



# SCHUYLKILL HERITAGE

*A Newsletter of the Historical Society of Schuylkill County*



Volume 4, Issue 1

*“to discover, procure, and preserve...”*

January - February, 2009

## Moving county history forward into 2009 ...



Happy New Year. I certainly hope it will be a Happy New Year for all of us. Depending on who and what you listen to from the news media, it can be a little unsettling as we watch the roller coaster ride with the stock market and economy.

The financial crisis we are going through does not paint a rosy picture for anyone, and that includes “nonprofits” like us. In November we were advised by the Pennsylvania History and Museum Commission that grant money may not be as plentiful as it was. We too have experienced a shortfall in our annual appeal. Last year we raised \$8,000. This year it is just over \$5,000. With an annual budget around \$62,000 this hurts.

I would rather be optimistic and positive in our outlook for the coming year, however, and not paint a scenario of doom and gloom. Let me tell you why. Our board has been working hard on several projects in the past few months that need mentioning. First we have made some amendments to our Bylaws that will improve the way we govern ourselves. We are expanding our Board to a total of 15 so that we may have better representation throughout the county. We are not the Pottsville Historical Society but the *Historical Society of Schuylkill County*.

We need to develop a means to generate more income so that we can sustain ourselves without depending so much on grant money. For example, we are developing a teacher history education program that will enable teachers to take history courses focused on Schuylkill County history. Today there are no history courses offered in the

county that teachers may fulfill their accreditation requirements under Act 48. This program will provide a source of income for the society. At the same time it will enable us to attract student field trips from the county schools to visit the society. We have made space for a gift shop adjacent to the research room. We need volunteers to help set up and staff it so that we will be able to sell gift items on site as well as through our web site.

We are developing a “*Then and Now*” power point program utilizing some of our old photos and along with new photos of the same area to use as a marketing tool to create interest in our society. We intend to take this program out to the local clubs throughout the county. We will also extend an invitation to them to hold one of their meetings at the Society and have a tour of our exhibits. Hopefully, that will create more interest in the society which in turn should generate an increase in our membership and income.



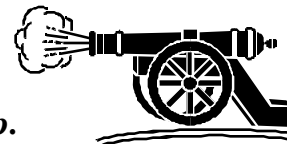
Our utility costs have always been high. Last month we were able to reduce the usage of a large blower that runs 8 to 12 hours/day, 7 days a week. We have cut the time down to one hour per day. That should help our utility costs which run around \$18,000. We are looking at other ways to reduce our costs.

So rather than sitting around wringing our hands and worrying about where our next dollar is coming from, we are looking forward to having a very active, productive and fruitful year. We will need more volunteers to help and assist in other fund raising projects such as historical bus trips and historical programs and events. Will you help us?

Dave Derbes,  
*Dave Derbes*  
President

## Schuylkill Countian Escapes From Andersonville Prison 1864

*Branchdale soldier escapes from Andersonville prison camp.*



By Stu Richards

Almost one third of the some 40,000 federal prisoners who entered the Confederate Prison at Andersonville remain there today in its cemetery. Strikingly it is estimated that only two dozen men broke out of Andersonville and successfully reached Federal lines. And despite legends to the contrary, almost none of them escaped by tunnel.

This is the story of Pvt. David Weir born in Kilmarnock, Scotland. He resided in Branchdale, Schuylkill County. Unbelievably Pvt. David Weir is one of the two dozen men to have made history by escaping from Andersonville Prison.

David Weir enlisted in the Union Army on September 3, 1861. He enlisted in Company E of the 55th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry under Captain Horace Bennett of Minersville, who was killed in action bravely leading his men at the battle of Pocotaligo River in May 1862. Most of the men in Company E were from the Minersville, Frailey Township area of Schuylkill County.

Pvt. Weir took part in many of the engagements that the 55th was involved in from late 1861 until May 10, 1864 when he was captured in the battle of Drewry's Bluff. During the battle he received a bullet wound in the thigh. He was taken prisoner and moved into Petersburg, Va. where the confederate surgeons worked on his leg. He was hospitalized for a month and later transferred to Charleston, S.C. where he was processed and then sent on to Andersonville, arriving sometime in July of 1864.

Captured along with Private David Weir was Pvt. Thomas Conway and Pvt. David Hughes both friends of his who grew up in Branchdale with him. Privates Weir, Hughes and Conway were mess mates in H Squad North Mess. The men usually formed into small messes with comrades from the same regiment or company. In this way they would draw rations and share everything they had with each other and also protected one another from the roving bands of thieves and murderers that existed in the camp. This was one way of trying to survive the horror that was Andersonville.

As stated above, of all those who were held in Andersonville only two dozen men ever escaped. On October 18, 1864 Weir, Hughes, Conway and another man, a Tennessee scout by the name of Thomas Cheshire,

made their escape. The story has it that Cheshire bribed one of the rebel guards to help them escape. Upon leaving Andersonville the group fled through the swamps and continued their flight, hiding in the bushes by day and traveling by night while being pursued by bloodhounds sent after them by the rebel militia.

In a story written by Weir that was published in the Pottsville Republican on November 16, 1927, Weir relates that Conway, weakened by sickness and prison privation, was unable to proceed and was caught by the rebel guards and their bloodhounds and sent back to prison along with David Hughes, but Cheshire's report states that three of them escaped.

During this harrowing flight the remaining three somehow found a sympathetic slave who agreed to help them. The slave, at great risk to himself, hid the men in his wagon under a load of corn and took them over seventy miles through two Rebel towns and across a ferry. The slave turned the men over to another slave who guided them to some sympathetic white Floridians who were loyal to the Union. These people gave the men a boat that they took out into Ochlocknee Bay near Tallahassee.

Running down the coast was the U.S.S. Mortar Schooner Oliver H. Lee enroute to Key West. The Lee had just put some men in a small boat looking for fresh water, when the trio signaled the men and were rescued. Their journey took them over 200 miles, quite a feat for starving and sick men.

Later Thomas Cheshire would write an interesting story about his escape from Andersonville. The story is held in the Gettysburg College archives listed under the Thomas Cheshire Papers.

David Weir arrived in New York on Thanksgiving Day, 1864. Unbelievably he rejoined his company immediately and participated in the fall of Petersburg April 2nd, 1865 and was present at the surrender of Robert E. Lee and the Confederate forces at Appomattox, Va. April 9, 1865. On May 19, 1865 he was mustered out of Company E, 55th P.V.I. In 1925 Pvt. David Weir was one of the last surviving members of the George Lawrence Post 17 in Minersville. After the war he went back to working in the mines where he worked as a breaker hand, and ran the

Continued on page 3

## Burd Patterson was a legendary hero of the anthracite coal trade

Recently we had a direct descendent of Burd Patterson visit the Historical Society looking for additional information about the Patterson family. She is descendant from Burd Patterson's son Joseph. They were from Pittsburgh and Dr. Yasenchak made arrangements with the current owners of the Patterson home for her to tour the family home.

Burd Patterson was considered a legendary hero of the anthracite coal trade, as the Miners Journal put it in 1867, "who assisted in building up this region to its present prominent position." Mr. Patterson was born in 1788, and his early life was spent in Juniata County, Pennsylvania. Burd Patterson was the son of George Patterson and Jane Burd and was named James Burd, but he dropped the "James" and was always known simply as "Burd" Patterson. He married Matilda Dowers in 1820.

When the Pattersons took up permanent residence in Pottsville they lived for several years in a stone house on South Center Street, at the corner of Mauch Chunk Street. He then built the mansion on Mahantongo Street, between Eighth and Ninth Streets, where he lived until his death in 1867.

In 1826, soon after the opening of the coal trade, James Burd Patterson moved to Pottsville and promoted the development of the first railroads that sprang up in the late 1820s and early 1830s to connect the col-

lieries with the canal landings of the Schuylkill Navigation Company. He engaged in the real estate and coal business. In conjunction with Abraham Pott, a son of John Pott, the founder of Pottsville, he laid out Pott and Patterson's addition to Pottsville. He took a prominent part in the early development of the towns of Port Carbon, St. Clair, Tamaqua, Ashland, Mahanoy City, Girardville, Minersville, Yorkville, Patterson and other places in the county.

He was an aggressive booster of iron and steel, being the entrepreneur who financed the Pioneer Furnace at Pottsville. Some local coal operators believed that coal found below the water level would be worthless. But Burd Patterson and Henry Carey, another major real estate and coal operator, arranged with the operators of drift mines on the Spohn Tract to sink a slope below water level. By July, 1835, they had driven the slope 250 feet, well below the water level, and the mine was steadily producing coal. The experiment was a complete success and set the pattern for future operations in the Pottsville district.

In 1839, Philadelphia financier Nicholas Biddle offered a reward of \$5000 to the first furnace operating exclusively with anthracite coal. Patterson induced William Lyman of Boston, to operate his Pioneer Furnace using anthracite coal exclusively. The Pioneer furnace fulfilled the con-

### State Historical Markers

On October 5, 1996 a State Historical Marker was dedicated at 803 Mahantongo St, Pottsville, in front of the home of Burd Patterson. The marker reads: *Anthracite pioneer. He developed slope method for mining below water table, 1835. His Pottsville Furnace was the first successful smelter of anthracite iron, 1839-40. His home, built 1830-35, was first of the mansions to line Mahantongo St.*

dition by running from the middle of November, 1839, to the middle of January, 1940. Later, at his own expense he was an early promoter of the Bessemer process for making steel.

Beginning in 1837, a great depression took place in the coal and iron industry. In the 1840s Patterson, along with many other operators, went bankrupt. Subsequently he retrieved his fortune and paid his indebtedness. By the time of his death in 1867, he was worth upward of a million dollars. Upon the announcement of his death a large meeting of prominent citizens of the county was held at Pennsylvania Hall, Pottsville, which adopted resolutions highly eulogistic of his work in the development of the anthracite region.

engine in the Otto Colliery. David Weir is one of those long lost heroes of Schuylkill County.

David Hughes also went back to the regiment and was mustered out December 29, 1864. Thomas Conway survived the ordeal at Andersonville and was also mus-

tered out with the company on August 30, 1865.

For those interested in reading about the escapes from Andersonville Robert Scott Davis wrote an excellent book entitled "Ghost Shadows of Andersonville."

**“150 Years Ago”  
NEWSLETTER TIDBITS  
Miners Journal Newspaper,  
Pottsville  
January 14, 1859**

**Recipes**

**Brown Betty** - Take two dozen of large apples, and cut them into thin slices, pare them if preferred, but it is not necessary. Crumb up a loaf of stale bread. Take a deep pudding dish, put in a layer of bread crumbs, then one of apples, sprinkle over them some brown sugar, put in a piece of butter and any spices preferred, then sprinkle in a very little cold water. Put another layer of crumbs, and then the apples, sugar, butter, spices and water again. Go on until the dish is full, making the top layer of apple. Bake in a quick oven. Eat hot, with sugar and butter, or wine sauce.

**Tea Cake** - Take a quart of sifted flour, and three spoonfuls of baking powder, mix them well together, and then rub in a heaping tablespoon of lard; moisten with water, kneading until you get a dough. Roll it on a pie board until thin and cut in round cakes with the edge of a tumbler. Bake immediately. Knead and roll the dough as little as possible, as too much handling makes it heavy.

**Table Sauce of Great Excellence** - This sauce is most delicious with trout, lobster or game-and not its least recommendation is that you can make it yourself.

1 part lemon juice,

1 part mushroom catsup, 1 part port or claret,

With a little cayenne pepper

(Note to newsletter readers. Has anyone heard of mushroom catsup or have a recipe for it?)

## Programs

**January 28, 2009**

Due to a mix up in scheduling we are unable to have a program or membership meeting in January.

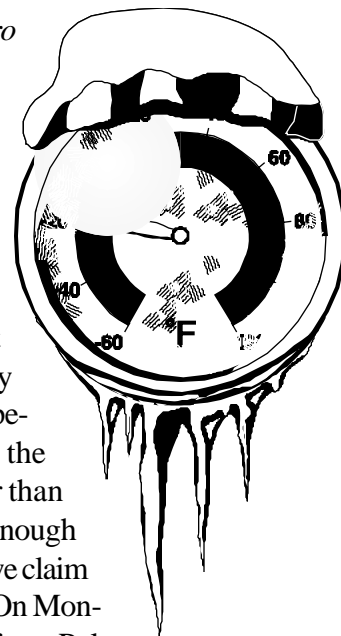
**February 25, 2009, 7:00 p.m.**

Topic - Stephen Girard and the Danville and Pottsville incline plane railroad.

Long before the Mahanoy Plane or Gordon Plane railroads, successful inclined plane railroads, were built, a railroad with incline planes was begun between Danville and Pottsville. Stephen Girard was one the major inves-

### Weather

*Ten degrees below zero*  
- Monday last was one of the coldest days on record in this latitude. At daylight, the thermometer marked ten degrees below zero; at 9 o'clock, the mercury was at a six below zero, and at 8 P. M., the mercury was at zero. The sun shone clearly all day; but at the warmest period, the thermometer in the shade did not mark higher than four degrees above. Cold enough in all conscience, for what we claim to be a temperate climate. On Monday evening, an old man from Palo Alto, bent almost double by age was picked up in Centre Street, chilled through, and taken into Epting's drug store. After warming him, internally and externally, he was conveyed home in a carriage. There is no doubt that if he had not been taken in charge, he would have been frozen to death. Aged men should not be allowed to go abroad in such severe weather as that of Monday last.

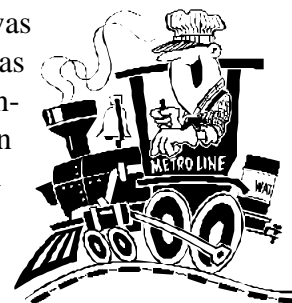


**Remedy for Chilblains** - Boil some turnips and mash them until reduced to a pulp; put them in a tub or large basin, and put the feet in them, almost as hot as can be borne; for a short time, before going to bed. Preserve in doing this for a few nights, and the itching and irritation of the chilblains will be cured.

(Note - chilblains are defined as inflammation of the hands or feet due to extreme cold.)

tors in this project, which was chartered April 8, 1826. It was developed to transport the anthracite coal from Northern Schuylkill and Northumberland Counties.

Historical society board member Jean Dellock will lay out the story of this railroad. Join us for the evening and bring a friend.



## Featured Authors are Mary L. Weigley and Brian Ardan

### The Anthracite Coal Region's Slavic Community

By *Brian Ardan*

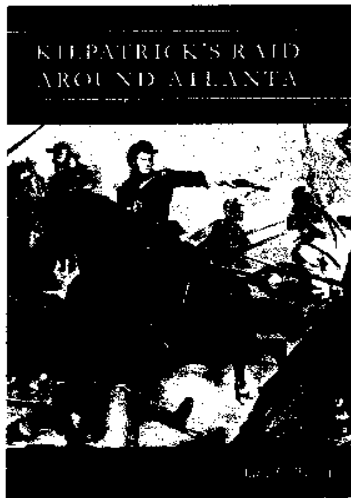
Beginning in the latter half of the 19th century, individuals identifying themselves as Poles, Slovaks, Carpatho-Rusyns, Ukrainians, and others began what would eventually become a mass influx of eastern and central Europeans into Pennsylvania's anthracite coal mining region. These people brought with them languages and customs quite alien to the longer-established groups that had settled the area many years earlier. At times the Slavs clashed with these groups, as well as among themselves. Eventually, however, they wove their way of life indelibly into the multiethnic fabric of the growing region. *The Anthracite Coal Region's Slavic Community*



presents a pictorial history of Slavic people in hard coal country, conveying the unique and rich culture brought to the area with the arrival of these diverse communities

**Sale Price \$21.99 + \$1.32 sales tax, S & H \$4.00**

**BRIAN ARDAN** is a faculty member in the Stevenson Library at Lock Haven University. He has a master's degree in Slavic studies from Indiana University and a master's degree in library science from Clarion University. He has lived in Slavic language-speaking countries, including Poland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia and Montenegro. He has carefully selected rarely seen vintage photographs from various private collections, churches, historical societies, and archives for this publication.



**Sale Price \$12.00**  
**Sales tax \$ .72**  
**S & H \$4.00**

### Kilpatrick's Raid Around Atlanta

By *Mary L. Weigley*

This first time author has put together an interesting and informative account of a long overlooked action, Kilpatrick's Raid Around Atlanta, August 18-22, 1864. Focusing on official reports, diaries and letters from participants and accounts written after the war, she tells the story of the raid through the eyes of both Union and Confederate soldiers. Judson Kilpatrick's troopers spent four days and nights in the saddle, continuously skirmishing with Confederate troops

under the command of William Hicks Jackson, tearing up large sections of railroad tracks, burning the Jonesboro depot, making a daring sabre charge on the grounds of Lovejoy Plantation after being surrounded and swimming a rain swollen river. The Union horsemen began their raid on August 18 at Sandtown, the extreme right of the Union army, arriving at Decatur, the extreme left of the Union army on August 22, having made a complete circuit of the Confederate army.

**MARY L. WEIGLEY**, historical researcher and writer from Richland, Pennsylvania, has uncovered official reports, newspaper accounts, letters and diaries, and the recorded speeches of veterans from post Civil War years.

And the author, who earned a B.A in American History from LaRoche College in Pittsburgh, presents her notable findings in this rare compilation, appropriately entitled *Kilpatrick's Raid Around Atlanta*.

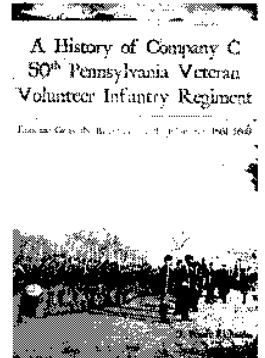
# Four great Civil War books by Schuylkill County writers.

## A History of Company C 50<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteer Infantry Regiment

By *J. Stuart Richards*

The story of the men from Schuylkill Haven who made up Company C written in their own words from letters, official records and surviving narratives. Stu Richards brings to light the men who worked on the Schuylkill Canal as they fought from Beaufort, SC, to Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania to the siege of Petersburg. Truly an interesting read.

Sale price \$21.95 + \$1.32 Sales tax, S & H \$4.00

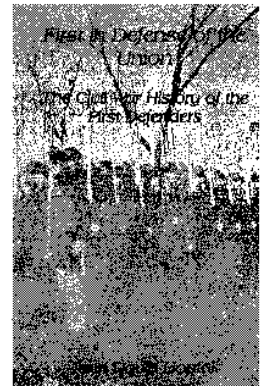


## First in Defense of the Union The Civil War History of the First Defenders

By *John David Hoptak*

This is a story of those Schuylkill County men who were the first to respond to President Lincoln's appeal to come to the defense of the nation in April, 1861. Men from all walks of life left their homes, farms and mines to answer the call to arms. Hoptak not only tells their story but also names all the men and their units. The proceeds of the sale of this book will go to the Gen. Nagle's sword replacement fund at Antietam.

Sale price \$19.95 + 1.20 Sales tax, S & H \$4.00

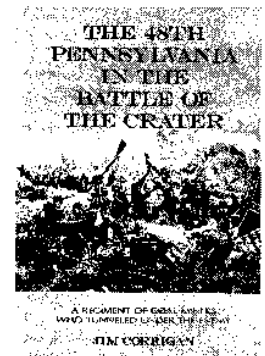


## The 48th Pennsylvania in the Battle of the Crater A regiment of local miner who tunneled under the enemy.

By *James Corrigan*

The siege at Petersburg brought the two armies facing each other in the static defense of Petersburg. How dissension among the Union generals allowed a perfectly good plan to fail in execution causing the Confederates to claim victory. A must read to get the true story of how a good strategy failed.

Sale price \$29.95 + \$1.80 Sales tax, S & H \$4.00



## Schuylkill County in the Civil War A publication of the Historical Society of Schuylkill County

This is a reprint of a 1961 HSSC publication with articles written by Walter S Farquhar, Edith Patterson, Herwood Hobbs, James Haas, Paul Murphy and Leo Ward. The original book of 124 pages has been expanded to 204 pages. This is a limited edition reprint.

Sale price \$19.95 + \$1.20 Sales tax, S & H \$4.00



# Books and DVDs available for purchase at the Historical Society of Schuylkill County

## **1902! The Great Coal Strike in Shenandoah, PA**

**A true story of martial law in an anthracite community**

***By J. Robert Zane***

On July 30, 1902 the Great Anthracite Coal Strike, which was already in progress, took a violent turn. Joe Beddall, a hardware store owner, went to the assistance of his brother, a county deputy sheriff. He was brutally murdered by a mob of his own neighbors in the first ward of Shenandoah, PA. The incident caught the attention of the Governor of Pennsylvania and even the President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt.

“1902! The Great Strike in Shenandoah, PA is an interpretive historical accounting of the community, the labor dispute and subsequent riot, murders and court trial. Interspersed with ethnic and family stories, the book brings to life a by-gone time loaded with adventure and suspense.

**\$10.95 + \$.66 Sales tax, S & H \$4.00**

## **Images of America**

### **Pottsville in the Twentieth Century**

Farewell 1890! Welcome 1900! Was the headline in the Pottsville Republican on January 1, 1900. The people of Pottsville ushered in the new century in the usual manner with noisy gatherings and crowded churches. Coal was king in Schuylkill County during the 19th century, but the demise of coal had already begun by 1900. At the beginning of the 20th century Pottsville has seven volunteer fire companies, the second-finest courthouse in the state, a first-class hospital, twenty three churches, a \$100,000 YMCA building, a public Mission, a free kindergarten, twelve fine school-houses, two parochial schools, and a free public library.

Leo L. Ward and Mark T. Major have compiled this memorable history from the Society's extensive vintage photograph collection. Ward and Major are also authors of Pottsville, Schuylkill County, and Schuylkill County Volume II.

**\$19.95 + \$1.20 Sales tax, S & H \$4.00**

## **A Guide to the Molly Maguires, Featuring the ORIGINAL Molly Maguire Tour**

***By H. T. Crown and Mark T. Major***

Students of Molly Maguire history will find this book an indispensable aid to visiting the landmarks of that chapter of Pennsylvania's colorful past. This guidebook is designed to map out the important places, people, and events of the Molly era. But even more than that, A guide to the Molly Maguires provides information that goes beyond directions, it allows for self-paced, self-study along the route of the tour.

The Molly Maguire saga is geographically spread over five eastern Pennsylvania counties, with most key events happening in Schuylkill and Carbon counties.

**\$15.95 + \$ .96 Sales tax, S & H \$4.00**

## **The Color Bearers DVD**

***Produced by John Folley & Steve Newbert***

The Color Bearers tells stories of American Patriotism from 1776 to the 21st Century with specific emphasis on stories that pertain to the American Flag. Our own Historian Stu Richards is interviewed as well as Jean Dellock whose Great Grandfather Private James Seitzinger story is part of the video. A very interesting video.

**\$19.95 + \$1.20 Sales tax, S & H \$4.00**

# Historical Society of Schuylkill County



**Tourists, Historical  
Researchers, Scholars and  
Genealogists are Welcome**

**305 North Centre Street,  
Pottsville, Pennsylvania  
(570) 622-7540**

## Board of Directors

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**Sch.hist@comcast.net**

**www.schuylkillhistory.org**

## Society Hours

Wednesday 1:30 - 6 p.m.

Thursday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Friday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Saturday 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

The Purpose of the Historical Society of Schuylkill County is to discover, procure, and preserve the records of the history of Schuylkill County and any data or materials which may establish or illustrate that history.

The Historical Society  
Of Schuylkill County  
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