



*knee-deep in history*

# The Scribe

April 2022

Palmerton Area Historical Society  
www.palmertonhistorical.org

## **Palmerton**

### ***A Community of Immigrants***

As this issue of The Scribe was being prepared, people everywhere strained to learn the fate of countries in Eastern Europe. The destruction that is being wrought in Ukraine evokes memories of the devastation of World War II and it is hoped that a political solution can be reached to allow peace to return and reconstruction to take place.

After more than a century of assimilation, some may not realize that Palmerton was built to a great extent on the labor and commitment of many Eastern European immigrants. It was only appropriate that the earliest exhibits following the opening of the Society's Heritage Center were dedicated to the customs and dress of those who came here from countries such as Hungary, Poland, Germany, Portugal, Russia, and Ukraine. Although these newcomers were proud of their cultural heritage, they worked together to build the schools, churches, and businesses that form a community.

In January 2006, the Heritage Center displayed a history of the Ukrainian immigrants and for several months visitors came from all parts of the Lehigh Valley to experience it. Among them was a young married couple from Ukraine who spent an hour and a half at the Center explaining, commenting, and enjoying an opportunity to "revisit" their homeland. Before leaving, they signed the guest book with an appreciative note in their native language.



*Adams Outdoor Advertising billboard in support of Ukraine is seen around the area, including this billboard near Palmerton.*

Two days later, the late Mary Taschler – a Society volunteer – provided the following translation: “We thank you very much for your hospitality, We enjoyed the display of our native costumes since they were so familiar and reminded us of our native land. We express our gratitude to you.”

The Historical Society appreciates the contributions made by all immigrants who journeyed to these shores to build a strong community and an even stronger United States.

# Palmerton Area Historical Society

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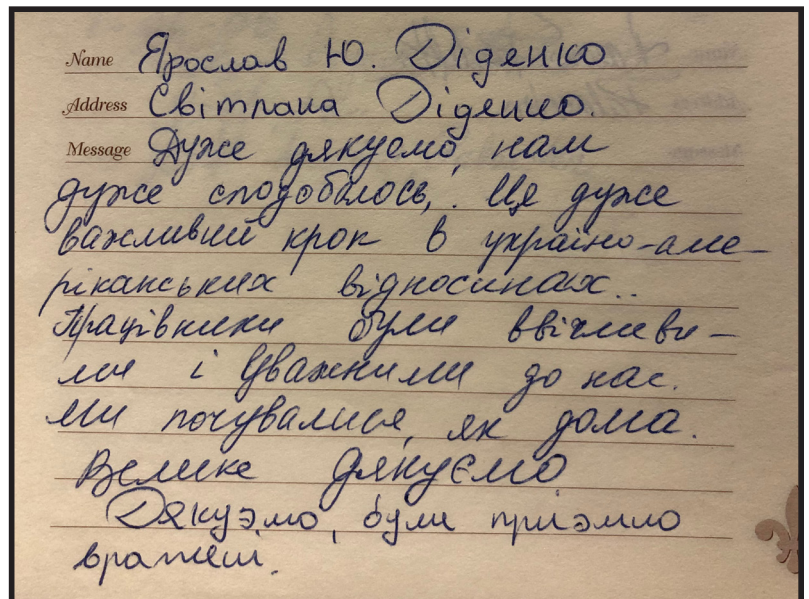
Jane Borbe, Peter Kern & Susan Steigerwalt

## **Memorial Park Celebration!**

***Park and its Iconic Pool are 75  
and Going Strong***

Sunday July 17th will host a celebration of Palmerton Memorial Park. The Park was dedicated May 30, 1947 after two years of construction. Its \$150,000 cost was underwritten through local contributions and a \$75,000 matching gift from The New Jersey Zinc Company. The official Grand Opening took place on July 4, 1947 and this year's event will mark 75 years of virtually uninterrupted service to the community.

The Park is governed and operated as a non-profit corporation recognized under the Internal Revenue Service Code Section 501(c)(3). Through the years it has been carefully maintained and improved through generous contributions and bequests.



*A message from Russel and Syvtana Digenco who visited our  
Ukraine exhibit on February 2, 2006*

## Farewell

*The Scribe* wishes to note the recent passing of four members of the Historical Society whose careers were intimately associated with Palmerton.

### **Milton D. Stemler (1923-2022)**

A lifelong citizen of Palmerton, Milt was awarded a Bronze Star for his service as a sonar operator aboard a WWII attack submarine. After the War, he teamed with his late brother Donald to operate Stemler's Hardware, a family-owned business, that became a destination for customers near and far. Milt displayed a passion for sailing, golfing, and playing bridge - but he is remembered most for his warm and engaging personality.

### **Terry Eckert (1938-2021)**

A graduate of the Palmerton High School Class of 1956, Terry continued his outstanding basketball career at Lehigh University from which earned his Bachelor's degree in accounting. He returned to Palmerton where he eventually assumed ownership of Butz Lumber Company. Terry never lost his love for his hometown and he was asked to serve on numerous local corporate boards, including Pencor Services and Citizens Bank & Trust.

### **Howard C. "Pete" Peterson (1924-2022)**

After earning degrees in chemical engineering from the University of Michigan under the GI Bill, and later his PhD from Iowa State University, "Pete" was recruited by New Jersey Zinc in 1964 to head up the Development Division of the Company's Research Department. He guided NJZ projects from Australia to Brazil and from Canada to Europe and his reputation nationally and abroad brought increased recognition to NJZ and to the community.

### **George Chmiel (1932-2021)**

George served during the Korean conflict as part of the Army's Special Services division and later earned a degree in accounting from the University of Scranton. He had a long and distinguished career as part of the management team of the Coca Cola Bottling of Palmerton and as an internal auditor of Coca Cola of New York. George impressed all he met with his pleasant wit, his kind and gentle spirit, and his quiet love for the game of golf.

## The Horse *Memories of a Pal*

To some the event may seem a fresh memory – others know it only as part of Palmerton lore. In September 1971, an iconic building became a pile of rubble – the end of a period in the history of the world’s foremost producer of zinc and related products.

The two years from 1898 to 1900 were filled with frenetic activity in the area north of the Lehigh Gap. The town of Palmerton was taking shape, homes were being built, workers were being hired, and New Jersey Zinc’s state of the art smelter was under construction. Investors and officials of the newly created company were

making the trip from New York to monitor its progress. At the same time, others were engaged in the creation of what was to become the Chestnut Ridge Railway – a short line that would

connect to the Jersey Central at Palmerton and provide access to valuable white clay deposits in the Kunkletown area.

These distinguished visitors were initially housed at the Meendsen home on Fireline Road, part of a 151-acre property acquired by NJZ. Since there were no hotels or inns in the

area large enough to meet their needs, Stephen Palmer engaged the services of architect William E. Stone of New York to design a building for the center of town large enough to accommodate thirty guests. Constructed in less than a year in a distinctive Tudor style, the Horse Head Inn was formally dedicated on November 15, 1900.

For more than 70 years the Inn was host to visitors of all ranks – from Stephen Palmer and his son Edgar to a young man from an orphanage in Newark, NJ. The guest book reads like a “Who’s Who” in business – from those



*Courtesy of Jon Siller*

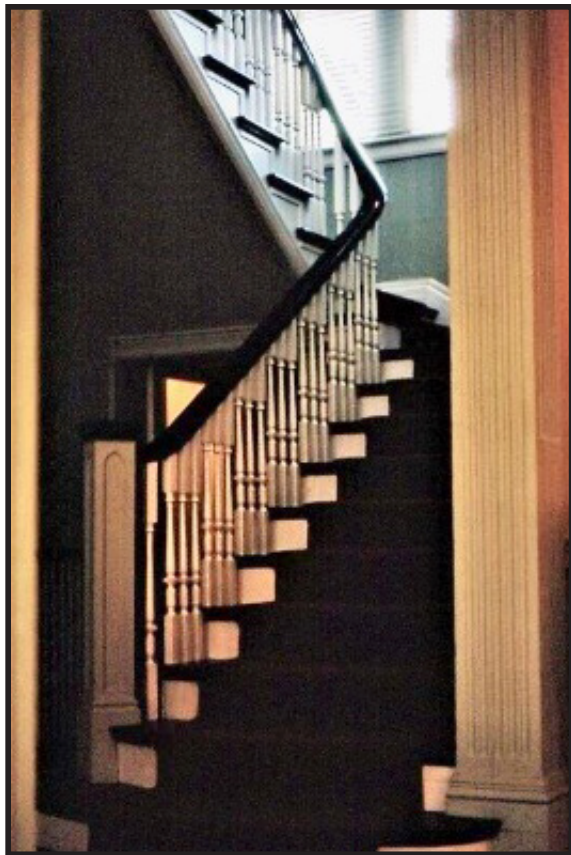
In the post-war era of the 50’s and 60’s NJZ’s Research and Manufacturing operations were highly regarded. It was common to hear engineers from Germany and France conversing on the porch of the Inn with their counterparts in Palmerton as they sought licensing agreements for NJZ technology to aid in the rebuilding of European industrial plants.

who were there to experience a Palmerton reception over an elegant business lunch or dinner to those who spent several days visiting the NJZ operations.

## e Head Inn

### *Palmerton Landmark*

The hospitality of the Inn was legend. Its meals and service were comparable to that of the finest hotels – so also were its seating protocols and rules of behavior. Single men – engineers, chemists, and other professionals – who had been recruited by NJZ often began their Palmerton careers as residents of rooms on the Third Floor. Some resided there for years and their stories would fill volumes. For less than \$100 per month they were provided with a comfortable room and three meals per day Monday through Friday. The camaraderie was valuable to NJZ as it led to a broad exchange of ideas among the various disciplines.

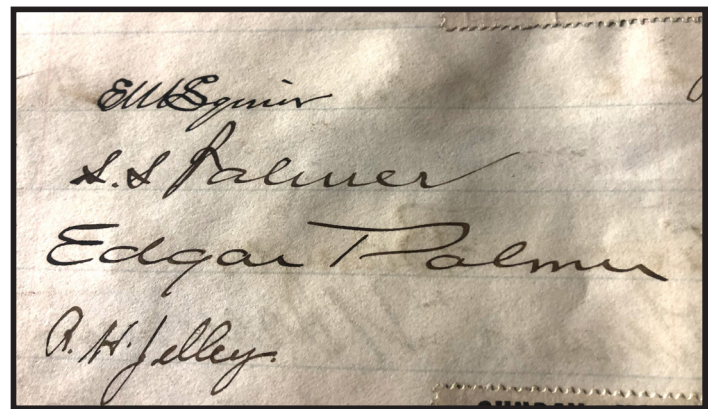


*Courtesy of Jon Siller*

*Even near the end of its days, the elegance of the interior was apparent*

During the day, the Inn was often used to provide orientation and training sessions for NJZ supervisors and for newly hired employees. It was an asset and few anticipated its demise. Gulf + Western Industries had acquired NJZ in 1966 and when a financial downturn hit the economy around 1970, the cost to maintain the Inn couldn't be justified. New hotels and national motel chains and convenient transportation made the Inn redundant. A decision was made to raze the building and sell the property that is now the site of the flagship branch of First Northern Bank and Trust.

The historic significance of the Inn is better appreciated today than it was fifty years ago and those who remember it often lament its passing. However, the face of Palmerton has changed often through the years – and it will continue to change in the future. This is a reflection of the dynamic community that Stephen Palmer undoubtedly envisioned more than a century ago.



*Rare signatures of Stephen Palmer and his son Edgar, who stayed at the inn on Saturday, November 20, 1909 in rooms 4 and 5*

## 2022 Monthly Program Schedule

*all programs held in the Knight's Gallery of the Palmerton Library at 6:30pm unless otherwise noted  
handicap accessibility*

**April 11**

***History of Local Trains***

*Emphasis on NJZ Trains*

Kermit Geary

**August 8**

***Annual PAHS Members' Picnic***

at Holczman Estate

**September 9-11**

***Palmerton Community Festival***

**May 9**

***The History of the Lehigh River***

Louise Bugby

**October 3**

***PA German Gravestones***

Michael Emery of

PA Historical Museum Commission

at Little White Church

**June 13**

***Beekeeping***

Chris Maxwell of Wild Creek Bee Farm

at Little White Church

**November 14**

***TBA***

**July 3 (2-4pm)**

***"Big Toys"***

Bob Swaim

in Borough Park

**December 4**

***Ecumenical Service (3pm)***

*at Little White Church*

***Annual Banquet (4:30pm)***

*at Bert's Steakhouse*

**July 17**

***Celebrating 75th Anniversary***

at Memorial Park

## Volunteers Needed!!

As the limitations imposed by the Covid pandemic have lessened, the Historical Society is seeking additional volunteers to staff the Heritage Center and the archives. Flexible hours and rewarding relationships. If you desire further information call 610-824-6954.

Leave a message and we will return your call.

## **A Timeless Message to Graduates ...**

***Donald W. Denniston, PHS Principal To the Class of 1956***

For the past twelve years, you have been the recipients of literally billions spent by the taxpayers of this state for public education. Had all public funds been diverted into channels other than education you would be the illiterate youth of today. As they, your parents and grandparents, gave to education you profited. Had they withheld needed funds you would have suffered.

In a few years, you will be the ones responsible for drafting public school policies and making school budgets. Remember that the fate of public education is in the hands of each generation of adults. By withdrawing funds from education, you as adults can produce a generation of illiterates or you can, by wise and generous appropriations, give better than you have received.



## **Never-Ending Beauty in the Borough Park**

***Each Season is Filled with Photographic Delights***

The image created by a late winter “onion snow” may be fleeting but it is only one of a myriad of opportunities Palmertonians and visitors have to photograph the Park. From its early beginnings in 1906 to the present day, generations have benefitted from the foresight of the community planners. Ongoing care and maintenance of the Borough Park is necessary if Palmerton wishes to provide similar opportunities to future generations.



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PO Box 267  
Palmerton, PA 18071

**Palmerton Area  
Historical Society  
Heritage Center**

410 Delaware Avenue  
(610) 824-6954

**Thursdays & Saturdays  
10am-1pm**

