



# Jenkins Journal

Newsletter of the Lansdale Historical Society

August-October 2023

## Society urges preservation of bank

As most of you are aware, Wells Fargo Bank, the current owner of the former Lansdale National Bank building on West Main Street announced earlier this summer that it will be permanently closing that facility and placing the historic structure up for sale. The future of the building is unknown at this point.

The Lansdale Historical Society, its officers and trustees are extremely concerned about this

building, which is both an architectural gem and an important part of Lansdale's history.

Our president, Pat Rieker, addressed Lansdale Borough Council on July 19, to express the society's desire that every effort be made to preserve the bank and that Council should take a proactive approach to avoid future preservation crises like this. She said, in part:

*"We're here tonight to encourage*

*you, the members of Borough Council, to take action now to ensure the preservation of the First National Bank building, retaining the appearance of the exterior while repurposing the interior. To that end, we propose that you take these actions:*

- *First, that you act soon to change the wording of the Borough's demolition permit to give Borough officials greater control over changes made to buildings of historic significance.*

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Community Programs to resume September 12



Two of many commemorative tiles produced by American Olean.

### Remembering when the Tile was the town's largest employer

The society begins its 2023-24 Community Program series with a retrospective look at Franklin Pottery, later American Olean Tile Co, founded 100 years ago by Roy and Malcolm Schweiker, which rose to become Lansdale's biggest employer in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century.

**The show will be held Tuesday, Sept. 12, 7 pm, at Lansdale Borough Hall, Broad and Vine Sts.**

One hundred years ago, Malcolm and Roy Schweiker started Franklin Pottery in Lansdale, featuring Benjamin Franklin on their logo. The brothers, having gone to trade school and then having worked at a pottery, decided to start their own company to make hard-to-find ceramic tiles

*(Continued on page 2)*

### LHS Historic Walk planned for Founders' Day, August 26

With the arrival of late summer comes Lansdale's annual Founders Day celebration, marking the incorporation of the borough in 1872. A full day of fun and activities is again on the menu for this year's version of the community celebration on **Saturday, August 26.**

The Society is again playing an active role in the event. Beginning at 10 am, the Lansdale Lifetime Achievement

*(Continued on page 4)*

## IN OCTOBER: The mastery of Milton Bean

**Tuesday, Oct. 10, 7 pm, Lansdale Borough Hall**

Recently, we acquired the extensive research archives on Milton B. Bean from researcher Leopoldo Montoya, who began researching the architect and his buildings after purchasing a Bean-designed house in Wyncote. This launched a 20-year-long search that yielded hundreds, if not thousands, of structures designed by Bean, who resided in Lansdale for half a century.

Many of these homes and buildings are in Lansdale and the surrounding area. The society has featured several of these buildings such as the Hotel Temont and the Music Hall Block in previous programs.

Our program will look at several behind-the-scenes stories of Bean-designed buildings. Included will be Lindenwold Castle and the Lindenwold

Terrace homes in Ambler, the George S. Snyder home in Hatfield, and the “Pink Palace” (never built) near Colmar.

Richard V. Mattison was one of the founders of Keasbey & Mattison Asbestos Works which was started in 1883. His home, “Lindenwold”, was built in 1890, and redesigned in 1912 by Bean. Mattison had been to the British Isles and was inspired to have his house transformed into a “castle” resembling Windsor.

Bean also designed the George S. Snyder residence, now the Paradise Manor retirement home. Snyder lived in the house only 15 years before his death in 1911, but his home supply business, renamed “The Estate of George S. Snyder”, outlasted him by a century.

— *Linda Evans*

## Schweikers built tile empire in Lansdale

*(Continued from page 1)*

The company grew quickly based on the experience, skill and integrity that the Schweikers brought to their business. They started out in an abandoned cannery with a capital investment of \$55,000, eight employees and no customers. By 1925, they had to add an addition to the original building.

In 1929 they purchased a 30-acre site on the outskirts of Lansdale and began their new plant.

Their early products consisted of plain and decorative tiles as well as all sorts of ceramic fixtures. The Schweikers insisted that their product lines maintain the highest of quality. They developed the “one-fire” process that drastically cut

down the manufacturing time. They acquired ownership of pyrophyllite mines, an ore essential to the production of their tiles.

Malcolm and Roy were definitely hands-on during the early years. Later, when they occupied executive offices, they continued to monitor what was happening in the factory on a daily basis.

They also showed concern for their employees, paying them a living wage, providing a comfortable work environment, coffee breaks and company picnics. At its peak, American Olean boasted more than 3,000 employees in the 1950s and 60s. Join us as we review a program produced by the society in 2008 .supplemented by additional information.

— *Linda Evans*

### **Lansdale Historical Society**

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

137 Jenkins Avenue  
Lansdale, PA 19446

**Phone:** (215) 855-1872

**Email:** [info@lansdalehistory.org](mailto:info@lansdalehistory.org)

**Website:** [www.lansdalehistory.org](http://www.lansdalehistory.org)

**Facebook:** Facebook/Lansdale Historical Society



### **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.



## LHS takes photo display on the road to Dock Woods

Dock Woods in Kulpsville, one of the Living Branches communities for seniors, invited Lansdale Historical Society to participate in Dock’s rotating art exhibition program. They were interested in seeing images of “old” Lansdale. Of course, we could accommodate!

Among our vast photo collection are large black and white and color photographs with descriptive captions that were initially assembled for Lansdale Borough’s 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala last year.

These photos showing turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup> Century life in Lansdale – including old street scenes with vintage vehicles, aerial views, baseball teams, the railroad passenger station, and more – were perfect for this occasion. Several paintings depicting local scenes of a bygone era by artists Judith Boyles and the late Sen. Edwin G. Holl were also included.

Our society’s exhibit of photos and artwork ran from May through July.

- Helen Harlow Schwartz

## Library to host talk on Heebners

A public presentation entitled “The Heebners of Lansdale: Titans of Industry” will be presented on **Sunday, October 29** at the Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center in Pennsburg beginning at 2:30 pm.

Linda Evans of the Lansdale Historical Society and the Descendants of the Schwenkfeldian Exiles will present the program along with Anna Heebner, a sixth generation descendent of David S. Heebner, founder of Lansdale’s Heebner Agricultural Works.

## IN BRIEF:

### Cemetery tour on Vets’ Day

On **Saturday, November 11**, Pat Rieker will lead a walk through St. Stanislaus Church Cemetery. She will share a brief history of the cemetery, which has served the families of the church since 1879.

The program titled *Those Who Served* will highlight military veterans and others who have served their country and community.

Those who attend the program should wear walking shoes and dress for the weather. The hour-long walk will begin at 12:15 pm at the large parking lot next to the church at E. Main St. and Lansdale Ave.

### Save the date...

The Society’s annual Holidays at the Homestead, with be held **Saturday, December 9**. Details will be in the next *Jenkins Journal*.

**Dine & Donate**

at

750 Upper State Rd, North Wales, PA 19454

**Tuesday, September 19**

**11am – 9 pm**

**10%**

of

**TOTAL SALES ALL DAY**

**will be donated to**

**Lansdale Historical Society**

# Walking tour included in Founders' Day events

*(Continued from page 1)*

Award will be presented post-humously to the Rev. Dr. Susan Bertolette, pastor of St. John's United Church of Christ, at the Jenkins Homestead.

Rev. Bertolette was selected to receive this award at the 2022 Founders' Day, but she passed away several weeks earlier at age 66. The decision to delay the presentation until this year was made out of respect for her family.

LHS will also be offering a Self-guided Walking Tour of Downtown Lansdale, including historic structures that have stood the test of time.

The tour can be taken at your leisure at any time. Printed

**FOUNDERS' DAY SCHEDULE**  
See [www.discoverlansdale.org/founders-day](http://www.discoverlansdale.org/founders-day) for updated information.

maps, photos and information on the buildings will be available at the research center on the 26<sup>th</sup>, and will also be post-

ed via the internet for downloading. Check our Facebook page beginning August 23. for details.

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## BANK CLOSURE

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*(Continued from page 1)*

*\* Also, that a letter be sent to the Realtor who is handling the sale of the building to express the borough's concern for the future of this property.*

*\* Finally, that the Borough of Lansdale begin the process of establishing a historic district to be administered by a Historical Architectural Review Board as defined by PA state law. Some of our neighboring boroughs, such as North Wales, Ambler, Souderton, and Doylestown have established historic districts in order to preserve their landmark buildings. The historical society would welcome the opportunity to work with the Borough to define a historic district for Lansdale."*

We urge you, our members, to express to Council your support for these long-overdue and critically-needed measures to preserve our town's historically important past.

**-- Dick Shearer**



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137 Jenkins Avenue  
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