

SCHWENKSVILLE BOROUGH

A HISTORY OF SCHWENKSVILLE

The Schwenksville Bicentennial Committee originally published the following article in booklet form. A few minor changes have been made in format but the article remains substantially as written.

Many thanks are owed to those who researched this information. Today we are in need of someone to fill in the time frame from 1976 to the present. Contact the Borough of Schwenksville if you interested.

On the occasion of the celebration of the Two Hundred Years of our nation's Declaration of Independence, the BICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE of the Borough of Schwenksville, Pennsylvania, agreed to assemble pertinent data regarding the growth of Schwenksville. The task to research and compile the historical data was undertaken by MARY BELTZ KEHS.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT IS ALSO MADE TO FRANK, FRANKLIN AND BARBARA
RENNINGER WHOSE GENEROSITY MADE IT POSSIBLE TO PUBLISH THE
ORIGINAL BOOK.

PREFACE

Towns, villages and cities, like a family, have a cohesive life-thread from its origin through to its maturity. This composite picture is structured by the individuals involved. The progress of an area reflects the positive drives, dreams and ambitions of the people.

Schwenksville Borough grew out of an Indian Territory. Its development reflects a part of the fabric intimately woven into the whole structure of our nation.

May this small book be of some help to present and future generations in their strides toward progress and happiness.

by JOSEPH L. BEHMER

Long before the first settlers came to the area now known as Schwenksville, the Lenni Lenape Indians, a branch of the Delaware Tribe, made their home here. In 1684, the land of the Perkiomen Valley was ceded to William Penn by the Indians.

The name Perkiomen is of Indian origin, the earliest mention of which appears in the deed of 1684 as Pahkehoma. Home's map of 1704 lists the name as Perquamink, and in 1749, it appears as Perkiomy. Two interpretations of the name Perkiomen have been given, one being, "where the cranberries grow". and the other, "cloudy waters" In years past it was not unusual for farmers and local residents to find arrowheads and other Indian artifacts on their property. Legend also has it that the rock formation known as Kettle Rock, located on Spring Mountain, was used by the Indians for the purpose of grinding corn or heating water.

Schwenksville, which was once a part of Perkiomen-Skipack Township, dates its early history to 1718 when 600 acres of land on the east bank of the Perkiomen Creek were conveyed by Joseph Kirkbride and Thomas Stevenson of Bucks County to Hans Yost Heijt (Heyt). Stevenson had purchased this land from the Penningtons, who had secured it in 1681 from William Penn, for the purpose of allocating it to other settlers. Heijt sold the property on January 9, 1730 to John Pawling, at which time a grist-mill is mentioned in the deed. His heirs sold it in 1747 to Peter Pennypacker (Pennebecker Pennybecker), who added a fulling-mill in 1755. The Skipack Road, which was laid out in 1713 by Hendrick Pennypacker, had by this time been extended from Whitmarsh to Pennypacker Mills.

In 1770, Peter Pennypacker died, leaving the property on the East Side of the Perkiomen to his son, Samuel, including the mill, which is now the site of "The Red Fox Inn." The land on the West Side of the creek, where Schwenksville later developed, was left to his son, William.

According to a complete census of Perkiomen Township taken in June 1756 by Walter Johnson, constable, there were 83 householders and heads of families and 18 single men. Of the former, 18 were renters, 3 were millers, 1 fuller, 9 weavers, 2 tailors, 1 blacksmith, 2 tanners, and 1 locksmith. Among these early landowners we find the names of "Peter Pennypacker, miller, 8 children under 21 years, 500 acres, 300 unimproved, 100 clear, 25 with corn, 7 horses, 14 cattle, and 15 sheep; Henry Pennypacker, miller, 3 children under 21, 100 acres, 50 cleared, 15 in corn, 1 bound servant, 4 horses, 4 cattle, and 4 sheep; Jacob Markley, farmer and collector, 4 children, 150 acres, 50 clear, 1 horse and 3 cattle; William Ziegler, weaver, 120 acres; Henry Keely, 100 acres; Solomon Grimley, 150 acres. "

It is interesting to note at this point that in 1884, in conjunction with the Montgomery County Centennial, there was an exhibit of antiquities, with people from all over the County exhibiting family pieces. A descendent of this early Solomon Grimley, also a Schwenksville resident, was one of the exhibitors. Among the many articles he is credited with exhibiting were two large, pewter, funeral bread and wine plates. Mr. Grimley furnished the following information as to the history of the plates:

"In olden times, people sometimes had to drive five and ten miles to the church and burying place with their dead. It was customary to provide bread, cake and wine on such occasions for the refreshment of those in attendance. The daughter of a principal farmer was selected, who took a large pewter plate, laden with bread and cakes, and stationed herself on the side of the path by which the procession was to pass from the church to the grave. A young man, son of one of the farmers of the first class, held a large plate upon which was a bottle of wine or whiskey and a wine cup, and took a position opposite the young woman. Each person 'in passing took a piece of bread or cake from the maiden, and then turned to the other side and took a sip of wine from the cup, which the youth replenished from time to time. My grandmother, Mary Keely, who died in 1848, told me that she was on one occasion chosen to hold the bread plate, and that it was deemed a great honor to be a Leichenwarter, or funeral waiter.

As early as 1728, Valentine Keely owned land in Perkiomen Township, part of which is now included in the Schwenksville Cemetery. In 1762, he donated a portion of his ground for the building of a log school and church. This building is no longer standing. The building was used by all denominations in this area at that time, including a group of Mennonites. The story is told that on one cold Sunday morning in 1818, the Mennonites prepared to hold service in the Keely school. When the fire was built and lit, the room quickly filled with smoke. Upon investigation, it was discovered that the stovepipe had been stuffed with wet rope! Because of this incident, the Mennonites felt that they were no longer welcome at Keely's and later built their own meeting house on ground purchased from Andrew Ziegler for the token sum of \$1.00. The meetinghouse was located on Mine Hill, and in 1893, it was torn down and the church was built in Schwenksville, where it stands today. The sanctuary of Eden Mennonite Church was dedicated in 1895, and in 1947, the home of Henry Dorn, a blacksmith in town for many years, was purchased as a parsonage.

Sometime after the Revolutionary War, Keely's church was enlarged and divided into two compartments, one being set apart for worship, and the other for educational purposes. In 1834, Keely's church and school was torn down, and in 1835, the Lutheran and Reformed congregations laid the cornerstone for a new building on this site. This building is no longer standing.

Although there is no substantiated evidence of which is truth and which is fiction, the recording of the early colonial history of this area would not be complete without mentioning the old copper mine that is in the vicinity of what is now the Mennonite Cemetery. Records indicate that operations were in progress prior to 1720, and it is believed that efforts to mine this copper were begun as early as 1695. The leader

supposedly was Andrew Hamilton who with James Logan, William Penn's secretary, formed a corporation. An old English history, dated 1747, tells of the mine being opened by King George II in 1734, at which time two shiploads of ore were readied for England and the remainder of the ore hidden for their return trip.

After the death of Hamilton, complications resulted over the claims of the different associates in the mining company and their heirs. Finally in 1722, the court appointed four trustees to sell the mining lands to the highest bidder, and equitable distribution of the proceeds was made. As a result, the Perkiomen Copper Mining Company was chartered by an act of Assembly. The Revolutionary War seems to have interrupted mining operations, as evidence points to the fact that the vein was hidden and work stopped to prevent the British from procuring the ore.

An attempt to re-open the mine prior to World War I proved unprofitable because of the low-grade ore that was found, but in the cleaning-out process, eighty tons of copper ore valued at \$2,500 were found buried within 50 feet of the shaft. Supposedly, this was the ore that had been hidden to await the return of the British ships.

Over the years, many strange tales of the mine were circulated, one of which involves two adventurers who were determined to find the hidden ore. They entered the shaft with candles and began working at removing some heavy stones that blocked their way. After the removal of several stones, an icy blast hit them and blew out the candles. They hastily withdrew, claiming that a "spirit" of the mine guarded the treasure.

The Revolutionary War not only halted whatever mining operations there were, but it also brought to the Schwenksville area a claim to fame in the person of General George Washington who, with approximately 10, 000 men, camped in and around this vicinity before and after the battle of Germantown.

The events preceding the encampment here had been disastrous for Washington. He had been defeated at Brandywine, September 11, 1777, and retreated from there to Pottsgrove while the British @crossed the Schuylkill below Valley Forge and proceeded to Philadelphia. According to a journal kept by a Lieutenant McMichael, the army left camp in Pottsgrove at 9:00 a.m. on the morning of September 26 and headed toward Pennypacker's Mills. They came by way of Trappe, and crossed on the old farm roads, one of which may possibly be Township Line Road. It is reported that the settlers of this area survived the army's encampment by taking a supply of excess food, livestock and grain to Oley Valley. Supplies were also hidden in the caves of Spring Mountain and Stone Hill.

Researchers seem to agree that Washington used the home of Samuel Pennypacker as his headquarters prior to the battle of Germantown. This house, at the head of Skippack Road, would seem to be the logical place for a strategically situated headquarters, since the Skippack Road was the main road to Philadelphia at that time. It was here that Washington drew up the plans for the attack on the British at Germantown. It was here, too, that on Sunday, September 28th, Washington received the heart warming news of

General Gates' victory over General Burgoyne at Stillwater, New York. To celebrate this success, Washington ordered that at four o'clock all the troops be paraded and served with a gill of rum per man! Furthermore, thirteen pieces of cannon were fired from the Artillery Park in light of this victory. The commotion raised by the cannon fire was apparently so loud that the Rev. Muhlenberg in Trappe, a good five miles away, wrote of hearing "heavy cannon fire in the afternoon". Another recorded event of this day was that a court martial was held at a house above the Pennypacker home. Colonel James Wood, presiding, found that Robert Cragg, accused of repeated disobedience of orders, and Adjutant Kincaid, charged with not bringing his picquet on the grand parade in proper time, were not guilty, and therefore were acquitted.

On Monday, September 29th, General Washington took leave of the home of Samuel Pennypacker and led his army to the Mennonite Meeting House on the Skippack Road where they encamped several days. After the Battle of Germantown on October 3, 1777, which ended in defeat for the American forces, Washington returned to this area with his wounded, many of whom were dropped along the way to be cared for by farm families. Other wounded were housed at Pennypacker's Mill, while it is reported still others were carried by the way of Frog Hollow (Centennial Street area and beyond) to Keely's Church, where a hospital had been set up. About 250 soldiers who died here are buried in the Schwenksville Cemetery.

Reports that Washington used the Henry Keely home as a headquarters after the battle of Germantown may be absolutely correct; at any rate, Valentine Keely II, who was about 20 years old at the time of the encampment, recalled a large circular grave being dug on the farm of his father, Henry, and many soldiers being buried there.

On October 8, 1777, General Washington moved his troops from the valley and proceeded toward Towamencin where he attended the funeral of General Nash. The General had been wounded at the battle of Germantown, and is buried in the Towamencin Mennonite Cemetery.

No doubt one of the witnesses to Washington's encampment was George Schwenk (Schwenck), who is credited with founding the town of Schwenksville in 1756. It is a known fact that his son, Abraham, was in Washington's army. George was the son of Hans Michael Schwenk, who, with his parents and brother, Hans Jacob, came to this country from Germany on the ship "Lydia" in 1741. These early, Pennsylvania German settlers, fleeing from religious and political persecution in the Palatinate, made their way to ports in Holland from where they booked passage for America. Arriving here, Hans Michael Schwenk purchased farmland in Frederick Township, and his son, George, built a home on what is now Faust Road. Later, George moved and built a more substantial house in the vicinity of where the East Branch Creek joins the Perkiomen, three-quarters of a mile southeast of Schwenksville. There, in addition to farming, he plied his trade as a blacksmith, making tools for the cop per mine.

It was not until 1816, however, that George's grandson, Jacob, seeing the possibility of further settlement in this area, built a dwelling and store on the site of the oldest

settlement in the borough of Schwenksville (now the Schwenksville Inn). Before the Revolutionary War, this site had belonged to the Pennypacker estate, and evidently some building had been begun by a Mr. Ott. From time to time, Jacob accommodated travelers at his store that were unable to cross the Perkiomen in flood time, and in 1845, this dwelling, which by then had been extended, developed into the Farmers and Mechanics Hotel. In 1847, Jacob built a larger store across the street, which was destroyed by fire in 1892.

After his death in 1852, the store was willed to a son, Jacob G. Schwenk, and the hotel plus 76 acres of land to another son, Abraham, who is credited with laying out the plan for the town of Schwenksville. A daughter, Elizabeth Schwenk Strassburger, inherited land from what is now Maple Street down to the intersection of Routes 29 and 73, then up over the hill to the area of the school buildings. Because Abraham's wife did not care for the hotel business, he eventually sold it, and in 1856, built the large, brick house located on Main Street across from the Renninger building. Six generations of Schwenks lived there until it was sold during the 1960's.

The Farmers and Mechanics Hotel passed through a succession of owners, among whom were James Hendricks and Manassas Bean. At the time of the Bean ownership, the building directly across the street was used as a livery stable with meeting rooms on the second floor, and was known as Bean's Hall. In 1922, Edward Krupp bought the hotel and operated it successfully for about 30 years, having a longer tenure than any of the previous owners.

After the sale of the hotel, Abraham Schwenk and his brother-in-law, Reuben Strassburger, founded the coal and lumber business that is now Schmoyer's. In 1872, Strassburger was killed by shifting cars when he fell onto the railroad tracks while unloading one of the cars. In 1880, the business was sold to A. H. Keely, who was succeeded by his son, H. P. Keely. H. P. Keely graduated from the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, and for a short time practiced in this capacity. He was also active in politics, serving as County Treasurer and Superintendent of the Montgomery County Highway Department.

The 1848 William E. Morris Map of Montgomery County shows the location of Schwenk's Store, the Pennypacker Mill (which was Hunsberger's at that time), Weaver's Mill, and the home and blacksmith shop of J. Steiner.

During the Revolutionary War, Weaver's Mill was known as Detwiler's Mill. It was rebuilt in 1865 by David Wasser and Thomas Zendt. For many years, it was owned by the Kratz family and was one of the last roller mills on the Perkiomen to make flour under the trade names of "Pride of the Perkiomen" and "Globe Flour". It is now owned by Frank and Dorothy Morgan, housing apartments and businesses.

The tiny community was beginning to send down roots when the first post office was established here on March 6, 1838. It was known as Schwenk's Store, and it was in the store that the post office was located, with Jacob serving as the first postmaster. During

the years the post office has, known many locations and many postmasters, but from all available evidence, Irvin Mavberry served the community as postmaster for the longest period of time. It was during the 1850's that George Bear, who owned the marble and Granite works on Centennial Street, served as postmaster. At this time the post office was housed in a small frame building on his property. This building has now been moved to a location in the meadow near the wastewater plant.

The Marble and Granite works of George Bear were eventually sold to Frank Z. Kehs who, with his son Edgar, operated them for many years. At the time Edgar Kehs sold the property on Centennial Street in 1975, this business, along with Schmoyer's, had the distinction of being the oldest business in the borough of Schwenksville in continuous operation since the time of its founding. The Farmers and Mechanics Hotel was older but passed through a period when it was not in operation.

In the same year that the post office was established, the Montgomery County Commissioners built a long wooden bridge across the Perkiomen in the South end of town. Because Pennypacker Mills were now owned by the Hunsberger family, the bridge became known as Hunsberger's Bridge. This bridge burned in 1923, and was believed to be the work of arsonists since evidence of kerosene was found. No one was ever convicted, however, even though a \$1,000 reward was offered by the commissioners for any information leading to the culprits.

During the year 1846, the Perkiomen and Sumneytown Turnpike was extended through the village, and a toll house was built at the south end of Main Street. The toll house keeper was Amos Keely, and in 1873, he was succeeded by Moses Pennypacker. The Turnpike extended as far as Green Lane, with corporation headquarters in Zieglerville. Because of its location in the angle between the Turnpike and the Great Road, the Colonial Inn became an important stage coach stop. Later, this Turnpike became known as Gravel Pike. In 1920, the road was macadamized, and in 1947 it was widened, at which time the old toll house in Schwenksville was torn down.

As early as 1830, plans had been discussed for a railroad that would run parallel to the Perkiomen, connecting the Philadelphia and Norristown roads with the Lehigh area. Operations finally began in 1868 at Perkiomen junction in Chester County. The road traveled into the valley through Collegeville, Rahns and Graterford, ending at Skippack Station one-half mile below town. A year or so later, it was continued to Schwenksville. The first locomotive to arrive in Schwenksville on the newly laid track was appropriately named "The Perkiomen".

Morris Carl was the station agent in 1903, the year that Fred Buhman moved to Schwenksville and began his employment as a telegraph operator. Mr. Buhman became the station agent in 1911, and served in that capacity until his retirement in 1949.

Passenger service was good and well patronized, especially during the summer months when extra cars were added to accommodate the people who vacationed in this area.

Woodside Manor, Perkiomen Inn, Spring Mountain House, The Cedars, and the Weldon House were among the establishments catering to "die summer frischlers" (a Pennsylvania Dutch expression meaning "those summer people who came to refresh themselves"), as well as nearby boarding houses. The high spot of the day for the local residents was to meet the trains that carried all of the vacationers.

The peak of railroading was from 1900 to 1920, after which cars and trucks reduced the amount of railroad patronage. After World War II, passenger service in Schwenksville was limited to one train in each direction per day. Eventually, a passenger car was attached to the end of a few freight cars, and by 1960, passenger service had been discontinued altogether. Because tracks have been taken up north of Schwenksville, there is no longer any direct freight transportation between Schwenksville and Allentown.

The "good old days" of the steam trains were relived in September 1960 when the Reading Company's "Iron Horse Ramble" made a two-hour stop in Schwenksville. The day's events, under the chairmanship of Howard Buhman, included exhibits, craft displays, and the monumental task of preparing and serving a chicken supper to the 1200 passengers. Members and friends of the Community Library, under the direction of Mrs. Hugh Schmidt, managed to make this dinner an outstanding event for Schwenksville's visitors. Other "Iron Horse Rambles" visited Schwenksville in the following years, with Marvin Lewis acting as chairman for several years. Unfortunately the Reading Company eventually found it unprofitable to continue these excursions. It was this occasion, however, that gave birth to "Touch of Dutch Days".

It was with the advent of this railroad in the late 1860's that the community experienced its first growth spurt. Because of this convenient means of transporting goods to Philadelphia or Allentown, more businessmen found Schwenksville an attractive location.

Albert Bromer adopted the town as his home in 1864 when he started a small clothing manufacturing business in his home with one employee. He and his wife Catherine were the parents of 11 children, three of whom remained in Schwenksville . . . Jacob, Elizabeth (the wife of Irvin Schwenk), and William, who took over his father's business in 1889. Until William's retirement in 1907, the business employed about 600 people with an output of 8,000 garments per week.

In order to house his growing business, Albert Bromer designed, and engaged Peter Scholl to build, what is the present Fire House. On the ground floor of this building, clothing was cut and was distributed by wagon to the homes of the women who "sewed for Bromer". These women received about \$1.00 for a finished garment. When the work was completed, the garments were brought back to Bromer's, pressed, packed and transported to Philadelphia stores by horse and wagon. Later, clothing was packed in big boxes and sent to Philadelphia by train.

The horse and wagon team would travel to Roxborough, and there they changed horses and continued into the city. The same procedure was repeated on the return trip. The story is told that often robbers would lie in wait on the Mile Hill for the return wagons from Philadelphia. On one occasion, as the team was making the slow journey up Mile Hill, a robber attempted to board the wagon. The driver's assistant, who evidently carried a hatchet in anticipation of such an encounter, chopped off the robber's fingers, thus keeping the money safe for the Bromers.

Albert Bromer's building became known as Industrial Hall, and in fact, the second floor boasted a large hall used as a place for meetings and entertainment. The third floor of this building was used as a meeting place for the Improved Order of Red Men and the Brotherhood of the Union. No doubt the Hall's most notable gathering was the 1877 Penny packer Reunion. When the 1200 people attending were forced to find shelter wherever possible because of the torrential rains falling that day, they sought refuge in Industrial Hall. Samuel Pennypacker, who became governor of Pennsylvania in 1903, delivered an address on the history of his family to those who could find space in the Hall. (The Governor later retired to the ancestral home east of Schwenksville.) In 1975 this building, along with the Pennypacker home, was placed on the Pennsylvania Inventory of Historic Places.

A frame building on the site of the State Liquor Store was also built by Mr. Bromer and used as a buttonhole shop. Later these buttonhole machines were transferred to the present Borough Hall, and the frame building was rented by Horace B. Harley who manufactured cigars. Nathaniel Kehs, whose father had settled here after his discharge from the Union Army, operated the buttonhole shop.

At the time Albert Bromer arrived in Schwenksville, he found that, in addition to several mills, a store, hotel, and blacksmith shop, the town also boasted a doctor. Dr. Joseph Y. Bechtel graduated from Pennsylvania Medical College in 1856 and came to Schwenksville in October of that year. He soon acquired a large practice that he continued for 57 years. During this time he was often called upon to treat patients as far as ten or twelve miles away. It was the rare good fortune of this small community to have other dedicated physicians who followed "Doc" Bechtel, such as Doctors Markley, Allen, Wilkins, Coles, Whitman, Junker, Hess, Moore and Ginsberg, who is currently the town's physician. It was not until 1928, however, that Dr. Ralph Hammond established a dental practice in town. He was succeeded at the same location by Dr. Bell, and currently Dr. M. Donald Markley is capably serving the community at his office on Second Street.

For many years, "Doc" Bechtel's son John was a druggist, and until his death in the 1950's, he operated his business in a building (no longer standing) north of the Renninger building. It was here that the first telephone exchange in town was located, having a total of 20 subscribers. It was here, too, that the first soda fountain was installed. It is said that there were no better ice cream sodas anywhere. Bechtel's Drug Store dealt only in patent medicines, and it was not until 1957 when Frank and Thelma Hancock opened a pharmacy that prescription drugs could be obtained in the town. This

pharmacy had formerly housed a bakery owned at one time by the Kratz family, and at another time by the Kramers. Several people operated luncheonettes at this location also, among whom were the Robisons and Al Fritz.

During the 1870's, the town continued its slow, development. At this time, it had a total of ' 30 houses. The brick for many of the homes built at that time was obtained at the Miller Brick Yard in Delphi. Second Street was laid out in 1877 and had one home, that of Jacob Renninger. In August of 1879, Perkiomen Avenue was opened from Main Street to Second Street through lands owned by Mrs. Reuben Strassburger. Street lights were of kerosene and Isaac Hunsicker and August Koons were the official lamp lighters. In 1914 the town council entered into a contract for electric street lights.

It is to the credit of these early Pennsylvania German settlers that they not only recognized the need for educating their children, but established schools to meet that need. The first schools were church-related, Keely's Church and School having been mentioned previously. A second school was later built across the road from Keely's. (This building is no longer standing) and in 1849, Benjamin Pennepacker built a school house, which still stands next to the Sparks Building at the corner of Perkiomen Avenue and Main Street.

In 1894 the brick building on top of the hill, known as the Miller Building, was erected by the Perkiomen Township School Board. For ten years, only primary grades were taught in this building, but in 1904, through the efforts of Francis Wack- and a group of interested citizens.. high school classes were established. The Miller Building served the community until 1927 when the J. Horace Landis Building was constructed. This construction followed the merger of Perkiomen and Lower Frederick Townships and the Borough of Schwenksville to form a consolidated school district. At that time, 327 pupils were enrolled in grades one through twelve.

With the increase in pupil enrollment, other new buildings were added until, in 1969, it was deemed advantageous to merge with the Perkiomen Joint School System to become Perkiomen Valley School District.

In addition to educational facilities, the growth of the town had created a need for a variety of other services, and in 1874 the National Bank and Trust Company was founded. The banking business was conducted from the Bardman home (formerly on the south side of the Renninger building) until 1877 when a new building was completed next to the present bank building. In 1927, the bank building on the corner of Main and Centennial Streets was completed at a cost of \$125, 000, and the business was moved into its new quarters. The first Board of Directors included Isaac H. Johnson, Philip Prizer, Benjamin Alderfer, George W. Steiner, Albert Bromer, James H. Price, Jacob G. Schwenk, J. Warren Walt and Isaac Bowman. In 1962, the Schwenksville National Bank and Trust Company merged with the Union National Bank and Trust Company of Souderton.

A second banking establishment, Ambler Savings and Loan, opened on the south corner of Main and Centennial Streets in 1974, next to the Bell Telephone Company Building. The Bell company building and property occupy the site of the former homes of Garfield Dyer, tinsmith, and C. D. Richards, a real estate and insurance broker.

A local newspaper, known at first as "The Weekly Item", was founded in 1877 by the Rev. Nathaniel B. Grubb who operated a printing shop in Schwenksville. For a time during its early years, the Item was printed in the basement of what is now the Timely House Apartments.

Before being turned into apartments, part of the building housed a jewelry business. For many years, Warren K. Schlotterer operated his jewelry shop at this location. Mr. Schlotterer was the town historian, and much of his collection is now in the possession of the Goshenhoppen Historians and housed in the Goshenhoppen Museum in Green Lane.

It was in the basement office of the Item that the first telephone in town was installed, with a line running to the Farmers and Mechanics Hotel. In 1883, the Rev. Grubb was called to supply the First Mennonite Church in Philadelphia, and the publication of the Item was taken over by Irvin Bardman, in whose family it remained until 1948. The present owner and editor, Bruce MacBain, has been serving the interests of the community since 1958.

A few notes from the Item of September 7, 1877:

"Everybody should subscribe to the Item and thus procure a companion for the long winter evenings. Only 75 cents a year. "

"A few nights ago some thief entered the yard of Mr. J. G. Prizer, cashier of the Schwenksville National Bank, and stole some fine peaches. "

"On Wednesday night some idle and mischievous persons entered the drove yard of S. B. Rosenberger of this place, and painted two of his hogs black. "

The following recipe for killing a village, taken from the Item of October 5, 1877, is as timely today as it was then:

1. Put up no more buildings than you can occupy your selves.

- 2 . If you should have an empty building to rent, demand three times its value.
3. Look sorry at every newcomer; give the cold shoulder to every mechanic who desires to come among you.
4. Go abroad for your goods and wares. By no means purchase from your own merchants and manufacturers, even at the same price or less.
5. Don't contribute one cent to the cause of religion or education.
6. Finally, put a thorough finish to your work by killing your local paper, refusing to subscribe for or advertise in it, so that persons at a distance will not know that any business is being done in your village, or they may want to come and settle among you, or buy something from you, and that would put you to extra trouble.

Finally, from the May 24, 1899 issue, the following quote: "Schwenksville could afford and should have a public library. "

The idea for a public library was planted by the Item, but it was not until 35 years later that Eva and Edna Meng, Estelle Kline Goodman, and Mildred Reed Bechtel took the first steps toward establishing a small library in the basement of the former Albert Bromer residence. The library moved to its present location at Second and Church Streets in January, 1957. The building, designed through the donated services of architect Alfred Panepinto, was constructed under the supervision of Wayne Meng at a cost of \$71,650.

From a very modest beginning, the library today houses more than the 12,500 volumes for which it was designed, plus two meeting rooms that are used by various organizations in the community . A unique feature of this library is the fact that it is now, and always has been, entirely supported by volunteer contributions of time, money and books. Over the years many people, like Head Librarian Eva Meng, have contributed countless hours to staffing and conducting the business of the library.

Although Schwenksville may not have had a library in the 1800's, it did have a Literary Society, which was organized in 1877 with the Rev. Grubb as the first president. Because of the opposition to secret societies among the Pennsylvania Germans, one of the most notable debates of this organization was, "Should Secret Societies Be Encouraged?" The affirmative side was upheld by Albert Bromer and Enos Schwenk,

and the negative by A. K. Thomas and G. H. Grater. There seems to be no record of how the issue was resolved.

Those who were not fond of debating could either participate in, or listen to a cornet band, which was led by Charles Whitman and housed in what was known as "The Academy of Music", located on the site of the present Gill residence. Music was provided for picnics, parades and other public functions. The first floor of the Academy was used to house the horse-drawn band wagon, and the second floor served as a meeting room. When this musical organization disbanded, the building was sold and moved to Spring Mount Later, a one story brick building was erected on this site and a Mr. Allem, who was a photographer, conducted his business here. Ross Koons then bought the house and enlarged it, living there with his family for many years..

In 1874 a group of concerned citizens organized the Schwenksville Fire Company, and with money raised from community carnivals, a shallow-well, hand-drawn pumper was purchased and housed in what is now Borough Hall, following its completion in 1880. Water was provided from a well on the hill (near the site of the Miller Building), from which 560 feet of pipe was laid to Industrial Hall. This not only provided water for Industrial Hall, but served a fire hydrant that Mr. Bromer had erected in front of the Hall. The company received its charter and was incorporated May 22, 1907. Volunteer firemen have provided protection to the community and outlying areas since the time of the company's organization, and a capable auxiliary has helped to raise money for equipment. It was not until 1975 that it became necessary to seek additional revenue through taxes. On April 23, 1974 the Fire Company celebrated its 100th Anniversary with a parade and community picnic.

By the turn of the century, according to a booklet "Picturesque Perkiomen Valley", the town had a modern public school house, pretty Lutheran, Reformed and Mennonite Churches, two public halls, a Grand Army Post, a Circle of Brotherhood of America and a Camp of the P.O.S.A., drug store, cigar factory, printing and newspaper office, jewelry store, bank, marble cutter shop, tinsmith, creamery, coal and lumber yard, bakery, clothing factory, and harness shop. "

According to one young "blade" of that era, there were also twenty spinsters in town. Whether or not these women found husbands and raised families in the community is not recorded, but it is a fact that between 1910 and 1930 the population increased by only 24 people.

Jerusalem Lutheran Church and Heidelberg Reformed Church had decided in 1887 that they had outgrown the facilities at Keely , s and it was agreed that each would build their own edifice in town. Records indicate that for these two churches, as well as Eden Mennonite, land for building was either donated or sold for a nominal fee by members of the Schwenk family. It was during the year of 1887 that the cornerstone of Jerusalem Lutheran Church was laid, and in 1890, Heidelberg Reformed Church followed suit. Rev N F. Schmidt had the longest tenure of any minister in the three churches, serving the needs of Jerusalem Lutheran and the community as well from 1889 to 1948.

By 1900, a distinct "upper end" and "lower end" had developed in the town, with the dividing line in the vicinity of the railroad station. Each end was more or less an entity unto itself, having its own hotel, store and hall. The lower end had the Perkiomen Hotel (at one time owned by a Hendricks family and later by the Porr family), Garges Store, and Industrial Hall. In the upper end were Bean's Hotel and Hall, McNoldy and Prizer's Store (established in the same building as Jacob Schwenk's early store. This building was destroyed by fire in 1892, and McNoldy and Prizer rebuilt at the same location), Bechtel's Drug Store- and Beltz's Cigar Factory.

During the early 1900's, Schwenksville was a self contained community, as were all small communities before the coming of the automobile. Christian Allebach built several homes on the hill in the south end of town, and the area became known as "Allebachshteddel" (Allebach Town). Setting up housekeeping was no problem because everything necessary could be bought at Pennepacker and Bromer's General Store. McNoldy and Prizer had sold the store to Jonas Pennepacker and Jacob Bromer in 1907. The store carried a complete line of groceries, clothing, furniture, hardware, utensils, yard goods and notions.

Fred Beltz moved from Norristown to Graterford and then to Schwenksville, where he established a cigar factory in 1900 (a building later converted to apartments and also used by several business including an American Store grocery, Garrel's Music Store, a news stand, and video rental). Branch factories were later established, and at the height of, the business, when cigars were still hand rolled, 5,000,000 cigars a year were manufactured under various brand names, one of which was "El Murillo".

One of the first restaurants in town was owned and operated by John L. Johnson. The outstanding feature of Johnson's Restaurant was Johnny's ice cream, for which he used only pure cream from the creamery. Unfortunately the recipe for this ice cream was lost; quite possibly it was never written down.

Pure dairy products were not hard to come by for these early restaurant and boarding house owners. William Unger who bought the creamery from William and Elsie Ziegler in 1900, had the reputation of manufacturing top quality dairy products. In addition, he also butchered calves and sold poultry. Assisted by John Stevens and David Badman, he sold these dairy and meat products in the Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia, as well as locally. Ice was taken from the dam adjacent to the creamery and used for the cold storage of these products. It is interesting to note at this point the procedure for harvesting ice:

The first step was to square the lines, having straight lines from east to west and north to south. The lines were plowed with a special ice plow, drawn by a horse whose shoes were very sharp. First the lines from north to south were plowed, and then from east to west in the area intended for harvesting. Initially, the plow cut only halfway through the ice. The next step was to open a channel four feet wide, which was used for floating the ice. One man started to open the channel with a large ice saw. Another man, with a spear like fork cut the cakes two feet square. The channel was then completely opened

for floating the ice from the main area. The process was then repeated, with two men sawing and two men separating the cakes with the forks. To load the ice, the cakes were moved through the channel to a platform built at the breast of the dam, where the ice was pushed into a wagon (later trucks) and hauled to the ice house. It was stored there in layer fashion, each layer overlapping the previous layer in order to seal the cracks. After the house was filled, leaving an area of about four feet, the top and sides were covered with sawdust to prevent the ice from thawing.

One of Unger's ice houses is still standing and has been converted into apartments. The large ice house in Schwenksville, which was located in the meadow near the sewer plant, was washed away in a flood in 1902. There is a notation in a diary kept by Mrs. William Bromer that on January 21, 1901, ice was hauled from Leidy's dam in Delphi and stored in the Schwenksville ice house, the job being completed the following day.

When William and Elsie Ziegler sold the creamery to Mr. Unger, they continued the meat and poultry business at their home on Second Street. Later a slaughter house and ice house was built adjacent to the railroad tracks in back of the present Perkiomen Valley apartment building. Three generations of the Ziegler family (sons Harrison and Hastings, and grandsons William and Jonathan) sold meat and poultry in Reading Terminal Market for many years. They established a reputation for high-grade products that was envied by many of their competitors.

A cattle dealer and his son also conducted their business in town. Frank Schwenk and his son, Frank, had a cattle yard near the railroad station where cattle were loaded and unloaded. One of their buyers was Henry Hoff who traveled as far as Ohio to buy for Schwenk. The cattle would be unloaded at night and moved to corrals behind the hotel. Older residents complained of the noise as drovers herded the cattle up Main Street, banging long sticks against fence posts to keep the animals in line and moving. Cattle auctions were conducted on a Monday afternoon, following which local boys from time to time would be given the responsibility of delivering the cows to their new owners. Edgar Kehs recalls herding 25 or 30 cows to Yerkes, walking the whole distance in his bare feet. For this service he was paid 250, and it wasn't until later that his wages were raised to 500.

It was not until 1898 that a petition for incorporation as a borough was circulated among the residents. Many would not sign because they feared an increase in taxes, and it was not until April 6, 1903 that a charter was handed down by the court, and Schwenksville received status as a borough. Elections were held, and Irvin H. Bardman became the first burgess. John G. Prizer was the first president of council, with Jacob Bromer as clerk and Irvin S. Schwenk as treasurer. Some of the many people who have served as burgess of Schwenksville over the years are: Stanley Bardman, Jonathan Miller, Jacob Bromer and Ross Koons. Warren O. Fry was the first to bear the title of mayor, succeeded by Schwenksville's current mayor, Frank Morgan. Present council members are Elizabeth Shellenberger, President, Claudia Foy, Doris Silver, Bertha Magill, Donald Whitko, Gary Krupp, and Paul Chonka, the ladies having scored a surprise victory in November, 1975, running as the Womens Party.

Highland Terrace, developed by Francis Wack in the 1920's, was incorporated into the borough in 1972. This addition plus Spring Mountain Summit Apartments has increased the borough population to over 1,000. The census of 1910, the first taken after the borough's incorporation, showed it to have a population of 381.

Following World War I, the Schwenksville Improvement Company purchased land along the Perkiomen, north of Schwenksville. A park, known as Memorial Park, was established and dedicated August 3, 1919 to the area soldiers and sailors who gave their lives during the war. A pavilion was built, and for many years the American Legion and other organizations held their meetings there. An athletic field was constructed for sports events, a merry-go-round was installed in a building next to the pavilion, motor boat rides were conducted on the Perkiomen, and bath houses were available for swimmers. To further beautify the area, the Ott family was engaged to plant flowers and do some landscaping. Under the early management of Winfield Harley, and later Warren Robison, the park became a center of recreation for people as far away as thirty miles or more. Constant flooding, however, made the management of the park one that proved to be unprofitable. The merry-go-round plus several of the buildings were washed away in floods, and several years ago the pavilion was destroyed by fire.

The annual Farmer's Picnic was one of the events held at the park. Because of the variety of entertainment provided at these picnics, Schwenksville residents looked forward eagerly to picnic time each year. However, this was not the only recreation provided in the community. A movie house was built (the building later was a State Liquor Store for many years and is currently the home of the Tailwind Bike Shop) which showed not only the most popular silent films, but "talkies" as well. There was also some form of entertainment every Friday night in one of the aforementioned halls. Medicine shows were conducted in Bean's Hall, and the story is told that on one occasion Dr. Tait's Medicine Show rented the Hall. Dr. Tait astounded his audience by removing a tapeworm from a local resident, and then displaying it to the audience by holding it high on the end of a stick.

Although it is true that the automobile made villagers less dependent on what Schwenksville offered them in the way of entertainment and shopping facilities, it was responsible for the opening of a new business in town. Ira Simpler and John Tallis opened an automobile repair shop in what is now the Fulmer Apartments (formerly a livestock sales stable and, in later years, a wagon, automobile, and truck paint shop operated by D. W. Keyser). After several years, Simpler dropped out of the business, and Jacob Bromer formed a partnership with John Tallis. The garage was then moved to the ground floor of Industrial Hall, partly because people, when told of the location of the garage, would say, "If my car can get up that hill it doesn't need to be repaired!". At the time of its location in Industrial Hall, Bromer and Tallis also sold Fords and Fordson tractors. Mr. Bromer then purchased the building next door and made an office and auto parts and accessories room out of the store (Garges Store, which, at the time of the sale, was owned by John Rahn). The garage business was forced to move from Industrial Hall when the Seminole Hosiery Mill started manufacturing operations there. Mr. Bromer then built a garage on the site of the former Perkiomen Hotel, which he

operated until his death in 1936 as Bromer Motor Company, John Tallis having dropped out of the partnership. It was then purchased by J. Edwin Miller and operated in much the same fashion for 28 years. Bromer and Miller were both capably assisted in the operation of this business by Oscar Vogt.

The automobile brought a few problems to the borough in the form of motorists who exceeded the speed limit. In 1924, a speed trap was installed, with special police officers employed to enforce it. The result was a bigger problem for the borough when motorists began to avoid Schwenksville altogether. Local merchants complained to council that they were being humiliated by sarcastic remarks and insults from outsiders, and their businesses were suffering. Council agreed to remove the speed trap, and the borough speed limit returned to the 30 mph that was state law, except where posted at 15 mph.

Borough Hall contained a lock-up for many years where constable, Mose Allebach, would confine law offenders. Hoboes deliberately managed to get themselves locked up in order to have a warm place to sleep. Hobo Gus was Schwenksville's "resident" hobo who lodged in George Shoemaker's stable in the extreme southern end of town. There seems to be no record, however, of anyone being confined for breaking the speed limit.

Until 1921, Schwenksville residents supplied their own water through individual wells. It was in that year that Francis Wack, a teacher, surveyor, and magistrate, founded the Schwenksville Water Company. Bonds were sold to finance the project, and a stock company was formed. A well was dug on Highland Terrace, and a standpipe erected to store the water. Today there are two wells and standpipes on Highland Terrace, one well and standpipe on the school grounds, and a fourth well is located behind the post office. In addition to supplying residents in the borough and Maple Hill, water is also sold to the Lower Frederick Water Company and then resold by them to their customers. In 1968, the borough bought the water company from the bond holders.

The problem of waste water, sewage and overflowing cesspools was solved in 1964 when the borough council passed an ordinance that established a modern sewage treatment plant in town. Work began shortly thereafter to connect borough homes to this system.

During the 1930's, residents still referred to "the upper end" and "the lower end" of town. The years had produced some changes, though. Garges' store was once again a grocery store, owned and operated by the Albright family. The Perkiomen Hotel had been replaced by Bromer Motor Company, and the Fire Company had purchased Industrial Hall. Gerald Loelinger, under the Federal Unemployment Education Relief Act, was conducting art classes in the former Beltz Cigar Factory. An American Store was also located in this building, along with the clothing and men's tailoring business of Herman and Harry Becker. Pennypacker and Bromer's General Store was the location of Paragon Bag Company (now the Cla-Mar apartments) owned by Samuel Sherr. David Badman had converted Bean's Hall into a Ford sales agency and garage. Johnny Johnson's restaurant was still operating in that capacity, but under the ownership of

Washington Saylor. The Bechtel Drug Store was still a familiar and reassuring sight to older residents, who were already talking about "all the changes in town".

The 1930's were the years of the depression, and W. P.A. projects were underway across the nation. The Athletic Field at school and the widening and macadamizing of Game Farm Road were the result of the efforts of W.P.A. workers who were assigned to Schwenksville. Twelve additional railroad cars were needed to carry these workers to Schwenksville every day and return them to Philadelphia in the evening.

At a time when few people had the courage to begin a new venture, Frank Renninger moved to Schwenksville with his family in 1930, bought the Warren Bossert home and converted the living room into a grocery store. At the time, Mr. Bossert had a butcher shop in a frame building behind his house. Several additions were built over the course of the years, and eventually, the entire house was utilized to accommodate the growing business. In more recent years, in order to provide parking space for his patrons, Mr. Renninger bought both the Bardman and Bechtel properties and converted the existing area into parking facilities. This, too, proved inadequate for the expanding business, and, in 1975, he and his son, Franklin, opened the beautiful, new supermarket south of Schwenksville on Route 29.

Nostalgia plays a big part in the lives of those who have spent most of their days in Schwenksville. Some of the things residents look back on with fondness are ... roller skate keys hung around the neck on string ... meeting the 7:00 P.M. train ... hair cuts at Hockel's for 25 cents ... ice skating on the Perky ... the ragman ... milk dipped into your own bottle for 40 a quart ... strawberry socials ... the ice houses ... hoboes coming to the back door for a meal ... the first machine permanent wave at Bertha Grey's Beauty Shoppe ... dances and movies at high school during World War II ... gypsies camped in the meadow ... the Community Service Committee ... making daisy chains for high school graduations held in Bromer's Hall ... soap box derby ... "Teddy" Hufnagle's column in the Item during World War II ... buying tickets for the 6:00 A - M. milk train (tickets tied to each milk can with string) ... eating cracklings ... groceries, baked goods, meat and dairy products sold door-to-door ... shoes repaired at LeRoy Fryer's for 250... excursion trains ... And some not so fond memories of... the floods, especially 1935 ... Heidelberg Church fire in 1970 ... our young men lost in the wars ... the flu epidemic in 1918 ... the station fire in 1942.

Tribute must be paid to the hundreds of people who, although they are not mentioned byname, nevertheless helped to establish a community out of the wilderness. Without them and the memories they evoke, this history could not have been recorded. The history of Schwenksville, however, is continually being written by those who call the town "home". The future challenges us to learn what to build and what to preserve, so that we, too, may leave something of ourselves and our dreams to those who follow.

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