

Upcoming Exhibits

The Germans in Luzerne County Exhibit will explore the history, culture and contributions of the German immigrants who settled in Luzerne County in the 19th century. Historic artifacts, photographs (like the one below, from the St. Conrad's Society, circa 1910), music, printed materials and ethnic clothing will be among the items which will be featured in the exhibit. *The Germans in Luzerne County* will continue the series of exhibits focusing on the ethnic groups which contribute to the rich cultural heritage of Luzerne County. Previous exhibits in the series focused on the Welsh, Slovaks, Jews, African Americans, the Irish and the Poles. The exhibit will open September 26, 2014 and run through January 2015.



The Weddings and Courtship Exhibit will focus on traditions from the 18th century to the present and include wedding gowns and accessories from the Society's extensive collection. Come learn about the changes in the rituals of marriage and courtship through time. The exhibit will be on display September 26, 2014 through January 2015.



Pictured is Olivia Burr Hillard Conyngham's wedding gown from 1864.

President's Message

Dear Members,

As my term as President is just beginning, it is very clear that the opportunity for growing this organization has never been better. Our mission, as stated so many times, is to preserve and promote local history throughout our county.

At the forefront of that mission are the two historical structures we all know as the Denison and Swetland Homes, our expansive catalog of written publications as held in our Bishop Memorial Library, and the seemingly endless collections we maintain in our museum. As the oldest County historical society in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, we have managed to accumulate a vast collection of historically viable items, most of which are held in storage until brought out for specific exhibits. That said, our long-term priority will be to ensure that our members, as well as the public at large, have access to our entire collection on a permanent basis. This will eventually come in the form of a new museum and library.

Additionally, the Swetland Homestead, whose family was the impetus for erecting the Wyoming Monument, needs a great deal of work on both the outside, as well as the inside. While there are numerous historic structures within our county that are in need of improvement, addressing the needs of the Swetland Home needs to be at the top of our list.

Membership has benefits, and growing our membership on both an individual and corporate level will be paramount to making our short and long-range goals a financial reality. This also means getting our brand out into the community. What better way to do this than to ramp up special events, whereby our local history is woven into the fabric of our present-day community. This happens when Luzerne County's own 143rd Regiment does an encampment, or when Nathan Denison appears within the front yard of the Denison House in Forty-Fort. History buffs and novices alike can all find something positive in these examples of living history. Standard events including our Annual Dinner, which thanks to the oversight of our own Susan Shoemaker, will continue to be a great success. Look for a variety of new events that will perk new interest for our members and the community. In closing, remember – this is your history, my history, and most importantly, OUR history.

- Carl B. Rosencrance, LCHS President

In the Stacks

by Amanda C. Fontenova

As the county historical society, we are always in search of historical information regarding all parts of the county, not just the Wyoming Valley area where we are located. Most of the items we have in our collections have come from donations from individuals and families, businesses and organizations: books of local history, photographs, yearbooks, maps, tombstone readings from local cemeteries, family histories, church histories, etc. Over the years, I have noticed that our collections are a bit lacking when it comes to the lower portion of our county. In the past, this would have been attributed to the difficulties in crossing the mountains that pass through the region, effectively cutting us off from places such as White Haven, Freeland, Hazleton, Drums, Conyngham, and more. Since the advent of the automobile and the highways, it has become much easier for individuals to travel through the county and share information with us, but I know there is still much that we do not have.

For example, recently I came across some titles I had not heard of before concerning Butler Township: "Two Hundred Years of Progress: Butler Township, 1784-1984" by the Drums Lions Club, "History of Butler Township, Luzerne County, 1786-1880," and "The History and Genealogy of the Drum Family" by Laura Helman, 1927. If you have a copy of any of these books that you are willing to donate, or lend us to scan or photocopy, please contact our Library at (570)823-6244 x 2. We appreciate help from our members and the community to preserve our local history for the benefit of all.

Hometown Heroes Return to Plains

In the last issue of our newsletter I wrote about the anonymous donation to the Historical Society of the portrait of Lt. Michael Duddy, a soldier from Plains who was killed in action during WWI. Since that time, the portrait has been repaired and restored and also reunited with its "twin," the portrait of Lt. John Curry, donated to the Historical Society by the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. Rather than let these two large portraits sit in storage until adequate space (and a sturdy enough wall!) could be found to display them, the Historical Society has placed the portraits on loan to the Plains American Legion, so the two men can be remembered and honored once again in their home town.

On June 7th a celebratory dinner was held at the Plains American Legion to honor the memory of Lt. Duddy and Lt. Curry. Descendants of both Curry and Duddy, art restoration expert Judy Dotzle, and myself were among those assembled to view the portraits which had been brought together again for the first time in many years. Some Plains Legion members in attendance remembered seeing the portraits when they hung in the Plains Memorial High School, which closed sometime after 1969. Robert Corcoran told the story of his interest in the paintings and his lengthy quest to find them. Bob has told his story so many times to friends and acquaintances over the years that he wrote it up into a little booklet, of which he was kind enough to give a couple copies to the Historical Society. I am very happy that this bit of local history has been brought to light once again!

Save the Date

There will be an afternoon of fun and food from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm on Saturday, October 11 at the Swetland Homestead in Wyoming. A chicken barbeque, Civil War encampment, games and house tours will be featured so please plan to attend.

Garden Volunteers Wanted We are seeking regular volunteers with an interest in gardening and working outdoors to help with taking care of the gardens at our Research Library in Wilkes-Barre and at the Swetland Homestead in Wyoming. Tasks include weeding, pruning, raking, watering, etc. once or twice a week. To volunteer, please contact Amanda at (570)823-6244 x 4.

2014 Calendar of Events

- July 4** Commemoration of the Battle and Massacre of Wyoming
- July 18-20** 143rd PA Regiment Encamped at Swetland
- August 22-24** 143rd PA Regiment Encamped at Swetland
- August 30** Women's Work and Quilt Exhibits Close
- September 19-21** 143rd PA Regiment Encamped at Swetland
- September 26** Germans of Luzerne County and Weddings Exhibits Open
- October 11** Swetland House, Chicken Barbeque, Civil War Encampment, fun and house tours, 1 to 4 pm

The 143rd Pennsylvania Regiment Renactors will be at the Swetland Homestead five more times this year on July 18-20, Aug 22-24, Sep 19-21, Oct 10-12, and Dec 4-7. The 143rd Regiment was the local Luzerne County unit during the Civil War and was the first Union infantry unit on the field at Gettysburg. Come and see an actual Civil War encampment and see how Union troops lived during 1864. The unit will be drilling and demonstrating their weapons throughout the weekend, from Friday evening until Sunday afternoon. The 1803 Swetland Homestead will also be open for tours and refreshments will be sold as well.

Fourth Annual Car Show a Success

On Sunday, May 4th, the Society held its Fourth Annual Classic Car Show at The Swetland Homestead. Despite the iffy weather, 95 cars, trucks, and motorcycles, spanning nearly 100 years of Automotive History, packed the Swetland lawns, proving that after four years, this young event is one of the Society's largest. "I think this shows that we are blessed to have a strong following for this event, who seem to really enjoy it, and come year after year." Says LCHS Director of Operations Mark Riccetti, "They make the event as great as it is every year."

The show featured classic cars, race cars, muscle cars, modern tuners, trucks, motorcycles and customs. DJ Steel Dragon once again was on site playing music of all tastes, and GAC Photography did the wonderful onsite pictures, including the ones pictured here. Numerous homemade dishes were sold at our food stand, and the Homestead was also open for tours. The show would not be possible without the dedicated group of volunteers, board members and staff who put weeks of effort in beforehand, and the hundreds of LCHS members who brought cars, took a tour, or just stopped by to walk around. The tentative date for next year's show is May 3rd, 2015.



Bring Back Ellen Webster Palmer and the Breaker Boys
— Sign the Petition! A group of 6th graders from St. Nicholas St. Mary's School in Wilkes-Barre went going to the National History Day Competition this spring with their performance "Ellen Webster Palmer: Fighting for the Rights of the Breaker Boys". The students placed second in the state competition. As part of their project they have started a petition to have the statue of Ellen Webster Palmer and the Breaker Boys put back on the Court House Commons where it stood until it was removed for restoration in 2005 during the levee raising project. For those who do not know, Ellen Webster Palmer started the Boys' Industrial Association to provide schooling and training for the breaker boys of the area, thousands of whom were able to live better lives because of her dedication. Please go to www.change.org and sign the petition so that Mrs. Palmer and her work will not be forgotten.

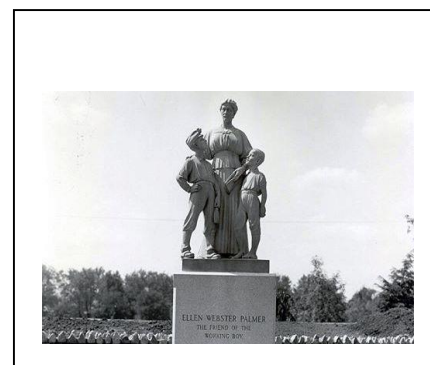


Photo ID: Luke Sullivan, Becky Revitt, Andie Sullin and Aoife Burke at the History Day in PA Competition

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