

Hellertown Historical Society

150 W. Walnut Street - Hellertown, PA - 610-838-1770

www.hellertownhistoricalsociety.org



Summer Newsletter 2015

Issue 2

Our Website is Taking Us Back to the Future!

No one knows for sure how many local historical societies and small museums exist in the United States today. Debbie Ann Doyle, a staff member at the American Historical Association, places the number at 10,000. The majority of the local historical societies have budgets of under \$25,000 per year, and 15% of these are staffed solely by volunteers.

Miss Doyle has just described the Hellertown Historical Society. Our budget is very close to that number but is expanding, and our society is staffed solely by dedicated and resourceful volunteers.

Small historical societies - like ours - play an important role in preserving and protecting historical records, memorabilia, and devising ways to present the past to the public. For decades bricks and mortar buildings and museums with revolving displays were the answer. However, a more mobile society has seen demographics change and many "born and raised" locals have scattered across the United States and the world.

This change in demographics has occurred in the Hellertown area, too. In fact, it is very important that new local residents feel connected and a part of their community's past. New outreach methods were proposed...and the most successful has turned out to be the society's website!

Since the website was established less than four years ago, there have been nearly 10,000 visits!

Don Mills, the Hellertown Historical Society's Webmaster, has done an excellent job

presenting the many facets of the society's buildings, grounds, and museum displays in an interesting and educational manner. For those who are unable to visit in person, making the trip through Hellertown's historical buildings via the website is the next best thing.

Watch for expansion plans...more and more access to Hellertown's past is on the drawing board.

The part of the Hellertown Historical Society that places it above and beyond other historical societies of its size is the Tavern Room. The Tavern Room is available for parties, meetings, showers, etc and generates donations that help bolster the society's challenging budget. The Tavern Room is prominently displayed on the website and has yielded a growing number of reservations. According to Earl Hill, Tavern Room Coordinator, "I am constantly receiving email requests from website visitors who are interested in reserving the Tavern Room for their next event. The website has helped take reservations to the next level."

The society's website is just one tool being used to improve services to the community. In fact you could say that Hellertown Historical Society, through use of technology, is rapidly coming "Back to the Future." Tools such as Past Perfect software (complex software used to record and track donated artifacts, membership, etc. in process of being obtained and implemented), use of email addresses, etc., are helping small historical societies (such as ours) meet future challenges head on.

Visit us at www.hellertownhistoricalsociety.com.

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Vice-President - Joseph Sofka
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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Linda Fiegel
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MEETINGS

The Board of Directors meets the first Thursday of every month at 7:00 PM in the Miller's House. Meetings are open to the public. For more information call 610-838-1770.

EMERITUS

Marcella Dimmick
Stella Pasternak

Contact us at: Hellertown Historical Society
150 W. Walnut Street
Hellertown, PA 18055

www.hellertownhistoricalsociety.org
610-838-1770 (Please leave a message)
Email: info@hellertownhistoricalsociety.org

Summer Memories and Halloween

by Andrea Danner

In our last newsletter we shared the memories of fun and games in the 1940's Hellertown as told to us by Grumpy Ward and George Werkheiser. In this edition, we continue their stories of innocent summers and devilish Halloweens in years gone by.



Summer days were all about fun. Sometimes, even when as young as 7, Grump would leave home at 6:30 a.m. and walk to the stone quarry. The stone quarry was near the Heller Homestead along the Saucon Creek. The

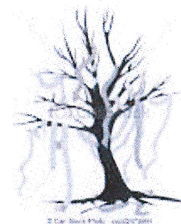
Geyer family lived in the Heller Homestead at that time. Grumpy and the other boys would play there all day. People used the quarry as a shooting range, so the boys would dig out the lead from the rocks for fun. There was a fresh water spring with cool water to quench their thirst. Watercress grew in the water which made a great lunch when paired with bread they bought at the Hellertown Bakery and a few ill-gotten tomatoes! Gene Mateff owned the bakery and Grump remembers buying many a loaf of bread for his mother at 15 cents a loaf. Many nights, the gang from New Street would sleep out in a lean-to made of Sumac branches. They made a campfire at night. Parents would come down to say goodnight to the boys and then the kids would spend the night with a blanket as a bed. During the day, if they weren't playing hard they would go swimming at the Wagner dam. There was a rope swing to use. Nothing beat swimming in the "crick", not even the Hellertown pool. When the pool was first built, there was no filtration system. You would have to get a basket for your clothes from Dick Eckert, the cage guy. Then you would change into your bathing suit, take a mandatory shower, and finally dip your feet into black colored disinfectant. Then, and only then, could you go swimming! As mentioned, there was no filtration system, so by



Saturday the pool water was kind of cloudy. The pool was drained every Sunday and if you were lucky and knew someone you were hired to scrub down the pool sides. The pool was then refilled using fresh, cold spring water, which meant every Monday's swim was "cold as hell." Because of the lack of filtration system, parents thought it cleaner to swim at Wagner's Dam! Plus it cost the exorbitant price of \$1.50 to \$2.00/season to swim at the Hellertown pool!

Warm springs and summers provided good yields in family gardens. Many were used to supplement family incomes, as well as provide canned food during winter months. George's family had a big garden and he helped by picking weeds. He was also responsible for picking and cleaning spring onions for Hine's Market. The family had a garden at Main and Spruce Streets and another located at Phillips and Easton Rd.

Summer ended, September and school started and then October finally arrived! Since there wasn't a designated trick or treat night for Halloween, the whole month became Halloween for Grumpy and George. Starting October 1st they would go around to neighbors, when the mood struck them, to ask for candy. When neighbors got tired of their requests, the boys would start their tricks. A favorite trick was to put a water filled can in a slightly opened screen door. When the neighbor would open the door the water would fall on them....and that's when Grumpy and George ran like lightning.



The trolley was also a target of Halloween pranks. The boys would collect used brass casings from 22's. They would put a match head in the empty casing and cinch it shut with pliers. They would fill several hundred over a period of time. Come Halloween they would lay out 100 yards of casing over the tracks. When the unsuspecting trolley driver would drive over that section there would be a lot of popping going off!

Another prank, which in hindsight was dangerous for the conductor, is when they would "pull the monkey" on the trolley. They would usually do this in front of the Legion or at the end of Hellertown's line by Walnut St. The "monkey" was a device that rode on the wire above the trolley and gave the trolley its power. From the monkey hung a rope that the trolley driver could pull down with a pole and reverse direction on the tracks. When the boys pulled the monkey, the trolley lost power and stopped. The poor conductor had to get out of the trolley and sometimes climb on top of the trolley to reattach it to the wire to allow power to return. The kids would then run like hell to not be caught by the conductor, who was known to give chase by foot.

Oh, and there was outhouse tipping. I had never heard of this. The boys would knock over outhouses during their Halloween exploits and I am told it only took 6 or 7 guys to do this! One time, Mr. Warren Heffner was still inside the outhouse when it was tipped over. For the record, Mr. Heffner was not injured and the boys weren't caught.

Toilet paper was a useful tool to be taken from outhouses and used for Halloween pranks. It could be launched into trees and draped all over yards. Wooden sewing machine spools could be further notched, string attached and a pencil put in the middle. When the string was released just right, next to a window, under the cover of darkness, it could provide a wonderfully startling effect to those inside a home!

What fun to go out to the corn fields surrounding town and get ears of dried corn. Then they would take the kernels off and fill a bucket. Now they were ready to go tacking homes; throwing the dry corn at windows. This was great fun for kids of every age. And so was soaping windows!

Everyone knew which homeowners would give chase after they pulled pranks, like Mr. Charles Anderko and Mr. Ralph Zeiner. They would really give the boys a good chase for a long distance. This was all part of the fun and added to the relief of getting away with another prank. The cops were never called and neighbors took care of the pranksters when needed.

Even in those fun times, what went around came around. One Halloween, older boys Tom Ward, Dick Rauscher, Gene Riess and Cary Doll grabbed Gordon Pfeiffer and Grumpy and took them to the cemetery after dark. The older boys grabbed wash line and tied the boys together to a tombstone. After the two boys were left to cry and be scared for an hour, the older boys came back and untied them. These were the Halloweens some of you fondly remember.

It has been a pleasure to share these stories with our newsletter readers. We are looking to share your stories with our members. Please stop by on a Tuesday or Thursday morning and have a cup of coffee and tell your story!



Speaker Series 2015

On Saturday, May 2, as part of History Day, we held our first Speaker Series for the 2015 season. We paid homage to several of our WW II veterans, by inviting them to tell their story in their own words.

Those in attendance were not disappointed by what they heard. Our speakers were Walter Rasich, Joseph Kugler, Al Groegler, William Diehl and William Frey. Their service and stories were varied. We heard tales of duck boats to trenches, world travel decoding secret messages to servicing military aircraft and most movingly, being requested by a German soldier to kill him to put him out of his suffering. The audience was enthralled with what some of these men had to endure, and did so without hesitation.

Also in our audience was Leon Werkheiser. He was not of age when he first attempted to enlist and was turned down, but was later drafted when he was 18. These men/boys did not think twice about protecting and fighting for their country. Thank you to each and every one of them! And a special thank you to Harold Furry who was scheduled to appear, but was under doctors orders to stay home. He graciously allowed us to display his Nazi flag as part of our History Day display.

We hope you will join us for our next two Speaker Series events. On September 17, at 7:00 p.m. we will be hosting Dan Ruth, fresh off of writing a new book. And since our WW II event was so popular, we will host another one on Saturday, November 7, at 1:00 p.m. We will announce our speakers once we finalize them.

Saucon Valley Third Graders Tour Heller-Wagner Grist Mill

The volunteers at the Hellertown Historical Society welcomed Saucon Valley Third Graders during the month of May. Individual classes joined us for a two hour visit. Each group began with a brief history of Hellertown presented by Dorothy Freeman. Dorothy talked about how Hellertown had grown throughout the years, by showing pictures of buildings that have changed, as is currently the case with the former The Movies building. She mentioned how some buildings have been demolished to allow new growth, as recently occurred at the former Murray Motors site. She pointed out how some buildings have stayed relatively the same for 100 years, as has the Saucon Valley Dance Conservatory building. These examples demonstrate how towns and cities evolve. She also explained how and what a grist mill does before handing the program over to Harry Boos.



enjoyed seeing old ice skates and radios that were the size of furniture and also hoped that our ice cream cart actually held ice cream!

Next, Harry guided the classes through our pole barn museum. Learning how planting and harvesting was done by farmers before modern equipment seemed to catch their interest, as did how ice was harvested, stored and delivered before refrigeration. But the hands down favorite was learning how a simple machine works: the pulley. Each child clamored for their chance to try to lift a heavy bucket by hand, and then to lift it easily with the help of a pulley! After the pole barn, all classes had a chance to walk across our Pony Bridge, then over to our herb garden. Brook Loller, our intern, explained how useful an herb garden was before drugstores existed. Many herbs were used for homemade remedies to cure common ailments. Brook explained how lemon balm helped ward off ticks and the students enjoyed smelling it!

Harry was the tour guide for both of our museums. He eased the children into the tour by showing them our fish, which are always a hit. Then Harry showed the students how the mill worked. He explained that while it is no longer operational, many original parts still remain in the mill. Then it was upstairs to tour the museum and to see how life used to be in days gone by. The children were amazed by the freestanding tin bath tub. Harry explained that once a week it was bath day and everyone shared the same bath water. Many of the children are the youngest in their family and were shocked to learn they would have been the last to bathe on wash day! Our diorama of an old general store brought a lot of interest as did our little school room. The students

We were delighted to have the students visit us and allow us to share Hellertown's history with them. As a token of our appreciation, we provided each class with their own seeds and materials to grow their own herbs back in the classroom. We consider educating the community about our heritage as a main part of our mission. We certainly hope Saucon Valley Third Graders make this an annual occurrence. As Dorothy said after each visit, "It was a great day!" All of us at Hellertown Historical Society agree!



- Aug. 22 - Visit HHS at Hellertown-Lower Saucon Community Day at Dimmick Park
- Sept. 13 - Visit HHS at the Saucon Valley Farmer's Market
- Sept. 17 - Speaker Series -7PM in the Tavern Room - "Hellertown Home Movies Memories Con't" presented by Dan Ruth
- Nov. 7 - Speaker Series - 1PM in the Tavern Room - WWII
- Dec. 4 - Annual Holiday Open House - 7PM in the Tavern RoomTours - 6:30 PM, Refreshments, Live Entertainment, Trains Display. Snow Date: December 5th
- Dec. 6 to Dec. 20 - Trains Display - Noon to 4 PM, Basement level of the Miller's House
- Dec. 13 - Photos with Santa - Noon to 4 PM in the Tavern Room
Santa visits the Mill for photos with kids of all ages (Santa loves pets, too!)
Train Display. Refreshments. \$2 fee per photo
ALSO
- Dec. 13 - "*Christmas Shopping at the Mill*" Noon - 4 PM, Tavern Room
Shop for last minute gift items from various vendors