



## Saint Clair man survives sinking of the S.S. Leopoldville in WWII



**Sergeant Robert "Bob" Plummer**

It was Christmas Eve, 1944, the **S.S. Leopoldville** was making her final crossing of the English Channel. The Leopoldville was a Belgian passenger liner converted to a troopship and was carrying 2235 men of the 66th Infantry Division from Southampton to Cherbourg, France. The 66<sup>th</sup> were reinforcements for the Battle of

the Bulge.

At 5:50 p.m. the ship was just 5 miles from its destination when a German U-boat 486 fired a torpedo that struck the Leopoldville. The torpedo struck the Leopoldville on the starboard side aft and exploded in Number Four Hold. Many of the men were trapped in flooded compartments and had no chance to escape. Others were trapped when the stairways were blown away, yet many managed to escape to the higher decks.

Those that were able to reach the higher decks began to stand in formation to await rescue while explosions were resonating from the bowels of the ship. At 1825 hrs., the Captain of the Leopoldville



**S.S. Leopoldville**

allowed all non-essential personal to abandon ship, taking with them many of the life boats.

Miscommunication and disorganization contributed heavily to the loss of hundreds of American soldiers. As the ship sank slowly the men were given a series of contradictory messages over the loudspeaker announcing variously that a tug was on the way; that men would be transferred to other ships at sea; and that the ship was not sinking.

After a long delay, the H.M.S. Brilliant, a British destroyer, maneuvered alongside to rescue the soldiers, but the only way to complete the rescue was to have the soldiers jump one by one from the Leopoldville to the destroyer. Hundreds of men took their turn leaping to rescue as the two ships bashed together in the choppy ocean. The majority of men succeeded, but others mistimed their leaps and were crushed to death as the hulls of the great ships came together. Other soldiers met their fate in the 46 degree water from the cold or from the very life jackets that were worn to save their lives. The soldiers were not trained on securing their life

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**The Schuylkill County Historical Society**

**2017 Annual Appeal Campaign Continues!**

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**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.

## Gordon Nagle: Most beloved and prominent citizen in the early 1900's

There is a stretch of road in North Manheim Township extending from Route 183 in Cressona to Route 209 between Pottsville and Minersville commonly known as the Gordon Nagle Trail. This road was named in honor of one of the county's most beloved and prominent citizen in the early 1900's. Gordon Nagle, the son of Elias Nagle, was born in Wayne Township on September 3, 1879 and died on January 31, 1930. Nagle was a prominent building contractor and served as sheriff of Schuylkill County from 1926 to 1930.

Mr. Nagle, a native of Cressona, resided in Beckville for many years and was one of the most prominent contractors in the coal region. He specialized in the construction of large public buildings and erected more school buildings than any contractor in the state, if not in the nation. During his years as a builder, he constructed almost a hundred large public buildings, including schools, convents, parochial residence, halls, etc. Among the larger buildings credited to Nagle were the Necho Allen Hotel in Pottsville; the Immaculate Heart Academy at Gordon, St. Francis Orphanage, Orwigsburg, St. Kierans' Home, school and convent, Heckscherville, Bunker Hill School and the Childrens' Home, Pottsville, St. Mary's school and St. Clair High School, St. Clair, St. Joseph's school, Ashland, St. Vincent de Paul's, Minersville, St. Stephen's School, Port Carbon, St. Ambrose Convent, Schuylkill Haven, St. Joseph's Convent, Mt. Carmel, Shenandoah Trust Company, Schuylkill County Country Club, Schuylkill County Fairgrounds and the Cressona High School.

Gordon Nagle was active in many fields of the civic life of Cressona, Pottsville and the county. He was a member of the original board of directors of the First National Bank of Cressona, vice-president of the charter organization of the Good Samaritan Hospital, a member of St. Mark's Reformed Masonic organization in Cressona and the Miners Lodge I.O.O.F.. He was one of the founders of the original Schuylkill County Fair Association, built the structures on the Fairgrounds and was instrumental in boosting every department of the Fair. Being intensely interested in outdoor sports, especially baseball, he managed and financed the Cressona Tigers. Under his management this baseball team became one of the best known amateur baseball organizations in Central Pennsylvania.

On November 15, 1900 in St. Mark's Reformed Church, Cressona, Mr. Nagle married Mary Dornsife. Mary Dornsife Nagle was born in Gordon on December 25, 1882 and died in 1966. They were the parents of two children, a son William Joseph and a daughter Laura. At the time of Gordon Nagle's death, his daughter Laura was a music supervisor in Cass Township and his son Joseph was attending the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh.

The death of Gordon Nagle, which occurred on January 31, 1930, in Jefferson Hospital, Philadelphia, from the effects of injuries received in an automobile accident, caused profound sorrow throughout Schuylkill County. The stores and business houses of the entire town of Cressona were closed

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## Gordon Nagle

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the day of his funeral and it was attended by hundreds of people from all walks of life. In addition to the six active pallbearers for the funeral cortege to the Cressona Cemetery, sixty-seven men were named as honorary pallbearers in the newspaper report of his funeral services.

The death of no man in Schuylkill County could have caused greater expression of regret among so large a number of county citizens than that of Gordon Nagle. He was widely known in every part of the county, enjoyed the highest respect and confidence of everyone who knew him and, although a man of great energy and accomplishment, had few enemies. We know of none.

A few days after Nagle's death, the Pottsville Republican published a fitting tribute, from which the following excerpt is taken, "...although he will be missed as a leader of the democratic party, although he will be keenly missed by his townspeople of Cressona, although he will be missed in a business way, the greatest loss will be to those close personal friends who had learned to admire and love him for his homely honesty, his companionship, his sincere friendship, his devotion to a friend and his ever eagerness to be of some service. While others will step in to take up his work, his place cannot be filled."



### Over There: Schuylkill County and the Great war 1917-1919

A commemorative exhibition for the Schuylkill County Historical Society is set to open in April 2017. In addition to utilizing artifacts and photographs held by the SCHS, pictorial aid from the Red Cross and other sources related to the war effort will be incorporated into the exhibit in order to give a well-rounded representation of what the events of the period looked like. Additionally, element of a WWI trench and medical aid station will be created. These pieces will be effective representation of the daily life of the men who left Schuylkill County — entering the infantry, tank corps and medical corps.

## Saint Clair continued from page 1

jackets or how to enter the water wearing them; the force caused many to break their necks. Others were lost because of their heavy winter field jackets, boots, rifles, ammunition belts and entrenching tools causing them to sink even though they wore their life jackets. There were 763 American soldiers killed, 493 were never found. The survivors were instructed not to write home about the sinking and wartime censorship enforced the order. It was not until 1958-59 that the accounts of the sinking were unclassified and in 1996, the British released some, but not all, documents on this war-time tragedy.

Sergeant Robert "Bob" Plummer, from Saint Clair, survived this tragedy. Being December, the weather was frigid, the seas rough and choppy, and Bob being prone to seasickness was on the top deck when the torpedo struck. Bob said it "felt like someone with a baseball bat hit an empty metal drum he would have been standing on". Many of his buddies went down with the ship, trapped inside the Leopoldville. Bob attributes his survival to the seasickness he experienced in the rough seas that day.

To learn more about the sinking of the S.S. Leopoldville, please visit this informative web site; <http://uboat.net/history/leopoldville.htm> .

## Church Congregations and Cemeteries Established in the Orwigsburg, PA Area ca 1840 and before.

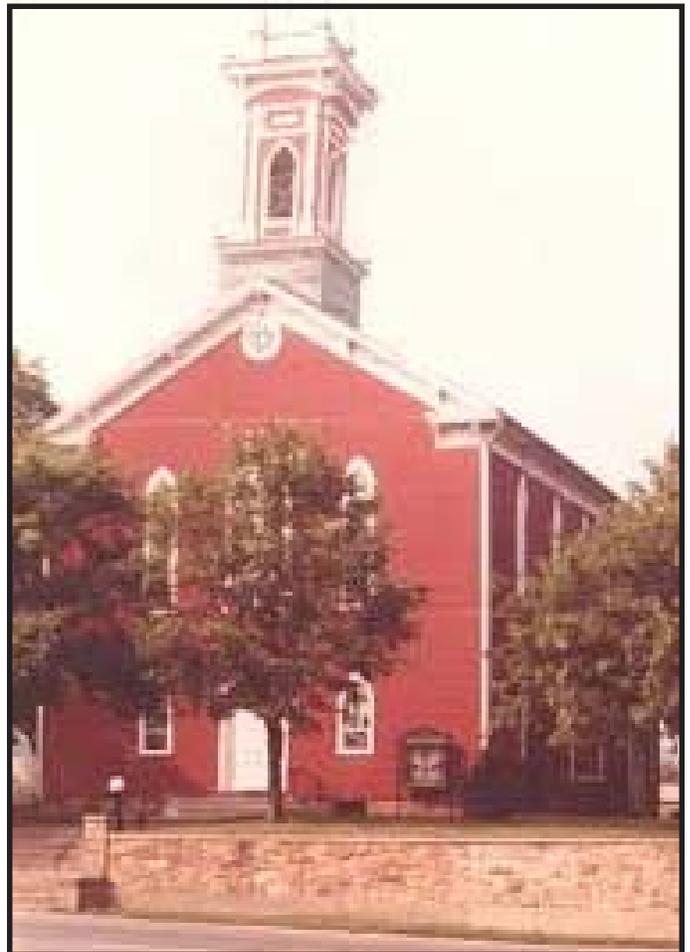
By Randy Lindenmuth – 2001 revisions thru February 1, 2016

As an aid in genealogical research, the following is an account of the churches and cemeteries established in the Orwigsburg, Schuylkill County (Berks before 1811), PA area ca 1840. It only includes those within two miles of Orwigsburg. Care has been taken to distinguish church buildings and cemeteries from church organizations since union churches were very common at that time. A union church is a church building that was used by both a Lutheran and a Reformed congregation.

**Zion's Evangelical Lutheran Old "Red" Church** was established in approximately 1755 in then Brunswick Township, Berks County, and now West Brunswick Township, Schuylkill County. The area is also referred to as "over the Blue Mountains" in some older records. The first church building was probably of log construction and not 'red'. It was burned during Indian unrest in 1756. Most of the settlers moved to the south side of the Blue Mountain (now northern Berks County) and lived there for more than 10 years until it was safe to return to live on their farms located near the 1770 newly rebuilt church. The church was rebuilt twice since then (in 1799 and 1883) and is still in use today. The church is located about one mile south of Orwigsburg along the original settlement road from the south, now PA State Route 61. Initially the founding fathers of the church deemed it only a Lutheran church. However, in approximately 1832-33, it became a union church and since then serves both a Lutheran and a Reformed congregation.

The cemetery adjacent to the Red Church was always a union cemetery. The Faust family, who were of Reformed faith and owned the adjacent farm, donated the land for the cemetery.

**Christ (Reformed) Church** was located "a few rods to the west and across the turnpike from the Red Church." It was formed in 1795. The building was dismantled in approx 1832. At that time, the Reformed congregation joined the Lutheran



Zion's Evangelical Lutheran Old "Red" Church

congregation in shared use of the Red Church building. This Reformed congregation always used the same cemetery as the Red Church Lutheran congregation.

**St. John's German Reformed and Lutheran Church** was located at the corner of Tammany and Washington streets in Orwigsburg. It was also referred to as the **Old White Church**. Built in 1831/1832, it served the Lutheran congregation until 1844 and the Saint John's Reformed congregation until 1908. When built, it drew a part of the Zion Lutheran and Christ Reformed congregations away from their country churches to this new 'in town' church.

In 1844, the Lutheran Congregation split from

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## Church Congregations and Cemeteries continued from page 4

the St. John's union arrangement to build their own church called **St. Paul's Lutheran Church**. The first St. Paul's was located in the building now known as the Campbell Apartment building at 109 north Warren St. in Orwigsburg. In 1892, they commenced building the current edifice a block away at the corner of Warren and Church streets.

To further confuse the situation, after the Lutherans moved to their new church, their old church building at 109 north Warren was used by the **Covenant Methodist Episcopal Church** ca. 1894.

The St. John's Reformed Congregation continued to use the original Old White Church building until 1908 when a new **St. John's Evangelical and Reformed Church** was built at the corner of Market and Sherman streets in Orwigsburg. Today this congregation is known as **St. John's United Church of Christ**.

The original St. John's Old White Church structure was struck by lightning and destroyed by fire while in disuse in 1911.

The three cemeteries related to these 'in town' Lutheran and Reformed churches also need explanation. All are along Washington Street. There is a small cemetery known as the Old Lutheran Cemetery, located on the west side of the street to the north of the Old White Church site. It is not obvious at first since it is so small and located between homes and set back from the street. Available burial records recorded in 1941 list burials from 1809-1823. The larger cemetery on the east side of Washington Street is known as St. John's Cemetery and served as a union cemetery from at least 1834 until 1844 when the second St. Paul's Lutheran Cemetery was established across the street from it and one block south of the Old Lutheran Cemetery. The St. John's Cemetery continues to serve St. John's UCC church.

**Salem Evangelical Church** congregation organized in 1824 and built their first church at the

west end of Independence Street in 1826. A second new church located at the corner of Liberty and Independence streets was built in 1834/5. Since 1968 when the Evangelical and Methodist churches combined, this church has been called the **Salem United Methodist Church**.

Established in the 1830s, the Salem Evangelical Cemetery is located near the site of the original church at the west end of Independence Street in Orwigsburg. It is still used today for Salem United Methodist Church congregation burials.

As far as I can determine, the above covers all of the Orwigsburg area churches built ca 1840 and before. There were other country churches beyond the 2-mile distance from Orwigsburg, but they are not addressed here.

In addition, **Kimmels United Brethren Church, aka Kimmels Church of God, (since 1991 Kimmels Evangelical Free Church)** just outside of Orwigsburg on Kimmels Road was established and used various meeting places ca 1834. The original church was built in 1851, their new church across the road in 2003. They established a cemetery adjacent to the original church.

Keep in mind that many older documents refer to Orwigsburg and the surrounding area as being in Berks County. At one time it was, but upon the creation of Schuylkill County in 1811, the area north of the Blue Mountains changed from Berks County to Schuylkill County. Searching for documentation related to dates prior to 1811 may reside in Berks County, and before 1752 when Berks County was established, in Harrisburg or Philadelphia.

Randy Lindenmuth  
340 Ridge Road  
Orwigsburg, PA 17961

Original issue was dated April 4, 2001

Check church websites for updates, adjustments to cited sometimes conflicting dates, and additional information

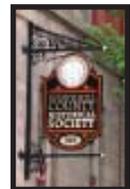
Comments and corrections encouraged.  
Please email to me at: [rlindy@comcast.net](mailto:rlindy@comcast.net)

# Thanks **Recent Acquisitions**

- 1992 Calendar featuring US Army and US Navy airplanes from Harold Brokhoff, Pottsville, PA
- Wall Sconces, roll of tickets and film canisters from the Ritz Theatre in St. Clair, Pa donated by Michael Kitsock, St. Clair
- Collection of advertising pencils 1970-80 from M. Andrea Bashore, Lewisburg, PA
- A silk map of Japan from WWII in leather folder from Darlene Lango, Schuylkill Haven, PA
- Spanish American War coat, cape, medals and correspondence from Faith, Mary Beth, and John Delany, Pequea, PA
- Photo of WWI Vets at home in St. Clair for Thanksgiving in 1917, from Michael Yordy, St. Clair, PA
- 1912 Booklet: "Allison" a paper prepared and read before the Historical Society of Schuylkill County by Robert Allison of Port Carbon donated by Joan Gray, St. Clair, PA
- Memoir and collection of art work with accompanying text from Bob McCormick, Ashland, PA
- Childs wooden rocking chair from Elise Thomas, Bethlehem, PA
- Several John O'Hara journals, Pottsville City maps, Cressona Bicentennial book, Chronicle

- of New Philadelphia book, Wayne Township Centennial Book, Minersville Book, donated by Edward Manion, St. Clair, PA
- Collection of Navy and Army WWII uniforms and a WWII German banner donated by Harry and Rose Lilley, Minersville, PA
- WWI Red Cross stretcher donated by Jim Peifley, Auburn, PA
- Book on Pottsville Personalities , 2 volume set of Schuylkill County History, donated by Jeri Nagle, Pottsville, PA
- Collection of Zerby family memorabilia, cameras, assorted family correspondence, photographs, newspaper clippings, civil war commission letter of Joshua Seigfried, GAR letters, framed portraits of family members, donated by Joseph H. Zerby III, Sylvania, Ohio

# WELCOME



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

- |                       |                         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Michele Allen         | Ashley Knaver           |
| George J. Britton     | Sharon Martini          |
| Dr. Deborah A. DeRose | R.R. McKeever           |
| Karen & Steven Durkin | Lynn Medley             |
| John Fagan            | Jane Pritiskutch        |
| Sharon Fryer          | James Robinson          |
| Ken Harig             | Rev. William A. Sherman |
| Nelson Hess           | Charles Sinlock         |
| Kaitlan Hoffman       | Michelle Straub         |
|                       | Russell R. Zerbay       |

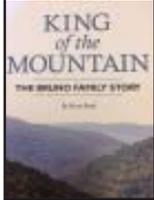
**Program Announcement:**

**KING OF THE MOUNTAIN**  
*The Bruno Family Story*

*Book signing and Author presentation*

Thursday, March 16, 2017 at 2 PM  
Schuylkill County Historical Society  
305 North Centre St., Pottsville, PA

Meet author, Bruce Boyd, as he shares his insight and musings regarding one of Schuylkill County's most notorious families.



**Memorial Donations:**

- Matthew Buletza given by Richard Tomko
- Francis Portland given by Richard Tomko
- Paul Sheers given by Richard Tomko

# “2016 Goals Achieved!”

## Thank you for your generous support



**The roof has been repaired**



**The HVAC system has been replaced.**

## You can make a difference



*Volunteering is a rewarding experience. Get involved and you will “make a difference”.*

We continue to look for volunteers as our activities and our programs increase.

With the approaching spring and warmer weather we find more people out traveling on their vacations. We are becoming a tourist destination. This is great and we welcome the opportunity to share the history of our county. Along with this increase in visi-

tor traffic our need for more volunteer help is required.

For those who never had the opportunity to volunteer let me tell you it is a rewarding experience. You find yourself getting involved and interacting with others and at the end of the day or time you spent working you get that feeling of satisfaction that you “made a difference”.

Would you like to become involved with the Schuylkill County Historical Society? We need to develop new exhibits.

The Society offers many opportunities for those who are interested in “giving back” to the community. If you are willing to share your “gifts” and can afford a few hours a week, please call Schuylkill

**We can always use your help in our ...**

Gift shop  
Reception area  
At special events  
Genealogy research  
Historical research  
Administrative and clerical work  
Housekeeping  
Exhibit development  
Program planning  
Exhibit guides

County Historical Society at 570-622-7540.

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

# 2017 Fundraising Appeal

*Your generous support can help us maintain and preserve our historic collections and property and continue our quality programming.*



**Schuylkill County Historical Society 2017 Annual Appeal**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ \$ 500.00 \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ \$ 100.00 \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ \$ 75.00 \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Telephone (\_\_\_\_) - \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ \$ 50.00 \_\_\_\_\_  
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