



Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

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February 2023

Greetings to our friends and members. Spring begins next month, none too soon. February seems to be loaded with holidays, providing us with interesting events while we wait for robins and flowers. In February, we have Valentine's Day, President's Day and the entire month is Black History Month. Lunar New Year, Dark Chocolate Day, Super Bowl Sunday, and Strawberry Day (Feb 27), to name a few. Enjoy this shortest of the twelve months and prepare for Spring.



Contained within the last newsletter was the dues notification. We thank those who responded to the request. If you forgot, or meant to but didn't, please take a few moments to send in some sort of donation. The directors and volunteers work very hard in maintaining our three buildings, but sometimes hiring contractors is the only way to preserve the properties. Your financial help is key in allowing us to preserve his historic site.



You may recall reading that due to the generosity of the La-Mal Garden Fund Foundation; we were able to pay a tree company to cut down five large dead trees on the property.

We were recently awarded additional funds from the Visit Bucks County Foundation to perform roofing and exterior work on the museum building. We can't wait for Spring to get these needed improvements done.



The Trail of the Liberty Bell

Every schoolchild learns the story of the escape of the Liberty Bell to Allentown, ahead of the incoming British troops in 1777. That much we know. There is quite a bit that is still being debated. Much information written of the travels begin with the phrase "Tradition tells", or "Legend has it". We've been told that the bell in the statehouse in Philadelphia (Independence Hall) rang out on July 8, 1776, summoning crowds to hear the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence by Colonel John Nixon. At the time it was merely known as the state house bell. The name "Liberty Bell" was first used in an 1837 edition of *Liberty*, published by the New York Anti-Slavery Society.

On September 11, 1777, the British Army under General Howe met the Continental Army under General Washington near Chadds Ford, PA. The Patriots were soundly beaten and began their retreat. After the battle, the British troops were headed to

Philadelphia, America's capitol. In anticipation, Pennsylvania's Supreme Executive Council ordered that eleven of the bells in the city be removed and relocated to safety. It was feared that the British would take the bells and melt them down to cast into munitions that would be used against the Patriots. This was no small task, especially since the State House bell weighed over 2,000 pounds. Also taken down were the bells of Christ Church on North 2nd St and St Peter's Church at 3rd and Pine St.

In July, a call went out in Eastern Pennsylvania for wagons. In August and early September, a great number of wagons headed into the city from the surrounding counties. This was not unusual, as the farmers typically brought wagonloads of goods into the city to sell. This journey from Philadelphia to Allentown consisted of much more than a dozen bells. Families supporting the cause in the city, possessions, and goods that the British could take, were loaded onto a great quantity of wagons. Blankets, clothing, shoes, spirits, and other items that could be used by the enemy were taken, to prevent them from falling into the hands of the British. Eventually, this convoy consisted of about 700 wagons, and a Colonel Polk of the Continental Army with his force of 200 cavalymen.

The journey out of the city began early in the morning of September 17. The bells were covered with manure and hay. At this point, the story becomes unclear. One popular story has this wagon train leaving the city on the Limekiln Pike, until the outskirts of Montgomeryville, then travelling on the Bethlehem Road. Some historians automatically assume this is Bethlehem Pike, that runs through Sellersville and into Quakertown. Maybe, maybe not. Back then, the Bethlehem Road was the main highway from Philadelphia to Bethlehem. After passing through Ambler, Fort Washington,

and Montgomeryville, it travelled to Line Lexington, where it took a slight turn to the right. This is what now is called Hilltown Pike. This Bethlehem Road (now called Old Bethlehem Road) after it crosses Route 313 is currently beneath Lake Nockamixon. The confusion may be between Bethlehem Pike, Bethlehem Road, Old Bethlehem Road, and New Bethlehem Road. This route through Hilltown was also one known as part of the Great Road. Before the damming of the Tohickon Creek in the 1960s, this road would take you into Bethlehem. Remember that in the 1700s, there were no "turnpikes", thus no "Pikes".

Another version has the bell passing through Sellersville on what is now Bethlehem Pike. At a time⁸, this portion of the road was known as the New Bethlehem Road. And a stop in Quakertown is well promoted, with bell hiding behind Evan Foulke's house on the night of September 23. The building remains today, with a replica of the Liberty Bell out front. It is claimed that the cavalry horses were cared for and the officers slept at the old Red Lion Inn (McCooles Tavern). Quite a feat for a cavalry unit of 200. And what about the 700 wagons? The small village of Quakertown could not have handled this parade, probably stretching for miles. They could not all fit behind Evan Foulke's house. On the wall inside this tavern is a map of two possible Liberty Bell routes.

Did the wagon train arrive at this spot via Bethlehem Pike, or Bethlehem Road? Did they leave Hilltown on what we call Route 313 and enter Quakertown the back way?

A few more similar versions are worth considering. The Liberty Bell headed east, out of the city, through Bristol, Falls, and Morrisville. From there, it headed north along the Delaware River to Coryell's Ferry (New Hope). This route kept Washington's troops between the British and the wagon train. Another version of this is that they

crossed the river into Trenton, headed north in New Jersey until hitting Coryell's Ferry, and recrossed the Delaware River again, back into Bucks County, then zigzagging throughout the area, passing near Doylestown, near Perkasie, and into Quakertown. Some weather histories may provide more clues. Just prior to the wagons leaving the city, the area was hit with torrential downpours. This would have turned the main roads into quagmires, so it was said that some back roads were used. But wouldn't have those heavy rains made the Delaware River much more difficult to cross, leaving the route along the river on the Pennsylvania side much easier? Also, at the same time, Trenton had a substantial inventory of arms. It too was being evacuated. It seems unlikely that since Trenton was being evacuated, this trail of wagons would cross the river into Trenton.

General Washington was well versed in the land above Trenton and Bucks County. Who can forget his stunning December foray into Trenton in 1776? These two versions seem to be the most researched. An important clue exists – On September 24, 1777, the day of the arrival of the wagon train in Bethlehem, it was recorded in the Diary of the Moravian Congregation – The train of wagons and the 200 soldiers camped on the south side of the Lehigh River “*and in one night destroyed all our buckwheat and the fences around the fields. The wagons after unloading, returned to Trenton for more stores*”. Returned to Trenton...That certainly gives the Trenton route great credence.

Yet another route rumored in this journey is following up Allentown Road. It seems unlikely, as it doesn't quite explain the stop in Quakertown, Bethlehem, or the fact that General Washington wanted this wagon train as far away from the British troops as possible.

This journey was supposed to be secret. They were to have traveled by night and rested by day. But in a land full of British loyalists (remember Hilltown had quite a few), how could this miles long caravan of wagons and soldiers be kept a secret?

Maybe somewhere, there is a definitive history of this journey. If I ever find it, I'll be sure to let you know!

Reported in the newspaper in June of 1849 was the following: *Grasshoppers have again made their appearance on Bucks County Pa., and promise to be very annoying, if not destructive the coming summer. In Upper Makefield and Hilltown Townships, they have attacked the young corn, and, in some instances, the tops of potatoes, and it is feared, from these demonstrations, that they are going to be troublesome.*

The Key 1952

A publication of Hilltown High School was named “The Key”. It was not a yearbook, but contained prose, poetry, and a collection of thoughts of the students. By the early 1950s, the school went by Deep Run High School, losing the Hilltown High School name until it became part of the new Pennridge High School.

A 1952 issue of the Key was published in February and had a theme of romance, dating, and puppy love. It was most likely a Valentine's Day publication. Clara Widmann was a junior at the time and wrote of a problem that may have been wishful thinking. It was titled “Too Many Dates”. The main character, Jane, had a date that night with the handsome football captain, Dick. Wearing a blue gown that matched her eyes, she felt like a queen. Fifteen minutes before her date, the phone rang. It was John, the shy neighbor next door. He asked if she could go to the movies with him tonight.

Without answering, she slammed the phone down. It rang again within seconds, this time it was Tom, a boy she had wanted to date as long as she could remember. Tom asked her to go to the dance with him that night. Jane claimed that her father was calling her and hung up. Suddenly, the doorbell rang. When she opened it, in walked John, the boy she hung up on. Jane's head was now spinning. John thought the call was accidentally cut off, so he came over in person to ask her to the movies.

The doorbell rang yet again, but it was Jane's best friend Patty. Upset and crying, Patty explained that Dick and Bill can't take the girls to the dance. The boys were camping, and the car broke down. It would take a few days to fix, so the double date at the dance was off.

Jane gave the situation some thought and told Patty that she had two boys there in her house, Tom, and John. They were both looking for a date. She sent Patty home to change, while she negotiated the double date with the two other fellows. As it turned out, Jane was going out with Tom after all.

As I read (and re-read) this confusing story, I wondered about its author, Clara Widmann. Was she a social butterfly? Wishful thinking? Or just a knack for an amusing story? This story certainly has the energy of a teenager, 71 years ago!

The Hazards of the Crinoline

This fashion originated in Paris and caught like wildfire. The size of skirts kept growing and new methods were needed to keep the size out. First, layers of petticoats supported by layers of horsehair. A warm garment, to say the least. The improvements of a structural support lightened the load and allowed for fewer petticoats which were no longer needed to provide the full effect.

What were they made of? Originally horsehair to support multi-layers of petticoats. Then came along whalebone and steel. The inventor of the steel hooped crinoline in Paris realized \$50,000 for his invention in the first five weeks. Inflatable rubber tubes were also used so the size could be increased or decreased. A hole or leaky valve could be disastrous, however. Gutta percha was a new product that was used, sort of a plastic material, but during exposure to heat, it let off an unpleasant smell. Just not the thing for a woman to have.

As steel became more popular, a sturdy version was adopted in Paris. It was reported that an unfortunate woman fainted at a party, but her steel cage held her upright, so she fainted only from the waist up. Also in the 1850s, adjustable bustles were being sold in addition to corsets.



As early as 1841, crinolines were being advertised in Philadelphia newspapers, as a new article at Miss Prat's store, specializing in fancy women's clothing. Early on, outside of Philadelphia, this fashion was frowned

upon. "Skirts have swollen to the extent of fashion that no door is wide enough for them to pass through without considerable squeezing. Men on the sidewalks must steer clear, as the women completely take up the sidewalks". Thus, it was reported in Carlisle in 1855, that young men liked to be close to their women and the hooped skirts kept them away. These large skirts were reportedly the cause for the falling marriage rates. Why? Because of the crinoline, a skirt took 30 to 40 yards of silk. Therefore, only the rich could afford the luxury of a wife. "A clerk must be content to look from afar upon the promised land".

Negative comments against them flourished, (primarily by men) but ads in the newspapers indicate there was a huge demand.

By 1857, it was reported that boiled whalebone seems to be the most popular material, and three separate rows make up the crinoline. Sometimes more, sometimes less. Steel was a new invention but remained inflexible. The top one was about 56" in circumference, the second one would be about 74". The bottom whalebone in the crinoline was about 95" circumference. Using my old school math, that puts the skirt at about 30" wide. The hoops are connected by lines of cord.

In a letter to an editor of the Wayne County Herald (Honesdale, PA), a lady wrote asking the doors to be widened to accommodate "the expansive crinolines of the numerous young ladies who visit the aforesaid place". (April 9, 1857)

In Boston in 1857, a young lady was arrested for obstructing sidewalks with the extremely large skirts. She was fined \$5.

At its widest point, the crinoline could reach a circumference of up to six yards, although by the late 1860s, crinolines were beginning to reduce in size. By the early 1870s, the

smaller crinolette and the bustle had largely replaced the crinoline.

Thousands of women died in the mid-19th century as a result of their hooped skirts catching fire. A primary source of heat and cooking was the open flame fireplace. Florence Nightingale estimated that at least 630 women died from their clothes catching fire in 1863-64. Although flame-retardant fabrics were available, these were thought unattractive and were unpopular. Other than fire, other hazards included the hoops being caught in machinery, carriage wheels, gusts of wind, or other obstacles.

Wind was an enemy of the crinoline. Picture the effect of a gust of wind on an umbrella when it may turn inside out. Many a skirt was lifted on a windy day, exposing whatever was on underneath.

Despite the dangers and inconveniences, several stories exist of women wearing a wide crinoline falling into a lake, unable to swim. The crinoline kept them afloat until a rescue could be mounted.

In 1858, the Philadelphia Bulletin reported on the use of crinolines "It frees women from a needless weight of skirts, strengthens the system by exposure to cold, and aids manufacturers, stimulates the whale fishery, improves figures, displays ankles to a delirious extent in getting upstairs, and gives editors subjects for articles. All things considered; we see no great reason to grieve over the institution. It is not every fashion which develops so much or such varied industry as the crinoline".

You may wonder if this style found its way to Hilltown. This was a farming community and I wonder how important fashion was to the local residents. Reuben Strassburger owned the store along Bethlehem Pike during this period. I bet these things found their way into the store.

Hilltown's Old Schools

At the corner of Diamond St and Orchard Road, there is a red brick residence that was once known as the Red School. Was it named for the color of the brick? No. Actually, that building was the second Red School built. The first Red School was built not far away on Orchard Road, between Route 152 and Diamond St. It was noted that this original Red School was built in the woods, and consisted of stone and plaster, not bricks. How about the Blue School, built in 1854? It was not named that because it was located on Blue School Road, just the opposite. That too consisted of stone and plaster. And then we have the Yellow School that was located in Silverdale, where the Dunkin Donuts now stands. The Yellow School was built in 1930, just five years after the school fire of the Gehman School, at Route 113 and Telegraph Rd. This Yellow School consisted of asbestos siding, painted yellow. Apparently, the schools' plaster finishes were painted in colors. Thus, the red, blue, and yellow school names. The original Red and Yellow schools are long gone. Is there a trace of Blue paint on the Blue School?

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As early as 1805, Hilltown had a library, complete with a Board of Directors. A notice in the newspaper read "The members of the Hilltown Library Company are requested to remember that their annual meeting for choosing Directors and treasurer will be held on Monday, the 30th of this instant at two o'clock in the afternoon, in the Library Room.

Thomas Mathias, secretary

Sept 2, 1805

Where could this library have been? Did a local church or school have enough room to house a library?

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Take note of the list of programs for the upcoming year. We are still working on several more. Check in with our Facebook page as well as our website for updates.

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Did you know that the Historical Society owns three pre-Civil War buildings on five acres? That translates to a lot of work. We are constantly painting, repairing, and upgrading. Would you be able to help? Our picket fence is a maintenance nightmare! Are there any gardeners out there? Flowers would certainly beautify the site. Any volunteers should email us at Hilltownhistory1@yahoo.com

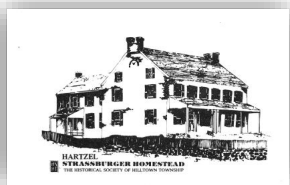
In an 1831 journal written by Hilltown clergyman Joseph Mathias, he told of Jonas Thomas in the 1700s, "*who lived 10 years in Hilltown, (near Carson Helicopter) after which he purchased a large lot of land in Lower Saucon, Northampton County upon the bank of the Lehigh, on a fertile soil, where he lived and improved and grew rich. After being there sometime, he used to tell his friends that God Almighty, ought to lengthen out his days 10 years for the time he spent in Hilltown, upon so poor a property.*"

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2023 Calendar of Events

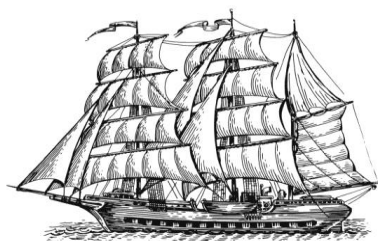
<u>Wednesday, March 22</u>	Local author Scott Bomboy, a historian and preservationist, recently wrote the book, “Wooden Treasures, the Story of Bucks County Covered Bridges”. He will give a talk on the history of these bridges, along with showing slides of the covered bridges still standing in Bucks County. Speakers’ Program at the Hilltown Township Building , 7:00 PM
<u>Saturday, March 25</u>	The PA 71 st Infantry Civil War re-enactors will present themselves at the Strassburger farmstead. The ladies of the group will sew inside the homestead. 10:00 – 12:00 PM. Rain date April 1. Open House at the Strassburger Farmstead.
<u>Wednesday, April 26</u>	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
<u>Sunday, May 7</u>	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
<u>Saturday, September 16</u>	14th Annual Fall Festival & Open House. This is our Annual Fall Festival, being held at the Historic Strassburger Farmstead . It is one of the top free, fun, family events in the area. Crafters, Baked Goods, Silent Auction, Antique sales, Much More! 10:00 AM-4:00PM
<u>Wednesday, October 25</u>	George Whitehair will present a Speakers’ Program about Dr. Frank Boston, a Hilltown resident until his death in 1960. He was a special doctor and altruistic man: founding Lansdale Hospital, house calls, giving meals to needy families, etc. He is gaining local, state, and national recognition. Program at the Hilltown Township Building – 7:00 PM

Any Questions, call 267-614-9174



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You may have guessed by now that my last name is Stahl, of German descent. I was browsing through a book of German immigrant contracts and found some interesting information. On September 29, 1818, a ship of immigrants from Germany landed in Philadelphia. A large Stahl family contracted with Francis C. Clopper (I believe he was a successful miller) for a term of service. The entire Stahl family, consisting of seven, signed a 3-year contract with Clopper, who paid the ship's captain \$124 as reimbursement for the Stahl family's journey. At the end of three years, the family was to receive 2 sets of clothing, one of which would be new. John Stahl, matriarch of the clan would receive \$160 at the end of the term. Two of the younger children would receive basic education.