



# Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

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## October 2021

Our Fall Festival is over. We have to say, it was one of our most successful events ever. The sky was blue, the temperature was balmy. So many people, and they seemed to be so happy to attend. There was so much to see and do. Many of the visitors were there for the first time. We thank those attendees who helped the Society, but we especially want to thank those who helped put this event on. That includes donors to the Silent Auction, those who baked goods, vendors and craftspeople. Such an event needs people to set up tents, carry chairs and tables, and beautify our grounds. It all came together for the festival.

In our December newsletter, we will publish a list of those who donated or worked to allow us to have such a successful Fall Festival.

This newsletter will be emailed only. It is our “bonus” issue. We will continue to mail four issues per year. This supplements those four.

### Our 2021 Speakers’ programs

By now, you may know that our October 27<sup>th</sup> and November 14<sup>th</sup> speakers’ programs have been cancelled due to the pandemic. We hope to

present them next year. We now have a backlog of programs, so we hope 2022 will be a banner year for interesting one for events. Keep checking into our Facebook page and website for updates.

### Thank you!

We have had some recent donations of articles and documents. Thank you as always, Eleanor Buehner, we enjoy your articles. A big shout-out goes to Jennie Sperling for a large collection of Hilltown documents. It shows her aptitude for research and will be an important addition to our archives.

We took possession of a wood scale model of a barn, made by Allen Detwiler in 1881, at the age of 16. It was the family barn. He was the son of Joseph and Sarah Detwiler of Hilltown Township. It is a beautiful piece of work. Now, to find out where the barn was and if it stands today. I looked at an 1876 Hilltown map with many names noted. I found six “J. Detwiler” names. I just have to get out and visit each site. This barn was in possession of the Hatfield Historical Society, and when they discovered that the barn was located in Hilltown, so they generously offered it to us. How could we refuse?



*The 1881 barn model made by Allen Detwiler. Note his initials and date below the gable window. It came with a great deal of fencing. Does this building look familiar?*

Peering through the glass windows, it appears that the interior framing of this model copies the framing of the original. Maybe a careful removal of some doors will shed some light on this in the future. At some point, it was wired for interior lighting. I debate whether we should re-wire this. It would look interesting lit up. This was built as a bank barn, so common in this area. The forebay feature, or overhang, has been added on to. Is that 2 story addition or just part of the original barn? Also, so many barns consist of stone at least for the first story. This model is 100% wood. Could the white painted area represent a portion of stone? So many questions.

October can be a month of spookiness and unusual traditions. Keeping that in mind, we are including a few Octobers themed stories.

## Halloween

My memories of Halloween are typical for someone who grew up in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. A costume, a trick-or-treat bag, and a lot of walking. Upon returning home to dump the contents on the floor, we then traded treats with our siblings. How long would our candy last? One year, my brother set a record of restraint, not finishing his candy until Easter, when the supply was replenished.

How did this odd custom start? I don't think there is a definitive origin. It seems to be a combination of several very old customs. Several thousand years ago, the Celts would honor Samheinn the, the lord of the dead, on October 31. Samheinn would control the spirits of the dead, and would allow them to rest peacefully or spur them into a wild frenzy. The Celts also believed that Samheinn would assemble all of the souls of those who had died in the past year and put those souls within bodies of animals. The greater the sins of the persons, the lower the animal into which his or her soul was placed. This was known as the Vigil of Samheinn.

In Rome, a festival honoring the goddess Pomona took place around November 1. She was the mistress of fruits and gardens. Pomona was thanked for a good harvest by laying out apples and nuts in her honor. The Romans played games, held races and celebrated all day. When the Romans conquered their neighbors to the north, these customs morphed into a Fall holiday with mixed customs.

Later, during the Middle Ages, witchcraft emerged as a cult opposed to the Catholic Church. The night of October 31 became known as the night of the Witch. On this night, witches, goblins and demons gathered to mock the coming Church Festival of All Saints Day on November 1, by performing

unholy acts. All Saints Day was also known as All Hallows' Day. While All Hallows' Day was religious in nature, All Hallows' Eve was a night of magic and superstition. As time went on, the name was shortened to Hallowe'en, then to Halloween.

In England, November 2 was known as All Souls Day. The poor walked door to door, begging for food. This custom was called "going a-souling". When people gave the traveling poor a special treat, the poor would promise to pray for any of the family members who died. In time, more children than adults went around on All Souls Day, seeking apples, buns and money.

During the Colonial Days, witchcraft was a serious matter. They firmly believed in Satan and his helpers. Puritan preachers warned of the tricks of the devil, as well as imps, witches and warlocks that roamed the countryside.

Accusations of witchcraft in early America could be deadly for those accused. An execution for witchcraft occurred in Boston in 1648. Two years later, in Connecticut, another execution took place. In the 1690s, in Salem, over twenty executions took place. Witches were thought to gather twice each year. The first meeting was April 30, on the eve of May Day. The other great meeting occurred on October 31. They would meet and dance around a bonfire. Before daybreak, they would get on their brooms and head home. On this October 31 event, they would plan the mischief and evil for the coming year.

In ancient Ireland, on October 31, peasants paraded from house to house in search of contributions to Muck Olla, a Druid God. This was basically a parade, led by a man wearing a white robe and a horse-head mask. If a farmer wanted a good crop the next year, he could ensure this by presenting a generous donation to this Druid God. This contribution

many times consisted of eggs, butter, corn or potatoes.

Gradually these customs changed from horse masks, saints and devils, to ghosts, witches and goblins. You can see how this day, October 31 became the current Halloween, dressing up as virtually anything, and hoping for Snickers bars or a bag of Skittles.

Around 1900, a new custom came into play. Most rural homes had outhouses. Some disappointed trick or treaters might overturn an outhouse. Mischief Night became a regular event, on the night before Halloween. Soaping windows, throwing eggs, throwing toilet paper into trees. Many feel that Mischief Night is a mystery in the folklore calendar.

The conglomeration of these customs provides us with so many Halloween symbols – Jack-o-lanterns, witches, bats, black cats, cemeteries, ghosts, spiders and zombies. Superstitions galore!

In Silverdale in the 1940s-1950s, sometimes Halloween stretched into two nights. Everyone in town knew the children, and it took time to guess who the costumed trick-or-treaters were. They learned which house gave the best treats and who gave money. A favorite was the bakery.

In Abington, in the 1960s, our best treat-giver was the local dentist. Also on our route was Bill Keane, the illustrator for the comic strip "Family Circus". Somehow, he trained his dog to wear a mask on Halloween. That was always a fun stop.

Today, you will see young girls dressed as princesses, cheerleaders, or the character Elsa from the Disney movie "Frozen". Boys like to be athletes, soldiers or monsters. But we can't be so gender-specific. Costumes allow for great creativity on October 31. Elaborate house decorations make for a fun holiday. Talented people create artistic jack-lanterns.

Halloween has come to be second only to Christmas in spending.

### **The Witchcraft Trial in Pennsylvania – William Penn presiding**

No doubt you are familiar with the Salem witchcraft trials in the 1690s. Most likely, you are unaware of the trial that took place in Philadelphia in 1683. Margaret Mattsen was a Swedish immigrant who spoke no English. When Margaret was arraigned, she pled not guilty. Members of the jury who were summoned, but those who did not appear were fined 40 shillings each.

William Penn was the governor of Pennsylvania and acted as judge for this trial. He provided Margaret Mattsen a translator, and seemed to ask her many questions himself.

Three witnesses testified. The first witness testified that he was told 20 years prior that the accused was a witch. A friend's mother told him that she bewitched some cows, then later she said it wasn't Margaret, it was someone else. Confusing testimony to say the least.

The second witness testified of second-hand stories, an old woman at night with a fire and a knife and again, bewitching cows so they would not give milk. Margaret denied this and pointed out if the person who had first-hand knowledge of her behavior testified, she would have answered the claim.

The final witness, the daughter of Margaret Mattsen, said that her husband boiled the heart of a calf that died as a result of witchcraft. Margaret denied this. But she did comment that they would have been better served to boil the bones. In closing, Margaret denied all of the accusations and "saith that ye Witnesses speake only by hear say."

Prior to jury deliberations, tradition has it that William Penn said to her: "Art thou a witch? Hast thou ridden through the air on a broomstick?" When the poor, confused creature answered, "Yes," he said that she had a perfect right to ride upon a broomstick, that he knew no law whatever against it.

The jury came out with an unusual verdict. She was found guilty of having a reputation of being a witch, but not guilty of the specific crimes she was accused of. Her husband and son-in-law pledged 50 pounds each to guarantee her good behavior for the next six months. As there is no further record of this case, we must assume she did behave herself.



### **Lonnie Osman - Halloween 1912**

Several newsletters ago, I introduced you to Lonnie Osman. She was a Hilltown student in her teens. She had a flair for writing, and kept a journal of her thoughts. The following took place in late October, 1912.

**How I Spent Institute Week.** Lonnie's holiday week probably occurred during the week of October 28 to November 1, 1912.

***Monday** – The first day of Institute Week was a nice clear day and as we had no school, I did some work at home. On Tuesday, I helped to iron, and as I had received an invitation to a Masquerade party on Halloween, I started to make a costume. I would represent "Night". On Wednesday, I did some work and finished my costume. In the evening, I*

*went to Luther League in Trinity Lutheran Church in Perkasio. A good program was rendered which I enjoyed veery much.*

*Thursday, I could scarcely wait until evening as I had never been to a masquerade party before. In the afternoon, I went to my friends' home with whom I had decided to spend the night. We left her home soon after seven o'clock and joined a number of our friends with whom we went to the party. We had a pleasant time and left for our homes at a late hour.*

*On Friday morning when I arose, it had started to rain, but did not rain much until afternoon. I spent most of my time that day in studying my lessons for the next week as I had not studied much that week yet. Saturday and Sunday passed quickly enough and on Monday morning, I was ready to start to school again. I was glad to have had a vacation, but was also glad to start to school again.*

It's been a while since we reminded our members who the Board of Directors are. These are the people who work so hard in preserving the past and maintaining our historic site. We have had some updates and additions since our last listing:

Dan Paci – President and Treasurer  
Ivan Jurin – Vice President  
Alicia Snyder – Secretary  
Bob Chope – Director  
Scott Fischer – Director  
Cindy Geary – Director  
Donna King – Director  
Mark McCoy - Director  
Beverly Slifer – Director  
John Snover – Director  
Bill Stahl – Director  
Elsie Tagg - Director

Of course, we also depend heavily on the many volunteers. Without YOU, we would not be able to share the assets of the Society to the public.

Many thanks to all!

Our next newsletter will be published and mailed in early December. This will be the dues and donation issue. To those supporters who are lifetime members, we thank you for your support.

*Bill Stahl*