



SCHUYLKILL HERITAGE

A Newsletter of the Schuylkill County Historical Society



Volume 11, Issue 1

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

January - February 2016

Miners Journal/Pottsville Journal Microfilm Conversion Completed

As previously announced the Schuylkill County Historical Society, has undertaken a project that will greatly advance researchers ability to quickly and accurately find data in the Miners Journal (1825 – 1900) and the Pottsville Journal (1901 – 1951).

The Society contracted with IMR Digital to have the microfilm data transferred to digital media. As a result of the conversion, over a quarter of a million pages of newspaper, which was previously viewed on microfilm readers, is now available for viewing on desktop PC's in a PDF searchable format.

The research process has been simplified dramatically. Researchers will no longer have to retrieve individual rolls of microfilm, load them into a microfilm reader, and research page by page for their desired information. Now with one key-stroke the entire library (nearly 250 rolls of film) has been indexed onto a home screen where the researcher can select an individual year, open a “find box”, and enter a name, date, or phrase. Once the find box word(s) is entered the computer will quickly scan



Tom Drogalis, Executive Director of the S.C.H.S. demonstrates the ease with which you can access files from the Miners and Pottsville Journal newspapers. Below, A sample page from the Pottsville Journal.



the newspaper for the year selected. When the search word is located it is highlighted on the computer screen.

The researchers who have used the new process have been very impressed. Schuylkill County Historical Society, Vice-President, Rick Nagle, said “the conversion is going to save the average researcher hours!” “The best feature is the accuracy of the search. In the past having to rely on the human eye to carefully scan the microfilm screen, many research items are missed or overlooked. The computer now performs the same task with incredible speed and accuracy”.

Researchers are encouraged to visit the Schuylkill County Historical Society to use this new research method.

A special thanks from the Society goes to Dr. and Mrs. Ray Leidich, Tremont, PA, for their underwriting of this historic project. Thanks to their generosity, researchers for years to come will benefit from the preservation of this true Schuylkill County treasure.

**It's Not Too Late –
2016 Annual Appeal
Campaign Winding
Down- Contributions
are welcomed**

Each year the Schuylkill County Historical Society kindly asks you, its members, to support the Society via a once a year contribution. The

Society relies on these contributions to provide working capital throughout the year which enables the

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**Schuylkill County
Historical Society**



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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.

2016 – Schuylkill County Historical Society Board of Directors

A special thanks to Schuylkill County Historical Society Board Members: William Webber, Linda Taylor and Deborah Reed for their service on our Board of Directors. These Board members have given of their time and talent to help our Society grow. Thank you for the many hours you have given to provide programs and services.

Join us all in welcoming our new Board members for 2016:

Diana Prosymchak

JoAnn Chuba

John Walsh

Colleen Hoptak

Thanks Recent Acquisitions

- Reproduction of an 18th century gown worn by Harriet Lane. Donated by Bob Stablur, Pottsville, Pa
- Commemorative plate – Pottsville Sesquicentennial – Donated by Jane Yeasted, Pottsville, Pa
- Scrapbook from former Young Woman’s Christian Association (YMCA) Donated by Mary Moran, Pottsville, Pa
- Photo and a Montovani Program, Donated by Vincent D. Balita, Pottsville, Pa
- Postcard picture of Pottsville City Hall, Donated by Alvin Schaut , Lena, Wisconsin
- 50th Anniversary Edition of Pottsville Newspaper, 1936-37, Pottsville City Directory 50th Anniversary of Historical Society of Schuylkill County, donated by Darlene Scellner and Denise Mullin, Seattle, WA
- Pictures and Plates of St. Mark’s Church Schuylkill Haven, Pa 1891-1991, coloring books and book on Cressona and Orwigsburg. Donated by Carol Wildermuth, Friedensburg, Pa
- WWI French Bayonet and WWI American trench knife, Donated by Margret Davidson, Pottsville, Pa
- Antique ironing plates and handle, Donated by Kathleen Gillespie, Pottsville, Pa
- Assorted maps of Schuylkill County, Donated by Mark Major, Pottsville, Pa

It’s Not Too Late

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Society to provide the programs and services you’ve come to enjoy.

Our thanks go out to those members who have already made a contribution to the 2016 Annual

Appeal. Those members who wish to make a contribution can do so by returning the envelope that was sent out in December or can visit our website: www.schuylkillhistory.org and make a contribute via the “DONATE” button on the homepage of the website.

My husband, he the best of men



Composed and Written by Mrs. Clara Austin whose husband was killed in a Coal Mine at Tower City, PA, November 18, 1881.

Kind ladies and kind gentlemen, come lend a helping hand, for I am a poor widow as you will understand; My husband, he the best of men, was killed while in a mine, leaving me and my two children in this lonely world behind.

Oh, when he lived, no care I knew, for all was happiness, with him to look to for support and my children to caress; I little thought that morning, when we parted at the door, that I my loving husband would see alive no more.

He has gone up to a better world, hi dangerous work is o'er, whilst we must struggle on below, he cannot help us more; yet one fond hope I cherish, and shall until I die, I will meet my loving husband in a better world on high.

We have a little house and lot, and on it there's a debt, which I must pay this coming fall, or out we'll have to get; so I wrote these little verses and took this little plan, to try and save my children's home...I'll do the best I can.

My little boy is five years old, my little girl is three, so they cannot help me much, as you can plainly see; I want to pay the mortgage, and cancel out the debt, and then my children's living I can make out to get.

Now in these little verses my case I've strived to state, my story's one of sorrow and hard to relate; but when I think of him whose gone, and my little children dear, I cry sometimes, and then nerve up and onward persevere.

And now my little children...a suffering can it be? No one but them is left me, no one to pity me! Five cent you'll never miss but sure to have the more, help the widow and orphans, and heaven will bless your store.

Now, kind ladies and kind gentlemen, buy my little rhyme, in passing through life's journey you'll not miss half a dime; in writing up these verses, poverty is my defense, one of these little rhymes of mine will cost you but five cents.

WELCOME

The Schuylkill County Historical Society welcomes the following new members:

Nancy Ballew	Anne Louise Van
Glenn Daniels	Nostrand
Dolores Delin	Loretta and Patrick
Michael Fitzpatrick	O'Hara
Kevin Flynn	Gail Patterson
Judith C. Fruhwirth	Mary Jane Pelham
Michele Yurichko Gillies	Shayne Schafer
George W. Gula	Helen B. Schimpf
Dave Holley	Joseph and Sarah
Carl T. Larkin	Scholy
Kristine McGuigan	Kevin Shay Family
Larry Miller	Pamela P. Whitaker
Tammy Miller	



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 Very Special Thank You



Special Thanks to the following volunteers! Without their time and talents the Schuylkill County Historical Society would not be able to provide and maintain the quality of programs, services, and operational support you've come to appreciate.



Dave Derbes



Dawn Morris-Bicht



Left, Zack Jefferson and Bill Webber



Allen Frantz



Dortothy Loy and John Bambrick



Bill Van Stone



Jean Dellock and Tom Dempsey

Programs and Events:

John Bambrick, Jean Dellock, Deborah Reed, Thomas Shay

Research Library:

Jean Dellock, Thomas Dempsey, Rick Nagle, Jay Zane, Andy Ulicney, Ted Thorne

Gift Shop:

Diana Prosymchak, JoAnn Chuba

Photo Scanning and Archiving:

Barbara Conage, Allen Frantz, Dorothy Loy, Dawn Morris-Bicht, Tom Eltringham

Artifact and Exhibit Administration:

Dave Derbes, Allen Frantz, Bill Van Stone, William Webber, Zachery Jefferson

Computer Systems Support:

Dawn Morris-Bicht, Mark Van Stone

Membership Renewals:

Charlotte Foran, Charlotte Grauf

Newsletter Layout:

Joseph Hupka

Building Maintenance:

Bill Van Stone, Allen Frantz, Bill Webber

Social Media:

Mary Ann Lubinsky

New volunteers are always welcome. There are a variety of activities that volunteers can help with. If you'd like to volunteer, please contact the Society by calling 570-622-7540.



2015 Holiday Marketplace

Our Holiday Marketplace was held on Saturday, November 14, 2015.



George Korson and the Folklore of Schuylkill County

By Deborah Shuman Reed

The winter holidays of Christmas and New Year's often serve as the perfect backdrop for singing and storytelling. Who wouldn't enjoy gathering around a crackling fire on a cold winter's eve and sharing tales and songs of wonderful or strange happenings from long ago?

Like many places, Schuylkill County has its share of stories and songs. Some of the stories can be historically documented. Others fall within the range of "lore". These are the stories that many people know but can't quite prove.

According to the online site, *Dictionary.com*, the term *folklore* refers to the traditional beliefs, legends, customs, etc., of a people. *Folklore* can also refer to a body of widely held but false or unsubstantiated beliefs.

These stories traditionally have been passed down by word of mouth. Unless someone recognizes the importance of these stories and takes the time to record or preserve them, the stories vanish. These stories often tell how everyday people were born, lived, and died. Fortunately for us, George Korson preserved many of our region's stories and songs.

George Korson (1899-1967) was born in the Ukraine. His parents emigrated to the United States when George was very young. The family settled in Wilkes Barre where George graduated from high school. He worked as a reporter on the *Wilkes-Barre Record* for three years. During World War I, he spent two years with the Jewish Legion in Palestine and Egypt. Upon his return to this country, he attended Columbia University for one year. During the next several years, Korson became interested in anthracite and bituminous mining folklore. He continued to work full-time as a journalist for over 43 years and found employment in Pottsville, Allentown, and New Jersey. He authored five books on mining folklore and wrote many articles as well. In addition, he was also

responsible for beginning the archive of miners' songs at the Library of Congress. He founded the Pennsylvania Folk Festival and was instrumental in

starting the National Folk Festival. He received the following recognitions for his work in folklore: University of Pennsylvania Citation in 1949, a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1957, an Israeli Service Ribbon in American Folklore Society in 1960, and a University of Chicago Folklore Prize in 1961.

Besides collecting folklore stories from the mining regions, Korson also collected mining songs. He received monetary support in this endeavor from the United Mine Workers. He was able to collect bituminous and anthracite mining songs from more than 20 states.

In Korson's 1957 folklore masterpiece, *Black Rock*, Pennsylvania Dutch folklore is used to explain the transformation from an agricultural way of life to a new industrial life. Most people today are unaware that many farmers in the western end of Schuylkill County commuted from their homes to the mines in the mountains. (My maternal grandfather, Anthony Ossman, lived in Valley View but worked in the mines at the Gilberton Coal Colliery and Good Spring Colliery for over 30 years.) The anthracite coal that was mined enabled the United States to develop into a great industrial power.

Let's explore one story and a ballad George Korson shared in *Black Rock*...

Who actually discovered anthracite coal? Many of us would answer "Necho Allen". (His name lives



George Korson (John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation)

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on in the former hotel-now senior residence in Pottsville.) According to legend, Allen was a hunter who had camped out under an outcropping of rocks in Schuylkill County. Before he fell asleep, he built a fire. When he awoke, the rocks were glowing. (The famous George Luks painting which hung in the Necho Allen Hotel illustrated this moment.)

In another legend yet another hunter, Philip Ginder, also discovered the burning rock. In actuality, Ginder was a farmer who had become a miller. In 1791, he was out on the hills near present-day Summit Hill in search of rounded conglomerate stone to be used for mill stones. Resting against a rock, he then rolled it over and found it to be shiny underneath. Ginder remembered the stories he had heard about the possible existence of "stone coal". Ginder had the rock tested by a blacksmith friend who was able to ignite it. Ginder then had the specimen taken to Philadelphia. Several interested investors formed the Lehigh Coal Mine Company in 1792. The firm eventually obtained almost 11,000 acres of land, including the spot where Ginder had made his discovery. Ginder himself had no interest in the coal and continued his life as a miller in Northampton County until being forced off his land because he didn't own a proper deed. According to Korson, Ginder's date of death and burial location are unknown.

As early as 1826, a written story about Ginder had appeared in Philadelphia. As the years passed, this story appeared in yet other publications and was then copied by scores of German and English-language newspapers. By the 1840's, the legend had made its way into state and local history books.

But what about Necho Allen? For one thing, according to Korson, Allen was a lumberman, not a hunter. Another source says because the coal lands were bought up after Ginder's discovery, Allen's name did not take precedence. Allen did prospect for coal not only for himself but for others as well. He owned coal lands in Norwegian, Reilly, and Branch Townships. The first tavern on Broad Mountain was built by Allen and his wife, Catherine. The last mention of him is in 1832 as a property

owner in Manheim Township. Like Ginder, Allen simply then vanished from history. We have no idea when he died or where he was buried. In the end, it all depends on where the storyteller is from. In most of the areas of Schuylkill County, Necho Allen is still the man who discovered anthracite. (After all, he did have a hotel named after him and a painting by George Luks!) Outside of Schuylkill County, Philip Ginder is the man credited for the discovery of anthracite.

To this day, the name of Franklin B. Gowen conjures up images of his role during the "Mollie Maguire" era. But even before this, Gowen showed his ruthlessness and ambition. Shortly after becoming president of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad in 1870, Gowen announced his intention of sinking a controversial 2600 foot deep mine shaft near Pottsville. Mining engineers warned that the proposed shaft into the Mammoth seam was absolutely impractical. Gowen forced the issue anyway because he wanted to own the deepest mine shaft in the region. Only after his stockholders balked at the tremendous expense did he let go of his pipe dream. As it was, he wound up with the deepest and most expensive hole around.

A ballad of the failure began circulating around the patches:

*"Draw near to me, friends, form a circle around,
And join in the chorus with music compound
To the song that I sing which will fully expound
Poor Franklin B. Gowen's big hole in the ground;
Some nine years ago Mister Frank had a dream,
And when he awakened he loudly did scream,
"Skim milk for John Tucker, but I'll have the cream,
For I'll sink a big shaft to the great Mammoth seam."*

All in all, there are 20 chapters of stories about Schuylkill County in *Black Rock*. From interesting individuals to courtship and marriage customs, spooks, breaker boys, and folk medicine, *Black Rock* spins a fascinating look at the remarkable heritage that makes Schuylkill County! If you are interested in reading this book, stop by the Historical Society or contact your local librarian.

The Historical Society
Of Schuylkill County
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Pottsville, PA 17901

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LOOK
at what's inside

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Or current resident

Visit us at our booth at the
2016 Schuylkill County History Fair
Saturday, February 13th
10:00 am. – 3:00 pm.
Fairlane Village Mall

**Note: Artifacts and Collectibles
will be on SALE!!!**



The 2015 display featured
our new identification sign
displayed above our booth
located at center court in the
Fairlane Village Mall.

