

Leesport Area Historical Society

INCLUDING THE COMMUNITIES OF THE SCHUYLKILL VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

VOLUME 20, ISSUE 1



January, February, March, 2024

History of the Leesport Area Historical Society

This is the first of a four-part series on how we can be and where we hope the society is headed in the future.

This is the 20th year that the LAHS has been in existence, but before we begin, we need to travel further back in time. In 1980 we acquired the building by asking the Globe Knitting Mill across the street if we could have so that the Jaycee's had a place to meet. The knitting mill was going to tear the old school down at the time, and thanks to Ryan Strause who made the initial request they agreed to sell to the Jaycee's for \$1.00. The Jaycee's folded in 2002, and Dick Clemens asked about the future of the building. A few community members thought that the old school would be a great place to have a historical society. In July 2003 officers were elected, Rich Strause, president, Roben Schappell, VP, Dex Mengel, secretary, & Elaine Strause treasurer. Harry Deitz and Bev Miller proceeded to write the by-laws and a constitution which were approved. In the spring of 2004, the Leesport Jaycee Foundation Inc. was chartered to do business as the Leesport Area Historical Society. Our new name was registered with the Pennsylvania Department of State Corporation Bureau so that we could become tax exempt. Many businesses contributed funds to help get things up and running along with approximately 120 people who signed up to be members. Unfortunately, or fortunately for us two organizations in the area folded and donated their remaining funds to the society, the Ladies Auxiliary of the Union Fire Co. and the Leesport Women's Club, and the Crime Watch of Leesport. The Schuylkill Valley Elementary School had a fundraiser, by collecting only coins for a whole week and donated it to us.

Now it was time to get started on renovating the building itself. Renovations included heat, air conditioning, plumbing, upgrading the electrical system, replacing the floor in one room, including the sub-flooring. Along with new shades for all the windows, and restoring the front entrance way, new windows and let's not forget the roof needed repair, and a coat of paint. Many other renovations are too numerous to mention. Santilli Oil, Erik Weyandt, & Mike Harle were the major businesses that got the school back from the disheveled condition it was in. We also had volunteers that would show up to help in any way they could, and we thank all of these people for taking their time to help with the renovations.

The first project of the society was to move the large clock that was in front of the former Leesport Bank to the current location at the intersection of Main and Leesport Avenue. Society assumed the responsibility of the annual Easter Flower sale that the Jaycee's had always sponsored and is still an annual event. The very first newsletter was published in the winter of 2004, and it was only one sheet of paper, we certainly have expanded the publication over 20 years.

In the next issue of the newsletter, we will explore how we acquired all the many items that we have on display at the museum for you to come and see.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Why Would I Stop Being President?

As you may have heard by now, I am not going to be President of the Leesport Area Historical Society after this year. That is true. After 20 years as your President, I will do something else.

First, I want to thank every one of you for the support of our organization. The officers are dedicated people who are keeping an organization running who care about the history of the area covered by the Schuylkill Valley School District. That would be Leesport, Centerport, Bern, Center, and Ontelaunee Townships.

So, why am I stepping down? I am not doing it because I am tired or don't care. I am stepping down because I care. It is time to have a new President to keep the organization going. I have seen many great people who were members of the LAHS leave our organization or leave this world. I am pretty sure I will not be around forever. But...I want the LAHS to be around after I am gone. It is time to move on. Anyone can do this. The Board of Directors and members are talented and caring people. Any one of them can be President.

I do want to make it clear that I will do my best this year as President of the LAHS. And I will work with our next president.

Agan, thanks for allowing me to be president.

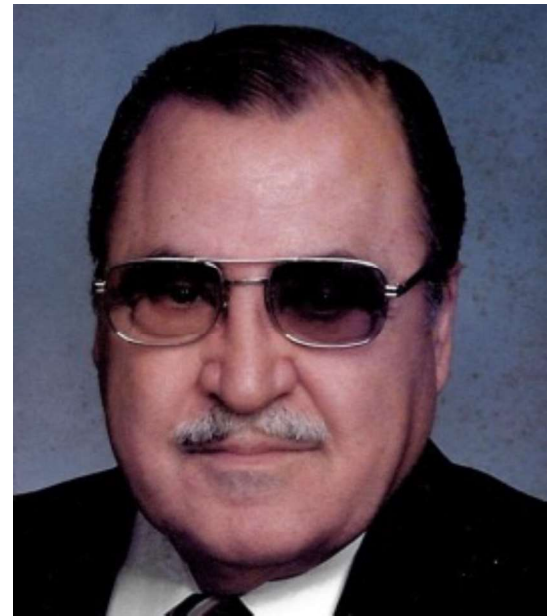
Thanks for everything! This is a GREAT organization.

Rich Strause

ROCCO (ROCKY) SANTILLI

As many of you are aware one of our beloved members of the society recently passed away, Rocco (Rocky) Santilli. Over the years Rocky has been very generous to society, along with many other non-profits. He donated a large collection of his softball memorabilia to the society which is on display in the museum.

Rocky was always interested in softball and played for the West Leesport playground team as a catcher. He became the coach of the Rising Sun Hotel Sunners Class AA fastpitch softball team in Reading. Under his leadership, the Sunners went on to win a World Softball Championship in New Zealand along with several national championships. Rocky also coached the U.S. men's fast pitch team in the Pan American Olympic games. He was inducted into the Berks County Sports Hall of Fame, Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame, American Softball Association (ASA) National Hall of Fame, and the International Softball Federation (ISF) Hall of Fame. In 2006 he was honored as King of Baseball town by the Reading Phillies.



Rocky was an integral part of our community and will be missed by many

MEMBERSHIP

If you receive your newsletter by e-mail you will be contacted in a week or two to renew your membership. If your newsletter is a hard copy, your renewal notice is included in this newsletter. All dues are due by January 31, 2024.

Linda Roshong, membership chair

LEESPORT RECREATION BOARD

Leesport Legacy Wall - Phase 2 of Virginia Santilli Memorial Stage Join us in building the Leesport legacy for our generation and future generations to come.

Support Phase 2 of the Stage Project at the Leesport Playground by purchasing a personally engraved brick for the Leesport Legacy Wall. By adding a roof to the Virginia Santilli Memorial Stage and creating a Legacy Wall, we can enhance the community use of the stage and create a lasting tribute.

Your engraved brick can feature your family name, your business name, or honor a special person in your life. This is a permanent way to recognize and celebrate mentors, parents, teachers, coaches, recent graduates, veterans, best friends, special birthdays, and milestone anniversaries.

Your personalized brick will stand the test of time, serving as a lasting reminder of your loved one and your invaluable support for the Leesport Community. Join us in building the Leesport legacy for our generation and future generations to come.

Bricks are two different sizes: 4 X 8 for \$75 or 8 X 8 for \$150

Donate to the Leesport Recreation by buying a brick today.

For more information and an order form please contact the Leesport Boro Hall at 610-926-2115 or at <http://www.bricksrus.com/donorsite/leesportstage>

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

LAHS January - March Calendar of Events:

Sunday, January 7: 1-4 PM - Open House at the Museum

Monday, January 22: 7 PM – LAHS Program - Brian Engelhardt “Shots in the Valley, Stop it Mr. Mayor” referring to Lake Ontelaunee

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

Monday, February 26: 7 PM – LAHS Business Meeting –“Show and Tell”

Sunday, March 3: 1-4 PM – Open House at the Museum

Monday, March 25: 7 PM – LAHS Program – Paul Miller –“Visiting the Hudson Valley, New York”

Flower Sale:

Saturday, March 23: Easter Flower Sale – 10 AM-6 PM

Sunday, March 24: Easter Flower Sale – 11 AM-4 PM

Friday, March 29: Easter Flower Sale – 8 AM-6 PM

Saturday, March 30: Easter Flower Sale – 8 AM -6 PM

LIVING ON THE FARM

This is the second article of three by Millie Reber

Who needs a gym membership when you live on a farm? No one I know or have ever known.

My life on a farm was an endless buzz of activities for myself and five siblings. No problem finding things to do, be it summer, winter, or any time in between.

Summertime was spent outside as often as possible. During the day we played baseball, kickball, jump rope, red light/green light, and hopscotch. Saving the heels from old rubber shoes made great hopscotch throws. We didn't need any fancy store bought throws.

At night we entertained ourselves collecting lighting bugs in jars. Ventilated of course, so we could release them later without harming them. But best of all we played hide and seek in the dark. Do you know how many places there are to hide on a farm? Plenty! Sometimes you were forced to give up looking because you couldn't find someone.

Hopefully, wintertime brought snow to make snow mazes for playing tag and if you were smart you didn't go into a dead end and get caught. We built snow forts and had snowball battles or just chilled out and made snow angels.

Our land was mostly flat land, however, we had a special hill area about a quarter of a mile from our house where we spent hours prepping a slick, slippery, and runny area to go sledding. We could sled for hours until we were sooo cold, wet, or half frozen, whichever came first, we then headed for home. We had a kitchen coal stove to warm us up and bring our parts back to life, thank goodness for that wonderful old kitchen coal stove. Hot cocoa, warm cookies, soup, dry socks, and dry clothes, we were toasty and tired.

Exercise...who needs a gym membership? Just some good old imagination and life on a farm.

SAVE THE DATE!!



June 8, 2024 - Bus tour of Ontelaunee Township

CHRISTMAS DURING THE CIVIL WAR

Mike Jesberger presented Christmas During the Civil War at the November meeting. Approximately 30 attendees heralded in the Christmas Season while they learned of traditions that were born out of the civil war time along with the history and evolution of the Christmas Holiday. During the dark time of the Civil War, Christmas provided solace for the day as both sides paused to reflect on what they left behind and long to have it again. We learned how the North and South both used Santa Claus as war propaganda against each other. President Lincoln commented that Thomas Nast, northern sympathizer, and artist, was the best weapon of the north. Nast used Santa in paintings along with Northern soldiers depicting a happy and jovial scene which did much for the morale of troops and citizens alike. On June 28, 1870, Christmas was formally declared a United States Federal Holiday.



17th ANNUAL HARVEST MOON FESTIVAL

In 2004 I attended the Joanna Christmas Event for the first time. I loved it and thought it would be great to start a festival right here in Leesport. With so many options for Christmas already, I thought a Fall Festival would be the thing, hence Harvest Moon Festival was born.

My recollection of the first festival was of about 50 of us gathered in the field behind the library enjoying hayrides (one wagon), a small campfire and food. Randy Strause would bring a generator and run electrical cords to power the equipment to cook the hotdogs and hot food that was offered. Wendall Yoder and his band, including Yodeling Betty, played bluegrass. Ryan Strause told some ghost stories around the campfire to the “diehards” that just weren’t ready to give up the evening after Charlie Adams was finished scaring us. Did I mention we had a full moon?

With each passing year the event grew and grew. About the 4th year I noticed a lady donating trays of perogies, they were a crowd pleaser. The next year she brought more perogies provided by her company Mrs. T’s. I asked if she would take on the role of food coordinator and she said yes! Georgine Miley joined the committee and does a fabulous job procuring donations for upwards of 800 people. She and John Lutz make a great team!

After a few years of Randy running cords for the event behind the library, committee member Linda Roshong suggested we move the event to the other end of the playground to take advantage of the pavilions, concession stand etc. duh... why didn’t I think of that?

Through the years, the event grew and grew requiring us to add another hay wagon, Appalachian Petting Zoo, a hay maze, and face painting provided by Mrs. Ronda Seymour, the SV Art Club. Mark Horrell advisor to the Leo Club at SV have his Leo’s volunteers each year to help with the various jobs that need to be completed.



Jason Reitenour of Reitenour Trailers, not only sponsors the event but joined our committee about 13 years ago and coordinates the hayrides and Hummer rides. (We now had to graduate from a Hummer to a bus).

We opened the museum and added the river walk in recent years. Ryan Strause led participants down the trail and shared local history and some folklore for the first few years. Due to the increased popularity of The River Walk, we have added more guides!

I am proud that Harvest Moon has become a popular event enjoyed by folks as far away as Delaware. They have family in Leesport that now hosts a family reunion around the festival. That’s great stuff!

Thank you so much to our many volunteers, committee and sponsors (Tompkins Community Bank and Reitnour Inc. have been long-term sponsors) the Leos, Mrs. Ronda Seymour etc. etc. who made the 17th annual a great success. We think it may have been the biggest crowd yet. The band Crow Hill played on the new stage!

Harvest Moon 2024 is scheduled for November 2. Please remember we do not charge for this event and rely on our sponsors and contributions for attendees! Thank you for your support!

by Robin Schappell



SANTA VISITS LAHS MUSEUM

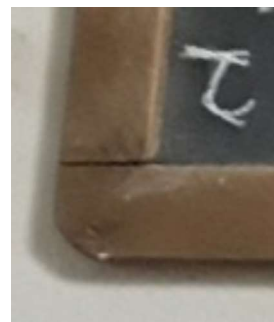


On December 3rd Santa visited the museum and it looks like everyone had a good time with him. Thank you, Santa, for making the day a festive occasion.

MYSTERIES AT THE MUSEUM



Last issue's photo



This issue's photo

Last issues photo was of a large document for membership in the Leesport Castle No. 503 Knights of the Golden Eagle dated June 14, 1897.

Good luck with this issues photo. Remember, you can always visit the museum to discover the answer.



2024 ANNUAL EASTER FLOWER SALE
LEESPORT AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY

SATURDAY March 23 – 10:00AM – 6:00PM

SUNDAY March 24 – 11:00AM – 4:00PM

FRIDAY March 29 – 8:00 – 6:00PM

SATURDAY March 30 – 8:00AM – 6:00PM

LOCATION:

CORNER OF ROUTE 61 AND APPLE STREET

COURTESY OF STEVE MOYER SUBARU

TREASURER'S REPORT

Bake Sale profited \$ 554.00

Harvest Moon Festival lost \$ 168.44

CHECKING ACCOUNT

Harvest Moon New Balance = \$3,336.68

Acquisition Fund = 641.28

General Fund = 4,017.45

January Luncheon = 100.00

Total & New Balance = \$8,095.41

CAPITAL RESERVE FUND

Trinity Repair Fund = \$32,770.88

General Fund = 6,391.49

Total = \$39,162.37

Leesport Area Community Days = \$ 6448.76

Submitted by Elaine Strause, Treasurer

LEESPORT AREA HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
128 MAIN STREET
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