

Hellertown Historical Society

Volume 2026
Issue One - July



Newsletter

"Dedicated to Preserving the History and Heritage of Hellertown and Its People"

The gravestone of Michael Heller at Lime Kiln Cemetery in Bethlehem.

Heller was the third-oldest son of Johann Christopher Heller, the father of the founding family of Hellertown.

Michael Heller fought in the French and Indian War and took food to Washington's troops at Valley Forge.



In Our 250th Year, Local Revolutionary Heroes Rest in Obscure Cemetery

By Lauren Kachmarsky

The semiquincentennial anniversary of the Signing of the Declaration of Independence is a momentous occasion for all Americans. It's a time to celebrate 250 years of self-determination and a revolutionary spirit that has been passed through generations. It's also a time to share our thanks for the freedom we appreciate and democratic ideals the Revolution helped spread around the world.

Often lost in the swirl of celebratory fireworks, parades, and July 4 picnics is our connection to people who made epic history right here at home. Many of these people helped build Hellertown; some served bravely in the American Revolution. A few of them lie at rest in an obscure cemetery just outside borough limits.

If you drive west on Hellertown's Water Street, cross the bridge over Saucon Creek, and turn right onto Creek Road toward Bethlehem, you'll pass luxurious town homes, small patches of farmland, and portions of Lehigh University's Stabler Campus on the west side of the road. About one mile down the road, a brick building resembling an old schoolhouse appears on the east side.

(continued on page 2)

Heritage Day Delights Large Audience

Heritage Day 2026 had the perfect recipe for a successful event: beautiful weather, terrific music, great antique and classic cars, colonial artisans and living historians, plenty of children's activities, and delicious food.

Add ample parking, a punctual shuttle bus service, and friendly volunteers and it's no wonder that more than 1,000 people descended upon Grist Mill Park and the Michael Heller Homestead for the third annual celebration of Saucon Valley's past. Event sponsors were the Hellertown Historical Society, Saucon Valley Conservancy, and Lower Saucon Township Historical Society.

Beginning with the playing of our national anthem by the Saucon Valley High School Band, and ending with a stirring rendition of John Phillip Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever" by the famed Allentown Band, Heritage Day was an afternoon of reminiscing for adults who traveled from as far away as Pittsburgh, North Carolina, Virginia, New York, and Ohio. For the hundreds of

children in attendance, it was a day to make whirligigs and pioneer rag dolls, watch a blacksmith craft objects of iron, take a narrated ride on a horse-drawn wagon, and watch living historians make chicken and vegetables and a delicious combination of pork loins and onions over open fires.

"I liked the wealth of activities, especially the historical exhibits at the Heller Homestead and the Grist Mill, and the kids' activities and classic cars," said Terese Reitbauer of Annville, PA. "It was all wonderful. I hope you hold this again next year."

Terese will be pleased to know that next year's Heritage Day will be held Saturday, May 15, at a time to be determined.

A volunteer review session was held May 26. Many ideas were shared to make Heritage Day 2027 a bigger and better event. If you are interested in joining the Heritage Day Committee, contact the Hellertown Historical Society at info@hhstours.org.



Artisans and living historians from three states brought colonial culture to life.

Hellertown Historical Society, 150 W. Walnut Street, Hellertown, PA

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(Lime Kiln Cemetery, continued from page 1)

A small cemetery spreads out next to it, with gravestones so old and weathered that most names are indiscernible.

You have arrived at Lime Kiln Cemetery, where 19 Heller family members are buried including Michael Heller, Sr., who built and occupied the Michael Heller Homestead along Saucon Creek, one-half mile north of the Heller-Wagner Grist Mill.



The graveyard is on two small adjoining pieces of land originally owned by Jacob and Barbara Kram and Isaac and Cathrout Rothrock. The couples donated the one-acre parcel to a local Mennonite Society. Jacob Kram's 1802 deed specifically sets the land aside "to build a house thereon for Keeping School and Public worship therein and also for a graveyard for the Said Societice and other Neighbors which will choose to bury their Dead ..."

Similar language in the Rothrock deed sets aside land for the same purpose: a school/meetinghouse and cemetery. These early Hellertonians understood the importance of community, education, and grieving. They knew these social goods would improve the new land on which they chose to settle.

The first grave was dug in 1751, for a German immigrant, Maria Margaret Riegel. As time passed, the cemetery became a final resting place for local families. The most recent burial was for a woman named Emmalinda Weaver, who died in 1895. As a comparison, Union Cemetery on Main Street in Hellertown had its first burial in 1838.

Lime Kiln Cemetery graves stand apart from others not because of their age or design, but rather the stories behind the people buried there. Six men resting in the cemetery - Benjamin Riegel, Samuel Rothrock, Johan Michael Heller, Sr., Michael Heller, Jr., and David Heller - are veterans of the Revolutionary War. They served in the 1st Battalion of the Northampton County Militia, under Captain Jacob Wagner, helping to protect the county and surrounding area from British incursions. Benjamin Riegel, who died in 1778, never lived to see George Washington's

decisive war-ending victory at the Battle of Yorktown in 1781. Although he never served on the war's front lines, his time spent protecting even a small portion of his new nation was not in vain.

Hellertown sometimes can be overshadowed by Bethlehem's impressive Revolutionary War history. There was no Continental Army Hospital headquarters in Hellertown, although 300 wagons filled with wounded and captured soldiers passed through the town on their way to Bethlehem, following a British victory at the Battle of Brandywine in 1777.

George Washington did not sleep in Hellertown, either, though he did ride through the settlement on the King's Road (now Main Street/PA Route 412) in 1782 on his way to Albany, New York, where he attended regional military and political matters.

The King's Road was a main thoroughfare for troops during the war, especially after Washington's defeat at Brandywine when the dirt road was choked with thousands of soldiers and civilians escaping the British in Philadelphia. A wagon carrying the Liberty Bell was part of the exodus. But the quiet little settlement - then part of Lower Saucon Township - never heard the terrible din of war.

Today, Lime Kiln Cemetery is dotted with small American flags placed next to graves of local patriots who guarded supply lines, protected civilian land from British marauders, delivered food to Washington's troops at Valley Forge, and never gave a second thought to the dangers associated with America's noble cause of revolution and freedom.

If you drive toward Bethlehem on Creek Road one day, consider stopping your car next to Lime Kiln Cemetery's stone wall. Look at the graves and understand who they hold. Then say "Thank you." It's the least you can do to honor the brave men who are the reason we are celebrating 250 years of American independence.

Upcoming Events

- National Night Out - August 4, 5-8 pm
Dimmick Park
- Hellertown Community Day
August 15, 10 am to 3 pm, Dimmick Park
- Talk in the Tavern - August 27, 7 pm
Coffee with a Colonial: Join living historian Samuel Leamer for an interactive discussion about coffee customs of the 18th century.
- Hellertown Halloween Parade
October 18, 2 pm
Theme: "250 Years of Freedom"



President's Corner

by Don Mills, HHS President

National recognition, our annual membership drive, and a need for more volunteers

Hello! Our entire Heller-Wagner Grist Mill site is now on the National Park Service's Register of Historic Places, a feat three years in the making. This year marks America's Semiquincentennial, our nation's 250th anniversary of independence. Many of the activities at May's Heritage Day fittingly reflected America's earliest years, when the Saucon Valley played a key, but often unnoticed role in helping the country gain freedom from British oppression. As at Heritage Day, the HHS will stay focused this year on public programs that reflect social and cultural activities that were prevalent during our country's infancy.

The Semiquincentennial also presents a perfect opportunity to recognize the national importance of our HHS site. Public tours of our buildings at 10 a.m. on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month are a perfect place to start.

We also have begun our 2026 membership drive, and hope to recruit many new members. I urge those who have current memberships to renew as soon as possible. This year, we will issue membership cards to all HHS members, new and current and at all levels of giving. You will see these cards appear in your mail over the next couple of months.

The HHS currently is recruiting new volunteers who share an interest in preserving Hellertown's history, and furthering our goals. We have many opportunities for volunteers of all ages: archiving records, maintaining volunteer records, physical site maintenance, field trip and public tour docents, corresponding on behalf of the HHS, sewing 18th-century garments, and much more.

I hope many of you will choose to volunteer and discover - and share - the many treasures we offer the public. Start your volunteer journey by visiting our website. Below is your direct link to volunteering. Thank you!

<https://hellertownhistoricalsociety.org/contact/>

Blast from the Past

(This short article appeared in the September 30, 1868 edition of the New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette, when news traveled by telegraph. Thanks to HHS volunteer Dan Stohl for finding it.)

Bethlehem, Pa., Sept. 28, 1868 - A frightful accident occurred on the North Pennsylvania Railroad, near Hellertown, about five miles below Bethlehem. A passenger train, consisting of three cars, was thrown from the track and two of the cars were badly smashed, and five persons, it is reported, were killed and 30 wounded. The accident was caused by a cow on the track.

Hellertown Area Library

How it began, how it grew, and where we are today

By Dorothy Pennachio

Roughly 37 years ago, a group of residents from Hellertown and its surrounding area, were casually purchasing and exchanging books from their private collections. Three thousand books and several years later, these grassroots efforts led to the establishment of the Hellertown Area Library (HAL) Association. Individuals and civic groups soon began to donate money toward a rental site appropriate for the small library. Volunteers gathered supplies, built bookshelves, and educated themselves about the mechanics of the library system.

On August 11, 1990, the building at 528 Main Street (now Adam's Plumbing), opened as the library's temporary home.



Circulation assistant James Elfers is one of five library employees. Ali Finkbeiner serves as the library's director.

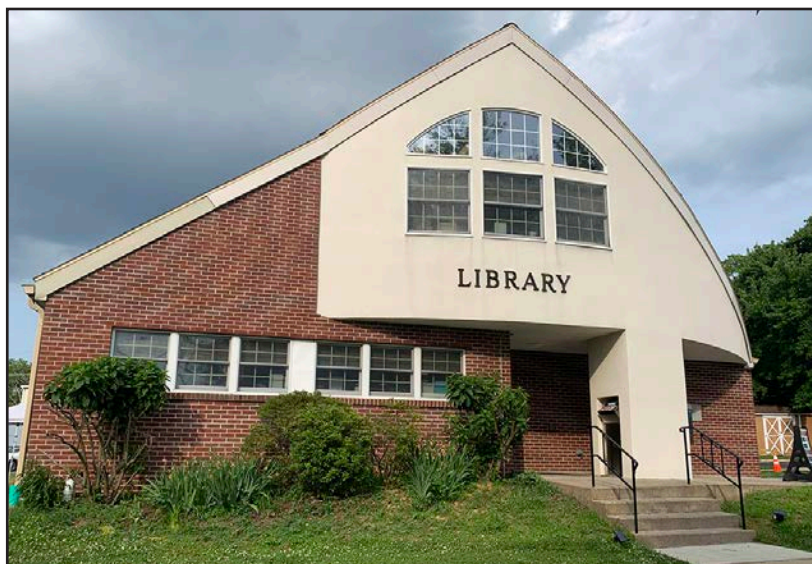
It soon became apparent that a permanent location was needed. A \$50,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Education provided an impetus. The Borough of Hellertown then offered to lease HAL a vacant site at 409 Constitution Avenue. On August 4, 1992, 250 interested citizens witnessed the breaking of ground, and construction of Hellertown's new library commenced.

Brick and Mortar

HAL officially opened to the public in Summer, 1993. Twenty years later, HAL's space was renovated to better suit patrons' needs. Children's and young adult volumes were transferred and consolidated on the top floor, which opened space on the main floor for several computers open to use by patrons. In addition, the basement level was reorganized, and space was created for public events.

In late October 2024, Hellertown Borough Council announced a decision to secure the future of HAL by approving a 10-year partnership and funding agreement. The borough's long-term commitment ensures stable

The Hellertown Area Library has grown from a dream of local residents to a full-fledged library serving residents of the borough and Lower Saucon Township.



financial support and is seen as solidifying HAL's role as an essential educational and cultural resource for Hellertown residents. On December 18, 2024, Lower Saucon Township Council approved a 10-year partnership and funding agreement with HAL.

"We're just very excited for our Lower Saucon patrons to be able to have full access again," HAL Director Ali Finkbeiner said.

In July 2025, township citizens were officially added to HAL's direct service area, gaining access to HAL's CloudLibrary and Inter-Library Loan Service. The township agreed to pay HAL \$117,596.40 annually across monthly installments of \$9,799.70, to cover library operating costs. That number was based on the township's 2020 U.S. Census population of 11,094, and a \$10.64 per-capita rate.

New Cards

Recently, library patrons were issued new library cards because HAL is transferring to a new circulation and online catalog software. Now, patrons must have their library card or a digital image of the barcode with them in order to check out materials.

Your new card allows access to all libraries participating in the ACCESSPA program, whose logo is printed on all new library cards. The new system will link HAL's catalog with other libraries in the area. Eventually, HAL will be participating in resource sharing with libraries in the area.

Cloud, Kanopy and PowerLibrary

HAL's CloudLibrary is an online reading resource that includes eBooks and audiobooks. To use the service, patrons download a CloudLibrary app and register, using their new library card number to log in.

The next additions were Kanopy and Power-

Library. Once patrons download the Kanopy app and register their library card, they gain access to selected ad-free TV shows, movies, and videos.

PowerLibrary is available to all Pennsylvania residents, whereas Kanopy and CloudLibrary are available only to patrons of Hellertown and Lower Saucon Township. Kanopy and CloudLibrary are provided through the District Library Center, Bethlehem Area Public Library.

Museum passes

Museum passes are available if a patron has a HAL card and resides in the Saucon Valley School District, one pass per family for one week. A late return of a pass incurs a \$10/day fine. Museums included in the program are America on Wheels and the Da Vinci Science Center (Allentown); Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve (New Hope); Museum of the American Revolution, the National Constitution Center, and Please Touch Museum (Philadelphia); Elmwood Park Zoo (Norristown); Michener Art Museum (Doylestown); and the National Museum of Industrial History (South Bethlehem).

Hellertown Area Library Hours of Operation

**Mondays and Wednesdays, 10 am-8 pm;
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10 am-6 pm;
Friday, 10 am-3 pm
Saturday, 9 am-4 pm**

**Contact the library at 610-838-8381,
or visit its website at
www.hellertownlibrary.org**



Christopher Heller's Descendants Spend a Day in Hellertown

By Jeff Heller

My family and I recently had a family vacation in Pennsylvania and got to spend time in Hellertown. It was amazing to learn about our family's heritage and to explore the tavern, museum, and Michael Heller's family homestead. We wanted to thank the volunteers that are keeping the place up and working hard to restore the history of Hellertown.

We were able to get three generations of Hellers together and used the Tavern Room for our special occasion. We live in North Carolina, so my kids and their cousins had never visited Hellertown. The kids had a dance party in the tavern while the adults had lunch. In addition, my parents, Dawn and Allen Heller, just celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary. They were married in a Moravian church in Allentown by Dawn's brother, John Griffith, who was a minister and comes from a long line of ministers also

named John Griffith.

I have gotten more interested in genealogy and have started going through my grandfather Norman Heller's things. He got very interested in genealogy when his sister Frieda Heller passed away in 1981 and inherited all her old paperwork, including old Heller birth certificates and baptism certificates, some of which are written in German.

After acquiring these documents, Norman got the genealogy bug and wrote to all the nearby churches, city governments, the Mormon church, and the Library of Congress to get information about the Heller family. He saved the



The Hellers (Dawn and Allen in the middle) on vacation in Pennsylvania.

letters he wrote and their responses and was able to create a family tree dating back to 1618 in Germany. He collected information about our direct line as well as any other Hellers he could find. I hope to do more research and fill in more gaps in our family tree in the near future.

Thanks to all the volunteers in Hellertown for making it a great visit.



**Volunteer
Spotlight**
Curt Doll

Hellertown native and current resident, Curt Doll, has been an active member of the HHS for three years. A former North Penn School District teacher, Curt joined the HHS Education Committee in 2023 and trained to become a tour guide and field trip docent, specializing in interpreting the water wheel technology that powered the Heller-Wagner Grist Mill. Curt hopes more area schools take advantage of the HHS's colonial field trips.

Membership in the HHS

Your annual membership contribution to the Hellertown Historical Society allows the Society to perform a variety of administrative responsibilities and maintain the Heller-Wagner Grist Mill, Miller's House, Wash House, Pole Barn, Walnut Street "Pony Bridge," and the physical grounds in and around the Grist Mill Complex, which is now included in the country's National Register of Historic Places.

Without your generous support, the HHS would not be able to improve the exhibits in the Grist Mill Museum or Pole Barn. Our archival collections would not be kept up-to-date, and our lovely herb garden behind the Grist Mill would be in disrepair.

Memberships are the lifeblood of the HHS, as they are with most historical societies and other non-profit organizations. If you have received this newsletter but have not yet renewed your HHS membership, please do so now by visiting the following URL:

<https://www.hellertownhistoricalsociety.org/membership/>

Various membership options are listed. Simply follow the directions on the form.

Saturday Morning Tours

Do you know where the Hellers originally lived and why they crossed the Atlantic Ocean to settle in the Saucon Valley?

Do you know what was produced in the Heller-Wagner Grist Mill? Do you know who the Wagner was who's associated with the mill?

Do you know how many Founding Fathers traveled from Philadelphia to Bethlehem prior to and during the Revolutionary War, on what is now Hellertown's Main Street?

You can get the answers to those questions and many, many more by taking a Saturday morning tour of the Heller-Wagner Grist Mill Complex, with trained guides of the Hellertown Historical Society.

Tours are offered the second and fourth Saturdays of each month from June through October, beginning at the Miller's House at 10 a.m. Adults are charged \$5 for the 75-minute tour; children 5-17 years of age, \$3; and families, \$12. Rain or shine!

Book your tour online at:
<https://hellertownhistoricalsociety.org/product/public-tours/>

Or, just arrive at the Miller's House at 9:45.

The HHS Needs Volunteers

If you are retired, or a high school student or Scout in need of filling community service or merit badge requirements, or just someone with a little time on your hands and a need to give back to community, please consider volunteering at the Hellertown Historical Society. We need you. What can you do?

Our Education & Research Committee needs more Saturday morning tour guides, docents for spring and fall student field trips, researchers to find factual information about Hellertown's sometimes vague history, and seamstresses who are willing to sew colonial-period attire. We'll train you!

Our Buildings and Grounds Committee needs handy people who can maintain our colonial-period buildings and "Pony Bridge," and cut grass and prune trees. Our fully equipped workshop is at your disposal.

There is archival work in the Miller's House, grants to write, public events to be coordinated and marketed, and a busy Tavern Room to be prepped and cleaned before and after private events. Heritage Day is growing and needs more organizers. If you are interested in helping, send your questions to:

info@hhs-tours.org or call 610-838-1770