



Pottstown Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

568 High Street

Pottstown, PA

Editor: David Kerns

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

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November Meeting – Monday November 20th, 7pm

Mike Snyder will take us back 100 years to late 1917, one of the most tumultuous periods in American history.

The U.S. has entered the Great War, poignant letters from Pottstown soldiers in the trenches have begun to arrive, the Spanish flu is coming, revolutions are brewing around the globe, little is making sense to anyone, and yet it was the beginning of the American Century.

In what promises to be another entertaining program by our own Mike Snyder, well-known local author and historian, come learn the details from Pottstown for this period.

Public invited; light refreshments will be served.

Library Hours

November 2017: 12th & 26th 1-4pm

December 2017: 10th only 1-4pm

Acquisitions

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

- * Mike Snyder for numerous items, including items relating to the Van Buskirk family, Pottstown on Parade issue, photographs of the Ken Nichols Band and George Coffin, and local postcards.
- * Keith Jones of Wisconsin including a Brownback Stove, items related to the Ludwick family and items from the Jacob Aircraft Company.

Miscellaneous

Thank you to the anonymous members who donated the money for new LED lighting in the Society, new storage racks, and a new color printer! The Society has limited funds to make

improvements such as these, so we greatly appreciate these members efforts!

Project Update!

We're thrilled that we've been able to restore another book as a part of our ongoing effort to save the valuable collection at the Society. The latest book to be restored is the "Grand Army of the Republic Service Book for Post #595". It has new binding and is back in one piece! Thank you everyone who has continued to donate to this project.

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!

In Memoriam

We are saddened by the loss of two long time Society members and supporters: Judy Weiss and Milton Yohn. Judy was a frequent participant at our Society membership meetings and will be missed and Milton gave generously to the Society over the years to help support our efforts and projects.

The Richards Family

Anyone who has ever visited our Society's archives and looked over the old town photographs may have come across the picture of what we call the Richards Home, which stood at 213-215 High Street. It was a stone residence which possibly was built about 1790 by Samuel Potts for his sister-in-law, Mrs. Sarah May. Samuel only erected the western portion, the eastern section was added in 1822 by then owner, George Leaf. George Richards, of a prominent New Hanover township family, purchased the

mansion in 1833. George was the son of John and Anna (Hillegass) Richards. His father was an ironmaster and served as a Philadelphia magistrate during the American Revolution, and served as a Justice of Peace for Philadelphia County (which included Pottstown at the time). John later served as a Judge of the Common Pleas Court of Montgomery County. John was a delegate to the Federal Constitutional Convention in 1787 and a member of Congress during the Jefferson presidency. John died in November 1822 and is buried in a family plot in the Falkner Swamp Lutheran Cemetery. His son George, born in 1788 had a somewhat exciting life for his time. He attended a local school before entering a Philadelphia counting house as a clerk and within a few years he became a partner. In 1811 he made the first of what would be three mercantile voyages. The first was to Cuba, then Puerto Rico and the third to Caraccas, Venezuela. On the last trip he crossed the Andes Mountains and on arriving in the city, he was caught in its great earthquake. With his own eyes and on his knees, he witnessed the earth open and close before him and saw buildings crumble around him. Upon his return he found his country engaged in the War of 1812 and joined a company of volunteers under General Cadwallader. In 1815 we find him again a merchant connected to the iron industry in New Jersey. Then in 1820 he returned to his roots in Montgomery County and took up farming and surveying and serving as a Justice of the Peace for the county. In 1833 he retired and moved to Pottstown where we find him at 213 High Street. Except for serving as a State Senator in 1846 he now lived retired but not out of local activities. He becomes very active in local education being one member of a group to establish the Pottstown Academy and in the movement for free schools, he is a huge supporter. George passes on in August 1873 at the ripe old age of 85. He was married three times and had five children. His son M.E. Richards became a lawyer and served in the Civil War. He resided in Pottsville and died at 47 and is buried in Pottstown. His daughter married a physician in Philadelphia, Dr. Thomas Lancaster. Two of his children remained in the mansion on High St. His son Mark, the oldest, never married but was very active in Pottstown society. He was educated at the Pottstown Academy that his father helped organize. He was apprenticed to a printing business, but he never followed that vocation. His

main occupation was in real estate. In the community he served several years on the Pottstown School Board, was a Director of the National Bank of Pottstown, Treasurer of the Turnpike and a Director of the Pottstown Gas & Water Company. He also owned a 44-acre farm north of Edgewood Cemetery. He died in 1890. His sister, Annie, also never married and lived in the house on High St. along with an inheritance from her father, properties she owned and real estate from her brother Mark she was a very wealthy lady in town. She sold off the properties where Walker Troutman Funeral Home stand in August 1892 for a mere \$24,500. She also sold the property to the Eagles Association on High St. in 1906 along with her brother's farm. She dies in 1917 and the estate goes to the only heir, a nephew George Richards Lancaster, her sister Sophia's son in Philadelphia. In June 1918 Mr. Lancaster sells the mansion which was in the Richards family for 85 years to Aldes Bernhart, an insurance and real estate agent in Pottstown. Due to WWI and materials being scarce, Mr. Bernhart did not start razing the house at 213-215 High Street until 1921 and he erected on its site a brownstone commercial building which still stands in 2017.



The Richards Home on High Street