



# SCHUYLKILL HERITAGE

*A Newsletter of the Schuylkill County Historical Society*



Volume 18, Issue 1

*"To discover, procure and preserve ..."*

January-February 2023



At the Society Christmas party at the Crimson House in Pottsville. (All are volunteers unless otherwise noted.) Front row, left to right, Assistant Director Steve Young, Executive Director Diana Prosymchak, Charlotte Foran, Amanda Campbell, Chrissy Young, Daniel Young, Andrew Prosick, Zack Rodgers; second row, Felicia Wolf, Dot Loy, Larry Vinskie; third row, President Jay Zane, Barb Conage, Sue Dellock; fourth row, Secretary Deb Reed; fifth row, Joanne Weres.

## 2022 was a year of getting things done

**By Diana Prosymchak  
Executive Director**

It's hard to believe that 2022 is already over. Time just flies when you're busy, and there were many things to do!

Fortunately, I have a lot of help from Assistant Director **Steve Young** and a great group of board members and volunteers.

Thanks to them, we continued to get out in the community and present our county's history in new and different ways.

As part of Black History Month, Society Board Member "**Porcupine**" **Pat McKinney** organized and led a Feb. 26

ceremony to honor Pottsville native Ralph E. Brock, who is believed to be the first Black U.S. forester.

The Society was the proud sponsor of the Sept. 15 Harrisburg Then and Now program, where 11 current and former state legislators discussed the changes our state capitol has undergone. It was an honor for me to speak at the beginning of the program, which was presented by the Schuylkill County Chamber of Commerce and state **Sen. Dave Argall**.

Led by the Society, the Schuylkill County Coalition of Historical Societies brought its

History Fair back to the Fairlane Village Mall after a one-year hiatus due to Covid. Crowds of people visited the 27 organizations and vendors' booths and mingled with fellow history buffs.

In June, we turned to the Majestic Theater to present Reading Deputy Fire Chief **Michael Glore's** perspective on Hurricane Agnes 50 years after it devastated parts of the county.

And a performance by the Majestic's choir brought some holiday cheer to our building during the Dec. 7 opening of our exhibit of retired North Schuylkill School District art teacher **Continued on next page**

## Schuylkill County Historical Society

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### Society Hours

Wednesday-Friday 10-4

Saturdays 10-2 (except January  
and February)

*Our purpose is to discover,  
procure and preserve the  
historical records, data and  
other relevant materials of  
Schuylkill County.*



The Majestic Theater's choir sing holiday songs at the opening of our exhibit of **Joseph Evanousky's** charcoal drawings of life in the coal region.

### Continued from page 1

Joseph Evanousky's charcoal drawings depicting life in the anthracite region. So did our annual Christmas tree-decorating contest for local historical societies and other nonprofits.

We worked with radio station **T102's Kasey Owen** to start the Local Reads book club in February for anyone interested in Schuylkill County History. We've had stimulating discussions at our monthly meetings, and often the authors have **participated**, whether in person or via phone or internet.

We showed off our building and exhibits during Yuengling's July 9 Stars & Stripes celebration in downtown Pottsville.

At the same time, we continued many of our popular programs.

Our Haunted History Tours of downtown Pottsville and the Charles Baber Cemetery were a great success. We even added something new - ghosts portrayed by local actors!

We also packed our calendar with plenty of After Hours

programs, some of which were presented by board members and active members who are experts in some aspect of our county's history.

Folk artist **Georgine Postupak-Borchick** returned to teach pysanky egg-decorating, and we donated the proceeds to Ukraine relief efforts. And **Amy Dougherty** showed students how boilo-making is done.

We've got a wide variety of activities on tap for 2023. Besides Haunted History Tours, book signings and discussions and After Hours programs, we're planning bus trips and genealogy classes.

Be sure to check out our Facebook page and upcoming issues of our newsletter so you don't miss any of our events!

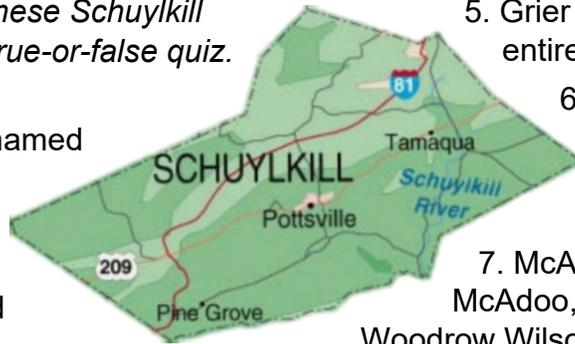
We acquired some amazing artifacts, including about 50 sculptures created by Valley View native Charles Harner from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. They are on display in our hallway.

We also received some gor-  
**Continued on next page**

# A quiz about our local towns and villages

Test your knowledge of these Schuylkill County locales with this true-or-false quiz. Answers are on page 8.

1. Foster Township was named after the famous composer Stephen Foster.
2. Wadesville was named after Captain John Wade.
3. The village of Molino's name originated from the 19th-century war with Mexico.
4. Cass Township was named after Civil War Colonel Thomas Cass.



5. Grier City is a city surrounded entirely by Ryan Township.
6. Wayne Township was named after Brigadier General "Mad" Anthony Wayne.
7. McAdoo is named after William McAdoo, the son-in-law of President Woodrow Wilson.
8. St. Clair was named after St. Clair Nichols.
9. Tremont is the French word for three mountains.
10. The founder of Pottsville was John Potts.

## Continued from page 2

geous quilts from the Schuylkill County Quilters Guild.

And we got a trove of memorabilia and a great interview from the family of Howard "Fungy" Lebengood, halfback and punter for the Pottsville Maroons in 1925. That was the year the team won the NFL championship - before the league rescinded it.

We've already started planning an exhibit and other exciting events to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that bittersweet moment in Schuylkill County sports.

Speaking of exhibits, we're moving ahead with a permanent one on our area's rich ethnic heritage and industrial history. And we're reserving the front part of our hallway for more local artists to display their work.

Local media has helped us promote our events. Special thanks to the *Pottsville Republican Herald* for their great coverage and to WPPA radio for giving us a regular monthly spot on their "Step up to the Mic" program.



Sandy Sorlien, author of *Inland: The Abandoned Canals of the Schuylkill Navigation* presented a program at the Society in November.

We can't put up exhibits or present programs if our building isn't up to par, so we owe a huge debt of gratitude to our elected officials, who worked hard to secure us funding for much-needed new windows.

Our members are the backbone of the Society. Come check out our exhibits, research your family history, attend a program or drop in and say hello. We hope to see you soon!

## Help the Society with a 'Smile' stay up to date on Facebook



If you shop on Amazon, you can donate to us by buying on Amazon Smile. You just have to go to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and designate the Historical Society of Schuylkill County as your charity of choice. We'll receive 0.05% of the purchase price. And don't forget to like us on Facebook so you can stay informed about our news and upcoming events!

## New board members to tackle Maroons

### *Special events and expanded exhibit are planned*

The Society is happy to announce the appointment of two new board members who will co-chair a special committee to commemorate the 100th anniversary of what many consider the Pottsville Maroons' championship season.

**David Russek** of Middleport and **John J. Smolock** of Pottsville both expressed a strong interest in local history. But they're particularly drawn to the Maroons, who would have been the National Football League's 1925 champions if not for a suspension that remains controversial to this day.

The committee will have charge of special events and expand the Society's Maroons exhibit. "With David and John on board, we have plenty of time to plan and organize these important projects," Executive Director Diana Prosymchak said.

John grew up in Frackville and graduated from North Schuylkill High School. Before retiring, he was the comptroller for 19 state agencies. He was a member of Schuylkill County Vision's first board.

"It would be interesting to further explore the origin of significant events and forces at play and how they came together in the culmination of a National Football League championship that



David Russek (left) and John J. Smolock

changed the course of professional football," John said. .

David has even started the Maroons 1925 polo team, which pays homage to its namesake football team.

A multimedia and software executive and entrepreneur, he worked in Hollywood, the Silicon Valley and New York before returning to his hometown of Middleport in 2018. He is currently CEO of social video platform 10Tales.

Entre One, his digital media company, provided commemorative NFTs (non-fungible tokens) as part of the 2022 Yuengling Stars and Stripes Summer Celebration.

## Don't miss the '23 county History Fair

Anyone with interest in local history will find all sorts of fascinating things to see and buy at the Schuylkill County History Fair at **10 AM to 4 PM on Saturday, February 11, at the Fairlane Village Mall.**

You can also meet up with fellow history buffs and find out how you can get involved in your local historical society - or ours!

Led by the Society, the Schuylkill County Coalition of Historical Societies, is hoping this year's fair will be even more successful than last year, when our 27 exhibits drew huge crowds.



A 2022 fairgoer watches a slideshow at our booth.

# A look at Cressona's historical society

By Beckie Strauch

Many of us don't realize that Schuylkill County and the communities within it have quite a history.

Right now, Cressona is probably best known for its traffic, but let me share some other insights into our community.

Our town has had three names. It was first called Manheim, then West Haven and finally Cressona after John Cresson, who was president of the railroad. The first settlers in the area were primarily German and English.

The Cressona Historical Society was formed in 1985 by Artie Berger and Bruce Kantner. Over the years we have

published 11 books containing all the programs that were presented.

I particularly love to read the programs about growing up in Cressona – how Jane Ferrier splashed in the gutters on Pottsville Street (Route 183) after the rain, how the boys tried to make a hot air balloon out of canvas from the county fair (By the way, it never got off the ground, and it caught on fire) or how Harry (Gump) Lebengood spoke about his experience playing professional baseball in the 1920s.

Did you know that...

Cressona had the first woman school board president in Pennsylvania? (Mrs. Iva Bittle)

Cressona had the first Schuylkill County Fair? (It was



Strauch's Mill

This illustration from Volume 1 of the Cressona Historical Society's series of books shows an old grist mill on Pottsville Street with St. Mark's Church in the background.

first held in 1923.)

Cressona resident Gordon Nagle built the Necho Allen Hotel in Pottsville – and many other buildings in the county?

*Except for January and February, our society meets at 7 PM on the first Tuesday of the month at St. Mark's Church at 30 Pottsville Street.*

## A Majestic Christmas tree wins our annual contest



Congratulations to the Majestic Singers, whose Christmas tree received the most votes in our annual contest.

The tree stretched from our floor to our ceiling and dominated the first-floor hallway. With all the ornaments needed to decorate it, it's a good thing the Majestic Theater is right down the street from us!

We want to thank the Stanhope Schoolhouse and the Auburn and Minersville Area historical societies, as well as the Majestic, for participating in our contest and adding their holiday cheer to our building.

Each vote cost \$1, which went to the group whose tree

was voted for. People could vote as many times as they wanted.

We're looking forward to doing this again next year!

### LOCAL READS

The Society and T102's Local Reads book club is starting off 2023 with ***Yuengling: A History of America's Oldest Brewery*** by Mark A. Noon. Come to our building on **January 25 at 6:30 p.m.** to discuss and learn about the company that put Schuylkill County on the map!

# From harvesting ice to skating on it

By J.R. Zane

Ice skating's history can be traced back more than 4,000 years to the Finns, who made skates out of animal shin bones. Today it still has a following in Schuylkill County.

We have Shenandoah native Jerry Wolman to thank for bringing the Flyers to Philadelphia in the 1960s and making professional hockey a popular spectator sport here.

However, for several generations, people frequented Stoyer's Dam in Schuylkill Haven for fun and exercise wearing shoe skates, not bones.

According to Schuylkill Haven historian James Caravan, that body of water at what is now Bubeck Park was created by his great-great grandfather Marcus Bittle, a prosperous farmer who owned a large amount of land on the west side of the Schuylkill River.

Born in the Long Run section of North Manheim Township in 1846, Bittle was a member of one of the earliest families to settle in the region before it became our county. He traced his ancestry to the Baden area of Germany when the surname was Büttel.

He created the dam to produce ice, which was in demand before the home refrigerator was invented in 1913.

He also built a two-story, primitively insulated icehouse nearby and continued this successful business until he died in 1909 at age 63.

His family continued the business for several years, but it became unprofitable as demand decreased.

After World War I, William Spotts, Bittle's son-in-law, operated the pond for public swimming. In the late 1920s, he put in the concrete Crystal Pool and operated for only a few years; its abandoned bath house was demolished in 1938.

The pond survived a plan to drain it and sell the land for residential lots as part of the Columbia Heights subdivision.

In 1919 a young mechanic named Earl Stoyer from Bethel opened his Oldsmobile dealership. In 1932, during the depth of the Depression, he had the courage to add a Cadillac dealership.



(Above) A couple stands on a chunk of ice that drifted ashore from Stoyer's Dam after heavy rain and warm temperatures in this January 1976 *Pottsville Republican* photo. (Right) Earl Stoyer.



His commercial land for his car sales included the old Bittle's Dam, which he cleaned out and enlarged.

Swimming was not allowed, but he encouraged fishing and skating. Stoyer would use his plow to clear the snow off of the ice so that anyone could skate. Soon the pond was informally renamed "Stoyer's Dam."

The 1950s and '60s were the most popular years for ice skating at Stoyer's. The Call newspaper reported that almost 1,000 people were skating on a mid-January Sunday in 1957. In the evenings, small fires were often lit for light and warmth.

Stoyer died in 1972, and 10 years later, the borough held a fundraiser to buy the three acres of water. In May 1984, the dam was formally dedicated as part of Bubeck Park.

Young and old still skate there thanks to Marcus Bittle and Earl Stoyer, two visionaries who are both buried in Union Cemetery in Schuylkill Haven.

## 10 Questions/ 10 Answers



Palo Alto millennial **Jennifer Reiner**, a volunteer and the author of the popular “Feeding the Coal Region” cookbook series, answered the 10 questions for this issue.

**Q. Describe the era and community where you grew up.**

**A.** The millennium brought new technology. Limewire allowed one to download music. Before Limewire, I listened to T-102 or purchased CDs from Disc Jockey at the Schuylkill Mall. I would socialize with friends and watch movies at the mall. My community, Palo Alto, continues its holiday traditions like Santa arriving on a fire truck. The difference now is that I dress up as Mrs. Claus!

**Q. Who inspired your interest in local history?**

**A.** My grandmother, Catherine, who shared family stories of the past. Once her superstitious family made a cotton-wrapped Christmas tree. That same year my Aunt Marianne

stepped on a nail and spent the holidays in the hospital. The family was convinced that the new Christmas tree brought bad luck. That inspired me to learn more about both local superstitions and the history of cotton-wrapped Christmas trees, which I avoid!

**Q. Where and when did your earliest known ancestor settle in the county?**

**A.** My great-grandfather Vincenzo Riotto was born in Castellana Sicula, Sicily in the Province of Palermo. He arrived in New York in 1904. He married Amalia Cicchini from Villamagna, Province of Chieti, in 1918 at the former St. Joseph’s Church in Pottsville. In 1919, he opened Jimmie and Sons Auto Graveyard in Palo Alto.

**Q. What was the most significant world event that occurred during your youth?**

**A.** The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. I was studying for an economics test with friends and at first thought it was a tragic accident.

**Q. Can you name a teacher who made a positive impact?**

**A.** Dr. Harold Aurand at Penn State’s Schuylkill Campus. His lectures about how Disney brought laughter during the Great Depression or about our roadways and how incredible our interstate system really is were fantastic!

**Q. What county business do you miss?**

**A.** Plain & Fancy Donuts brings back fond memories of

trips with my father, Joe, to Renninger’s Market. For many years, my community sold their doughnuts for Fasnacht Day. I considered that to be the start of spring, even though it is in February!

**Q. Do you have a favorite coal region food?**

**A.** Spaghetti and meatballs is my favorite dish, but I will never pass up bleenies, as the topping possibilities are seemingly endless. My new favorite way to enjoy them is with a drizzle of maple syrup!

**Q. Why did you volunteer at the Society?**

**A.** I am passionate about the purpose of the Society, and my work involves preserving coal region recipes.

**Q. Did you have a local hero when you were a child?**

**A.** “Porcupine Pat” McKinney, the Schuylkill Conservation District’s environmental coordinator. His programs are fun, interesting and engaging. His social media posts take me back to elementary school when we were sniffing bark that smelled like root beer!

**Q. Is there a county legend that intrigues you?**

**A.** The Gordon Mountain ghost tale of a murdered woman whose identity and that of her perpetrator are unknown. There are many stories of car headlights dimming, ghostly figures roaming the area, and car engines shutting off since her body was discovered in 1925. The area is notoriously foggy, and I avoid traveling through it after dark!

# We are grateful for these deeds of gift

**Ruth Leonard** - Necho Allen Hotel placemats.

**Steven L. Williams** - *Turning the Pages of Time*, volumes I-X.

**Mary Arlene Swope** - Ginger and paprika jars.

**Charlotte Foran** - Tom Thumb cash register and metal potato masher

**Sallie Badger** - 20 Schuylkill County coalfield maps.

**Hedy Davis** - Yearbooks, books, photos and maps.

**Nancy Kessock** - Tumbling Run glass milk bottle.

**Kay Jones** - Sewing machine and table.

**Daniel Reed** - Books and binders of Schuylkill County history.

**Lisa Ferhat** - Photo of the Schuylkill County Bench and Bar Association.



**Mary C. Marker** - Lace handkerchief with newspaper clipping and kid gloves.

**Cheryl Swartz** - Pottsville memorabilia.

**Mary Stoner** - Commemorative plates.

**Randy B. Maurer** - Hegins Township High School yearbooks and photos.

# Many thanks for the memorial donations

The Society was very sorry to learn of the death of **Virginia M. Miller** on December 4. After she retired as a registered nurse,



she volunteered for us and other organizations through the Apprise program.

We appreciated the time that Virginia gave to us and send our sincere condolences to her family. We appreciate

their designating the Society as a recipient of memorial donations.

Thank you to everyone who donated in Virginia's name:

**Deborah Reed**

**Maryann Conway**

**James & Antoinette Yourshaw**

The Society has also received additional donations in memory of **William E. "Bill" Webber**, who died on October 11. Thank you to all of these donors for remembering our longtime archivist.

**Dr. & Mrs. Jonathan Keyes**

**Blake & Jennifer Basom**

**Rita Tamalavage**

**Barbara Ann Basom**

**Thomas & Kathleen Kelly**

**Arlene M. Francis**

**M. Kent & Mary M. Edwards**

**Elaine & John Webber**

**Patti Lord Heffner**

**Stephen & Janis Kurtek**

**Elena Zdanova & Tatiana**

**Basom**

**Dave Derbes**

## WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

**Craig & Sally Moritz**

**Tracy A. Zelinsky**

**Thomas Kowaloner**

**Patricia Lee McGrath**

**Eileen Destfanco**

**John J. Smolock**

**Logan Lopez**

**Elaine M. Bryant**

**Carolyn Lord**

**Bernie Myro**

**George Tice**

**Timothy B. Moyer**

**Frederick Wilson**

**Roberta Sherman-Rosa**

**Bryan & Mary Anderson**

**Sukeena family**

**Joseph & Judith Piel**

**ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ ON PAGE 3:** 1. F, named after Judge Nathaniel Foster; 2. T; 3. T; 4. F, named after Lewis Cass, who ran for president in 1848; 5. F, it is not a city and, the place is located in Rush Township; 6. T; 7. T; 8. T; 9. T; 10. F., named after John Pott.

# Remembering Jean Dellock

We at the Society were deeply saddened to learn that Jean Davis Dellock, our librarian, genealogist and former board secretary, died on December 22 at age 83.

She had been an integral part of the Society for many years and was working at her desk in the library a week before her death.

The daughter of John and Louise Davis, Jean graduated from Pottsville High School in 1957 and married Stephen Dellock in 1961. The couple owned Dellock's TV in Frackville.

Jean became hooked on genealogy in 1982 when a niece asked her to trace her roots to a Revolutionary War veteran. Later she began using the skills she developed to help other people learn about their family history. Regardless of what they asked her, "I love digging for the facts and seeing what I can find," she told the *Pottsville Republican* in 1996.

She also made numerous facts much more accessible to local researchers. With her cousin Philip Rice, she published many volumes of church and cemetery records.

Her tireless quest for information won her widespread admiration, but she was the first to admit that there was always something new to learn. "No matter how many answers you find," she would say, "there are always more questions."

She will be sorely missed. We send our condolences to Jean's family, and we are grateful and honored that they have asked that she be remembered with donations to the Society.



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**OR CURRENT RESIDENT**



***Warm yourself up  
with one of our  
hoodies this winter!***



Whether you're shoveling ice and snow or watching the Super Bowl, you can flaunt your coal region heritage with these hoodies. And like a glass of boilo, they'll relieve the winter chill.

They're available for \$35 in S, M, L and XL and \$40 for XXL.

Visit our online store for Schuylkill County gifts [www.schuylkillhistory.org](http://www.schuylkillhistory.org)