

The Chronicle

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The Poor Man's Penny

. . . by the Rev. Judith A. Meier, Historian

An article published in *The Reformed Church Almanac and Yearbook* of 1897 (pp. 31-32) related an incident that occurred right here in the Trappe-Collegetown-Perkiomen Valley region . . . and beyond.

On October 3, 1893, the Secretary of the Board for Foreign Mission of the Reformed Church in the United States, the Rev. Dr. Samuel N. Callender, received an envelope marked "FOR THE LORD—Given by an inmate of the Montgomery County, Pa., Almshouse." The envelope contained one penny. Dr. Callender didn't know who had given the penny or who had passed it on to him, but he likened the "humble offering" to "a veritable gospel mite." Recognizing that a precious seed had been planted, he announced to the church at large that he would like to see that one penny grow into at least \$60 for a year's tuition of one candidate for the ministry at the school in Sendai, Japan. Within weeks that goal was far exceeded and amounted to enough to support a student for a full three-year course in the Theological Department. Dr. Callender periodically reported on the progress of the fund, and eventually the person who had sent the penny on to the Secretary came forward.

The young man, A. Judson Walter, reported that some local college boys had been visiting the Almshouse for religious services. After one of those services, a "poor colored man sadly afflicted with an incurable ailment" gave him the penny, saying to the college boy, "Here is something for the Lord. It isn't much but I felt that I ought to give something. I had a good bit better give it to the Lord than spend it for other things." For a while Walter didn't know what to do with the penny but then decided to send it on to the Board of Foreign Missions. Walter visited the Almshouse again at the end of December 1894 and learned that the man was Isaac Bruce, 34 years old. When Walter told Bruce what had become of that penny, Bruce replied, "Did the cent do all that?" Walter replied, "No, the cent didn't do it all, but with the blessing of God, it started a train of circumstances that have brought about this great result," prompting Bruce to give Walter a nickel to be added to the growing fund. By September 1895 the Almshouse One Cent Fund had become an endowed perpetual scholarship in Tohoku Gakuin in Sendai.

It's a delightful and inspiring story, but a little local research brings it home to the members and friends of this Historical Society.

. . . continued on page 4

From your President . . .

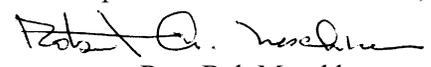
There's only one reason to belong to the Society: that's because you believe it is important to preserve the rich history of the communities we serve. We've been doing that for over four decades with faithful dedication to enriching the lives of old residents and new by providing opportunities to experience their roots in visible and tangible ways. The rest of the *benefits* of membership are the perks of *free* access to our extensive resources for research, *admission* to the Muhlenberg House and Dewees Tavern, *participation* in our community education programs like Heritage Day, *discounts* for our annual **Flag Day** and **Veterans Day** programs and, of course, receiving *The Chronicle*.

We are an association of volunteers who combine our talents and our resources to safeguard and maintain our historic legacy that dates back to the establishment of our communities and even before. The extent that we are able to continue this mission is solely dependent on the financial support and participation of our membership. While we do receive small financial grants from foundations, local government, and state agencies, the support that makes it all possible comes through your *annual* membership contributions.

This is the time of year we ask you to consider doing that again and maybe even to go a step further. If you believe that the *Society* is important to the life of our community, why not invite a friend or neighbor to join in that support? If you are a *Life Member*, consider making an additional donation this year to help us meet our increasing operating costs. Finally, consider the ways you can stretch the benefit of your contribution by *volunteering* some of your time and talent.

We are excited about our forthcoming summer exhibits highlighting music in all its forms and memorabilia of past election campaigns. Members and friends are scouring nook and cranny to provide us with the things that will comprise our exhibits. To be able to provide these unique opportunities to visitors this summer we need more help than we presently have. Dona McDermott will be conducting a special training for docents on May 17th. Why not let her know you can offer a Sunday or two? You'll get to meet the nicest *people*—with stories to tell that you'll long remember, plus provide an invaluable service to your *Society*.

Your partner in preservation and education,



Rev. Bob Meschke

**FROM THE NORRISTOWN REGISTER
AND MONTGOMERY DEMOCRAT**

October 28, 1840

On Saturday morning last, the people of Norristown were "gratified" with the show of a "Log Cabin and Harrison Ball," which were paraded through the town; and such a show, for the honor of our country, we hope never to see again. Such contempt for the intelligence of the people is only befitting the leaders of the federal party, who thus insult the honest poor by displaying a caricature of their humble dwelling, and, as in this case, with a colored man sitting in it playing upon the fiddle! Verily, they "Stoop to conquer." Jonathan Roberts, their leader, rode side by side with a colored man, in the same vehicle; and how many other colored persons were of the Harrison log cabin procession, we cannot say. The whole number in procession, of all ages, colors, and sexes, when passing through this place, may probably have reached a hundred. In the evening they returned and hauled their log cabin again through the streets, surrounded by a crowd, yelping and shouting. Upon the whole, it was a scene such as never before appeared in Norristown and we trust never may again.

August 5, 1840:

A Candidate for the Office of Sheriff. I take the liberty to offer myself to the people of Montgomery County as a candidate for the office of Sheriff, at the election in October next, and in doing so I take the responsibility entirely on myself. I do not come before the public through any solicitations or offers of pretended friend-ship. I come before them in justice to myself, and, if possible, to counteract the false (and successful) statements made by my pretended friends in October, 1837, to defeat my election. To prevent falsehood from having any effect against me (should it be resorted to again) for my principle and character in general, I would refer those unacquainted with me, to the inhabitants of the place where I am best known, viz: Norristown; at which place I was born, and lived at least thirty-five years. For all true friendship shown me heretofore, I tender my sincere acknowledgments. Should I be elected, I will endeavor to perform the duties with as much lenity as the nature of the office will admit. —James Wells.

October 7, 1840:

The reader will observe, in another column, that James Wells, Esq., has withdrawn his name as a candidate for Sheriff; an act highly commendable in Mr. Wells.

Well, we're into another election year, one perhaps as lively as the Harrison-Van Buren campaign. The Dewees Tavern was a polling place for many years in the first half of the 19th century. Perhaps the strains of "Tip and Tye" were heard along Main Street in Trappe. Perhaps that Log Cabin even rolled right on by, to the frantic waving of flags and the shouts of "Hurrah!"

The Museum Committee is assembling an exhibit of political campaign ephemera and realia (a word learned from the Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society) for the front room of the Tavern. We are soliciting the loan of anything from any campaign, from George Washington to George Bush and beyond: buttons, pennants, broadsides, songs, photos, fliers. Help us to create something Henry A. Hunsicker might recognize. Just call or e-mail the Society office and hop on the bandwagon!!! . . . The Rev. Judith A. Meier, Historian

HEAR YE! HEAR YE! TAKE NOTICE OF THE ELECTION!!!

Tip and Tye, words and music by "A member of the Fifth Ward Club" (1840):

What has caus'd this great com-mo-tion
mo-tion, mo-tion our coun-ty through,
It is the ball that's rol-ling on,
For Tip-pe-ca-noe, and Ty-ler too.

For Tip-pe-ca-noe, and Ty-ler too,
And with them we'll beat lit-tle Van, Van,
Van is a us'd up man,
And with them we'll beat lit-tle Van.

Henry A. Hunsicker's Reminiscences about Mother Dewees' Inn (Letter No. 17, Thursday, November 1, 1906, *Independent*): "I must be permitted to interject a notable event that occurred at the Dewees Inn in my boyhood. It was here in 1840, during the Old Tippecanoe Campaign of Gen. William Henry Harrison's, a Campaign of Log Cabins, Hard Cider and Raccoons, that I was present to hear political speeches and campaign songs. I remember that one of the songs commenced:

'Old Tip's the boy to swing the flail,
And make the Locos all turn pale.'

"It was here I heard the celebrated Buck Eye Blacksmith of Ohio speak. James A Pennypacker, an uncle of the present Governor Pennypacker, also spoke, as did some others. The meeting was held in a spacious yard in front of a large open shed that ran out from the barn towards the turnpike, in which hard cider was freely dispensed to thirsty patriots. Badges bearing miniature pictures of Log Cabins and Raccoons were prominent.

"At a Harrison mass meeting, held later in Morris' woods near Phoenixville, it was my good pleasure to see the great Daniel Webster and hear him speak. Here a large log cabin mounted on rollers, drawn by a team of eight oxen with chained raccoons crawling on the roof, was conspicuous and excited my boyish curiosity.

"The Harrison Campaign of 1840 was the most exciting I ever remember. The country had not recovered from the effects of the Panic of 1837, when the bane of 'shin plasters,' a paper currency of fractional denominations, consisting of 5, 10, 15 cents and upwards, issued in 1838 in consequence of the scarcity of money, was inflicted on the country. This was caused by Jackson's veto of the United States Bank. The people longed for a change of governmental policy and better times, and elected 'Old Tip,' a Wig [Whig], by an overwhelming majority. Martin van Buren was the Democratic candidate. He had been Vice-President during Jackson's last administration."

Flag Day 2008



In May of 1776, Betsy Ross reported that she sewed the first American Flag. A year later, on June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress passed the first of many subsequent Flag Acts to establish an official flag for our new nation: "Resolved, That the flag of the United States be made of thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation." The flag has changed many times but the patriotic allegiance it engenders continues.

On June 14th we will again gather at Moorehead Catering in Trappe for our annual Flag Day Celebration. The festivities begin with some light refreshment and conversation at 6:30pm, followed by dinner at 7:00pm. After our meal is completed, a special program of music featuring the New Horizons Band is planned for our enjoyment. This musical ensemble is comprised of older members of our community and is a program of the Community Music School in Trappe. There will also be items from our Gift Shop on display.

Plan now to attend and invite family and friends to join you. It should be a fun evening for everyone as we kick off our summer emphasis on music. A flyer is included for you to reserve your places at the table. Reservations can also be made by calling Richard Holcombe at 610-489-7266. ❖

A Tribute . . . to Dr. Ivan Hess and Mrs. Phyllis Parsons

It would be impossible to count the many ways that Dr. Hess and Mrs. Parsons have contributed to The Historical Society—certainly monetary donations but, even more important, time, hard work, treasures, and heartfelt dedication. Although they are no longer members of the Board, they will always be a part of The Society and their names will be ingrained forever in the history of its growth.

Our thanks to you both. We will continue to count on your knowledge, take advantage of your ideas, and work with you in teaching the heritage and the history of our area through our two historic sites. We look forward to sharing the satisfaction and success of continued growth of The Society.

Cyber World

It started out as what some thought would be just just another passing fad. But ever so gradually people started turning to the internet as a source of information, entertainment, and communication. Anything you ever wanted to know and then some you could get off the net. I recently "googled" myself and was surprised to learn the places my name popped up—not to mention how many people share my name across the world. A computer resides in our Dewees office, as much a significant artifact in our continually evolving history as a critical tool for communication.

Our Society maintains a very attractive and informative website thanks to our sponsors, TR Insurance Group and Holcombe Funeral Home, and the creativity of our webmaster, Richard McDowell. It's the "go to" place for people seeking information about the local history of Trappe and our neighboring communities or family members who resided here. More and more people are using e-mail to contact us. Our website calendar provides much up-to-date information on our life together. Plan to stop and visit soon, and let us know what you think. Also consider sending us your e-mail address for those times when we need to "get the word out" quickly. . . . Bob Meschke ❖

The Historical Society of Trappe, Collegeville, Perkiomen Valley, Inc., is a Pennsylvania non-profit corporation, a 501(c)(3), exempt organization under the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and is registered with the Pennsylvania Department of State, Bureau of Charitable Organizations. Official registration and financial information may be obtained by calling toll-free (within Pennsylvania) 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement. Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by

Renew your Membership . . . and invite and encourage friends and neighbors to join!

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student | \$10.00 |
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Take time to review the enclosed membership information!

Congratulations Neighbor!

Way back in 1808 when the Almshouse was established on the bank of the Schuylkill there probably wasn't much between them and the Tavern except farm land. The name of the place has changed several times over its lifetime but it has never strayed very far from its original intent—to assure that proper care was provided for all citizens of Montgomery County, re-gardless of their condition or ability to pay.

Today it is called "Parkhouse." However you remember it best, plan to be on hand for their Bi-Centennial celebration on June 3rd from 10:00am to 1:00pm. (See article on page 1) ❖

Mark Your Calendars . . .

Docent Training

May 17, 2008

1:30 to 4:30 P.M.

See enclosed information!

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SPRING 2008 NEWSLETTER

Timely Information — Please, Do Not Delay!

The Poor Man's Penny

continued from page 1

The original enrollment book of the inmates of the Montgomery County (Pennsylvania) Alms House (celebrating its 200th anniversary June 7, 2008) contains information about Isaac Bruce. Isaac Bruce, a 19-year-old black man, was admitted to the Almshouse on April 1, 1881, having been committed by J. Carmody. Bruce had been residing in Lower Merion Township, although his name did not appear in the 1880 census of that township. The admission information included that he was a laborer, was unable to read or write, had never married, was able-bodied, was abstinent and sane. He suffered from "fits." Fits, or epilepsy, was probably the "incurable ailment" Walter mentioned. The Almshouse book is in the archives of the Historical Society of Montgomery County. No other information could be found about Isaac Bruce in the Almshouse records.

Andrew Judson Walter was an Ursinus student. He came from Tradesville, Bucks County, in the vicinity of Neshaminy and Warrington. Battle's *History of Bucks County, PA*, published in 1887, reports that Tradesville was a village in Warrington Township consisting of four houses on opposite corners of the principal square at the crossing of Bristol Road and the State Road leading from Doylestown to Norristown. "Its prospects of growth are not encouraging. The only fraternity represented here is the loafers who seem to be created for no other purpose than to perpetuate the ancient and honorable order of idleness" (p. 515). Hannah Keller was married to Thomas Walter. Mahlon Keller was the hotel keeper at P. O. Neshaminy.

There were two farms that once belonged to the Walter family, one in the area of Neshaminy Creek, Line Lexington, and the other

in Colmar. The Walter farm in New Britain Township was less than a mile west of Chalfont station. The Neshaminy Creek ran through it; the railroad and a public road from Chalfont to Line Lexington passed in the rear, and another road was in front leading to Colmar. The Walter farm was once in the possession of the Rev. John Walter, Mennonite minister in Line Lexington.

According to Ursinus College records, Andrew Judson Walter was a Senior Academic Student in 1891-92, a Preparatory Senior the next year (1892-3), and a Freshman in the Collegiate Course the next year (1893-94). He did not graduate from Ursinus. Instead, according to the records of the Reformed Church in America, Walters received the A.B. degree from Rutgers College in 1897; a degree from New Brunswick Theological Seminary in 1900; an A.M. from Rutgers in 1900; and a B.D. from Rutgers University in 1926. Walters was licensed by the New Brunswick Classis in 1900 and ordained by the Hudson Classis in 1900. He served pastorates in Gallatin, NY (1900-02); Harlingen, NJ (1902-1910); Addisville, Richboro, PA (1912-1920); and North Hackensack, NJ (1920-1936).

Andrew Judson Walter was born in Warrington, PA, April 12, 1869, the son of John B. Walter. He married Flora Beard, a graduate of Ursinus College and the daughter of Abraham W. and Sarah Beard of Upper Providence Township.

The Beard and Walter families are buried in the cemetery of Trinity United Church of Christ in Collegetown. The Rev. Andrew J. Walter died in Marlboro, NJ, on January 12, 1951, at the age of 81. His widow, Mrs. Flora B. Walter, died December 16, 1954, at the age of 86 years. Their children as well as Rev. Walter's father, John B. Walter, are interred near them. ❖