



SCHUYLKILL HERITAGE

A Newsletter of the Schuylkill County Historical Society



Volume 16, Issue 6

"To discover, procure and preserve ..." November-December 2021

We are going *all out* for the holidays with a wide variety of special programs

The Society is working hard to make this holiday season a festive one by bringing back several popular events as well as presenting two After Hours programs with very different Christmas themes.

Each of the After Hours programs will be held on a Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. Admission is free for our members and \$5 for the general public.

Ukrainian Christmas traditions will be the subject of the Nov. 17 After Hours program.

Folk artist Georgine Postupak-Borchick, who has taught the popular pysanky egg-making classes here, and Kim Fritzges, an expert on Ukrainian and Russian culture, will discuss Christmas food, decorations and icons, as well as pysanky eggs that depict the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

That Wednesday also marks the start of our third annual **tree-decorating contest, which** will run through Jan. 6. Local historical societies throughout the county are participating, and the Block of Art plans to enter a tree based on the Ukrainian legend of the Christmas spider. (Georgine and Kim will explain this story a their After Hours program.

You can cast as many votes



Clockwise from top left: Pysanky eggs by Georgine Postupak-Borchick, an ornament depicting the Christmas spider, the Emanuel Leutze painting of George Washington crossing the River, historian Mike Jesberger.

as you'd like for your favorite tree. Each vote will cost \$1, which will go to the group whose tree you choose.

For our Dec. 8 After Hours program, historian and reenactor Mike Jesberger of Lansdale will provide a look at Christmas when our country was just getting started.

In "**A Colonial Christmas – A Winter with Washington's Army,**" he will detail the move-

ments of the Continental Army in Pennsylvania during the winter of the 1776, including the Christmas night crossing of the Delaware River and the attack on Trenton. He will also describe colonial Christmas customs and compare them with those of today.

Nov. 27 - the Saturday after Thanksgiving - will be a big day for us. We'll be participating in **Continued on page 2**



Left: The Elf on our shelf in 2020. Right: A boilo pot and ingredients at Jenn Dougherty's class in September.

Continued from page 1

the Pottsville Business Association's **Small Business Saturday**, when you can come out and support the downtown stores, including our gift shop.

Small Business Saturday also marks the beginning of the Pottsville Business Association's **Elf on the Shelf** scavenger hunt, which until Dec. 11, when Santa will do the prize drawings. As one of the stops along the way, the Society is looking forward to welcoming the Elf Hunters! For more infor-

mation, check out the association's Facebook page.

After all the excitement, it would be nice to kick back and relax with a nice hot beverage.

If you weren't able to get to Jen Dougherty's **boilo-making class** at the Society in September, we're giving you another chance to learn how to put together this traditional coal region drink for the holidays. She'll be back here on Dec. 1 from 6 to 8 p.m.

Bring a one-pint mason jar and 1/2 cup to one cup of your

preferred alcohol. The cost is \$25 for Society members and \$30 for the general public. Call us at 570-622-7540 to make reservations, which are required.

While it's not a holiday program, our **Mount Laurel Cemetery cleanup** in Pottsville is a way to experience the spirit of giving while helping to preserve history. We'll be at the cemetery on Bulls Head Road from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Nov. 6. Please bring lawnmowers and gardening tools if you happen to have them!

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

NOV. 6 - Mount Laurel Cemetery Cleanup, 9 a.m.-Noon

NOV. 17 - Ukrainian Christmas program, 6:30 p.m.

NOV. 17-Jan. 6 - Vote in our tree-decorating contest

NOV. 27 - Small Business Saturday

NOV. 27-DEC. 11 - Elf on the Shelf scavenger hunt

DEC. 1 - Boilo class, 6-8 p.m.

Dec. 8 - Colonial Christmas – A Winter with Washington's Army

*From the president***Season of thanks and giving**

By J.R. Zane

As another unusual year ends, I thank Diana Prosymchak and her staff of volunteers for keeping the Society on course, with more programs held this year than in the past. Diana has also been applying for grants to help defray the cost of new energy-efficient windows and other building improvements. We expect the renovations will begin in the spring.

Thanks also to Lisa Von Ahn for getting the great newsletter out regularly. Our watchful treasurer, Tom Eltringham, and his finance committee oversee the budget and all funds that come in and go out. Obviously, we had to absorb rising postage and utility expenses, but this year the Society had to replace its boiler, which was an unanticipated emergency expense. Ouch!

That is why the Annual Appeal is so important if we are to continue the progress we have made. Already a room devoted to coal, iron and railroads is planned, and artifacts are now being delivered. 2022 will be an extremely busy year.

Take the quiz on page 4 and learn a bit about generous county residents who shared their good fortune locally. Part of being a person is sharing with others.

Yes, I understand that there are many worthwhile nonprofits, but please put the Society on your list of year-end charitable contributions. Besides the annual donation, other ways to consider include naming the Society as a beneficiary under your will, retirement account or life insurance policy. Donations can also be made to the Society's fund with the Schuylkill Area Community Foundation. If you are older than 70 1/2, withdrawals from your IRA can be entirely tax free if donated to a charity, but discuss this with your financial advisor first. And we will dedicate a window to anyone who donates \$5,000.

At a minimum, consider purchasing some of our gift shop items, whether online or in person, or obtain gift memberships. Lastly, if you make any purchases on Amazon, then please use Amazon Smile and designate Historical Society of Schuylkill County (our original name) as your charity.

Thank you in advance for any help!

Lastly, happy holidays to all members and staff! May we be rid of the virus once and for all in 2022!



Schuylkill County Historical Society

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305 North Centre Street

Pottsville, PA 17901

570-622-7540

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.*

How much do you know about our county's philanthropists?

Match the charitable people from the past who put their money to work in Schuylkill County. *You'll find the answers on page XX.*

And by the way, please consider a donation during our Annual Appeal!



- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) A classical pianist in his spare time who was the Society's largest donor. 2) A co-owner of the Schuylkill Haven Walk-In Shoe factory who endowed scholarships for future generations. 3) Owner of a family mansion on Greenwood Hill in Pottsville that was donated to to start a hospital. 4) A generous Avenues/UCP donor who owned Nesbitt's drug stores in Shenandoah and Tamaqua. 5) The Canadian-born operator of Pine Grove Tannery who funded scholarships for Pottsville High School graduates. 6) An organizer and benefactor of Pottsville Hospital. 7) Penn State-Schuylkill's auditorium is named after this Tamaqua business owner. 8) A co-founder of Cressona Aluminum who helped create Sweet Arrow Lake Park. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Harry Snayberger B. Robert Comloquoy C. John E. Morgan D. Russell Hershberger E. Alice Milliken F. James M. Stine G. Fred G. Smith H. Elizabeth Swift Shippen |
|--|---|

WELCOME To Our New Members

Mark Boreen	Toni Fritz
Howard L. Hannum Jr.	Leo Martin
Marilyn Nelson	Arlette Wright
Ed Santai	Edward Goodman
Kathy Stanton	Edith I. Curry
Gregg V. Yutko	William C. Cleary
Eric Yutko	Kelly Davis
Daniel Rice	Judith Mehlbaum
Dianne P. Winder	Jean Maliniak
Paul F. Murphy	Joseph Zerbey

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



If you shop on Amazon, you can donate to us via Amazon Smile. Just go to smile.amazon.com and designate the Historical Society of Schuylkill County as your charity of choice. We'll get 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!

Pottsville's last 'Third Thanksgiving'

By Lisa Von Ahn

People didn't know it at the time, but Thanksgiving 1941 was the last big holiday for our country before it entered World War II.

It was also the second and last year that Pottsville celebrated Turkey Day for three Thursdays in a row.

Two years before, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had shifted Thanksgiving to Nov. 23 from the 30th to extend the holiday shopping season for businesses that were recovering from the Great Depression.

Pennsylvania accepted the change that year but returned its holiday to the last Thursday of November in 1940.

Claude A. Lord, Pottsville's flamboyant mayor, responded by declaring a third Thanksgiving for the following Thursday, Dec. 5, to celebrate the nearly completed Aetna Steel plant on Peacock Street and to generate favorable publicity for the city.

The first Third Thanksgiving did get national newspaper and newsreel coverage, so Lord decided to repeat it in 1941.

The 52-year-old funeral director had just won the third of the four terms he'd serve as mayor. The *Pottsville Republican* honored him with a doctored photo showing him with fellow "three-termers" FDR and New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia.

As he did in 1940, Lord distributed hundreds of live chickens to the needy from his Garfield Square home on Third

Thanksgiving Eve. This time he tossed some of the birds into the crowd for people to catch.

The highlight of the day itself was a morning parade featuring the Toytown Express, a 300-foot "train" with Santa Claus and inflated rubber animals that had appeared in Philadelphia, Boston and other cities.

Schools in Pottsville and neighboring towns closed early so kids could see the downtown procession. Thousands came, according to the *Republican*.

"It was just like Circus Day in Pottsville, only a bigger crowd," the story said.

The paper's reporter rhapsodized about the shrieking animals on the "all-the-colors-of-the-rainbow" Express, which was so big that it sometimes got tangled up in the city's Christmas decorations.

Lord and others, including members of a women's rifle club, were honored at a Home Defense Council luncheon at the Necho Allen Hotel. Afterward, the mayor and the police treated children from the orphanages to a show at the Capitol Theater.

In the evening, the family of the first baby born on Third Thanksgiving received 41 gifts at a ceremony at the Hippodrome.

The day concluded with a "dream game" between the football stars of the county's northern and southern high schools. The weather was perfect, and the South, which



Onlookers admire Old Splatterpuss, one of the many passengers aboard the Toytown Express,

included Pottsville, was the winner, the *Republican* reported, but lamented that the event drew only 4,000 people.

Most people probably expected a return to normal the following year, at least as far as Thanksgiving was concerned.

Roosevelt had already decided to move the U.S. Thanksgiving to the fourth Thursday in November since his experiment had failed to boost retail sales.

Three days later, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. For many Americans, the next few Thanksgivings would be far more solemn occasions. .

GIFT GUIDE

GIFT GUIDE

Spotlight on ...

Shenandoah area's historical society

By Andy Ulicny

Since its inception in 1998, the Greater Shenandoah Area Historical Society has not only preserved the past but also has been a driving force in the community's present-day life.

The Society is only one of several organizations founded or revitalized by Valerie E. MacDonald, a retired pharmaceutical professional who moved to the area from New York.

With Downtown Shenandoah Inc., which she co-founded, the Society held the borough's first Heritage Day in 1999 and added the Parade of Nations the following year. Both have become successful and highly anticipated annual events.

Over the decades, the Society has sponsored other events, including church and cemetery tours and annual Christmas tree lightings with vignettes from Charles Dickens. The group has also successfully pushed for state historical markers in the town.

For a number of years, the Society operated its museum at the site of Link's Butcher Shop. When a fire shut that building's doors, Ted and Jean Twardzik provided our current home in the historic Aranoff building at 201 South Main Street in 2005.

The Twardzik family's generosity to the Society has continued. Jean, a founding member, provided significant funds to replace the roof in 2018.



(Top) Our military display. (Right) Some of the many items in our church and ethnic room.

Around that time, the ancient windows also needed replacing, and the people of Shenandoah donated enough money for that project as well as for new display showcases.

The Society has a vast collection of photos and memorabilia from our local schools and businesses.

Under current President Andrea Pytak, a room full of clutter was transformed into an area highlighting our local ethnic groups and their connections to local places of worship. Curator Deb Berresford Ulicny, Peter P. Cieslukowski, and Bobby Yudinsky created this wonderful display, and Al Ulichny of New Philadelphia bricked up an exit that led to a demolished building next door.

Not wanting to slow its progress, the Society recently re-



vived its military display in an area where we can also hold meetings and special programs.

We are open for work sessions most Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and visitors are welcome then. You can also contact us via our Facebook page to make a special appointment.

Here's what's been going on at the Society



Many thanks to our donors

_____ Bolich of _____ donated a sequel to her family's history. Her _____ holds the original version, which the Society already had in our library.

Other recent donors include **Frances Lorenz**, German bridal dresses and blouses, hairpieces; box of military dog tags; **Bob Kahner**, postcards and a pen, railroad pass, USS Pueblo pin; **Margret Kane**, photo of 1937 class reunion; **Judith Moyer**, medical books; **Peggy Dawson**, Hegins High School letter H.



Top left: A stop on the Oct. 23 Haunted History Tour at Baber Cemetery in Pottsville. Above: Jen Dougherty teaches Larry and Erica Vinskie Cinelli how to make boilo at her class at the Society on Sept. 22. Right: Reading Deputy Fire Chief and local historian Michael Glore discusses "Schuylkill County Firefighting: A Legacy of Frame Row Homes" at the Society's Sept. 29 After Hours program at the Majestic Theater.

Need Bolich information and is it Frances (a woman) or Francis (a man) Lorenz in deeds of gift?

10 Questions/ 10 Answers



For this issue, the 10 questions were answered by retired county **Judge John E. Domalakes**, a Society board member and lifelong historian.

Q. Where and when did you grow up?

A. Frackville, in the 1950s was typical small-town America. I attended Annunciation BVM grade school and was taught by the excellent but demanding Sisters of Jesus Crucified, who taught Lithuanian culture and language every Friday afternoon.

Q. Name a significant national event that occurred during your childhood.

A. The Cuban Missile crisis of October 1962. Many thought it would lead to a nuclear war. Our house had a fallout shelter in the basement filled with gallon jugs of water and jars of my grandmother's cherries on the shelves.

Q. Who inspired your interest in local history?

A. My mother, Jane Wetzel Domalakes, who was valedictorian of her college class and later taught in the Frackville School District. She had a keen interest in the history of her adopted Schuylkill County and brought up county history during casual conversations.

Q. Tell us about an interesting but overlooked person from the county's past.

A. Roy Hicks, Frackville's first county judge, who was elected in 1927 and served for ten years. Right after his election, Frackville hosted an hour-long celebration parade. Hicks sentenced the last Schuylkill County man executed by the Commonwealth back in 1931. In 1937, Hicks ran for reelection but was defeated and resumed the practice of law. He passed away in 1954.

Q. Any historical figures in your family tree?

A. On my maternal side, Lewis Wetzel, a controversial 18th-century frontiersman and Indian fighter from Lancaster County (which covered a substantial portion of Pennsylvania at that time). There is much written about him.

Q. Name a favorite county sports figure.

A. Tony "Two Ton" Latone, Pottsville Maroon's star running back, who was of Lithuanian descent and weighed 190 lbs. By working as a slate picker in the mines, pushing mine carts up slopes, he developed very strong legs that paid off on the football fields.

Q. What local business do you personally miss?

A. Frackville's Scharadin Pharmacy on South Lehigh Street, which had a great old-fashioned soda fountain no longer found in drugstores anymore. They served "White House" ice cream (vanilla ice cream with maraschino cherries), which was a special treat.

Q. Name a favorite county song.

A. "Sloe Gin" by the Jordan Brothers, released in 1963.

Q. Do you have any memories of participating in local historical events?

I wrote the history of Frackville in 1976 for the borough's centennial celebration, and I was on the Frackville swimming pool committee in 1978. It was a generational family tradition to support our local pool which still continues.

Q. Tell us something historical about the Frackville area.

A. The Mahanoy Plane was an inclined railway constructed about 1861 along the north side of the Broad Mountain. It transported anthracite coal from the Mahanoy and Shenandoah Valleys to Frackville. It operated for 70 years until 1932.

Without it there would be no Frackville, no Gilberton, no Mahanoy City, no Shenandoah, no Girardville. At Frackville over 1¾ billion tons of coal was shipped south to Philadelphia. Foundations are all that remain, but there is a historical marker erected to commemorate its importance.

Remembering Dec. 7, 1941, the day of infamy, when our country was attacked



George Stembrosky



Walter Wardigo



Michael Pelesky

While Schuylkill County was looking forward to celebrating the holidays, the Japanese, without provocation, attacked Pearl Harbor in the early morning of Dec. 7, 1941.

Our first reported casualty was Private **JEROME SZEMANTOWICZ** of Mahanoy City, who died at Hickam Airfield. The confirmation of his death was followed by that of Private **WALTER H. WARDIGO** of Shenandoah, who also died at the airfield.

Sailor **MICHAEL PELESKY** of Shenandoah died on the USS Arizona, and sailor **GEORGE STEMBROSKY** of Coaldale died on the USS Nevada. Marine **JOHN KATCHAK** of Coaldale was killed during a simultaneous attack on Wake Island.

A total of 2,403 Americans were killed on that day of infamy. The United States declared war on the next day.

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OR CURRENT RESIDENT



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ponchos. Check them out
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