



# Historic QUAKERTOWN

26 N. Main St. P.O. Box 846  
Quakertown PA 18951  
www.QuakertownHistoricalSociety.org  
QuakertownHistoricalSociety@gmail.com  
Phone: 267-227-3864



## December 2022 Newsletter

Season's greetings from the Quakertown Historical Society! Do you remember those toy soldiers in the picture?! In this edition, we are reprinting an article written by Jack Schick about the blizzard of 1888! Hopefully we don't have too much of this in our future. Also you will see excerpts by Henry Shaw about different churches in the area.

On April 15<sup>th</sup> we will be hosting our "1<sup>st</sup> Class Dinner on the Titanic" fundraiser. Tickets include a gourmet 7 course meal, photo, and much more! Tickets are \$150 and go on sale on our website February 1<sup>st</sup> on our website.

## Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

### Charles Leitch Weathers the Blizzard of '88

by Jack H. Schick

Charles T. Leitch was born in Hilltown on May 11, 1865, to Thomas and Catherine (Walp) Leitch, but moved to Quakertown in 1886 as a Registered Pharmacist. He established a drugstore at the corner of Main and Broad Streets in the borough where successfully conducted business until his retirement in 1919. Charles was a bachelor when he began his career and, in 1888, he was 'seeing' a woman in Bethlehem.

Charles tells us: "Sunday, March 17, 1888, was a sunshiny and balmy day." He left Quakertown for Bethlehem on the 3 P.M. train and attended church services with "a lady friend". When they came out of church it was just drizzling but, "by 10 o'clock there was a gale blowing" and it was snowing. Honorably, he left his lady friend's house at about 10:30 P.M. He was shivering and weather beaten by the time he got to the hotel "at Broad and Main Streets in Bethlehem" where he spent the night.

By the next morning, Monday, March 18, the gale still blew, it was bitterly cold and the snowfall had intensified. Drifts were rapidly accumulating. Charles "wended [his] way to the [train] station." He was "glad to reach the old covered bridge" where he huddled for a while, getting some protection from the icy wind and driven snow. When he finally arrived at the station he "was told there were no trains running today."

The station was "too cold for comfort" so Charles "took shelter" at the nearby Triangle Hotel and anxiously bided his time. When he saw railroad cars being "shifted" he made his way back to the station and was informed that "they were going to start a train shortly but could not promise how far it would go." Charles bravely boarded and, after a disconcerting ride, "reached our town safely."

The blizzard was even worse in Upper Bucks. As Charles left his train, he saw "Mr. Richard Johnson and two other men (who were Jurymen)," boarding the Doylestown train. Snowdrifts across the Richland farmland were already huge, and growing. After leaving the Quakertown Station the train bogged down and stalled before reaching the Penn Ridge tunnel. Mr. Johnson and the other passengers had to trudge home across

the frigid, snow-blown fields. Charles' trek from Front Street to his store at Main and Broad was far from an enjoyable hike. He finally got home at about noon and, presumably, stoked up the coal stove and sat out the rest of the memorable storm.

In addition to providing pharmacological services for decades and giving us a brief glimpse of winter travails 130 years ago, Charles Leitch contributed much more to the Quakertown Community. At Christmas time in 1918 when most people were celebrating the end of The Great War, Charles and his wife Mayme received notice that their soldier, and only son, C. [Charles] Russell Leitch, had succumbed to bronchial pneumonia on December 13th. He was the very last soul Quakertown contributed to the nightmare we call the First World War.

Charles's previous affiliations are obscure but, in 1924 he joined the Quakertown Methodist Church and became a "faithful member and regular attendant." Charles loved music and donated the church organ in memory of his wife, who died in 1934, and his veteran son. Still interested in the 'lady friends' at age 81, Charles T. Leitch "happily united in marriage" with Emma E. Boyce on June 4, 1946.

Perhaps remembering that horrible blizzard in 1888, Charles spent the last few years of his life with Emma at the Hotel Cordova in St. Petersburg, Florida. After a long illness, he died there on April 21, 1950. In memory of Charles, Emma donated an electronic Carillon Bells system to the Quakertown Methodist Church. The dedication was a big event. "The 'Bells' are not placed in the organ, but in a metal box in the room below and electric wires carry the sound to the speaker which is placed in the organ," or "to the outside producer, which is on the roof," we're told.

## **The Union Tabernacle** **A Book by Edwin F. Long, Tent Superintendent** **Excerpts by Henry F. Shaw**

The years 1858 & 1859 were especially memorable in the history of Quakertown and its church history. In 1857 the Y.M.C.A of Philadelphia sponsored a religious revival in the form of a tent tabernacle which could be moved from place to place. Eventually this Union Tabernacle was brought to Quakertown where the only house of worship (at the time) was the Friends Meeting House. There were small churches in the surrounding villages of Richlandtown, Trumbauersville, Spinnerstown, and Mennonite churches in Milford Township but in the village of Quakertown the Meeting House was the only place of worship. Following are excerpts from Rev. Long's book on the subject.

"At the beginning it was not known whether the ground upon which the Tent was to be erected could be obtained without expense but it is gratifying to say that in no instance was the ground refused when applied for and, in Quakertown, it was presented by a Quaker."

Since the Tent was brought to Quakertown by the North Penn Railroad company, built in 1855, for a charge of \$5.00, it was probably erected near the station which was surrounded by the farms of Joel Roberts and John Strawn, who had laid out the land into building lots. We do not know which one presented the land.

Reverend Long: "The following description of the Tent meetings given by a Quaker in a letter to a patron of the Tabernacle will convey an idea of the order of exercises and their saving efficacy in his experience as well as that of others.

The letter, dated October 16, 1858, reads as follows: 'I think I am safe in saying that the Tent has been a very great benefit to the people of this neighborhood and through it a great revival was brought about which is past description. When it was first pitched here on Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup> of last month, I, with my friends, out of curiosity, visited the meeting where about eight hundred persons were in attendance.

On the next morning, being Sabbath, I attended Friends Meeting with which I have a birthright membership. Afternoon came and I found myself drawn to the Tent again, to see the crowd of people gathered there and also to see and hear what might be said and done – for if there was to be any excitement or fun got up, I was one always ready and willing to join in. There were then, according to my estimate, from 3 to 4 thousand people present who appeared to be very much interested in the preaching. In the evening, about 1200 persons.

In the course of a few days I began to feel that there was something drawing me there which I could not resist. I began to feel that I was traveling on the broad road to ruin and I am thankful to the power that sent the Tent to Quakertown.

Sabbath came again and found the Superintendent of the Tent in Friends Meeting where he had been invited to attend, which was something quite unusual, and if he felt like it, to speak. He then poured forth the feeling of his spirit in regard to sin.

Afternoon found many Friends at the Tent with from 4 to 5 thousand people. Three things were necessary in order to draw the people of the surrounding neighborhood out. (a) something interesting (b) something united, (c) something that did not ask for money.

Next Sabbath the Superintendent again visited Friends Meeting and the house was full. Our minister remarked in his sermon that he was glad to see the revival the Tent had occasioned and would encourage those who felt anxious for their souls. A Friend.’

“At last the day came when we were to move the Tent to Greenville and the work was hardly begun in Quakertown. I had a list of 100 people who professed anxiety about the moving out. While sitting in the house of a friend pondering the matter, a Quaker who had been thinking over the matter too, came in. We took paper to devise some plan for a building to continue and as we were working another Quaker came in. We had a plan drafted when a Mennonite came in. He said he thought he might get some boards and erect a frame building.

That evening, to the joy of many, it was announced that a committee composed of members of 6 denominations would have charge of the erection of a building until we were finished at Greenville. Just 6 weeks after we opened the Tent, we were assembled to dedicate a permanent home of worship.

The Y.M.C.A had assumed the expense of this enterprise for only 6 months. At the end of this time, we were in Quakertown. When it was stated that the Association had not the funds to continue thru the winter and we would have to close up, friends of the Tent from the Friends came forward and proved to be Friends indeed.”

### **Some of the results of the revival**

A larger church was built in Trumbauersville in 1870

A larger church was built in Richland in 1860

A larger church was built in Spinnerstown in 1874

A larger church was built by East Swamp Mennonites in 1870

A Lutheran Church on 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Quakertown was built in 1860

A Methodist Church was built in 1874

Richland Monthly Meeting built a larger House in 1862

Of course, we realize the population was growing because of the railroad, but we believe the spiritual life of the town was the cause of the many new churches.