

Leesport Area Historical Society



INCLUDING THE COMMUNITIES OF THE SCHUYLKILL VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 3

July, August, September 2016

A Small Town Doctor

The following people were contributors to this article; Anna Smith, Pearl Ann (Smith) Gavaghan, Ruth and Randy Saylor, Tom Sebastian, and Whit Schoenfelt.

Dr. James Schoenfelt graduated from Altoona High School as the Valedictorian in 1931. In 1935 he graduated from Dartmouth College and went on to attend Jefferson Medical School with a degree in surgery. He served his residency at the Reading Hospital. In 1941 he joined the army as the Chief of Medical Service stationed at John Hopkins Hospital. In August 1943 he was assigned to the 191 st Hospital in England continuing service in France, Germany and Austria from 1944-1945. He returned to England and in 1946 he was discharged as a Lieutenant Colonel. While serving in the Army his eyesight developed a condition that prevented him from returning home as a surgeon. This is the reason that he became a "A Small Town Doctor."

His office and home were located at 318 Main Street in what was once known as West Leesport. His office occupied the lower level of the building and his family, wife Paulette (Polly), son Whitford, and daughter Dorcas lived on the second floor. Doc would travel around the area from Fleetwood, Blandon, Greenfields, Bernville and Shartlesville and areas between to visit patients during the daytime hours. He would then see patients in his office after returning home and having dinner with the family. His wife Polly served as the nurse in his office, after all she was a surgery nurse prior to marrying Doc. He had a very big interest in the Civil War, his grandfather had served in the Union Army during the Civil War.



Dr. James Schoenfelt 1913-1962

"Memories"

Doc enjoyed hunting and often times would bring home a pheasant or two for his wife to clean. As it was told Doc carried a 12-gauge shotgun in his Triumph or other sports car while roaming the countryside visiting the patients and loved to hunt. Doc also had a love for all types of cars, big or little, it didn't matter. The family had a summer home near Split Rock Lodge and Doc would stay home during the week to tend to his medical duties and spend the weekends with the family. He and a local car dealer (name to remain anonymous) were very good friends and they spent time enjoying a beer or two on occasions. On these occasions the car dealer became incapacitated, and Doc would always be able to get his cars for a good deal. Whit said often times when his dad would come up to the summer home on the weekends, he had a different car than he had a week before.

Anna remembered that her daughter Pearl Ann graduated in 1962 and Doc told her to become a nurse, which she did and is now retired. Pearl Ann related that Doc explained that she was a person that cares for others and that is why he told her to go into nursing. Pearl remembers an accident she had by walking across the top of her swing set with a wash prop to balance, like the circus people did. Of course, she fell, and Doc fixed her up, which he did for her and her brother many times.

cont. on pg. 3

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER

I have a confession! I am not doing all or even most of the work done by the Leesport Area Historical Society. Truth of the matter, our organization is made up of some really great people. They do the work, I just look good, if that is possible, I work closely with my wife and she makes me look good. Elaine and I were putting a sign at Turkey Hill and a nice policeman stopped to say that he appreciated all that we do. This made me think about others who say the same thing..." We appreciate all that you do". Truth of the matter is that the LAHS does a lot and most people don't even know it.

Our organization started in 2004. We have been blessed with some really talented members. From the start I look like I do the work. But...many people do as much or more. I could not possibly name them in this report. If you want to get the names look at the past newsletter that lists all the members of the Leesport Area Historical Society. Truth of the matter, they all make this thing work. You may not see them at Turkey Hill because they are behind the scenes doing work to make the Leesport Area great.

Truth of that matter... I am glad that people see what your organization does. I will try to let the people know the truth of the matter!

Thank you,
Rich

LEESPORT AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY HOLIDAY DINNER

When: Saturday, January 13, 2024

Time: 1-4pm (Meal at 1:30pm)

Where: Ontelaunee Grange

Full course Hot Meal

Desserts Provided by Members

Gifts – Stories - Fun

\$20 per person

Reserve by January 2, 2024

Call: Mildred Reber

610-926-4432

Ruth remembered him as a very sociable person and that he delivered her son Randy in 1946. Anna and Ruth were cub scout den mothers and met in the basement of the Doc's office building. Randy also related several stories about him having to see Doc on many occasions for a medical problem. One such incident was when Randy accidentally swallowed some brake fluid thinking it was a coke. Doc gave him some kind of brew to counteract the effects of the brake fluid. Randy has no idea what the brew was, but Randy is still alive and doing well at 77 years of age. One of my own experiences was when I broke my wrist while roller skating on a Sunday afternoon. My Dad called Doc to see if he would look at it and he said bring her over. My dad held me down while doc pressed the bone back in place, gave me a cast and home I went, no need to wait 6 hours in an emergency room. Doc was the emergency room for the town.

As mentioned before Doc loved cars, he owned various models over the years; a Lincoln Continental Mark 3, Packard, Gold Wing Mercedes, Jaquar, Triumph, Corvette, and a Chrysler Imperial which happen to belong to a Shah from Iran. The Lincoln was a very special car because only a few were made, and Doc was concerned about parking it on main street because of getting damaged.

Whit also told the story that Doc and Hosey Bewley would ride around the countryside in a Packard convertible looking for groundhogs or rabbits. Hosey would drive the car and Doc would sit in the back and shoot the groundhogs and the rabbits as they drove by.

Tommy recalled that Doc was like a second father to him. Tommy had an interest in medicine and thought about becoming a doctor. Doc would take Tommy with him on house calls and one time to the hospital. Tommy had to write a term paper for high school, and he choose to write about the American Medical Assoc., and doc helped him with it. Ironically it was the day before Doc died from a massive heart attack. Several months before, Doc had gone to the Mayo clinic and was told that there was nothing, they could do to correct his heart condition. Of course, his habit of smoking certainly didn't help his heart condition.

Doc posed for the photo of an American Indian with full head dress for the National Boys Scouts of America photo that was distributed in the 1950's. I'm sure many of us can remember that photo and who knew it was our "Small Town Doctor."

Linda Roshong

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

LAHS October - December Calendar of Events:

Sunday, October 1: 1-4 PM – Open House at the Museum

Monday, October 23: 7 PM – LAHS Business Meeting, Annual "Election of Officers" and "Budget Approval"

Saturday, November 4: 5-8 PM – 17 th Annual Harvest Moon Festival

Sunday, November 5: 5-8 – RAINDATE 17 th Annual Harvest Moon Festival

Sunday, November 5: 1-4 PM – Open House at the Museum

Monday, November 27: 7 PM – LAHS Program - Mike Jesberger presents - "Christmas During the Civil War"

Sunday, December 3: 1-4 PM - Open House at the Museum with special visit from Santa

LIVING ON THE FARM

This is the first article of three by Millie Reber

The first twenty-five years of my life involved farming of some type. I was born on a farm in Blandon, PA, lived on a pharmaceutical farm as a small child in Oley, and spent my teenage years and young adult live helping my parents on a farm they owned in Bern Township. Always having chores and expected responsibilities seemed very confusing to me when my friends had numerous freedoms. What's the old saying, "hard work never killed anyone". Well, I was sure it would be the death of me!

Time has a way of altering one's perception of things. Let me share a few things I have grown to realize about farm life.

Food, food and more food: The modern craze of "Farm to Table" has been practiced by Farm Families for centuries. The words "buffet" and "smorgasbord" had to have described a farm family's table. From our garden we had peas, which were so good you could eat them raw right out of the pods. Tomatoes so good and juicy I would eat them like apples. Strawberries that grew wild along our dirt path leading to our farm. Elsewhere on our property, there were bushes full of black raspberries. Do you realize how much you pay for a pint of black raspberries today? LOTS!

My father would pick sweet corn by the truck load and dump it on our lawn under a shade tree. We, my sisters and I would husk the corn and my mom would be blanching in mass, then cut the corn from the cob to be frozen for our winter meals.

Yes, I think of all this as I pay for produce today, wondering how long it has been since it was fresh. Time has altered my perception of farm life. IT WAS PRETTY GREAT!

To be continued,

NATIONAL NIGHT OUT

August 1, 2023, was a beautiful night that God had blessed the community with, for The National Night Out at Schuylkill Valley High School. The Leesport Historical Society participated for the first time and had a great time. Our location was set up on a corner where there was lots of traffic. We had cut out boards where visitors could take pictures with their family and friends.

This was a learning experience for the Leesport Historical Society, and I believe we managed to get the word out that we exist. I volunteered to take on this project, but I couldn't get it accomplished without the following volunteers: Mark, Amy, Rich, Jim, Ember, Shanan, Mildred, Chuck, Rosie, and Dex. So, a great big thank you to all that volunteered and all the people who stopped by to see our display.



Submitted by Sue Berg

JULY 2023 LAHS PROGRAM

LAHS programs never disappoint. On July 24, approximately forty members and guests came out to hear the program, “Transportation and how it Affected the Development of West Leesport and Leesport” presented by local historian, Ryan Strause. The interactive program included several artifacts to represent the modes of transportation which included by foot, canal, train, stage, ferry, turnpike etc. Mr. Strause explained how transportation affected not where people settled but also their way of life.



LEESPORT AREA COMMUNITY DAYS 2023

This year’s event was definitely different from past events. First, let me say that it was a successful event. We had more sponsors and participants than any prior event. However, the weather forecast had some participants concerned and they decided not to take part in the festivities.

The event was kicked off with the dedication of the new stage. Mayor Tom Fronina made a few remarks after which he introduced Rocky Santilli. Rocky had a few heart felt words after which the mayor announced that the stage will be known as “The Virginia M. Santilli Stage”. The first performance on the stage was given by the Leesport native Jeff Krick, Jr. with a tribute to Elvis Presley.

We had a brief shower on Friday which sent a few car cruise people home, but the event went on as scheduled.

Saturday was interesting, by 8 am we had to make a decision of yes or no, to hold the fireworks at 9 pm. The weather looked like a repeat of Friday with only a chance of rain so it was decided to go ahead with the schedule. Mother nature provided her own fireworks for us around 8pm, the rain was a downpour, but it let up shortly before 9 pm and the fireworks were set off proving that you can have fireworks despite the rain.

We are already starting to plan the event for 2024. The committee meets on the last Tuesday of every month at Bethany Church at 6:30 pm. Everyone is welcome to attend, the more voices that are heard and bodies that can help, the bigger and better this event becomes.



NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Nominating Committee for October elections are: Anna Smith, Sue Berg and Amy Koller.

Special thanks to past members of this committee, especially Kenny Miller, Mary Danenhower, Janet Weaver and Joyce Strause.

A very special thank you to Anna Smith – longtime member of this committee

Since we will not have another newsletter until January of 2024 the society would like to wish everyone a:



MYSTERIES AT THE MUSEUM



Last issue's photo



Last issue's answer



This issue's photo

Last issue's mystery was the original clock to our school building from the 1860's. The clock was purchased by the society at the Mervin Moyer estate auction. It was recently refurbished by an anonymous donor. Good luck with the new mystery.

HOW DID THE LEESPORT PLAYGROUND GET A NEW STAGE?

Good question. Here's the answer. First... we needed a new stage. A local organization was willing to fund a new stage. However, it was decided that Leesport did not need a stage. Ron Strause decided that we did need a new stage. So, he designed one, but it did not get off the ground at the time. Then a very interesting conversation happened, Dex Mengel and Rich Strause went to visit Rocky Santilli. During the talk Rocky said he has his name at lots of places and would like to honor his wife Ginny on something. Virginia Santilli had helped in many ways in Leesport, she was a great supporter of the playground and President of the Leesport Woman's Club. Dex said "Well, we need a new stage". This started the idea of a new stage, and after Rocky heard that, he said, "We might be able to make that happen". Tom Fronina, our new mayor, and Recreation Board member took on the project. The Recreation Board and Leesport Borough bought into the stage project. They agreed to name it:

IN MEMORY OF
VIRGINIA M. SANTILLI
DEDICATED SEPTEMBER 8, 2023

The Leesport stage still needs a roof. And with a little help we will see a roof soon!
AND THAT'S "HOW LEESPORT PLAYGROUND GOT A NEW STAGE".

OUT OF STATE MEMBER VISITS

Lifetime member Robert Kissinger and his wife Sandra, who live in Michigan, were in the area on August 9 and asked if we could open the museum for them to visit. We always state that we are open on the first Sunday of the month or by appointment. So when an out of town member asked us to open for them we try to accommodate. If you ever have guests that you would like to have visit the museum, please contact us and we will do our best to try to accommodate.



TREASURER'S REPORT

Harvest Moon Festival fund \$3171.12
Acquisition Fund 661.28
General Fund 4257.56

Capital Reserve Fund Trinity Repair \$32,770.88
General Fund 6,391.37
TOTAL \$39,162.37

TOTAL \$8089.96

Leesport Area Community Days shows a balance of \$ 18,629.72

Submitted by Elaine Strause, Treasurer

LEESPORT AREA HISTORICAL
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P.O. BOX 204
LEESPORT PA 19533

www.leesporthistory.org

LEESPORT AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

INCLUDING

THE COMMUNITIES OF

BERN, CENTRE & ONTELAUNEE

MEETINGS @ 7:30

ON THE FOURTH MONDAY

AT BETHANY E.C. CHURCH

308 MAIN ST, LEESPORT

PARKING IN REAR OF BUILDING