



SCHUYLKILL HERITAGE

A Newsletter of the Schuylkill County Historical Society



Volume 17, Issue 2

"To discover, procure and preserve ..."

March-April 2022

We've started a book club with T102 *Pysanky egg classes on tap for March*

As the weather (hopefully) becomes more manageable and COVID (hopefully) starts to fade away, come take advantage of some of the great programs we have lined up.

Easter is fast approaching, and what better way to prepare for it than to make some beautiful pysanky eggs?

Renowned folk artist Georgine Postupak-Borchick will share her expertise in this Eastern European craft. She will teach two Thursday classes at the Society, on March 10 and March 31, from 4 to 6 p.m. Fees for each class are \$30 for Society members and \$35 for the general public. Supplies will be provided, but take-home kits will also be available for \$10 each.

These classes have been very popular since we began offering them, so reservations are required. Call us today to make yours.



(Clockwise from top left) Kathryn Canavan portrait, Lillian Reis dancing the twist, pysanky eggs created by Georgine Postupak-Borchick.

Talking about Lillian Reis

We're also very excited to team up with radio station T120 of Pottsville to start a book club focusing on local history.

Kathryn Canavan led a lively discussion of her new book, *True Crime Philadelphia*, at our first meeting, on Feb. 23.

Of special interest was a

chapter about Lillian Reis, who was accused of masterminding what turned out to be the most lucrative house burglary in Pennsylvania – a 1959 break-in at the Mahantongo Street home of coal magnate John Rich.

A high-profile detective tried

for 10 years to make the case against the Philadelphia showgirl and nightclub owner who was so sexy that she was once arrested for doing the twist – fully clothed.

Kathryn said she began her

Continued on page 2

Schuylkill County Historical Society

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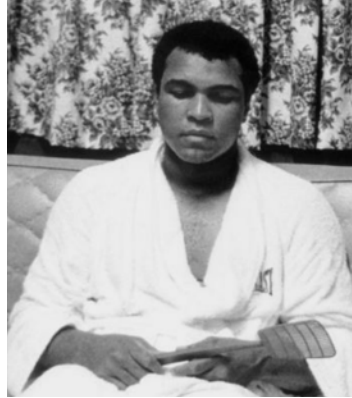
570-622-7540

Society Hours

Wednesday-Friday 10-4

Saturdays 10-2 (except January
and February)

*Our purpose is to discover,
procure and preserve the
historical records, data and
other relevant materials of
Schuylkill County.*



Muhammad Ali at his Deer Lake training camp (now Fighter's Heaven)

Continued from page 1

book with the Lillian Reis case because it was the most recent of her Philadelphia crime stories, but it was also one of her favorites. The book is loaded with fascinating details that she said she got from trial transcripts and newspaper articles.

Society Executive Director Diana Prosymchak noted that we have a very rare photo of "Tiger Lil" – her mug shot.

T102's Kasey Owen, who set up Kathryn's appearance via Google Meet, said the next meeting, at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, March 30, will be on the historical novel *Dirty Mines: Coal Mining in Pennsylvania*. Author John Fitzberald will discuss the book, which depicts

the lives of mining families in the eastern part of the state.

At the third meeting, in late April, we will discuss *The Doctor's Son*, John O'Hara's fictionalized account of how people in the Pottsville and Minersville areas coped with the 1918 flu epidemic.

Check our Facebook page and T102's for more details.

Fighter's Heaven

We are working on a special event in June to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Fighter's Heaven, the Deer Lake training camp that boxing champion Muhammad Ali started in 1972.

We'll have more information in our Facebook page and in our next newsletter.

WELCOME To Our New Members

Vincent Shay Jr.

Diane Appelt

Karen Marks

Diane Resvick

Erin Brown

Dan Brennan

James Kervitis

Georgine Korrubin

Kyle Strokeltus

Mike Kenny

Joseph Zilatis

Austin Cherry

Jennifer Livengood

Bob Single

Bryan Marchefsky

Nancy Marchefsky

James Thompson

Richard Docherty

Thomas E. Hepler

Patricia Nowik

Joyce L. Clark

Betty Prybolsky

How much do you know about the founder of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary?

With most of Hawk Mountain located in Schuylkill County, here is quiz about its founder.

1. In 1877 Rosalie Barrow Edge was born in **A. Philadelphia B. Boston C. New York City D. Pittsburgh.**

2. In about 1915, she became involved with **A. women's suffrage B. Alpine skiing C. mountain climbing D. French cooking.**

3. Her interest in bird watching began in **A. the Canary Islands B. Bird-in-Hand, Pennsylvania C. Central Park D. Turkey Run.**

4. She married Charles Edge in **A. Elkton, Maryland B. Tokyo C. Cancun D. Niagara Falls, New York.**

5. For decades, Edge feuded with the **A. Audubon Society B. Girl Scouts C. Boy Scouts D. Fraternal Order of Eagles.**

6. She founded Hawk Mountain at Dreher'sville **A. in 1934 B. on 1,340 acres C. to end the slaughter of hawks and eagles D. all of the above.**

7. Located in the Sanctuary is **A. Schaumbach's Tavern B. A KFC C. Fort Lebanon D. none of the above.**

8. Her father, John Wylie Barrow, was first cousin to **A. Thomas Edison B. Charles Dickens C. Mark Twain D. Clyde Barrow**



9. Her bird sanctuary is Schuylkill County's only location designated as a **A. state park B. national natural landmark C. state forest D. none of the above**

10. Which statement is not true? **A. She died in 1962 B. Her first name was Mabel C. Rachel Carson was her guest at Hawk Mountain D. She is buried at Hawk Mountain.**

Answers on page 8.

Help the Society with a 'Smile'; stay up to date on Facebook



If you shop on Amazon, you could donate to us by buying on Amazon Smile. Just log onto smile.amazon.com and designate the Historical Society of Schuylkill County as your charity of choice. We'll receive 0.05% of your purchase price. And don't forget to like our Facebook page so we can keep you informed about our news and upcoming events!

History Fair makes a triumphant return

After a one-year absence due to COVID concerns, the Schuylkill County History Fair came back with a bang on Feb. 12 at the Fairlane Village Mall. Sponsored by the Schuylkill County Coalition of Historical Societies, which is led by our Society, the event had 27 organizations and vendors, up from 25 in 2020.

Pleasant weather and a pent-up desire to mingle with fellow history buffs drove up attendance. "It was a wonderful time," said Society Executive Director Diana Prosymchak. "I want to thank all the vendors and Coalition members who made our 22nd annual History Fair a great success."

Participating Coalition members also included the Ashland, Auburn, Lansford, Minersville Area, St. Clair, Tamaqua, Tremont Area and Wayne Township Historical Societies; Coal Region Racing; the Frackville Museum; Hawk Mountain Chapter 31, the No. 9 Mine; Pioneer Tunnel, Railway Restoration Project 113; Schuylkill Haven Historian & Collector, Mike Glore; Schuylkill Historical Model Railroad; the Stanhope School Restoration Project; Valley View Park and the Yuengling Collector.

Clockwise from right: A partial view of the show floor; fairgoers study obscure facts about the county; Society Head Researcher Jean Dellock (seated) and Executive Director Diana Prosymchak chat with visitors; attendees mingle; Society President Jay Zane staffs the book table.



Society honors Pottsville native Ralph E. Brock, who is believed to be the first Black U.S. forester



Ralph E. Brock, a Pottsville native who is believed to be the first Black U.S. forester, was honored at a Feb. 26 program organized and led by Society board member "Porcupine" Pat McKinney.

The ceremony was held in Pottsville's Charles Baber Cemetery as part of Black History Month.

Ralph Brock was born in 1883, one of seven children of John Brock, who was pastor of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Pottsville, Porcupine Pat said. The family later settled in West Chester.

Ralph was only 18 when his father died. A family friend referred him to Joseph T. Rothrock, Pennsylvania's first commissioner of forestry, and he was hired as a student assistant forester at the Mont Alto State Forestry Reserve in Franklin County.

Two years later, he was one of 13 students in the first class of the State Forestry Academy. He graduated in 1906 as salutatorian.

He then became supervisor of the Mount Alto Nursery and wrote articles for the Department of Forestry. He resigned five years later, apparently because the employees resented having to take orders from a man of color.

However, he went on to a successful career as a gardening consultant whose projects



Porcupine Pat adjusts a wreath on a tree planted in honor of Ralph E. Brock.

included Radio City Gardens at Rockefeller Center and Riverside Park on the Upper West Side. He also lectured at the Tuskegee Institute.

He died in New Jersey in 1959, leaving his wife, Pauline, and a son, Russell T.

As part of the ceremony, Porcupine Pat and Don Snowell, founder of the local NAACP chapter, rededicated a pin oak that the Pottsville Shade Tree Commission had planted in Ralph's honor 20 years ago.

Other speakers were the Rev. Dr. Kurt Kovalovich, Frank Snyder for the Schuylkill County Conservancy and Joe Orlowsky for the cemetery. Society President Jay Zane and Pottsville Mayor Dave Clews also addressed the attendees.

A Fight To The Finish!!!
Championship Final for President's Cup
POTTSVILLE PACKERS
 vs.
SUNBURY MERCURIES
P.H.S. Gym, Tuesday, April 8
AT 9 P. M.
 (500 reserve seat and 800 general admission tickets on sale at Rose's, 3rd and Market St.; Rose's, 2nd and Norwegian St.; Dimmerling's, 18th and Market St., and Penn Hall Cigar Store.)
 (NOTE—This game is not a sellout. There will be plenty of reserve seat and general admission tickets on sale at the doors of the PHS gym Tuesday night).

In the late 1940s and early '50s, Pottsville had a minor league basketball team. The Packers spent much of the 1951-1952 season "mired deep in the dungeon" but finished in first place after winning 12 of 14 games in the final two months, according to the *Pottsville Republican*.

The team dominated the Eastern Professional Basketball League's championship game, the paper reported, "but the spirited Mercuries remained in striking distance until the closing seconds of play."

The Packers relocated to Wilkes-Barre the following year but folded soon afterward.

Heartfelt thanks to all of you who contributed to our Annual Appeal

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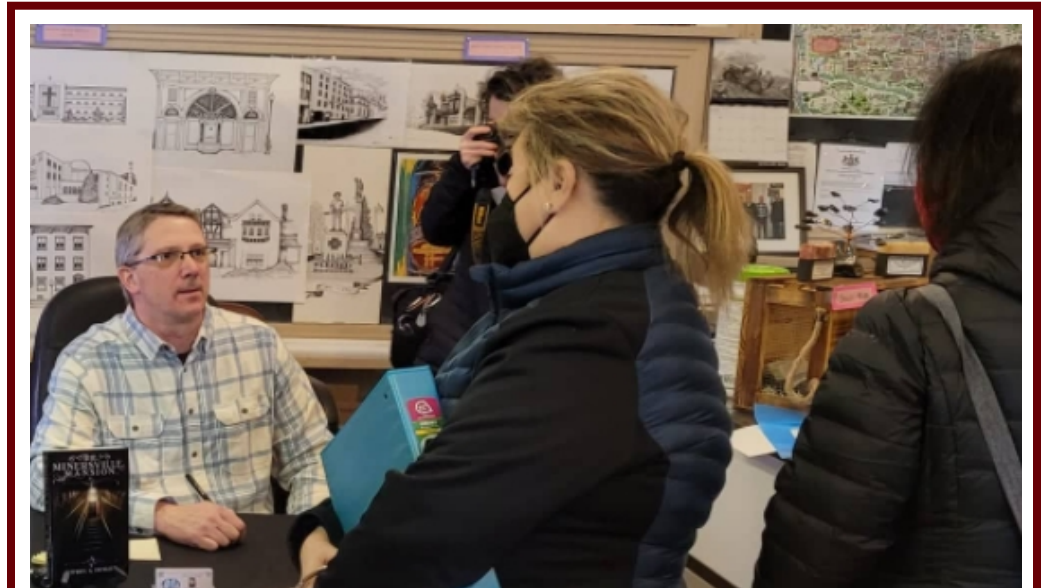
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 Lynne Medley for **Bridget Breslin Gillespie**
 Lynn F. & Rhonda J. Bower for **all who came before**
 Lynne Medley for **James Gillespie**
 Nancy O'Rourke for **John M. Kaiser PHS '21**
 Joyce Rey for **Henry William Buseck**

Annual Appeal

Continued from page 8

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The Society hosted a book-signing by paranormal researcher Jeffrey A. Dengler on Jan. 22. *The Minersville Mansion* chronicles his investigation of strange events at the historic DiNicola Mansion.

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 Patricia Wishousky
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10 Questions/ 10 Answers



In this issue, **Marty Hupka**, a longtime Society member and supporter, answered the 10 questions.

Q. Where and when did you grow up?

A. I grew up in small-town New Philadelphia when most of the residents were either Irish or Lithuanian, but it was in a time when everyone looked out for their neighbor. There were no locked doors. Milk, vegetables and beer were home deliveries long before Amazon. It was the era before credit cards, and payment at the local grocery store was by “the book,” where the items purchased were written down and paid for later.

Q. What grade school did you attend?

A. Holy Family Elementary,

run by the Sisters of Mercy. The grounds of the school building had been dug out by miners during the Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902.

Q. What high school did you attend?

A. I was in the first graduating class from Nativity BVM in Pottsville back in 1956, having transferred from Pottsville Catholic, which was in the city’s Bunker Hill section.

Q. Were you in the Peace Corps?

A. Yes. President Kennedy established the Peace Corps in 1961, and after my Air Force discharge, I was one of the first enlistees. I was assigned to Colombia, South America.

Q. Any historical memories from childhood?

A. I remember the absence of men in the town, as I was too young to comprehend that many were away in the armed forces fighting during World War II. After the war ended, I recall New Philly having large memorable parades with the returned soldiers.

Q. What inspired your interest in local history?

A. While I was in the Air Force, often I was questioned about Gettysburg, being from Pennsylvania. After my discharge in 1960, I finally had my first tour of the historic battlefield. I have been hooked on history ever since.

Q. Any historical figures in your family tree?

A. In my wife’s family tree,

there is John Toomey, who was in Co. D of the 7th Cavalry. He resided at Tucker Hill, in Blythe Township, near the Silver Creek Colliery, and participated in many historic battles fighting for the Union.

Q. What local business or establishment do you miss?

A. The downtown Coney Island and Mootz Candies, both in Pottsville. There was also a eatery that was on Second Street run by a Slovak woman who served huge portions, but I can’t remember the name of the place. Maybe someone reading this will remember.

Q. What about a New Philly establishment?

A. As children, we went to the Saturday kids’ matinees at the Lyric Theatre, where for 15 cents you watched a western movie, a couple of cartoons and a shorter film. Candy was a nickel. After the theatre burned down in 1949, movies were shown at the Sacred Heart auditorium, but it was not the same.

Q. How did you get involved with the Society?

A. I mistakenly went to the old building on Second Street to research the Civil War. When I got to the right building, I met Dave Derbes, who was president at that time. He showed me around, and I offered to help construct a Civil War room. I brought Bill Webber along with me, and he became the archivist. I have been a loyal member ever since.

Daylight Savings or Standard Time? Who really knew in the spring of 1922?

By J.R. Zane

One hundred years ago, Daylight Savings Time was the center of a heated controversy in our county.

Congress enacted DST to conserve energy during World War I, but it became optional after 1919. Acceptance came gradually, though, and because nearly everything and everyone moved by train, the railroads had a large say in the matter. Once they said yes to turning the clocks forward, most industries followed.

Pottsville had adopted DST in 1920 and 1921, but nearby towns and some businesses did not. By the spring of 1922, J. Oren Bearstler, an East Side dentist who was in his first year as mayor, had withdrawn his support for the time change.

He suggested that stores and factories simply set their opening and closing times an hour earlier during the “daylight” months. “The mere putting forward or backward of the hands of a watch or clock does not increase or decrease one hour of daylight,” he told the *Pottsville Republican*.

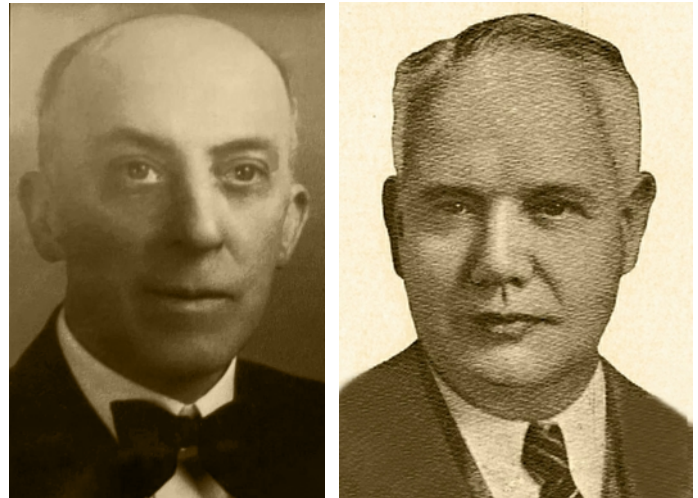
DST was scheduled to start on Sunday, April 30. While Schuylkill Haven and Cressona had decided to go with it, other nearby towns were waiting to see what the county seat would do.

On April 27, Bearstler made a motion to the city council to repeal DST and keep Pottsville on standard time. Despite public support for the time change, the city council voted 3-2 to ignore DST.

Still, the question remained whether the county courthouse’s clock, the largest in the city, would stay on standard time. With its four faces, it was visible from most parts of Pottsville.

President Judge Harry O. Bechtel announced that the county judiciary would adopt DST as a convenience to litigants, witnesses and jurors who took the train to court. Despite the city ordinance, he issued an order on May 1 to turn all courthouse clocks ahead by one hour.

Nearly all the city residents also ignored the repeal, but the fight over time continued.



Mayor J. Oren Bearstler (left) and Judge Harry Bechtel

In 1923 Governor Gifford Pinchot signed the Derrick Anti-DST bill, which prohibited municipalities from going off standard time, but some cities and towns did so anyway.

It took until 1966 for Congress to standardize DST to help transportation industries distressed by the chaotic hodgepodge of times across the country.

So, while we take the adage of “spring forward, fall back” for granted, the tumultuous history of DST is still not over as Americans continue to debate proposals to either eliminate it or make it year-round.

As for the main participants in the 1922 tug of war, Bearstler became a one-term mayor in 1925, when he was defeated by Lamar Pritchard, one of the council members who had voted to keep DST. He continued to practice dentistry and died in 1949.

Bechtel retired as a judge in 1928, returned to a private law practice and became city solicitor. He died in 1962 at the age of 90.

Both are buried in the Charles Baber Cemetery, whose residents no longer have to worry about what time it is.

But for everyone else, make sure to “spring ahead” one hour on March 13.

Schuylkill County Historical Society
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OR CURRENT RESIDENT

We can help you celebrate St. Patrick's Day!

**Or any day you want to
bring a touch of the
Emerald Isle to your table.**

The latest volume in Jennifer Reiner's popular *Feeding the Coal Region* series contains a wealth of classic Irish recipes (\$16.99). And you can dress up your table with centerpiece of Irish and American flags that are literally rooted in coal (\$9.00).



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