

Durham Historical Society Newsletter

Spring

Volume VII, Issue 2
March 2004

Grand span

Celebration planned for bridge's birthday

The Riegelsville Bridge will be placed on the National Register of Historical Places during its 100th birthday celebration Sept. 18. And it may be a one-of-a-kind structure.

An all-day festival will begin at 10:30 a.m. with a parade and a dedication ceremony at the bridge, according to Elizabeth Weaver of Riegelsville, chair of the Riegelsville Bridge Centennial Steering Committee. The bridge, which connects the twin Riegelsvilles in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, has a truly interesting history.

The original bridge, a covered wooden one, was built in 1835. It was used continuously until it was swept away in the flood of Oct. 10, 1903.

The existing bridge, constructed the following year by John A. Roebling & Sons Co., is a three-span



Photo by David Denenberg

The Riegelsville Bridge turns 100.

suspension structure with a total length of 577 feet. The 1835 masonry piers were rebuilt as the company began its work. The pier nearest the Pennsylvania approach was demolished in the flood of 1936 and was subsequently rebuilt using reinforced concrete. Roebling also built the Brooklyn Bridge.

The bridge is unique. It is one of the few—and may be the only—remaining American multi-span highway suspension bridges with continuous cables, according to David Denenberg of the Web site, www.bridgemeister.com.

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Did you know?

Did you know Durham Cave was once a big tourist destination?

In the decades before the Civil War, the cave attracted crowds of visitors, many riding on horseback from distant towns and cities, according to Place Names in Bucks County, which was written by George MacReynolds, a former librarian of the Bucks County Historical Society. In the second edition of his book, published in 1955, he quoted from an article in the The Doylestown Democrat on July 9, 1850, that said people had demolished the cave, broken and burned parts and boated pieces to New Jersey. The article claimed, "We very much doubt whether the rest of mankind can then be persuaded that such a cave ever existed in Durham Township."

A new leaf for this historic little newsletter

Every now and then publications change their style. The editors always agonize over the public's reaction—just as we are agonizing over this new look for this tiny publication in this cozy nook of Pennsylvania. People, in general, resist change. They like things to stay the way they are. But if Henry Ford had bowed to that concept, we'd still be driving Tin Lizzies.

Spring is as good a

time as any to let a new broom sweep through—to welcome a design change.

What you have here, ladies and gentlemen, is a slight change in style, but not in substance. The Durham Historical Society Newsletter will continue to offer information about Durham's important role in the development of this country.

This issue is short (*reduced to four pages*) and a little late (*but it still is*

spring) because the editor was late in signing on, but we hope you believe it's full of promise for the future. History is not a dead thing. It should be honored and celebrated as we move ahead.

If you have ideas for changes, please share them. Messengers on horseback not needed—we're only an e-mail away.

The Editor



President's Message

As was noted in the **2003 Annual Report**, which members should have recently received, last year was one of great accomplishment for our society. We finished the year with a **record level of membership**, our **treasury balances were strong**, we fulfilled our dream of restoring the **Ceresota Flour Mural** and we marked **Durham Day** with another terrific celebration.

With your continued support, I feel confident that we will build upon the achievements of last year and that our 2004 Annual Report will similarly show much that we will be proud of. Our next major endeavor will be the creation of a suitable memorial for the "**Beam of Freedom**" we were able to recover last year from the debris of the fallen World Trade Center in New York City. Suggested designs have already been solicited from the community, and **Ann Funkhouser**, chair of the Durham Beam committee, is currently working with her co-members to bring this project to fruition.

Durham Day has been scheduled for **Saturday, Oct. 9**, from noon to 4 p.m.. **Carle Robbins** and his committee have already begun planning the logistics for the

celebration and I'm confident the event this year will once again be another great opportunity for our community to get together, meet their neighbors and share a festive time around the Durham Boat and Gristmill.

We expect that our Web site, www.durhamhistoricalsociety.com, designed by webmaster, **Thomas J. Unger** and generously hosted by member, **Ken Fenske**, will be completed prior to your receiving the next newsletter in June. Once it is up and running, it will allow us to efficiently share Durham's unique history worldwide in addition to providing us with an outlet for generating revenue through the sale of our memorabilia.

The Board of Directors reluctantly agreed to the retirement of **Lynn Oliver** who has been the editor of our well-regarded newsletter since 1999. We are very fortunate, however, that our member, **Kathryn F. Clark**, has agreed to succeed Lynn in that position, starting with this edition. I'm sure that many of you are already familiar with Kathy's writings for the *Bucks County Herald* and the *Eastern Pennsylvania Business Journal*, among others, and I'm certain that our newsletter and its readers will be well-served by her stewardship.

Our **2004 annual mem-**

bership drive is currently in progress. Thank you very much if you have already submitted your renewal--we will strive to justify the trust you have placed in us. A renewal application can be found in the previous mailing which contained our Annual Report. Please note that our coveted *thank you* gifts are still available and can be selected on the form. Unfortunately, given the costs of mailing, this will be the last newsletter that we can send to those who do not renew.

Elections for our corporate officers were held during the March 23 board of directors meeting. Stephen Willey, Carle Robbins and Jim Herrmann were unanimously elected to serve one-year terms as president, vice-president and secretary-treasurer, respectively.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Willey, President

This quarterly newsletter is free to members and is published by

Durham Historical Society

P.O. Box 5

Durham, PA 18039

E-mail:

durhamhistoricalsociety@juno.com

Editor: Kathryn Finegan Clark

E-mail: kathrynclark@earthlink.net



The little house in the woods

By Lorretta Riegel Deysher

The walls of the little house on Coon Road just past the Riegel farm could reveal a lot of history.

One interesting feature of the house was the cave in the basement. A still was on the property to make moonshine.

Water was taken from the creek to start the boiling process. Then the finished product was stored in the cave. As often as I went into the cave I only saw potatoes and carrots and a few other odds and ends— never any booze. But why should a little kid look for moonshine?

Back in the '30s some very interesting and vivacious people lived there. One such family was the Zimmermans. This again was a large poor family striving to keep nourishing food on the table. Mrs. Zimmerman took time out from her large family to teach my mother how to manage a home— to boil potatoes, sew and mend and to operate the old black kitchen range. In return, Mother gave her milk, eggs, and hand-me-down clothes the rich families in Easton no longer needed.

Around 1930, Mrs. Zimmermann was expecting another baby. When the due day arrived she sent one of her daughters Rozzie, to see if Mother could get a message down to the mill. She was having trouble with the delivery and needed Dr. Cope. As Dr. Cope drove past our house, he stopped in to see if Mother would assist him. Naturally everyone in the valley helped each other and Mother was no different. When the baby was



This photo of the little house was provided by Lorretta Riegel. Deysher.

delivered, Dr. Cope handed her to mom with the instructions to clean up the child and put some baby oil on her. Mother searched for the needed item but could find nothing. She told Dr. Cope about the situation and asked what she should do. He turned to Mom and asked, "Is there any lard in the house?" Mother found lard and the baby was rubbed down with it and then swaddled in a linen sheet.

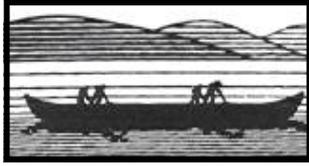
Another feature of the property was the outhouse. I was fascinated with the relief system and used the facility every time I went to visit. The fascination was how the system was set up. There were two adult arrangements, then the holes were staggered to accommodate the various ages and heights of children, starting with very low and a small hole for the tiniest bottom and working up to adult needs. If I remember cor-

rectly, it had six convenient placements along with corn cobs and an old Sears catalog. You never had to pound on the door for the person inside to hurry up and there was always company to talk to as business was being taken care of. This was one way to meet the needs of a large family.

After the Zimmerman family moved to a larger home in Riegelsville, a couple by the name of Derica or Deriko (not sure of the spelling) lived in the house for a couple of years. Bill, was a lawyer and in poor health. The house was a refuge until he gained his strength back. They were a nice couple and in the evenings they would take walks to the farm to visit and enjoy a cup of coffee and a piece of cake.

Editor's Note: The writer has given us special permission to print this story. It may not be duplicated in any way without her permission.

March 2004



Durham Historical Society
P.O. Box 5
Durham, PA 18039

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Durham—a tiny Highlands gem

Durham is a tiny township, the second smallest in Bucks County and as such it often is overlooked—or even joked about on a county level. It's not that the powers-that-be don't love us. They do visit now and again and pause long enough to envy our lifestyle before they beat it back to the bustling lower end as though they fear being caught up in its magic.

Manhattanites, too, are drawn here as though by some natural magnetic substance in the soil. They, too, often poke a little fun at our country roads and slower pace. Nevertheless, their love of place shines through. We have to understand, too, that though the jokes may fly, the city dwellers have chosen this place for their weekend retreats—and they've chosen it even though there are many other wonderful areas within driving distance of New York City.

Unlike other Bucks townships, Durham has grown slowly and with grace. We value it highly. Durham is beautiful, unique—and even a little quirky, but it is not just a dot on an old map. It should now, in this 21st Century, be viewed also as part of a larger pic-

ture, a historic segment of a giant geographical area that spans parts of four states.

If things go well, Congress will establish a Highlands Stewardship Area, a geographic area that encompasses more than 2,000,000 acres and extends from eastern Pennsylvania through New Jersey, New York and into northwestern Connecticut.

The Durham Township supervisors recently passed a resolution to support the Highland Stewardship Act being considered by Congress.

If enacted, the bill will declare the Highland Region is an environmentally unique area that provides clean drinking water to more than 15,000,000 people in metropolitan areas of the four states, provides critical wildlife habitat, maintains an important historic connection to early native American culture, colonial settlement, the American Revolution and Civil War eras and provides recreational resources for 14,000,000 visitors annually.

The Editor

The Durham Historical Society

Mission Statement

To study and preserve the history of Durham Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, to educate the general public on the significant role played by the township and its residents in the development of the United States of America during the colonial period, the Revolutionary War and thereafter, and to insure that this history is not forgotten.

The Durham Historical Society is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization.