Leesport Area Historical Society

INCLUDING THE COMMUNITIES OF THE SCHUYLKILL VALLEY SCHOOL DISTIRCT

VOLUME 21, ISSUE 3

July, August, September 2025

OUR OLDEST MEMBER OF THE LAHS

By Linda Roshong

Can you guess who the oldest member of LAHS who will turn 100 on December 4, 2025? As a child she lived on a farm on Gernants Church Road in Ontelaunee Township. She loved living on the farm tending to chickens, geese, cows, and chasing the geese. One of her favorite activities was to make diapers for the chickens so they could be in the house. Woody & Cindy Weist now own the farm and have done extensive renovations over the years.

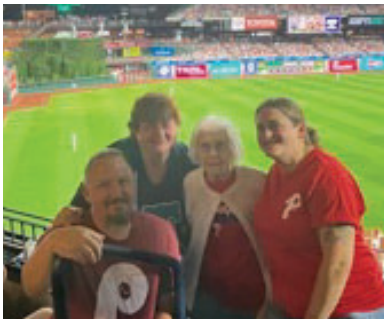
Her all-time favorite person in the world was her grandfather, Jacob Delp. He would pick flowers and swing with her under the trees and play tag with her. He gave her her first car when she was 16 and of course she knew how to drive because she would drive the tractor in the fields before her feet could reach the pedals. She was known to have a "lead foot" back in the day. At 16 she worked at the Meinig Glove Factory in Reading. One day she was late to get back to work after lunch and a policeman followed her back to the factory and asked her to slow down and she politely thanked him for not giving her a ticket. Pennsylvania Dutch was her first language, a reflection of her strong cultural roots to the area.

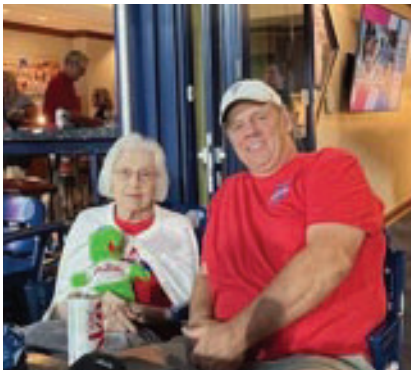
Later in life she was employed by Crown Knitting Mills in Mohrsville as cutter. She volunteered at many a place throughout the area, Leisure Living Center, Bethany Church activities, and of course the Leesport Historical Society. She was the number one phone caller for LAHS calling other members to donate bake goods, and to volunteer at the various events we sponsor. We understand she loved being on the phone so much that the church found her indispensable in the same capacity as LAHS did. She also volunteered through her church to go to Alaska to help at a camp…this she did several times. Another one of her volunteer assignments was to be a den mother to a cub scout troop in the late 1950's.

Some of her favorite memories are of traveling to Germany, Switzerland and many riverboat cruises through the United States. It seems she was the center of most of the partying on these trips, she attracted lots of people to party with.

One of her many recollections from Leesport was when the kids were sledding on the "Flat". She would provide hot chocolate and cookies and a warm place to stop by.

She is a devoted Phillies fan, and her favorite player is Bryce Harper, as you can see in the photos below. This outing was on her 98 th birthday and she was given many special souvenirs after her family made arrangements to have a special seat at the Phillies stadium for her. The people in the one photo are her daughter-in-law, Tammy, her granddaughter Barbara and her husband Grant Will. The other photo is the Tastykake sales rep, Dave for Redner's who acquired the tickets for the Phillies game and the special seating in the Tastykake Courtesy Box.





By now I'm sure you realize who this article is all about, it is Anna Smith, her family suggested we do this article on her. Anna and her husband Charles had two children, a daughter Pearl and son, Randy who passed in 2021. Her grandkids are Julie, Debbie, Randy Jr. Mandy and Barbara. She also has five great grandchildren, Sydney, Emily, Milo, Logan and Hailey.

Congratulations, Anna, for being our oldest member. Keep up the good work you have been doing all these years.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I hope you are all enjoying the dog days of summer with its events, picnics and festivities.

As I think of summer and all its offerings, I reflect on all the events, festivals and opportunity for community connections that LAHS provides. It is a wonderful life to be lived in beautiful Northern Berks in the SV area. Consider if LAHS was not able to continue to host Community Days, Harvest Moon and Magical History Tour and how that would change the complexion of our community. Think for a minute what would happen if we did not continue to get support through membership and volunteerism. What would happen to our community events? What would happen to our history? Would West Leesport schoolhouse still be standing?

Organizations such as LAHS provide so many intangible benefits to a community. We truly are proud to be the heartbeat and hope to continue to grow and serve. Please consider joining LAHS. With any organization, you grow or die. The future is dependent on new members and the next generation to support us.

Warmest Regards,
Robin Schappell

HELLO FELLOW HISTORY LOVERS

When the President of the Leesport Area Historical Society asked me to consider writing a story about 'what it was like growing up on a particularly unique property in this area', I thought it would be fun to make you guess where I grew up. So readers, put your sleuth cap on, read through the entire story, collect the clues & solve the mystery. Where is this property?? (The answer is somewhere in this newsletter.)

It was 1950 when mom & dad moved the family to this lush paradise located off the macadam road a good half mile. I was still a baby. There were actually two houses on this property; mom had her heart set on the stone house, but it was in need of repair and had no electric nor indoor plumbing. The frame house didn't have indoor plumbing either but it did have electric, so that's the house I grew up in. At first, our address was R.D.#2, Reading; then, in 1963, the post office added the zip code 19605. Hmmm, somewhere rural in Reading – but 19605 is Laureldale – Huh? Read on for more clues.

Intoxicatingly beautiful in springtime, this property was already a thriving perennial nursery filled with fields of lilac trees, peony & forsythia bushes, iris of many colors, bachelor buttons & snow ball bushes, Japanese cherry & flowering quince trees, and a large patch of bamboo, which was quite the oddity back in the fifties in Berks County! These isolated 20 acres had it all for us kids – fields, pine forests, wild berries to eat, hills to sled on and coal dirt piles to slide down with a river close by to wash the black dust off before heading home to an old house with no indoor plumbing BUT it did have a two-seater outhouse! That was all I ever knew after diapers until I turned six years old when dad took half a bedroom to create a bathroom for the family of six. Finally, I could lay in a tub of warm water instead of 'washing so' from a pot of water mom pumped from the well & heated atop the cast iron coal stove.

Another modern convenience we lacked for the first six years was phone service. Believe it or not, Bell Telephone strung the first line over the Schuylkill River from Muhlenberg Township! There were actually a couple of winters when ice built up on that line so heavy that it snapped and fell into the river! Those times we were without phone service til Spring. Back then it was common to have a 'party line' – we ended up sharing with seven other families, each assigned their own distinctive ring because we heard each one. Our ring was two longs; our number started with WAlker; and the Leesport Telephone Company considered Kutztown a long-distance call! Are these clues helping yet??

Each winter we were guaranteed to get snowed in. Dad put the plow on the trusty Farmall tractor and spent hours moving snow off the lane only to have it drifted shut by morning! When the blizzard in March 1958 dropped a few feet of snow overnight we were snowed in for two weeks! During power outages Mom was resourceful by bringing buckets of snow inside to melt on the coal stovetop for our drinking & washing water. Thanks to her preplanning for such times we had home canned veggies & fruits to get us by until our lane & the main road got opened for electric to be restored. Over the years, friends & relatives purposely came to visit when

cont. on pg. 3

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a snowstorm was forecast in hopes of getting snowed in for a day or two! All through the year many would visit with their kids to experience life without modern conveniences for a few hours --- never really understanding how hard it was to live like that every day of the year.

During the warmer months Dad planted Christmas trees & other evergreen bushes to fulfill his dream of working this nursery full time. He also planted tomatoes in the rich soil of the canal bed in front of our house which we kids helped harvest & clean to sell to local restaurants. To this day whenever I touch a tomato plant, the smell takes me back to that field, same as the smell of a peony flower brings me right back to standing in amongst hundreds of blooming peonies, cutting buckets full of them to sell for Decoration Day! When dad needed to replace the trees he sold, we'd fight for the position to sit on the plow behind the tractor to plant the seedlings. Two of us sat side-by-side on the plow, a box of seedlings on our laps, the smell of freshly dug soil indescribably calming as we lovingly placed the baby trees in the trench.

When the river was being dredged to remove the coal silt my sisters & I found it exhilarating to walk across the slippery riverbed from Bern Township to Muhlenberg Township in just a few minutes. Then after the river filled back up, Dad built a fine two-decker dock for our family & friends to sit by the water and watch the motor boats pull water skiers, skillfully making a U-turn just before our dock where the river got too shallow for boats with motors. That summer dad surprised us with a canoe and trained us how to properly paddle without tipping it. Of course, you know it wasn't long before that's all we wanted to do – tip it over! But we also loved to paddle up the river to gaze at an architectural masterpiece – the Peacocks Railroad Bridge – sometimes catching site of two fit young men climbing up to stand in the open circle and dive without breaking their necks! Maybe one of you readers was one of those daredevils? With a sigh of relief, we'd continue on to the island beyond this bridge to explore it awhile before continuing to paddle all the way around the island to ride the rapids on the other side. I was shocked when my parents allowed me to hold my 1967 high school graduation party on this island. (If you are a fellow '67 Schuylkill Valley graduate, you may recall being there with me.)

So, are you getting warmer? Do you think you've discovered where I grew up? If not, maybe this last clue will help you.

A very old Amish cemetery sat beside the gravel lane leading to the house. There were some simple fieldstone markers, a few granites written in German script, and one newer stone standing proudly in the center with the name Nicholas Stoltzfus. Interestingly enough my sisters & I never feared what most children would find creepy – quite the contrary as we often felt drawn there with our baby dolls to sit atop its concrete walls to sing joyful songs to those buried there - children, parents, and this Stoltzfus man who we figured must've been pretty important because it stated when he came to America. (It would be decades later when we were to discover his true importance via the restoration of the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead in Wyomissing.) Once every summer a family of Amish came to maintain this burial ground. They didn't speak English but somehow my mother conveyed the offer to use our picnic table to eat their bagged lunches. In an expression of thanks, one man offered her a hard-boiled egg and in exchange she gave him a Hershey Chocolate Bar. His eyes lit up like Christmas!

All things considered my childhood was uniquely magnificent! I will always feel fortunate that my city raised parents had the gumption to take on the challenge to live like the 1850's in the 1950's. Sadly, a brain tumor took dad at the age of 60; mom tried her best to manage the hardships of living there on her own but three years later had to sell. I am happy that my children got to experience some of what I did for 33 years. I've never been back since then because I'd rather remember it just as it was when I grew up there. I truly hope you enjoyed a glimpse of my life growing up on this unique property.

I'll bet many of you have been able to identify where I grew up, along with what it is used for present-day. Thanks for playing along with me.

by Donna Paff

ANSWER on page 7

UPBRINGING

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.

Millie Reber

LAHS MAGICAL MYSTERY HISTORY TOUR

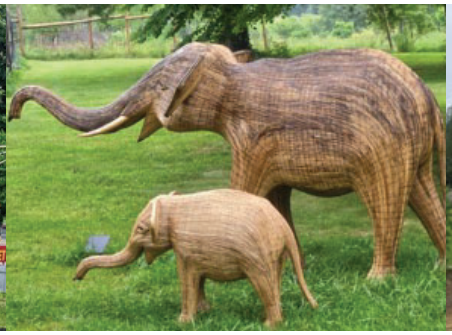
On June 14, we held our annual mystery tour. This year we toured Bern Township. Our narrators were Dr. Boyd Wagner and LAHS member Mike Brady pictured above who were very knowledgeable about the area.

Driving through the countryside we learned many facts that were not known to alot of us on the tour. We passed several of the historical homes in the township, such as Dr. Wagner's own home near the Ontelaunee Grange. A number of these homes were built by German/Swiss immigrants that were relative to each other, such as fathers & sons, and brothers passing the homes down through the generations.

We made a stop at the Berks County Heritage Center to learn about the center and all the activities they sponsor throughout the year. A special treat was to tour the Epler's one room schoolhouse that was saved from demolition a few years ago.

One stop was very interesting, it was the home of Tulpehocken Nursery and Patty Minehart the current owner, gave us a very informative talk on how the nursery came to be with the history of the home on the grounds. In the front yard is the sculpture of the elephants you see in the photo below. Patty purchased the elephants to help an organization that raises funds to support hunger throughout the world.

Many thanks go to several people who made this happen, of course Mike & Boyd, along with Ryan Strause, who did the program that was handed out to all participants, Heidi at SOS printing, and Jessica Turnick from Berks Heritage Center.



CALENDER OF EVENTS

Saturday, July 5: 10-2 PM - Open House at the Museum
Sunday, July 6: 1-4 PM – Open House at the Museum
Monday, July 28: 7 PM – LAHS Program - American Bee Farm – "History of Bee Keeping" - Bethany Church; 308 Main St.

Saturday, August 2: 10-2 PM – Open House at the Museum
Sunday, August 3: 1-4 PM – Open House at the Museum
Monday, August 25: 7 PM – LAHS Business Meeting - "Show and Tell" - Bethany Church; 308 Main St.

Sunday, September 6: 1-4 PM – Open House at the Museum
Friday, September 5: 5-10 PM – 14th Annual Community Days
Saturday, September 6: 4-9 PM - 14th Annual Community Days – (Sunday Sept,7 rain date)
Monday, September 22: 7 PM - LAHS Program - Evelyn Morrison - "Berks County Slave - Dinah Clark" - Bethany Church; 308 Main St.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Leesport Community Days	$10,011.62
Harvest Moon Festival	$3,878.99
Acquisition Fund	$685.25
General Fund	$5,465.00
TOTAL	$10,029.24

The Capital Reserve Fund

Trinity Repair Fund	$20,823.38
General Fund	$6,391.49
TOTAL	$27,214.87

MAY 19

Brian Engelhardt presented an informative program regarding the 1907 California train wreck where thirty-two passengers were killed. Eighteen of the dead were Berks County Shriners or their family members who were on what was to be a trip of a lifetime to a national convention in San Francisco. The cause of the accident was disputed in two counties and never proven, however, the railroad assumed responsibility and paid restitution to survivors and the deceased families.

MYSTERIES AT THE MUSEUM

Last issue

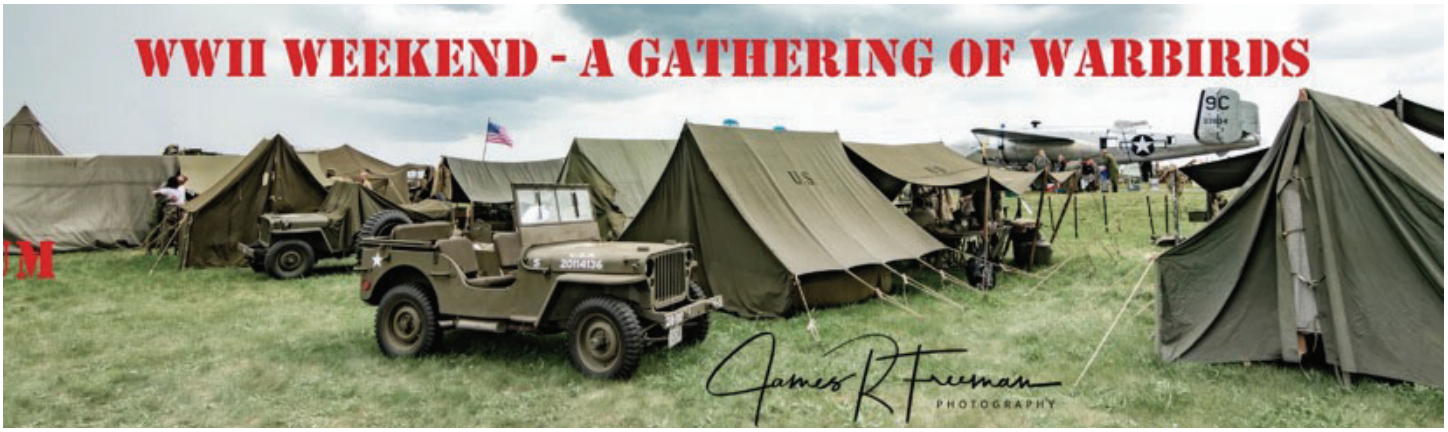
New issue clue

The last issue was more of a memory, as the bottles are not on display at the museum, but a memory of a project that was done at the Schuylkill Valley Elementary School. When we first started as a historical society in 2004 and were trying to raise funds to restore our building and create a museum, they placed empty soda bottles in the classrooms of the elementary school and had the students put in loose change. As I recall they only did this for a one month period. It was amazing when they gave us all of those bottles filled with coins. There were a few other things inside as well (some play money, a couple of small toys). But the total raised was an astounding $2,344.29. Just think, all of those students have now graduated and have moved on with their careers. Do they remember helping us get started?

Now for this issue's mystery item. I will tell you that it is a document that is currently on display in the museum. Do you know what it is? Come to one of our open house events and see if you can find it.

ANSWER

The old Peacock's & Locks property was known as 'Sitlinger's Nurseries', now known as 'Peacock's Bridge Kennels'.



By Jim Freeman

Right in our backyard, the largest living history WWII reenactment in the country is presented by the Mid Atlantic Air Museum. "A Gathering of Warbirds", World War II Weekend at Spatz Field is held the weekend after D-Day. This three day event has grown to become the largest of its kind in the world. Almost 2,000 reenactors with over 200 military vehicles and rare WWII era planes gather here to recreate over 25 acres of military encampments, conduct mock battles and demonstrations. Visitors get to wander around the different camps and interact with the reenactors. Despite the huge crowds that come every year from all over the US and beyond, the event is spread out over such a large area that it doesn't feel 'crowded'. One can visit a re-creation of a French Village, where mock battles with German troops are staged. See a vintage Gulf gas station, movie theater, WRDG radio broadcasts recreated in a "studio", hair salon, cafes, live vintage music, a hanger swing dance Friday and Saturday nights and an extensive "flea market" area with lots of military surplus items and more available for sale.

This year, a rare one-of-a-kind replica WWII era ME-262 German jet made an appearance, flying each day, dramatically 'chasing' P51 Mustangs around the airport. This event is not just about the air show though. It's a photographer's dream, everywhere you look. It is also the main fundraising event for the Mid Atlantic Air Museum, which, besides caring for its extensive collection, it's in the process of restoring to flying condition, a P61 Black Widow night fighter that was retrieved from the jungles of New Guinea, where it crashed in 1945. Once completed, it will be the only one of its kind in flying condition. Actual WWII vets and others in the VIP area of the MAAM hanger were available to visit with. They enjoy sharing their stories and deserve a hearty thank you for their service.

We encourage everyone to support MAAM and their amazing living history event that's right in our area, especially considering that so many people travel thousands of miles for the experience.

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