



Luzerne County Historical Society

FORECAST

February 2017

Come See Our Exhibitions!

Members Reception - March 3, 2017

Points of View:

Luzerne County Landscapes

Luzerne County is renowned for its fascinating history from Revolutionary War battles to coal mining, from Native American settlements to posh hotels and downtown department stores. How has our landscape changed over the past 250 years? As it continues to evolve all around us, come see how it looked in the past. The paintings, photographs, prints and drawings on view, drawn from the Historical Society's collection, offer perspective on how things have changed, how they have remained the same and how they may look in the future.



The Susquehanna at Forty Fort, 1875, J.J. Merriam, gift of Mrs. Gordon O. Markle, 85.140.1.

Join us at the Museum for a **members reception on Friday, March 3, 2017, 6-8 p.m. FREE for members!**

Through July 15, 2017

“Bringing the Giant to Its Knees”:

The History of the

Giant's Despair Hillclimb

Visit this exhibition to explore the 110-year-history of one of America's greatest motor races, run right here in our backyard. The race has been associated with names like Penske, Shelby, Danko, Chevrolet, De Palma and Koveleski. The gallery includes art, pictures, trophies, artifacts and memorabilia from “The Giant,” allowing visitors to relive the legend that was once billed as “the most famous one mile climb in the East.” Other items on view are from the Matheson Automobile Company, which manufactured cars in a Forty Fort factory in the early 1900s, and participated in races throughout the country to promote their vehicles, including the Giant's Despair Hillclimb course.



At 6:30 pm, on Friday, June 9, Director of Operations Mark Riccetti, Jr. will present an **illustrated lecture on the Giant's Despair Hillclimb** in the upstairs gallery of the LCHS Museum. Come hear about the 110-year-history of one of auto racing's crown jewels just one month before the running of the 111th annual race! **FREE for members!**

Native Americans in the Wyoming Valley

Ongoing – With a New Look!

The history of the Wyoming Valley offers dramatic stories of conflict between European settlers and Native peoples. However, these stories come from a brief span of time. This exhibition provides context about native life in Luzerne County from the prehistoric era through the mid-1800s. Explore some of the tools that area Indians used to catch and make food, defend themselves, decorate their living space and construct their homes. Learn about Luzerne County people whose lives were changed when European and native populations intersected here. Think about how you might have reacted if you were a Wyoming Valley native or a recently arrived European settler meeting the other for the first time.

Message from the President

We have had a productive year at the LCHS. I want to thank the membership and the Board of Directors for their support as we have accomplished our most pressing goal, appointing an Executive Director.

Great lengths have been taken by the leadership of this organization to overcome the financial challenges of its past and to set the table for its rebranding for the future. After a year of planning and allocating our resources, a national search for an Executive Director was conducted by our dynamic search committee. It is my pleasure to formally announce and welcome our new Executive Director, Dr. Aimee E. Newell. The Society has not had an Executive Director for a number of years and the Board of Directors felt that for the LCHS to make great strides forward, we needed to bring a qualified leader into the organization to bring much needed buoyancy to our day-to-day operation of LCHS. We certainly have that leader in Dr. Newell.

Since Dr. Newell arrived in November, she has been working diligently to move the LCHS forward in a number of different areas. She has also been working with Tish Last, our Development Committee Chair, on our 2016 Annual Appeal. As we plan for 2017, we will turn to setting a strategic plan, increasing membership, bringing our new website online and increasing outreach to area educators. Please continue to support the Luzerne County Historical Society through active membership, attendance at our events and volunteering. It has been my pleasure to serve as the President for the last six months and I look forward to the next six months. The future is bright for LCHS and I am extremely proud of our progress.

Jon William Pollard, Ed.D.

Christmas by Candlelight

LCHS Museum Assistant Allyson Earl as Margaret Swetland for Christmas by Candlelight at the Swetland Homestead, December 2016. A huge thank you to our volunteers at this event: Nancy Lychos, Sherry Emershaw, Bob Schertzer, Annie Riccetti and members of the Wyoming Area School District's History Club. Thanks also for our cookie and cider donations from Steve and Estella Killian, Tish Last, Catherine Riccetti and Nancy Lychos. Plan now to join us for this event in December 2017!

Message from the Executive Director

Hello! I am happy and excited to be the Executive Director of the Luzerne County Historical Society. I was drawn to the many histories that intersect in Luzerne County – prehistoric settlements, Revolutionary history, coal mining innovations and environmental lessons, to name just a few! This history has much to teach us locally and nationally. I look forward to learning more about the fascinating stories of the Wyoming Valley and being able to share them with our members and visitors.

We have been busy during January and February – putting up a new exhibition, refreshing the Native American exhibition, processing gifts of objects and papers so that we can share them with researchers and visitors, and working on refining behind-the-scenes policies and procedures. As you read through this newsletter, I hope that you will find something that inspires you. Attend our events, come find an answer to a research or genealogical question, consider donating to the Historical Society, shop our gift shop or like us on Facebook. I look forward to meeting you!

Aimee E. Newell, Ph.D.



Calendar of Events—March through June 2017

March 1—Wednesday

LCHS reopens! FREE for members.
Bishop Library hours – Tuesday through Friday 12-4 pm, Saturday 10 am-4 pm. Museum hours – Tuesday through Saturday 12-4 pm

March 3—Friday

New Exhibition – Members Opening
“Points of View: Luzerne County Landscapes,” 6-8 pm, Museum, FREE for members.

March 24—Friday

Lecture, “Stories of the Million Dollar Mile: Anecdotes Concerning the People and Architecture of River and Franklin Streets for the Past 250 Years,” by Matthew Schooley, President, Forty Fort Cemetery Association, 6:30 pm, Museum, FREE for members; \$5 for non-members.



April 15—Saturday

Gallery talk in “Points of View: Luzerne County Landscapes” by Aimee E. Newell, LCHS Executive Director, 2 pm, Museum; FREE for members, \$5 museum admission for non-members.

April 28—Friday

159th Annual Meeting of the Luzerne County Historical Society, Westmoreland Club, Program theme – the 109th during World War I. Details to come. **Reservations required in advance. To vote at the Annual Meeting, your membership MUST be current as of 2/28/2017.**

May 7—Sunday

The 7th Annual Classic Car Show at the Swetland Homestead, 9 am-3:30 pm., \$15 to enter a vehicle; FREE to attend.



(Rain date: May 21, 2017)

May 18-21—Thursday-Sunday

Fine Arts Fiesta, Public Square, Visit the LCHS booth! Free.

<http://fineartsfiesta.org/>.



May 27—Saturday

Museum and Bishop Library closed in observance of Memorial Day Weekend.

May 28—Sunday

Nathan Denison House opens for tours, Sundays through September 3, 1-4 pm, Denison Street, Forty Fort, FREE for members, \$5 for adults, \$3 for children.

June 9—Friday

Lecture, “Bringing the Giant to its Knees” by Mark Riccetti Jr., 6:30 pm, Museum, FREE for members, \$5 for non-members.

June 10—Saturday

Bus trip to the Museum of the American Revolution, Philadelphia, 8 am-4 pm Join us and be one of the first to see this eagerly-awaited new museum in Philadelphia. The day will include round-trip coach transportation to the museum, admission to the museum and lunch at a Philadelphia restaurant (additional cost). **Reservations required in advance.**

July 4—Tuesday

Wyoming Battle Monument ceremony

July 15—Saturday

Last day for “Bringing the Giant to Its Knees” exhibition at the Luzerne County Museum, 12-4 p.m.

To make a reservation for any event, call 570-823-6244, ext. 3

or email reservations@luzernehistory.org.

Volunteer (or Intern) at the Luzerne County Historical Society!



Get Involved!

Do you want to learn more about history? Have you always wondered about what goes on behind the scenes at the Luzerne County Historical Society?

Come and volunteer with us! We are looking for volunteers and interns who can commit to short-term and/or long-term projects. Current opportunities include:

- Research projects at the Bishop Library—previous research experience preferred, but not essential; these projects require self-motivation and curiosity, attention to detail and ability to work on one's own; they can be short-term or longer-term commitments
- Become a tour guide at the Denison House—enthusiasm and curiosity are required, as well as good people skills. Training is provided. This is a longer-term commitment and requires availability on several Sunday afternoons between Memorial Day and Labor Day, as well as on scattered other days for special events and tours.
- Help with Special Events—this is a shorter-term volunteer project. Help us with aspects of our special events—exhibit openings, annual meeting, May 2017 car show, October Harvest Festival, Candlelight Christmas at the Swetland Homestead, and others. We need volunteers to work the admission desk, help set up and clean up, assist with food preparation, and many other tasks.
- Indicate interest in becoming a Luzerne County Historical Society board member.

If you are interested in pursuing any of these opportunities, please call us at 570-823-6244 ext.1 or email anewell@luzernehistory.org.

2016 LCHS Annual Appeal

A huge thank you to all who donated to the LCHS 2016 annual appeal! These donations are essential to our operating fund and will allow us to bring you the 2017 programs that are listed in our calendar of events. Our fiscal year ends on June 30, 2017. We welcome donations in all amounts, which can be sent to the Luzerne County Historical Society, 49 South Franklin Street, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701. Please mark your check "annual appeal" on the memo line. As of January 20, we received \$11,090 from 86 donors.

\$1000 and above

Mr. and Mrs. Stephen B. Killian
The Paul D. Wasserott Foundation

\$500-\$999

Ms. Molly S. Hinkin
Thomas J. O'Neill and Linda B. Ross

\$250-\$499

Bicentennial Building Associates
Ms. Janet E. Flack
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\$100-\$249

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\$99 and under

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Ms. Helen Westenheffer
Mr. and Mrs. W. Brooke Yeager III
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Zavada

Coming Up!

The LCHS will hold its 7th **annual Classic Car Show** from 9 am-3:30 pm, on Sunday, May 7 at the Swetland Homestead, 885 Wyoming Ave., Wyoming. The show is open to any vehicle: classic cars, race cars, muscle cars, tuners, trucks, motorcycles, choppers, bicycles, etc. Entry fee is \$15.00 per vehicle; **free for spectators**. The show will feature DJ Steel Dragon, a 50/50, raffle prizes, and food. The Swetland Homestead will be open for tours (for an additional fee, members free). Trophies will be awarded to the Top 30 entries, the Best in Show and the People's Choice. Dash plaques and goody bags will be given to the first 100 entries. The rain date is Sunday, May 21. For more information, or to pre-register a car, call 570-823-6244 ext. 3 or email reservations@luzernehistory.org.

Denison House Opens on Sunday, May 28

The Nathan Denison House at 35 Denison Street in Forty Fort is open for tours by the Denison Advocates on Sundays between Memorial Day and Labor Day from 1 to 4 pm. **Admission is free for members!** Nathan Denison was one of the first forty shareholders in the



Susquehanna Company to settle five new towns or townships in the Wyoming Valley in February 1769. Denison became a popular leader of the pioneer settlers from Connecticut. He served as a Justice of the Peace and colonel of the local militia, distinguishing himself in the ill-fated Battle of Wyoming in 1778. In 1790, Nathan Denison built his

house on the western bank of Abrams Creek in then Kingston Township (now Forty Fort). He lived there until his death in 1809. Although typical of the homes in Connecticut, it was built in a style unusual to Pennsylvania. The house has been owned by the Luzerne County Historical Society since 2010.

Bus Trip to the New Museum of the American Revolution

June 10, 2017

Join us for a day trip to Philadelphia to explore the newly-opened Museum of the American Revolution. The trip includes round-trip coach transportation, admission to the museum and a special program on Philadelphia during the Revolution. After touring the museum at your own pace, the group will have lunch at a downtown restaurant (additional cost) and return to Luzerne County.

\$60 for members; \$75 for non-members. **Reservations required in advance**—call 570-823-6244 ext. 3 or email reservations@luzernehistory.org.



From the Bishop Library and Archives...

Bob Schertzer, who comes to LCHS from the Mature Worker Program, has been working on organizing a collection of papers from Wilkes-Barre attorney Edward P. Darling (d. 1889). When Bob came across several legal documents associated with a Mr. Dilley who made specific arrangements for his cats after his death, he wanted to learn more. Here is Bob's account of the story:

THE CELEBRITY FELINES OF THE DIAMOND CITY: PINKIE & BLACKIE -- Wilkes-Barre, PA City Cats

In 1905, the same year that a young Albert Einstein formulated and announced his innovative theory of relativity in Europe, two fortunate cats in Wilkes-Barre were enjoying a comfortable and pampered existence at their own private dwelling with a full-time live-in caretaker. Civil War veteran and wealthy owner of downtown hotels Benjamin Dilley lived with his two pet cats, "Blackie" and "Pinkie." Mr. Dilley was an active and enthusiastic member of the Elks Club of Wilkes-Barre as well as being devoted to his cats.

In his will, Mr. Dilley specified that, upon his demise, the cats were to remain on the upper floors of his home and to be cared for by his long-time housekeeper. Mr. Dilley's will and its codicil contained the specific directive that the two cats were to be undisturbed in their occupancy of the top two floors.

When Mr. Dilley passed away early in 1905, he received an Elks funeral as he had requested. His trustees also arranged to compensate his housekeeper, Mrs. Addie Ruch, to remain in the house and provide for the welfare of Blackie and Pinkie on its upper floors. There the cats enjoyed an idyllic feline existence with savory, tasty and scrumptious treats and meals, as well as soft, furry toy mice to chase. The two cats were in feline heaven.

When the inevitable end came for these contented cats, their passings made headlines around the nation and the world. Pinkie passed away on September 5, 1906, after suffering from painful throat tumors. Pinkie's death was the lead news article on the front page of the *San Francisco Call* on September 6, 1906. Blackie, undoubtedly missing his playmate, endured for another two years in the Dilley mansion, but in early July 1908, Blackie expired, due to an unidentified illness. Blackie's death was noted in the far-away *New Zealand Herald* on July 4, 1908. And, in the Wilkes-Barre newspaper, Blackie's passing was noted as the end of a life of feline indolent ease.

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Amanda C. Fontenova, Library and Archives Director
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Bob Schertzer, Mature Worker Program
Mary Walsh, Bookkeeper

The mission of the Luzerne County Historical Society is to preserve and promote the collective history and heritage of Luzerne County, Pennsylvania.

Luzerne County Historical Society

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Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701

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www.luzernehistory.org

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