



*knee-deep in history*

# The Scribe

January 2020

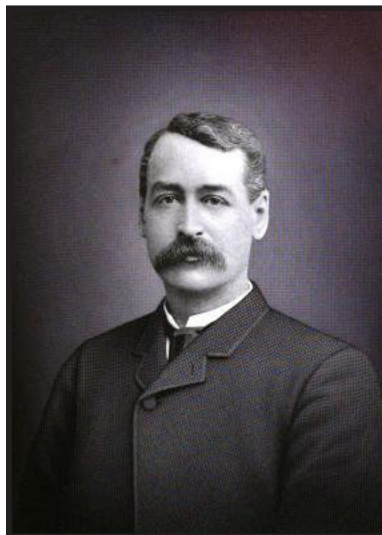
Palmerton Area Historical Society  
www.palmertonhistorical.org

## **The Wetherill Family – From Zinc Plants to Trout Streams**

If circumstances in the late nineteenth century had been slightly different, the town of Palmerton might just as easily have become Wetherillville! It was Stephen Palmer's vision that resulted in the combination of several small zinc producers and the subsequent construction of the community that bears his name, but his achievements rested to a great extent on foundations laid by others. None were more important than the Wetherills of Bethlehem.

The Wetherills descended from a successful Revolutionary War era Philadelphia Quaker family. During the building boom of the early 1800's paint was in demand to extend the lives of wooden homes and other structures, but often it was expensive, uneven in color, and had to be prepared by hand from a number of ingredients. Samuel Wetherill (1736-1816) helped build a thriving business based on the use of red lead and white lead pigments.

The discovery of zinc ore in the Friedensville area south of Bethlehem helped change this when Samuel's great grandson, Samuel II (1821-1890) and others created the Lehigh Zinc Company. In 1853, Samuel II developed an efficient process for zinc oxide pigment and furnaces were built to produce 2,000 tons per year. These furnaces were prototypes of those that eventually produced American Process zinc oxide in Palmerton's West Plant for eighty years.



*John Price Wetherill*

The Lehigh Zinc Company furnaces were so efficient they doubled the output of a furnace built a year earlier in a small Newark, NJ plant owned by a fledgling New Jersey Zinc Company. Together, in one year, these two plants turned out more zinc oxide than had been produced in the United States through the years. This facilitated the formation of a new industry of ready-made paints with superior color and performance.

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# Palmerton Area Historical Society

PO Box 267 ~ Palmerton, PA 18071  
www.palmertonhistorical.org  
palmertonhistorical@ptd.net  
(610) 824-6954

## **OFFICERS and BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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Jane Borbe  
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Susan Steigerwalt

## **Five Star Awards**

In 1919 The New Jersey Zinc Company recognized a number of employees for 25 years of service. They represented the following components that were the basis for the “new” NJZ –

Passaic Zinc  
Franklin Iron Company  
Bertha Zinc  
Lehigh Zinc  
Lehigh Zinc & Iron Company  
New Jersey Zinc  
Mineral Point Zinc  
Wyeth Lead & Zinc  
New Jersey Zinc & Iron Company



*The Great War had ended on November 11, 1918. The following year, Palmerton prepared to welcome home its returning heroes!*

## Moses Taylor Pyne

### *NJZ Director and Philanthropist*

When we think of noted business people today, the names of Jobs, Buffett, and Gates are foremost among them. In the late 1800's the names of Carnegie, Frick, and Rockefeller immediately come to mind. Often overlooked are Palmer, Heckscher, and Moses Taylor Pyne. The latter three were instrumental in the creation and success of The New Jersey Company.

Palmer's reputation is well known to readers of *The Scribe*, and Heckscher was briefly profiled in the April 2016 issue. Few are familiar with the third member of the trio. Pyne's maternal grandfather, Moses Taylor, controlled National City Bank of New York and the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad. Although Pyne came into the world with much wealth inherited from his grandfather, he was brilliant in his own right.

He was an 1877 graduate of Princeton University where he excelled in Latin and

Greek. He followed that with a law degree from Columbia University and then devoted his life to many philanthropic causes. At the age of 28 he was appointed to Princeton's Board of Trustees and he served in that role for 36 years.



It is said that he missed not a single meeting in that time. His generosity to his alma mater is legendary and for several years "he drew his own check to cover the deficit in the budget."

Pyne was an early member of the NJZ Board of Directors and his influence on Stephen Palmer and his son Edgar is apparent from their equally generous attitude toward

Princeton. At the time of his death in 1921, the *Wall Street Journal* wrote of Pyne – "A man of exemplary character .... (who) considered his trusteeship in Princeton University the greatest honor and most worthy task that fell to his lot."

Such was one of the early founders of The New Jersey Zinc Company.

### **Did You Know???**

In 1913 the production of 204,000 tons of zinc made the tiny country of Belgium the world's largest zinc producer. The Great War devastated their facilities and production in 1918 was only 8,000 tons. It was only through the war-time efforts of New Jersey Zinc in Palmerton that much of this production loss was offset.



Early attempts by Samuel II between 1854 and 1859 to produce commercial grade zinc metal (or spelter) met with limited success. It was not until young engineers such as Matthiessen and Hegeler from Germany and 30 year-old Joseph Wharton of Philadelphia employed the “Belgian retort” approach that satisfactory metal production levels were achieved. Wharton later helped create Bethlehem Steel and founded the renowned Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.

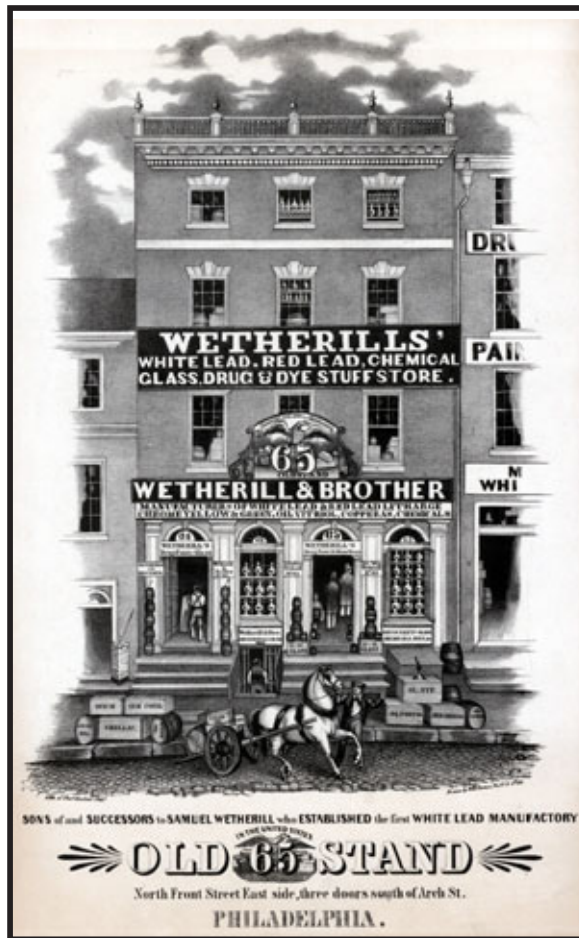
By 1864, Lehigh Zinc had erected a rolling mill and was producing 1700 tons annually of rolled zinc sheet – just in time to meet the demand of a breakthrough technological invention – the dry cell battery.

Although Samuel II had a great technical mind, it was not matched by his business skills – skills that his son, John Price Wetherill (1844-1906), had in abundance. John was a graduate of Polytechnic College of Philadelphia with degrees in both civil and mining engineering. He started his career with the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company and eventually rose to Chief of Mining Engineers.

In 1881, with the Lehigh Zinc Company struggling under his father’s management, John and his brother (Samuel Price Wetherill) together with Richard and August Heckscher of Philadelphia, purchased the Company. Shortly thereafter, with more than 400 workers employed, annual production rose to about 6,000 tons of zinc oxide, 5,000 tons of zinc metal, and 3600 tons of spiegeleisen.

Enter Stephen Palmer in the early 1890’s. Although Stephen rightly deserves the lion’s share of accolades for the quantum leap from a handful of small producers to what became the world’s most innovative zinc company, he had a great supporting team. The Wetherill brothers, the Heckschers, Moses Taylor Pyne and others all

contributed to the success of The New Jersey Zinc Company. Not to be overlooked was Stephen’s son, Edgar, who took over at his father’s death and led the Company for 30 years. This is a story of industrial cooperation worth telling - at another time. But what about the trout stream?



## Wetherill Family – from front page ~

John Price Wetherill was an avid fisherman. When the challenges of running a major zinc operation were transferred to a new management team in Palmerton, John looked to fill his remaining years in the enjoyment of his free time. For years, he had fished in relative privacy in pristine Pocono Mountain streams and in 1894 he undertook a new venture with the creation of the Pohoqualine Fish Association.



*The Clubhouse - circa 1894 ...*

The Association had as its charter “to promote stream preservation and the enjoyment of fishing for its members” and it was headquartered in a former Monroe County Stagecoach stop in the village of McMichael north of Brodheadsville. From that point south, for a distance of about ten miles, the Association acquired through purchase or lease agreements the exclusive use of the McMichaels Creek. The purpose of the members was to maintain the waters free of “manure, offal, etc.” and other refuse. Although their interests were self-serving, they

were truly among the environmentalists of their day.

Wetherill served as president of the Association from 1894 to 1905 and the organization he created recently celebrated its 125th year. In addition to his love of fishing, John remained active as a member of a number of elite Philadelphia social, athletic, and patriotic societies including the Union League, the Merion Cricket Club, the Radnor Hunt, the Corinthian Yacht Club, and the Art Club of Philadelphia.

Following his death, his family endowed the John Price Wetherill Medal at The Franklin Institute in recognition of discovery or invention in the physical sciences. The Wetherill name in the annals of zinc (and trout fishing) will always carry great significance.



*... and as it appears today*

## 2020 Monthly Program Schedule

*all programs held in the Knight's Gallery of the Palmerton Library at 7pm unless otherwise noted  
handicap accessibility*

**January, February & March**

*No Meeting*

**August 10**

*Annual Picnic*

**April 13**

*How the Ice Age Impacted the  
Lehigh Gap Area*

Dr. Dru Germanowski, Geologist

**September**

*No Meeting*

**May 11**

*The History of the Lehigh River*

Louise Bugby

**October 12**

*PA German Gravestones*

Michael Emory

PA Historical Museum Commission

**June 8**

*Wild Creek Bee Farm*

Chris Maxwell

**November 9**

*TBA*

**July 13**

*History and Demonstration of the  
High Wheel Bicycle*

Donald R. Serfass

at the Borough Park

**December 6**

*Ecumenical Service &  
Christmas Party*

*The Palmerton Area Heritage Center will be closed from  
January through March for a complete display revision*

## Have Your Renewed Your Membership for 2020?

*Check Your Label for a "Blue Dot"*

If you have a "blue dot" on the address label, it indicates that we haven't yet heard from you.

Don't miss future issues of *The Scribe!* Renew now! Memberships begin at only \$15. Support the Historical Society and keep Palmerton alive for future generations.

## **Financial Summary**

### *Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2019*

In an effort to keep our membership apprised of our financial status, the following summary is provided for the fiscal year just ended.

<b>INCOME (\$)</b>		<b>EXPENSES (\$)</b>	
Membership Dues	10,325	Utilities & Fuel - LWC	3,241
Contributions - In Memorium	2,420	Maintenance - LWC	5,543
Contributions - General	21,217	Archives	1,150
Sales & Applicable Taxes	1,828	Utilities & Fuel PHC	5,926
Miscellaneous	825	Maintenance - PHC	4,512
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>36,615</b>	<b>ADMINISTRATIVE</b>	
		Insurance	2,089
		Printing & <i>The Scribe</i>	2,143
		Internet & Website	2,473
		Taxes	3,861
		Honorariums	2,634
		Miscellaneous	1,583
		<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>35,155</b>

This is a summary of the income and expenses of the Society for the year ending September 30, 2019. It does not include bequests.

A formal financial report has been prepared by the firm of Francis X. Mullane, Inc. and all required Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and IRS 990 filings have been made.

## **Heartfelt Thanks to All Volunteers**

We would be remiss if we didn't express our appreciation for the efforts of all our volunteers –

- To those who staff the Heritage Center
- To those who diligently archive information and artifacts
- To the Steering Committee for its programming skills, Feature Room, window displays and Christmas Tree in the Park
- To the Cleaning Committee of the Little White Church
- To those who staffed the Covered Bridge Trailer at the Festival
- To those who assist at the Sidewalk Sale and who provide decorations
- To our Officers and Board of Directors for their guidance

*Thank you for your time, your talent, and your support. You make us what we are!*





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PO Box 267  
Palmerton, PA 18071

**Palmerton Area  
Historical Society  
Heritage Center**

410 Delaware Avenue  
(610) 824-6954

**HOURS**

**Wednesday** - 12:30-3pm

**Thursday** - 10am-2pm

**Friday** - Noon-4pm

**Saturday** - 10am-2pm

