



# HAMBURG AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINDOWS TO THE PAST... *The Official Newsletter of the Hamburg Area Historical Society*

Volume 24, Issue 3

*"Preserving Our Past for the Future"*

Summer 2025

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As the excitement builds for our new museum, I would like to pay homage to our current museum, and recap its history.

In 1784 a large portion of land, including where our house sits, was sold to Philip Shatz and wife Catharina. Between 1784 and 1853, no recorded deed could be found as to when our stone house was built. This is a frustrating point when researching old houses, I have the same problem dating my own log house. However, our town experienced a lot of growth in that time period, including the building of the Schuylkill Canal, and in 1837 the borough of Hamburg was incorporated. It was during this time we think the house was built. In 1853 a deed recorded the sale of the property by Philip Shatz (probably son or grandson of the aforementioned) to J.A. Beitenman and wife Henrietta. They then sold the property in 1876 to Rebecca Reifsnnyder, the first deed to mention a building on the property. With a gap between 1876 and 1902, we then see a deed recorded when William Keistler sold it to William and Llewellyn Saul. They then sold it to Henry Sievert in 1908. Days later, Sievert sold it to William "Billy" Billman. Unmarried, Billy worked in the two side rooms of the house as a shoemaker, and his sister and mother occupied the other portion.

The next known owners were Adam and Cora Wagner, purchasing the property in 1911. Adam worked at the broom works during the day, and repaired watches and clocks in the evening. Like Billy, he also utilized the two side rooms on the east side of the house for his business. Their daughter Helen married Edwin Grim and moved into their own home, but in 1952 returned to the stone house and purchased it from Harold and Ruth Weidenheimer. Helen Grim remained in the house for many years.

Our Historical Society bought the house in 2002 from the Higgs family. Within two years we were able to pay off our debt because a generous member of our Society paid the publishing cost of our first Hamburg history book, enabling all proceeds from the book to cover our mortgage.

So there are gaps in our timeline information. If anyone can fill in information, please contact us.

That brings us to the next chapter. We are working with a realtor to soon list the stone house for sale. Many people have walked through our doors, for research, curiosity, history tours, a visit with Santa, or just our members working on the house or brick walkway, and preserving our history. We have been blessed with our accomplishments.

As our relationship with this proud, enduring building comes to an end, with a few tears, we are looking forward to a new beginning. I believe in the saying "When one door closes, another will open." We hope to see all of you walk through our new doors and help build new memories to preserve for the future.

Special thanks to Brian Riegel for information from his 2003 President's Message in our newsletter, providing documentation and research on our stone house.

Deb Billman, president

## COMING EVENTS

**August 30** - Taste of Hamburger-er Festival. We will have our stand set up on 3<sup>rd</sup> St. near the Library. Can you help? See article on page 2

*Our schedule of regular meetings starts up again in September. Our meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month, unless otherwise noted, beginning at 7 p.m. in the LGI room at the high school. An interesting program follows the meeting. Free to all.*

**September 4** - Meeting 7 p.m. Program is The Code Girls from WWII, by Hallie Vaughan.

**October 2** - Meeting 7 p.m. Program by The Bootleg Knitter, sheep to shawl process and dyeing wool.

**November 6** - Meeting 7 p.m. Program is Civil War medicine, by David Smoot.



*Our dear old stone house*

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## **MORE DONATIONS TO BUILDING FUND**

Have you seen how far our new building has progressed? But there is much still to be done, and the need for money to pay the bills is ongoing. So we are very grateful that donations still keep coming in. The following were received since January 1, 2025. Some of these people also donated before.

### **\$5,000:**

Don and Pat Pitkin

### **\$2,500:**

Hamburg Rotary Club

Kore Mart Ltd.

### **\$1,000:**

James Beltz

Marcia Scharadin

Ronald Kunkel

### **\$500:**

Phil Kistler

Kathryn Becek

Janet Barr

Karen Fister

Sandra Dietrich

James and Ann Steffel

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Henry and Cathy Correll

John and Marie Rightmyer

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Maurine Porter

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Audrey Kunkle

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Larry and Susan Miller

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Lara Thomas

Roy and Darlene Berstler

Randall and Lori Dunkelberger

William and Donna Dusso

Richard Seyfert

Bruce and Dennese Shaak

Dennis Kramer

## **NEW MEMBERS**

Dean and Becky Schreffler, Hamburg

Jeff Schrepple, Seabeck, WA

Nathan and Sylvia Stutzman, Hamburg

Frederick Mengel, Shoemakersville

## **ANOTHER BBQ**

Our BBQ that we held in April, featuring Smokin' Rubs pulled pork, was a very successful effort. Our total profit from that was \$4,513. That included over \$1,100 from our baked goods table! A big thank you to all the helpers, and those who sold tickets, made those baked goods, and of course enjoyed the dinners.

We think it would be a good idea to have another BBQ in the fall, tentative date October 19.

## **HAMBURGER FESTIVAL COMING UP !**

Our area says farewell to summer by celebrating the many ways to enjoy ground beef patties and salute the name of our town. Our Historical Society takes part in the Taste of Hamburg-er festival each year with our popular stand on North Third Street. Under canopies, we have a Used Jewelry stand, a dime toss game, a fish pond for little kids, and a table where we sell our books and other things. If you can spare an hour or two to help set up, tend, or take down our stands, please call an officer or board member (contact numbers on back page of Newsletter) to volunteer.

We collect used costume jewelry, purses, and jewelry boxes for this annual event, so if you have these and any rings, pins, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, or jewelry for men and children, give a call to 610-562-5904. We will pick it up or tell you where to drop it off. Our stand is a very popular place, due to the quality and variety of what we offer.

We hope to see you on North Third Street on August 30.

## MYSTERY PHOTO

That old photo in our Spring issue was recognized by quite a few people as the old Raubenhold (later Moyer's) Hardware Store on 4<sup>th</sup> Street. Calling with the answer were Bill Dalious, Debbie Devine, Gary Hasenauer, Jane and Adam Kershner, Sylvia Summons, Elaine Spatz, Randy Specht, Darrell Dietrich, David Trump, and Jesse Shrom. Some had relatives that at some time lived in an apartment in that building, some had lived there themselves. Many of us can remember when there was still a portico out front, and at Easter season there were live chicks in the window, for sale in a variety of pastel colors.

The Raubenhold's store was established around 1884. Charles and Mary Moyer bought the store and adjoining residence in 1944, and in 1971 it passed to the next generation, Donald and Joyce Moyer and Jean and Mel Horning. As Moyer's, the façade was modernized, and the portico taken away. What a wonderful place it was! A wide variety of just about anything one might need, from tools and paint and hardware to gifts and garden supplies. You could buy nails by the pound, pick out an exact number of little bits of hardware from tiny drawers, get vegetable seeds by weight, and chicken wire by the foot. And you didn't leave the store without cheerful conversation with the owners and staff. In 1983 the firm was sold to Jesse and Nancy Shrom, who continued the business for a time. In March 2008, when that location was a fitness center, there was a fire, started by workmen on the roof, that destroyed this historic building, and it is now a parking lot.

If you can identify the new Mystery Photo, call 610-488-1817 and leave a message. You will get a call back.



*Mystery Photo*

## THE LITTLE RIVERS OF HAMBURG

*By Dale Graff*

The Hamburg borough has four little rivers, two of them flow through the town and the other two are at the town's north and south boundaries. These little rivers are usually considered as small streams, runs, or mere creeks or "cricks." Those of us who lived near them as children considered them little rivers. Do you know their names, the location of their sources, or where they flow through town?

A map of 1861 identified the creeks that flow through Hamburg as Mill Creek and Kaercher's Creek. The ones at the north and south boundaries are unnamed. The Furnace Creek that flows from the Hamburg Reservoir originates from springs in the valley and plateau that slope up to The Pinnacle. However, it is diverted east by slightly higher terrain and flows into Maiden Creek at Lenhartsville.

The creek at the north side of Hamburg flows along Mountain Road and has a source at the mountain spring that supplies the dam at the Olivet Camp. It flows under a bridge at Port Clinton Ave., goes into a remnant of the canal, and into the Schuylkill River north of Hamburg's Etchberger Memorial Park. This north side creek could be named Olivet Creek to acknowledge its source.

The borough's south side creek originates from springs along Old Route 22 near Monument Road and Sunday Road in Windsor Twp. It could be named Sunday Creek since it originates close to the Sunday homestead. It flows under bridges at Sunday Road and through a culvert built for the abandoned railroad route in the meadow east of the Monument Road bridge. The creek continues under bridges at Windsor Castle Road, Woodland Road, and passes under Route 61 near Outten Chevrolet. This is near the site of the former Christman Ice Cream facility (1930s – 1950s) that attracted long lines of customers waiting eagerly for heaping scoops of ice cream.

The Mill Creek has its origin from several springs. The main branch begins east of Hamburg near Mountain Road and Valley Road. It is joined by two creeks that originate from Reidenhour's farm and from spring-fed ponds at the Hamburg Game Assoc. on N. 5<sup>th</sup> Street. It flows under I-78 and through the old culvert at the earthen bridge constructed for a planned railroad route that was abandoned in the 1880s. Then it enters Hamburg at Belmont Avenue, passes under the Franklin Street bridge and the State Street bridge (now called Sgt. Jackie Seltzer Memorial Bridge), goes past Weis Grocery, drops under Leibensperger Funeral Home, goes under S. 4<sup>th</sup> and S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets, passes First U.C.C., continues in a deep channel behind houses on Washington Street, angles south and turns west past Kinley Ford, goes under Route 61, and into the Schuylkill River.

The Mill Creek has two flood control dams that were built in 1965. The largest one is on the main branch and can contain several acres of water. The smaller one is on a creek that originates on the Reidenhour farm. These dams could be used for irrigation, but would require dredging due to sediment accumulation.

A map of Hamburg in the *1876 Illustrated Historical Atlas of Berks County* indicates a large dam existed on Mill Creek north of the State Street bridge. Another reference identifies it as Shomo's Dam. It was the source of ice cut in large blocks and stored in a nearby ice house for summer use, and was a great place for ice skating. Two children drowned there when they broke through the ice. During

summer, swimmers enjoyed dipping into the cool spring-fed water.



*Source of Kaercher Creek at former Hershey Orchard*

Kaercher's Creek originates at a mountain spring near Reservoir Road that fills two small dams at Stone Spring Farms, currently a venue available for public events. This is the site of the former Hershey's Peerless Orchard, where local teenagers endured long hot summer days picking fruit. The creek flows past St. Paul's Smoke Church, through the valley below Edenburg, and enters the 32-acre lake at Kaercher Creek Dam. It spills out of the dam at a flow chute and goes through another culvert under an earthen bridge built for that abandoned railroad route. Then it passes the municipal facility of the Hamburg Fire Co.,



*Kaercher Creek drops under Plow Works at 4<sup>th</sup> Street*

goes under Hamburg Manufacturing Co., (formerly Hamburg Plow Works). It passes through open channels beyond 4<sup>th</sup> Street and goes under Always Towing Co. on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and The Mill On Third Street (formerly Windsor Knitting Mill), now a historical building. It runs close to Walnut Street, angles south at Peach Street, turns at the Niagara Water Corp. facility, passes under Rt. 61, enters the old canal and a swampy area, and drains into the Schuylkill River.



*Kaercher Creek near Always Towing & former Windsor Mill*

The little rivers became destructive when heavy rain filled their narrow channels. Significant flooding occurred in 1906 and 1942, The August 1906 flood was devastating. Intense rain filled the creeks. The Shomo Dam on Mill Creek ruptured, and the Pine St. and S. 4<sup>th</sup> St. bridges were washed away. High water from Mill and Kaercher Creeks merged and swirled through town, causing destruction. Debris blocked culverts, water surged over streets, pushing logs and other objects into buildings. Some structures near Mill Creek were crushed against the S. 3<sup>rd</sup> St. bridge. People had to be rescued, some from upper floors. There was one drowning. Another death was from typhoid that swept the area after the flood subsided.

The culverts under the earthen bridges for that abandoned railroad on Mill Creek and Kaercher Creek became partially blocked by debris, creating unintended dams that held back acres of rushing water. Otherwise, flood damage in Hamburg would have been much worse.



*Mill Creek flood debris, South 3<sup>rd</sup> Street*

The flood in 1942 destroyed the Franklin Street and Pine Street bridges and entered many basements and lower floors. In 1974, rain from Hurricane Agnes again inundated the area, but far worse destruction was prevented by the

Kaercher Creek Dam, completed just a few weeks earlier, following 12 years of planning and construction. In 2018 high water from blocked culverts again entered homes on Washington Street.

Children along Washington Street had Mill Creek as their play area. Riding a bike through the creek, wading during summer, looking for stones and bottles, catching crayfish and minnows, provided adventure and learning opportunities. There are stories of a mysterious waterhole known as The Umsey, over a century ago, that attracted activity. This was probably a pond in the old canal system at the south end of town.

At recent festivals, dozens of yellow rubber ducks were dropped into Mill Creek from the 4<sup>th</sup> Street bridge. Spectators waited to welcome the ducks when they bounced their way across the finish line at the South 3rd Street bridge.



*Mill Creek behind Washington Street houses*

Those who grew up in Windsor Township had entire meadows for exploring. The south side creek ran through my parents' farm and was our "little river," a place for letting imagination flow. My sister Joanne and I constructed small boats from sticks, cups and other floatable objects and launched them on the slow current. We followed them to the fence line at the next farm, wondering if they would pass through Hamburg for other children to see, and if our tiny craft would reach the distant Schuylkill River and the faraway ocean. We moved stones, searching for crayfish, fished with safety-pin hooks and grasshoppers for bait, and were occasionally startled by wriggling water snakes. We watched kingfishers dive into deep pools, and water "doctors" skate across ponds. We built small dams of clay and mud that lasted until the next thunderstorm. In the evening while walking in the meadow we heard the splash of muskrats as they jumped to safety.

All the little rivers of Hamburg flow from within a 12-square-mile bowl-shaped area in Windsor Township and gradually descend about 300 feet in elevation, into the Schuylkill River. Many small meadow streams combine to become the creeks we see from the bridges in Hamburg.

These little rivers can remind us of Hamburg's milling history, the pastoral streams that create them, the destructive floods, and many other situations. They may stir up memories of wading in cool water, searching for something. We can drive around Windsor Township and look for the springs and ponds that give birth to them. Or we can stand at the bridges and wonder about all the incidents associated with these small streams, these "little rivers", that flow through our town.

## **MAKING PROGRESS**

Work continues at our new museum at 4<sup>th</sup> and Franklin, inside and out. As these recent photos show, porch posts are up, but the railings are still needed, as well as the stone work on the outside walls. Inside, heating and plumbing work was done prior to pouring the concrete floor.

In addition to the large display areas, there will be a library/board room, a kitchen, two restrooms, and storage space. Would you like to see your name or that of a loved one permanently displayed as sponsors of specific areas or items, such as shelves, windows, lighting or landscape features? We appreciate and will honor those whose efforts help to preserve our unique history.



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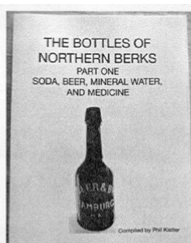
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Our annual membership dues is \$25 per household.

Our Museum at 102 State Street is open each Sunday afternoon, except holidays, from 1 to 4 p.m. We are proud of our large collection of photos and newspaper clippings, books on historical subjects, yearbooks, histories of towns and churches, and 100 years of *The Hamburg Item* newspapers. We have artifacts of all kinds to pique your interest. Come and browse to your heart's content. Admission is free.

Check out our Memorial Brick Walkway in front of the Museum. Memorial bricks may be ordered at any time, with any names you want, limited to three lines of print. Order forms are available at the Museum, or call 610-488-1817.

Our various books may be purchased at the Museum.

Hamburg Area 1752-1852

Hamburg Area 1850-2000

In Our Neck of the Woods (2<sup>nd</sup> printing)

Home Cooking and Eating Out (5<sup>th</sup> printing)

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