



# Jenkins Journal

Newsletter of the Lansdale Historical Society

March, 2021

## Society to mark 50th anniversary

By DICK SHEARER

On an autumn evening in 1971, a group of area residents gathered to discuss the possibility of forming a historical society in Lansdale.

The group was small – 14 in all –

among them were two persons well-known within the community – Phil Miller, a member of Lansdale Borough Council, and Dr. John B. Jacobs, a co-founder of the Lansdale Clinic, now the Lansdale Medical Group.

They came together on Tuesday, October 12 to discuss an urgent matter. The Jenkins Homestead, owned by Roy Accor, was up for sale on the eve of the borough’s Centennial celebration in 1972. The fate of Lans-

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### **BILL HENNING:**

## Different times, new challenges

*(EDITOR’S NOTE: Bill Henning is the new president of the society, effective March 1, 2021.)*

Well, here I am, Bill Henning, the new president of the Lansdale Historical Society. An honor I am excited about and a position I see as a challenge,



one that I am looking forward to tackling. Needless to say I do have some big shoes to fill taking over from our amazingly knowledgeable Dick Shearer. He is like the walking encyclopedia of the

North Penn area.

Fortunately Dick will not be going very far anytime soon, if I can help it. With his help as second vice president and Clarence Kinsey remaining as first vice president, I foresee a pretty smooth transition year.

Being born and raised in Lansdale,  
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### **The way we were**

This photograph from 1971 shows the Jenkins Homestead as it appeared when it was purchased by the Borough of Lansdale for \$33,000, leading to the formation of the Lansdale Historical Society.

## **A gentle reminder: Dues are overdue**

Here’s a final reminder to pay your 2021 dues if you haven’t done so already.

As you know, the restrictions placed on us by the pandemic have

curtained almost all of the public events we depend on to cover operating expenses of the society. Every dollar you contribute in the form of dues helps us meet our 2021 goals.

# Moving the society toward the ‘new normal’

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while being a fourth-generation resident, I have a natural passion for the area and thoroughly enjoy learning every aspect of my hometown. There are a couple of large aerial photos of Lansdale from the 1960’s mounted on the walls in the staircase at the historical society’s research center. I have found myself a few times getting mentally lost just looking at them, pointing out in my head all the details that have changed since then. Buildings that have come and gone, streets that have changed, trees that have grown. It can be quite hypnotic, try it.

For my first year (hopefully the first of many) we intend to put a lot of focus into our

internet and social media presence. We will upgrade our website to allow people to join the society and to purchase items we have to offer, like DVDs and books, from our web site. I would also like us to create a series of regular video shorts that can be viewed from home through our web page or social media avenues.

Unfortunately this internet-based direction is one we need to concentrate on primarily caused by the current COVID pandemic that we are all dealing with. There is so much to share but we feel so limited without our typical LHS presentation opportunities.

Life has changed quite a bit this past year but throughout history life has changed many times and every time we always overcome to a new normal. whatever that new normal will become I am excited to be a part of it.

## 2021: It’s a golden year for the society

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dale’s oldest house was at stake. Borough council, spurred on by Miller’s persuasion, agreed to buy the house from Accor for \$33,000. But there was a hitch: not all of council wanted to commit to the initial expense or the prospect of maintaining the property in the future.

So an unusual deal was struck. The borough agreed to buy the house from Accor on the proviso that a group of local history buffs would come together and form a historical society that

would raise the funds necessary to purchase the property from the borough.

Time was short – the borough expected its money back by the middle of 1972. The challenge was daunting for everyone involved. In essence, the town fathers were making the purchase of a building for an organization that did not exist. Hence, the October 13 meeting to launch what would become the Lansdale Historical Society.

With plenty of help from Jacobs, who founded the Tow-

mencin Historical Society a few years earlier, the pieces fell in place quickly. By the end of 1971, the new group developed a mission statement, elected a board of trustees, elected John Roberts as its first president, appointed committees, filed paperwork as a non-profit organization and launched a publicity campaign to spur public interest.

That was the easy part. Raising \$33,000 to buy the homestead from the borough was a different matter.

*More about that in our next issue of the Jenkins Journal.*

### **Lansdale Historical Society**

*is a 501c3 registered non-profit organization.*

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### **The Jenkins Homestead and Historical Research Center**

are open to the public  
Wednesdays-Thursdays 11 am–3 pm  
Saturdays 9:30 am-noon.

**(Masks required. Homestead tours limited to parties of four)**

There is no charge for tours of the 1770 homestead. Charges may apply for research projects.

# Two new programs coming on internet

Because of the pandemic, we are forced to put our in-person Community Programs on the internet, specifically our Facebook page. Check the Facebook page after March 5 for the dates of our two upcoming shows.

Many of you are familiar with how Facebook works. Others don't go near it. Have no fears, what we do on our page is easy, civil and safe.

-- First, go to your search engine (Google or whatever) and type in the search box "Facebook, Lansdale Historical Society".

-- Open the Lansdale Historical Society page. Make

sure "Facebook" is in the name. Usually, it's the first entry.

-- Scroll down the left side of the page.

-- Look for the "Videos" section.

-- Scroll down to the program of your choice (70s or 40s).

-- Click on your choice, turn up the volume and enjoy the show.

*After the program, check out our popular "Back Then" entries, posted daily. Click on the current entry and scroll back to see thousands of vintage photographs from the North Penn region.*

## The 1970s: The years of love, violence

The decade of the 1970s – what a dichotomy – peace and love, war and violence – a holdover from the 1960s. There was a division in our country like never before – old and young, liberal and conservative, black and white. The highs and lows of our country's news cycle, as well as the local news, were defined like few other times.

Because the COVID-19 pandemic prevents us from gathering in person, this program, hosted by Linda Evans, will be posted on the society's Facebook page on a date to be announced after March 5.

We'll take a look at the big stories – the end of the Vietnam War, Watergate, Nixon's resignation, Three Mile Island and the Kent State Shootings, among others.

The changes in TV programming reflected and commented on the happenings around us. Remember Archie Bunker and his son-in-law, Mike Stivic, arguing the opposite sides of the current issues? M\*A\*S\*H brought the war in Vietnam to the forefront in the guise of the Korean conflict. A mini-series based on a Pulitzer Prize-winning book became one of the biggest television events ever.

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**THE 1970s:** The Bicentennial Wagon Train heads down 309 to Lansdale.

## THE 1940s: War, and finally peace

The 1940s are most remembered for the impact of World War II, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, soldiers going off to fight in Europe and the Pacific, and air raid drills, victory gardens and rationing at home.

But the 1940s were also about cultural, political and news events at home and around the world. We were introduced to paperback books, 45rpm records, the Golden Globes and Dr. Spock. Learn the story of "Kilroy Was Here" and an interesting twist to the life of Sugar

Ray Robinson.

The Olympics were canceled, but other sports continued. Returning soldiers joined semi-pro base-

ball teams such as the Lansdale Dukes and Nighthawks. The Girls Baseball League was organized.

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**THE 1940s:** Ralph's Market on Main Street.

# My thanks to many from the old guy

By DICK SHEARER

Most people should be as lucky as I've been. Over the past 60 years, I've had two careers and loved them both – 40 years as a journalist and 20 as an officer of this society, 18 as president. Both were passions for me and in a sense, still are.

Bill Henning replaces me as president on March 1 and I'm excited that Bill will be taking over, bringing new blood, new ideas and a new energy to our organization at a difficult time for all of us.

Bill brings to us a unique knowledge of Lansdale as a native-born son whose family has been active in community affairs for decades. He's a borough councilman, vice president of Discover Lansdale, head of the Freight House renovation project in addition to overseeing Henning's model train business.



In short, he's the perfect choice to lead us forward.

His column in this issue of the *Jenkins Journal* describes part of his vision of the society's future. I'll use my space to briefly look back at the last 20 years. And what a time it has been:

- We acquired the property adjacent to the Jenkins Homestead and renovated it into a historical research center with the help of the late Sen. Edwin G. Holl, Lansdale Borough Council and many of our volunteer members.
- We were able to complete the interior renovations to the Jenkins Homestead, giving visitors a

taste of what life was like during the 1700s.

- We doubled our membership with an outreach campaign to the public.
  - We introduced Community Programs that encouraged the public to come and learn about the area's historic past. Some of these shows attracted more than 150 attendees.
  - We produced multiple books and a series of DVDs featuring the history of our region.
- We entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century with an internet website and a Facebook presence that now attracts 3,500 views per day.

- We offered a series of Holiday House Tours so our residents could usher in the Yuletide spirit by meeting and greeting their fellow citizens.

Let me emphasize that the "We" we're talking about isn't me. It's the gang of dedicated volunteers who have done so much of the work over these two decades, often without the recognition they so richly deserve.

Special thanks must go to our board of trustees' members, past and present, who have supported us along the way. Same, too, to the Borough of Lansdale, for the assistance it has given us.

I plan to stay active in the society's operations as historian and second vice president. I will be concentrating on our Facebook page, historical research and writing, and activities related to Lansdale's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year.

I expect to be in the office at least two days a week – probably Wednesdays and Thursdays – so stop by and let's chat.

Thanks to all of you for your support and encouragement over the years.

## The 1970s

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Movies, including all the Oscar-winning Best Pictures, will bring back memories of those times. We'll look at the music of the era in a different way, and highlight the remarkable sports feats of the 1970s.

Moving on to our hometown scene, we'll check out some local ads, highlight a new high school, open a new mall that changed our downtown, attend an open house at *The Reporter*, and build a new hospital. On the darker side, watch out for the demolition of two iconic buildings, and recall a feature story in the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* "Today" magazine that turned our town upside-down. Also, watch how Lansdale celebrated two major anniversaries – Lansdale's Centennial in 1972 and our Nation's Bicentennial in 1976. Did we pull them off? You bet!

## The 1940s

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Some Hollywood actors went to war and others were blacklisted, but we still went to the movies at the Music Hall and had dinner at the Eitherton or the Hotel Tremont.

We shopped locally, at Jeanne's, Hager's, the A&P, Koehler's and Sam Fruit's shoe store, among many others.

Join host Marsha Althouse for a look at life in Lansdale during the 1940s. What was happening in the borough? What were our favorite foods, books, toys, and television shows?

Because of COVID-19 restrictions we will not be able to meet in person. Instead this program will be presented on the society's Facebook page. Check there after March 5 for the date.