



knee-deep in history

The Scribe

July 2022

Palmerton Area Historical Society
www.palmertonhistorical.org

NJZ Pigments – A Brief History *The Company's Foundation Was Built on Zinc Oxide*

When we go to the local hardware store for paint we don't always appreciate all that has gone into this remarkable product. It is so convenient! Count new and partially used cans of paint in your home and you might be amazed at the number!

Yet, it wasn't always like this – and what does this have to do with Palmerton and New Jersey Zinc? A little history might help connect the dots.

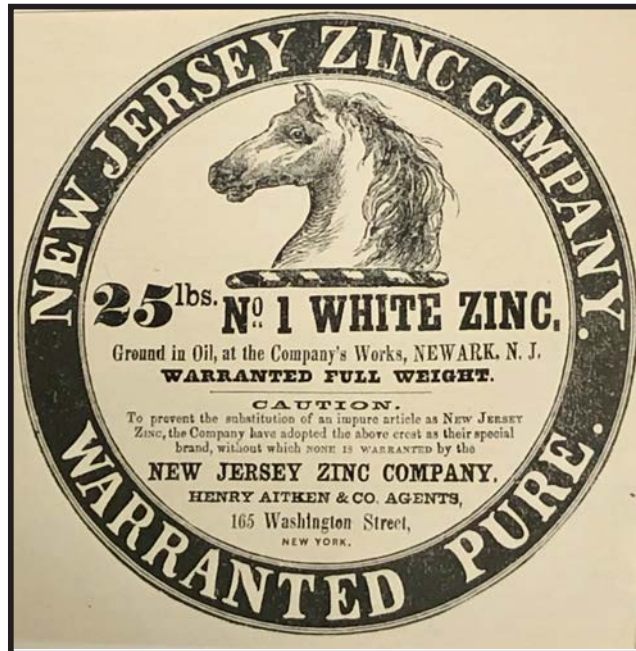
Early cavemen created pigments and paints for depictions that have lasted thousands of years and new cultures developed more sophisticated uses.

Art was a driving force and advances in colored pigments broadened the appeal to the upper class and during the Renaissance the wealthy began to engage craftsmen to paint their residences.

Settlers arriving in the New World found magnificent hardwood forests along the east

coast and the durable wood was ideal for the construction of homes. The Pilgrims not only considered paint unnecessary, they saw its use as a vanity – and some of their community were charged with sacrilege if they chose to beautify and protect their homes with it.

Zinc oxide had been used for medical purposes as a topical ointment for almost two thousand years, but now an exciting new market was emerging. As the colonies grew and the austere attitudes of the Pilgrims became less influential, the use of paint became more



Even 160 years ago the NJZ logo was carefully protected

acceptable.

By 1800, Europeans recognized the hiding power of zinc oxide as a base pigment and production increased to meet demand. The New World followed suit. Machines for grinding colors were improved and in 1866 the resealable paint can was developed. Within years, names

continued on page four

Palmerton Area Historical Society

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

OFFICERS and BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President

Jane Borbe

Vice President

David Taschler

Secretary

Susan Steigerwalt

Interim Treasurer

Peter Kern

John Aulenbach
Roy Christman
Bert Holczman
Vinita Horinko
Richard Horinko

COMMITTEE CHAIRPEOPLE

Publications

Vinita & Richard Horinko

Kibler School

Roy Christman

Little White Church

Jane Borbe

LWC Building and Grounds

Richard Horinko

Membership

Jane Borbe

PAHS Steering Committee

Jane Borbe

Program Coordinators

Vinita Horinko & Marianne Smelas

“The Scribe” Editorial Staff

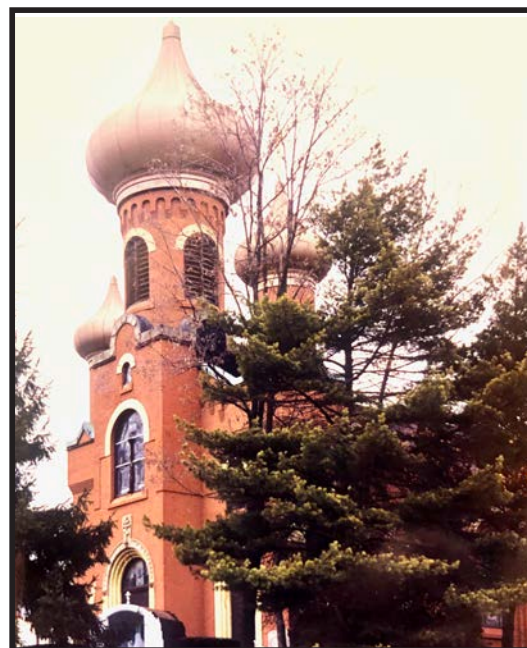
Jane Borbe, Peter Kern & Susan Steigerwalt

Iconic Church Sold!

St. Peter and St. Paul Greek Catholic Church has been an integral part of Palmerton for more than 100 years. Since 1918, it has stood proudly at the entrance to town and is a symbol of the diverse cultures that helped build this community.

Like so many other congregations in recent years, a declining membership was unable to support the mission of the church and the building was officially decommissioned. It follows just six years after the similar closure of the neighboring St. George Russian Orthodox Church that was reported in the July 2016 issue of *The Scribe*.

The church building was recently purchased by a private buyer. Adaptive reuse of church buildings is not uncommon when they can no longer serve their original purpose. To the extent possible, the Historical Society encourages the new owner to respect the integrity and unique character of the structure whose image has represented Palmerton to visitors far and wide.



Palmerton Pool Celebrates!

Dedicated 75 Years Ago!

Many things in life don't improve with age – but that is certainly not true of the Palmerton Memorial Park. When bulldozers began the task of clearing the land west of Third Street at the northern end of town in 1945, few could have anticipated the beautiful surroundings that have provided a fitting setting for family and community gatherings. The centerpiece of the park is its impressive community pool that is 50% larger than an official Olympic pool!

As residents of New York City, Stephen Palmer and his partners were well aware of the importance of a strong community park

system. They would have been pleased to know that contributions to the non-profit Memorial Park Association are being put to good use. The beauty and utility of the Park and its pool improve year after year. This is due to the efforts of its dedicated Board of Directors and community volunteers, like Tom Davies, who earlier this year provided the pool floor and walls with a fresh coat of paint

On Sunday July 17th, from 1PM to 5PM, the Memorial Park Association will celebrate the Park's 75th anniversary. You are invited to join and share in the festivities.



*Photo Courtesy of Jan Ahner
Ahner's Aerial Photography*

such as Harry Sherwin and Edward Williams and Benjamin Moore were well known.

From 1850 to 1900 a number of small zinc companies (including NJZ) engaged in fierce competition to sell paints produced with “White Oxide of Zinc”. This product was advertised as being superior in all ways to paints made with “White Lead” which they claimed is “known to be destructive of health and often of life.” In those days, advertising was less genteel, corporate back stabbing was common, and lawsuits were abundant.

It would take volumes to adequately relate the complex history of the era that culminated in 1898 in Stephen Palmer’s “masterpiece”. During the half century leading to the founding

of Palmerton, the paint industry experienced rapid growth and zinc oxide pigments would share equal billing with NJZ’s production of zinc metal. But clouds were on the horizon –



The Reed & Lovatt building was constructed in 1902.

For many years the pigment characteristics of titanium dioxide (TiO_2) were well known to artists, but it was not until about 1916 that economic commercial production was possible. It was inevitable that the superior hiding power of TiO_2 and its attractive whiteness would gradually erode zinc oxide’s dominance as a paint pigment.

NJZ attempted to stem the loss of business during the Depression when it acquired the Reed & Lovatt building on Franklin Avenue. It used this former silk mill to increase its applications research in a futile effort to retain a measure of market share for its zinc oxide.



Although the trusses were more than 90 years old, they were in remarkable condition.

A Brief History

m front page -

Fortunately, the loss in pigment sales came at a time when there was an increased demand for rubber in World War II. Zinc oxide is a critical component in the vulcanization process. Today, rubber is the largest single consumer of zinc oxide and each tire on your automobile contains as much as one pound of this vital product.

NJZ did not take the loss of zinc oxide as a pigment without a fight. In the 1950's it undertook the acquisition of two titanium dioxide plants – one in Gloucester City, New Jersey and one in Ashtabula, Ohio. The former facility produced

a pigment that was well-suited for the growing paper industry while the product from the latter plant was ideal for the paint industry. Together, these plants allowed the Company to

retain its well-earned reputation as a pigment supplier until NJZ was eventually sold by Gulf+Western Industries in 1981.

Over the next fifteen years, the applications research laboratory on Franklin Avenue was

eventually abandoned. Only old-timers remember the paint panel test area that adorned the side yard and which served for years to evaluate paint performance.

In 1995, Horsehead Industries donated the building to Palmerton Hospital to make room for a planned community health center. A contract was awarded to raze the building in such a way as to recover the beautifully engineered trusses that supported the roof. They were carefully removed and were “repurposed” elsewhere by the contractor.



In many ways, the new building captured elements of the original.

The new building was dedicated in 1997 and Palmerton Hospital was subsequently recognized a year later by the Economic Development Council of Northeast Pennsylvania

through its Community Improvement program.

This was a fitting conclusion to a story of NJZ pigments that began in Newark, NJ 150 years earlier.

2022 Monthly Program Schedule

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

July 3 (2-4pm)

“Big Toys”

Bob Swaim
in Borough Park

July 8 (9am-3pm)

Sidewalk Sale

Palmerton Heritage Center

July 17 (1-5pm)

Celebrating 75th Anniversary

at Memorial Park

August 8 (5pm)

Annual PAHS Members' Picnic

at Walnutport Canal Pavilion

September 9-11

Palmerton Community Festival

October 3

PA German Gravestones

Michael Emery of
PA Historical Museum Commission
at Little White Church

November 14

Guitar/Piano Music

Roger Latzgo

December 4

Ecumenical Service (3pm)

at Little White Church

Annual Banquet (4:30pm)

at Bert's Steakhouse

Purchase Historic Items!!!

Available at Annual Sidewalk Sale

The July 8th Sidewalk Sale will offer many deaccessioned historical items. Through the generosity of friends, the Society often has duplicates and triplicates of items. If you wish to acquire an unusual gift for that “hard to please” family member or friend, stop by and see our selection of HO gauge railcars, NJZ ties, 100-year old classic *ZINC* Magazines and other items.

The Heritage Center has also just received a new shipment of t-shirts, sweatshirts and blankets. It's never too soon to plan for the cool weather ahead!

Heritage Center Has “Job” Openings! *Society Seeks Enthusiastic Greeters*

The pre-Covid era seems far off. After two years of enforced and voluntary shutdown, the Heritage Center at 410 Delaware Avenue is seeking volunteers who are willing to work a two -three-hour shift once a month. Although there is no pay, the satisfaction that comes with being here is great.

Since the Center opened in 2005, our Visitor’s Books have recorded over 4,000 comments from residents, tourists, and students.

Consider this sample of what some have had to say about Palmerton, the Heritage Center and our cordial hosts –

Marietta, GA

*This is a sweet town. The people are always friendly.
Thank you for being so welcoming.*

Manziana, Italy

*Thank you for your tour today. I’ve so appreciated it
and I’ll always keep and remember that visit inside my
heart. Nice to have met you.*

Jim Thorpe, PA

*“I came in with questions about an old church & left
with all the information about the area I couldn’t have
imagined. So thankful!”*

Wakefield, RI

*Interesting journey through the evolution of a town, an
industry, and the growth of our whole nation.*

Lower Hutt, New Zealand

*Thank you for your hospitality. You have a treasure
here that is a wonderful record of a progressive
company, town and people. The company credo should
be published to the world. Thanks again.*

Palmerton, PA

*I always enjoy coming in to see this wonderful display
of the history of Palmerton. Keep up the great work.
Your organization is the envy of many other towns.*

Easton, PA

*It’s remarkable that Palmerton does not have parking
meters in this day & age!*

Rochester, England

*Really nice and friendly place and lots of information
about Palmerton. Really enjoyed seeing the little shop
and the pictures.*

If you would like to help us increase our hours of operation and share your greetings with visitors from near and far, call 610-824-6954 and leave a message. We will return your call.

Be assured that you will receive much joy as you extend a welcome to others.



knee-deep in history

PO Box 267
Palmerton, PA 18071

**Palmerton Area
Historical Society
Heritage Center**

410 Delaware Avenue
(610) 824-6954

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

