



SCHUYLKILL HERITAGE

A Newsletter of the Schuylkill County Historical Society



Volume 17, Issue 1

"To discover, procure and preserve ..."

January-February 2022

A miner who turned coal into works of art



Left: One of our several displays of Charles Harner's coal sculptures. Right: An early photo of Charles.

By Lisa Von Ahn

For most of his life, Valley View native Charles Harner replicated the world around him in coal, a mineral he also spent years digging out of the ground.

His body of work consisted of more than 1,000 sculptures, and now the Society is thrilled to own about 50 of them. Visitors can see them in our building.

These carvings, created from about 1890 to 1955, range from cars and trains to the former Pennsylvania Capitol building and an old colliery, all reproduced in painstaking detail.

"In some cases, the figures of humans and animals are almost uncanny in their resemblance to the originals," a Shamokin News-Dispatch reporter wrote.

Born in 1873, Charles was one of 12 children of Joseph

and Mary Shuey Harner. He spent his early years on his family's farm, but in the early 1880s, they moved to Mount Carmel, where Joseph worked as a miner.

The children also helped support the family. Charles, who started out as a slate picker, became adept at wood carving. He turned to coal after he took a job as a mule tender at a colliery in Marion Heights, which was a few miles away from home.

"The necessary delicate touch needed for this art was evident in his first creation - a beer mug," according to an article in a local newspaper.

A few months before his 20th birthday, he received a "certificate of competency" from the state that enabled him to work in the mines.

He married 19-year-old

Mary Koppenhaver, who was also from Valley View, in Shamokin in June 1896. Their first child, Harvey was born in Mount Carmel in April 1897. Clayton followed in 1899 and Harold in 1906.

Charles later moved his family back to Schuylkill County, where they settled for several years in Barry Township. At one point, he was working on a farm.

By 1920, however, the Harners had returned to Mount Carmel, and Charles was working in the mines again.

When the 1930s began, the Harners were living in Marion Heights, and Charles had worked his way up to stable boss. Later that year, they moved to Trevorton, and Charles started a gas station. It was a short-lived venture, and

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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.*



From left: Michelle and Harvey Harner and Alisa Chiaretti at the Society.

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when he couldn't find a job during the Great Depression, he built a house on land he owned on Trevorton Road in Zerbe Township, near Shamokin.

Tragedy struck in 1933 when Clayton, who was living in Helfenstein with a wife and children, was killed in an explosion at the Locust Spring Colliery. Mary died two years later.

Charles, who had continued to carve coal, found work in 1937 teaching his craft at the Shamokin and Trevorton high schools. Funded by the Works Progress Administration, the courses were believed to be the only ones of their kind in the United States, according to the News-Dispatch.

In 1945, Charles proudly watched as Clayton's son Freeman, who had lived with his grandparents for much of his life, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his service in World War II.

Charles died in 1967 at age 94. Because his hands weren't as steady as they had been, he had retired from sculpting about 12 years before.

Since then, his works changed hands several times before they found a home here.

A Wilkes-Barre resident bought nearly all of his collection and it to Joseph and Phyllis McCormick for \$35,000 to display in their Ashland coal mine museum, which opened in 1961.

Retired mine inspector George Walaitis later acquired the sculptures for his own museum/shop in Frackville.

The last owner was Schuylkill Haven businessman Paul Bedway, who died in February. We are grateful to his daughter, Tamara Amato, for donating them to the Society.

We were also thrilled when Alisa Chiaretti came in before one of our Haunted History tours and noticed our exhibit of Charles' sculptures. She was amazed to learn that the artist was none other than her great-grandfather.

Alisa later brought her cousin, Michelle Harner, and father, Harvey Harner, to the Society to see their ancestor's work.

Come see these amazing works of art for yourself!

The History Fair will return on Feb. 12

We're happy to announce that the Schuylkill County Coalition of Historical Societies is bringing back its popular annual History Fair this year.

Council members and other exhibitors will have items on display and for sale at the Fairlane Village Mall on Saturday, Feb. 12, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

"We were all disappointed when COVID forced us to cancel the fair in 2021," Society Executive Director Diana Prosymchak said, "but we're looking forward to a successful event this year."

The Society, which is organizing the fair, will have a large booth and is still signing up other exhibitors.

So far, the list includes the



The Society's booth at the 2020 History Fair at the Fairlane Village Mall.

Schuylkill Haven History Collection, the Mahanoy Area Historical Society, the Hawk Mountain Chapter 31 Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology, the Railway Restoration Project 113, the

Stanhope School Project, Coal Region Racing, the Wayne Township Historical Society, the Tamaqua Historical Society, and the Schuylkill Historical Model Railroad Club,

How much do you know about Necho Allen?

1. He was born about ...
A. 1760 B. 1810 C. 1830 D. 1900
2. Where was he born?
A. Ohio B. New York C. Vermont D. West Virginia
3. He worked as a ...
A. Stage coach driver B. Lumberman C. Hotel bellhop D. Canal boat captain
4. His wife's name was ...
A. Kate B. Bertha C. Sarah D. Mary
5. What did he supposedly discover?
A. Bituminous coal B. Anthracite coal C. Iron D. Funnel cake
6. Where did this happen?
A. Sharp Mountain B. Blue Mountain C. Broad Mountain D. Locust Mountain
7. The Allens once lived here.
A. Mount Carbon B. Port Carbon C. Port Clinton D. Beury's Lake
8. The Allens operated an Inn near here.
A. Centre Turnpike B. High Ridge C. Schuylkill Canal D. Lakewood Park
9. Did Necho Allen build a hotel in downtown Pottsville?
A. True B. False C. Neither true nor false D. All of the above
10. Reportedly Necho Allen drowned in a fishing



accident here.

- A. Lake Hauto B. Lake Wynonah C. Sweet Arrow Lake D. Lake Champlain

Answers on page 7.

From the executive director

We had a very busy year despite COVID, and we'll have a lot for you to do in '22

By Diana Prosymchak

As COVID ebbed and flowed last year, the Society kept its doors open, and we moved ahead with our packed agenda.

Who could forget hometown hero Gen. George Joulwan's visit to Pottsville on Memorial Day weekend? Not only did he draw hundreds of people to his book-signing event at our building but he also served as the keynote speaker at our fundraising dinner at the Fountain Springs Country Inn.

We won't stop this year. COVID forced us to cancel the annual History Fair at the Fairlane Village Mall last year, but as of now, we plan to hold it this year, on Feb. 12. (See our story on page 3.)

Whether we're talking about ghost sightings at the Charles Baber Cemetery or in downtown Pottsville, our wonderful Haunted History Tours are our most popular events and attract people from all over the state. We'll be back next year with more of them!

Building on the success of our day trips to nearby attractions like the Pioneer Tunnel, we're planning to take off to Fighter's Heaven and the No. 9 Mine in Lansford. We'll also have a get-together at Sweet Arrow Lake,

And we're also working on more bus trips to out-of-town historical spots.

After renovating and reopening the Civil War Room last year, we'll do the same for the Schuylkill Room.

We'll present a coal, railroad and canal exhibit and are planning events centering around the 100th anniversary of the Maroons' 1925 championship. We already have a display

Continued on next page



Photos, from top: The building that's the subject of *The Minersville Mansion*. Society President Jay Zane conducts a Haunted History Tour at the Charles Baber Cemetery. Amy Dougherty teaches a boilo-making class.

And the winner is?

We were still taking votes at our deadline, but these contestants submitted the three top entries in our annual Christmas tree decorating contest: (from left) St. Clair Historical Society, Shenandoah Historical Society and Minersville Historical Society. We'll let you know the winner on our Facebook page!



Continued from page 4

of the coal sculptures of Valley View native Charles Harner (See the story on page 1.)

We'll resume our After Hours programs on the last Wednesday of each month, starting in March. We may even add some bonus programs, as we did last year.

A big thank you to the historians who presented our 2021 programs on subjects ranging from ethnic traditions to mine disasters and county "firsts."

Georgine Postupak-Borchick taught two classes on making pysanky eggs, while Amy Dougherty twice shared her boilo-making expertise. Both of these popular instructors will return in 2022.

We'll also have genealogy classes for anyone looking for tips on tracing their roots.

Besides Gen. Joulwan,

several others authors signed their books at the Society: former District Attorney C.A.L. Shields (*50 Ways To Stay out of Jail*), Jennifer Reiner (*Feeding the Coal Region: A Collection of Classic Irish Recipes*) and James Wosochlo Jr. (*Appalachian: Schaumboch's Tavern*).

To help us kick off the new year, author and paranormal researcher Jeffrey A. Dengler will be here from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 22, to sign copies of *The Minersville Mansion*, the story of his investigation of the historic DiNicola Mansion on the borough's Sunbury Street.

We'll continue to participate in local events, as we did with the Elf on the Shelf scavenger hunt and Music in the Streets.

2021 concluded with our annual Christmas tree-decorat-

ing contest for local historical societies and other groups. We'll continue this tradition during the next holiday season.

We are still working on our campaign to replace our 59 windows, and we're still in dire need of more funds to complete this crucial project.

Of course, we can't do much of anything without our volunteers, whose ages range from 28 to 93. They do everything from setting up displays and cleaning to organizing our archives and researching genealogy and local history.

And we rely so much on our donors, whether they contribute to our annual appeal or present us with amazing artifacts.

We thank everyone who has shown their support for our work in preserving our county's history.

A Pine Grove native created 'Bandstand'

By J.R. Zane

Dick Clark may be the best-known host of the teenage dance show "American Bandstand," but a Pine Grove native originated it.

Donald Horn was born in 1916. His parents, Lloyd and Anna Bateman Horn, were both from western Schuylkill County. Donald spent his early years in Pine Grove, but the family moved to Ohio in the 1920s before returning to Pennsylvania and settling in Reading several years later.

Soon after his mother died in 1933, he went out on his own, working various jobs. At 18, he married, and the young couple became the parents of a son and a daughter.

Noted for his articulate speech and deep baritone voice, he was hired as a radio broadcaster for Reading's WRAW after changing his first name to Robert. He was known on the air as "Bob Horn."

By age 24 he was working at WFIL, the Philadelphia affiliate of the ABC TV network. "Bob Horn's Bandstand" premiered in September 1952.

Those were the days before rock and roll, and ballads by Doris Day and Johnnie Ray ruled the charts. At first, the show featured short music videos, but soon Horn transformed it into a live dance program featuring Philadelphia teens.

The show became very popular, especially with youngsters who wanted to see other kids dance. By 1955, Horn had reached #1 in his time slot. Thousands of teens flocked to the WFIL Studio, which resembled a high school gym.

Among them was Jerry Blavat, who would eventually host a similar show. Horn selected Blavat, then only 13, to be on a committee to select the musical selections. Blavat would never forget Horn's kindness and professionalism.

In 1956, Elvis Presley brought rock music to the forefront. Unfortunately, Horn also got into trouble that year.

He drove his Cadillac through a red light in North Philadelphia and was arrested for drunk driving. Another DUI soon followed after he injured six people, and he was sentenced to six months in jail. He also faced a morals charge but was found not guilty because it appeared to be



an extortion scheme. His troubles continued with a federal indictment for evading income taxes on "payola fees" he received for promoting certain songs. He was found guilty, fined, and sentenced to two years probation.

WFIL quickly replaced him with Clark on a renamed "American Bandstand," which was broadcast nationally.

Horn was soon broke, and the family started over in Houston. He changed his name again, this time to Bob Adams. Working in advertising, he was a rehabilitated law-abiding family man.

He died at 50 from a heart attack while cutting his lawn on July 31, 1966. Jerry Blavat wrote in his autobiography that after hearing of his mentor's death, he helped pay for a proper funeral. Horn was buried at Forrest Park Cemetery in Houston with a one word epitaph: "Bandstand."

Clark became a TV icon whose net worth was estimated at \$200 million when he died in 2012.

10 Questions/ 10 Answers



For this issue, **Dominick Jambeter**, a new Society member and volunteer, answered the 10 questions..

Q. Describe your school years.

A. I attended the Immaculate Heart school in Girardville, which closed in 2006. It was the last parochial school in the town. I enjoyed playing basketball, wiffleball, football, and even “ultimate frisbee.”

Q. Name someone who will be remembered as a county historical figure.

A. Frank Zangari who was the fire chief of Girardville for decades. He started as a volunteer in 1973. Under his leadership the firehouse was enlarged and modernized. He also was president of the Schuylkill County Fire Chiefs Association and was honored to be on state fire safety boards. He dedicated his life to the safety of the community.

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

A. I was in my third-grade science class when an announcement came over the loudspeaker that America was under attack on September 11, 2001. We watched a bit on the school TV before being sent home early. When I got home, I continued to watch the TV coverage.

Q. Who inspired your interest in local history?

A. Both Dot Loy and Barb Conage, who are dedicated Society volunteers. We work together in the photo media room preserving and cataloguing the countless historic photographs, many of which, unfortunately, were never labeled or identified. That is when we become detectives.

Q. Do you know any historical county eateries?

A. Tony’s Lunch in Girardville, home of “the screamer,” a legendary mouthwatering cheeseburger topped with chili sauce, onions and marshmallow fluff. It was founded in the early 1940s by Tony Fulginiti, who died in 1985, but his luncheonette is still going strong.

Q. Name a favorite county sports figure.

A. Minersville’s Joe Balsis was a world billiard champion who had the nickname “The Meatman.” He was a child protégé, learning the game at age 4, standing on soda cases to reach the table. He won his first

world junior championship at the age of 12. He got his nickname as he ran a butcher shop.

Q. What local business do you miss?

A. The Jiffy Mart in Girardville. It was opened in 1976 by Don Majikas and was the only convenience store in town. It burned down in a huge accidental fire in November 2012.

Q. Name a favorite county song or musician.

A. The Poptart Monkeys, a metal and alternative music band based in Central PA. The nationally known band played at Goodfellas in Mount Carbon many times, as well as at other county venues. Clark Tyson was the lead vocalist, and he was great.

Q. Is there a local event that stands out in your memory?

A. St. Patrick’s parade in Girardville, March 19, 2011. My father, Thomas Jambeter, had started his own contracting business. My brother and I each rode 1990 Yamaha 100 cc motorcycles alongside of my father’s red van in the parade. It remains an amazing memory of Girardville and family.

Q. Why is the county historical society important?

A. The Society preserves and shares the county’s remarkable history. There is something for everyone – military, industrial, family, cultural. You name it and they have it. Stop in and see for yourself.

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

A couple who courted with postcards

The Society's artifacts contain numerous clues about the lives of Schuylkill Countians. For Valentine's Day, here's a bittersweet love story that our head researcher, Jean Dellock, found among some postcards that we had received.

George Christ and Annie Bretzius were writing to each other in 1913, when he was 27 and she was 21.

George, who grew up in Pine Grove Township, was the son of Josiah Christ, a miner. His mother, the former Christianna Bachert, had died in 1902, and George was living and working in Philadelphia but would return home for visits.

The oldest of seven children, Annie had lost her father, Henry, in 1909. When she and George were corresponding, she was living in Pine Grove Borough with her mother, Katie, and working as a seamstress at an underwear factory.

The postcards don't say how George and Annie met, but the ones he sent indicate he was quite smitten. In one dated March 18, he wished Annie a happy Easter and signed it, "Very Truly Your Loving Friend."

Annie gave him some encouragement in July with a card that promised, "Everything comes to those who wait," but her message was much more neutral.

"Believe me this is some wait," George replied.

But in September, Annie sent a card with her picture in the front. "I hope you will not get scared



Annie's photo and a card that encouraged George.

when you see this mug of mine," she wrote, and signed it "Lovingly."

They soon were married, and had four children over the next seven years. For several years, they lived in Philadelphia, where George was working for a shipbuilding company.

But the 1920 Census shows him as a miner, living with his family back in Pine Grove Township.

According to an Ancestry.com family tree, he was injured in a motorcycle accident in Philadelphia in October 1920 and died at home several weeks later at age 35.

Annie and the children stayed in the township. In 1930, she was working in a factory and living with her children, mother and siblings as the head of the household. She died in 1972.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Linda Mills-Stanhope
School
Margaret Doyle &
family
Cheryl Swartz
Cathy Rooney

Julie O'Neill
Benjamin Gipe
Chrissie Williams
David Clews
Kimberly Fields

Cynthia Arnold
Susan Samhaber
Diana Gartland
Kathy McGee
William C. Kimmel

Cathy & Gary Cortez
Jack Killian
Christopher M. Mlynek
Frances C. Lorenz
Stephen Stroble
Deirdre I. Murphy

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If you shop on Amazon, you can donate to us by buying on Amazon Smile. You just have to go to 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!

We are grateful for these deeds of gift

Charles Guensch - Ester Simms paintings.

Rick Purcell - print of Pottsville view from Sharp Mountain.

Wendy Wallace - photo of Tumbling Run School, 1903.

Joseph Henry Zerbey IV - carpet bag, quilt, and U.S. Grant items.

Nancy Berger - wedding gowns and Navy uniform.

Sophia Kelly Shultz - 1909 Cameragraph program.

Roberta Kincaid - Kienzle family history.

Lisa A. Sleva - PA Magazine issue: "The Game of Pottsville" and "Greater Pottsville Area."

Eric Miller - 1938 Shenandoah track meet brochure.

Judith R. Moyer - Civil War medical register:

Anne Flannery Kolish - *Rickett's Battery* book, photo of Gettysburg Battlefield, Rickett's Battery information.

Richard Closson - Booklet: Pearl Chase Society: "The Ashland Story" and "Ashland Today"

Darlene Dorsey - Schuylkill Haven High School yearbooks.

Harry M. Zerbey - Civil War-era wooden furniture.

John Koch - various pictures, Pottsville High



A piece of Civil War-era furniture from Harry M. Zerbey

School program books, Pottsville High School Centennial plate.

Carol Haughey - *Old Town and Districts of Philadelphia* book.

Alain Munkittrick - ledger book, 1848-1850.

Patricia Day - Port Carbon Drum and Bugle Corps photos,

Richard Stoltz - Pottsville Area High School yearbooks.

Katrina Heckman - postcards and newspaper clippings, Local No. 515 A.F. of M. directory, St. Clair Class of 1952 photo, St. Clair Parade of Progress souvenir program.

Lincoln's Birthday Ads

(Left) The Pottsville Republican, Feb. 10, 1922, and (right) the Shenandoah Herald, Feb. 10, 1942.

SATURDAY SPECIALS
Bower's Doughnuts
 Sale Price, 21c Doz.
Log Cabin Cookies
 Sale Price, 14c Doz.
 Special for Lincoln's Birthday
FANCY BAKED GOODS
 Strawberry Short Cakes, Charlotte Russe, Chocolate Eclairs, Cream Puffs, Lady Locks, Cream Coconut Layer Cakes, Macaroons, Kisses, Lady Fingers, Salted Nuts.
BOWER'S BAKERY
 308 West Market Street

Savings
ON LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY
 Most stores in Philadelphia will be closed. But on Lincoln's Birthday you'll save . . . by visiting SHOYER'S for your new fur coat. SHOYER'S offer you unusual mid-season bargains in the finest furs in the latest styles . . . and at Sale prices.
 Add luxury to your 1942 wardrobe with a SHOYER fur coat or jacket. Take advantage of the Lincoln's Birthday excursion to come to SHOYER'S—and save! Easy payment plan available.
LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES:
 Philip Schless, 14 N. White St., Shenandoah.
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OR CURRENT RESIDENT

WARM UP THIS WINTER WITH THIS COMFY BLANKET



Price: \$30

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