



SCHUYLKILL HERITAGE

A Newsletter of the Schuylkill County Historical Society



Volume 18, Issue 4

"To discover, procure and preserve ..."

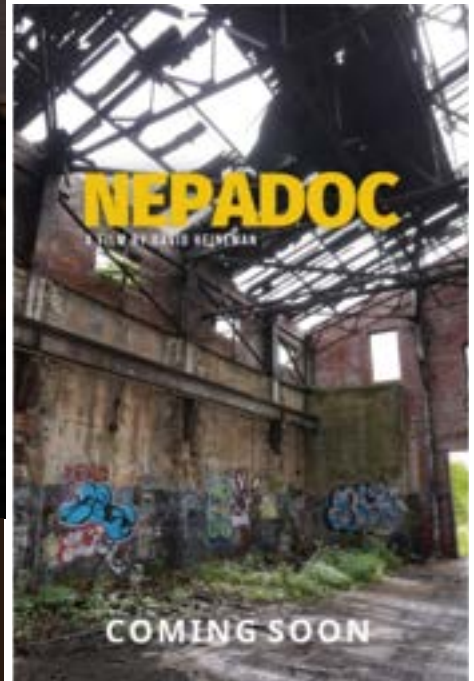
July-August 2023

Our region's story, in pictures and music

The Society is screening NEPADOC, and our building is in it!



6:30 p.m. Thursday, July 20
Majestic Theater, 209 N. Centre St., Pottsville



The Society is proud to present *NEPADOC*, a new documentary about Northeastern Pennsylvania's industry, environment and identity over the past 300 years.

The film by Bloomsburg University communications studies professor David Heineman uses pictures and music, along with occasional text, to tell the story of our region.

David, who will attend the screening and answer questions from the audience, said the Society has a supporting role in the film.

Some of our holdings, including the cardboard cutout of miners shown in the top left

photo, appear in *NEPADOC*.

"I filmed at the museum because I appreciated that its art and artifacts reflected the region's rich cultural history," David said.

Our county is one of a dozen depicted in the documentary, which traces the booms and busts of the various industries that shaped the area.

"*NEPADOC* highlights the resilience of a people who, surrounded by the insular beauty of Appalachia, maintain a well-earned mistrust of authority, a fierce sense of independence, and an often-tenuous relationship with their own past," David noted.

Schuylkill County has a prominent place in the section on anthracite mining.

"Schuylkill County is, to my mind, the part of the region where that legacy is most apparent," David said, citing its monuments, museums and memorials to an industry that has left its mark on the landscape and the economy.

But he also shot nature footage at places like the stretch of the Appalachian Trail that runs through the county, including The Pulpit and The Pinnacle.

Admission is free to Society members and \$10 for the general public

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Historical Society**

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Sch.hist@comcast.net

www.schuylkillhistory.org

305 North Centre Street

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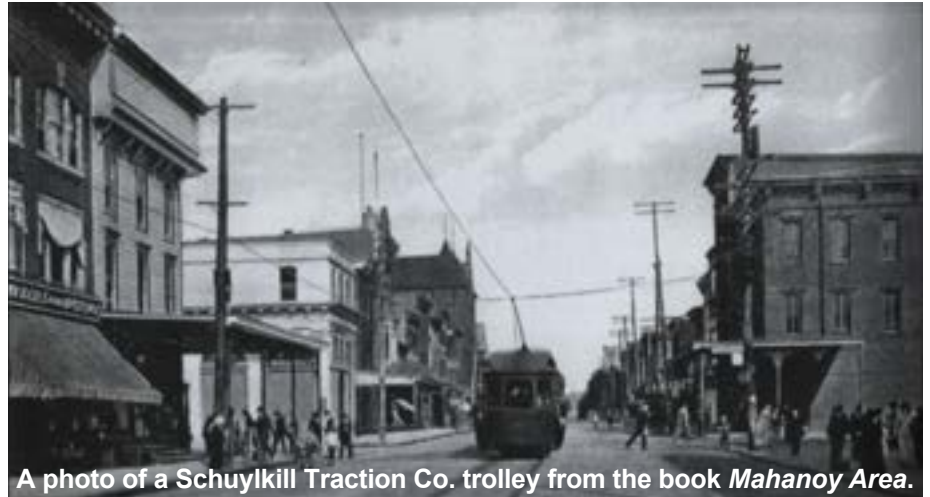
Saturdays 10-2 (except

January and February)

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

From the president

Two young men killed in a riot over trolley tracks



A photo of a Schuylkill Traction Co. trolley from the book *Mahanoy Area*.

By J.R. Zane

A dispute over trolley tracks in Gilberton erupted in a riot on the night of Monday, Aug. 21, 1893, that left two bystanders dead and several men injured.

James Parfett, a Welsh coal miner who had turned 25 the day before, was just standing in the crowd, and William Holland, 19, was sitting on his front steps when a bullet pierced his chest.

The borough had been upset about the location and grading of the tracks on the Schuylkill Traction Co's Locustdale-Mahanoy City trolley line. After many cellars in Gilberton had become swamp-like from heavy rains two days before the riot, borough workers started ripping up the tracks.

The STC sent men, some of whom were armed with rifles allegedly obtained from the Girardville militia, to stop them.

Richard Armour, a former Shenandoah police chief and county detective who was working for the STC, forbade the men from shooting except in self-defense.

An STC official accompanied Armour with hopes of reaching an amicable settlement. About 50 people gathered to listen.

Then people in the crowd began taunting Girardville resident John Briggs, a reputed "hot-head" with the STC group, for carrying a rifle, witnesses later testified. Briggs brandished the weapon from a trolley window and fired it when someone attempted to grab it. Some of the residents fired back with revolvers.

Investigators later reported that 50 shots were fired and countless rocks were hurled.

Continued on page 3

Test your knowledge of our townships

1. Which was *not* one of the original 1811 townships?

A) Brunswick B) Pine Grove C) New Castle D) Norwegian

Which township is *not* named after a military leader?

A) Washington B) Barry C) Walker D) Wayne

3. Which was *not* named after a judge?

A) Butler B) Hegins C) Foster D) Blythe

4. Cass Township formed in 1848 from which township?

A) Butler B) Branch C) Foster D) Eldred

5. The village of Frisbie is in West Brunswick Township.

A) True B) False



The North Manheim Township building

6. Which is our county's southernmost township?

A) Pine Grove B) Reilly C) Wayne D) South Union

7. The war between North and South Manheim Townships

A) never happened B) ended in a truce C) North victorious D) South defeated

8. Which township has a native American name?

A) Mahanoy B) Upper Mahan-

tongo C) West Mahanoy D) All of the above

9. Which is the smallest township in the county?

A) East Norwegian B) Frailey C) Porter D) Foster

10. Which is our county's northernmost township?

A) North Manheim B) North Union C) Rahn D) North Latenengo

Answers are on page 6.

Trolley Riot

Continued from page 2

Both Parfett and Holland died almost instantly from gunshot wounds.

A few brave men saved Armour from a lynching, but he was gravely wounded by shots in the leg and lung that were said to come from one of his own men. Early reports by some newspapers erroneously said he was killed.

One bullet grazed Briggs' face, and another hit his leg. Although he managed to escape an angry crowd determined to lynch him, too, he was soon apprehended and charged with killing Parfett.

Arthur Whewell, who was

also with the STC group, was arrested for Holland's murder.

An unofficial third victim was William Holland's mother, Bridget Coogan Holland, who died from "heart failure" on Sept. 30. Newspapers said her health had begun to fail after her son's untimely death.

She was buried in Holy Rosary Church's parish cemetery, as her son was. She left her husband and seven other children to grieve.

Armour recovered and was able to testify at Briggs' trial in January 1894. The defendant was well-dressed and clean-shaven, accompanied by his wife and three daughters. He even held his baby girl, Sally, on his lap, during the closing argument by his lawyer, Char-

les Napoleon Brumm. The jury's verdict was "not guilty."

Whewell was released in February on \$6,000 bail (worth about \$211,000 today). He was to stand trial in March, but there is no report that he did or that charges were dropped.

STC passengers had to change trains in Gilberton for a time, but despite continued disputes with the borough, trolleys ran through it until 1927, when buses replaced them.

James Parfett's tombstone in Frackville's Zion Lutheran Cemetery states that he died "from being shot in Gilberton, PA." His family wanted future generations to remember him as a victim of a senseless gunfight that became known as the Gilberton Trolley Riot.

County fair celebrates its 40th straight year

By Patrick McKinney

This year the Schuylkill County Fair is celebrating four decades of continuous operation, but the tradition began 171 years ago.

The Schuylkill County Agricultural Society put on the first one in 1852 on Jim Lessig's farm in North Manheim Township, the *Pottsville Republican Herald* reported in 2008, citing records kept by Schuylkill County Fair Association member Grace Karrer. The fair later moved to Orwigsburg and was held each year until 1904, when financial problems forced it to close.

Businessmen from Pottsville and the surrounding area resurrected the fair in 1923 on what is now Hydro Extrusions in Cressona.

William Strauch described the second incarnation of the fair in a 1986 speech at Cressona Historical Society, as printed in its booklet, "We Remember ..."

The site included a grandstand that could seat up to 4,000 people, as well as exhibition buildings for poultry, handiwork and farm products. Local churches operated restaurants.

Back then, the fair opened on Labor Day and hosted crowds of 50,000. The schools, which opened in late August, gave students the whole week off so they could attend. Tuesday was designated as Children's Day.

Prizes were awarded for various types of exhibits. The latest farm equipment, including tractors, combines and plows, was on display, as were automobiles.

Strauch said the entertainment usually included a carnival on the midway, with rides, sideshows and games of chance. "The barkers would do a superb job of getting patrons into the sideshows," he added.

Vaudeville, plus local talent, performed twice daily, and there was a glorious fireworks display every evening.

Horse races were held each weekday afternoon on the half-mile track. There were auto races on Saturday, the last day of the fair, although the dirt track was very dangerous and the scene of a few accidents.

-During the off-season, the grounds were



used for other activities like races. But in 1934, the Schuylkill County Historical Society put on a pageant.

All of the county's public schools participated in this program, which had a cast of 3,000, 20 bands and a chorus of 1,200! The bleachers on the stage collapsed, but the event continued with the crowning of Miss Schuylkill County.

The fair operated until the late 1930s, when "the bottom fell out," according to Strauch. Ralph Bashore, who bought the grounds at a sheriff's sale, held the fair for a few years until Alcoa took over the property in 1940.

Fast forward to the early 1980s. My former boss Craig Morgan, the 4-H coordinator for Penn State Extension, decided to reinvigorate the fair to showcase his club members' hard work.

His office was next to the old County Farm, which served as the the new fair's site.

In 1984, the Schuylkill County Fair Association was incorporated as a nonprofit. By 1986, the county fair was outgrowing its location, and Penn State was looking to expand its campus.

Hats off to Glenn Luckenbill, who was driving on Route 895 in Summit Station and saw a for-sale sign at Happy Holiday Park. It already had all the makings of a fairgrounds, with restrooms, a few pavilions and black-topped grounds.

In 1986, the site was purchased for \$220,000 that was paid off in just five years.

The 40th consecutive county fair will be held from July 31 to August 5. For more information, see www.schuylkillfair.com.

10 Questions/ 10 Answers



Georgine Postupack Borchick, our newest volunteer, is an expert in the Ukrainian culture. She is known for her pysanky eggs, some of which are displayed in the Smithsonian Institute. She has donated proceeds from her classes, including those at the Society, to the Ukraine relief effort and has sponsored several Ukrainian refugees.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. I was born in 1940, and I have lived in McAdoo all my life. Church was most important to us, but we also had a youth center, Scouts, two movie theaters, block parties, and great schools.

Q. Did you have a favorite activity?

A. My great-uncle, Constantine Postupak, owned Postie's Soda, which bottled Coke and soft drinks he made from

recipes he brought from Ukraine. When I was 16 or 17, my friends and I – 40 of us -- would go into the woods with a case of beer and a case of his grapefruit smash or ginger ale. And he knew it!

Q. Can you name something that has improved over the years?

A. The way we treat the handicapped. My brother was in a wheelchair, and we took him everywhere. In the '40s and '50s, when you had someone in a wheelchair, people shunned you. They thought you had the plague.

Q. What is an early historical event that you recall?

A. A blackout during World War II when I was 4. My aunt and her three children were visiting. When my mother opened the coal stove to get some light, someone knocked at the door and told us to shut off the light. I was scared, and I remember that when I see news of the war in Ukraine.

Q. Who inspired your interest in local history?

A. It's part of my DNA! My 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 in that puzzle.

Q. Was there a teacher who was a positive influence?

A. Miss Mary McDevitt, my third-grade teacher. If we were having trouble with any subject, she would take us to her home and work with us at her kitchen

table so we wouldn't fall behind. She was a magnificent woman.

Q. How did you become a pysanky artist?

A. In our home it didn't matter how little we were, we all had to sit down on Good Friday afternoon and do an egg. At 12 or 13, I really got into it and wanted to do it all the time.

Q. How did the Smithsonian discover your eggs?

A. A woman who had retired from the Smithsonian noticed one of my eggs when she was visiting my daughter. They asked me if I'd send them to Smithsonian for consideration. I said, "Definitely not. There are better artists than me," but they sent them anyway. I didn't know they did until the museum sent a letter thanking me.

Q. Name a noteworthy person from the past.

A. Both of my parents! They loved our country but never forgot their Ukrainian heritage.

My father was a miner and a deputy sheriff, but he also helped start the local ambulance service and the McAdoo Fire Co. He loved McAdoo and would do anything for anyone. And my mother thought nothing of getting up at 4 a.m. and baking 15 loaves of bread to hand out to people having a tough time feeding their children.

Q. Why do you do so much for the people of Ukraine?

A. It's for the love of my heritage, and my parents have inspired me to do all I can to help anyone who's less fortunate than I am.

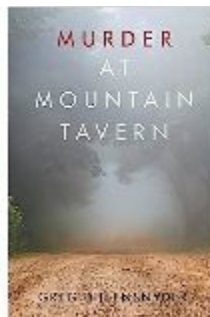
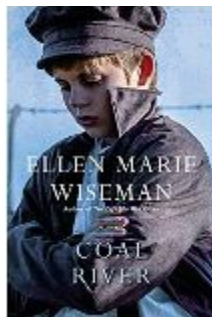
Learn about how our ancestors did their laundry, and join a discussion at our Local Reads book club

IT'S WASH DAY!

Whether you groan about doing laundry or look forward to it, you'll probably appreciate the washing machines and dryers of today after learning how this chore used to be done.



Bob Lee of Newm-anstown will show and explain the items in his extensive collection of laundry equipment from the 1700s to the 1940s at **6:30 p.m. Wednesday, August 23**, at the Society. *Admission is free to Society members and \$5 for the general public.*



OUR NEXT LOCAL READS

The Society and T-102 Radio's Local Reads book club will discuss two coal region novels at our building on **Wednesday, July 26, at 6:30 p.m.** *Murder at Mountain Tavern* is a detective story by Frackville native Greg Dillensnyder, and *Coal River* by Ellen Marie Wiseman is about young children working in the mines in the early 20th century.

Both books are available for sale from Amazon.com and other booksellers.

The selection for **Wednesday, August 30, at 6:30 p.m.** will be "A Case History," a John O'Hara short story that takes place in Gibbsville, his fictional version of Pottsville.

You will be able to find this story in collections that include *Gibbsville* and *Assembly*.

For more information about Local Reads, visit our Facebook page or T-102's website at <https://www.t102radio.com/localreads/>.



Pottsville Republican, Feb. 21, 1931

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Teri Fegley
Margaret Davis
Patrice Taglieri
Lisa Delavergne
Natalie Golden
Andrew Hunt
Dan Peckworth
Marie Williams

Frances Yob
Arthur DiCasimirro
Ron & Barb Rozansky
Mary & Peter Roeller
Danny & Becky Miller
Eric & Michelle Bentz
Tom & Carol Green

Cheryl Taylor Desmond
Alan Baxter
Colette Moser Bressler
Shelby Heckman
Lawrence M. Graver
Emma H. Hess
Shirley Trauger
Bob & Mary Harrow

Answers to the quiz on page 3: 1. C; 2. C; 3. A; 4. B; 5. A; 6. A; 7.A; 8. D; 9. A; 10. B

A limited-edition book of letters from WWII

A June 8 program about a young Pine Grove area reporter who chronicled his experiences as a soldier in Europe during World War II included a special surprise for the Society.

Thanks to **Timothy Schwartz** of Mount Joy, we are the proud owner of one of a very few copies of *Letters from War*, a collection of letters that his father, Irvin R. Schwartz, wrote to the *West Schuylkill Press* and *Pine Grove Herald*. The

book also contains a wealth of pictures and maps.

After returning home, Irvin Schwartz continued to work in journalism. He died in 1992.

Timothy was among the Schwartz family members who attended the fascinating program by Jake Wynn, who writes the wynninghistory.com blog about the coal region.

PHOTO: Society Executive Director Diana Prosymchak accepts a copy of *Letters from War* from Timothy Schwartz.



We are grateful for these additions to our collections

John Grazis - trophies and signed softball from the Schuylkill County League.

Edward J. Donahue III - framed architectural pictures of the Pottsville Post Office and Tamaqua People's Trust Co.

George Lord - poster for Nite Baseball Circus.

Historical Society of Montgomery County - Schuylkill County pocket map by H. S. Tanner.

Lamar Schwartz - photos from Valley View.

Georgine Borchick - child's

barrel seat and a framed mirror and picture.

Penny Glasser Edwards - photos.

Joan Strause - Roda family photos, clothing, books, documents and doctor's bag.

Berks History Center - 1913 Pottsville Ceremonial Session ribbon.

Joseph and Kathy Pattay - photos of Canfield Construction Co. and school foundation.

Grace Woodward - Lone Star Quilt made by Ruth Minnie Nagle, 1929.



Patti Lord - Civil War soldier figures (see photo above).

Anonymous - deck of cards from the Pottsville Club.

A special thank you to our most generous donors

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P.O. Box 1356
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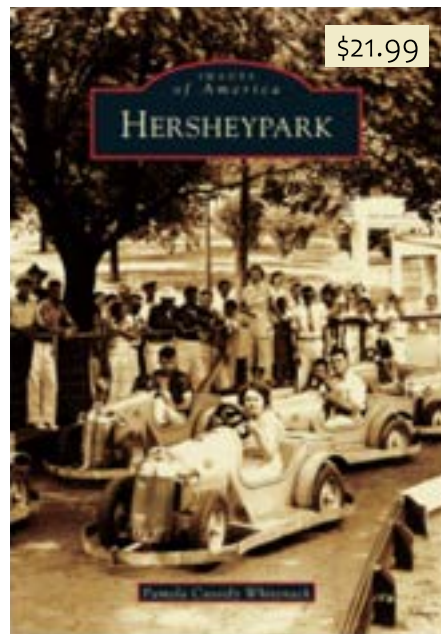
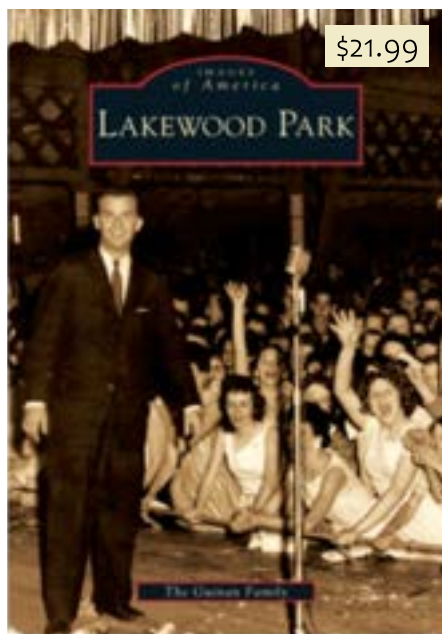
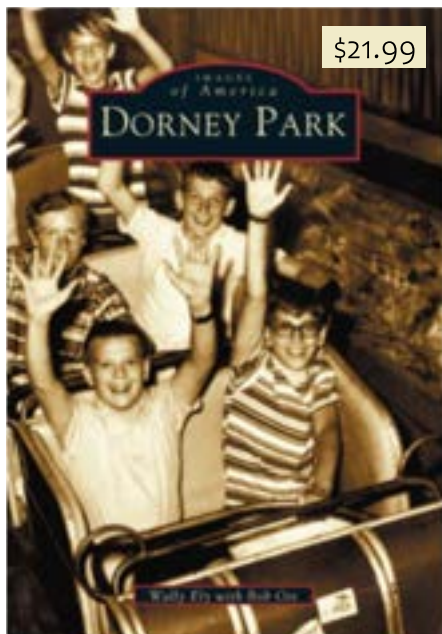
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OR CURRENT RESIDENT

Take a trip down Memory Lane to your favorite amusement park with these books in our gift shop!



Come in or visit our online store (www.schuylkillhistory.org) for Schuylkill County gifts