



SCHUYLKILL HERITAGE

A Newsletter of the Schuylkill County Historical Society



Volume 10, Issue 5

“to discover, procure, and preserve...”

September - October 2015



Historical Society Exhibit Honors Lives Lost in Vietnam War

The 38 Schuylkill County men who did not return home from the Vietnam War are being honored with a new exhibit at the Schuylkill County Historical Society.

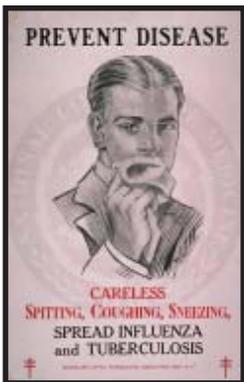
The exhibit, entitled “The Schuylkill County Historical Society’s Salute to Our Vietnam Veterans and Fallen Heroes,” opened Monday and features wall displays with the photos and information on each of the men that died while serving in the military during the Vietnam War. The exhibit coincides with the 50th anniversary of America’s involvement in the Vietnam War from 1965-75.

“It’s an international historical event and we tried to localize it,” J. Robert Zane, president of the Schuylkill County Historical Society board of directors said Monday. “They may, by seeing this, be able to put a name and a face on the conflict, whether it is a family member or a neighbor.” 38 were killed in Vietnam, four were killed en route to Vietnam and one was missing in action.

The historical society commissioned Reidler Decal, Saint Clair, for the seven 96-inch-by-48-inch

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The 1918 Influenza Epidemic



By educating people on how influenza could spread, public health officials hoped to help people avoid it.

As many of you are aware, Schuylkill County recently made national news. Working to widen a portion of Route 61 in Schuylkill Haven, a highway construction crew discovered human bones. Authorities were immediately notified. After some investigation, it was determined that the remains belonged to individuals who had perished during the 1918 influenza epidemic. While the identities of these persons are currently unknown, their physical remains remind us of a time when a pandemic struck not only Schuylkill County but the entire world.

In his classic short story, *The Doctor’s Son*, John O’Hara utilizes the influenza outbreak as the background for the plot. Dr. Malloy’s son, James, accompanies his father’s substitute to visit patients in one of the mining “patches”. For

convenience all the patients assemble at Wisniewski’s saloon. By the time James and Dr. Myers reach the saloon, the ailing Wisniewski and his friends have gotten quite drunk while drinking from a succession of three liquor bottles. During the doctor’s visit the mining su-

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Exciting News!

There is some very exciting news on the horizon! We are having some of our most valuable microfilm transferred to digital media (pdf file searchable). This will take our research library from the “Flintstone to the Jetson’s” overnight. We’ve received a grant from the Schuylkill Area Community Foundation for new computers in the library and will be using this new technology to integrate the new digital resources.

Schuylkill County Historical Society



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Bill Webber

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www.schuylkillhistory.org
305 North Centre Street,
Pottsville, Pennsylvania
(570) 622-7540

Society Hours

Wednesday 1:30 - 6 p.m.

Thursday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Friday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Saturday 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

*Tourists, Historical
Researchers, Scholars
and Genealogists are
welcome*

The Purpose of the Schuylkill County Historical Society is to discover, procure, and preserve the records of the history of Schuylkill County and any data or materials which may establish or illustrate that history.

Influenza Epidemic

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perintendent, Mr. Evans, appears. Worried about the supposed illness of his wife, Mr. Evans demands that the doctor accompany him back to the Evans residence. Reassured by the doctor that Mrs. Evans wasn't that ill, Mr. Evans sits down with Wisniewski and his friends and drinks from the same bottle. At the end of the story, Mr. Evans is dead.

The origins of the outbreak have been debated for many years among historians and scientists. According to a January 2014 article in the National Geographic, evidence now points to an outbreak of respiratory illness in China in November of 1917. About the same time, the British and French had organized a labor corps which eventually shipped over 90,000 Chinese laborers to England and France. These workers were needed to free up soldiers for the front. Rather than being sent in transport ships around South America, the Chinese were shipped by rail across Canada. From Canada they were sent to Europe. Many got sick along the way. By the time they reached France in January 1918, hundreds died from respiratory illness. By the time spring arrived the flu turned lethal.

In March of 1918 officials in Haskell, Kansas reported an outbreak of a "severe" type of influenza. By May, reports were received of illness among the soldiers in Europe. By July, the illness had spread to the civilian populations of Europe. In August the disease was reported in several port cities around the globe, including Boston. According to the *Pottsville Journal*, few people paid attention to this illness that had sent some soldiers to the

hospital at Camp Devins in Massachusetts. Local newspapers featured scattered articles about the school closings in Boston. There was even speculation that "Hun U-boats" were spreading a plague on America!

The first county hint of influenza appeared on September 17, 1918. The call for army draftees had been held up by influenza. By October 4 the headlines of the *Pottsville Journal* read: "State Closes All Saloons, Pool Rooms, Theatres, Dance Halls". By that same afternoon, all the movie theaters, including the *Hippodrome* in Pottsville, had closed. However, the State Liquor Leaders Association issued a statement saying, "If ever there was a time when people needed whiskey, it was now." This attempt to modify the order of the state regarding the saloons "proved futile". In subsequent weeks, state police raided saloons in Gilberton, Minersville, and St. Clair. Owners were arrested for defying the closing order.

One day later, there were over 800 cases of influenza in Pottsville alone. The city board of health ordered that all stores, churches, schools, clubs, and other organizations had to be closed by 6 P.M. Drug stores were the only establishments allowed to be open. The board of health also stated that fine or imprisonment would result if anyone was found spitting on the sidewalks.

The Pottsville Journal headline of October 12, 1918 stated: "More Army Doctors Coming Here; Death Rate From Influenza Epidemic Continues High". Fifty doctors from the US Medical Corps camp in Allentown were ordered to proceed to the county to "assist in fighting the epidemic".

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Influenza Epidemic

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Conditions in Frackville and Minersville were “at a standstill” in terms of current hospital cases. Several of the Army doctors along with some nurses were rushed to these two communities where there were only four doctors and two of them were ill. Fewer new cases were reported and these were “among



Despite wearing masks, many postal carriers became ill and unable to deliver mail.

the foreign population”. This indicated “that the stringent quarantine generally observed by the English speaking population was bearing fruit”. The *Journal* then went on to list the names and ages of those who had succumbed in Frackville and Schuylkill Haven

while noting that the deaths in Tamaqua were of “alien residents”. The situation in Pottsville noted that there was a decrease in the number of new cases. It was estimated that there were 1700 cases, most “on the road to recovery” in Pottsville.

Minersville was hit especially hard. Of the 5000 county cases reported at one point, Minersville had 1300. At one point, there were 47 deaths. The local undertaker fell ill despite the fact that he had 20 bodies to bury. By October 14, Minersville had 164 deaths, 41 of which occurred in two days. A carload of caskets was rushed to town by rail.

In many coal region communities, colliery ambulances took people to an emergency hospital. Few foreigners were found on the ambulances. According to *The Pottsville Journal*, “Many of them feared reporting cases because they thought the bodies of loved ones might end up buried in potters’ fields.” Also noted in *The Journal* was the following

item: “In Schuylkill Haven, there were no caskets, and bodies were stacked in open pits in a field and covered with lime before they were finally covered with dirt.” Perhaps this is the reference for the remains that were found recently on Route 61.

Many people wore masks in an attempt to block the disease from entering. Children were told to eat yeast cakes. Patent medicine was heavily advertised and often sold out. Quinine was the only prescribed medicine while many also advocated drinking a daily glass of whiskey. Some people wore garlic braids or small bags of camphor around their necks. None of these measures proved useful.

On October 19, 1918, the *Journal* noted the epidemic was still “rampant” in the western sections of the county. The number of deaths in the county was still high but most of these were among the “foreign population” and due to the fact that their early treatment was “avoided or unobtainable”. Deaths of Branchdale residents were recounted. Collieries were idled by the disease. By October 21 the flu story began shifting to the inside pages of the newspaper. There were hints that the theaters would reopen by November 8 and schools would reopen by the 11th.

Quarantines were slowly lifted, Masks were discarded. The country celebrated the end of the war in November of 1918. A final wave of influenza swept through in the spring of 1919. When it was finally over the pandemic was credited with killing 50 million people or more worldwide. (To put this into perspective, more people died of influenza than all who had been killed in World War I or had died from the “Black Death” or Bubonic Plague of 1347-1351.) In America, 675,000 people were dead by the time the pandemic ended in 1919. Over 1600 people died in Schuylkill County alone. Hundreds of county women were widowed and/or left childless. Hundreds of county children were orphaned. Years would pass before the coal and other industries got back on their feet. “Black October” proved to be a month of true horror.

Part II of this article will be published in the November/December issue of this newsletter.

Vietnam War

Continued from page 1

displays in the main hallway. Listed next to each soldier's photograph is his name, date of birth, military information and where his name appears on the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C. The exhibit also has other items like photographs and political buttons.

"Their service should not be forgotten" Thomas B. Drogalis, executive director of the historical society said.

Drogalis said he wants the exhibit to serve as a "launching pad" to bring other Vietnam War artifacts to the historical society. The archives at the historical society do not have many Vietnam War items, and the organization is looking for people to donate things as well as support the cost of the exhibit.

The exhibit is open to the public and for school field trips. Drogalis encouraged history teachers to bring their students. The exhibit will be open until Veterans Day in November.

"I think this is a terrific tribute to these 38 men that gave their lives," board member David Derbes said.

Derbes is a Vietnam War veteran along with Bill Webber, board member and volunteer at the society.

"This wall means a lot in paying honor to the ones in Schuylkill County that did not come home," Webber said.

Webber donated jungle fatigues and boots that soldiers wore in Vietnam during the war. While the fatigues were not actually worn in Vietnam, his brother's boots were.

Other items in the exhibit came from retired Gen. George A. Joulwan and Carl "Boonie" Sterner, a member of the American Legion Post 38 and Veterans of the Vietnam War Post 29, Schuylkill County. One of the things Sterner donated was a flag of South Vietnam with the signatures of his fellow soldiers.



"I would spend more time on water than on land," Sterner said, recalling some of his more pleasant memories from Vietnam.

He knew most of the names in the exhibit, like James G. Anderson. The first person on the display, Anderson graduated from Schuylkill Haven Area High School the same year as Sterner. They completed basic training together.

"I think it is really neat," Sterner said about the exhibit.

Sterner said the exhibit has been a long time in the making. Before the Vietnam memorial in Schuylkill Haven was dedicated in 1997, Sterner said the Veterans of the Vietnam War Post 29 tried to do something similar to the exhibit at the historical society but it was too difficult for some family members, especially mothers.

"Back then, it was just too soon," Sterner said.

Sterner said the exhibit allows "other people to remember them too."

"There were so many bad things about Vietnam when they came home," said his wife, Karen. "This is the complete opposite. It honors them."

The Schuylkill County Historical Society, 305 N. Centre St., is open 1:30 to 6 p.m. Wednesdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays. For more information about the organization or how to donate, visit the organization's website at www.schuylkillhistory.org or call 570-622-7540.

“CANAWLER” - October 17th 2015

The Schuylkill County Historical Society in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Canal Society invite you to join us for the “CANAWLER”, an event that will focus on the Schuylkill Navigation System, one of the most successful towpath canals in the United State and the most profitable of the famous Anthracite Canals.



First thing Saturday the 17th of October a Klein Coach will start tracing the route of the Schuylkill Navigation System as it heads north to the original head of navigation in Port Carbon.

The first stop is a small museum in Port Clinton. We then make our way to the site of the first tunnel ever cut in the United States. Stopping by several lock sites along the way, we have lunch at another Museum in Orwigsburg. After lunch we work our way through Historic Schuylkill Haven and finally to where the canal actually started. Because coal was the very reason for the success of the Schuylkill Navigation Company, we conclude our expedition with a visit to an actual coal mine. It’s kinda cool in there, so be prepared. The day will conclude with a buffet at Roma Pizza – Market Street, Pottsville. The fee of this trip through time including everything mentioned above is \$85 per person. To reserve your place on this trip please complete the reservation form below.

Pennsylvania Canal Society – CANAWLER Saturday, October 17, 2015

Yes, I (we) will be pleased to participate in the trip described above.

Name: _____
e-mail _____
Address: _____
phone _____

Name: _____
e-mail _____
Address: _____
phone _____

Enclosed find a check payable to the Pennsylvania Canal Society in the amount of \$85 for each attendee.

Total amount enclosed: \$ _____

Each attendee must sign the disclaimer below:

The undersigned hereby releases the Pennsylvania Canal Society, it’s officers and agents, including third parties who furnish transportation or provide access to their land for historical sightseeing, from any and all claims, whether of personal injury or property damage, arising out of or connected in any way with the tour sponsored by the Society on October 17th.

Name: _____ Date _____

Name: _____ Date _____

Please complete this form and send it with your check to the Registrar:



Glenn A. Wenrich
5757 Stoudts Ferry Bridge Road
Reading, Pa 19605-3249

Reservations should be received by October 10th in order to complete arrangements. Address any email questions to: gaw31@frontier.net

Pottsville Car Cruise



President J. Robert Zane, and Executive Director Tom Drogalis serve up refreshments to visitors during the Pottsville Car Show



Hundreds of vehicles of all makes and models line Centre Street in Pottsville during the annual car show.

Vietnam Veterans Exhibit



7 panels commemorate the brave soldiers from Schuylkill County who lost their lives in Vietnam.



Vietnam Veterans pay tribute to their brothers in arms.



Thanks to Madeline Domalakes, Frackville, for volunteering in our research library and gift shop this summer. Good Luck in school this year!

Thanks Recent Acquisitions

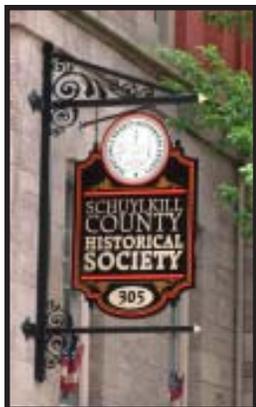
- Old Empire Beauty School Kit donated by Karissa Jamison, Schuylkill Haven.
- Pottsville High School Year Books 1932 and 1933 donated by Harry Piccioni, Pottsville.
- Photo of King Charles II of England. He was the King who granted the Charter to Pennsylvania and a Map of the British Isles printed in 2014. donated by Theodore D. Thorn III, St Clair.
- 4 rolls of Pottsville High School football film donated by Kathy Case, Pottsville.
- Navy uniforms, 2 sets of whites and 1 set of blue, baseball glove and shooting gloves donated by Barb Kasper, Orwigsburg.
- Certificate of Affiliation to the Federation of Musicians dated Jan. 31, 1914 donated by Bob Seiberling, Northumberland, Pa.
- One pair of Ho Chi Minh sandals donated by Donald J. Chesnavage, Pottsville.
- Pottsville Union Tractor Trolley Token, Pomeroy's 25th Anniversary Coin, Doutrich's Store Coin-1936, Orwigsburg Centennial Coin, Pottsville 50th Anniversary Coin donated by Eric Hoffman, Reading.
- Collection of WW 2 Newspapers donated by Joe Orlowski, Pottsville.

- Partial collection of a coal breaker photo album owned by Clarence Ludwig, Minersville donated by Jeanne Cias, Mansfield.
- Genealogy booklet on Benjamin Robert and Juliet Teresa Gillespie who had family members living in Schuylkill County, donated by W. Robert Gillespie, Reading.

WELCOME

The Schuylkill County Historical Society welcomes the following new members:

Majorie Hoffman Anderson	Nancy Menaugh Sandra A. Petti
Robert P. Becker	Hubert G. Plungis
Valerie Chenail	Salem Potts
Clare Chesnavage	Ann Purcell
Richard and Ferris Devins	James J. Purrell
Michael Scott Duffy	Deb Saltzer
Alice Hain	Von C. Schaeffer
Christopher J. Hohman	Joe and Nancy Schlitzer
Deborah Howland	Romona Steiner
Patricia K. Jones	Rebecca J. Strauch
Thomas Kelsh	Daniel Taylor
Ross Labar	Mike Tobash
Tricia Liuzzo	Michael A. Trump
Christopher McKenna	



Memorial Donations

Looking for a meaningful charity to honor or remember a departed loved one? Look no farther. Memorial contributions to the Schuylkill County Historical Society is one way for families to keep their loved one's memory alive by helping the Society achieve its mission of honoring and promoting Schuylkill County's history. We will notify you of each gift made in your loved one's name, and acknowledge each person who makes a contribution. Donors will be mentioned in our newsletter and information given to

the Republican Herald newspaper. Donations can be made directly to the Society for either current operating expenses or earmarked for the Society's Endowment with the Schuylkill Area Community Foundation.

A memorial was given to the Schuylkill County Historical Society in memory of Gary Zerbe by Richard E. Tomko

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

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at what's inside

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Or current resident



Schuylkill County Historical Society
305 North Centre Street,
Pottsville, Pennsylvania

**Schuylkill County
Historical Society Hosts:
150th Anniversary Event
Female Grammar School
Homecoming
Wednesday, October 21st
6-8PM**

*Tours of the classrooms and
museum will be given.
Light refreshments and cake will
be served.*