



CONNELLSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY SPRING 2023 NEWSLETTER

20TH ANNUAL BRADDOCK'S CROSSING OF THE YOUGH JUNE 23, 24, 25, 2023

Many times I remember Bill Balsley saying to me that he wanted to recreate General Braddock crossing the Youghiogheny River at Stewart's Crossings (now Connellsville). The Historical Society was able to

accomplish that goal during the celebration called The Age of Empire which included the French and Indian War in the Thirteen



American Colonies. Our first reenactment was a dress rehearsal in 2004, and our first official river crossing was in June 2005 which was 250 years after the original crossing. It was a big deal to actually accomplish that goal. I hope that it made Bill proud. This year marks the 20th anniversary of our reenactment. I never thought that we would celebrate this historical event for 20 years. This makes me proud.

I have been promised that this year, we will once again cross the Yough as part of the week-end activities, *unless* Mother Nature sends us a flood or something equally disastrous. Also, this year we plan to reinstate what I hope will become a new tradition, a dinner/lecture on the Friday evening preceding the River Crossing week-end.

We began that idea in 2019, with Dr. David Preston, professor at The Citadel, speaking on the Battle of the Monongahela during the French and Indian. Dr. Preston has written an award-winning history of that battle. Then COVID struck! This year, a local historian Richard Robbins, is joining us Friday evening, June 23, 2023. Mr. Robbins writes for the Uniontown Herald Standard and will speak on his book, *TROUBLED TIMES; THE STRUGGLE*

FOR WAGES, RECOGNITION AND POWER IN THE AGE OF COAL AND COKE. He will have copies of his book available at dinner. The menu and price for dinner will be announced. The dinner will be held at the Connellsville Canteen.

The **Opening Ceremony** for the crossing will begin at 11:00 am on Saturday June 24, at Crawford's Cabin. Reenactors have the option of attending one day or both Saturday and Sunday. Saturday, June 24, will be from 11:00 am until 5:00 pm with the River Crossing at 1:00 pm.

Sunday, June 25 will be from noon until 5:00 pm. ***There will be no crossing on Sunday, June 25.*** We will not ask New Haven Hose to have to provide aid on both days. We hope to provide dinner for the reenactors on Saturday evening as has been our tradition in the past.

GOOD BYE AND HELLO

It is always difficult to have to say **good-bye** to a person who has given so much to the Connellsville Historical Society. In the 50 plus years of the Society, we have had only five treasurers.

Our first, who served the longest time, was the gracious and wonderful Louise Balsley. Louise and Bill were the heart and soul of the founding of the Connellsville Historical Society in 1970. We had all our early Executive Board Meetings at the Balsley house on Cedar Avenue. That house is now gone, but it had been built by Bill's father. After Louise could no longer take on the responsibilities of the office of Treasurer, we elected Martha Colburn to take that position. Martha was a delightful fun-filled person. When Martha was not available to hold the office, she was replaced by Elizabeth "Lib" Mobley Basley. Lib had also been a charter member of the Historical Society. She and Bill married after Vern and Louise's deaths.

Next to take on the awesome task of treasurer was Janet Hiltabidel who served for numerous years. I really depended on Janet's efforts to make sense of our finances. When Janet informed me, after the death of her dear Arnold, that she intended to spend more time with her children and could no longer handle the job of treasurer, I didn't know where to turn for help. I was at a meeting at Penn State Fayette Campus concerning Hotel Tax grants, and sitting beside me was Susan Lewis. I thought to myself, "Should I ask Susan to take on this important office?, or might she be too busy with her own personal plans?" Without hesitation, she said that she would be glad to be our Treasurer. I was overjoyed by Susan Joy Lewis. She has served us well over the last 5 or so years. Now with the death of her beloved husband and the need for her to help raise her grandchildren in Kentucky, Susan will soon be leaving Connellsville for the next phase of her life. The best of luck to Susan in her new endeavor! Susan has been busy trying to bring the treasury of the Connellsville Historical Society into the 21st century, and the President of the Society has been having difficulties accommodating the newer techniques, but I am trying hard to accept change.

Now for the Hello! Who would take over the job of Treasurer? Most people join a group or Society to be social members and enjoy the events offered by the group. Officers are required to assume responsibilities that are sometimes not extremely pleasant or are time consuming. The Executive Board suggested several candidates, and we had discussions. I knew the person I wanted to ask to take on the job, but I didn't know how to approach him.

Yes, a man, so far we have only had ladies in this position. I was having a meeting in my home for an entirely different matter, and he was there for the meeting. At the conclusion of our meeting, I asked Ethan Keedy if he would consider serving as the Treasurer for the Historical Society. Without hesitation, he had a few questions about our system, and then said **YES** he would take on the position. At our April Annual Meeting, he will be presented to the Historical Society. The Executive Board has approved Ethan for the position.

WELCOME ABOARD, ETHAN!

When you need help, the answer is always, "Ask a busy person"! Is there anything in Connellsville that Ethan Keedy is not involved in? He is already a lifetime member of the Historical Society, and I am most grateful that he has agreed to take on the position of Treasurer.

Susan is in the process of cleaning out a huge house and getting it ready to be put on the market. We will miss Susan for she is a unique, impressive, one of a kind person. She will make her presence known in her new community. Susan is getting Ethan up to date on our treasury situation in the Historical Society. We cannot thank Susan enough for her service, and she couldn't be replaced by a better person than Ethan Keedy.

Most of you know Ethan from various venues. He is a successful businessman being the owner of Keedy's Pizzeria and is an elected member of Connellsville City Council, having served for several years. He has a full-time position as the Financial Advisor for the city of Jeannette, and he is the Chairman of the Connellsville Festival Association. He has been known to do substitute teaching in the Connellsville School System. He is generous with his donations to Connellsville projects recently serving on the staff for the Connellsville High School Musical, **WHITE CHRISTMAS**, etc., etc., etc. He also has lots of experience in applying for grants!



A group of friends have been asking and discussing the history relating to the lone stone bridge pier that stands about 50 feet out from the river's edge at Yough Park. When was it built, for what purpose, by whom was it built by, and date of removal? Also are there any illustrations or drawings showing the structure. The 1897 map of Connellsville shows the pier (with no bridge) so I am assuming the bridge predates the map. I am asking for any information that you may have or point me in the direction that could or would be helpful. Furthermore the park could benefit nicely by having a historical plaque placed in the view of the pier, I'm sure many locals and visitors would find this interesting. Thank you.

Michael: From what I have been able to figure out is that the pier would have been part of a bridge connecting to the Southwest Pennsylvania Railway (branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad) from where the C'ville Municipal Authority Building is today to the westside of town (then New Haven) to the river's edge of 5th St., if 5th St. continued to the river. But, I don't think the bridge was ever built. I have never seen a map with the bridge on it on that part of the river or have read any accounts of a bridge there.



Furthermore, at the time the SWP Rwy would have had to cross the Pittsburg & Connellsville Railroad (B&O later) at grade and if I were the P&C RR, I would not want that. There also could be another explanation. Maybe the Pennsy wanted to avoid coming through town early on; going across the river between Apple & Peach Sts. They were servicing to Sligo and other industries in Dutch Bottom and the North End of C'ville, and thought that this would be the easiest way to get through New Haven and to coal mines & coke ovens south & west of Connellsville. But like I said before the P&C and its branches south & west of town didn't want that. It eventually became possible, but at the time P&C had the leverage to not let the PRR to cross their tracks.

I have looked at many railroad books but have not found any direct info to confirm that was any bridge across the river at that point. The PRR might have built the pier in the river and ones on the banks hoping that they could cross the P&C at level grade. One map did show a line across the river, but I think it was supposition. Just my view from what I can surmise. *Bill Sechler*



Two Private Secretarial Accounting Schools in Connellsville
by *Dr. David Geary.*

Responding to a question seen on Connellsville Memories about the Franklin Commercial College in Connellsville, I would like to share its history, but also an interesting connection between two private Connellsville secretarial-accounting schools.

Annette Dull Durbin taught at Franklin Commercial College in 1939. She may have graduated from Franklin as she was the secretary at Dull's Moving & Storage, her family's lucrative business. She and husband William Durbin began Durbin's Secretarial School on Peach Street around the time Franklin ceased operations. They later moved the school to their new home, in Moses Aaron's old home on the Country Club Road. That school was successful during the 1960s and 1970s. Annette Durbin died in 1995, age 83.

Franklin Commercial College was a successful private school in Connellsville for 17 years, from 1935 until 1952. In 1939 it had 28 students, a local VIP advisory board, and income of \$25,000 (\$538,000 today). It expanded to nearly 100 students a year, taught graduates from many local



high schools, and conducted formal graduations. It was able to place 95 percent of its graduates in secretarial and accounting jobs from which many retired. It was state-accredited. It had three out-of-town owners in its history: J.

Walter Barnes, A. V. Calhoun and Mr. & Mrs. R. H. Carder. Miss Nellie Cole from Scottdale was the long-time principal. She previously ran a small business school in the 1920s in Somerset, Pa. The Carders, from Parkersburg, W. Va. could not continue Franklin after purchasing it 1951. Newspaper ads reveal it started to become a copy center using mimeograph machines. The school had classrooms in two banks in town before moving into the First National Bank (Troutman Building) on the sixth floor where it stayed the longest.

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS
INDUCTED INTO FALCON H.O.F.**

Two members of the Historical Society were inducted into the Falcon Foundation Hall of Fame with the Class of 2022, and what is amazing is that they both are graduates of the Class of 1965 from

Connellsville Senior High School. David L. Geary, Ph.D is a life member of the Connellsville Area Historical Society. After graduation in 1965, David attended Otterbein College majoring in English.

During his time in college, he became part of the Air Force ROTC. Next came his Masters in Journalism from West Virginia University. While David served as an officer in the Air Force, one of his many assignments was teaching English at the Air Force Academy. After retiring from the Air Force, David taught at Georgia State University, was a GS-15 Public Affairs Director for the U. S. Department of Energy, overseeing what is now the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History and was a communications director for Lockheed Martin. He completed his Ph. D in Humanities at Costa Rico's Empresarial University. David now lives in New Mexico and is very involved in the history of that state. He has written for many professional journals, but he still has much interest in his hometown of Connellsville. Since 2006, he has written historical articles which have appeared in: The Daily Courier, Pittsburgh Tribune Review, Connellsville Crossroads, and the National Park Service.

While David has traveled over much of the United States, his fellow recipient of the Falcon Foundation honor has concentrated her amazing energy on the Connellsville area. Judy Keller, the second member of the Class of 1965, has been involved in activities that have preserved the outstanding history of Connellsville. Judy was very involved in activities during high school with especially fond memories of being in the Coker marching band. Other activities included: National Honor Society, senior class officer, editor of the school newspaper, and playing in the Yale-Princeton Basketball Classic. She stayed close to home going to Penn State Fayette Campus and California University of PA. The next step had to be teaching, and that included almost anything dealing with history at Connellsville Senior High School as well as sponsoring many school activities.

How else did Judy serve her community? She became involved in local government serving as: City Controller. City Council member, Park and Public Buildings Department and City Treasurer.

Judy served on the Connellsville Bicentennial Committee. Now she is seeing one of her most ambitious projects coming into existence, she is the chairman of the Veterans Honor Roll Committee. She is also a published author writing her tribute to Connellsville Veterans who made the Supreme Sacrifice in World War II. She is also working on books to honor Connellsville veterans who served our country in other wars.

When she offered to paint the back porch and porch furniture at the Gibson House, we knew that we had a "keeper" in Judy Keller and asked her to serve on the Executive Board of the Historical Society. Judy was awarded the Distinguished Citizen Award in February 2023 by the Connellsville Chamber of Commerce.

The accomplishments of these two 1965 Connellsville graduates have only been touched upon. We are privileged to have their continued interest in promoting and preserving Connellsville history.



**CONNELLSVILLE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

Thursday April 13, 2023

The annual meeting will be held at the Gibson House at 217 West Patterson Avenue, Connellsville at 7:00 pm. Officers will be elected and light refreshments will be served. The public is invited to attend..

The featured presentation is **"WHAT A CROCK!"** The history of salt glazed stoneware from the Monongahela River Valley will be discussed from the beginnings in the early 1850's to the demise in the early 1900's. Ed DeMuth will explain the production process, the companies involved and the craftsmen who produced the famous blue and grey crocks. Included in the program will be the brief history of crocks in Connellsville. Ed will also give collecting tips and current values followed by a question and answer discussion.

Connellsville Area Historical Society Archive
Sarah Reedy, archivist

Happy Spring! We are very excited to see what the new year will hold for the Connellsville Area Historical Society Museum and Archive.

2022 was a great year for the Museum and Archive. We welcomed visitors and shared Connellsville's vast history. We also accepted several wonderful donations into the collection that will help tell Connellsville's history and the histories of the communities that call her home. Our most recent donations include an Anchor Hocking Drinking Glass, a World War I Homecoming Medal, and two historic photographs. Some of these stories are moments of achievement while others show darker sides of our history. The Museum and Archive would like to extend a huge thank-you to all our donors for their wonderful contributions to the collection and their time.

The keen eyed among you will have noticed that I mentioned a dark piece of Connellsville's history. In 2022, the Historical Society received an anonymous donation of a document that shows the hiring of black individuals and renting of land. The document is dated 1850. It is unknown if individuals listed in the document were free or enslaved. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania had long held the institution of slavery as a crime against humanity and was among the first states to abolish slavery within its borders (Abolition Act of 1780). There is still a great deal to be learned from this document. This document will help shed light on the experiences of black individuals in America at the cusp of the American Civil War.



The unofficial theme for 2022 was Zachariah Connell. Connell was the founder of Connellsville. In 1806, Connell would gift several acres of his property which became Connellsville. During 2022, the Historical Society welcomed over 10 Connell

descendants to the Museum and Archive. During one of these many visits, I asked if there was something calling all the descendants to investigate Connell and his family. From what was said each family group started their family genealogy and stumbled across their connection to Connell. Thankfully, we have a collection for that. The Historical Society preserves the papers of Zachariah Connell. These papers include land surveys, legal documents, Connell's Will, and the charter where Connell creates Connellsville. One of the many questions that we receive is: how did we acquire the collection? Funny story, we are not entirely sure. The essentials are the same. A truck full of documents was found at an auction, some of the documents were the Zachariah Connell papers. The documents were sent to the Historical Society. Now, where this auction occurred is up for debate. Some have heard that it was a local auction others heard Texas. Whether they are from closer to home or Texas; we are beyond thankful to have them!

Genealogical inquiries make up the majority of research requests to the Historical Society. For some families we have collections to help illuminate the past; for others their stories are waiting to be told. The Museum and Archive would like to thank the Domer Family for their generous donation of the Beverly Murray Domer Papers. Beverly Domer was a wonderful researcher whose expertise helped many families connect to their history. We are proud to preserve her papers and continue her legacy.

If you have any questions or pieces of family or Connellsville history that you would like to donate, contact us at CAHSarchive@gmail.com. If you are hoping to conduct research at the Historical Society, please make an appointment. This allows us to research your topic and ensure that we have items available. Gibson House is open Saturdays from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM and by appointment only on Wednesdays.

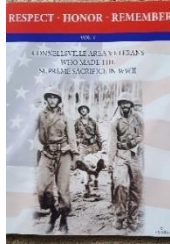


BOOKS AVAILABLE FROM JUDY KELLER

Society member Judy Keller is offering her two written projects for sale with 25% of the purchase price donated back to the Historical Society. These books provide great information about the men of the greater Connellsville area who made the supreme and ultimate sacrifice during time of war.

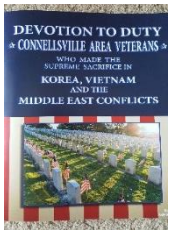
RESPECT - HONOR -

REMEMBER - (\$20) gives background information for the 148 men, including 77 personal photos, who died during WWII.



DEVOTION TO

DUTY (\$12) remembers the 37 men who died during the conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, and Gulf War.



To purchase book(s) contact Judy at kellerja@zoominternet.net or 724-628-3639. Books can be shipped out of the area for an additional \$5.

COMING EVENTS

April 13: 7:00 pm at the Gibson House. Annual Meeting with a presentation by Ed DeMuth titled

“What a Crock.” We will have Election of Officers and light refreshments will be available.

May 11: To be Announced

June 14: Flag Day Picnic 6:00 pm at Crawford’s Cabin. Bring a covered dish

June 23: Dinner Lecture at the Canteen at 6:00 pm

June 24, 25: 20th Annual Braddock’s Crossing of the Yough. (See article on page 1)

July 12: To be Announced

August 9: Annual Corn Roast at 6:00 pm

PEOPLE WITH A LOT OF TALENT

Did you know that our youngest member of the Connellsville Historical Society, Addie Richter, is a dancer? She was doing all kinds of fancy moves in Connellsville Middle school’s production of the musical **FOOT LOOSE**. We also saw her mother, Becca Richter, busy selling tickets. Ben Haines, the director of the musical, really inspired his students to do a great job. Ben also is very loyal to the Historical Society and participates in our Opening Ceremony at the Braddock’s Crossing each year. He and Todd Reagan present the National Anthem. Ben is on the drums and Todd does the vocals.

CONNELLSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

217 West Patterson Avenue

Connellsville, PA 15425

e-mail: chs@connellsvillehistoricalsociety.com

www.connellsvillehistoricalsociety.com