

# Leesport Area Historical Society



INCLUDING THE COMMUNITIES OF THE SCHUYLKILL VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

VOLUME 21, ISSUE 2

April, May, June 2025

## Remembrances of a Paperboy Dexter Mengel

I was approached at our Holiday Gathering by Mike Potts to do an article about the one time he and his brother came to help me deliver the newspapers. I spoke to Linda Roshong about this and she said to not have it too short. Well most people that know me can tell you that I am an expert at making a short story long.

Growing up in Leesport in the 1950's there were not a lot of opportunities for a young boy to earn a little spending money, one way was delivering newspapers. Now if you lived in Reading, you worked for the Reading Eagle and had to collect the money from the customers as well as deliver the paper. In Leesport, that was done by Butch Frankhouser, who in turn hired people to deliver the papers. He covered a very large area, Leesport and the outlying area. I was 13-14 years old and was hired to help him with several areas.

First was the Reading Times in the morning for all of Leesport. He would pick me up at my house at 4:30 am. This taught me a good work ethic, as I had to do it every day. We would drive around Leesport and deliver the paper to each customer. Many times we would stop at one of the two diners on the north end of town for breakfast, either Oscar's Diner or Tyson's. It was always two eggs, toast and home fries. Mine over easy, his sunny side up. I would dip my toast in the yoke like most people, but he would cut everything and mix it together. I would say "How can you eat them like that?" Guess how I now eat my eggs. Anyway, he would drop me off back home and then I would go to school.

Sunday mornings, I think there were three crews, that met at his house in the little brick building across from the Fire Co. Social Quarters. We would sort the papers for each crew and load the cars. We delivered the Reading Eagle, Philadelphia Inquirer, Philadelphia Bulletin, and The New York Times. One crew delivered the papers in Leesport, I am not sure where the second one went, and Butch and I delivered them to all of Bern Township. And of course, we would stop for breakfast at the Airport Diner.

On weekday afternoons in Leesport there were three of us who delivered the Reading Eagle to the homes in Leesport. Unfortunately, I do not remember who the others were. The papers were dropped off at what is now The Village Tavern. We would fold and wrap the papers for delivery, then get on our bicycles and deliver them. My route was in West Leesport. It started at the bridge, down to Kern's Butcher Shop, where on the cold winter days I would go into the back of the shop and stand next to the big stove to warm up. Then up Main Street to the railroad tracks. I remember one day it was raining only on the right side of the street. So I rode my bike in the middle of the street where it was dry. Then I would go along the railroad to Nichols Street, up Nichols Street to the top, then on to Dix's Hill for the couple houses that were there. It was on this route that I learned about the value of customer service. There was one home up on Dix's Hill that had an enclosed back porch. When the weather was bad I would place the paper inside the porch. I could reach around the door frame and on the window sill would be some coins. Sometimes a dime, sometimes a quarter. Sometimes on my way home I would stop at Lester Schappell's Drug Store for a Coke, or in the winter for a hot chocolate. His was always rich and creamy.

Now the reason that started this article. One winter day we had a sizeable snow and Kenny Potts called me and asked how would I like some help with the papers. You see he had a horse and a sleigh. Kenny and Mike hitched up the horse to the sleigh, complete with sleigh bells, came into town and picked me up. And we delivered the papers by horse and sleigh. We got many looks as we traveled the streets in Leesport. This would have made a good Norman Rockwell painting, three young boys delivering newspapers in the snow by horse and sleigh. Looking back I wish we would have done this more than once, but it is a good memory.

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Winter is gone and Spring has arrived! With that comes a sense of renewal and rebirth. LAHS is also experiencing renewal. I am excited to serve as president and welcome the addition of three new board members; Leandra Karasack, Publicity Chair, Amy Koller, Finance Chair and Melissa Strause, Membership Chair. After having him serve for the past twenty years as president, we are saddened by the loss of Rich Strause but will endeavor to carry on his vision.

Did you know that LAHS's mission is to foster deeper understanding and appreciation of our area's history, offer educational programs and publications, partner with other area historical societies and community partners, and preserve history by receiving and displaying artifacts and documents in our schoolhouse museum? I am happy to report that LAHS is upholding its mission and am eager to be leading the organization to continue to serve our community.

We provide six outstanding programs a year, have our museum open for tours and continue to provide family-friendly events such as Harvest Moon, Community Days and the Magical History Tour with the help our volunteers, sponsors and partners.

Our members are valuable to us and we appreciate all they do. If you have an interest in helping LAHS achieve its mission by being a representative at events, serve as an Open House host, or serve on a committee please let us know. We cannot achieve our mission without you.

Respectfully,

Robin Schappell  
LAHS President

## NEW BOARD MEMBERS



New board members above are left to right, Missy Strause membership chair, Leandra Krasack publicity chair, and Amy Koller finance chair.

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Now a little history on the sleigh. Mr. Potts was born in Gibraltar and moved to the Leesport area in 1947 to start his business. They bought a horse for Kenneth to ride. Mr. Potts remembered that the man who had the general store in Gibraltar had an old wooden sleigh, and he bought it. It was not a fancy one like you see in the movies, but one meant for work. That is the sleigh that we used to deliver the papers. In the late 1960's Kenny joined the air force and they sold the horse at the Leesport Auction. He sold the sleigh to Mervin Moyer. When Mervin passed away he bequeathed the sleigh to the Leesport Area Historical Society. Not because it was used that one time to deliver the newspapers in Leesport, but on the front of the sleigh was the name



of the person who built the sleigh, I will guess back in the late 1800's or early 1900's. "Harry B. Adam, Leesport". So this sleigh has now gone full circle and is back in Leesport. We do display it at the Leesport Lock House special events, like Step Back in Time, and our Magical History Tours, weather permitting.

## RYAN'S ARTICLE

By Ryan Strause

Richard A. Strause, our founding president, passed away on Saturday, February 8, 2025 in the Reading Hospital. His interest in local history was more about the people connected to the artifacts than the items themselves.

Born in Reading, he lived the majority of his life in Leesport. Rich was the son of the late William Darius and Evelyn Sarah (Huey) Strause and the husband of Elaine C. (Chroney) Strause. They married on August 19, 1978 and celebrated 46 years of marriage.

In his youth, Rich lived his summers at the Leesport Playground and Pool. He graduated from Schuylkill Valley High School in 1969 where he played basketball. His Associates Degree in Business from Penn State Berks was awarded in 1971. Rich's first job was at Ontelaunee Orchards, where he worked in the fields, the packing house and the roadside stand. Employment positions in retail were held at Kuzan's, Boscov's, Weis Markets and Grant's where he met his wife Elaine. Best known as the Resident Manager at K-Mart on Fifth Street in Muhlenburg and Shillington for 41 years, he loved creating Blue Light Specials. Not surprisingly, he kept the light when K-Mart retired the program. Retirement came in 2017.

Rich was a member of Bethany Evangelical Congregational Church, Leesport. Over the years, he served as a Trustee, Sunday School teacher and helped with Bible School. He was a Past President of the Leesport Jaycees and served as District Director, Individual Development Program Manager and Product Sales Manager on the State level. He was recognized as JCI Senator #38295. The Tropseel Remmus Picnic was his project, which stood for Leesport Summer spelled backwards. The idea came to him from a movie where they had a Halloween event named Neewollah.

Rich was the founding Treasurer of the Leesport Jaycee Foundation and founding President of the Leesport Area Historical Society. He held that position for twenty years. He served two terms on the Leesport Borough Council and as a member of the Leesport Recreation Board. He was also active with the Leesport Lockhouse Foundation where his wife Elaine serves as President.

In his spare time, Rich enjoyed creating bowling ball yard art, was an avid fan of the Beatles and enjoyed "the art of the deal" at Flea Markets. He enjoyed music; especially listening to and collecting records, tapes and CDs. He was a weekly presence at the Leesport Farmers Market on a Wednesday. He collected lots of "stuff" and joked about having a Flea Market at the cemetery during his burial. He was a great story teller. At Community Days, he was best known for collecting donations asking "Did you know that fireworks cost a lot of money?"

Family included a son: Erick D. Strause, a daughter: Cathie J. (Strause) Peters, wife of M. Shane, four grandchildren: Logan, Willow, Ethan, and Ellia. He is also survived by three brothers: Ryan W. Strause, husband of Ann (Marderness), Randall S. Strause, husband of Vina (George), and Ronald J. Strause, husband of Melissa (Hanson). Nieces and nephews who Elaine and Rich had for day care were Michael, Steven, Darius, Kyle, Sarah, Andrew, Nathan and Jenna.



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Funeral Services were held February 15, 2025 from Leibensperger Funeral Homes, Inc. in Leesport. Contributions may be sent to: Leesport Area Historical Society, PO Box 204, Leesport, PA 19533, or Bethany E.C. Church, 308 Main Street Leesport, PA 19533.

Elaine's memories include walking hand in hand and a favorite statement that "we are not guaranteed one more breath".

He viewed our members as family. His presence in the community will be missed greatly.

## TRACY SCHUTT

The short film "From the River" by Schott Productions was shown on Monday, January 27. Approximately forty people attended and learned of the history of Reading and Berks County which is multi-faceted and fascinating. The film depicts the early history of hunting grounds for the Lenape natives and its inclusion in the William Penn Land Grant, to the innovative creation of industry, transportation and products, to the city's political controversies, economic booms and losses, and the cultural growth of the 20th century. LAHS programs are excellent!



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Saturday, April 5: 10-2 – Open House at the Museum

Sunday, April 6: 1-4 – Open House at the Museum

Saturday, April 12: Easter Flower Sale – 10 AM-6 PM

Sunday, April 13: Easter Flower Sale – 11 AM-4 PM

Friday, April 18: Easter Flower Sale – 8 AM-6 PM

Saturday, April 19: Easter Flower Sale – 8 AM -6 PM

Monday, April 28: 7 - PM LAHS Business Meeting - "Show and Tell" - Bethany Church; 308 Main St.

Saturday, May 3: 10-2 – Open House at the Museum

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

Monday, May 19: 7 PM – LAHS Program - Brian Engelhardt - "Pilgrimage to Disaster" - Bethany Church; 308 Main St.

Monday, May 26: 1 PM - Memorial Day Program at Leesport Playground

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

Saturday, June 14 - Magical History Tour "Step Back in Time" – Lockhouse

Saturday, June 21 – Magical History Tour for Event Volunteers

Monday, June 23 - 7 PM – LAHS Business Meeting - "Show and Tell" - Bethany Church; 308 Main St.



# Leesport Area Historical Society Annual Flower Sale Fundraiser

Saturday April 12 - 10:00 am - 6:00 pm

Sunday April 13 - 11:00 am - 4:00 pm

Friday April 18 - 8:00 am - 6:00 pm

Saturday April 19 - 8:00 am - 6:00 pm

**Location:**

Corner of Route 61 and Apple Street  
Courtesy of Steve Moyer Subaru



Grange

Proceeds support the Ontelaunee Grange  
and Leesport Area Historical Society Programs

[www.leesporthistory.org](http://www.leesporthistory.org)



LAHS

## TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer's Report is as follows:

|                                       |                              |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| The Leesport Area Historical Society  | has a balance of \$ 3,878.99 |
| Harvest Moon Fund                     | \$ 685.28                    |
| Acquisition Fund and the General Fund | \$ 2,270.28                  |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                          | <b>\$ 6,834.55</b>           |

|                                   |               |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| Capital Reserve Fund              | \$ 20,823.38  |
| Trinity Repair Fund               | \$ 6,391.49   |
| General Fund                      | \$ 27,214.87. |
| Leesport Area Community Days Fund | \$ 5,336.62.  |

Elaine Strause, Treasurer

# LEESPORT AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## BERN TOWNSHIP

SATURDAY, JUNE 14, 2025  
BUS LEAVES AT 9 AM AND 12 NOON  
from the Leesport Fire Co. Lot.  
(ONLY 40 SEATS EACH BUS)  
RESERVE YOUR SEATS!  
CALL 610-781-4012

### LEESPORT LOCKHOUSE

#### “STEP BACK IN TIME”

Saturday, June 14, 2025 - 9 AM - 4 PM  
27 E. Wall St, Leesport, PA 19533

Lockhouse Tours, Food, Vendors  
Games, Demonstrations.  
Fun! Fun! Fun!



Lockhouse



LAHS

## MYSTERIES AT THE MUSEUM



Last issue clue



Last issue answer



New issue clue

The answer to last issue's mystery is a Diploma from the West Leesport High School. This is one of three that we have on display in our classroom. They are from the years 1913, 1916, and 1919. Come check them out. This issue is more of a question, as the soda bottles are not on display at the museum, but rather a question about them. Do you know what significant role these bottles played in the history of the Leesport Area Historical Society? You can get the answer at one of our open house events, or at a meeting. Just ask!!

# UPBRINGING

by Millie Reber

Recently, I was asked to give a talk to a group of individuals about the subject of integrity. As I continued to collect my thoughts on this subject, I realized with great gratitude the wonderful parents I was blessed to have who attempted to instill integrity into my upbringing.

My parents taught me this:

- When you say you will do something, you do it.
- When you make a commitment, you honor it.
- When you borrow something, you return it.
- When you have a financial obligation, you pay it.
- When you enter into an agreement, you keep it.
- When you are given a job to do, you do it.

All these lessons have enabled me in times of trial and testing to make difficult and extremely important decisions correctly even when they seem overpowering.

As the calendar reminds us to observe Mother's Day and Father's Day, I am also reminded how very fortunate I was to have been blessed with parents who understood the value of integrity.

## MEMBER PROFILE – John Faust

John Barr Rentschler Faust is the grandson of Verna (Rentschler) Faust, who was the last family member to operate the M.S. Rentschler Store in Centerport, a place where you could buy anything from penny candy to dynamite. John has been working on downsizing and wanted to find a place for some of the store artifacts that he inherited. Luckily, he found the perfect place with the LAHS. We now have the store cash register, typewriter, spool cabinets, vintage photos of the store, family Bible, an 1885 marriage certificate for Michael S. Rentschler and Sallie R. Potteiger and other Centerport treasures. He's also hired professional organizers to help us to get our archives better 'organized'. We are proud of his trust in our organization to preserve his family treasures.



LEESPORT AREA HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
128 MAIN STREET  
P.O. BOX 204  
LEESPORT PA 19533

[www.leesporthistory.org](http://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