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January 2022 Newsletter



Dear Quakertown Historical Society members,

We hope that 2022 has gotten off to a good start for all of you. As this is being written, the weather forecast is for daily high temperatures to be in the upper teens. It is that time of year!

With the onslaught of winter, things have somewhat slowed down at the Society. The Board continues to meet and make plans for later in the year. Of course, all of this has been complicated by the ongoing spread of the Omicron virus. Uncertainty abounds as the "experts" try to advise us on just how to deal with it. No doubt many of you have tested positive for this virus and it is our hope that your symptoms, if you had any, were minor in nature.

It is our desire to have a membership meeting sometime in the spring. Of course, all of that depends on the health concern that might still be present. We have had, since the fall of 2019, speakers lined up to make presentations concerning the history of Quakertown. We want to schedule them at a time when many of you feel comfortable in attending.

The first article that we are including in this newsletter was done by Helen Papashvily in 1949. We have included a brief summary of her and how she became an important part of greater Quakertown. Her husband, George, was born on August 23, 1898 and died on March 29, 1978 and Helen was born on December 24, 1906 and died on May 19, 1996.

Helen Waite Papashvily moved with her husband, sculptor George Papashvily, to Ertoba Farm near Quakertown in 1935. Ertoba means harmonious place in Georgian, George's native language. Papashvily and George lived at Ertoba Farm when they co-authored their famous book, *Anything Can Happen* (1945). The book contains an account of how and why they settled at Ertoba and how George initially struggles as a farmer.

Papashvily owned and operated the Moby Dick Bookstore in downtown Allentown. She supported the local library system, including donating page proofs of *Anything Can Happen* to the Allentown Public Library. She taught writing workshops for years at Quakertown High School Extended Education Division and the Allentown College Continuing Education Program. She believed that "you're never too old to write. Everybody has a story to tell." Lehigh University conferred an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree to Papashvily in 1985 for her service to young readers, aspiring writers, and her dedication to Lehigh's libraries. She was a member and teacher of the Bucks County Writers Group and lectured locally.



The Town I Like - Quakertown

By Helen Papashvily

“Now remember,” my Quaker neighbor said, “if thee writes of Quakertown, thee must take care not to overpraise. Thee knows our town is just like any other town except – “ she added thoughtfully “ - perhaps in most respects it’s better.”

Those of us who live here feel the same about the place. Its charms are so many ---tree-lined streets dappled with sun, quiet gardens, square houses of soft pink brick or gray fieldstone built to stand through the next century with the same strength and beauty they weathered the last.

Ten minutes’ walk in any direction leads to a countryside of soft meadows fringed with dark woodlands, rolling hills and wide fields studded with great stone barns decorated in bright intricate designs. You can start an argument any day of the week in Penna-German country by asking what these barn symbols mean.

“Hex signs to ward off witches,” say one group. “See the false arch painted over the doors? That’s for the devil to bump his head against if he tries to get in.”

“Nonsense,” claims the other faction and offers crude proof. “The designs are the lily, the tulip conventionalized, painted open.”

Whoever is right, the magnificent barns testify to rich land respected by generations of careful farmers.

Beyond all this the curving roads run to dozens of other little towns each with the same quiet and independent security, the same cameo-like perfection ... Boyertown, Spinnerstown, Sumneytown, Applesbachsville, Old Zionsville, and New Jerusalem, Hosensack and Skippack, Blue Church, Huff’s Church and Keller’s Church.

Quakertown is the oldest of them all, settled by Quakers who pushed north from Philadelphia and “in Penn’s Manor of Richland where the road to Newtown crossed the Bethlehem Pike,” established a town.

At one end of our long main street, as in most Pennsylvania towns, is a Soldier’s Monument. At the other the Meeting House built by these early Friends (as they call themselves) still stands in calm and classic beauty, its lawn marked with even rows of small uniform gravestones to remind us “in death all men are equal.”

Along the main street are shops and offices, too, offering all the newest merchandise and services but with very little fanfare. Goldsmith’s Jewelry, for example, needs no neon sign to proclaim it sells genuine diamonds. Quakertown has been married with Goldsmith rings for eighty-five years and probably will be for another eighty-five.

The factories, clothing, textile, hosiery, and many others, are tucked unobtrusively in among the dwellings. When one glimpses a group eating outdoors around a gay table it needs a second look to see whether a garden party is in progress, or the personnel of the Quakertown Clothing Company is lunching on the factory lawn.

Many Friends still live here, descendants of the first Irish, Welsh, and English settlers, but the majority of the population is Penna-German whose great grandfathers emigrated from the Palatinate in the eighteenth century, drawn by Penn’s promise of religious freedom and good farmland.

Some of these people still keep the “plain” ways and “plain” clothes of the early sects. In and out of the post-office and Sine’s Variety Store they go, the women with neat bonnets and somber dresses, the men in broad-brimmed hats and black coats fastened with hooks and eyes to a high collar. The only bright and glowing thing about them is the radiance shining from their faces.

Sometimes when I tell my friends all these things about Quakertown they say, “Yes, yes, that’s fine, but what do you *do* in a little place like that?”

I try to answer them with the story of the dashing hussar from a famous Viennese regiment who somehow at the turn of the century found himself exiled to relatives in Quakertown. He was gay and handsome, a patron of music, art, the ballet, the theater, a connoisseur of food and wine, at home in all the courts of Europe.

“What, oh what,” his aunt wailed as she awaited his arrival, “will we do with him?”

“Why that,” said her Quaker friend, “should be no problem, for thee knows in winter he may use the library for ten cents a month dues and all summer he’s welcome to the free band concerts in the park. He’s very fortunate he comes to Quakertown.”

The hussar must have agreed. He settled in town, established a successful business, and never missed a band concert until the day of his death. He probably joined our library, too, one of the oldest in the United States and surely the only one where first editions of Mr. Emerson and the Brontes still circulate from open shelves.

Since this is Pennsylvania Dutch country, there is food for the body as well as the spirit. Lucullean ham dinners and chicken suppers at the volunteer fire company – covered-dish meals for any and all occasions where the finest cooks in the world engage in epic competition and the winners are the lucky ones who eat the results – cole slaw, baked limas, pot pie, hot potato salad, Schnitz un Knepp, Boovashenkel, schmierkase, and “ – for dessert, we got only peach pie, shoofly pie, sticky buns, cocoanut cake and cherry pudding. The lemon pie and the almond cream is all.”

Christmas, we go putzing – visiting from house to house to see the putzes set up under the Christmas tree. Putzes are as varied as taste can devise – the Child in His manger, the shepherds, Wise Men, camels, flocks, an angel or two, and often the whole is encircled by a railroad track and fast-running model train. At each putz fragrant hot coffee and cookies wait, and what cookies! Springerle, Appees, Lebkuchen, Leckerlein, and Peffer Niss.

In summer strawberry festivals begin (all the ripe berries and homemade ice cream you can eat for a quarter) and almost every Saturday the year around there’s an auction sale. Somebody who wants to move to town and take it easy is selling out to somebody who wants to move to the country and take it easy. Henry Hottle calls the sales, half in English, half in Penna-German. He can sell a 12-room house, a 40-cow barn, and the contents of both in an afternoon and keep the crowd interested, good-humored and convinced every purchase is a bargain.

Saturday is shopping day, too. Eight thousand people (some drive two hundred miles) stream into the great market that covers fifteen acres to buy baby pigs, candied apples, puppies, religious mottos, house plants, sugar snow on a stick, fresh beef, hand-woven rugs, home-canned piccalilli, dogwood trees in bloom, tractors, Indian snake oil, old books, hot potato chips, and a thousand other things all displayed in happy confusion under one roof.

On Thursdays, the *Free Press*, one of the finest country newspapers in the U.S. (twice winner of the “A” certificate of the National Editorial Association) appears and we can read what we’ve done all week as well as check on our neighbors’ activities. “Mr. and Mrs. Harold Heimbach enjoyed fresh lettuce from their garden on Monday.” “Mrs. Blean thanks all who sent the lovely cards during her illness.”

But the very best thing about Quakertown is that all this – the place, the people, the life – doesn’t change. Oh, we have new businesses come in and fine new factories go up and there’s a new recreation park, a memorial to our war dead. We probably have more television sets than we have time to look at, but the town stays the same – friendly, independent, quiet, secure.

In the early Thirties some artists discovered the beautiful fieldstone farmhouses of Bucks County, bought, and remodeled them. Moss Hart, Pearl Buck, Oscar Hammerstein, Dorothy Parker, Eric Knight came and were followed by a host of lesser celebrities who in dirndls and espadrilles descended on the town. Sometimes such a deluge changes a small place – not Quakertown.

If the newcomers measured up to the community’s standards, they were accepted. If not, they weren’t. In any case, the general feeling was, “Summer people and flies leave about the same time.”

During the war, a soldier from Quakertown wrote home from overseas and his mother read the letter at Sewing Circle.

“This here where I am,” he began, “is Italy and the place ain’t hardly fit. Send me a cheap watch. The people keep a different time here and I don’t want to mess up my good watch with it. Seems to me it gets dark too early here. Write me what time it gets dark at home now, so I’ll know for sure.”

An out-of-town guest thought the letter extremely amusing. None of us did. Like the soldier we accept the fact that Quakertown is not only the center of the United States and of the world but the whole solar system as well.

This essay appeared in the September/October edition of the Lincoln-Mercury Times in 1949.

G. A. R. Disbanded After Thirty-Five Year Career
Veterans' Association Preceded Grand Army of The Republic – Foundry Fire Caused Big Loss in
Membership – Perkasia Post Was an Offspring
By C. Norman Detweiler – Quakertown Free Press 1931

At the close of the Civil War, the men of Quakertown and vicinity who had served in the Union forces organized what they called the Manoah Gery Veterans' Association. It was for Manoah Gery, Esq., himself a member of the Association, that the camp was named.

In 1879 Gery died, and it was at his funeral in the Union Cemetery that the Grand Army of the Republic of Quakertown had its inception.

History records the fact that at the Gery funeral his comrades wanted to accord him full military honors. The firing squad reported, but because of the great number of horses in and about the cemetery it was deemed unwise to fire a salute. The guns were not fired, and in a discussion that followed, the Boys in Blue among other things started to talk about the G. A. R. that was growing in membership all over the country.

Officially Organized

To be affiliated with a nationally recognized body was the desire of the boys, and on April 3, 1889, the General Peter Lyle Post, No. 145, G. A. R. was officially organized.

Charter members were Jere S. Fluck, Joseph C. Harmer, Allen M. Harmer, Joseph Gerbron, George S. Scypes, William C. Shaw, Jacob Kleinman, Augustus Russel, Evan Strawn, Charles Pluck, William Wood, Henry Seas, Edward Carrol, George H. Kline, Robert E. Patton, and Levi K. Moore.

By the middle of the year the membership had grown to forty, but the big foundry fire in the Fall of that year cut the membership to sixteen, the rest of the men having gone elsewhere in search of employment.

Divided With Perkasia

Interest in the Post lagged somewhat, for the membership dwindled to nine members, but these nine one day decided upon a plan that would bring the roster back to where it once had been. They went down to Perkasia and interested a number of veterans there, and within a year or two the membership was up to forty-three.

Things went fine until 1903, when the Perkasia boys withdrew, organized the Washington G. Dengler Post. This left the Quakertown organization with seventeen members.

Death began calling the roll, and one by one the "old soldiers" answered. Sometime in 1903 the illustration accompanying this article was made. The photograph was taken on the lawn adjoining the Leitch Drug Store, at Broad and Main Streets. Time has somewhat corroded the face of the cut; but it is because of its historical value that we print it.

The ranks of the Post, as time passed, became sadly depleted, and the few surviving members, because of their age, were no longer able to carry on the work. So, about 1913, the Post was disbanded, and the Sons of Veterans took over the work their fathers so reluctantly relinquished

