

PENNSYLVANIA'S BEST HOMEPAGE 2013

Local freelance historian sheds light on Silver Spring Township



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The photographs are more than just moments frozen in time.

They are windows tinted in shades of grey, offering glimpses of insight into the bygone days of Silver Spring Township.

Christine Clepper Musser already had a solid foundation when she started work on the “Images of America” book for Arcadia Publishing back in August 2013.

A Monroe Township native, she had graduated from Cumberland Valley High School and has been a Silver Spring Township resident since 1986.

The nine-month journey of discovery that went with her first book took the freelance historian into the living rooms and kitchens of three generations of prominent local families.

There she busied herself scanning images into her laptop and listening closely to the stories of local people as told by children, parents and grandparents.

“I’ve always had an interest in preserving history,” Musser said. “In order for us to learn, we have to know history. It is a survival mechanism for the human race.

“My goal for this book was to help current and future generations respect and understand where they came from,” she added. “Having information as accurate as possible was very important to me. I wanted to make sure I got everybody’s story right.”

Using what she already knew as a start, Musser set out to connect further with the past through folks in the present. The majority of her contacts were cold calls made to people she didn’t know but were recommended by others.

“I am humbled by all the support that I had,” Musser said.

By the end of the project, she talked to more than 20 sources and compiled about 200 photographs for “Silver Spring Township” — the latest book in Arcadia’s popular “Images of America” series. Like the publisher, she believes in the importance of making history accessible.

“Most of the photographs are vintage and have never been published anywhere before,”

Musser said. The majority come from the private collections of local families.

Book

With a forward by state Sen. Patricia Vance (R-Cumberland County), the book sets the stage by telling the early history of a township that was established in 1757 and named for James Silver, an early settler who traded with Native Americans.

Musser organized the book into 10 chapters. The first two center on the villages of Hogestown and New Kingstown, which to this day are population centers in the township.

There are then separate chapters showcasing images of local churches, schools, farms, businesses, recreation venues, the airport and post offices/fire companies.

“Older people looking through the photos are going to say, ‘Well, I remember when,’” Musser said. The hope is that the book would stimulate memories and more history.

The final chapter, Notable Mentions, highlights the achievements of some of the most influential families of Silver Spring Township history, including the McCormicks.

Vance McCormick, for example, served as mayor of Harrisburg from 1902 to 1905 and was the campaign manager for President Woodrow Wilson. In 1919, McCormick was appointed by Wilson to the committee that negotiated the peace treaty at Versailles following World War I.

Closer to home, Vance McCormick and his family were instrumental in establishing the annual Hogestown Stock Show that helped teach farmers how to be better producers, Musser said.

The book mentions how inventor Raymond DeWalt sold the patent for a radial arm saw to purchase what became known as the Willow Mill Park. Musser describes him as a dreamer, thinker, poet and philosopher who wanted to develop Willow Mill into a holistic community. Later the land became the site of an amusement park.

Then there is the story of how Max Hempt, founder of Hempt Brothers Inc., donated land for what became the main campus of the Cumberland Valley School District, Musser said.

As she delved deeper into the family history, Musser learned how Hempt was instrumental in extending the water line from New Kingstown to the high school and how his crushed stone and concrete business, provided material for the construction of the township police station and donated land for the Silver Spring ambulance.

Research

Other stories emerged from her research. She chronicled how local residents suffered through a typhoid epidemic that started when workers improving a road drank untreated water drawn from Hoges Run.

Musser described how township residents in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had to cope with an influx of tramps coming through the area on the railroad. Also known as hobos, these men would gather around a one-room school and sleep on its steps and in its entrance way.

The earliest photograph included in the book was taken in the late 1800s and features members of the Silver Spring Township Ladies Missionary Committee sitting stoically in a dimly lit room. The most recent photograph was taken by Musser and features the Kanaga House that was built in 1775 by Joseph Junkin.

Located at 6940 Carlisle Pike, the house was an outdoor meeting place for religious services. It was there where members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church conducted their first recorded communion in America on Aug. 23, 1752. Musser said the reformed church was a stricter sect that viewed other Presbyterians as heathens and thus felt compelled to distance themselves.

“They ended up all the way west to New Kingstown,” Musser said. She added the Junkin property was also used as a campground for soldiers of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia during their June 1863 invasion of the Cumberland Valley. That campaign culminated in the three-day Battle of Gettysburg.

“Cumberland County was the place where everybody passed through on their way to somewhere else,” Musser said. “There was a time when the county stretched all the way to Pittsburgh. There’s a lot of history here. Doing this book was one little piece of county history that can be preserved through photographs.”

Musser holds a bachelor’s degree in American History and Writing from Vermont College, which had merged with the Union Institute and Research University. A writer of history articles for an online magazine, she is active on the Silver Spring Township Conservation and Preservation Committee and the Hogestown Redevelopment Committee, and chairs the Hogestown Historical Committee.

More Info:

Author Christine Clepper Musser will officially launch her first book, “Silver Spring Township,” during a book signing event this Thursday, Sept. 25 from 7:30 to 9 p.m. at the New Kingstown Fire Company community room, 277 N. Locust Point Road, New Kingstown. There will also be a book signing at the Barnes & Noble store in Camp Hill on Saturday, Oct. 4 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Due for release today, the book is available at area bookstores, independent retailers and online retailers or through Arcadia Publishing at 1-888-313-2665 or online at www.arcadiapublishing.com.