



# SCHUYLKILL HERITAGE

*A Newsletter of the Schuylkill County Historical Society*



Volume 11, Issue 2

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

March - April 2016

## **Pennsylvania Trolley Museum Member Finds a Treasure Trove of Information**

***George Gula digs deep into Schuylkill County Trolley History During Recent Visit***

*The following article was provided by Mr. George Gula, Pittsburgh, PA, after his recent three-day visit to the Schuylkill County Historical Society.*

I have been interested in street railways all my life. Although I was born in Scranton, eight years of my childhood was spent in Philadelphia living along a streetcar line one block away from the world's largest car barn, Luzerne Car House. That's where I got the trolley bug.

My investigation eventually brought me to Schuylkill County Historical Society. There I found a host of helpful members and an incredible selection of material, including books, a well-written thesis, variety of maps, and a set of 98 original Eastern Pennsylvania System maps showing all track, sidings, switches and roads along which the trolleys operated.

When my father moved the family back to Scranton, I kept that interest. There I met other fans, notably Edward S. Miller, whose photos and knowledge taught me much about the Eastern Pennsylvania streetcar network, especially the Laurel Line, which operated between Scranton and Wilkes-Barre and became (and still is) my favorite system.

At Penn State I studied transportation, which led to a transit career in Pittsburgh and membership in the Pennsylvania Trolley Museum, where I actually operate real trolleys for the public and volunteer in its archives. Having much free time after retirement, I began sorting, cataloging and identifying our eastern PA photo collection and came upon four folders of Eastern Pennsylvania Railways pictures. This system, which had local lines in the Pottsville area and a mainline stretching from Pottsville to Mauch Chunk, truly intrigued me but initially I found more questions than answers on the Internet and in



**Mr. George W. Gula**

our museum library.

I have determined that after the research on the trolley system is finished, I will be returning to The Schuylkill County Historical Society to study the region's fascinating history of canals, railroads, mining and industry.

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## **Rebecca Neal Stoffler** *Schuylkill County Historical Society's oldest member*

**Rebecca N. Stoffler**

Rebecca Neal Stoffler died peacefully at Providence Place in Pottsville on February 17<sup>th</sup>. The Board of Directors honors the memory of the Historical Society's oldest member. For many decades Becky and her late husband Frederick Stoffler were dedicated to the mission of the society. Fred had been an active former member of the board and his loving wife supported his interest in our fascinating history.

Becky Neal was the daughter of John Neal and Carrie Harvey Neal, born in Tower City in 1909, a

*See Rebecca Neal Stoffler on page 5*

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(570) 622-7540

**Society Hours**

Wednesday 10 a.m. - 4 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.

# George M. Bretz

*“All photographs are there to remind us of what we forget. In this—as in other ways— they are the opposite of paintings. Paintings record what the painter remembers. Because each one of us forgets different things, a photo more than a painting may change its meaning according to who is looking at it.”—John Berger (<http://www.quoteland.com/search.asp>)*

“A picture is worth a thousand words.”— phrase of American origin, early 1920’s.

There are many written accounts of the time when coal was king in our county. Countless writers have documented the innumerable aspects of how coal mining affected our area. But unless one solely views statistics provided by the mining companies or State (cold, hard, black and white facts such as tonnage mined or on the job), the rest of the works often reflect the writer’s point of view. Here is a case search of the state library ACCESS PA for any the Molly Maguires will yield distinct titles! Consequently, be both praised and pilloried.

But give someone old either dust-covered breaker Molly Maguire member and viewer is emotionally drawn into



George M. Bretz about 1875

Just as coal became king in the art and business of photography came into its own. The man who would combine these two was George Michael Bretz.

He was born in Carlisle, PA, on June 6, 1842. By the time he turned sixteen, he had received letters of recommendation from several influential citizens of Carlisle. He went to New York City where he worked for two years. At age twenty he began studying photography. Just a few weeks into his study, he received an appointment as a clerk in the quartermaster’s department of the Union army in Tennessee. During the time he served, Bretz wrote letters home and kept a diary of his experiences. Significantly, he often mentioned the state of his health. May 1863 saw his departure from service due to an unspecified illness. He returned to Carlisle in time to witness the occupation of the town by the rebels during the Gettysburg campaign and its eventual re-capture by the Union. He rejoined the army in late 1864 and served as a clerk in the provost marshal’s office until war’s end.

During the war, Bretz continued his interest in photography by visiting the Carlisle studio of a photographer friend. Here Bretz had his picture taken and also watched how C.L. Lochman worked. After the war, Bretz and Lochman set up a studio in Newville, PA but the partnership ended in 1867. Bretz then went to work for the photographer A.M. Allen in Pottsville. By 1870 he was ready to open his own studio...right across the street from Allen’s. Instead of competing with his former employer, Bretz chose to cooperate. There was

See George Bretz on page 3

## George M. Bretz continued

enough business for both. Their biggest cooperative project was the production of stereo views of Pottsville and surrounding areas.

Bretz did specialize in many areas. Descriptions of his talents included “scenic artist and photographer” and “crayon artist and photographer”. He also made sculptures and life-size portraits. Like many other photographers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he took photos of the famous and infamous and sold them to an eager public. His biggest coup came in June 1877 when he photographed 10 alleged members of the Molly Maguires before they were hanged for murder. A year later he took the last photo of Jack Kehoe on his way to the scaffold. These portraits were made into *cartes de viste* size for ready sale.

In 1884 the Smithsonian Institution sponsored an exhibit at the New Orleans Industrial and Cotton Exposition. Part of the exhibit was to show how coal was dug and processed. Bretz was hired to photograph the actual working of a mine. A breast of coal in the Mammoth Vein (the thickest vein of anthracite in the world at the time) at the Kohinor Colliery near Shenandoah was chosen. It was decided to use electric light. A complicated engine run by compressed air with lines to five separate arc lamps provided the power.

The resulting photographs were produced under the most difficult setting ever attempted. Bretz elected to use a “dry plate” method which allowed shorter exposures. Eight views of the mine were made in all.

Bretz’ pictures attracted almost instantaneous recognition. Less than a week later, the photographs were shown in Philadelphia. Here the president of the Photographers’ Association of America highly praised Bretz. In December 1884 the New Orleans Exposition opened. The Bretz photos were included in the US exhibit. The photographs were reviewed in the 1885 edition of the *Annual Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*: “The experiment was a perfect success, and marks a new era in the history of photographing mining views.”

Bretz was approached to provide photographs for the upcoming 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. As he prepared for this, tragedy struck. According to the *Shenandoah PA Evening Herald* of November 13, 1892, fire

destroyed the Shissler Building which contained Bretz’ Pottsville studio. Lost were all the studio scenery, equipment, and gallery contents. Far worse was the loss of about 10,000 negatives. (The actual negative loss was probably closer to 30,000 negatives.) This was most of Bretz’ life work. The studio and contents were valued at \$10,000 but it was insured for only about \$1500. Despite the fire, Bretz was able to participate in the Chicago Exposition.

In the years following the fire, Bretz expanded his business by giving lectures on anthracite coal mining. He used lantern slides to illustrate his talks. One lecture featured over 125 views.

Bretz never tired of expanding photography. He co-invented a panoramic camera which could make a 360° view. No patent was ever recorded.

By early 1895, Bretz’ health began to fail. Upon his death in Pottsville on April 12, 1895, it was noted that he suffered from diabetes. He was survived by his wife, Emma, and their two children. Bretz’ son, Gilbert, had been trained as a photographer but after 1910 he closed the business. Fortunately, the University of Maryland Baltimore County Library acquired Bretz’ work and preserved what was left of this remarkable man’s legacy.

The Schuylkill County Historical Society owns many Bretz’ photos. The Society also has Bretz’ business journals in which he kept track of his various projects and records of payment.

Perhaps the *Shenandoah Evening Herald* obituary for George Bretz said it best:

“By his death one of the leading photographers of the state is removed. He made a specialty of photographing interior mine workings with great success and invented a camera which takes a picture at 180° (sic), the largest ever invented.”

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### Resources:

Beck, Tom. *George M. Bretz: Photographer in the Mines*. Baltimore, MD: University of Maryland County Library, 1977.

“Obituary: George Bretz, the Famous Mine Photographer, Dead.” *Shenandoah Evening Herald* 13 Apr. 1895.

“Photographer of the Mines: Pottsville’s George Bretz.” *Anthracite Coal Region*. 2015. Web. 20 Feb. 2016.

“A Pottsville Blaze.” *Shenandoah PA Evening Herald* 14 Nov. 1892.



## AAhhh... The Smell of Fresh Popcorn

JoAnn Chuba, S.C.H.S. Treasurer and curator of the "SCHUYLKILL COUNTY CINEMA" exhibit stated at the opening of the exhibit "it would be hard to look at Schuylkill County cinemas without viewing them in their historic context".

The Schuylkill County Cinema exhibit is a photo collection of the movie houses that once dotted all the towns in Schuylkill County and is on display on the first floor of the S.C.H.S. building. The exhibit which opened March 2<sup>nd</sup> will run through the end of May.

The presentation included the showing of a classic eight minute 1929 Laurel and Hardy film entitled "Berth Marks", which was the second sound film made about their train trip to Pottsville.

The film can be viewed upon request during regular exhibit hours.

Penny Arcades ran the very first films. Usually they were short- 50 feet of film or about a minute and to view the film you had to look thru a hole in a box.

In 1905-1914 Nickelodeons showed longer silent films that were accompanied by a piano. Silent films were big business.

Eventually Penny Arcades and Nickelodeons could not compete with the film companies newly constructed movie palaces. The industry was dominated by large studios. A few smaller regional companies existed including our own Comverford Amusement Co.

Between 1910-20 the U.S.



**Exhibit curator JoAnn Chuba points to a photo of one of the many Schuylkill County movie houses no longer in existence as Barb Consugar and granddaughter Tabatha look on.**

**This popcorn machine is from the Orpheum Theatre in Orwigsburg**

had over 25,000 movie houses and an average daily attendance of six million people.

Studios expanded the idea of escapism in movies to include the viewing venue. From the moment people lined up on the sidewalk – they were whisked away into another world.

Today many of the local theaters are only a pleasant memory of fun days of yesteryear. Going to the theater on a Saturday afternoon, seeing a great film, and of course enjoying a box of popcorn was a real treat.



**The Schuylkill County Cinema exhibit panels display photos of county movie houses. Additional**

## *Thanks* Recent Acquisitions

- Descendants of David Fritz family tree dated 2013 and family history dated 2014. Donated by David Fritz, Shenandoah, Pa
- Corduroy logo jacket from the Schuylkill County Airport (Near Deer Lake) Donated by Carol J. Pothering, Llewellyn, Pa
- Photo of the 4<sup>th</sup> Drum and Bugle Corps from Pottsville during the Spanish American War, printing dye map of Schuylkill County, miners lamp, and Ost & Ost Logo utility knife. Donated by South Schuylkill Printing & Publishing, Schuylkill Haven, Pa
- Merchants list from 1939, American nightlight, Citizens documents, post cards of Port Carbon, pictures, yearbooks, four sports tee shirts, salt and pepper shakers, Auburn tablet and pencil set, two bank bags, mirror from Webbers Gulf station, window picture box, beer mugs, coffee cups, book written by Mary Filber, Boy Scout book, two books from the Gospel Tabernacle, Stallers Hotel Bag, HB Harding plate, eleven cast iron pictures, two medicine bottles, acid stopper and line pin. Donated by the Auburn Area Historical Society, Auburn, Pa
- A poem written by a woman from Tower City in 1881 in memory of her late husband killed in a coal mining accident. Hancock Historical Museum, Findlay, Ohio
- Appearance Docket, Sheriff of Schuylkill County dated 1868 to 1871. Donated by John P. Garrah, Honesdale, Pa
- Fritz Family Cookbook. Donated by David Fritz, Shenandoah, Pa
- Slides from the Greater Pottsville Winter Carnival from 1967 – 1977. Donated by Rosalie Wiest, Schuylkill Haven, Pa
- Rudolph Breisch General Store Account book dated 1891 from Ringtown, Pa and a family portrait of children of Emanuel & Hannah Zimmerman. Believed to be taken in 1850 at Lockport, NY. Donated by Robert Zimmerman, Weatherly, Pa
- A post card mailed by Bright Samuel Enterline from France to his brother Lamar Enterline in Lavelle in 1919. Donated by Josh Hamerman, Scotch Plains, NJ
- Old pull down wall map of Schuylkill County. Donated by Jim Kervitis, Seltzer, Pa
- Medals awarded to Peter Rumpt for saving miners in Rausch Creek, Pa. Donated by Rosalie Rumpf.

### Rebecca Neal Stoffler continued

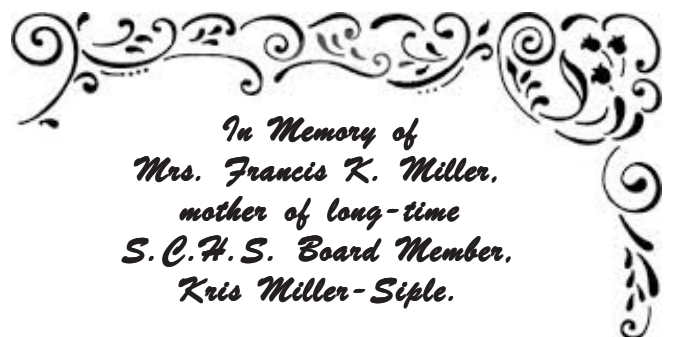
few months after William Taft was sworn in as president of the forty-six states that made up our great country.

For many years Becky was the secretary to Frank D. Yuengling, the president and owner of D.G. Yuengling & Sons, who guided the nation's oldest brewery through the Prohibition years. She was a member of the First Methodist Church, Pottsville and a former member of the Pottsville Club and Schuylkill Country Club, as well as an active member of the Pottsville Hospital Ladies Auxiliary.

Becky was a charming and delightful lady. Part of her secret to long life was her youthful attitude. On June 19, 2009, her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, while a resident of Providence Place in Pottsville, she was granted her wish to be driven around the area in a

bright convertible with its top down as she loved Schuylkill County.

After Fred's passing Becky continued to support the society. The members of the society are grateful for the Stofflers' thoughtful generosity and commitment to protecting and preserving Schuylkill County history for future generations.



*Thank You!*

**One and All for your support of the Schuylkill County Historical Society's Annual Appeal**



**In memory of**

James & Clarence Jenkins, Sons of Elam Jenkins  
 Arthur & Elizabeth Connery  
 Robert N. Bohorad, Esq.  
 Marsicano/Tarone Families  
 Mr. & Mrs. Howard S. Fernsler  
 Florence Brenneman Died Aug 1973, Pottsville Hospital  
 Deceased Members of Mahantongo Chapter NSDAR  
 Cleary Family (Michael) Ford Family (Thomas & Elizabeth)  
 Thomas & Michael Holleran - 96th - PVI  
 Alfred & Alice Joulwan, Helen & James  
 My research on the Miners in Schuylkill Co. PA  
 Schley and Meyrick Families  
 Joseph & Mary Slane, Jessie & Nancy Wood  
 Jonas Shaup LVRR Engineer killed in accident 1/20/1897  
 Civil War Veterans George & John Ross of Ashland (Brothers)  
 All of my Coyle, Dougherty, Costello & Hoctor Ancestors who  
 immigrated from Ireland & labored in the mines,  
 Tudor & Louise Ann (Gainer) Davis  
 Fishback sector: Ravine & Wallace Streets  
 Kenneth H. & Beatrice L. Kreager

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 Anthracite Coal Miners  
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 Larry Tschopp

**Names are continued on page 6**

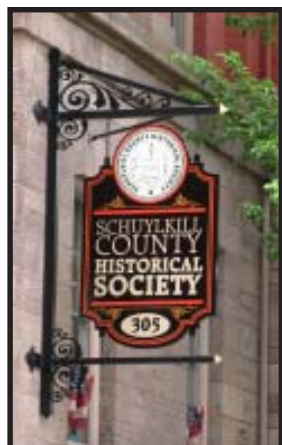


# Thank You!

John & Mae Halabura  
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Mrs. Bobbi Murray  
Mr. James Ryan  
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Alina Ebling  
Henry Knauber  
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Hon. Charles M. Miller  
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Herb Bohler  
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Norm Bertasavage  
Anne Robbins Aregood  
Randy Lindenmuth  
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Gary & Sandy Hess  
Mary Davis  
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Beth Boyer  
Howard Merrick  
Ed McLaughlin  
Honorable Joseph F. McCloskey  
Eleanor M. Wood



# WELCOME

**The Schuylkill  
County Historical  
Society welcomes  
the following new  
members:**

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Cheryl Sciscione  
Robert Wilson  
Margaret A. McGraw  
Mary Timpany  
Paul Coombe

Aaron Piaskowski  
John Richards  
Natale Lucas  
John G. Saylor  
Susan J. Quezada  
Todd Graybill  
Jane Frankel  
Diana O'Donnell  
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John Heck

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**LOOK**  
at what's inside

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Or current resident



Schuylkill County Historical Society invites everyone to come and see what is blooming in the exhibits in our landmark building. Our newest exhibit "Schuylkill County Cinema" is a collection of photographs of the historic movie houses from throughout Schuylkill County. Our hours are:

- Wednesday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- Thursday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- Friday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- Saturday 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

We are located at 305 North Centre Street, Pottsville, Pennsylvania.

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

