

The Chronicle

A Publication of The Historical Society
of Trappe, Collegetown, Perkiomen Valley, Inc.

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The Henry Muhlenberg House
201 W. Main Street, Trappe
(across from St. Luke's UCC)



The Dewees Museum
301 W. Main Street, Trappe
(corner Main Street/Rt 113)

Ross Library Project

Volunteers **Amanda Schaefer** and **Manni McNeil** continue their efforts to reorganize and catalog the **Ross Library**. In a few short months, they have set up new Museum Archiving software, moved furniture, and started to sort through shelves and drawers. So far, a few exciting items have been found including what is believed to be a copy of a ticket from the Perkiomen Bridge Lottery, several family Bibles and other exciting artifacts including photos, maps, and much more. Amanda and Manni would greatly appreciate any help with identifying the source of items or helping to move and sort items! ❖

Attention Down-Sizers!!!

The **Museum Committee** and the **Historian** are looking at ways we can more fully interpret the **Dewees Tavern**, so that we can get a feel for what it was like to be in an actual tavern and bar-room as well as welcoming dining rooms and sleeping facilities for the young men who were studying across the road at Prizer's Trappe Boarding School. We're thinking about ways we can exhibit our house as a polling place and the site of rowdy presidential campaigns.

As you assess your furniture in preparation for making the move to a smaller home, would you check to see if you have any 19th century tables, chairs, and other pieces of furniture that you would like to donate to the Historical Society, whether as an outright gift or as a loan? Of course we encourage the donation of furniture, dishes, pottery, farm implements, or any other things that might be found at Dewees, even if you're not downsizing right now. If you think you have something for us, please contact Bob Meschke, Bridgie Daller, or Jay Meier. ❖

Our Valuable Volunteers

Our hero this month is **Dan Mitchell of Mitchell Heating and Air Conditioning** in Trappe. He rescued us from the summer heat when he repaired our air conditioning at Dewees Museum recently. This is not the first time he has come to our aid. Dan arrived quickly, replaced a broken part, and when finished said, "No charge." Dan is a long term Society member and we thank him for his generosity. ❖

Dear Friends of the Society . . .

If you are ever having a boring day on a Thursday morning, stop by the Dewees museum and we can cure you of that.

Our office is open from 9-12 and in that period of time artifacts are reviewed, dusted off, recorded, and relocated with documentation completed. This will assist future volunteers to locate items for display and research.

You might wonder what I am talking about. Examples this past week included historic deeds, school books dating back to the 1800s, a copy of a lottery ticket that was sold to pay for the construction of the Collegetown stone bridge, a bound newspaper from the 1700s that we could still read . . . what fun!

How can this be that we are finding such gems now? Have they not been there for the past 50 years? (We are that old, you know.) Well, fifty years ago every donation was recorded by hand and the volumes of paper trail now need to be converted to new technology . . . thus a great volunteer project—if you love history.

If you feel that you do not know enough about such things, you would have the support of our Historian, Jay Meier, and Museum Chair, Bob Meschke, to sort out questions and find solutions. We also have a trio of Manni McNeil, Amanda Schaeffer, and Anne Grasberger who are ever present to answer questions and direct the goals for the day.

If dusty shelves do not appeal to you, boredom can be relieved in our garden at Muhlenberg house where volunteer David Detwiler has planted a wonderful vegetable and herb garden. Those who come to weed and water may take home what is ready for harvest. If vegetables

. . . continued on page 3

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If we don't have innkeeper's records, photos, local newspapers, or first-person accounts of the taverns and stage coaches running through the town, how can we know what the Dewees Tavern looked like in the mid-19th century or what the Fountain Inn or the Lamb Tavern or even Jacob Schrack's very, very early Trappe Tavern looked like? What was it like to have wagons and stage coaches driving up and down the roads and making stops to refresh man and horse?

Well, Henry A. Hunsicker, a citizen of the Freeland-Trappe area, born in 1825, was an eyewitness and wrote up some of his memories for the *Collegeville Independent* in 1906. We also have some pretty good descriptions in the form of advertisements in the old newspapers of the county seat, Norristown. Perhaps then our imaginations can fill in the gaps.

For instance, in late 1804, William Coleman, an early and important stage coach proprietor, advertised for a good stage driver who would have to drive only 16 miles every other day. In 1814 Lewis Schrack and Joseph Denson ran the Norristown Stage daily except Sundays. It left Joseph Denson's in Norristown at 6 o'clock A.M. and arrived at M. Roberts in Philadelphia, sign of the Fountain Inn, North 5th near Arch street, at 10 o'clock. It turned around and left Philadelphia at half past two and arrived in Norristown in the evening. The fare was one dollar.

In 1815 Nicholas Coleman took over the Norristown Hotel, catering to travelers using the Philadelphia, Reading, and Harrisburg line of stages. In 1816 Schrack and Denson's Norristown Stage ran daily (except Sundays) between Norristown and the Green Tree Tavern on North Fourth Street in Philadelphia. In 1821 Schrack began daily runs from Norristown to John Dunlop's sign of the Green Tree, with stops along the way at Barren-hill and A. Levering's. The stages also carried baggage, packets, and bundles. That same year he ran a stage to Yellow Springs on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, with return trips on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sunday. The fare was \$1.25. Way passengers were charged 8 cents a mile. Each passenger was allowed 14 lbs. of baggage, carried at their own risk.

The Swiftsure New Line from Philadelphia to Norristown commenced operations in 1826, running from Robert Evans' Inn in Philadelphia to Isaac Pritner's hotel in Norristown. A newspaper advertisement stated that "Good stages, careful obliging drivers, and superior horses are procured and nothing shall be wanting on the part of the proprietor to render the passengers comfortable."

Lewis Schrack's Norristown Mail Stage ran between Mordecai Willets' sign of the White Horse in Norristown to Robert Evans' sign of the Wagon at 138 Race Street, between Fourth and Fifth, on a daily basis in early 1827. Later that year Henry Styer bought out Schrack's establishment and continued the Springs line (from Philadelphia to Yellow Springs), charging two dollars for the trip.

By the end of that year Levi Roberts had joined Styer in the co-partnership of the Norristown, Manayunk and Philadelphia Stage. They also had a co-partnership in a Livery Establishment, which was "well-stocked with good Horses, Gigs, Dearborns, &c., which were to be let at all times on the most reasonable terms, and at the shortest notice." Styer's Livery was attached to his public house, at the corner of Egypt and DeKalb in Norristown. The Norristown-Philadelphia run usually took about three and a half hours. In an effort to be competitive, they reduced the fare to 75 cents and at another time to 37½ cents.

John Horter took over Robert Evans' tavern (sign of the Waggon) in 1829. "His bar is furnished with the choicest liquors, and his table spread with all the delicacies of the market," said a newspaper ad.

Although the Swiftsure Line guaranteed "Good stages, careful obliging drivers, and superior horses," the public was not always happy about the traffic through their town. This notice appeared in a local paper on March 23, 1831: "A correspondent in the last *Register and Sentinel*, notices the 'disgraceful and reprehensible conduct of the drivers of the two lines of stages (Coleman's and Miltimore's) in running their horses through the town, endangering the safety of individuals and carriages in the street at the time.' We are authorized to say, that the proprietors of both these lines immediately discharged the drivers, and that they are determined to prevent a like occurrence, if possible."

We can't be sure what the interior of the Dewees Tavern looked like in the mid 19th century, but an advertisement for the sale of the Rising Sun Tavern in the center of Norristown in 1836 gives us a general idea of how a typical tavern might have been laid out. The Rising Sun had two parlors, bar rooms, bar, dining room and kitchen, all on the first floor, seven chambers on the second floor, and a garret divided into chambers and finished. Compare this to the description of the Dewees Tavern Dr. Jacob Dewees preserved for his mother: "a large and commodious stone tavern house, with five rooms and a kitchen on the first floor and seven rooms on the second, a good cellar and a well finished garret, sign of the 'Brig Holker.'"

Although the foregoing examples of tavern and stage coach activity are concerned with runs between Norristown and Philadelphia, we know that stage coaches traveled through Trappe to points west as far as Pottstown, Reading, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and all points in between.

John N. Boucher, in 1906, wrote beautifully of this travel in his "History of Taverns, Turnpikes, Wagons, Stagecoaches in Westmoreland County, Pa." I quote liberally from one such passage because it describes what might be a typical Philadelphia to Pittsburgh run . . .

"... the most romantic feature of the pike to our generation, as we look back through the dim years to the forties, is the stage coach. No one, it is said, who ever saw a genuine old stage coach in use, can forget it. The outside of the coach was tastefully painted and beautified with bright colors, while the inside was lined with soft silk plush. There were three seats within splendidly cushioned, and three people could ride on each seat. There was also another seat by the side of the driver, which was very desirable in fine weather. Then on the top, others could ride in a way, if the management allowed it, and these in turn took the inside seats as they were vacated in the journey. Thus sometimes a stage bore as many as fifteen people, while its capacity was nine or ten and the driver. It was without springs, as springs are now, but the bed or top part was swung on large leather girders called thorough braces, which were stretched between high bolsters or jacks on the front and rear axles. By this arrangement stiff springs were obviated, and, whether heavily laden or nearly empty, the passengers rode with equal ease, a feature of comfort which could not be obtained with our modern springs of steel. This gave it, moreover, a gentle swinging back and forth, or rocking motion, which was not by any means unpleasant to the passenger. At

the extreme rear of the stage was the boot, a three cornered leather covered affair, in which baggage was carried. The driver sat high up in front, swinging his long whip and handling the lines of the four spirited horses with a grace and skill which has never been equaled since his day.

“The horses were invariably showy animals, selected because of their lightness of foot, and yet they were strongly built. Most of them were of the ‘North Star,’ the ‘Murat,’ ‘Hickory,’ or ‘Winflower’ breed, strains which are now extinct, but which for beauty of carriage, speed and endurance combined, have not been surpassed by the best of our modern thoroughbreds. They were driven very rapidly, generally making ten miles in an hour if conditions were at all favorable. The object of the stage line was to speed the passenger, and every possible arrangement was made to facilitate his journey. To this end a system of relays was established all along the pikes where stage coach lines were operated. By this means fresh spans of horses were hitched to the stage coach about every ten or twelve miles. With his long whip the driver could touch his horses gently, or at his will lash them into their highest speed. Under ordinary circumstances they made from six to eight miles an hour, and by relays kept that speed up all day. The mail stage stopped at the post offices, at the relay stations, at taverns at meal times to accommodate passengers, and not otherwise. They often came into Greensburg, Youngstown or Ligonier at a dead run, and drew up at the principal tavern for fresh horses. There awaiting its arrival was the relay of horses, each span held by a groom. The driver threw down the lines, the grooms unhitched the panting horses and ‘almost in the twinkling of an eye,’ says an old stager, the new spans took their places, the lines were handed to the driver, who, without leaving his seat, cracked his whip and away rolled the coach for the next station. If it was at meal times the stay was longer, but even then did not exceed twenty or twenty five minutes. The mail coaches had to stop at the post offices long enough to leave the incoming and secure the outgoing mail. This was called ‘changing the mail.’ . . . The regular time between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia was fifty six hours . . . The coaches did not stop at night. Passengers were required to travel in them night and day in a continuous passage, till they reached their destination . . . The driver . . . carried a horn . . . which he wined at the brow of the last hill before entering a village or town, to give notice of his approaching stage. New passengers, the relay horses and the postmaster or the landlord were all therefore ready and waiting for its arrival.”

Perhaps you can capture a bit of that excitement and anticipation the next time you visit the Dewees Tavern. ❖

Mark Your Calendars . . .

- | | | |
|---------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sept 13 | Trappe Community Day Booth | Waterworks Park
10:00am - 4:00pm (rain date 9/20) |
| Oct 25 | Participants in Old Augustus Tombstone Tales | Augustus Lutheran Church 2:00 - 5:00pm
(Rain Date 10/26) |

Enjoy a guided tour at our two sites on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month.

. . . and watch for updates on our website!

Muhlenberg Picks Up His Books in Philadelphia

From The Journals of
Henry Melchior Muhlenberg

1743

January 18, Tuesday. A strong, cold, and stormy wind and front set in. We were obliged to run to keep warm and get through, arriving safely in the city of Philadelphia in the evening. I learned that two ships had arrived from London during the preceding week. I did not know whether my two book chests were on the ships or where they might be, but finally I learned that two boxes were lying on the dock. On going there to see, with Mr. Koch, I found that they were my boxes. The captain had not known where to send the boxes, there being no accompanying letter or note. I had to pay the captain £2 13s current money for the freight charges. Now I do not know whether anything was paid for it in London also. It was a great joy to me to receive my things which I had long given up for lost, but a brief letter would have been almost more welcome. The books are all in good, unharmed condition, and to me they are real treasures. The little apothecary’s kit is also in good condition. I kept thinking, if I only knew whether the Fathers were still alive! The remaining days of the week I was busy with all manner of official duties. I consulted with Mr. Koch concerning a Lutheran church.

The English have their fine church, the Swedes, too, the Quakers have their *meetings*, the *Moravians* have a church house, the Catholics have their church buildings and are growing apace. Almost all the sects have their church buildings and *meetings*; the Germans alone have nothing in such a large city.

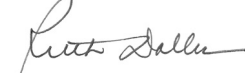
Submitted by The Rev. Thomas Kochenderfer

Dear Friends of the Society (*continued*) . . .

do not appeal to you, come work with Sue Krimmel who currently is working to beautify the grounds at Dewees with small shrubs and flowers.

I am there on Thursdays also and would be glad to talk with you about these volunteer offerings or any additional ideas you might have. You will find me filing papers or dusting—that never ends.

Happy volunteering,



Ruth Daller, President

P.S. Check our Facebook page to see some of the recent discoveries that Manni and Amanda have posted:
<http://facebook.com/trappehistoricalsociety>.

The Historical Society

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P.O. Box 26708 Collegeville PA 19426-0708

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About Our Newest Board Members . . .

New board member **Paige Meacham** was born and raised in Chester County where she developed a love and interest for history. We are fortunate that she has relocated to our community as Vice President Retail Manager for First Niagara Bank at the Collegeville and Skippack offices. With twenty-five years of banking experience, her role at First Niagara is to oversee the banking offices and help to expand relationships with families and businesses in the area. When looking for a treasurer to serve on the board and talking with her about this, she volunteered and we are so happy to have her as a board member for our Historical Society.

Another new board member, **Eric Hundertmark**, is not new to the society or community. Eric served on the board in the early days and in fact was secretary for the board when Dr. Ivan Hess was president. Not only has Eric been a past board member but was a very “hands on” person as a part of the Muhlenberg House restoration. Eric and his wife Mary had shovels in the dirt on the day the five-plate stove was uncovered. His memory of those early days was evident at a recent work party in the shed at Muhlenberg House when he was heard to say, “I remember when we discovered that . . .” and “I recall where that artifact came from . . .” It is great that we can tap into his past experiences and we thank him for again serving the Historical Society as a board member. ❖

Membership Information

- | | | |
|--------------------------|------------|---------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Student | \$10.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Individual | \$25.00 |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> | Patron | \$250.00 - \$499.00 |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> | Benefactor | \$1000.00 and up |

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Checks Payable to: The Historical Society

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The Historical Society
P.O. Box 26708
Collegeville, PA 19426-0708

Invite your friends and neighbors to join!



The Gift Shop

at the

Henry Muhlenberg House

We are not staffed on a daily basis, but we will make arrangements to be available

for you—with no obligation to purchase! Call Linda at 610.489.8805.

201 West Main Street in Trappe

*Open during tours!
Great gift ideas!*

Visit our website:

www.trappehistoricalsociety.org

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