



# Historical Society of Hilltown Township Newsletter

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Hilltown PA. 18927  
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## **December 2020**

Greetings from our Historical Society! As you see, we have enclosed another membership application, dues and/or request for donations. Call it what you wish, it is a plea for funds to allow our organization to continue. Every single fund-raising event for us in 2020 was cancelled due to Covid-19. The exception being our annual request for funds. If you can spare more than the minimum, it would be greatly appreciated. Remember, we have three buildings to care for on five acres. Some of you have been generous in the past and have lifetime memberships. We thank you. So that we may publicly thank some of the more generous donors, we will publish the names of certain categories in a future newsletter. Donations between \$5 and \$50 over and above the dues amount will be identified as a bronze donor category. Donations between \$51 and \$100 over and above the dues amount will be identified as a silver donor category. Donations between \$101 and \$249 will be identified as a gold donor. \$250 or more will be considered platinum donors and will be considered as a life member.

## **Collection of Stories Wanted**

Our Historical Society owns many possessions. They range from a 19<sup>th</sup> century pump organ, many antique tools, historic archives, farm equipment, to a one-horse

open sleigh. There is another type of history we are interested in, however. That would be stories. Stories of school days in a one room schoolhouse. Stories your grandparents told you. Stories of life on your family farm. Please keep in mind, that when you expire, so will your memories. We feel these stories are important to collect for future generations. I've heard so many local anecdotes in my brief time with the society, and I've come to realize that each one is like a jewel to collect and treasure. Please pass any information on to the email address above, or simply call Bill at 215-822-8256. I've started a notebook of these stories which I will call the treasure chest of Hilltown Township (and vicinity). Keep those memories alive!

## **Artwork of Hilltown Township**

Several local artists have graced us with their paintings of Hilltown Township scenes, mostly of the Strassburger Farmstead. We are looking for more, anywhere in the township. We would love to have a room in our homestead or museum dedicated to this artwork. We have small copies of Hilltown scenes painted by Walter Baum. If there are local Hilltown scenes, we would love to be able to display them. We could also photograph your paintings and create a high-quality framed copy to display. That way, you could maintain ownership. Please call Bill at 215-822-8256.

## Belsnickel

As a boy, my favorite person in the world was Santa Claus. I made lists from the Sears catalog and gave them to my parents to forward to the guy in red, and hoped for the best. We all knew him as a round jolly gift giver.

A German tradition was well known in Pennsylvania as the Belsnickel. The name translates to “St Nicholas in Furs”. This creature of folklore came to Pennsylvania along with the German immigrants in the early 1800s. Belsnickel was described as a “crotchety, fur-clad gift-bringer”. At times, it would be a woman in costume, sometimes a man. He was typically very ragged and disheveled, many times wearing a mask. (How appropriate today!) He wore torn, tattered, and dirty clothes with bells, and he carried a switch in his hand with which to beat naughty children, but also pocketsful of cakes, candies, and nuts for good children.



Belsnickel showed up at houses before Christmas and often created fright because he always knew exactly which of the children misbehaved. He would rap on the window with his stick and often the children would have to answer a question for him, recite a Bible verse, or sing some type of song. In exchange he would toss candies onto the

floor. If the children jumped too quick for the treats, they may end up getting struck with Belsnickel's switch. Children who were on their best behavior prior to this visit were allowed to grasp the treats on the floor. The ill-behaved children often got a switch before grasping the treats. Belsnickel always knew if a boy had swiped a neighbor's apples during the year. A curious Christmas custom.

The above version of the Belsnickel was considered the rural version, a lone Belsnickel traveling house to house. An urban version involved costumed Belsnickels traveling house to house in groups, entertaining, singing, or playing instruments. Their intent was to be rewarded with Christmas type treats. This activity was considered as “Belsnickeling”.

In time, in this area, it seems that the rural and urban versions sort of merged according to newspaper reports from the late 1800s and very early 1900s. Often alcohol was involved in the group travels, with these Belsnickels ending up at a local tavern. Belsnickel themed dances and parties were held. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, this custom disappeared as Santa Claus was a much favorable Christmas character.

Years ago, I took my three daughters to the Goschenhoppen Historians Christmas party. When Belsnickel appeared, dressed exactly as described above, many of the children weren't sure what to think. Eyes went wide. His switch was evident. His mannerisms were not at all Santa-like. Belsnickel did throw out the treats, behaved in a frightening manner, but we all enjoyed the show. No one ran away and all received the treats.

## Silverdale

Looking at a map, Hilltown Township is roughly a rectangle, with a hole in it, representing the borough of Silverdale. Although they maintain two separate governments, their relationship and history are quite close.

In the early 1800s, the road from Souderton to Dublin (Route 113), intersected with Green St and the Limekiln Pile (Route 152). Thus, a village was born. This is the “big” Silverdale intersection, complete with two traffic lights.

One of the first homes built in what is now Silverdale is a log home by a carpenter, Peter Sellers. It stands proudly today, on Walnut St, about 240 years later. Slowly, houses, a store and an inn were built and the area became known then as Paletown, for the pale board fence in front of Henry Kaufman’s corner store. The German influence called this spot “Clopboard Stettle”, the German translation for Pale Fence Village. The current Main St. (Route 113) was known as Comleyville Mud Road.

We know that a portion of Route 152 is known as Baringer Ave. In 1777, German immigrant, Nicholas Baringer purchased 140 acres of land from John Penn for 350 Pounds. At the time, there was probably a small house there. An odd circumstance of the transaction was that Baringer was to pay John Penn one ear of corn every year, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June. As June is too early for a crop of corn, it must have been from the prior year’s crop. I believe the white double house on Baringer Ave was known as the Baringer home.

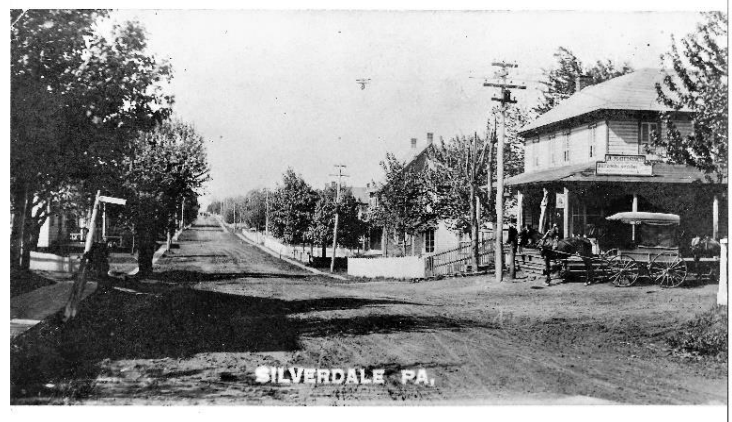
Later on, in the 1800s, the village became known as Portland. J C Wismer was operating the store at the corner of Walnut St and Route 113. Wismer starting manufacturing pants behind the store, and

delivered them farm by farm to the women so they could complete the finish work by hand.

The name of the town was changed yet again in 1876 to Lawndale when the town got a post office. The new post office was located within a store owned by Martin Angelmoyer at the corner of Main Street and Walnut Street. In 1895, the name was changed once more to Silverdale. Why Silverdale? It was rumored that J. C. Wismer paid his employees in silver. The Silver Inn also opened, primarily a pool hall.

Industry seemed to abound in this village. In 1886, Mr. Yoder, an ice cream manufacturer in Lawndale sold 1,700 quarts of ice cream to people during their camp in Perkasio Park. Kate Fretz operated a dressmaking establishment, quite possibly in direct competition with Annie Hedrick. Frank Knoll was a village cabinet maker and undertaker. There were several blacksmiths, a wheelwright, and a bakery,

In 1889, the mud road was changed to the Souderton – Dublin Turnpike. Tolls were collected at the “Dunlap Tollhouse” at the corner of Diamond Street. Yet another tollhouse stood past Blooming Glen.



*Main Street looking towards Souderton. Walnut Street to the right, A M Geisinger’s General Store at the corner. c. 1905*

In 1883, a new brick one-room school house was built on Barringer Ave, not too far from Main Street. It containing grades one through eight. By 1930, as the population grew, it became necessary to build another school house, next to the brick one built in 1883. This new school was on the corner of Barringer Ave and Main St. This new building had yellow asbestos siding on it, so it became known as the “Yellow School”. (In 1925, the school at the corner of Route 113 and Telegraph Road burnt down, so asbestos was the favored building material in 1930) This new building held grades 1 through 4, while the old building housed grades 5 through 8. By 1957, the students in these buildings were transferred to the new Margaret Seylar School and Pennridge High School. In 1964, the old school buildings were torn down, and Silverdale welcomed the Souderton Savings and Loan, then Pennview Savings, division of Univest, now a Dunkin Donuts. The only constant over time is change.

The Wismer Pantaloon Factory is now the Factory Antiques. The old Country Store is where Pino’s is. An ice house operated by Joseph Yoder was at a spot behind the original Silverdale Fire House. (remember the ice cream?) The 1890s Abraham Moyer bakery became known as Betz’s Bakery, then the multi-generational Benner’s Bakery, and now a private residence. And Main Street no longer looks like a “Mud Road”.

### **Pennsylvania German Folklore**

I’ve come into a book, written in 1888 of Pennsylvania German Folklore. At the time of its writing, these items were considered old. Now, over 130 years later, they are curious, to say the least.

**The Moon** – Fences must be made during the waxing of the moon, or else the posts will

sink and rot away. The horns of the moon must be pointing upwards. If not, the posts will sink and rot. Peas, beans and other plants growing as vines must be planted when the horns of the moon are pointing up so they grow vigorously. If they are planted when the horns of the moon are pointing down, they will be stunted.

Hogs must be slaughtered during the waxing of the moon since at any other time, the meat will shrink, and not be as good.

### **Corn-Husking Parties**

During a husking party, the finding of a red ear of corn entitled the finder to kiss any one of the girls present. If a girl found a red ear, and wished to avoid being kissed, she would hide it as quickly as possible, though if discovered, the first of the young men to reach her was entitled to the kiss.

### **Romance**

It was common, at church, in the mid-1800s, to see the marriageable girls, or at least those who had lovers, to wear a scarf or handkerchief around their throats to hide the scarlet blotches or “love-bites” of the preceding evening. (hickeys)

### **Superstitions that relate to children:**

-A child will have colic if an empty cradle is rocked.

-If anyone steps over a child, it will cease to grow.

-If a child is allowed to see its image in a mirror before the age of one, the child will become proud.

-To cut an infant’s fingernails may cause it to become a thief in later years.

-Slobbering is cured by passing a live fish through the child’s mouth.

-To cure whooping cough, administer milk stolen from a neighbor’s cow

**Historical Society of Hilltown Township  
Membership Application  
PO Box 79  
Hilltown, PA. 18927**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Number in Family \_\_\_\_\_

**Type of Membership**

Family	\$25
Individual	\$15
Senior or Student	\$10
Patron	\$50
Sustaining	\$40
Business	\$100
Life Membership	\$250
An amount in excess of yearly dues	\$???

**Total** \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in volunteering in the following;

\_\_\_ Speakers' Programs

\_\_\_ Historical Research

\_\_\_ Historical Preservation

\_\_\_ Library & School Liaison

\_\_\_ Library & Historical Artifacts

\_\_\_ Building Maintenance