



Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

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August, 2020

Not surprisingly, we have decided to *cancel the September 2020 Fall Festival*. This is done for the safety of our community. Also, the planning of the festival is a yearlong job. Too many limitations prevented us from this task. At this time, we still have two speakers' programs scheduled in October and November. We will try to keep you informed as to the status of these events.

Covid-19, the Historical Society and You

Many of us have been affected in one way or another during these trying times. Illness, jobs lost, and the general stresses associated with Covid-19. The society has also been affected. Our income comes from several sources. We pass the hat at our speakers' programs. Unfortunately, we have cancelled four of these programs so far. Our big fund-raiser is the September Fall Festival. We depend on this event heavily. That too has been cancelled. Grants are available to non-profits such as ours, but they are for specific needs. In the past we used grants for a new roof on the barn, a new museum display, and new brochures. Our overhead costs typically don't qualify for these grants. Utilities, repairs and maintenance to these old buildings and grounds are left to us.

This leaves the yearly dues from members and donations to pay for the entire cost of maintaining our Historic site. In the past, we have operated on a deficit basis, but manageable. Now it is not. Can you help us? In the December newsletter, we will be sending out the yearly dues notification for 2021. Any amount over the minimum would be greatly appreciated. A check now would help us prepare for winter and would provide needed funds for the society.

We also look for volunteers that could help with our future programs and maintaining our grounds and buildings.

We have openings on the Board of Directors. This group makes decisions for the Historical Society as well as plans for it's future. Any volunteers can contact us at Hilltownhistory1@yahoo.com.

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“Historical Society of Hilltown Township”

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Knights of the Road

These Knights of the Road were what we might have called tramps, beggars, or peddlers. A romantic look back described them as generally intelligent, hardworking and talented. Stories abound of these tramps telling tales in a tavern for drink and food. Others played musical instruments for dinner or lodging. The most common chore assigned to a tramp was to chop or saw wood. Some stories tell of a tramp arriving at a farm and going to work immediately on the wood pile. Other times, a tramp would try to fool a housewife into thinking his task was complete, and he was ready for his meal. Tales of woodcarvers, traveling blacksmiths, skilled laborers, and scholars were told endlessly. Tall tales for the most part? A story made the rounds in the area years ago of a tramp named Jerry. Many times, he would just walk into a house through a kitchen door and sit at a table, ready to be fed, before performing

any work. Although he was reportedly a tireless worker, sometimes it was difficult to get him to leave. After a few days of feeding Jerry, a farmer's wife complained to her neighbor friend about this. Her neighbor said that Jerry hated onions, absolutely couldn't stand them. The next morning, the farmer's wife made an onion pie for breakfast. Jerry refused the meal, but did set out to work. Next, the wife baked onions on the stove all day. The entire house reeked. Jerry quickly grabbed his gear and disappeared for good.



A bit of newspaper research told a very different story in the Hilltown area. They were commonly referred to as pests and vermin. They were considered such a nuisance, that in 1879, that Tramp Act was passed in the Pennsylvania Legislature, meant to strongly curtail most activities of these wanderers. Many were jailed for loitering and begging. Still, citizens complained bitterly that the police were not enforcing the statute enough. A local farmer complained that one morning when he went out to his barn, he found a dozen tramps sleeping in the hay.

These fellows could be clever. It seemed that many arrests occurred in the late fall or early winter, allowing these tramps a warm jail cell and food for the winter months. Farmers always worried that if a tramp felt he was treated badly, a barn may mysteriously catch on fire in the middle of the night.

In 1882, a notice was placed in the local newspaper by George Knecht, the High Constable of the Borough of Sellersville – **“Tramps – Take notice of all tramps passing through this borough and stopping from house to house except on business shall be dealt with according to law”**. Not a welcoming committee in Sellersville! Earlier in the same year, a story was reported “Last week, the females of this place were scared by an old tramp. Most of the men were away from home, and he became pretty saucy. It would be good if the Tramp Law were enforced to rid the country of the dangerous vagabonds”.

Most tramps merely begged. A desperate area tramp named Butchery was a vile one and threatened people with his knives when robbing them of food or money. Upon his release from a stint in the Bucks County Prison, he was found dead along Hilltown Pike. I bet no one mourned his passing. A propensity existed with many of these fellows to drink, which just compounded the problem. In 1899, the town of Pennsburg purchased a cage, its sole purpose was to jail these vagrants. The new century did not make this problem disappear. Articles in the local newspaper in the 1940s disparaged these “knights”, even during the war.

Has anyone had any experiences, good or bad with these “knights”?

William Penn in Hilltown?

Did William Penn meet the Lenni Lenape Indians at the Philadelphia Glider Port on Route 152? Well, sort of. William Penn journeyed to this area in 1683 on his white horse, to meet with the Lenni Lenape. Hilltown did not become recognized until 1722, so this meeting took place on grounds which later became Hilltown Township.

One of the Lenape chiefs at this 1683 treaty meeting was Tammany, also known as Tamanend, along with two other chiefs. It is thought that Tamanend lived in the village of Perkasio in Bucks County, where Penn visited him in May of 1683. At the time, this area was considered “Perkasio Indian Towne”.

“Perkasio Indian Towne” was about 30 miles north of Philadelphia, in what was later the Manor of Perkasio (almost 12,000 acres by 1706), and now Hilltown Township, near present Mount Pleasant and village of Hilltown, and in the vicinity of Silverdale, Bucks County”. This location was reported by Sassoonan, a Lenni Lenape boy (d. 1747) who witnessed this meeting. This meeting was preliminary to one of the land treaties.

A deed was dated June 23, 1683 between Chief Tamanend and William Penn for the Lands between Neshaminy Creek, Bucks County and Pennypack Creek, Philadelphia County, “for consideration of so much wampum and so many guns, shoes, stockings, looking glasses, blankets and other goods as Wm Penn shall please to give unto me”. This treaty signing was held at the Quaker Meeting House (the 1st in Philadelphia) near Front St. and Sansom St.

A more detailed list reads as “2 guns, 20 bars of lead, 25 pounds of powder, 6 coats, 8 shirts, 5 hats, 1 peck of pipes, 2 kettles, 5 hoes, 2 blankets”, and much more.

An archaeological dig took place at the glider port several feet down about 25 years ago ~ Indian relics, evidence of old campfires and remnants of old European style clay pipes were found. What might remain buried?

It is most likely that William Penn traveled up what became the Old Bethlehem Road to get to this meeting with Tamanend. Part of the old Bethlehem Road is now better known as Hilltown Pike, beginning at Line Lexington. The area in Hilltown was wilderness and the trail merely dirt. As he would have crossed by an area where Chalfont Road is now, did he glance to his right and see an oak tree, maybe 100 yards from his trail? Maybe. That oak tree remains today, in front of the burial grounds of the Lower Hilltown Baptist Church. That tree has been determined to be a “Penn Oak”, a tree that was alive when William Penn was laying the foundation for our fine state.



The old Oak tree at the Lower Baptist Church, c. 1906, still stands along Chalfont Rd.

Line Lexington

Hilltown Township is one of the largest townships, area-wise in Bucks County, second only to Buckingham. Within the borders of Hilltown are a number of recognizable communities. Blooming Glen, Dublin, Silverdale, and Line Lexington are well known. Villages that were less known include Fricks, Leidytown, Grier’s Corner and Albright’s Corner. I’ve been told by someone in the know, that Hilltown Township is served by 13 different zip codes. A confusing postal problem. The Hilltown zip code (18927) serves only about 45 households.

A book was published years ago “Place Names in Bucks County”. It’s a great source of information as it was in 1942. It describes Line Lexington as a village in two counties and three townships. (Bucks & Montgomery, and Hatfield, Hilltown and New Britain) The village tavern, dating back to about 1850, sat at the corner of Bethlehem Pike and County Line Rd. It was said that the township line between Hilltown and New Britain ran through the tavern. The landlord slept in New Britain and voted in Hilltown. He served drinks while behind the bar in Hilltown, serving the customers on the other side of the bar in New Britain. Over the years, changes, additions and demolitions took place, but it still had a long history of serving the travelling public. The tavern was known by several names over the years: Eagle Hotel, Turkes Head, Apple’s tavern. Apple’s tavern was well known for its horse sales. The building was finally demolished around 1961. Progress?



Eagle Hotel, Line Lexington, now the site of the Sunoco Gas Station and the Line Lexington Fire Co

In 1800, the town was named Middletown, since it was about midway on the stage route from Philadelphia and Bethlehem. The first stage coach going through the village was in 1763.

It was soon changed to Lexington after the historic Massachusetts town where the Minute Men fought with the English Redcoats very early in the Revolutionary War. The first Post Office in the village was created in 1827. Unfortunately, there was already another Lexington in the state of Pennsylvania, so the name of Line Lexington was adopted. In the very early 1800s, Henry Leidy of Line Lexington was making hats, placing his name inside each one. It was thought that Henry was the first to make felt hats in America.

Upcoming Events – October and November

Wednesday, October 28 @ 7:00 PM

“Villages of Hilltown”



A triple play of the history of villages in Hilltown Township. Take a virtual ride up Hilltown Pike with Bill Stahl and learn of its history, and see images along the way from the 1800s. Then join Van Jurin, as he presents ‘lost’ villages, such as Pennville, Point Pleasant, and how Dublin and Silverdale became boroughs, independent of Hilltown Township. Bob Moyer will continue his recollections of Blooming Glen. Early photographs and maps will enhance the presentations. The audience is welcome to share their experiences living or visiting Hilltown villages. The program is **FREE**, donations are welcome.

Hilltown Township Building – 17 W. Creamery Rd & Rte. 152, Silverdale

Sunday, November 8 @ 2:00 PM

“Hilltown Township Through Postcards”



Local historian and author Aaron Heckler will present a program of the history and development of the picture postcard in America, beginning in the late 1800s. The program then explains how Hilltown Township utilized the medium of the picture postcards in various ways. It will conclude with many “then and now” comparisons between old time post cards and current day photographs of Hilltown and Silverdale. **FREE** program, donations accepted.

407 Keystone Drive & Bethlehem Pike, Sellersville

Open House at the Historic Strassburger Farmstead 1:30 – 4:00 PM

Info – 267-614-9174