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Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

April 2024

Spring is here! It just seems that winter lasts longer each year. We have great plans for the remainder of the year. Our speakers' programs are lined up, with two in April, one in May and one in June. A month after the Fall Festival, we share yet another program. Details are later within this newsletter.

Clarification

Our mailing address is PO Box 79, Hilltown, PA. 18927. This is where you might send dues, donations, and correspondence. The physical address of our Strassburger Farmstead is 407 Keystone Drive, Sellersville. This is what you might plug into your GPS to find us. Mail sent to the Keystone Drive address will be sent promptly back to you!

A 1781 Hilltown Document

A small original document came up for auction recently relating to both Hilltown and the Revolutionary War. We are unaware of the successful bidder or the bid, but we know it went for a premium price. It read as follows:

Bucks County, Pennsylvania No. 129. I do hereby certify that Sarah McHenry of the township of Hilltown has furnished this State, for the use of the United States with a gray horse, 12 years old, 14 hands high which has been appraised by two Freeholders, an oath at the sum of Eighteen Pounds specie exchange for one and for which the State is now justly indebted to him in that sum, with interest. Given under my hand, this 17th of August A.D. 1780. John Thompson W.M. / Bucks County.

A bit of explanation – The W.M. after John Thompson's name indicates that he was a wagon master. The receipt for this gray horse was submitted for payment in June of 1781 and paid in full with interest. The Revolutionary War was still very active in August of 1780.

Old Pennsylvania Dutch Customs

In the 1880s, a W J Hoffman, M.D. wrote in the Journal of American Folk-Lore about these customs of the Pennsylvania Dutch. His stories and customs didn't reflect those during the 1880s, but those of a time long ago. Have you heard of any of these?

- The housewife sometimes found difficulty in butter making, the spell being believed to be the work of a witch,

The Mulberry Tree Craze

- as every locality boasted of such personage. The remedy was to plunge a red-hot poker into the contents of the churn, when the spell was broken, and the butter immediately began to form.
- It was customary for the bride to receive from her parents or guardian a wedding outfit, consisting of household linen and other articles necessary to assist in furnishing a house. A case was recently decided (1880s) in Pennsylvania in which the husband had brought suit against the wife's guardian in default of the latter furnishing the usual gift. The plaintiff was awarded one hundred twenty-five dollars.
 - To cure whooping cough, administer milk stolen from a neighbor's cow.



It is with sadness that we share the news of Alice Kachline's passing. She was well known in the Hilltown area for her community volunteering, serving as Hilltown's tax collector for 12 years and the Hilltown Civic Association. She also served on the Advisory Board of the Penridge Senior Center and as an organizer and fundraiser for the Hilltown Kennel Club. After her important role as a stay-at-home mother, she worked as a Welcome Wagon Hostess for the Hilltown area, as well as many other jobs. Hilltown will miss Alice. Our condolences go out to her family.



Those of you who have visited our homestead site might have seen a large, old, and twisted tree nearest to the white museum building. The roots above the ground make it a happy place for our groundhog population. Using several apps to identify the leaf indicates that it is a white mulberry tree, or *multicaulis*. It bears no fruit, but it was also known as a silkworm mulberry. Also on site are a few mulberry trees that do bear that tasty fruit by mid-June.

In the 1830s, these trees were being sold at sales and auctions, hoping to promote a new silk industry outside of Philadelphia. The process starts by cultivating silkworms on mulberry leaves. Young trees worked best as they had large leaves. (And they were closer to the ground!) The leaves were picked and laid on a string grid above the ground. The silkworms were then laid on top of the leaves, which they voraciously fed on. A specific temperature range was needed. Eventually, the worms would turn into cocoons. They were dropped into hot water and the silk threads were reeled off. Other cocoons were saved for the eggs to create additional silkworms. Each cocoon would contain about 500 yards of filament and each pound of silk required about sixteen pounds of cocoons.

No fruit is needed. All over, these trees were being sold at 10 cents per foot. Millions of these trees were being offered for sale. Outlandish profits were promised and many of the trees were being sold two and three times by speculators. Other trees, not in the mulberry family at all were being sold fraudulently as *multicaulis*. By late 1839, the speculation of these trees ended, a victim of high price and low demand. During the height of this madness, fortunes were made, and fortunes were lost. By 1843, the trees

were considered worthless, and, in many cases, they were torn up and thrown away. Still, the silk industry steadily grew, just not at the pace of the mulberry tree madness. The mania was described as fortunes made in a day and lost in an hour. One local woman sold her spectacles to buy mulberry trees. Farmers were mortgaging their farms, only to lose them when the bubble burst.



Our White Mulberry Tree

Posted in the Philadelphia Inquirer on April 2, 1838 – **Great Sale of Mulberry Trees.** *On Tuesday April 10th, will be sold at public sale, 10,000 genuine Multicaulis trees, from 1 to 4 years old, packed in moss and straw, in bundles of 100 each, warranted to be from the original stock of Morus Multicaulis roots. By T. Birch Jr, New Auction Store, No. 84, South Second Street.*

In April 1840, Mr. Chas Du Bouchet was offering his expertise in the silkworm industry. It was advertised as the only means to make up for their losses in the Multicaulis speculation.

Our mulicaulis mulberry has a trunk of about 4 feet in diameter. Was this one of those in the mulberry tree craze of the 1830s? Maybe we should purchase some silkworms?

Hilltown north?

I have discovered that in a great deal of old history books about Bucks County, the following statement “Hilltown was the first township formed north of Buckingham”. William W. H. Davis, the founder of the Bucks County Historical Society wrote the set of three books titled “The History of Bucks County Pennsylvania: From the Discovery of the Delaware to the Present Time”, in the 1850s. It seems this statement has been copied repeatedly by later authors. This has always confused me as Hilltown is due west of Buckingham Township, not north! Book after book parrots this statement. How can they all be wrong?

Finally, in some random reading of a random book, I read that the borough of Bristol in lower Bucks County was named Buckingham in 1697. Three years later, it was renamed Bristol after the city in England. Now another question of accuracy exists – Was Hilltown Township the first formed north of Bristol? Our township dates back to 1722, although we have a copy of a land map showing the lands of Jerimiah Langhorne were in Hilltown Township in 1719. This is not a topic worth arguing about, (we’re number two!), but it clears up this question to me, so I share it with you.

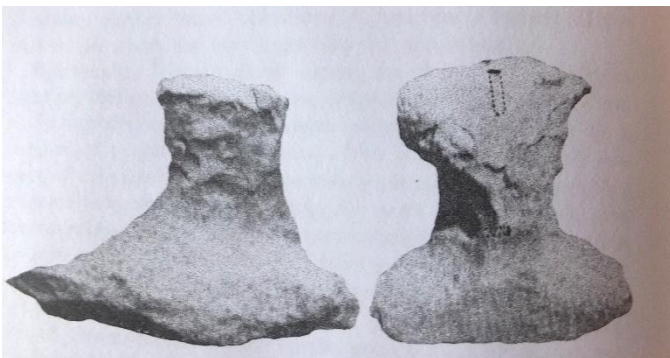


The Mystery of the Lenape “Sculptures”

In 1880, under the leadership of General William W. H. Davis, the Bucks County Historical Society was formed. Papers were read at their meetings and were periodically published in a book form. These volumes were aptly titled “A Collection of Papers Read Before the Bucks County Historical

Society”, in volumes one through eight. These are a treasure trove of mostly local historic information. These old volumes are also available in reprinted formats, so reading them will not damage the originals dating back to the 19th century. In volume two, published in 1909, a story caught my eye, “Indian “Busts” Found in Hilltown Township”.

The paper was presented in front of the Bucks County Historical Society by the Reverend J. G. Dengler of Sellersville. It took place in Quakertown on April 15, 1884. Records of his talk were missing, so the Reverend related his talk 25 years later, in 1908. Some of the information was relayed to him by aged Hilltown resident, Benjamin Wirebach, who told Reverend Dengler of these “busts” from when he was yet a young man. Wirebach stated that there were numerous Lenape graves, which were marked by carved stones shaped in a man’s head. The size of these varied, and it was thought that smaller ones marked the graves of children. Over time, many of these markers were taken or lost. Reverend Dengler was told of a Hilltown woman, Mrs. Meyers, who still had one of these busts in her possession. An arrangement was made between them, and the Reverend purchased it. He came upon several more, one owned by Hilltown resident Mr. Knoll. They were all based in a red stone, carved to mimic the face of the Native Americans.



Two “Lenape Busts”

After this presentation in Quakertown in 1884, Reverend Dengler was roundly congratulated for such an historic find in Bucks County. Once word got out about this archeological discovery, he was besieged with letters asking him for additional information. Even Henry Mercer felt it was an extraordinary find. But some doubt about its origin began. Reverend Dengler was asked by Dr. D. G. Brinton to submit his “sculpture” to the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. Some months later, Reverend Dengler read in a newspaper that the sculpture was not a handmade item, but in fact was an accidental creation of nature, “by water, frost etc.”.

When Henry Mercer became the Curator of the Museum, University of Pennsylvania, he acknowledged the “Lenape Stone” as a genuine article of Native American engraving. Mr. Mercer explained that a good many more of these curiosities were present in Bucks County, along a ridge starting at the Delaware River, from Point Pleasant to Hilltown Township. Mercer gathered over 40 of these “busts”, ranging in size from 8“ to 30” in diameter. According to a report by Mercer in 1908, he had no doubt in the manmade origins of these stones.

Weeks later, in a report composed by Professor George Koenig, a minerologist at the University of Pennsylvania, took a middle ground. He felt some were naturally created by the elements, some had both tool marks and natural erosion. His final statement indicates a stone used as a tool by the Lenape is an “Indian object”. Several centuries later it becomes an “Indian relic”. Koenig stated that they were not ever used as a Lenape gravestone.

So, we have three eminent scientists offering three different opinions. Have you found any of these in your back yard? And do

they still exist at the Academy of Natural Science or the University of Pennsylvania? The information above came from a report published by the Bucks County Historical Society in 1909, based on a paper presented in 1884 by Reverend Dengler.



Oddities in Philadelphia

In Philadelphia, 1735, Frances Hamilton was punished for picking pockets, by being exposed on the courthouse steps with her hands bound to the rails and her face turned towards the whipping post and pillory for two hours. She was then released and publicly whipped.

In the *Annals of Philadelphia*, a book written by John F. Watson in 1855," he writes that in 1702 "Solomon Cresson, going his round at night, entered a tavern to suppress a riotous assembly, and found there John Evans, Esq., the Pennsylvania governor, who fell to beating Cresson." This governor also built a fort in New Castle Delaware and illegally collected "tribute" from all ships passing on the Delaware River. Evans was eventually recalled in February 1709 and returned to private life, eventually travelling back to his homeland in Wales.

Also, in the Annals "By an act in 1719, all paupers in Philadelphia were instructed to wear a "P" on their right shoulder to prevent them from street begging.



War Journal of John Markley – 1865

We have a transcribed copy of a Civil War diary of John H. Markley of Line Lexington. He mustered in at Harrisburg in August 1862, in the 138th Regiment. He was in Company H, most of that company being from Bucks County. Two members of the Doan family also served in this unit.

The regiment participated in several battles, including the Battle of Gettysburg, where it lost 6 officers and 90 enlisted men killed and mortally wounded, and 1 officer and 70 enlisted men by disease.

His diary begins on January 1, 1865. What happened to the earlier notes is unknown to us. The most common entries involve the weather, understandably. Rain is an enemy to all soldiers.

Some of the notes involve working on Fort Dushane, a Union fort several miles south of St. Petersburg Virginia. At times he was sent to work at Fort Lee, along the front line. Markley said the enemy lines and camps were in full view while he worked. Described are the sounds of muskets and cannons. Also, the orders to pack up to get ready to move out at moment's notice. Then unpack and settle back in. Skirmishes occurred when "the Rebs" met up with the Yankee pickets.

The 138th Regiment was reviewed in February 1865 by Generals Truman Seymore and Horatio Wright. Later in February, he was garrisoned with eight others to Fort Siebert, where sadly, there were no quarters. The next four days were spent building a shelter in the pouring rain.

Tues., March 7, 1865 – "The President was to visit the line today accompanied by Meade, Wright and Seymore and a large bodyguard. Also were five headquarters wagons full of Ladies. The presented a gay appearance. The weather is like spring".

Sat., 3/11/1865 – “Today our division was out to witness the shooting of a bounty jumper and deserter a member of the 67th Reg. Pa., He passed death like a hero”.

Markley then described his travel from Virginia to Line Lexington on furlough – “On Friday morning, the 24th, I left on furlough going home. This morning, I took the cars at 7 O’clock and went to City Point. At 10 o’clock, got on the Mail Boat bound for Fortress Monrow. At there just before night changed boats took the Mail Boat bound for Baltimore Sat., 3/25/1865 – We arrived in Baltimore at 1 O’clock this morning. Took the cars for Philadelphia at 8. Arrived in town at 2 O’clock. Took the North Pa. R. R. Cars at 4. Got home at 6”. *He spent his time at home visiting friends and relatives.*

Fri., 4/7/1865 – “This morning I started for Philadelphia accompanied by Sister Eliza and Cousin Willie Johnson. I stayed with William W. Hainbright overnight”.

Thurs., 4/13/1865 – “Today a little after noon my Corps returned and I rejoined my Reg’t at Burkeville, and a glad boy I was to see the boys again. The Troops and Horses are almost worn out. The roads are very bad. The mud is in places knee deep”.

Wed., 4/19/1865 – “Today all unnecessary military duty was suspended. and the day was spent as a day of mourning. to respect the death of our Chief Magistrate”. *The assassination of President Lincoln occurred 4 days prior.*

Sun., 4/23/1865 – “This morning at an early hour we were routed out and ordered to March at daylight in the direction of Danville. I’ve marched some 20 miles when we camped for the night.” *On April 9, Lee surrendered his forces to Gen. Grant. Confederate Soldiers are to be seen in many numbers going to their homes. The next day, they again marched about 20 miles. The next*

day, their march brought them to the Halifax Courthouse. On April 26, they again marched a distance of 20 miles, Finally, after the five-day march of about 100 miles, they reached their destination of Danville, VA. In early April, Danville served as the capital of the Confederacy.

Fri., 4/28/1865 – “Today we moved camp a short distance. and pitched tents along a nice running stream of water. In the afternoon we had an order read to us that General Joseph Johnston had surrendered his army on the same conditions that Lee did”. *General Lee’s surrender at Appomattox occurred when Markley was in transit back to his regiment. There is no mention in his diary.*

Thurs., 5/4/1865 – All remains the same. There are many rumors in Camp about going home.

Tues., 5/16/1865 – This morning we got orders to be ready to march to the Railroad depot at 1 O’clock which we did at the time appointed. Embarked on the cars and started for Richmond about 4 O’clock. We were travelling all night. *In May, while still in Richmond, Markley got a pass into the city. He noted that the greatest and finest part of town was layered in ashes. A march began for the troops to board trains.*

Thurs., 5/25/1865 – We took up the line of march again this morning crossed the Pamunkey River after we had gone some 4 miles. We proceeded to Chesterfield Station. Richmond and Fredericksburg R. R., where we went in camp for the night. The weather is very warm. Many of the men gave out and many sun struck. Some died along the road.

In our next newsletter, we will finish up Mr. Markley’s journal and observations! He shared some of his army recipes in the back.

Hilltown Historical Society Upcoming Events

Sunday, April 14: “Mysteries of Dowsing” & Strassburger Open House

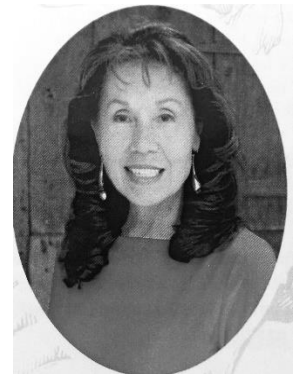


Keith Schaffer will demonstrate the art of dowsing, a seemingly magical way of finding water, metal, and ores. Dowsing dates back hundreds of years. Then try your hand at it! A Free Event

**Open House at the Strassburger Homestead 1:30-4:00 PM. Speakers’ Program at 2:00
407 Keystone Dr & Bethlehem Pike, Sellersville**

Wednesday, April 24: “Rags to Riches”

Join speaker and author Julie Henning as she shares her amazing life story. Julie is Amerasian, born in South Korea in 1953. Orphaned at 13, Pearl Buck brought her to live in her Hilltown estate in 1968. Julie’s life started in poverty, and now is a renowned speaker for the cause of other Amerasians. Her book “**A Rose in A Ditch**” follows her life from birth to today. Her book will be available to purchase. **7:00 PM Hilltown Township Building – 13 W. Creamery Rd & Rte. 152, Hilltown. Free Event, Donations accepted.**



Sunday, May 5: Life in Hilltown’s One Room Schoolhouses

Hear some tales and experiences of students who attended our one room schools. Many old school items will be displayed. Bring your own items and experiences! Enjoy the memories!
Open House at the Strassburger Farmstead 1:30 – 4:00. Program 2:00. A Free Event!

Sunday, June 9: Secrets of the Strassburger Farmstead

You may have wandered through our buildings at an open house. Some secrets and mysteries exist that may be of interest to you. Is that a date stone that is covered up with an eagle? What is in the 1868 locked painted chest? What does that painted symbol on a bedroom wall mean? Join Bill Stahl as he takes you through a virtual tour of the buildings. **Open House at the Strassburger Homestead 1:30-4:00 PM. Speakers’ Program at 2:00. A Free Event!**

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Last week, we “celebrated” April Fool’s Day. While most holidays have a distinct origin, this one has a variety. In 18th century Scotland, the tradition became a two-day event, starting with “hunting the cuckoo bird” as people were sent on phony errands, and followed by Tailie Day, which involved pranks played on people’s derrieres, such as pinning fake tails or “kick me” signs on them. In 1957, the BBC reported that Swiss farmers were experiencing a record spaghetti crop and showed footage of people harvesting noodles from trees. In 1996, Taco Bell, the fast-food restaurant chain, duped people when it announced it had agreed to purchase Philadelphia’s Liberty Bell and intended to rename it the Taco Liberty Bell. Were you victimized? Did you swap the contents of salt and sugar containers? Did you know that by pressing “Ctrl, Del, and Downward arrow key” on a Windows computer turns the screen upside down? To correct it, hit “Ctrl, Del, and the up-arrow key”. I am afraid to try it!