contract with you for a period of time.. These were usually oral agreements. The immigrant would be obligated to serve the master until the end of that period, at which time he would be a free man. These agreements were entered into voluntarily. Early on, these immigrants were British. By the mid-18th century, German immigrants were the majority. By then, many of these contracts were in writing.

Records show that most of the indentured servants who initially worked in Philadelphia, moved out to the surrounding rural areas in the hope of land. It was the

intent of William Penn to provide 50 acres of land to those individuals who completed their servitude.

Many reasons existed for this system. The New World needed labor to tame the vast wilderness. Parents unable to financially support their children might place them under indenture, since the terms of the agreement usually specified the provisioning of "meat, drink, lodging and washing". Sometimes education and clothing were included if the "apprentice" was a child.. In addition, "immigrants in bondage" were criminals in England. This could mean a great many things. Many were non-conformists, had problems with the church, or had committed some sort of offense.

The early indentured servants were used in clearing land and farming. Later on, they were used in trades, still farming, but also carpentry, coopering, tailoring, blacksmithing or any number of trades. In this manner, the servants would learn a trade that they could use to their advantage after their freedom was obtained. Around 1720, almost half of European immigrants in the 13 colonies were indentured servants.

What determined the cost of buying a labor contract? Of course, the main factor was how an immigrant could produce for his skills in a particular trade, but gender, and the provision of education determined the conditions stipulated in the contract, especially the length of service. Some came to America trained in some special skill. These were all factors.

At times, families were separated upon arrival in Philadelphia. Roger Bradbury was sold to Randolph Blackshaw of Bucks

County, while his wife and three sons were sold to a Maryland owner. Can we hope they were reunited once their terms expired?

As time went by, laws were established regarding these servants or apprentices. Pennsylvania law stated, "Every such Servant being seventeen years of age or upwards, shall serve five years; And all those who shall be under seventeen years, of age, shall serve till they Come to the age of twenty-two."

The Journey to America

Conditions were horrible on the journey to America. In 1710, it was recorded that 25% of the German immigrants perished during the journey.

An overriding reason one entered into the indentured servitude was abject poverty. But once on the ship, their misery began in earnest. Usually, enough food was brought on board to last a journey of twelve weeks. Don't assume the passengers ate well on their trip. Bugs and rats were common in the food supply. The actual time was based on factors beyond control such as bad weather or no wind. If there was enough food, basic as it was, a traveler would be subject to severe seasickness, disease, scurvy, lice, heat, or cold. In 1750, the ship Osgood, sailing from Rotterdam took fifteen weeks. On board were almost 500 passengers. Upon arrival in Philadelphia, a passenger would then be sold for a specific duty and length of service.

On December 18, 1728, the Pennsylvania Gazette newspaper published the following advertisement: "A parcel of likely men and women Servants are to be sold by Samuel Fergusen at the Widow Fox's on Walnut

Street, Philadelphia, on reasonable terms, either for ready money, Country produce, or credit".

How would you like to be sold for a wagonload of lettuce and apples? This was not a perfect system. "Owners" of a servant could sell them. Masters were fair, cruel, and everywhere in-between. Runaways were not uncommon. Ads were placed in newspapers describing a runaway, and outlining how to collect a reward for their return.

On October 19, 1769, the Pennsylvania Gazette newspaper published the following advertisement: "Run away from the subscriber, living in Hilltown Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania on the 14th instant, an apprentice lad named Abraham Tennis, about 19 years old, 5 feet, 8 inches high, a well set fellow, of a dark complexion: Had on, when he went away, a half worn caster hat, snuff colored coat, stripe lapelled waist-coat, fine shirt, leather breeches, gray worsted stockings, and calfskin shorts. Whoever takes up and brings the said fellow to me, or secures him in any of his Majesty's goals (jails), so that I may have him again shall have fifty shilling reward, and any reasonable charges, paid by me. Elias Thomas. Note He was learning the Tanner's Trade".

The penalty for runaways entailed the lengthening of the time served. By the 18th century, Pennsylvania law stipulated "five days for every day's absence, after the expiration of their Servitude," with the additional provision that the captured runaway make "Satisfaction for the Damages, costs, and charges. After securing the runaway servant, the master would submit to the courts a claim enumerating the

days of the servant's absence and the expenditures involved in his/her capture. The courts, in turn, would determine the extra time or "money charge" required in order to compensate the master, though a money payment was unlikely.

These ships flooded into Philadelphia in the 1700s. Records indicate the name of the ship, the Master's name, the port of departure, and the number of servants aboard. For example, on May 18, 1773, the ship *Britannia*, captained by Master Eyres arrived from Dublin. It contained 26 servants and apprentices. On June 17, the ship *Peggy* arrived from Belfast, captained by Master McKinsey contained 118 servants and apprentices. This steady stream from Europe help build America.

Certain economic conditions affected this flow of indentured servants into this region. Wars and the British practice of taking these servants into the armed forces and famine were several. After serving with the British military, a servant's indenture was commonly voided. Shortages in servants were made up by slavery. Keep in mind that with an indentured servant, from day one, there is a clock ticking until his or her time is up. With a slave, there is no clock. Conversely, excesses in workers led to a rural migration.

Published in the Pennsylvania Gazette on October 19, 1769: "TO BE SOLD, A servant girl's time who has to serve about two years and a half; she is very healthy, is a good servant, and fit for Town or Country. Enquire at the New Printing Office".

Was her master selling off an asset for much needed cash? This poor servant girl had no input to her future for the next two and a half years. This was all too common. Yet this class of individual, the indentured servant, was very important in the development of this New World. Many went on to become landowners when their term expired. How many of the early Hilltown settlers initially served their time as an indentured servant?

Happy Valentine's Day

In the spirit of Valentine's Day, let's explore some of the customs. St Valentine's Day is named for many martyrs named St. Valentine. It started out as a religious or feasting time. How in the world did it come to be the Valentine's Day we know now in the 21st century? Flowers, candy, dinners!

Over 600 years ago, Geoffrey Chaucer wrote of St. Valentine's Day, February 14 being a day when birds could choose their mates. In 1797, a British publisher issued *The Young Man's Valentine Writer*, which contained many suggested sentimental verses for the young lover unable to compose his own. Printers were, by then, printing a good number of paper valentines. It became quite a popular practice during the 19th century, sending through the mail Valentine greetings. Some anonymous, some racy, some outright mean (vinegar Valentine)!

The legends of Valentine's Day bring us to the legend of Cupid. These days, Cupid is

Snippets

A collection of stories from the past

In the Bucks County 1790 census, it lists 4 male prisoners and 1 female prisoner.

The printing for our newsletters and brochure is done by Labelcraft, a local printing company in Perkasio. Browsing through old newspapers, I find the following, from 100 years ago. December 12 1921 Central News – *“Unusual opportunity for bright young fellow (15 or 16) to learn printing. Reply by letter. Labelcraft, Perkasio PA.*

The early history of Hilltown goes hand in hand with the history of the Hilltown Baptist Church. We have some transcribed minutes of the business meetings of the church from 1782 to 1875. They contain a remarkable insight into life in Hilltown during those times. Notes from January 19, 1823 – *“We met near the water at Mr. Steers, where four candidates (Jonathon Jones, Sarah Troxal, Mary Jones, & Rebekah Griffith) 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. “*

Baptisms were performed in local waterways, many times near a ford (crossing), mill or mill pond. It involved total immersion, on this day into frozen waterway. I would have preferred to be Baptized during the warm summer months!

Bill Stahl

known as the God of love or romance. He dates back to classical mythology and is now portrayed as an unclothed chubby child with wings. Someone shot by Cupid's golden tipped arrow is filled with uncontrollable desire. As the story goes, Cupid also carries lead tipped arrows. When one is struck with one of these, they feel only aversion and want to flee. Cupid is known as the son of the love goddess Venus and Mars, the god of war.



A version of Cupid c. 1900

Yet another symbol of this holiday is a heart, and the colors of red and pink. It's been said that the traditional Valentine heart is roughly similar in shape with a human heart. Somehow, it became synonymous with love and affection. We Americans do truly enjoy our holidays, as spending for this particular day exceeds \$20 billion dollars.

Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Phone # _____

Number in Family _____

Type of Membership

Family	\$25
Individual	\$15
Senior or Student	\$10
Patron	\$50
Sustaining	\$40
Business	\$100
Life Membership	\$250

I am interested in volunteering in the following:

Speakers' Programs - _____
Historical Research - _____
Historical Preservation - _____
Library & School Liaison - _____
Library & Historical Artifacts - _____
Building Maintenance - _____
Anything Else! - _____

Historical Society of Hilltown Township

2022 Calendar of Events –

<p><u>Wednesday, May 25</u></p>	<p>“Old Villages of Hilltown”. Using 19th century photographs, Bill Stahl will explore the long-ago villages along the old Hilltown Pike, from Line Lexington to Bedminster. Ivan Jurin will present lost villages, such as Pennville, and will explain how Dublin and Silverdale became independent boroughs. Bob Moyer of Blooming Glen will talk of his experiences. Feel free to share your experiences! Speakers’ Program at the Hilltown Township Building, 7:00 PM</p>
<p><u>Saturday, June 4</u></p>	<p>Open House at the Strassburger Farmstead. Bonny Forbes will explain the purpose of the Sanitary Commission that was set up as a support program during the Civil War. Her group, clothed in Civil War era outfits will demonstrate the tasks performed by this commission. Program at the Farmstead, outdoors, 11-4. All buildings will be open to the public. We are planning this as an outdoor event, so bring your picnic lunch! We have plenty of large shade trees. Rain date June 5.</p>
<p><u>Sunday, August 7</u></p>	<p>Legends & Mysteries of Hilltown. Join Bill Stahl for some unusual tales of old Hilltown. Escape from today and go back in time to hear some of the oddities, mysteries and some downright unbelievable stories relating to Hilltown over the past three hundred years. The mass arrest at church! Where was the slave cemetery? Learn about Hilltown’s Revolutionary War heros and zeros! Hear about the supernatural events in Hilltown. What were the legends of the township? Feel free to bring your own Hilltown tales. We are planning this as an outdoor event, so bring your picnic lunch! We have plenty of large shade trees. As usual, all of the buildings will be open.</p>
<p><u>Saturday, September 17</u></p>	<p>14th Annual Fall Festival & Open House. From 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM, Rain or Shine. At the Strassburger Homestead. Antique Sale, Silent Auction, Animals, 50/50 Raffle, baked Goods, Food available for purchase. The BEST free family event in the area!</p>
<p><u>Wednesday, October 26</u></p>	<p>Nearly Forgotten Artists of Hilltown Township”, by Ivan Jurin. One of the best-known local artists was John Falter, who illustrated more than 120 magazine covers from 1940 to the early 1950s while living in Hilltown. A silent auction and raffle of original Saturday Evening Post issues with Falter covers will be held, benefitting the Historical Society of Hilltown Township. The art of Margaret Jurin will also be shown. Until recently, there were few local women artists. Speakers’ Program at the Hilltown Township Building – 7:00 PM</p>

Any questions, contact us at Hilltownhistory1@yahoo.com



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Winter Gardening in February

Experiment by creating a dish garden. It's a fun project for you or a child. The planting and care of a miniature indoor garden can satisfy any gardeners urge to keep something growing. Any dish or bowl will do. Since planters typically do not provide for drainage, a half to an inch of pebbles on the bottom is necessary. Make a selection of 3-5 plants. They should all have the same light and moisture requirements. A bit of research can help you out. These plants should remain small in size, or use dwarf types. Consider dwarf ivies, small ferns, kalanchoes or cacti. African violets, begonias, wandering Jew, pothos, peperomia are all good choices.

Place the pebbles in the dish bottom. Fill with potting soil that is suitable to plant types. Plan the placement then put them in. Soil can be mounded somewhat above the planter rim. Tamp pieces of moss, rocks, or pieces of rotted logs to create a pretty scene. When watering, test for dryness with a knife to probe beneath the soil. Ideally, the soil beneath should be moist, never wet.

From Jean Skeath Stahl's book "The Garden Log"