



*knee-deep in history*

# The Scribe

July 2021

Palmerton Area Historical Society  
www.palmertonhistorical.org

## **Palmerton Bandstand Undergoes Renovation Community Centerpiece Receives a 21st Century Update**

For the third time since its construction in 1914, the treasured bandstand in the center of Palmerton's borough park is undergoing a face lift. In addition to its purpose as a music venue, the bandstand has, for more than a century, been one of the area's most photographed scenes. As seasons change, amateurs and professionals train their cameras on the structure's classic lines in an attempt to capture a prized image.

The bandstand has served as a backdrop for wedding and graduation pictures and as a focal point for numerous community events during the year. For 40 years it has been the logo of the Chamber of Commerce and together with the NJZ "Horsehead" it has become synonymous with Palmerton.

But time takes its toll. The bandstand was first restored in the 1950's when it was updated

from its original rustic cedar shakes. It again gradually drifted into disrepair until the ladies of the Concourse Club came its rescue in 1989. They spearheaded community involvement and encouraged the cooperation and financial support of Exchange Club members. In less than six months they had restored and enhanced the bandstand for the next generation.



*photo courtesy of Carl P. Kern*

Use of the borough park and the bandstand has grown and by 2021 there was further need of renewal. Again, community organizations rallied. Plans were submitted and approved to address changes in building codes. More efficient lighting and microphone capability now enhance the experience of musicians and listeners, and with generous support from the Behler Foundation much of the projected \$25,000 cost has been raised. Dedication is scheduled for August 22nd.

# Palmerton Area Historical Society

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Jane Borbe, Peter Kern & Susan Steigerwalt

## **Dr. Jane's Rose Garden** *A Colorful Touch to the Park*

The January 2019 issue of *The Scribe* described the work being done on Dr. E. Jane Goplerud's wonderful gift to the Borough Park in memory of her sister, Ann, who distinguished herself during World War II and in the years following.

The Rose Garden is now in full bloom and continues a tradition of beautification that has made the Park renowned for its maintenance and upkeep for more than a century.



## **Help Wanted!!!**

Now that Covid 19 appears to be retreating, the Historical Society is planning a return to normal hours of operation. We are seeking volunteers to staff the Heritage Center and to assist in the Archives.

If you would like further information on how you can help, call Jane Borbe at 610-597-6807.

## **William A. Smelas**

### *In Memoriam*

In 1981, Gulf+Western Industries was negotiating the sale of its ownership of The New Jersey Zinc Company. The interested buyers included a group of seven outside investors who were given extensive tours of the plant. One of the guides was William A. Smelas, Manager of Production and Maintenance, who so impressed his guests with the depth of his knowledge of the plant that they made it a requirement of their participation in the purchase that Bill be given a contract to assure his continued employment.

Bill Smelas began his 41-year career at NJZ in 1960 after receiving his BS in Chemical Engineering from the University of Pittsburgh. Although he was a native of Leetsdale, a small, rural borough along the Ohio River in Allegheny County, Bill soon adopted Palmerton as his home. He married a local girl and together they proudly raised a family.

Bill's skill as an engineer became readily apparent to his superiors and he was given some of the most challenging assignments. He experienced the demands of new owners when G+W acquired the business in 1966; he adapted to rising energy costs and the recession that came with the Arab Oil Crisis of 1973; and he worked closely with regulators to help meet the EPA's rapidly developing environmental

guidelines. It was no surprise that the new owners who planned to buy NJZ in 1981 wanted Bill as part of their team.

The next twenty years were no less demanding as NJZ in Palmerton transitioned from the manufacture of zinc metal to a role in recovering zinc values from industrial by-products and wastes and Bill rose to the Presidency of the new recycling company.

Despite the demands of travel and the innumerable meetings, Bill always found time for family and community. He was an active member of Sacred Heart Church and a charter Board member of St. John Neumann Regional School. For 50 years he was on the Board of the Palmerton Memorial Park Association and he was a founding member of the Horsehead Community Development Fund. The list could go on. The Historical Society will miss him as well. As its Vice President he used his skills to assure that the community's heritage would not be lost to later generations.

Bill passed away quietly on April 5, 2021. He passed away with his family nearby. He passed away on his terms - with little fanfare and with only the heartfelt words of a simple obituary. It was as he wanted it.





## Does History Repeat Itself?

### *The Emergency Quota Act of 1921*

Palmerton was built on the diversity of its ethnic composition. From its earliest years, the growth of the community and the success of The New Jersey Zinc Company went hand in hand with a flow of immigrants from Europe. During a trip through the NJZ plant, a visitor could hear as many as eight languages spoken, although the mastery of “English as a Second Language” was an achievement in which most new families took great pride.

Within 20 years of the founding of Palmerton, the atmosphere in the United States toward immigration had taken a turn. The 1918 end of “The Great War” resulted in economic and social disruption in Europe and many of those who were displaced in their native country sought the stability and opportunities of the United States. However, a similar economic downturn in the New World had increased resentment toward these immigrants. Established families feared the further loss of jobs and the disruption of neighborhoods. This led to the passage of the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 that was subtly designed to slow the influx into the United States of Southern and Eastern Europeans and other “undesirables”.

How was this to be accomplished? -

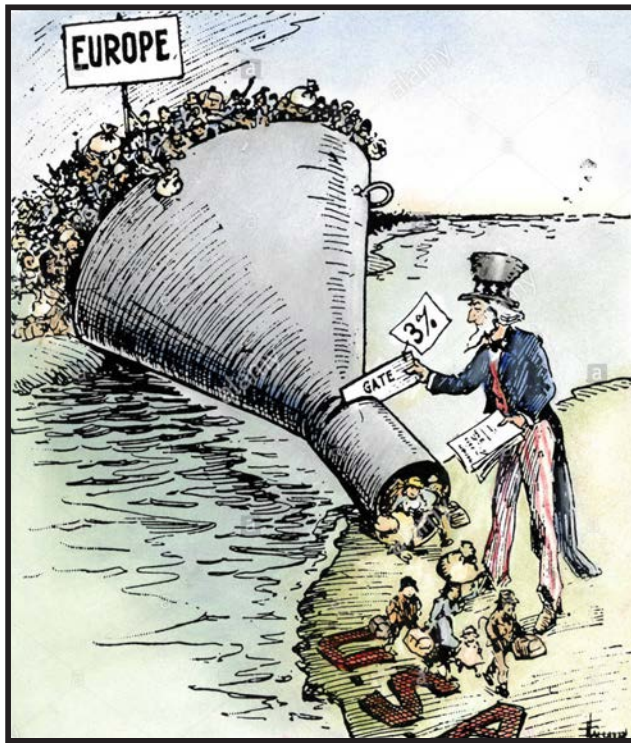
A formula was used that limited newcomers to 3% of a particular ethnic group as represented in the 1910 census. Upon passage on May 19, 1921, the Act had the effect of curtailing

the overall number of immigrants from 805,000 in 1920 to 310,000 in 1921-22. However, it fell short of its “unwritten” objective since many Southern and Eastern Europeans had immigrated here between 1890 and 1910 and were already represented in the 1910 census.

A revision to the quota was made in the Immigration

Act of 1924 which reduced the number of new immigrants to 2% of a particular group based on the 1890 census! This obvious change passed the Senate by a vote of 90 to 2 with 4 senators not voting!

The discussion of immigration policy is not new and it is not the intent of *The Scribe* to draw a parallel to the issues of today. It is simply to point out how important is the study of history and that every effort should be made to learn from the past.



*National Archives*

## 1951 – ZINC Magazine Has a New Look

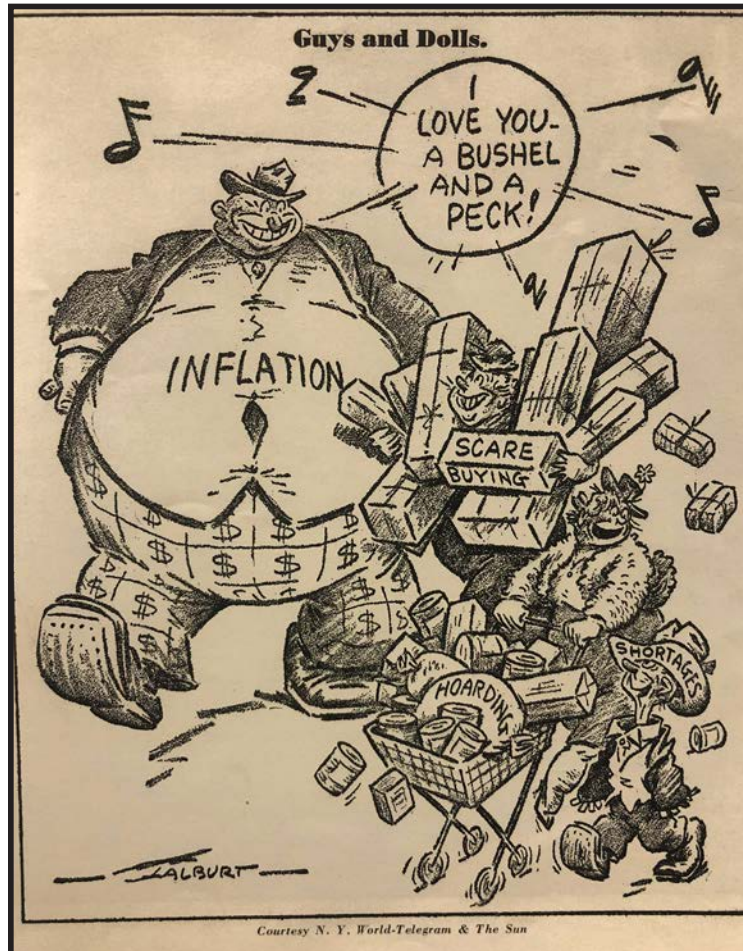
### *Addresses Events of Topical Interest*

For forty years, NJZ's Zinc publication was primarily devoted to zinc technology and to matters directly related to the company's mining and manufacturing facilities. Events would occur in 1950 that would change that. On June 25, 1950 North Korea sent 75,000 troops south across the 38th Parallel into the Republic of Korea. Within a month the US was fully committed to the defense of its ally.

Americans were tired of war. They had suffered through rationing in World War II and were enjoying a return to economic stability. Inflation was almost non-existent at 1% and they had helped start the rebuilding of Europe with billions of dollars in aid through the Marshall Plan. Now they were being asked to fight over a piece of ground that Secretary of State Dean Acheson said was "the worst possible location in the world to fight (a)...war".

Within six months of the onset of fighting in Korea, hoarding of goods had become so widespread that inflation ballooned to 9% and

threatened to go even higher. Wage and price freezes were imposed by the government to curb what one economist referred to as "too many dollars chasing too few goods."



*ZINC Magazine - April 1951*

on a "pay-as-you-go" basis; increase savings; use credit as sparingly as possible; and most important, buy only what you need! These suggestions have a very familiar ring and still hold true.

Seventy years later inflation is returning and economists still debate the solution, with the only thing two of them will agree upon is that the theory of a third economist is wrong - and that we should buy less toilet paper!

*ZINC Magazine* had taken on a new look in 1951. It was now an 8 ½ by 11-inch publication and it broadened its reporting with articles on the scourge of inflation. The articles steered clear of politics and focused on what could be done to check inflation – increase productivity; cut non-essential government spending; increase taxes to put the government



## **1864 Hose Cart – A Labor of Love** *A Feature of 2021 Memorial Day Parade*

The Aquashicola Fire Department's recently restored 1864 hose cart was a star attraction of the 2021 Memorial Day Parade along Delaware Avenue. The antique cart is an important reminder of an era past. First introduced more than 200 years ago to facilitate the speed of fighting fires, the carts always had their hoses ready for deployment at the station house. As they were pulled to the site of a fire by a team of four to ten men, the hose was played out and permitted a quick hook-up to the source of water.

The Aquashicola hose cart was a hidden treasure that had long since served its intended

purpose. Hose trucks had replaced it and it had been relegated to an unheated storage building. Through the years it received periodic cleaning and was displayed at various events, but it was not until four years ago that it was totally overhauled. Old paint was removed and the

entire vehicle was sanded and repainted. More than 300 man-hours of work by volunteers gave it a like-new look.

The local communities and The New Jersey Zinc have had a proud history of rapid and efficient firefighting. This historic gem will long remain a tribute to all who have served in this vital role.



*photo courtesy of Susan Steigerwalt*

### **Aquashicola Fire Company** *A Proud Tradition*

It's been 275 years since Benjamin Franklin organized the first volunteer fire company in the United States. Today, more than 70% of firefighters in this country are volunteers and the Palmerton area is fortunate to have the skills and dedication of the 21 volunteer firemen and 12 volunteer support staff of the Aquashicola Fire Company. Since their founding in 1929, they have maintained up to date equipment and have been quick to respond to calls. The Palmerton area is grateful for their service.

## 2021 Monthly Program Schedule

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

**July 12**

***Human powered toys  
including the "Slinky"***

*Pennsylvania's official toy that is  
manufactured in Hollidaysburg, PA*

Bob Swaim

at the Borough Park

**August 9 (5pm)**

***Annual Society Picnic***

Holzman Farm

hosted by Bert Holzman

**September 20**

***How the Ice Age Impacted the  
Lehigh Gap and Stoney Ridge***

Dr. Dru Germanowski, Geologist

**October 11**

***PA German Gravestones***

Michael Emery

PA Historical Museum Commission  
at Little White Church

**November 9**

***Pennsylvania Tour Photos***

Lynn Shupp

**December 6**

***Ecumenical Service &  
Christmas Party***

3pm at Little White Church

Dinner Following at Bert's Steakhouse

## Kibler School Events

**July 15**

Eco-Tourism in Carbon County - Its Importance

**July 22**

Carbon County's Environmental Education Center

**July 29**

Pysanky Eggs – Their History and How to Paint Them

***All Events are at 7pm with Wine and Cheese***



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410 Delaware Avenue  
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**Thursdays & Saturdays  
10am-1pm**

