



# SCHUYLKILL HERITAGE

*A Newsletter of the Schuylkill County Historical Society*



Volume 18, Issue 3

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

May-June 2023

## Check out our exciting program lineup!

A railroad that was so important that a town was named for it and an airplane crash that made national headlines 75 years ago are the subjects of just two of the exciting After Hours programs we've planned.

At two other programs, we'll take a broader look at railroads in the county as well as letters from an armed service member in World War II.

*Admission to each After Hours program is \$5 for the general public and free to Society members.*



Left: A view of the Mahanoy Plane. Right: The aftermath of the 1948 crash of United Air Lines Flight 624 about five miles from Mount Carmel.

**Wednesday, May 17  
6:30 PM**

**Michael Kitsock**, a Penn State fire instructor, founding member of the Schuylkill County Historical Fire Society and retired teacher, will discuss **the history of the Mahanoy Plane**.

This railroad, which he describes as an engineering marvel, carried millions of tons of coal to Frackville from what is now the Mahanoy Plane section of Gilberton.

Originally called Montgomery, the town eventually named itself after the Mahanoy Plane.

The Philadelphia and Reading Co. began laying the tracks in 1859 to make it easier to transport anthracite to Philadelphia.

The Plane operated from 1861 until 1932, and hikers can still see remnants of this piece of anthracite history.

**Thursday, May 25  
6:30 PM**

**Rick Kantner** of Schuylkill Haven will present a program on **railroads and their impact on our county**.

He will also talk about derailments, a timely subject in light of the disaster in East Palestine, Ohio.

Rick spent 38 years working on railroads, mostly as a locomotive engineer. He has given talks about the industry to local schools.

**Thursday, June 8  
6:30 PM**

A soldier from the Pine Grove area who recounted his experiences in more than 50 letters to his hometown newspaper while serving in Europe during World War II is the subject of a presentation by **Jake Wynn**, who writes the [wynninghistory.com](http://wynninghistory.com) blog about the coal region.

**Irvin R. Schwartz** was an 18-year-old sports writer for the *West Schuylkill Press and Pine Grove Herald* when he was called up for military service in the spring of 1943.

**Continued on page 2**

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Open 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.*

## May-June After-Hours lineup

### Continued from page 1

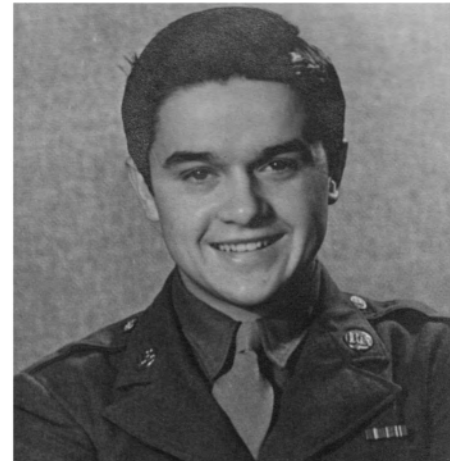
He was in the 26th Regiment of the First Infantry Division, which participated in many battles, including the D-Day landing in Normandy.

**Wednesday, June 14  
6:30 PM**

Local historians **Stu Richards and Tom Dempsey** will present a program on the June 17, 1948, **crash of United Air Lines Flight 624**, near Mount Carmel .

The accident claimed the lives of 39 passengers, including Broadway producer Earl Carroll; his girlfriend, actress Beryl Wallace; and *Esquire* magazine co-founder Henry L. Jackson. All four crew members were also killed.

The DC-6 was on its way to New York after taking off in San Diego and making stops in Los



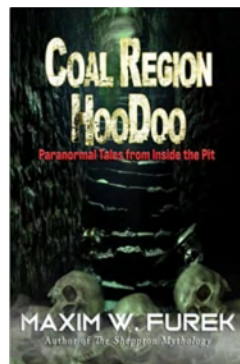
Irvin Schwartz in the Army

Angeles and Chicago. It hit an old coal breaker after the pilots lost consciousness when carbon dioxide leaked into the cockpit.

Stu, who worked on DC-6 planes when he was in the Air Force, will talk about the technical problems that caused the accident.

When he and Tom visited the scene in 2000, they found pieces of the plane, which had shattered after it hit the ground.

## ...and venture into the unknown



We've also scheduled two events around **Coal Region Hoodoo: Paranormal Tales from Inside the Pit** by Maxim Furek.

Maxim, whose other books include *The Jordan Brothers*, will discuss

and sign copies of *Coal Region Hoodoo* at **1 p.m. Saturday, May 20.**

The book is also the subject of a meeting of the Society and radio station T102's Local Reads book club at **6:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 7.**

See our Facebook page or <https://www.t102radio.com/localreads/> for more information about Local Reads.

**CORRECTION:** Linda Mike's Annual Appeal donation in honor of **Loretta Joulwan Cairo** was incorrectly listed as a memorial donation in our last issue.

*From the president***Remembering Charles Ling, a prominent doctor**

By J.R. Zane

Brenda Ling, a New York resident and former Pottsvillian, recently stopped in for a tour of the Society, which she had not visited since we moved from our Second Street location.

She was surprised and impressed by our growing museum and “all things Schuylkill” collection. On behalf of her family, she made a generous donation in memory of her father, Dr. Charles Cho-Sung Ling, who died in 2004.

A native of Nanking, China, Dr. Ling served in the Chinese Army as a paratrooper during World War II and later in the U.S. Air Force as a flight surgeon during the Korean War. He moved to Pottsville in 1959 and was affiliated with the Good Samaritan Hospital, which is now part of the Lehigh Valley Medical Network.

Dr. Ling was appointed chief of the surgery department, a position he held for 27 years. From 1986 to 1991, he was the hospital’s medical director.

The Ling family had resided at 1717 Mahantongo Street, the stately former home of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Smyth, civic-minded owners of the

St. Clair Coal Company.

Brenda Ling enjoyed her genealogical adventure back in her childhood hometown, where she had formed many happy memories. The Society extends sincere thanks to Brenda and her family for their kind and thoughtful donation.

This leads me to remind all those who may be planning a family or class reunion, as well as genealogical tourists, to make the Society a destination this upcoming travel season. I suggest you contact the Society in advance and schedule a guided tour of the museum. Ask about a group rate!

Remember that the richness of life lies in special memories, and a visit to our museum will surely bring many memories back for you.

Lastly, if you recently visited the Society, please give us a review on Tripadvisor as we are newbies on that website.

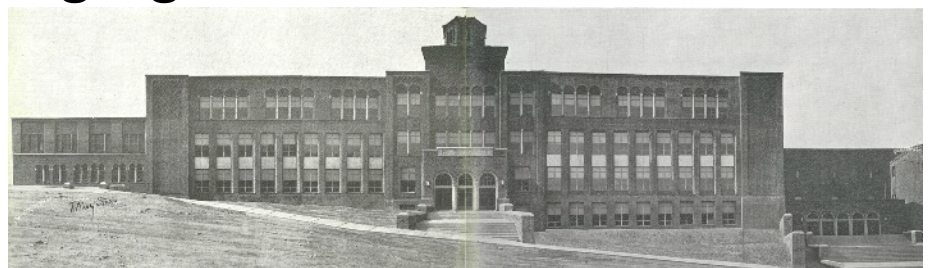
*90 years ago***First Pottsville High graduation at current site**

With great fanfare, the first graduation at the brand-new Pottsville High School building took place in the auditorium on Friday evening, June 16, 1933.

The standing-room-only audience gasped in appreciation when the curtain was drawn and they saw the nearly 200 graduates bedecked in then-traditional gray caps and gowns, the *Pottsville Republican* reported.

Major Edward Cray, president of the New York Guidance Association, was the commencement speaker.

The senior class devoted



several pages of its yearbook to the new building.

The move on Jan. 3 to what was known as the “million-dollar high school” and “the castle on the hill” at 16th Street and Elk Avenue led to a marked improvement in students’ morale, the *Republican* wrote. “From

the very worst school, they now go into one of the very best in the entire state.”

Built in 1909, the former high school at 12th and Market streets went on to house the Patterson middle school and later Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29. It was torn down in 1979.

# Take this quiz on local transportation history

The warmer weather prompts many of us to get moving, but how much do you know about the ways Schuylkill Countians got around in years past? Test your knowledge with “Porcupine” Pat McKinney’s first quiz contribution. **Answers are on page 7.**

1. The very first sale of an automobile was in Schuylkill County back in 1898. The name of the automobile was A) Malibu B) Stanley Steamer C) Winton D) Mustang.
2. According to local historian and Society board member Judge John Domalakes, the shortest street in Pennsylvania is located in Frackville and is called A) Appian Way B) Catawissa Street C) Burma Road D) Domalakes Drive.
3. The internationally famous Appalachian Trail forms most of the southern boundary of our county. The word Appalachian is Native American and means A) other side of the river B) big mountain C) long winding road D) expansive landscape.
4. Black top or asphalt-- best known locally as macadam -- was first used in all of Pennsylvania on Main Street in Ringtown. True or false?
5. More than 75 years ago, Route 61 was called A) Centre Thoroughfare B) Hamburg-Pottsville Highway C) Route 122 D) Dangerous Highway.
6. The Little Schuylkill Railroad was built in 1831 between Tamaqua and Port Clinton and was only



The old Darkwater Trestle crossing Route 61 just north of Saint Clair in 1955.

- the \_\_\_ railroad developed in America at the time. A) fifth B) 10th C) third D) 12th.
7. The Schuylkill River Trail being developed in our county is locally known as the John Bartram Trail. Upon completion, it will stretch from A) Frackville to Reading B) Pottsville to Valley Forge C) Frackville to Philadelphia D) Pottsville to Reading.
8. The very first U.S. Tunnel was constructed by the Schuylkill Navigation Company in the early 1820’s near Landingville. True or false?
9. The Schuylkill River starts in which community? A) Tuscarora B) Tamaqua C) Port Carbon D) Middleport.
10. The engine house of the Saint Clair Rail Yards – the largest classified coal yards in the world – was able to hold how many locomotives? A) 34 B) 25 C) 12 D) 52.

## Memorial Day 1923: A special train from Philly for ex-coal region residents who wanted to visit their hometowns for the holiday

Philadelphia transplants from the coal region were able to spend a very full Memorial Day with friends and family members in their hometowns.

The Philadelphia & Reading Railway’s one-day “low-fare” excursion train was scheduled to leave Philly’s Reading Terminal at 12:01 a.m. on Wednes-

day, May 30, and stop early that morning in Mahanoy City, Tamaqua, Gilberton, Mahanoy Plane, Shenandoah, Girardville, Ashland, Gordon, Mount Carmel and Shamokin, the *Shenandoah Herald* reported.

About 180 people arrived in Shenandoah at 4:30 a.m. and left at 8:15 p.m., the *Herald* said.

More than 500 passengers spent the day in Mahanoy City and enjoyed an afternoon ballgame and evening bazaar, the *Record-American* reported.

The paper said the trip was organized by Philadelphia restaurateur Ray Curran, a Centuria native, and his ad manager, Phil Coyle, “a former town boy.”

# Pilger Ruh, a Pine Grove area landmark

By Pat McKinney  
Board Member

It certainly was a struggle to climb the Blue Mountain, especially back in the 1700s with a wagon loaded to the brim with goods and supplies. Travel on the old Tulpehocken Path was a feat in itself as both humans and animals worked up a significant thirst due to the uphill grade.

“Pilger Ruh” is a historic watering hole -- a.k.a. spring -- that Appalachian Trail hikers still use. The noted Moravian missionary, Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, coined the name, which is German for “pilgrim’s rest.”

Von Zinzendorf’s contingent came across this spring in 1742 on his way to spread the gospel in what were then the Native American towns of Shamokin and Wyoming, Pennsylvania.

According to Wikipedia, von Zinzendorf, who lived from 1700 to May 1760, was a particularly important figure in the Protestant Reformation and an outspoken critic of slavery. He also was the founder of the Moravian Church.

He came to Pennsylvania in 1741, met with Ben Franklin and many other influential people, and visited a settlement that he aptly named Bethlehem.

He and his company then headed west of Bethlehem to do missionary work along the northern and western branches of the Susquehanna River. The local natives, the Lenape, were called Tulpehockens, from the Lenape word “Tulpewikak,” which means “land of turtles.”

The Tulpehocken Path, which mostly follows present-day Route 501, connected Shamokin and Womelsdorf, which is where the famous Conrad Weiser home still stands.

As the missionary team followed the path, they came upon a natural spring on the Blue Mountain in what is now northern Bethel Township in Berks County, just a tad over the Schuylkill County line.

Because they were pilgrims stopping to rest, the Count decided to call this locale exactly that!

Nearly 300 years later, the founders of Pilger Ruh Brewing of Pottsville named its craft beer business after the spring, the *Republican Herald*

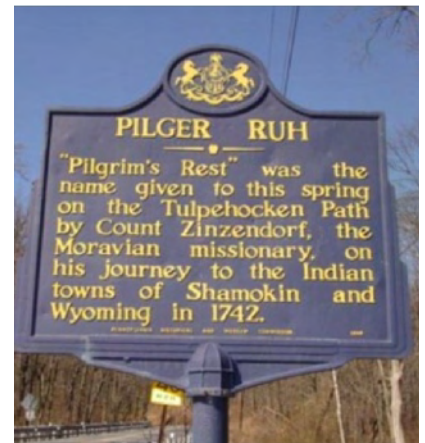


Photo by Paul Crumlish

reported in 2019.

This spring is so important to the area’s local history that the site sports a marker from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

The best thing to do is to see this spring for yourself.



Going uphill from Pine Grove on Route 501, you will see the parking lot for the Appalachian Trail on your left. Route 501 starts to descend, but keep a sharp eye out for this marker on your left.

When you see the marker, turn left into a small driveway and parking lot. Be careful when turning as travelers speed by in this area.

To see the spring and its onsite monument, walk to a rusty gate. You will see the well-trodden path on your left. The water pipe and nearby monument are right there.

The monument was erected in the 1940s and pays tribute to the water’s importance but has a couple of obvious misspellings. You will see the white markings of the nearby Appalachian Trail and a related sign describing how to make your spring water potable.

If you are feeling adventurous after visiting this spring, drive back to the Appalachian Trail parking lot, cross the road and follow the path’s markings for about 600 feet to check out an astounding panoramic view of Berks County!

# How the miners in Minersville lived

By Lisa Von Ahn

There was a lot to learn at the Minersville Area Historical Society's March 16 program on the culture of coal towns. For me, the biggest surprise was how much I didn't already know.

The presentation by Penn State Schuylkill professors Harold Aurand and Nicole Andel focused on how the borough began and how it changed over the years.

Anthracite was discovered in our area in the 1700s, Dr. Aurand said, but mining didn't begin in earnest until the advent of canals in the 1820s. At that point, it became easier to ship the coal to places that needed it, like Philadelphia.

Minersville was a good place to set up mining operations. Located halfway between Reading and Sunbury, it was already up and running, with a sawmill, a bar and a distillery.

The first miners were from England and Wales, where coal was also mined. They were followed by the Irish and Southern and Eastern Europeans.

Not all of them expected to stay, Dr. Aurand said. Many of the men instead planned to return to their homelands after they earned enough money.

Much of the housing for miners and the wives and children who eventually joined them was meant to be temporary.

Dr. Andel said her great-grandparents started life here in Skintown, a "patch" that got its name because the windows in the houses were covered



with goatskins. (There was also no indoor plumbing.)

"Within 15 years they had a church," she said, noting that many patches evolved into small towns with better infrastructure.

They tended to be very ethnically concentrated, she said.

Beginning in the late 1800s, Minersville's location began to work against it. Pottsville, the county seat, was nearby and had more people, so businesses moved there if they could.

There was still coal, an industry I grew up thinking trapped people into a life of poverty. But that didn't always happen, Dr. Aurand said.

Immigrants from a part of Ireland where coal was mined got the best jobs, and they passed their expertise on to their sons. (Women weren't allowed in the mines because it was considered bad luck.)

A family with several teenage sons benefited from their income along with their father's. Unmarried women and girls



**Top:** An undated photo of a patriotic parade on Minersville's Sunbury Street. **Above:** An unidentified woman in the borough.

found jobs in mills and garment factories, as did housewives with grown children.

"The factories were a good strategy for keeping families together," Dr. Aurand said.

Some women also took in boarders or operated small businesses, like grocery stores or laundries, Dr. Andel said.

Many churches, lodges, fire companies and other organizations began on ethnic lines.

"I'm not saying they got along perfectly," Dr. Aurand said, "...but they got along better than you'd think.

## 10 Questions/ 10 Answers



*Kasey Owen, a T-102 on-air personality and the Pottsville radio station's social media director, also hosts the Local Reads book club, which meets each month at the Society. Here are her answers to 10 questions.*

**Q. Describe where you grew up.**

**A.** I grew up in Ringtown in the '90s & early '00s, and it was the best place and time to be a kid! We had our own elementary school, and our generation still played outside! We grew up with a mix of old school and new wave technology. It was the best of both worlds.

**Q. What is an early global or national event that you recall?**

**A.** I was in fifth grade during 9/11, and I remember not only that but the ripple effect of things afterward. I think what

impacted my life the most were the subsequent anthrax scares. We were afraid to open our mail and our school shut down because of baby powder found in a locker room.

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

**A.** A love of history is part of my DNA! My entire family has been very into our genealogy and history for as long as I can remember. It's fun to dive into our local history as a whole and think about where we fit into that puzzle.

**Q. If you could interview any local author about one book, who would it be?**

**A.** I would love to sit down with John O'Hara and discuss *Appointment in Samarra*. I'd love to know his thoughts while writing it and how he handled the scathing aftereffects of its publication.

**Q. Can you name a teacher who was a positive influence?**

**A.** Mrs. Kim Kauffman, the reading specialist at Ringtown Elementary (which closed in 2009). She encouraged my reading habits and never tried to censor the books I wanted to read.

**Q. Can you name an interesting ancestor?**

**A.** Our roots are traced back to Governor William Bradford, who sailed on the Mayflower and was a 30-year governor of the Plymouth Colony!

**Q. If you could be a character in one of the Local Reads book selections, who would it be?**

**A.** I'd like to be one of the Dorsey Brothers' friends from *Tommy Dorsey, Livin' in a Great Big Way*. It just seems like it would have been a fun and glamorous journey to be on while they were making it big.

**Q. Name a favorite county artist, musician, band or song.**

**A.** It's so hard to choose just one! But I love what I call "block party music" – local bands playing everyone's favorite hits. I will always be one of the first up and dancing to our local musicians!

**Q. What book are you looking forward to reading for Local Reads?**

**A.** *Coal River* by Ellen Marie Wiseman. It's a historical novel in which a coal baron's niece observes the unjust treatment of miners. In her quest to do the right thing she falls in love with a Molly Maguire.

**Q. Why should people visit the Schuylkill County Historical Society?**

**A.** If you haven't visited the historical society, you're missing out! The displays of local artifacts are so cool; it's like taking a trip back in time. You never know what treasures you'll stumble upon when browsing the displays. The Society hosts a neat monthly book club also!

# Visitors see their ancestor's donation

It was a sad time for Wayne Parfitt of Newport News, Virginia, and his family when they came to Schuylkill County for the funeral of his father, Wayne K. Parfitt of Pottsville, who died on March 28.

But when they visited the Society, they were happy to learn that a mule whip that Wayne K. Parfitt had donated to us will be featured in our new Coal, Canal and Railroad Museum.

The whip had belonged to Wayne K. Parfitt's father, Howard, who died in 1992. Originally from Mahanoy City, he lived in Pottsville and worked at the former Alcoa plant in Cressona before retiring in the 1970s.

Wayne K. Parfitt was born in Pottsville, graduated from Pottsville High School in 1953 and worked for Rockwell Industries. His wife, the former Eileen Seltzer, died in 1992.

This photo shows the mule whip with Wayne's sons – Josiah of Killeen, Texas, Benjamin of Newport News and Donald of Norfolk, Virginia.



# Recent donations include Miners Bank memorabilia

The Miners National Bank building is vacant, but the Society has a wealth of memorabilia from the Schuylkill County's first bank

Santander Bank, which last occupied the building on Centre Street in Pottsville, has donated scrapbooks, ledgers, deposit tickets, framed pictures, books and printing plates from this historic business.

We thank Santander as well

as our other generous donors:

**Joan E. Burke** - Genealogy and history book collection.

**Larry Steficek** - *Brave Men* book by Ernie Pyle.

**Joe Quirk** - Newspapers, pins, yearbooks and Cressona photo.

**Jennifer Gillespie** - *History of Schuylkill County*, Pottsville High School yearbook, railroad stock certificate and postcard.

**Elaine Wyland** - Lute family

tree binder and Durr/Derr family album.

**Pottsville Business Association** - 2023 Pottsville St. Patrick's Day Parade t-shirt.

**Pat McKinny** - Pottsville 200th anniversary commemorative plate.

**Arrow Studios** - Fashion Craft wallpaper catalog.

**Richard Freeze** - Postcards.

**Eric Ziegmont** - Pottsville Stingers memorabilia, Schuylkill County music store pins and business cards.

**Joseph Kretulskie** - Liquor licenses for Yakabowski's Restaurant.

**Christine Smith** - City of Pottsville bicentennial book.

**Karen M. Gibson** - Local history books and two volumes of *Lehman Family History*.

## WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

Richard Buehler

Phil Deffley

Linda A. Frankenstein

Jim Hoffman

Carol Hahn

Veronica Harley Fritz

Mark Bassler

Jim Reese

Debbie Zimmerman

Jessica Bruce

Aiden Bruce

Joshua Madison

Letitia Minnick

Dennis Tiley

Audri Kalinowski

Donald J. Muller

Edward English



# Memorial Day ads in 1923

## As Time Passes

And the days lengthen into weeks, and the weeks into years, our reverence becomes greater and our love stronger for those of our splendid soldiers who laid down their lives in the World War that the cause of humanity might live.

In common with all of our fellow countrymen who find a just reason for pride in the blessings bestowed through an American Citizenship, we join with the millions of our people who, on this Memorial Day, weep the loss of Liberty's faithful representatives; and, in so doing, we tender, as best we may, a heart-felt tribute to those "that were not born to die."

THE  
**Schuylkill Haven Trust Co.**

SCHUYLKILL HAVEN, PA.

"The Bank With the Chime Clock"

*Schuylkill Haven Call*



**AMERICAN STORES CO.**  
**AMERICAN**

**MEMORIAL DAY, MAY 30th**  
*Let Us Not Forget*

Let us, one and all, in the spirit of grateful devotion, give fitting tribute on Memorial Day to our fallen heroes.

Those who lie on foreign soil, whose graves we cannot visit, we can cherish in our memories. These noble sons have placed their all on the altar of sacrifice to preserve our glorious nation. Let our heartfelt gratitude prove that their sacrifice has not been in vain.

**OUR STORES WILL BE CLOSED MEMORIAL DAY**  
Open the Night Before Until 9 O'clock to Better Serve You.

*Pottsville Republican*



**DANCING**  
—AT—  
**LAKEWOOD PARK**  
Afternoon And Night  
**Wednesday, May 30**  
WITH  
**GENEVIEVE'S  
MELODY GIRLS**

SATURDAY NIGHT—The First Dance at Lakewood Park with Utopian Harmony Octette.  
SATURDAY, JUNE 2d.

*Mahanoy City Record-American*

We wish all of our readers a happy and safe Memorial Day weekend, and we remember with gratitude all who gave their lives for our country.

Schuylkill County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 1356  
Pottsville, PA 17901

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**OR CURRENT RESIDENT**

# Please join us and stay with us!



If you're already a member of the Society, you know you get a lot more than just this newsletter. We offer free or discounted admission to our many programs, as well as access to our building and archives.

As part of our annual membership drive, we are also giving away a pen to anyone who signs up or renews as an individual (\$30), student (\$15) or family (\$45).

And you'll get a free mug when you join as a contributor (\$60), patron (\$100), benefactor or business (\$250) or First Defender (\$500)!

**Come in or visit our online store ([www.schuylkillhistory.org](http://www.schuylkillhistory.org)) for Schuylkill County gifts**