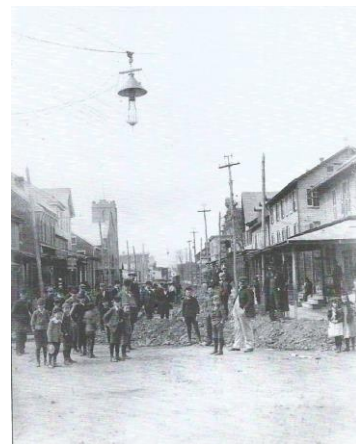




Historic QUAKERTOWN

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June 2021 Newsletter

Dear members,

Happy summer. Yes, it has finally arrived with many changes having taken place and more to come. The pandemic is finally coming to something of an end, and we can start to get back to normal. Slowly but surely the Historical Society is moving in the same direction. June 30 is the end of the Society's 2020/2021 fiscal year. It was tough for everyone. We can't express enough the appreciation we have for your continued interest and financial support. It has not only been needed but serves as an encouragement for us to continue the work of the Society. Quakertown has a rich history, and we are committed to not only preserve the history of the past, but to record the history that happens every day.

We are constantly looking for items that can become a part of our archives. Whatever you have doesn't need to be old. If it has some historical value, we would love to have it. We can also use any information that you might have. That could be anecdotal in nature, or it could be an essay on something, in particular, that you have experienced in the years you lived in the borough. We would be glad to help you with that.

Having said that, we need more help. Anything you can do to be of assistance will make a big difference. And what are the possibilities? You can help to record the archives/memorabilia that currently is housed in the three Society facilities. You can periodically do light cleaning in the facilities (the spiders are very active and relentless). You can join any of the current committees that the Society has. And, of course, you can support the work with a tax-deductible gift. Whether it be a phone message, an email, or an encounter of the street, we want to hear from you.

As we continue to record the archives, we are coming across essays that have been written in the past. Some have the identity of the author listed and some do not. As they are written by various individuals, there might be some differences in the "remembrance" of the some of the specifics of the essay when compared to others. We have included one such essay in this month's newsletter. The author is unknown, and the accuracy of each item discussed in the article might be subject to further information.

The second essay has been supplied by Dennis Shaffer, one of our newer members. In it, as you will see, is a story (he calls it lore) that was passed on to him as a child growing up in the area. If, in fact, it happened, one can only imagine what that was like.

His contribution is very much appreciated. If you have a similar story to tell about any remembrance in the borough, we want to hear it and share it. Thank you, Dennis!

We hope you enjoy this edition.

Early Quakertown History

Author Unknown

The Quakers formed the early population of this section of Bucks County dating from the year 1710 when Peter Lester, his wife and children, and their families arrived from Leicestershire, England. Immigration of Welsh settlers added to the number of Friends, and in 1723 a small meeting house was built about a mile south of the present location. While the Quakers were settling the township lands, German immigrants were settling the manor from 1720 to 1750. Since there is no evidence of a road leading into the Great Swamp, the migrations into the area probably followed the Perkiomen Valley.

The original old Bethlehem Pike was opened in 1745 and went north, starting from King of Prussia Inn on Race Street, Philadelphia, up Germantown Avenue and turned eastward at Line Lexington. It then went through Leidytown, Hilltown, Loux's Corner, northeast to Route 313, north on 313 about one-half mile, and then northeast on Old Bethlehem Road through Weisel, Applebachsville, Pleasant Valley and Hellertown, and then upward around the mountain by the Saucon Valley to the Sun Inn on Main Street, in Bethlehem.

The road became a good solid highway, the best there was in the eastern portion of the state. Over this road the first trip by "stage wagon" was made by George Klein on 10 September 1763. After that he ran regularly between Bethlehem and Philadelphia making the round trip weekly. He started on Mondays from the Sun Inn, Bethlehem, and he set out from the King of Prussia Inn, Philadelphia, on Thursday.

As time went by a shorter route was needed and it was decided to branch off at Line Lexington so that the highway passed through Sellersville, Rich Hill, and Quakertown, continuing north on California Road. Later it was decided to branch off at Quakertown from the old road and come more directly north through Coopersburg, Sun Valley and Seidersville. It was completed in 1795 and the old route was relinquished by the commercial stage line. The stage now made the trip three times a week.

Taverns were important to the development of a town or village because this is where the outside world met a small town. They were located at least ten miles apart so that the travelers could have overnight accommodations, meals, and spirits. The stagecoach dropped off newcomers, mail, and gossip. Taverns became the polling places as there were no town halls. Businesses were built alongside taverns to handle the necessities needed by travelers and the stages. There were wheelwright shops, blacksmith shops, and general stores. Horses had to be cared for, rested, watered, shod, or even changed. Travelers had an opportunity to refresh themselves, wash, and eat.

The following advertisement appeared in the Bucks County Traveller, January 1951: "Red Lion Hotel, Quakertown, Pa. The oldest hotel in Bucks County. On the old stagecoach road between Bethlehem and Philadelphia. For almost 200 years we have served the people of Quakertown and the North Penn." In 1756 John Foulke was the first one to operate an inn at Broad and Mains Streets in Quakertown, and it appears that this ad refers to this fact. A portion of an application for a tavern license, the original kept at the Bucks County Historical Society, reads:

“...sitting in Newtown at June Sessions 1812 – the petition of the subscriber respectfully represents that he is provided with necessaries for keeping the public house of entertainment for travelers and others at the house occupied by him for that purpose last year in Quakertown at the sign of the Red lion ...” This application is signed John Wilson. In 1823 Jacob Karn occupied the Red Lion. He applied for a license, but the application was rejected. He was not only an innkeeper but part owner of the stage between Philadelphia and Bethlehem. In his defense, the stagecoach driver said Quakertown was the breakfast place enroute to the City and the dinner place enroute to Bethlehem.

Until 1854 there were two villages: Quaker-Town, which began at Ninth Street and continued west, and Richland Centre which started at Fourth Street and continued east. In 1854 the two villages formed the Borough of Quakertown.

The first post office was established in the settlement which later became Quakertown in 1803 and it was at that time that the name Quakertown was adopted.

The opening of the North Penn Railroad at Richland Centre in 1857 made a great change in the fortunes of the town and marked the beginning of its prosperity. By 1860 a town of considerable size had sprung up around the station almost a mile from the old town. The settlement was named Richland Centre at that time and the name was not changed to Quakertown until 1874 when it was taken into the borough limits of Old Quaker-Town. The area was swamp land and the cellars of the first brick buildings to be erected west of the railroad were made shallow on that account. All the store buildings had four or five steps up to the doorways, but as the land was gradually drained, the basements were deepened, and the first floors were brought down to the street level.

The Borough Council, in its December 1875 meeting, ordered a crossing to be laid in front of the bank across Broad Street, if the bank would stand half of the cost. Council also ordered a plank crossing to be laid at the alley back of Sam Biehn’s barn between Biehn’s and John Walp. At the May 1884 meeting, the motion passed that Council erect a building that would combine a fire house, with a kitchen attached, with accommodations for the Borough Council. It was decided to locate near the center of town. Plans for the building were drawn and submitted by Milton Biehn.

Advertisements in January 1883 featured boots and shoes sold by M.A. Biehn. In May of 1887 butter went up to \$.25 per pound in the stores. The blizzard of 1888 hit Quakertown with drifts as high as twelve feet. Telephone service was discontinued – there were five customers. Trains were blocked by drifts. Everything came to a standstill. Milk could not be delivered to the creamery for several days.

In May 1883 William Loux and Harry Bean opened the first steam laundry in Quakertown. The Free Press, on June 2, 1893, reported that “last Sunday” the Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church was dedicated. In January 1895, Hinkle & Biehn advertised overshoes for sale - \$.10 to \$.25. Calfskin shoes were sold for \$2.25 at Hinkle & Biehn’s.

The modern age was encroaching into the local factories. Machinery was being introduced into the cigar factory for bunching. One machine could do the work of five men. By May 1900 cigar manufacturing came to a standstill and would never recover.

In the 1920’s and ‘30’s there were no class levels – no society – for everyone was on one level, a working community. Class distinctions began after World War II.

Quakertown was a cash community. Everyone seemed to be able to save e money, even girls earning \$3.00 a week at the telephone company. There did not seem to be a typical depression in this town. Representatives coming into the community from the outside were at a loss that there was no need for their assistance. There was no welfare here. Everybody helped each other.

When quarantine hit a home, the neighbors helped out. They got your food and what you needed. After all, there was a shanty for a watchman to see you did not leave your house. Of course, there was a great deal of intermarriage in the early days. Everyone seemed to be related by marriage to everyone else. At one time it was like a great big family. Almost everyone owned his own home. The residents were proud of their town.



Kettle Band Once Serenaded Liberty Hall's Honeymooners

By Dennis Schaffer



My parents (*Claude Schaffer 1905-1993, Edna née Wimmer 1906-1995*) and sister (*Frances Roberts née Schaffer 1926-2017*) Fancy Dutch formerly from Quakertown, often told a story of banging on kettles, pots, and pans in front of the Liberty Hall after the marriage on December 31, 1931 of my grandfather (*Uriah Wimmer 1869-1958*) to his second wife (*Susan Wimmer née Wimmer 1875-1948*). Story is that Pappy Uriah and Grammy Sue honeymooning at the Liberty Hall were staying in a second-floor bedroom, when family and friends arrived banging on kettles, pots, and pans. Recounted later by family revelers, the kettle band members mischievously serenaded the newlyweds into the night surely for their enjoyment. Uriah and Susan's descendants goodheartedly retell the family lore of the hazing serenade of our newlywed ancestors while staying in the legendary house that once sheltered the Liberty Bell.

After weddings traditions of boisterous hazing to send the bride and groom off on their new adventure has a long history both in Europe and America. Ringing bells, beating drums, tying cans to cars, firing guns into the air, honking car horns, decorating the couple's get-away vehicle, and following the newlyweds in a procession as they leave the church, a reception, and even to their honeymoon havens have ageless origins. Conjecture is that many of the mock serenade traditions, regionally known as charivari, skimmington, belling, horning, and shivareed, were brought here from Europe as superstitions for warding off evil spirits and ensuring good luck for the newlyweds. Apparently, the kettle band's cacophony serenade kept evil spirits away since Grammy Sue's goat milk custard was always tasty and luckily waiting for me at every visit. Also, lucky that the Liberty Bell was long gone before the kettle band arrived for a night of festive foolery ninety years ago.