



SCHUYLKILL HERITAGE

A Newsletter of the Schuylkill County Historical Society

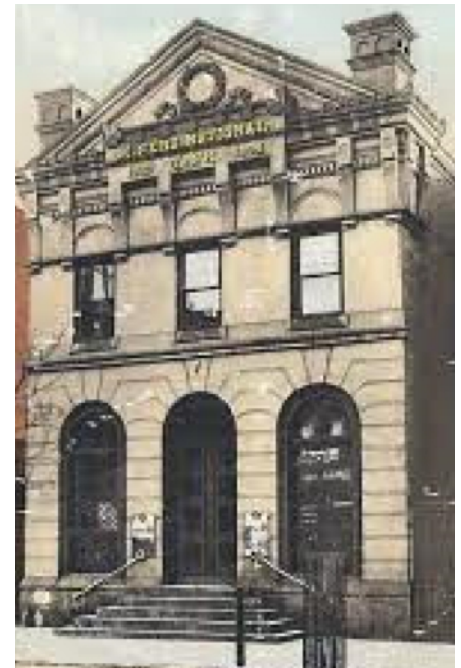


Volume 18, Issue 2

"To discover, procure and preserve ..."

March-April 2023

Farewell to Schuylkill County's first bank



(Above) The former Miners National Bank building in 2023, when Santander Bank occupied it, and (right) the building that it replaced in 1927.

By J.R. Zane

With the closing of Santander Bank at 120 South Centre Street in Pottsville, the building that housed the county's first bank will be empty.

The Miners Bank of Pottsville opened on October 20, 1828, in a small building it rented on the southeast corner of Centre and Norwegian streets. Pottsville, which had a population of about 2,000, had just become a borough that year. Francis Nichols, its first burgess, or mayor, was the bank's first president.

During the next few years, the bank bought its current site and put up a two-story building designed by renowned architect John Haviland (who also de-

signed the Pennsylvania Hotel across the street). The bank occupied the upper floors; an oyster saloon was in the basement.

The bank was nearly bankrupt when John Shippen, who was involved in lucrative coal mines and an iron furnace, succeeded Nichols as president in 1831. In his 51 years at the helm – the longest in Pennsylvania history – business increased dramatically, and Miners became a national bank in 1864.

John was a direct descendent of Edward Shippen, Philadelphia's first mayor. Others in his family tree include Peggy Shippen, the second wife of Benedict Arnold, and Dr. William

Shippen, the surgeon-general of Washington's army.

He and his wife, the former Margaret McCall Swift, lived on the northwest corner of Second and Mahantongo streets, the current site of the Reading Anthracite building.

Their son Edwin, one of the First Defenders in the Civil War, died soon after it ended. Surviving children Samuel and Elizabeth would erect the Pottsville Hospital in their parents' honor.

Historian Jones Wister recalled that John drank grog, "the worst firebrand stuff I ever tasted," every day without fail for 40 years.

"He seemed to like it, and he lived to be over 80," Wister
Continued on page 2

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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.*



Francis Nichols (left) and John Shippen, with depictions of coal mining in the Miners Bank of Pottsville building's doorway.

Continued from page 1

wrote. "The query is, 'How long would he have survived with good whiskey?'"

John was just shy of 87 when he died in 1883, the year after he retired.

The bank expanded and remodeled its building in 1884. A new vault and safe deposit boxes were added in 1905, but in 1926 the structure was demolished.

On November 4, 1927, the bank opened a magnificent new building made of Harvard red brick and Georgia marble.

Above each of the large windows were marble sculptures, including one of Pluto, the god of underworld, to symbolize the riches derived from local mines and quarries. In the middle doorway of wrought bronze were depictions of the coal mining industry. The counter and stair rails were of crafted ornamental iron.

The bank expanded in the early 1960s for its drive-thru and demolished 122 S. Centre Street, which over the years

had housed several well-known stores, including Brenneman's, Britton's, Benesch's, Reiley's, and Hadesty's.

It also purchased the brick buildings on its north side from the Odd Fellows Lodge for an office building.

The bank had also been expanding throughout the county. When it observed its 150th anniversary in October 1978, it had branches in eight other communities. Eight years later, it bought Miners Bank of Shenandoah.

The bank changed hands several times, beginning in 1995, when it merged with Schuylkill Haven Trust Co. to form Heritage Bancorp. In 1999, that company was bought by Reading-based Main Street Bank, which in turn was acquired by Wyomissing-based Sovereign Bank in 2002.

In 2013, Sovereign became part of Santander.

Sadly, this year brings an end to a fascinating chapter in our county's history. Hopefully a new chapter will be written.

How much do you know about local stores during Easter 1960?



New clothes, new shoes, flowers and, of course, candy are popular items for Easter. Test your knowledge about the stores that sold them in 1960.

Answers are on page 7.

1. Boussum's Men's Store was formerly known as **A.** Tom Schu's **B.** Miles & Timm **C.** Doutrich's **D.** Oppenheimer's.
2. Flowers could *not* be purchased from **A.** John Joyce, Pottsville **B.** Vera's, Shenandoah **C.** Nat's, Schuylkill Haven **D.** Puddu's, Pottsville.
3. Shenandoah kielbossi could *not* be purchased from **A.** Kowalonek **B.** Capital **C.** Hollywood **D.** Ed Pelsinsky's.
4. Which of the following was *not* a haberdashery? **A.** Chas. Dimmerling, Pottsville **B.** Aggon & Demalis, Shenandoah **C.** Bohorad's, Pottsville **D.** Terzopolos', Shenandoah.
5. True or False? The Globe at 110 N. Centre Street, Pottsville, was a millinery.
6. Costas candy could be found in **A.** Pomeroy's basement **B.** Farmer's Market **C.** Tuchler's **D.** None of those.
7. True or False? The Bonnie Jean women's store was in Tamaqua.
8. True or False? The Boston Store in Pottsville was a children's clothing store.
9. Shoes could *not* be purchased at **A.** Puddu's **B.** Gittleman's **C.** Raring's **D.** F.J. Sauer's.
10. This was *not* a women's fashion store **A.** Horowitz's, Shenandoah **B.** Zubroff's, Minersville **C.** Elton's, Shenandoah **D.** Tuchler's, Pottsville.

CORRECTION

A story in our last issue said the first Schuylkill County fair was held in Cressona in 1923. This was the first county fair held by the Schuylkill County Fair Association, but others had previously been held in other towns in the country..

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- **FRUIT FLAVORED SLICES**
- **DARK CHOCOLATE LOLLY CANES**

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●
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RUTH ZMUDA O'NEILL
 18 W. Centre St.
 Shenandoah

It was a great day for the History Fair

Crowds of history buffs and curiosity seekers turned out at the Fairlane Village Mall on Feb. 11 for the Schuylkill County Coalition of Historical Societies' annual History Fair. The 28 exhibits from local societies and vendors offered all sorts of information and artifacts to see and buy.

(Clockwise from top: Dawn Morris-Bicht and Bill Van Stone of the St. Clair Historical Society; Andy Ulicny (seated) mans the Greater Shenandoah Area Historical Society booth; Schuylkill County Historical Society Executive Director Diana Prosymchak and Lawrence Vinskie (right) converse with a fair-goer; Bruce Markovich (left) and Joe Matukonis at the Lansford Historical Society exhibit; Jean Medvitz (left) and Joann Zynel dress up as miners' wives for the Tamaqua Historical Society.



Thank you for these donations

Anna Kalkiezicz - Books on coal mining.

Wayne County Historical Society - *Miner's Journal and Pottsville General Advertiser*, March 22, 1862.

Doreen Fesko - Pysanky eggs (shown in photo).

Linda Stephens - *Miner's Journal*, July 4, 1863, and Faust family transcripts.

Carol Haughey - Collection of Jones family genealogical records and other information.

Penelope Cizewski - Scrapbooks, diplomas and yearbooks.

William K. Sowers - Three barber's aprons and framed certificate.



Robert T. Holzer - 1939 Pottsville High School yearbook and 3rd Brigade Band cymbals.

Veida Ruth Bartholomew - piano sheet music.

Charlotte Foran - Navy surgical equipment, photos, Navy peacoat, photo ID cards and duck pin.



Renowned folk artist Georgine Postupak-Borchick will hold several of her popular **pysanky egg-making classes** at the Society in March.

We've already filled classes for March 23 and 30 and have scheduled a third for March 22. We may even add a fourth!

Fees for each of class are \$30 for Society members and \$35 for the general public. Supplies will be provided, and take-home kits will be available for \$10.



The Minersville Area Historical Society shows vintage ladies' finery at its History Fair booth.

Join other local history buffs at the Society and radio station T102's Local Reads book club! Check Facebook pages for info about the club's selections and meeting dates.

**WELCOME,
NEW MEMBERS**
Dustin Felty
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Michael Matz
Edward J. Gallagher
Alan Kull

In 1893, a *Miners Journal* reporter recalled when St. Patrick's Day was *really* celebrated

Whether it's watching a parade or toasting each other in a local watering hole, throngs of Schuylkill Countians dress up in green to celebrate St. Patrick's Day every year.

It was a vibrant and colorful holiday in the 19th century, too, but a *Miners Journal* reporter lamented in 1893 that it had gotten much quieter. Here's a condensed version of the story.

Not many years ago St. Patrick's day meant a season of unbridled conviviality in the mining districts of Schuylkill county. Now the day only lives in memory, mellowed by the cycling flight of time and the men who celebrated in the rapidly dimming retrospect have either passed away or have lost the old time fervor the day inspired.

Time was when Minersville led the region in the magnificence and splendors of a Patrick's day parade. That was before the Fergusons, the Muldoons, the Higgins', the Eagans, the Cosgroves, the Tooles and a host of others, left her borders to seek a fortune in that stirring mining town – Shenandoah. Rain or snow, sunshine or storm, did not dampen Irish enthusiasm in that day.

The day became proverbial as meaning the severest kind of weather, but the true born sons of Erin faced the worst element and trudged miles and miles through snow and mud, proudly wearing a green scarf



that fell from the shoulders to the knees.

The fife and drum were a musical luxury for the parade occasion. Pottsville and the surrounding towns contributed these extinct tortures of the war and with twenty thumping, screaming musicians, trying to drown the shouts of several thousand hurrahing patriotic Hibernians, the air trembled and the spheres palpitated.

It was the outlying villages that gave the Minersville celebration a bright green tint. Branchdale, then called Muddy Branch, Forestville, York Tunnel, Primrose, Black Valley, the Heckscherville Valley and Mine Hill Gap paid tribute to the day by sending decorated cohorts to the great turnout.

The Heckscherville legions, marshalled by the stalwart Murphy brothers, John, James and Thomas, and the Mine Hill

Gap patriots led by Capt. Hughey O'Neill, usually made the biggest showing as they marched stiffer than starch in the great parade. And when the parade started what a shout went up!

But that day is gone. The tie of brotherhood has been broken and the younger ones are gradually becoming divorced from the traditions of the race that were so dearly treasured by their fathers.

Yesterday's observances were quiet, orderly and decent. Most people refrained from work, but to the casual observer the day had nothing about it to indicate that it was commemorated in that spirit which characterized it in the olden time.

Tiny pieces of ribbon or a spray of evergreen on the bosoms of a few promenaders were the only emblems that reminded one that St. Patrick's day was with us.

A fitting close to the day was the second banquet and entertainment of Division No. 1, [Ancient Order of Hibernians] at Centennial Hall. It was a gathering of representative people and the event was a most successful one. The toast "A.O.H.," was responded to by Sheriff Thomas O'Donnel.

Francis Kinny, the famous piper, was there and played a merry cadence to the sound of tripping feet. At midnight the party repaired to the dining rooms where a collation of creature comforts was served.

10 Questions/ 10 Answers



Society Treasurer and certified public accountant **Robert B. Patton** answered the 10 questions for this issue.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. I was raised in the 1950's in the 1800 block of the Yorkville section of Pottsville. It was mainly a working-class/middle-income neighborhood. We walked to Yorkville elementary school, Patterson junior high school and Pottsville High School.

Q. Name a significant national or world event that occurred during your childhood.

A. The 1952 election of General Dwight Eisenhower as

president. Although I am not related to General Patton, I was impressed that a general could be elected president!

Q. Who inspired your interest in local history?

A. My Pottsville High teacher Mr. Carlton Sterner, head of the History Department. He said to me one time, "Patton, it is hard to know where you are going if you don't know where you have been." Some may remember him as a noted track coach.

Q. Tell us about an interesting but overlooked person from the county's past.

A. Minersville native William D. Hutchinson, who was a state legislator, state Supreme Court justice, and federal appellate judge. Even more important to me, he was my high school Sunday school teacher at First United Methodist Church in Pottsville. Unfortunately, he died at age 63 in 1995.

Q. Any historic ancestor in your family tree?

A. My grandmother, Grace Weiser Patton, was a direct sixth-generation descendant of Conrad Weiser, the 18th-century pioneer and Indian peacemaker.

Q. Any memories of early

participation in local historical events?

A. I was part of the massive crowd at Pottsville's Garfield Square on October 28, 1960, when JFK gave a speech.

Q. What local business do you miss?

A. The Capital, Hollywood and Hippodrome theaters in Pottsville. I visited them all many times in the pre-television age.

Q. Any favorite county food or beverage?

A. The sodas produced by Minersville's Harvilla family. I especially enjoyed their root beer and birch beer, which then cost only 10 cents a quart. Yes, that's right, 10 cents a quart!

Q. Name a favorite teacher.

A. Ben Liddle. He helped hone my math skills, teaching me algebra, solid geometry, trigonometry and advanced algebra. I have modeled many things in life after him. He was with the school district for 40 years before retiring in 1980.

Q. What was your first car?.

A. I learned to drive on a 1955 Chevrolet from Bob Miller's in Yorkville. It was a stick shift. I am thankful for that. Knowing how to drive a stick shift allows one to drive just about anything.

ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ ON PAGE 3

1. C; 2. D; 3. C; 4. D; 5. False, children's store; 6. B; 7. False, Schuylkill Haven; 8. True; 9. D; 10. B

Thanks for Smiling for us! Please keep liking us!



Amazon has stopped its "Smile" program, but we want to thank all of you who designated us as the charity that received a portion of the money you spent there.



But please keep liking us on Facebook so you can stay informed about our news and upcoming events!

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Check out our new line of 10 pewter plates depicting historic landmarks in Schuylkill County. Choose a memento of your special place or collect all 10! They're available for \$10 each at our gift shop.



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