



# Pottstown Historical Society

## NEWSLETTER

568 High Street

Pottstown, PA

Officers: President, David Kerns, Vice President, Robert Evans, Treasurer, Barbara Toroney. Assistant Treasurer, Marie Kelly, Recording Secretary, Laura Groth, Corresponding Secretary, Jean Sweeney

Editor: David Kerns

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### September Meeting – Monday September 18<sup>th</sup>, 7pm

The Pottstown Historical Society will host a presentation on Monday, September 18, 2017, at 7:00 pm by Ronald A. Sloto on the historic mines in the Pottstown vicinity.

Ron is an honorary professor and curator of the West Chester University Mineral collection, as well as researcher into the mineralogy of southeastern PA. His background includes more than 40 years as a hydrologist with the U.S. Geological Survey. He has published the popular Mines and Minerals of Berks County and Mines and Minerals of Chester County, as well as more than 80 technical and scientific papers and books.

The history of Pottstown is the history of mines, forges, furnaces, and their workers. Cast iron stoves, bridges, and all other necessities of the industrial revolution had their origin in our ground. Ron will provide an engaging evening of information and education for all.

### Library Hours

September 2017: 10<sup>th</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> 1-4pm  
October 2017: 8<sup>th</sup> & 22<sup>th</sup> 1-4pm

### Welcome New Members

Daniel Rhodes  
William S. Antrim  
Mike Szilagyi  
Todd Bainbridge

### Acquisitions

Thank you to the following people for thinking of the Society when donating Pottstown memorabilia:

- \*James Trout – Items from the Stanley G. Flagg company.
- \*Clara Hoss for a booklet on the Pottstown Symphony Orchestra & four booklets on the B.I.E.
- \*Gloria Schwab for sixteen photos of Pottstown, two Pottstown magazines, a school booklet, NY store memorabilia, and a newspaper.
- \*Laura Justiniano for a photo of a Flying Merkel motorcycle.
- \*Georgeann Reinert for a Pottstown Blade paper and Boyer’s Shoe Store item.
- \*Bob & Karen Lamb for a DVD and a Colebrookdale iron
- \*Margaret Forrest for Pottstown HS yearbooks, 1929 class trip photo.
- \*Waynette Shafer for postcards and photos of Ringing Rocks.

### Project Update!

Thank you to everyone who answered our plea to help restore our ‘sad’ collection of Pottstown Directories and various other books in the Society’s library.

A big thank you to Dave & Pat Stout donated \$1000 to the cause and we cannot thank them enough for making such a generous donation.

These Directories provide a glimpse in to the past of our town and we look forward to being able to continue the restoration project. Thank you!

To donate, please write a check made out to the “Pottstown Historical Society” and on the memo

line, state that it's for "Book Project". Donors will have their name place on the inside cover. Thank you!

### Odds and Ends

We're always looking for ways to reduce costs. If you have email and would prefer an electronic copy of the Society's Newsletter, please email the Society at [PottstownHistory@gmail.com](mailto:PottstownHistory@gmail.com) and please put in the Subject of the email "Newsletter".

### Ellis-Keystone Agricultural Works

Prior to about 1850, all farm work was done by hand and was very long and hard on the farmers. Then machines started making an appearance powered by horses. The horse was domesticated by man about 4000 B.C. and by 2500 B.C. draft horses were in use by farmers. As agriculture became more mechanized, stationary tread mills were developed to ease the labor of the farmer. In East Coventry a farmer and inventor named James Ellis, known as the "Bard of East Coventry", teamed up with a mechanic named Nathan Hoffman and proceeded to manufacture a grain thresher and level thread, on which John had a U.S. patent. They began about 1872 but by 1875 they needed more space and a better method of transportation for shipping their product and they relocated to Pottstown where property was donated by the town on Cross Street along the P&R Railroad. By January 1877 the new plant was up and running and Hiram Ellis, John's brother, joined the company as the selling agent. Hiram was very knowledgeable about every detail of their product and went all over the world to demonstrate it to the customer. The customer paid to freight the items and if completely satisfied with its performance paid for it as per agreement. If not the company the freight charge shipped it back. It was a three day trial. The approximate cost was \$1095 plus shipping and any attachments for the thresher were extra. John would add several more U.S. patents to the machines and every machine built had the numbers stenciled on the side. Other manufacturers were making larger threshers with vibrating racks but Ellis-Keystone stayed with their tried and true "Champion" grain thresher throughout the years. In 1878 Nathan Hoffman sold his interest in the company but stayed as master mechanic teaching among other apprentices a man named John R. Saylor his trade.

Saylor in 1895 would start the Pottstown Machine Company. In 1881 Ellis-Keystone reorganized under new partners with \$40,000 in capital. In the Panic of 1893 the company suffered as did others and John sold the company to James H. Morris, A.K. Saner and William M. Bunting. They put in \$160,000 in capital and started manufacturing peanut picking machines, circular saws and corn shellers along with the thresher. The products were sold all over Europe and throughout South America. The peanut machines were sold in our southern States. In 1897 a new building was added on the opposite side of Cross Street. In 1901 the built a foundry and chartered it in 1902 to do outside jobbing. By the turn of the century the number of employees went from six to eighty and were being paid \$1.25 a day by 1917. James Morris was its President from 1893-1920 when it was taken over by Paul L. Morris. By then combines were taking over and the company started production of one but found it to be too expensive to retool for that production and stayed with the thresher a while longer and after WW2 found their peanut machines as their best seller. They did incorporate gasoline engines to run their products finally leaving the horse behind. In 1932 they started leasing out the foundry and around 1940 Keystone Grey Iron Foundry took it over until around 1993. Fire destroyed the foundry about 1999. In the 1940's the newer building was purchased by the Keystone Foundry. In the mid fifties they stopped the production of their last product, the peanut picking machine and in 1958 the original Ellis building was sold to the Chop-Rite company. Most of the Ellis-Keystone workers that were left started working for Chop-Rite Manufacturing Co. which occupied the bottom floors of the building and they leased the upper floor to Ellis-Keystone. It became Ellis Keystone Manufacturing Co. which employed two men to make, assemble, paint and ship oil and gas griddles for restaurants. The company was at this time owned by William Engle of Mt. Penn. This company ended business in 1975 and Chop-Rite and Keystone Grey Iron Foundry closed up in 1993. The old 1877 Ellis building still stands on Cross St. but all others are a memory. A great Pottstown industry goes by the wayside due to changing times and technology.