A History of the Valley Forge General Hospital

By Galloway Morris

Part 1 of a Series of Historical Articles from the Spring 1998 edition of The Schuylkill Township News

The story of the Valley Forge Army Hospital begins on April 1, 1942, when a directive from the Office of the Chief of Engineers in Washington, DC authorized construction of this general hospital on its present site. On May 26, 1942, actual work was begun. Colonel Henry Beeuwkes, Medical Corps, reported as the first Commanding Officer in June 1942. He established his headquarters in the farmhouse located on the post property. This farmhouse was ultimately to become building #100, and the residence of the Hospital Commanding Officer.

On George Washington’s birthday, the 22nd of February 1943, and with ceremonial simplicity, the Valley Forge General Hospital was opened. Nearly a year later, on September 26th the Army post was formally dedicated. In contrast to its quiet beginnings, this later occasion was marked by distinguished quests and a full military dress parade, fitting symbols of the transition in this medical base from infancy to full maturity. Listed among the guests were Major General George F. Lull, Deputy Surgeon General, U.S. Army, Justice Owen J. Roberts, Associate Justice, US Supreme Court, and Brigadier General Milton G. Baker, Commander Pennsylvania State Guard, and former Commandant of Valley Forge Military Academy.

Endowed with the clear heritage of the Valley Forge of 1777-1778, Valley Forge General Hospital was admirably equipped to carry forward its fine historical tradition. Situated on 182 acres of farm land in Chester County, it was composed of 98 brick buildings connected by a labyrinth of corridors; and contained almost 2,000 beds. In addition there were 26 other structures that housed the necessary service functions of a small city. Built at a cost of $10 million dollars, its replacement value today would be in excess of $60 million.

Every modern facility was here for the care and rehabilitation of wounded men. There were eight operating rooms, mobile x-ray units for bedfast patients, five complete dental offices, and complete chemical and bacteriological laboratories.

The staff consisted of 265 officers and nurses and a large detachment of enlisted men and WACS. The officer personnel, many of whom had temporary homes in this area, came from most of the 48 states. The enlisted men lived on the post in clean, well-heated brick barracks.

During World War II, the Hospital gained international recognition of its work in the fields of plastic surgery and eye surgery, and in the rehabilitation of the war blinded. It became a research center in the development of the acrylic (artificial) eye and for investigation into causes and treatment of infectious hepatitis. After 1952, its specialties
were the treatment of patients with diseases of the chest and those with neuropsychiatric disorders. In addition to these specialties, patients with virtually every medical and surgical complaint were seen and treated.

In 1968 the orthopedic center was established to care for patients returning from Southeast Asia. The patient census was made up of active and retired military personnel and their authorized dependents, with a day-to-day occupancy of about 1100.

Before the hospital closed in 1974, it provided logistical support to locally based activities and to satellite units in the Philadelphia area. Approximately 1800 personnel, both military and civilian were required to provide the necessary services of its basic mission. Besides its professional staff, the hospital had a wide variety of occupations found in any small community.

This article can imply only a small part of the significant history of the Valley Forge General Hospital. Men from every battle theater of the world were represented in the wards and private rooms of this hospital and were the recipients of the best care that a grateful Nation could offer.

Operating slightly over 31 years, the hospital cared for nearly 200,000 patients spanning three major conflicts with peacetime intervals. It was one of seven installations of its kind operated by the Surgeon General and was the only Army general hospital, in addition to Walter Reed General Hospital in Washington, D.C. that lay east of the Mississippi River.

It is significant that Valley Forge General Hospital was the only one of 65 general hospitals named for a place rather than a military or medical-military personality. This demonstrated the Valley Forge heritage and its meaning to our nation’s development. In the winter of 1777-1778 an ill-equipped and barely functioning militia was turned into a fully functional army at Valley Forge.

For more information contact Galloway Morris of the GPA Military Vehicle Historical Society at 610-933-6580.
Valley Forge before
George Washington

(Part 2 of a Series)

The township will be running a series of articles on various points of interest throughout the township in upcoming newsletters.

At times a name is associated with a use different than its name indicates such as Valley Forge best known as the site of the winter encampment of General Washington and his troops from December 1777 to June 1778. Its name indicates some involvement in the production of iron.

On February 3, 1742, Stephen Evans and Daniel Walker Township purchased 125 acres of land from the attorneys of William Penn. This acreage was part of the “Great Tract” of the “Manor of Mount Joy”, land that had been given to Penn’s daughter Letitia.

The acreage that Evans and Walker bought was about one half mile from where Valley Creek emptied into the Schuylkill River. They established the Mount Joy Forge for iron making. It was built along the east side of Valley Creek between what is now “Washington’s Headquarters” and the covered bridge. The forge started operations on a full time scale about 1744. By this time the men had acquired a total of 376 acres - mostly timber which they used for making charcoal. The timber was felled on Mount Misery.

A saw mill was built and a third partner added to the company. Little profit was made, and 14 years later, Walker sold his third of the forge. The partner was John Potts, son of Thomas Potts who was one of the pioneers of iron-making in Pennsylvania. By 1759, Potts had acquired the other two thirds shares and had made great improvements.

Mount Joy Forge, later Valley Forge was a refining forge which processed and purified pig iron. Pig iron is the first or raw iron. It is formed when iron ore is smelted in furnaces. Slag impurities float to the top and are poured off. The bottom molten iron is released into a trough made in a sand bed. This trough was lined with a row of depressions extending to each side into which the molten iron would flow, cool, and harden.

The pattern formed looked like a row of sucking pigs, thus the name “pig iron”.

The pig iron for Valley Forge was produced at Warwick furnace and transported by wagon. The wagon owners were paid by the ton, usually hauling four tons at a time. They traveled the path of Route 23, which was a main link between Philadelphia and Lancaster.

A portion of that, Nutt’s Road (Nutt Road), was named after Samuel Nutt, the Coventry Forge Ironmaster. Nutt first traveled the roads when they were improved Indian trails. Mr. Nutt saw a means of shortening the journey by relocating the roads to run straight through from French Creek to Valley Forge. Part of this stretch still bears his name.

The crude pig iron was remelted then formed into more refined bars to be shipped to Philadelphia. The forge was called a respectable small forge whose production was less expensive because it was run by slaves and servants.

The forge remained entirely in the Potts’ family until 1771 when a Colonel William Dewees bought an interest. It was he who built the “Upper Forge” upstream and on the west side of Valley Creek. This was a bloomery forge, which removed sufficient impurities to produce wrought iron; malleable and tough enough to shape into barrel hoops and tools.

Did You Know?

Soon after Penn’s founding of Philadelphia, settlers began to move westward along the Schuylkill River. The first white inhabitants in the area were a few Swedish and Holland Dutch families. "Schuylkill" means "Hidden River" in Dutch. The area now known as Schuylkill Township was part of the Pickering Tract where Charles Pickering expected to mine silver. The attempt to do so ended in failure and in charges of counterfeiting against Pickering and an associate.

For other township facts, stop by the Township office and pick up a Community Information Guide.
The Anderson Cemetery on Valley Park Road

by Dr. John Lukacs

(Part 3 of a Series of Articles)

The township will be running a series of articles on various points of interest throughout the township in upcoming newsletters.

The Anderson family were the first permanent settlers in northern Chester County. James Anderson, born in 1690, emigrated in 1707 from the Isle of Skye, in Scotland. In 1712 he eloped with Elizabeth Jermain, who was the daughter of his employer and master (a Welsh Quaker). They went to live at what is now Anderson Place, James building a log cabin whose foundations are still recoverable there. Next year there was a reconciliation with the Quaker preacher Jermain. James then bought 340 acres in our present township. His son, Patrick Anderson, was the first child born in what is now Schuylkill Township (and what before 1828 was part of Charlestown Township). Patrick (1719-1793) served as Captain in the War of Independence (note that he was nearly 60 years old then.) He became a Major in the Army. He had three wives, survived them all. He was a member of the Assembly of Pennsylvania, 1778, 1781.

The oldest son of Patrick was Isaac Anderson. He was the most distinguished and historically significant member of the Anderson line. Born in 1760, he was First Lieutenant in the Chester County militia in the War of Independence. He was elected to the Congress of the United States in 1803 and 1805. He was a Jeffersonian Democrat. His name heads the list of Congressmen who voted for the Louisiana Purchase.

He voted in favor of significant bills, including one to free all Negroes born in the District of Columbia, and another to limit the importation of slaves. In 1816 he was a Presidential Elector at the inauguration of President Monroe. He married Mary Lane. He died in 1838.

Isaac Anderson was the man who established the Anderson Cemetery not far from the Anderson family estate. He and his wife are buried there. (There are other Andersons buried on Anderson Place, not far from the Anderson homestead house that still stands, built by him in 1804.) Anderson Place now belongs to the Sasso family and will become the Anderson Farm development. The historic buildings in the middle will remain untouched.

For awhile (I cannot tell the exact dates) Anderson also held title to a lot east of the Anderson Cemetery, the so-called "School House Lot" where a township school was to be eventually built. At some time that lot passed on to the traction company who built the trolley line running east of the cemetery; the stone building housing the end of the trolley line was provided for refreshments for a small amusement park. That was the origin of "Valley Park Road." The line stopped operation in 1924.

In the late 1940's my father-in-law, Lemuel Braddock Schofield, a prominent Philadelphia attorney, moved his permanent residence to Anderson Place, restoring some buildings and repairing the wall of the cemetery. He arranged for an annual reunion of the Anderson clan. That included Anderson, Schofield, Lane, Sutton, Pennypacker, etc. families. In 1950 the present Trusteeship for the upkeep of the cemetery was recorded, with three Trustees. Eventually the last Anderson died. The present Trustees are William Nassau and myself. A trust fund for the upkeep of the cemetery had been established. In the near future, the cemetery will become the responsibility of Schuylkill Township.
The Trolley Park at Valley Forge

by Dr. John Lukacs

(Part 4 of a series of Articles)

In the history of the United States, the four decades from about 1890 to 1930 were marked, among other things, by the rapid spreading (and then the sudden ending) of urban, suburban and rural electric trolley lines. To some extent their functions resembled those of the public service busses now. They were relatively easy to run, and they were much cheaper than the trains. One could travel from Philadelphia to New York, or from Philadelphia to Allentown or Reading by trolley. Trolleys were slower than trains and had frequent changes along their routes. One of the functions of the small-town and rural trolley lines was to attract their customers to small amusement parks serviced by their tracks. There were at least fifteen such “trolley parks” in Philadelphia, Montgomery, Chester and Berks counties.

The only trolley line across our township was that of the “Phoenixville, Valley Forge and Strafford Electric Railway”, built in 1911-1912. Its promoter and president was an ambitious man, Thomas O’Connell, who had planned a number of other lines in southern Chester County, none of which materialized. But the Valley Forge line did. His idea was to connect the Valley Forge end of it with another line running from there to Strafford which did not come about, nor did his project to build a line from Valley Forge to West Chester through Malvern. Today, the still running high-speed Norristown-Stratford-69th Street line continues to exist. He also had his battles with the Phoenixville Borough council about where the tracks in Phoenixville would start. But his line was built, with some grading that had to be done in our Township. Two bridges were built for the tracks, one crossing Pickering Creek, the other Valley Creek. And in August 1912 an amusement park, known as Valley Park - whence the present name of Valley Park Road - was inaugurated, with a ceremony featuring the Phoenix Military Band.

The fare was five cents and included entertainments in the park, which consisted at times of moving pictures shown on an outdoor screen and vaudeville acts as well as eating and picnic facilities. A stone building, once for the purpose of providing food and drinks and comfort facilities, still stands.

The park lay immediately west of the Anderson Burial Ground, opposite to the present Pasquale property. The trolleys clattered and screeched along a single track up White Horse Road to Williams’ Corner (where there was a temporary repair barn and an electric transformer), then along the high southern berm of the present road, crossing to the northern side beyond the amusement park. O’Connell’s optimism seems to have been finally warranted: in 1912 he arranged, by way of a switch in Phoenixville, to run two cars from Valley Forge through to Bonnie Brae Park, another trolley park outside Spring City. In 1915 the terminus of the Valley Forge line was moved down Starr Street to Bridge Street. By that time the park had provided opportunities for boating, baseball, and a merry-go-round. The trolley cars (many of them open-sided) ran each hour in the late spring, summer and fall. Winter traffic was limited, though it continued to exist.

What killed both park and trolley was the automobile. By 1927 more than 60 percent of American families owned cars - many of which were used for short rides, especially on Sundays. On Christmas Day in 1923, the trolleys stopped running. No one wished to buy either the equipment or the rails. They were then junked. The amusement park too went out of existence soon thereafter, in a year that I cannot now ascertain. One day automobiles will also disappear; and what will follow them? A new kind of trolley? Another thing that I cannot tell.

The Township will continue to run this series of articles on various points of interest throughout the Township. Submittals are welcome for upcoming newsletters. Please submit articles to the Township Secretary.
The Pickering Reservoir

By Dr. John Lukacs

(Part 5 of a series of Articles)

Pickering is a small town in the East Riding of Yorkshire in England. (Until very recently, Yorkshire was the only county in England divided into a West, East and North Riding. The word “Riding” derives from the extent of the county that a rider of the King’s Justice could cover within a certain time. (A variation of this term exists until this day in the American usage of a Circuit Court.) I could not ascertain whether Charles Pickering was born in Yorkshire. In any event, few of Schuylkill Township’s earliest settlers had come from the East Riding of Yorkshire. Yet, by an interesting coincidence, one or two of them had- the Schofield and the Walmsley families who were related to the Andersons, the very first white settlers.

Charles Pickering was a friend and associate of William Penn. Shortly after their arrival in what would soon become Philadelphia, Pickering trekked up the Schuylkill (meaning in Dutch: Hidden River) valley. Around what would be the western end of the present Township he thought he had discovered marks of silver in the ground. He reported this to Penn who gave him a charter for several hundred acres, along the present creek that carries Pickering’s name. Pickering then allied himself with another Penn immigrant from England, Tinker, who knew something about mining. (His name lives on in Tinker Hill and Tinker Hill Road, on the southwestern edge of the Township).* Pickering was there after being wrongly accused by a group of jealous Quakers in Philadelphia of illegally mining and counterfeiting silver coinage. He paid a large fine and was acquitted. He who came to a sad end: on his return to England his ship was drowned and he was drowned. He direct heirs, and his chartered land, Tract, was divided between sixteen Philadelphia. Whether Timothy Washington’s Secretary of State, was a Charles, I could not ascertain.

There are three other names in the history of our Township that relate to Pickering. A portion of his “Charlestown”, the name of the present Schuylkill was a part before 1827. from the Manavon Tract (an Indian name), granted to other people on the north side of the Pickering Creek. There is also the Pickering Schoolhouse, donated by the Andersons to the Township in 1840 (which the present writer rebuilt and where he lived from 1955 to 1984). For awhile people called the Pickering Tract the Mine Hole Tract, because around Williams’ Corner mining for lead and other minerals went on intermittently throughout the late 18th & 19th centuries.

When the British army (General Howe) chased Washington’s troops north after the Battle of Brandywine and the Battle of the Clouds (near the present Immaculata College), a large portion of it forded the Pickering at the end of a dirt road through Anderson Farm which still exists. This was one of three westernmost points where the British appeared in the Middle Colonies.

The creek continued to flow through beautiful and unspoiled lands for a long time. A primitive version of the present bridge at White Horse Road existed for many years. At a point where the creek had begun to widen, the present Pothouse Road (now ending at White Horse Road) reached it and a stone bridge crossed the creek leading towards Valley Forge. The pillars of that bridge still stand. Further north, at an inlet, a descendant of the Reeves family (founders of Phoenixville and the Iron Company) built a beautiful house in 1914, crossing the inlet on an elegant wooden bridge that unfortunately no longer exists.

In 1928 the Philadelphia Suburban Water Company built a dam at the northern reach of the creek, opposite Moore Hall, along Route 23. The company also bought a continuous strip of land, approximately 50 feet wide, from landowners along the creek east of the White Horse Bridge. Thereafter, a sheet of water came
into existence, many times wider than the original Pickering Creek. Along its western end, the Pickering Reservoir has now silted up considerably, forming large islands, which the company plans to dredge.

*Footnote: In Ireland a “tinker” is a gypsy. This Tinker was an Englishman.

Dr. Lukacs, a retired Professor of history, Pulitzer Prize nominee, author of 22 books, is a 35-year plus member of the township Planning Commission.

The Township will continue to run this series of articles on various points of interest throughout the Township. Submittals are welcome for upcoming newsletters. Please submit articles to the Township Secretary.
The Population History of Schuylkill Township

By Dr. John Lukacs

(Part 6 of a series of Articles)

The native people of this region were a scatteration of Indians, most of them of the Lenni-Lenape tribe. The first English and Welsh explorers appeared soon after 1680. They may have been preceded by a few Swedes. The first permanent settler of the present Schuylkill Township was James Anderson who built his log cabin in 1713 (foundations of which still exist) at the present Anderson Place, where later many members of the township’s most prominent historical family were born and lived. The population grew slowly, though sufficiently to the extent that in 1827 the township was established, separating itself from Charlestown. The establishment of this municipality preceded that of Phoenixville, even though the population of the latter soon became much larger.

During the 19th century both the extent and the habits of residents of the population of Schuylkill Township changed relatively little. The majority of the people were farmers. There was intermittent mining of tin and lead near Williams’ Corner, but it is not ascertainable how many of the miners lived within the township. The only school in the township was that on the corner of what are now Valley Park and Clothier Spring Roads, deeded to the township by Isaac Anderson and functioning from 1840 to 1929. The Schuylkill Elementary Public School was built in 1930.

The relationship of the township to Phoenixville was close, and not only geographically. The inhabitants did their shopping and their professional business in Phoenixville. Several Phoenixville residents built houses in Schuylkill. There were two remarkable developments in the early decades of the 20th century. One was the Phoenixville-Valley Forge trolley line, operating from 1913 to 1924, whose terminal was an amusement park on Valley Park Road (whence the name of the latter). The other was a movie studio, cranking out silent films, mostly of a comic theme, in the Betzwood part of the township, directed by an ambitious and imaginative producer by the name of Isadore Lubin who for a time was a serious competitor of the then rising movie industrialists in Hollywood and Brooklyn.

The suburban transition of people which had begun as early as the 1870's west of Philadelphia (but which, unlike in other American cities, consisted for a long time mostly of wealthy people who desired to build their houses and estates in the English manner, in “the country”) was made possible by the railroad. Schuylkill Township was unaffected by this, since the last stop of the Main Line in Paoli was several miles away. What changed the character and the history of the township - indeed, of the entire United States, more eventually of the world - was the mass availability of automobiles, beginning around 1920. A few years later a few prominent Philadelphians bought large lots of land in Schuylkill Township, attracted to its beautiful and rural nature, which appealed to them better than the increasing build-up on the Main Line. Here, among other things, they could pursue their favorite sport of fox-hunting. Even before the 1920s the Pickering Hunt existed, with its small headquarters and kennels in the township (first along Valley Park Road and then along Creek Road). Hunters rode across the fields of the uncluttered township, undisturbed, until about 1960. Meanwhile all around Philadelphia the movement of people to the suburbs increased after World War II; but in Schuylkill Township the rural character prevailed, with few or no marks of suburbanization. Many of the new residents, attracted by the charms of rural residence in this part of Pennsylvania, commuted daily to work in Philadelphia, by rail via Phoenixville or Paoli, or by automobile, even before the Schuylkill Expressway was completed in the late 1950s. (There may be some irony in the fact that soon after the Expressway came into existence the number of Schuylkill residents who worked in Philadelphia dwindled.)

The increase of the population in the 1950s was considerable, though less than in all of its neighboring suburbs to the east and south. Most of the needs and the services for the people of the township were still furnished by Phoenixville merchants and purveyors. (One small detail of interest: as late as 1954 many of the roads in the township were unmarked by road signs.) The first permanent township building was erected in 1932 by a stonemason (and supervisor) George Henzie, member of a family who had been living in the township for more than a century. The rising needs of the township led to the drafting and adoption
of the first Zoning Ordinance in 1955 (allowing in the present FR district no subdivision smaller than five acres). The first Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1965. The first police officer was appointed in 1965.

By the 1960s the national suburban residential and commercial building boom produced echoes and tides washing around Schuylkill Township. The King of Prussia commercial and industrial complex was begun in 1965. Immediately afterwards some of the township officials allowed themselves to be convinced that “growth” was beneficial in every sense; that the time had come to attract not only people and buildings but industries and commerce of all kinds to the township; and that therefore, for public relations’ purposes, the name of the township should be changed to “Valley Forge Township”. In order to establish this a referendum was required. The proponents of the change (mostly interests outside the township) had vastly more funds and publicity at their disposal than had its opponents, who depended mostly on a personal telephone campaign. Yet in November 1966 the proposal for the name change was defeated by 58% of the voters.

Around that time the population characteristics of the township had begun to change. In 1965 there were about 4,600 inhabitants; in 1970 about 5,200. The rural prospect of the township was still apparent. A great asset for its protection was Valley Forge Park which acted as a green barrier between Schuylkill and the exploding suburbs, including the King of Prussia complex to the east. The relative prosperity and stability of the people of the township were also considerable. In 1964, the average size of families in Schuylkill was larger than almost everywhere in northern Chester County, 3.8 (the county average was 3.5 and the national average 3.3). A survey in the same year showed that only 4% of all the dwellings in the township were in poor shape. However, the younger working families were leaving the area. In 1950, people between 20 and 24 years of age comprised the largest population group in the township; fifteen years later the largest group was that of children, between the ages of 1 and 10. There was, too, a trend away from Phoenixville. Many of the newer residents were shopping and marketing and using professional services elsewhere. There was also some hidden but statistically apparent reluctance to depend on the Phoenixville junior and senior public schools. In 1980 the percentage of Schuylkill Township youngsters attending private schools was the highest in Northern Chester County. The percentage completing college was not.

Between 1970 and 1980 there was relatively little increase in the overall numbers of people in the township. In and after 1980 statistics were contradictory: the local numbers seemed to be more accurate than those of the national census. However, during the second half of the 1980s, the first large developments (at least three) were constructed in the eastern and formerly semi-rural portion of the township. The population kept on rising, at times rapidly (while the population of Phoenixville declined in the 1980s as well as in the 1990s.) During the 1990s there developed a startling rise of automobile traffic both within and through the township roads, and the green cushion of Valley Forge National Park lost its protective function. In the 1990s the township was among those municipalities of Chester County where more than 500 new residential building permits were issued during some years. According to the U. S. Census the population of Schuylkill rose from 5,538 in 1990 to 6,960 in 2000 which may be an undercount of at least 10%; however, the rate of increase (26%) is probably close to being accurate.

By 2001 the “build-up” of Schuylkill Township - in other words, its overall suburbanization - is almost complete. The preservation of open lands and the curbing of “sprawl” has been for long a priority of the township government, espoused only lately by the planners and authorities of Chester County itself. Unfortunately and lamentably the consideration of automobile traffic relevant to planning and building regulations has not yet been admitted by the courts of Pennsylvania (unlike in a few other states). Most of the people of the township are now employed in institutions and places south, west, and north of Schuylkill. There is some increase in commercial and professional establishments within the township, which is likely to continue. There are reasons to believe that, in accord with national demographic patterns, the number of inhabitants of the township may stabilize around 2020. There is no reason to believe that (a) the population will decrease, or (b) that their patterns of life and habitation would alter, unless some unforeseeable change would lead to a new kind of non-urban civilization less dependent on automobiles.
A Brief History of the Corner Stores

(Part 7 of a series of Articles)

Corner Stores name was originated from the four corners, made by Nutt and White Horse Roads, being occupied by stores. Corner Stores, or Village as it was also named, was Phoenixville’s only shopping district for a very long period of time. It was built before any other part of town. Corner Stores had a significant impact on the surrounding area in the 1800s. The first store to be opened was in 1749 by Philip Housekeeper. The second store did not open until 1784, by John Longstreet. Shortly after, Solomon Fussel opened the third store in 1791. The fourth store was opened before the 1800s. Corner Stores were the important commercial base of the neighborhood. It was customary for people to make many of their purchases at the Corner Stores, except for the every day needs. The Stage Coach’s route from the Philadelphia to the Reading area, would pass by Corner Stores.

Interestingly, a new school was started on the second floor of one of the stores. The school was used as a center for religious and educational interests as well as civic and social services. The school expanded and became the Quaker Meeting House in 1818. Also known as the Society of Friends’ Meetinghouse, it became a rallying ground for the Anti-Slavery Society even before 1850. Elijah Funk Pennypacker, who was prominent in early Schuylkill Township history and whose home was a short distance south of Corner Stores, and his wife Hannah Adamson, served the Anti-Slavery Society and has been noted as actively aiding run away slaves through the Underground Railroad. Some early settlers would come from miles away in to attend the religious services. Many notables have addressed gatherings there such as Lucretia Mott, George Truman, Elijah F. Pennypacker and Charles Burleigh. There is also some historical reference that Sojourner Truth, and John Greenleaf Whittier were among the notables that spoke at gatherings.

Corner Stores has played various roles up to present-day. Store occupants have used them as a watch repair and jewelry shop, dress shop, cabinet shop, tailoring shop, blacksmith, millinery, and general store, which contained the Post Office, among various other commercial establishments. In 1870, along with the continuation of the general store, there was a grain and lumber dealer and also a Justice of the Peace. It has been noted that Daniel Webster may have passed through Corner Stores on his way to Valley Forge during a political campaign at which time he visited resident and shopkeeper Charles Adamson. Today the buildings that remain still prosper as commercial establishments. Three gas stations and a bank have replaced five other Corner Store buildings.

(Schuylkill Township sincerely thanks the Phoenixville Historical Society for their research in developing this article, Miss Angela Volpe, a Phoenixville Area High Student for developing the article, and Dr. Lukacs, a long time Township resident and Planning Commission member for his review of the article.)

The Schuylkill Post Office was opened there in 1826. It was named after the then new Township of Schuylkill. Before 1849, Charlestown Library and Lyceum contributed largely to the existence and essence of the social and intellectual aspects of the neighborhood by opening its doors to public lectures and concerts. The Post Office closed in 1903 due to Rural Free Delivery being instituted and Schuylkill Township lost all claims to the Corner Stores.

An article expanding on the Quaker Meeting House is planned in a future Township newsletter. Should you have any information that you would like to share concerning this aspect of the history of the Township, please contact the Township Secretary.
The Old Pickering Schoolhouse

(Part 8 of a series of Articles)

The Old Pickering Schoolhouse (on the corner of Valley Park and Clothier Spring Roads) is one of the oldest historical buildings in Schuylkill Township, even though it is not listed on the National or State register of historic edifices.

It was built in 1840 by Isaac Anderson, the most distinguished resident of the township (Member of Congress 1803-1807, signer of the Louisiana Purchase, Presidential Elector: member of the Electoral College, 1816), direct descendant of the first white settlers of the township. Shortly before his death he built and established the Anderson Cemetery on Valley Park Road (see Township News, Spring 1999) as well as this one-room school house for the children of the township, on the western edge of his property, Anderson Place.

The school was the only elementary school in the township until the early 1920’s when Schuylkill Elementary was built. It functioned until 1929. The original schoolhouse bell still hangs in the wooden belfry atop the building. (The inscription painted on a lunette underneath the belfry is incorrect.)

In 1947 Lemuel Braddock Schofield, descendant of the Andersons, put a new roof on the building, preparing to convert it into a dwelling for his brother, Rear-Admiral Albert Schofield, USN, who was suffering from Parkinson’s disease. Further building plans were then abandoned, since the Admiral and his family decided to move him into Bethesda Naval Hospital for the rest of his years.

In 1954 a horrid tragedy, with reverberations that lasted for many years, occurred on the grounds of the abandoned schoolhouse. About one hundred feet north of the schoolhouse there was a wooden privy, half in ruins, used by the children before 1929. A young girl from Phoenixville was murdered in March 1954, dragged to this outhouse, where her body was found a day or so later. Neither the cause of the murder nor the identity of the murderer were thereafter found.

Later that year Professor John Lukacs, then recently married to Mr. Schofield’s oldest daughter, acquired the ruined schoolhouse and its surrounding acre, in order to rebuild it into a dwelling. They moved into the still uncompleted house in May 1955, hardly a month before Mrs. Helen Lukacs’ father suddenly died, where after Anderson Place no longer remained a property of James Anderson’s (the earliest settler, 1713) descendents. After 1955 the Lukacs family added to the house, building, among other things, a stone wall protecting it from the road, a terrace, a library wing, etc. In 1973, on a tour of historic houses in the
Phoenixville area, the house was opened to visitors. Among the large number of them there were three older ladies who had been students in the schoolhouse before 1929.

Mrs. Lukacs died in 1970, in the same year when her husband was appointed to the Planning Commission of Schuylkill Township, where he continues to serve. Both before and after his first wife’s death the Old Pickering School House had a number of distinguished visitors from here and aboard, recorded in a guest book. In 1984 he and Mrs. Stephanie Lukacs his present wife, built another house about 1,500 feet north of the schoolhouse and sold it to the first of three owners who have occupied it since. There have been no significant structural changes of the building during the last thirty or more years.
Schuylkill School

By Sandy Momyer

(Part 9 in a series of Articles regarding the history of Schuylkill Township)

The Daily Republican, Phoenixville’s daily newspaper, reported on September 6, 1930, that “the new $100,000 Consolidated School, located on the A. W. Kley tract at Williams Corner, which was dedicated with appropriate ceremonies…was completed on scheduled time, does away with the old-style one-room buildings…will be used for the first on Monday morning when the 1930-31 term begins.” Thus the Schuylkill Township Consolidated School opened housing grades 1-8.

Schuylkill Township, founded in 1826, has had a series of one-room schools. These included Williams Corner/Pickering, Pawling, Society, Morgan’s Imgrim’s, Valley Forge School, Oak Grove, Schuylkill #1 and then the new Consolidated School.

Following a national trend toward school consolidation, construction of the Schuylkill Township School in 1930 signaled the end of a century old tradition of one and two room schoolhouses for this rural community. When opened, the Schuylkill Township Consolidated School became a distinctive landmark in the Township and shared its heritage with East Pikeland School in East Pikeland Township and Charlestown School in Charlestown Township.

The original part of the current Schuylkill School is all stone construction (as are the other two buildings which all are similar in appearance) with a bell tower with original bell still there. Mr. Frank B. Foster, a local entrepreneur who substantially financed construction, felt all the schools needed thick stone walls. He felt stone walls meant permanence. (His daughter is “Miss Betty” Stonorov whom we all know at the Charlestown Playschool.) It was he who conceived the idea of modernizing the township schools. He even improved the country roads so that busses could travel them and transport the children to school. To be at the dedication ceremony you would have met a series of people who provided the backbone for the Township such as Joseph Ewing, William J. Clothier, Thomas B. McAvoy, Howard Taylor, A. W. Kley, Truman Wade, David Midgley, Jr. and L.B. Schofeld and many others.

With Schuylkill School completed in 1930, the 1931 records show that the three consolidated schools, Charlestown, East Pikeland and Schuylkill, competed for the Foster Trophy (a silver statuette of “Victory” donated by Mr. Foster) in competitions of play, dances and songs. There were also annual contests with neighboring schools in athletics. The 8th grade classes could look forward to the annual three-day trip to Washington, D.C. as guests of Mr. Foster. All grades enjoyed the Barnum and Bailey and Ringling Bros. Circus in Philadelphia planned by Mr. Foster.

At Schuylkill, an old mill stone from the Pennypacker Mill on the Pickering Creek was brought in and served as the base for the May Pole. The community tradition was the annual May Day celebration with the May Queen and the dances taking place. Today residents still talk of this day and many of the women still have their May Day dresses.

The first addition to Schuylkill Township School was in 1954 when four classrooms, a kitchen, teachers’ room, principal’s office, medical room and toilet facilities were added. The addition was stone quarried from the same quarry that provided the stone for the original building. A library was set up in the basement. In a congratulatory letter to the school in 1954, Superintendent of Schools for Chester County Clyde T. Saylor stated, “The Board of School Directors of Schuylkill Township have rendered a great and important service to the children and adults of Schuylkill Township in providing this fine school with its modern design and its functional features. It makes Schuylkill Township a better place in which to live and to bring up children. Schuylkill Township becomes a stronger component in the life and security of the Nation.” A subsequent addition of eight new classrooms was added in 1961. In 1966, a new upper Schuylkill School
was built for grades 4-6 and the Schuylkill Lower School was connected to the Schuylkill Upper School by a covered walkway. Currently buildings on the site house grades 1-5 and support special needs classes and a Spanish immersion program. A Kindergarten Center houses all district kindergarten children.

Schuylkill Township is (was!) a rural area with mostly farms. The school was source of activity with the May Day event, the Christmas programs, athletic events, the Country Fair, Field Day, the P.T.A., science fairs and other class projects and trips. It is a part of our heritage and a part of the fabric of what our community and Schuylkill Township is about.

Today the Phoenixville Area School District is in need of additional elementary space once again. The proposed plan calls for utilizing the land at the Schuylkill School site. The upper Schuylkill School and the wing additions to the original school are proposed for demolition with construction to be phased in so as to alleviate disruption of the school year with classes in session. Adaptive reuse of the structure is being considered by the PASD.

The original Schuylkill School structure has received its Designation of Eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. This highly recognized and honored designation awarded by a team of architects and preservationists from the Bureau of Historic Preservation in Harrisburg, PA, places this structure as a valued building and one that deserves saving. It represents an important movement in educational history when schools were being consolidated; it represents the important work of a significant individual in the area – Mr. Foster; it represents a sense of people, time and place in the rural communities of our country.

We trust that this proposed PASD plan will command the same accolades given to Schuylkill School by County Superintendent Saylor in 1954. The Phoenixville Area School District is working to make our district a better place in which to live and to bring up children.

Keeping the past and sharing it with our children while living in the present and preparing them for the future is a legacy to strive for as the Phoenixville Area School District and Schuylkill Township work together.

*Sandra S. Momyer has been a resident of Schuylkill Township for 34 years. Mrs. Momyer received her B.A. summa cum laude from Cabrini College in Radnor, PA majoring in American Studies, English/Communications and Arts Administration. She recently retired having worked 18 years as Executive Director at Historic Yellow Springs, Inc., an historic village in Chester Springs, PA. While Executive Director she oversaw the daily operations, secured grants for projects, initiated new programs and events and managed the restoration and preservation of many of the buildings at the site. Born and raised in the farming family in Kimberton, she strives to preserve the history of the people and places of our area. Early in her career she worked at the Schuylkill School where her husband, Robert, was a teacher and principal.*