



The Scribe

January 2023

Palmerton Area Historical Society
www.palmertonhistorical.org

knee-deep in history

Razing of the Palmerton Hospital Building and The State of Health Care in Carbon County

"Perfection is attained by slow degrees; it requires the hand of time" -- Voltaire

Thirty years ago, Richard Anderson, CEO of St. Luke's Hospital, and Peter Kern, CEO of Palmerton Hospital, met to lay the foundation for the future of health care in Carbon County.

At that time, the small Palmerton facility was being challenged by the rising costs associated with rapid advancements in health care. Kern and the hospital's board of directors realized that an affiliation with a

larger, nationally recognized organization such as St. Luke's would assure the community of continued access to the highest standards of patient care.

Three decades later, on October 30, 2021, this relationship culminated in the dedication of

St. Luke's Carbon Campus – a state-of-the-art, eighty-bed, full-service hospital strategically located to provide quick and easy access to the communities it serves.



To end the story here would not do justice to the commitment of two neighboring communities to provide quality care to patients in Carbon County and surrounding areas. For 40 years following its founding in 1908, Palmerton Hospital

was the area's sole medical provider. In 1949, the Gnaden Huetten Memorial Hospital in Leighton was founded. This new facility had more beds and the latest in medical technology and it raised the health care bar in Carbon County.

continued on page four

Palmerton Area Historical Society

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Rome? Vienna? *Home to Some PAHS Members*

One of the advantages that comes with annual membership renewals is that we learn how far from Palmerton the heritage of this community is carried. We expect to find members in a metropolis like Denver or New York City – but who could have predicted Rome and Vienna? Alas, we are not referring to those historic European capitals, but rather to Rome, Georgia and Vienna, Virginia. Look up these distinguished mid-size communities of 25,000 or so and you will see why it is not surprising to find our members there.

One third of our members live in states other than Pennsylvania, and many of them seek an environment not unlike that of their native town. A Google search of places like Rainsville, Alabama and Carthage, New York will enhance your geographical appreciation of how different – and how alike – are our American small town communities. Of course, if you like the solitude of the “Big Sky” country, you could look up one of our members in Sand Coulee, Montana (population 201).

Regardless of where they now reside, these proud ambassadors from Palmerton and our neighboring communities honor the Historical Society with their membership and support.

Have you renewed your membership for 2023! Don't miss future issues of *The Scribe*! Renew now! Memberships begin at only \$15.

100 Years Ago – A Seminal Case

Meyer v. State of Nebraska

In April 1923, the United States Supreme Court agreed to hear a case that would subsequently result in one the country's most significant judicial rulings. At a time when immigration policy fills media coverage daily, readers of history might find parallels in this case.

In 1919 the State of Nebraska enacted a law that specifically prohibited (under criminal penalty) the teaching in any public, parochial, or private elementary school of any modern language other than English. Robert Meyer, a parochial school teacher was convicted of violating this law by teaching a ten-year old boy how to read Biblical lessons in German. He was fined \$25 which he refused to pay. Subsequent appeals to the Nebraska courts upheld his conviction and in 1923 his case made it to Washington, D.C.

The Supreme Court's 7-2 ruling in Meyer's favor formed the basis for many subsequent civil rights decisions and the case is still studied today for its judicial impact and for the eloquence of the majority opinion. The Court ruled that the Nebraska law violated the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution stating ".... certain liberties such as the rights of parents and teachers to instruct children may not be interfered with under the

guise of protecting the public interest. A desirable end cannot be promoted by prohibited means."



In the century following this case, there have been numerous references to it that have affirmed the fact that "the State has no power to foster a homogeneous people." In 1923, Palmerton was anything but a homogeneous community. More than seven languages were spoken and The New Jersey Zinc Company

provided its employees and their families with multi-language instructions on health and safety. It is interesting to speculate on the effect of a Pennsylvania law similar to that of Nebraska.



A threatening Uncle Sam intimidates new immigrants in a Colorado poster of that era.

Razing of the Palmerton Hospital Building and

~ continued from

For the next fifteen years the Palmerton Hospital facility slowly faced obsolescence and in the early 1960's the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania encouraged the two hospitals to merge. Instead, in 1967, the Palmerton community rallied to support the construction of a new, 70-bed facility. Two major expansions followed - in 1978 and in 1993 - to meet the growing needs of the community.

In 2017, the board of directors of the Blue Mountain Health System explored alternatives to assure continued hospital services in the area. Since its first meetings with the Palmerton Hospital board in the 1990's, St. Luke's professed its commitment to maintaining full health care services at the local level. In their model, most patients would receive care in Carbon County while only the most seriously ill patients would require transfer to the advanced care available at the St. Luke's facilities in the Lehigh Valley.



The inevitability of a merger between the Gnadon Huetten and Palmerton hospitals was reached in 2005 when they joined to form Blue Mountain Health System. Despite obvious operational efficiencies that followed, maintaining two facilities separated by less than ten miles remained a financial strain that could not be sustained.

After a thorough evaluation by the Blue Mountain Health System board, the St. Luke's offer to acquire the two hospitals opened a new chapter in Carbon County healthcare.

Difficult decisions had to be made. The services at the two existing facilities had to be consolidated until a new hospital could be built. It was determined that the larger, better-equipped Gnadon Huetten Memorial Hospital would serve as an interim facility and that Palmerton Hospital would eventually be closed. To minimize the inconvenience to the Palmerton community, St. Luke's immediately undertook construction of out-patient facilities in the heart of the town.

The commitment of St. Luke's was obvious, but the question still remained - "What was to become of the Palmerton Hospital?" For

End the State of Health Care in Carbon County

from front page ~

more than two years, alternatives were explored until it became clear that it was impractical to convert the hospital into another suitable use. The decision was made to raze the building.

This was not the first time that Palmertonians would experience this kind of change. It happened in the 1970's when the original hospital, that dated from 1908, was demolished. Progress can be painful at times, but upon reflection the end result is invariably positive.

Removal of the current building took careful planning and on October 27, 2022 a formal ceremony was held in the hospital parking lot on Lafayette Avenue to mark the end of an era. Approximately 150 former employees were invited to participate and to share memories and to shed a few tears.

One year earlier, at the dedication of the new St Luke's Carbon Campus, Peter Kern was asked to speak. He expressed the gratitude of citizens "to the entire St. Luke's team for demonstrating its long-term commitment to the health and well-being of the community." He said the visionary early leaders of Palmerton and Lehighton "could not have foreseen the great technological advancements that St Luke's is bringing to Carbon County –

and will continue to bring in the years ahead."

One year later, as he stood in front of the soon-to-be-demolished building in Palmerton, Kern reflected on the fact that health care is a journey – not a destination.

"We must constantly strive to achieve the level of care the community deserves. We must accept – and in fact, welcome - change and be thankful for the vision and commitment of the St. Luke's team"



He closed by saying that, "What was achieved here [at Palmerton] for more than 100 years has laid the foundation for the next century of health care in Carbon County."

Voltaire was right - perfection does require the hand of time.

2023 Monthly Program Schedule

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

January, February & March

No Meeting

April 10 at 6:30pm

***History of Glen Onoko and
Surrounding Landmarks***

Vince Hydro

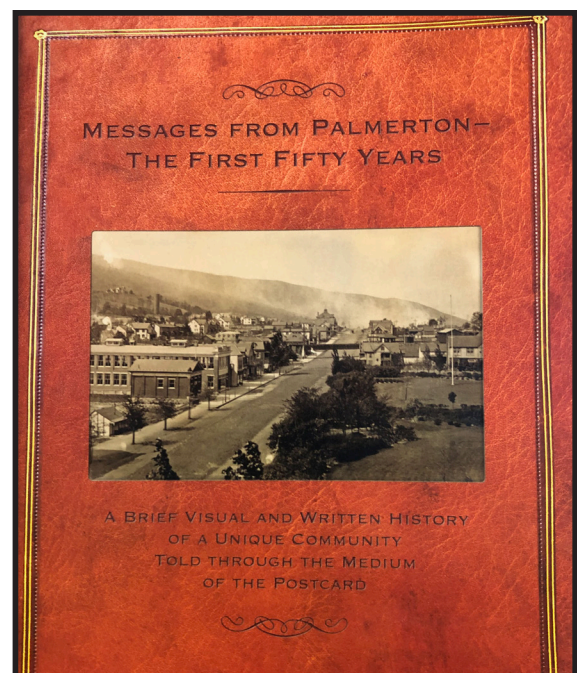
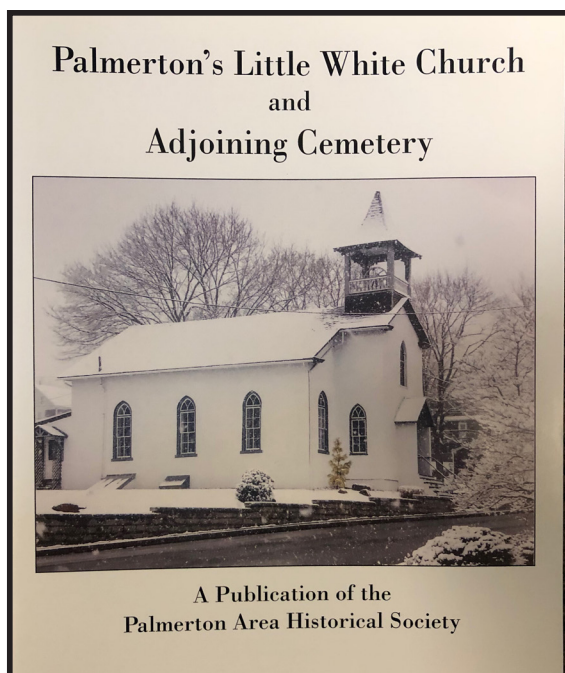
New Publication Available ***Little White Church and Cemetery***

An article in the October 2022 issue of *The Scribe* mentioned the work being done to preserve the records of those interred in the cemetery adjoining The Little White Church.

The Historical Society, assisted by TN Printing of Leighton, has published a 20-page reproduction of the 1940 compilation of cemetery records supplemented with full color photographs of the interior and exterior of the church.

Copies are available at the Heritage Center at \$7.00 or may be ordered by mail with modest additional shipping and postage charges.

Also available at the same cost, are copies of the signed and numbered edition of “*Messages from Palmerton – The First Fifty Years*” that conveys a visual and written account of this unique community through the medium of the postcard – an early version of “email.”



Financial Summary

Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2022

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

INCOME (\$)

Membership Dues	14,030
Grants, Donations, Bequests	17,695
Sales & Miscellaneous	2,921

Total Income **34,646**

EXPENSES (\$)

Utilities & Fuel	10,703
Maintenance & Repairs	1,443
Professional Fees & Insurance	3,042
Programs & Marketing	4,051
Dues & Contributions	1,488
Office Supplies, Taxes & Misc	6,366

Total Expenses **27,093**

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

Board-Restricted Endowment Fund

Society Stays the Course Despite a Down Market

Last year it was reported that the Board of Directors had created a Board-restricted endowment fund with an initial investment of a \$25,000 bequest from the late George Ashman.

The Board directed that future bequests, memorials, and designated gifts be put in this Fund and as of September 30, 2022 a total of \$30,502 had been invested. Unfortunately, the decline in the financial markets has resulted in a loss of 19.8%.

Despite this short-term loss, the Board remains committed to the long-term purpose of the Fund. A similar attitude is apparently reflected by Society members who have already designated \$3,515 toward the Fund in the first quarter of the present fiscal year. This amount will be invested in the Fund through a practice of dollar-cost averaging.

The Board appreciates the confidence expressed by these gifts and will continue to be good stewards of all the Society's assets.



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PO Box 267
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**Palmerton Area
Historical Society
Heritage Center**

410 Delaware Avenue
(610) 824-6954

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

