



Jenkins Journal

Newsletter of the Lansdale Historical Society

May-July, 2023

Community Program May 11

Montgomery County's role in the Revolution

The Lansdale Historical Society will bring down the curtain on its 2022-23 Community Program series with a unique presentation by historical reenactor, lecturer and tour guide Michael Jesberger featuring the common soldiers who fought in the American Revolution and the various incidents that took place in Montgomery County and the surrounding Philadelphia region during that period.

The program will be held **Thursday**, May 11, 7 p.m., at Lansdale Borough Hall.

We may remember the 1776 crossing of the Delaware and the Valley Forge encampment as events that tested the mettle of the patriot forces, but the continental soldiers triumphed over scores of other hardships at places lesser known.

In the fall of 1777, the Conti-



ental Army fought two key battles and marched hundreds of miles through all types of terrain and in all sorts of weather. Often deprived of food, sleep, and comfort, the soldiers deserve recognition for what they endured during this campaign for the cause of liberty.

Join Mr. Jesberger for this lecture that includes images of Philadelphia and the Montgomery County area historic sites, maps, and eyewitness accounts of the participants bringing

these seldom-celebrated events to life.

He is an independent military historian who specializes in the American Revolution and Civil War time periods. He is renowned for his depth and breadth of knowledge, as well as his engaging and passionate presentation style, whether providing formal lectures, living history presentations or tours of historic sites.

A member of numerous history-based organizations and active in the reenactment community, he participates in numerous battle reenactments, living history programs and ceremonies to honor our veterans.

A lifelong resident of the Philadelphia region, Mr. Jesberger is a native of Northeast Philadelphia and now resides in Lansdale.

Record turnout for spring tea

Borough Hall in Lansdale was the scene of the Lansdale Historical Society's 12th Annual Spring Tea on Saturday, April 22.

Eighty members and guests attended, some dressed in period costume to reflect the theme *Teatime on the Titanic*. Each guest was given a boarding pass at the door and an envelope containing a biography of one of the passengers on the *Titanic*. *Titanic*-themed books and memorabilia were on display.

A high tea was served by AAA Catering of Lansdale and included soup, salad, tea sandwiches, scones, and dessert along with several varieties of tea.

A basket raffle lent an air of fun and suspense to the occasion as the winners were announced.

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Historical reenactor Alisa Dupuy models fashionable finery of the *Titanic* era. ➔



PEOPLE FROM OUR PAST...

Sylvester Z. Jenkins: Banker, inventor

There's no end to the information we find about the Jenkins clan.

For example, we never heard much about Sylvester Z. Jenkins (1852-1944), the third great-grandson of Jenkin Jenkins, but it turns out he was an inventor of some note.

While his primary job was as a clerk at the Lansdale National Bank, Sylvester also maintained a workshop on Courtland Street in which invented a wide variety of items that were granted U.S. Patents.

Among them was a fluid elevator that was developed as a dumbwaiter. He also patented a version of a symmetroscope.

According to Wikipedia, a symmetroscope was a version of a kaleidoscope, which it describes as



an optical instrument consisting of two or more mirrors set at particular angles to produce beautiful patterns that were used by fashion designers and apparently for retail store displays.

A 1917 *Philadelphia Inquirer* story referred to Jenkins as "a geni-

us" when it reported that "he was instructed by the United States Government to forward papers, plans and specifications of his latest devices for military airplanes".

There are also references to patents Jenkins was granted for improvements to vending machines.

Jenkins personal life is also worth noting. He lived in and around Lansdale for most of his life and was easily recognized because he walked with a severe limp, the result of an accident with an axe he suffered as a child. He never married and was a boarder at the Lansdale Hotel for 40 years before moving to Norristown in the 1930s, presumably to live with his brother, Arthur, his only survivor. He is buried in the Montgomery Baptist Cemetery with many members of the Jenkins family.

-Ruth Madison and Dick Shearer

Digital newspapers are now online

Our archive of Lansdale newspapers has long been the backbone of our research library. Beginning in 1870 and extending to the present, our collection includes copies of the *Lansdale Reporter*, the *North Penn Reporter*, *The Reporter*, and the *Lansdale Republican and Review*.

Some of the issues have been preserved on microfilm, and others exist only on their original newsprint, which is now extremely fragile.

In 2022, the society made a commitment to digitally preserve this collection on newspapers.com., an online newspaper archive. This effort will likely take years to complete, but for now we are thrilled that issues from the first 26 years of the *Lansdale Reporter* (1870-1896) are

now available to the public on newspapers.com. We expect that issues dated 1897-1926 will be made available by mid-summer of 2023.

Anyone may access the digitized *Reporter* newspapers online free of charge at our Research Center. Lansdale Historical Society members only may access the entire newspapers.com website free of charge at our Research Center, a sizable savings of subscription fees for our members.

Access to newspapers.com at the Research Center is by appointment only. Please contact us by phone at (215) 855-1872 to schedule a visit.

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 to 3 pm
Saturdays 9:30 am to noon.

There is no charge for tours of the homestead and research center but a fee may apply for research projects. Donations are always appreciated.



The story of the cut coin



This unusual coin was recently donated to our collection. The coin is unusual and somewhat rare— an 1848 Braided Hair/Liberty Head One Cent piece (at left).

One-eighth of the coin has been cut off (top photos), making it more unique. In the past it was common practice to clip coins to make change when smaller denominations were not available.

Liberty Head Large Cents were minted in the U.S. from 1839 to 1857. During the Civil War, the copper Liberty Head was the symbol of the Peace Democrats, or Copperheads. Some wore the coin as a watch fob or pendant, or cut out the Liberty image to wear as a pin. The Copperheads pushed for a negotiated settlement to the hostilities between North and South.

This particular coin has an interesting story of its own. It was found on the grounds of the former Green Street School after the school was razed in 1959, and before the Lansdale Village Apartments were built in the early 1960s. We wonder whose hand last gripped this penny before it was dropped into the soil near the old school.

Newsletter transitioning to email

The *Jenkins Journal* is going (almost) paperless.

Beginning with this issue, members who have provided email addresses to us will receive the *Jenkins Journal* only by email. We will continue to mail paper copies to our members who do not have email.

This change is made necessary by the increasing cost of postage, printing and supplies.

Yearbooks needed

Our research library contains an extensive collection of local yearbooks from Lansdale, North Penn, Lansdale Catholic and Christopher Dock high schools. We need a few more yearbooks to complete our collection.

Is one of these treasures hidden in your attic? We would love to give it a permanent home on a shelf in our library.

We are seeking donations of the following yearbooks:

- *North Penn *Accolade*- 2020, 2021
- *Lansdale Catholic *Trail*- 1961, 1977, 1983, 1990, 1993.

Summer Events in Lansdale

Here are the dates of three history-oriented events scheduled this summer by Discover Lansdale. Check their website (www.discoverlansdale.org) for more events and details.



MONDAY, MAY 29/Memorial Park

Remembering those who gave their all

The annual ceremony is preceded by the traditional Main Street parade.



SATURDAY, JULY 22/Memorial Park

Old-time Baseball Game And Community Picnic

The Brandywine Base Ball Club and the A's of Philadelphia hit the field to show us how the National Pastime used to be played. A picnic in the park with music follows.



SATURDAY, AUG. 26/All Around Town

Founders Day 2023

Morning, afternoon and night, Lansdale will buzz with activity capped by fireworks after dark.



Raffle winners at tea

Showing off their winnings are Chris Flyzik (below left) and Heide Murtha; at right, Michele Marrongelle with afghan designed by Pat Mahoney.



Narrator describes passenger's 'rescue' from ill-fated *Titanic*

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Following the meal, a program was presented by historical reenactor Alisa Dupuy. Ms. Dupuy, elegantly attired as a lady of the Belle Epoque, recounted in the first person a tale of disaster and rescue as a passenger aboard the ill-fated ship.

Her narrative was so compelling that many in the audience felt drawn into the story.

The speaker also set the record straight on some commonly-believed misinformation about the *Titanic*. For one thing, the ship was never described as unsinkable until after it sank.

Also, the final song played by the band on the deck of the sinking ship was a popular waltz, *Autumn Dream*, and not the hymn *Nearer My God to Thee*.



Lansdale Historical Society
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