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# The importance of the adaptability of historical societies to grow from the amateur to the professional : an examination of four local historical societies

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A.**

**The Importance of  
the Adaptability of  
Historical Societies  
to Grow from the  
Amateur to the  
Professional...**

**May 2008**

The Importance of the Adaptability of Historical Societies to grow from the Amateur to  
the Professional:  
An Examination of Four Local Historical Societies

By

Tiffany A. Fisk-Watts

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

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## **Abstract**

For over two hundred years, historical societies have played an important role in preserving the heritage of the United States for future generations. As American society faced rapid growth and industrial and social change, historical societies initially emerged as institutions designed to preserve the cultural dominance and historical legacy of white elites in their communities. Over time most historical societies became more inclusive in their membership and mission, acting as repositories of a broader community history while engaging a wider public audience. As they grew more inclusive, the curatorial and educational responsibilities of historical societies grew more complex, and the boards of the most successful societies hired professional staff and made the transition from amateur to professional curatorial practices. The role of the board of directors was, in fact, a critical factor in the success or failure of historical societies. Effective, involved boards ensured that a society had the support it needed to function successfully by establishing clear policies and supporting the professional staff in a variety of ways.

Historical societies that struggled to function effectively did so because they failed to acknowledge their growing role as both stewards of history and as educational institutions, by the late twentieth century. To be successful, historical societies had to recognize their expanding responsibilities as curators, preservationists, educators, and publishers, all of which demanded a transition from amateur to professional historical practices. The transition to professional practices also had to include a change in the way each board operated, for the most successful historical societies had boards that understood the increasing demands of financial oversight and fundraising, as well as the necessity to hire and support a trained staff.

An examination of the Historical Society of Berks County, the Moravian Historical Society, the Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society and the Jacobsburg Historical Society provides support for the argument that adapting to social change, acknowledging ever-broadening roles in the community, and focusing on professional practices at the board and the staff level are all essential to the success of historical societies of the twenty-first century.

## Introduction

Late-nineteenth century America was a period of constant change and social turmoil. Innovative technological advances and, in particular, waves of immigration brought rapid social change that seemed frightening and even threatening to the dominant classes. Many upper-class men who were anxious about social change were what historian Carol Kammen calls the “nascent professional class whose occupations allowed them the leisure to engage in the writing of history.”<sup>1</sup> What current historians refer to as “local history” or “public history” was born out the men’s fear of losing that which (they felt) made them American. As men in communities throughout the United States wrote about their counties, towns, businesses, industries, and traditions, they organized themselves into historical societies. A method of preserving history that had emerged in the late eighteenth century, but gained popularity in the nineteenth century, historical societies began to appear, first at the state level, then county and town level throughout the United States.

For over two hundred years, historical societies have played an important role in preserving the heritage of the United States for future generations. Traditional membership consisted of white, upper-class men, resulting in collections with an especially narrow focus. Research pertaining to the local prosperous businesses of the past was common, as well as anything connecting the local community to the national history.<sup>2</sup> Despite the lack of diversity in the early years of historical societies, the dedication demonstrated by their founders set the standard of excellence in local historic

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Kammen, *On Doing Local History* (New York: Alta Mira Press, 2003), 12

<sup>2</sup> Sara Lawrence, “History of Historical Societies in the U.S.” Written for the Public History Resource Center, [www.publichistory.org](http://www.publichistory.org). December, 2003; Kammen, *On Doing Local History*.



preservation for years to come. Ironically, the high standards established by nineteenth century upper-class men have both helped and hindered historical societies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the manner in which historical societies have handled history has changed to meet the needs of their communities rather than only the needs of wealthy patrons. The changes and challenges historical societies faced reflected the challenges faced by historians in the larger field of local history. During the Progressive Era, historical societies underwent their first significant transition. As the public were more socially aware, and were becoming more involved in programs promoting the betterment of humanity in general, many “historical societies shifted their objectives and began to embrace this new form of social responsibility.”<sup>3</sup> Many societies began outreach programs with local schools, and developed more informative exhibits.

In 1939, historian S.K. Stevens, of the Pennsylvania Historical Commission, spoke with much concern before the Conference of Historical Societies in Washington D.C. Stevens acknowledged the trend at the time was that historians accepted the argument that interpretation of state and local history was integral to the interpretation of national history.

As a nation, we are also becoming more conscious of the importance of conserving records, documents, newspapers, antiquities and buildings from which much of our future history must be written or dramatized. We have very probably reached the end of that era in American historical scholarship when sweeping hypothesis, such as the frontier influence, or that of economic determinism, will be used glibly to explain all of the intricacies of our national development. History will come more and more to be regarded as an evolutionary process with

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

the roots of culture, institutions and behaviour [sic] strongly attached in native local soil.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, according to Stevens, despite the recognized trend, state and local historical societies lacked the necessary sources to sustain themselves in the new era of history. Local historians needed better training, more staff, more volunteers, and of course, more money. With foresight, Stevens stressed the need for a national organization that would allow for the sharing of ideas among fellow historians, promoting the idea that the more the societies helped each other to support the enrichment of local history programs, the more complete the national history would be.

It is unclear whether or not Stevens had knowledge of the upcoming formation of the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) in 1940, but his recognition of the need for such an organization demonstrates the rapid awareness of the potential historical societies had at that time. The purpose of the AASLH was “the promotion of effort and activity in the fields of state, provincial, and local history in the United States and Canada.”<sup>5</sup> The formation of the AASLH was the result of a break with the American Historical Association founded in the 1870s with a very academic focus.<sup>6</sup> The organization quickly became a network for historical societies and history museums throughout the country to exchange research and ideas. The formation of the AASLH proved that local history was gaining popularity and also reflected the need for state and local historical societies to work together to promote the study of history.

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<sup>4</sup> S.K. Stevens, “Organization and Aid for Local History in the United States,” *Pennsylvania History* vol 7, no 2 (April 1940), 79.

<sup>5</sup> The American Association for State and Local History website: [www.aalsh.org](http://www.aalsh.org).

<sup>6</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, “Marketing the Past: *American Heritage* and Popular History in the United States,” in

After World War II, historical societies experienced another transition. The post-war economic boom allowed Americans more flexibility than ever before. Automobiles were more affordable, allowing families to vacation and travel farther from home. At the same time, urban renewal brought the razing of many historic structures to be replaced by new buildings. This particular development encouraged historical societies to include the preservation of historic architecture in the goals.<sup>7</sup>

The late sixties, seventies, and eighties were also a time of professional development for historical societies. The passage of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966 was the turning point for local historic preservation. Backlash to the urban renewal movement motivated communities to preserve their local histories. “Community groups and corporations, banks, and courts, state governments, and private developers all supported historic preservation.”<sup>8</sup> The renewed interest in local history came just in time for (or perhaps because of) the upcoming celebration of the Bicentennial in 1976. According to Kammen, state-level arts and humanities councils also started in the mid-seventies. Grants for the purpose of making improvements to local nonprofit organizations had also become available.<sup>9</sup> The appeal of grant money to historical societies was great. For many societies, the potential for acquiring grant money was incentive to become more professionalized, creating a more formal board of directors structure with term limitations, creating a formal budget, as well as hiring professional staff such as an executive director and a curator.

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Wallace, “Reflections on the History of Historic Preservation,” Susan Porter Benson, ed, et al, in *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1986), 166

<sup>9</sup> Kammen, 165.

As historical societies have moved into the twenty-first century, they have had to recognize the need to stay relevant to their audiences. They have also had to adapt to even more changes in interpretive, archival and preservation methods. The latest archival digital technology is expensive and, if it is obtained, requires that staff and volunteers complete training in its use. Despite the challenges that lack of funds, volunteers, and visitors bring, many local historical societies have continued to adapt to meet the needs of their patrons. From the antiquarian societies of the past, featuring genealogical records and a few cases of local artifacts, most societies have become more professional, with libraries, archives, in-depth exhibits, and educational programs. The ability of the board of directors to grow from amateur historians to well-rounded mix of professionals who can understand and meet the various needs of the organization, in particular, is essential to the success or failure of a historical society.

Successful, professional boards of directors are acutely aware of their responsibilities that include acting as stewards of the organization, hiring appropriate, professional staff, establishing and possibly implementing the historical society's policies, contributing as well as obtaining resources—financial or otherwise, and establishing a long-term plan encompassing future goals of the society.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, the board must keep in mind the mission of the historical society while making decisions. As part of growing into more professional organizations, successful boards update their mission statements from focusing on collecting artifacts to educating the public about those artifacts. Focusing on current and future needs of the society allows the board to recognize whether or not hiring staff is necessary not merely to function, but to function

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<sup>10</sup> Roland Kushner, Ph.D., Nonprofit management consultant, seminar on nonprofit governance, June, 2007.

successfully according to the mission and policies established previously by the board. The decision to hire an executive director is an indicator of the level of professionalization the board of directors is seeking. A paid, on-site executive director becomes responsible for making the local history that has been preserved by historical society boards into programs and exhibits for the public, thus generating interest and revenue for the society. However, both the board and the executive director must maintain the synergistic relationship between them; otherwise, the society will struggle and potentially fail.

It is important for the board to understand that while the executive director is responsible for enforcing policies established by the board, the board, in turn must support the director in seven critical ways: (1) act as communicators facilitating the flow of information between board and director and/or other society staff; (2) as “antenna” in the community to understand the changes and needs of members and potential members; (3) as visionaries, possibly developing a strategic for the future of the society; (4) as conservationists or preservationists, with at least a minimal understanding of the skills needed for the management of the society’s collections and library; (5) as financial resources to the society either through cultivated donors, businesses, and/or through direct contributions as individual board members; (6) as program specialists, using the skills unique to individual board members to help the executive director accomplish program development such as education. (7) and as hands on workers/volunteers when the executive director needs assistance.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Fundraising is one area in particular where board members and executive directors sometimes find themselves in disagreement. It is the responsibility of the board “to ensure that the organization has the financial resources to undertake the work necessary to accomplish its mission. Boards need to raise funds for both operating costs and for capital repairs...”<sup>12</sup> At the same time, executive directors are often responsible for seeking grants for research and programs. Boards that have not fully made the transition into a professional body may see the executive director as someone who is supposed to “do it all,” resulting in a less active, less productive board.<sup>13</sup> It is imperative that the executive director’s role is not to remove financial responsibility from the board, but to accentuate policies already in place and engage the board in society activities, resulting in professionalization of the entire organization.

Working as volunteers and using their skills as program specialists when the executive director needs assistance are methods of board support are often roles that board members may not expect to play. In many cases, larger organizations have board members who may solely act as their company representatives, or have no real interest in the organization, but have financial or business connections that could benefit the organization. Larger nonprofits may have room on their boards for such members, but the smaller boards that support most county and local historical societies seldom have such roles. In fact, the research indicated that the most successful boards of historical societies establish and practice these particular roles while the less successful societies have not implemented such practices. The successful transition from an antiquated

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<sup>12</sup> Donna Ann Harris, *New Solutions for House Museums: Ensuring the Long-Term Preservation of America’s Historic Houses*, (New York: Alta Mira Press, 2007), 27.

<sup>13</sup> See sections on the Moravian Historical Society and the Jacobsburg Historical Society.

model to a professional model depends on willingness of the board to adapt to the changing needs of their society, their members and their communities.

Since the nineteenth century, the Historical Society of Berks County (HSBC) in Reading, Pennsylvania, the Moravian Historical Society (MHS) in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, and the Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society (NCHGS) in Easton, Pennsylvania have been striving to preserve their local histories and demonstrate to the communities they serve that in order to succeed in the future, we must first learn from the past. A “younger” organization, the Jacobsburg Historical Society (JHS), in Jacobsburg, Pennsylvania, was established in the later half of the twentieth century not only to preserve local history, but to save it from destruction. Jacobsburg’s interesting history, although in some ways very different from the other three societies presented here, is very relevant to the issues facing societies today. The HSBC, MHS, NCHGS, and JHS, these stewards of local history, have attempted to overcome their challenges and adapt to the changing needs of their patrons and the changing world around them. Such adaptability has proved important for their patrons, and for their own survival, as well.

### **The Historical Society of Berks County**

The first meeting of the HSBC was held August 5, 1869, in Reading, Pennsylvania. A small group of men had been discussing the need to preserve the history of the area. The historical society was established, “for the purpose of collecting and perpetuating the historical reminiscence of” Berks County.<sup>14</sup> On December 13 of that

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<sup>14</sup> First minute book of the HSBC, p.1, August, 5, 1869, Historical Society of Berks County, Reading, Pa. hereafter cited as HSBC minutes.

year the HSBC was incorporated, forty-nine people joined, and annual dues were \$10.00 per year.

Enthusiasm for the mission of the HSBC seems to have waned after its incorporation, for the minute book does not have a new entry until March 8, 1898, almost thirty years later. A brief note in the 1899 minutes sheds some light on the inactivity of the society. The first founders had to rent a space to hold their meetings, and as a result, within a year, ran out of funds and were forced to “suspend existence.”<sup>15</sup> In February of 1898, another group of men, including six surviving members of the original board, mailed a circular to two hundred citizens of the county in an attempt to reestablish the society. Seventy-two men accepted the invitation and joined in support of the revised mission statement to promote “the elucidation of the history of Berks County in particular and of history in general.”<sup>16</sup> According to 1940 article by George M. Jones in the quarterly publication, *The Historical Review of Berks County*, 1898 was the sesqui-centennial of the city of Reading. This event may have motivated the society to reorganize itself under the original charter.<sup>17</sup> The changing demographics of the city as a result of immigration and industry may have also encouraged the men to preserve their local history. Thus, the formation of the HSBC fits Kammen’s local history model.

According to the president’s address, the first two priorities of the HSBC were to seek out a better, (ideally) permanent location for the society and encourage women to join.<sup>18</sup> These two goals were met within the first several months of the reorganization. In

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<sup>15</sup> HSBC minutes, 1899.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> George M. Jones, “The Historical Society of Berks County,” *The Historical Review*, vol. 5, no. 2, (January 1940) 38.

<sup>18</sup> HSBC minutes, 1898. No reason is given why the board made a point to invite women to join.



April, the county commissioners granted the HSBC the use of a room at the court house for storage of artifacts. In May, the Board invited the Women's Literary Club of Reading to a meeting in hopes of recruiting members.<sup>19</sup> Including women in historical society activities was not an unusual phenomenon at that time. Kammen notes that in the late nineteenth century, the Association of Collegiate Alumnae asserted that women could do more than be teachers and suggested other professional fields, including local history.<sup>20</sup>

The actions of the Board members from 1898 into the early years of the twentieth century reflect the contemporary trends regarding historical societies. It is clear that the early members of the HSBC were self-conscious about the importance of what they were doing and that future generations would benefit from their actions. From the beginning, they set high standards of excellence and were even critical of their own actions at times. In his 1899 address to the society, the president expressed some concerns:

But to those of us who understand the true needs of a historical society, it is very clear that we have made little progress in reaching the place of a live organization, and unless we change the directions of our efforts and infuse new life into the workings of the organization, the end of the second year will find us little advanced beyond our present condition.<sup>21</sup>

In keeping with contemporary trends and Kammen's model, the HSBC focused on local history, specifically the Pennsylvania German heritage of the area. Several of the oldest books and manuscripts in the collection were in German. Even though many people could not read the German text, the HSBC recognized the importance of acquiring the books, as they represented the oldest period of the county's history. Due to the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Kammen, *On Doing Local History*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 1899.

steadily growing collection of books, letters, newspapers, and other documents, the HSBC acknowledged the need for a librarian, although they did not yet have a library.

According to the early minutes of the society, the first order of business conducted by the president was to create the position of librarian. The second order of business was to appoint three committees; two of which supported the idea of a library – the library committee and the publications committee.<sup>22</sup> Upon the 1898 revival of the society, the new president also addressed the important issue of maintaining a library:

What then is required to build up the Society and make it an object of interest and profit to all? The answer is that the true basis of success depends upon the possession of a well-selected library of historical books, especially such as related to the early history of our county and state.<sup>23</sup>

The library committee was responsible for assisting the librarian with acquisitions and maintenance of the collection. The publications committee was responsible for disseminating HSBC information and local history to members and the general public. One method of sharing knowledge was the presentation of scholarly papers. At each meeting, a scholarly paper, written by a Board member or local historian would be read. The intent was to eventually publish the papers so that members of the society, as well as non-members, could benefit from the research.<sup>24</sup> The papers read at the meetings were compiled and published as the *Transactions of the Historical Society of Berks County*.<sup>24</sup> There were only three volumes published: 1898-1904, 1905-1909, and 1910-1916. Subsequent articles still read at the meetings were included in the *Historical Review* after its premier in 1935.

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<sup>22</sup> HSBC minutes, 1869.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 1898.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

In 1904, in the same year that the first volume of the *Transactions* appeared, the society purchased its new home, a building at 519 Court Street, in Reading for \$3,000.00. This location was home for the society from 1905-1916 and the first location of a functioning library. The society had amassed a collection of records including “the oldest county records ... books, manuscripts, copies of church records, genealogical data, and newspapers.”<sup>25</sup> In 1905, the HSBC’s library was opened to the public for research purposes three days a week. By the spring of 1906, the library held over 500 volumes in its collection.<sup>26</sup>

Not only did they have a new building and space for a functioning research library, the first of many of what the society would call “pilgrimages” also occurred in 1904. The annual pilgrimage would become one of the most important and eagerly anticipated events the society created in an effort to fulfill its mission.<sup>27</sup> On 7 June 1904, twenty-five members of the HSBC “took a W & N Railroad train to Joanna Station, from whence they proceeded on a large [open] carriage to Morgantown.”<sup>28</sup> Pilgrimages were organized and carried out with precision by the “tour organizer,” for many years. Prominent historians from each of the sites including Kutztown and Crystal Cave, the Moravian Historical Society, Washington’s Crossing, Pottsgrove Manor, and many others, spoke at each pilgrimage and sometimes the society placed historic markers at various locations. On occasion, the society coordinated a pilgrimage with another

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<sup>25</sup> George E. Pettengill, “The History of the Society’s Library,” *The Historical Review*,” vol. 10, no.1 (January 1945) 43.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> J. Sherwood Weber, “The Annual Pilgrimage,” *The Historical Review*, vol.22, no. 1 (Winter, 1955-56) 14-16.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

historical society, providing the opportunity to share ideas as well as socialize.<sup>29</sup> The sharing of ideas and knowledge, members understood, was (and still is) important to the success of the historical society.

The changes experienced by the HSBC in 1904 reflect the national trends in local history at the time. The creation of a research library, publication of the *Transactions*, and establishment of annual pilgrimages all reflect Progressive Era ideology. Rather than serving the interests of upper-class, white, male members, the HSBC began to focus on educating the general public. In other words, the membership was becoming less upper class and more middle class-based. The growing library and success of the pilgrimages demonstrate the success of the HSBC during the early years of the twentieth century. Activity of HSBC during World War I demonstrates the awareness the Society had of preserving national history as well as local. During the War, “the librarian was directed to make a collection of all circulars, papers, and posters relating to the war, especially those of Berks County and Reading.”<sup>30</sup> In fact, the Society was doing so well, in just over a decade, it had outgrown the Court Street building.

In 1916, the HSBC purchased a home at 36 North Fourth Street in Reading. The new home was larger, and for a short time was able to accommodate the growing library. However, within six years, the Society again needed more space. In 1922, the Board discussed adding a fire-proof annex to the structure, but plans were never carried out. Not much else is mentioned in HSBC minutes or in *The Review* with regard to the North Fourth Street location other than complaints from the librarian and the library committee

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Pettengill, 44.

about the lack of space. Within a few more years the HSBC had once again outgrown its home. On July 20, 1928, the HSBC laid the cornerstone for the current home of the HSBC, 940 Centre Ave. The new building was dedicated October 1, 1929, just a few weeks before the stock market crash that led to the Great Depression.

Neither the crash nor the Depression had much of a negative impact upon the HSBC as there is little mention of national events in the minutes. Attendance was slightly lower during that time, but financially the Society was stable. In the early 1930s, Mrs. William H. Luden, wife of the successful cough drop manufacturer, bequeathed a monetary gift that secured the Society's financial status, allowing the HSBC to add to and maintain its collections.<sup>31</sup> From 1935-1940, the Society employed Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers to re-catalog the library, index manuscripts, and other reorganization projects.<sup>32</sup> It is also during the 1930s that the Society actively pursued publishing its own journal.

The *Historical Review of Berks County* has been the quarterly publication of the HSBC since 1935.<sup>33</sup> From the early years of the HSBC, there was mention of creating some sort of historical journal, but no mention as to why it took until 1935 to happen. Finances do not appear to have been an issue, as *The Review* was paid for by advertising. In an article celebrating the one hundredth edition of the publication Hanns Gramm, the first chairman of the editorial board, and the man credited with developing *The Review* as readers continue to know it, stated that the Editorial Board had two main objectives. The first goal was to strengthen the connections between members throughout Berks County

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> *Historical Review*, "Our Silver Anniversary: History of the *Review* as Told by All Its Editors," vol. 25, no. 4 (Fall, 1960) 106-111.

and those beyond with the Board of Directors and staff that consisted of board members with an interest and experience in journalism.<sup>34</sup> The second objective was to encourage members with an interest in history to contribute articles for publication, thus creating a collection detailing the history of the county. Articles in *The Review* covered HSBC business, such as annual reports and letters from the president and the editor. Other HSBC staff contributed articles about collections, the library, and exhibits. In the early years of its publication, *The Review* published many articles pertaining to local history, and was edited and published every quarter by volunteers from the Board and general membership.<sup>35</sup> The second editor of the magazine, Dr. Milton W. Hamilton, a professor of history at Albright College in Reading, encouraged his students who were history majors to write essays for possible publication in the *Review*. According to Hamilton, this was an excellent way to have articles on hand when needed. Another source for articles was the monthly lecture series hosted by the HSBC.<sup>36</sup> *The Review* was available to those who joined the HSBC, as well as by subscription. Publishing local history not only fulfilled the mission of the organization, but it was also an affordable way for the public to learn about its community.

A method of disseminating history that grew out the post-World War I era was the development of an education program. The timing also coincides with Kammen's model of local history development. She states that in the 1930s local history gained popularity in the public schools – specifically for high school seniors needing to complete history

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. The first Editorial Board included: a former editor of the *Reading Eagle* newspaper, a local attorney/historian, a genealogist, and an editor.

<sup>35</sup> Subjects researched for publication in *The Review* included but were not limited to, Berks County's involvement in the War for Independence and the Civil War, Pennsylvania German traditions, particularly, pow wow and hex signs, Moravians in Berks County, the Hessians, and Indian attacks.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

projects. Eventually, local history became a staple of fourth grade history curriculum.<sup>37</sup> In July of 1940, curator Dr. Gurney W. Clemens, a former teacher at a boys school, was hired by the HSBC. The curator's responsibilities included maintaining collections of artifacts, creating exhibits and related programs at the Society. A close examination of Board minutes from the period of his tenure, as well as *Review* articles written by him at the same time, reveals a particularly productive period in the HSBC's history. While surpassing all expectations as curator in his reorganization of the Society's collections, which by this time had grown beyond the scope of the librarian's duties, he also recognized the need for a school program.

In a 1941 *Review* article aptly named, "Our Museum Program," Clemens provided an overview of what a good school program should entail. He believed it the obligation of the HSBC to assist the local schools in providing a local history program that would engage and stimulate the young minds of students. "A sound educational program of a small museum is its lifeline and its most important avenue of creating museum interest in the minds of both the young and adult population."<sup>38</sup> Clemens recognized two methods of outreach to the students.

The first method—developing a school tour program at the society--was ideal, but not feasible due to lack of appropriate staff at the Society. The second was, in a way, the opposite. Rather than bringing the students to the Society, Clemens proposed bringing the Society to the students. With the assistance of the Board-appointed photography committee and other volunteers, Clemens prepared slides and lectures pertaining to local

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<sup>37</sup> Kammen, *On Doing Local History*, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Gurney W. Clemens, "Our Museum Program," *The Historical Review*, vol. 6, no.3 (April, 1941) 83-85.

history for the teachers. The Society also developed what became known as “school loan kits,” that could be “checked out” by teachers for use in the classroom. The kits were made up of models, dioramas and other instructional tools and were continuously used until 1960.<sup>39</sup>

The outbreak of World War II reinforced the importance of the need to teach local history. The curator’s reports from 1942 and 1943 reflect the impact of the war on the HSBC. Clemens wrote, “If there ever was a need for preserving and teaching local and American history in all aspects from a commonsense American point-of-view, to our people and children, there is no more appropriate time than during this crisis.”<sup>40</sup> The Society created a War Activities Committee, whose task it was to collect and preserve local documents directly related to the war, as well as to “make the best possible use of our facilities in winning the war and preparing the psychological mood necessary during the early years of peace.”<sup>41</sup> The HSBC followed through with this goal by showing films released by the War Information Office and creating special exhibits that were educational, yet had a more recreational aspect to them.<sup>42</sup> These activities instituted by Clemens were eventually called “Win the War Programs” and remained popular throughout the war.

Unfortunately, Gurney Clemens’s appointment at the HSBC was brief. In 1943, he was drafted by the Army upon United States involvement in WWII. However, his work in developing a reputable school program was not in vain. In the years 1944-45, the

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<sup>39</sup> Harold E. Yoder, “Our Developing School Program,” *The Historical Review*, vol. 36, no. 4 (Autumn 1971) 137-139, 143.

<sup>40</sup> Records of Louis J. Heizmann, box #1, 1938-1951, section F, folder 8, “Curator’s Reports,” Curator’s Annual Report for 1942-January, 1943, Historical Society of Berks County, Reading, Pa.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> There is no indication in the minutes indicating of what these exhibits may have been.



local history committee developed visual aid kits for sale to teachers. In 1945, the HSBC began awarding high school seniors who had achieved academic excellence in social studies with a one-year membership to the HSBC and a certificate.<sup>43</sup>

The activities of the HSBC during the late 1950s reflected post-war changes in American society although education remained important. In 1956, the school committee sponsored a radio program called “Showcase,” that provided students from the county the opportunity to “give a talk” about a historical person or event.<sup>44</sup> By the 1959, *The Review* had made its debut in the local schools as part of an outreach program called the Historical Education Service. The program had started as a lesson in the Summer 1959 issue about “historic spots in Berks County,” and proved to be an excellent method for recruiting newer, younger stewards of history. Students were expected to read assigned articles from *The Review* and report on what they had learned to their teachers. The HSBC also granted students the opportunity to contribute to *The Review*.

The formation of the Historical Education Service came as the editors of *The Review* also recognized a need to slightly change the focus of the articles to better suit the audience of the post World War II – “One World” era. Articles were no longer purely of a scholarly nature. “Whenever possible, articles were tied in with contemporary events such as centennials of towns, churches. Interests in handcrafts and folklore – particularly the Pennsylvania Germans – were pursued.”<sup>45</sup> With so many changes, there was room for only one academically-written article in each issue of *The Review*. By appealing to a

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

broader audience, the revamped publication provided an opportunity to recruit teenagers, as well as a wider range of the general public, to become members of the HSBC.

The formation of the Women's Auxiliary in 1959 was another turning point for the Society. Women had always individually been active participants in the HSBC's activities, including editing *The Review*, and creating the Historical Education Service, but the formation of the Auxiliary allowed them the opportunity to work together as a group to assist the society in reaching its goals. The women elected officers, established committees, and adopted their own Constitution and bylaws.<sup>46</sup> In September of that year, the Auxiliary hosted their first fundraiser: the Open House Tour, an event still held on an annual basis. This first event raised \$1,551.18 for the HSBC. They became so popular that within their first year, the Auxiliary increased their membership from twenty-seven to 220.<sup>47</sup> Over the years, the Women's Auxiliary has continued to play an active role in the operations of the HSBC. In fact, while the Society still has a librarian and curator on staff, Auxiliary members have assumed many of the responsibilities formerly included in those positions. As the HSBC has had to rely on volunteers throughout its history (as do most historical societies) the Auxiliary has proven to be just as essential to the success of the Society as members of the professional staff.

Over the years, familiar problems have plagued the HSBC with regard to the library: lack of space, lack of volunteers (with the exception of the Auxiliary), lack of funds, inadequate shelving. However, gradually the society has overcome most of those

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<sup>46</sup> The committees of the Auxiliary are extensive and include Research & Library, Publicity and Public Relations, Speakers' Forum, Slides & School visits, Hostesses and Hospitality, Museum and Housekeeping, Photographic & Display, and Fundraising.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Cornelia Stahr, "The First Year of Our Women's Auxiliary," *The Historical Review*, vol. 25, no. 4 (Fall 1960) 129-131.

problems. The long-lasting positive relationship the society has had with its members as well as the county at large is evident in the society's stability. In the 1980s, a new library wing was added to the building. Most recently, the society purchased a former bank building behind the Centre Avenue location to be converted into library and archival space. Today the library houses an impressive collection of family histories, local newspapers, cemetery records, maps, tax records, deeds, bound copies of *The Review* and much more.

The HSBC also houses a collection of over 20,000 artifacts. Changing exhibits allow visitors to experience as many as possible at a given time. School tours, as well as Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops regularly visit the Society. Researchers from across the United States visit the library, seeking information about their family histories and the role Berks County has played in state, local, and even national history. The HSBC has also made the transition into the modern technological age. Members (and others who are interested) can still follow the activities of the Society by accessing HSBC website. There, those interested can download webcasts of local history-related topics: old beer ads, music by local composers, or view a slide show of the Reading-Berks area in the early 1900s. A wide selection of articles is available on topics such as the 1918 flu epidemic, local Beer Baron Max Hassel, Daniel Boone, and the tragic story of Susanna Cox. A calendar of events is listed as well as membership information.<sup>48</sup>

The words of the mission statement have changed throughout the history of the HSBC, but the original purpose is the same: preserve, archive and promote the history of Berks County. By recognizing its mission and setting goals to fulfill it in the early days

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<sup>48</sup> HSBC website: [www.berkshistory.org](http://www.berkshistory.org).

of its organization, the HSBC has maintained a well-respected reputation among Pennsylvania historical societies. Recognizing that students are tomorrow's stewards of local history, the HSBC, has consistently offered school tours and education programs to encourage youth to pursue their interests in history. By fulfilling their roles as board members with a consistent, hands-on approach through their direct involvement with the *Historical Review*, the annual pilgrimages, and the education programs, the board of directors demonstrated that throughout its history, the HSBC has recognized the fact that history is not a "thing" to be kept in a box. It is complex, ever-changing part of the community identity that should be preserved and shared at the same time.

### **The Moravian Historical Society**

On Sunday, 14 October 2007, the Moravian Historical Society (MHS) celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting and Vesper. For the Moravians in attendance, the annual meeting represented one of many long-standing traditions within their church. Ironically, in 1857, it was the fear of the loss of many of their traditions that encouraged a small committee of Moravian men to form a historical society. While the founding of the MHS fits Kammen's model regarding the changes occurring in the nineteenth century, in this instance, it is because of the Moravian's belief that *they* were different from everyone else around them and their way of life was about to change forever. The town of Nazareth, home to Moravians since 1740, had been "closed" to non-Moravians until elders made a decision in 1856 to become an open community, allowing non-Moravians to live there. This decision, coupled with changes within the faith itself with regard to elimination or changing of specific traditions caused some discomfort among the Nazareth Moravians:

When we look into the tendency of things in this country, we shall find that the great watch-word is *change*. There is, perhaps, too little reverence for the past among the people of our time, and it is the mission of such a Society as ours to stem this tendency, to defend the past in all that is good and estimable ... to resuscitate into being that to which the heart still clings.<sup>49</sup>

While Moravians' concern about how the changes within their church and the community were going to affect their way of life (which was unique to their particular faith) was understandable, they did not realize that their desire to preserve their past was not unique. As observed by Kammen, and noted by the HSBC history, Moravians' fears mirrored those of other men in other communities who felt it necessary to create historical societies.

The first meeting to consider forming a society was held in March, 1857. Within a year, the religious publication, *The Moravian*, reported that the Moravian Historical Society had been organized and written its Constitution. Founding members determined that there be two types of membership to the MHS: active membership, granted to those who were members of the Moravian Church; and honorary membership, granted to those who were not members of the church.<sup>50</sup>

The Society's membership policy and purpose reflected the isolationist mindset of its founders. The officers of the newly-formed Society decided that "its object shall be the elucidation of the history of the Moravian Church in America, not, however, to the exclusion of the general history of the Moravian Church." While the MHS was (and still is) different from county historical societies due to its religious affiliation, its purpose acknowledged a relationship with the secular world. This perspective later allowed

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<sup>49</sup> "The Moravian Historical Society: Its Organization and Aims," *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society, 1857-1858*, vol. 1, Printed for the Society 1876, 12. Nazareth, Pa.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 6,7.

academic as well as religious historians the opportunity to study Moravian history within the context of American history. However, this same perspective focused on the differences between Moravians and their neighbors, fostering a provincial mindset among Board members that has survived to the present day.<sup>51</sup>

For the first several years of its existence, the society lacked a permanent home. From 1860 to 1870, the society met at the Nazareth Moravian Church. Then, in 1871, the Society moved into the second floor of the Whitefield House on Center Street. John Jordan Jr. of Philadelphia purchased the house and lot from the trustees of the Nazareth Moravian Church and deeded it in trust to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) as a “home for visiting and retired or pensioned missionaries or ministers of the Moravian Church *providing* that the Moravian Historical Society occupy, use and enjoy the second story of the building for the purposes of said society so long as it shall continue to exist.”<sup>52</sup>

During this period, the MHS focused on collecting documents, records, and manuscripts, and began the publication of their transactions. The second floor of the Whitefield House was used primarily for storage. The house, built by the famous colonial-era evangelical minister George Whitefield and a group of Moravians who came to the area in 1740, was a landmark in Nazareth. It was only fitting that a structure built by Moravians would be home to the MHS. In 1906, the SPG decided an addition to the Whitefield House was needed to accommodate more retired missionaries and ministers.

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<sup>51</sup> While attending the annual meeting and vesper in October of 2007, the first question asked of me by a long-time member of the MHS was whether or not I was Moravian.

<sup>52</sup> Robert H. Brennecke, “A Centennial Survey of the Moravian Historical Society: 1857-1957” *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society*, vol. 26, part 4, 143. Nazareth, Pa.

The cost of the project was estimated to be \$6,000.00.<sup>53</sup> The dedication of the new addition took place on September 26, 1907 – the fiftieth anniversary of the MHS.<sup>54</sup>

For the next fifty years, while the MHS was publishing transactions, which included minutes from annual meetings as well as history and church history-related articles, it continued to collect books and artifacts. During this time, the librarian, an elected, paid (albeit minimally) position on the Board rather than a volunteer position, focused on acquisition and organization.<sup>55</sup> In 1913, he suggested that the MHS organize the collection according to the Dewey Decimal System. Eventually, the second floor housed the growing reference library as well as an exhibit displaying highlights of Moravian history. Visitors were primarily researchers. While the MHS was active in publishing pamphlets and their *Transactions*, as well as accepting donations to the collection, the librarian noted with a hint of aggravation in 1930 that not much else was happening. “I heartily wish that the membership of own society, as well as the public, could and would show a more thorough appreciation of this treasure-house, for such, it really is.”<sup>56</sup> The librarian may have complained about general lack-of-interest in the MHS and its collections, but the records do not indicate any attempt from the librarian or anyone else on the Board to generate interest in the Society.

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<sup>53</sup> “Annual Meeting of the Moravian Historical Society September 18, 1906,” *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society*, vol. 8, 1906-1908, Times Publishing CO., Bethlehem, Pa.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* Incidentally, one of the historical societies attending the dedication was the HSBC. The event was mentioned in their 1907 minutes as well.

<sup>55</sup> Moravians have been known throughout the history of the Church in America, not just Nazareth, for their thorough record-keeping, thus the Board felt it necessary to elect a librarian from the Board, (therefore a Moravian), rather than encourage a volunteer who may not necessarily have been Moravian.

<sup>56</sup> Box marked “Moravian Historical Society – Financial Records – early;” 1. folder “Librarians’ reports 1857-1927.” 2. “Librarians’ reports 1929-1945,” Nazareth, Pa.

The Great Depression and World War II accounted for a drop in visitors as well as donations in the “box at the door.”<sup>57</sup> Board minutes reflect acknowledgement of the low numbers, commenting on the war more so than the depression. Gasoline rations prohibited members from Bethlehem, almost ten miles away, from making the trip to Nazareth.<sup>58</sup> The small society, focusing on Moravian history could not avoid the repercussions of national events.

The Society was doing better in the way of collections by 1953, however. As the collections grew due to donations from members, missionaries, and Moravians in Nazareth and nearby Bethlehem, the MHS sought more space. In the Executive Committee Meeting minutes for that year, the Secretary noted that the Library Committee was interested in using the Grey Cottage (adjacent to the Whitefield House) for “historical society purposes.”<sup>59</sup> Also in 1953, the first John Valentine Haidt painting was restored, beginning the restoration process for eighteen other paintings and four portraits in the collection. Haidt was a well-known eighteenth-century Moravian painter in the colonies. The musical instruments, a substantial and important part of the collection, as music was an important part of Moravian life, were also reconditioned.<sup>60</sup> Although the MHS published transactions, re-organized the second floor of the Whitefield House, and had begun to restore and preserve their collection, the society had yet to show any signs of moving toward professionalization.

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<sup>57</sup> The “box at the door” is mentioned throughout the minutes of the MHS and is still used today as a donation box. For many years, donations in the box were used to pay the lighting and cleaning costs. The wooden box currently rests upon a deep window sill in the stairwell heading to the second floor.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting, January 12, 1953. Nazareth, Pa. The Grey Cottage is a small log cottage built by the Moravians as housing while they constructed Whitefield House. Today, the MHS rents the cottage to a private tenant. The cottage is the oldest Moravian structure in the United States.

<sup>60</sup> Brenecke, 143.



In almost one hundred years of existence, the MHS was still trapped in the provincial, closed-community mindset of the nineteenth century. They did not seem to understand that collecting artifacts and printing pamphlets to be read to other Moravians was not enough to fulfill their mission. It is clear that the mindset of the MHS Board prohibited the Society from making the transition from an antiquated to professional organization, thus affecting its level of success within the community. In this respect, the MHS deviates from Kammen's model. Despite the significance of Moravian history to their region, the MHS, at this point, lacked educational programming, a newsletter or publication other than the *Transactions*, or any other program to support their mission.<sup>61</sup>

However, in the nineteen sixties, the MHS took its first steps toward professionalization. Other historic sites in the United States were now aware of the impressive collections of the MHS via society membership that existed outside of the local region. The Executive Committee Minutes from 30 April 1965 note that the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection in Williamsburg, Virginia, had requested the loan of six of the Haidt paintings. The Society granted the request.<sup>62</sup> Such a loan was one of many granted to a variety of museums by MHS throughout its history and was one of the few ways the MHS maintained a presence in the non-Moravian world.

By 1968 the MHS had over 3,000 books that had not been cataloged, despite notes in the minutes from earlier years showing each librarian reporting on the volumes of work he had accomplished. Edward Swavely, the elected librarian since 1947, expressed his disappointment and frustration that, more often than not, the library was

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<sup>61</sup> The lack of a membership publication may have been, in part, due to the fact that most members were Moravian, and therefore, had subscriptions to *The Moravian*, and another publication may have redundant.

<sup>62</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting, April 30, 1965, Nazareth, Pa.

very disorganized.<sup>63</sup> In response to Swavely's concerns, the Cataloguing Committee recommended "obtaining the services of an expert for the time needed to evaluate the material."<sup>64</sup> In 1970, Swavely resigned for health reasons. It took almost two years to find a replacement. In late 1971, Eschor Clewell, a member of the MHS, became the first paid part-time librarian of the MHS. The board intended for him to be a "stand-by" until an expert could be hired.<sup>65</sup> He maintained that position until 1982. During his tenure as librarian Clewell also implemented the services of the Whitefield Guild, a group of female members of the MHS who since the nineteen fifties had been giving tours of the Society while dressed in traditional colonial era Moravian attire.<sup>66</sup>

In the early nineteen seventies, the MHS continued to change, resulting in further steps toward professionalization. In keeping with Kammem's model for this period, at the 1971 Annual Meeting, the MHS amended article seven of their by-laws to expand their board from five members to ten. They also voted to form a finance committee. By 1974, the society had recognized the value in creating a newsletter. They discussed plans for a "semiannual newsletter" that would have been mailed to all members of the MHS, with the purpose of keeping them informed of society activity and "stimulating their interest." The board also hoped to increase membership.<sup>67</sup> The newsletter did not emerge for several years.

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<sup>63</sup> This finding was a bit of a shock to the writer considering the reputation Moravians have for being highly organized and excellent record keepers.

<sup>64</sup> MHS Executive Board Minutes, April 5, 1968.

<sup>65</sup> Minutes of a "Special Meeting of the Executive Committee, Moravian Historical Society, October 6, 1971," Nazareth, Pa.

<sup>66</sup> The Whitefield Guild is briefly mentioned in the 1956 Annual Meeting Minutes and after that is only mentioned in passing. They appear to have been a fairly inactive group compared to the Auxiliary of the HSBC.

<sup>67</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meeting, 14 October 1971, Nazareth, Pa.; Minutes of the Executive Board, 30 January 1974, Nazareth, Pa. No particular reason was given for wanting to increase

By the late nineteen seventies, the MHS took on another significant responsibility for its future. Nineteen seventy-seven marked the 120<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the MHS. Officers reported that they had been in talks with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to transfer the Whitefield House tract from the SPG to the MHS. According to the minutes, the society needed more space and the property was no longer suitable for SPG use. By the next annual meeting, the transfer was official: the MHS owned the Whitefield House as well as the other buildings on the property.<sup>68</sup>

Full ownership of the Whitefield Tract seems to have revitalized the Society. The late seventies and early eighties were the most productive years of the Society up to that point. In June 1979, the MHS held its first craft fair on the Whitefield House lawn as a fundraiser for the organization. They raised four hundred dollars. The craft fair is still held annually in June. In 1981, the MHS renovated the third floor as space for cataloging. Volunteers cleaned and painted all of the rooms and also cleaned 5,000 volumes of the collection.

In April of 1980, the MHS continued to show signs that, as a historical society, it was making the transition into a professional historic organization. Although Eschor Clewell had been the part-time librarian since 1971, health problems forced to him to cut back on his hours. The chairman of the Library and Museum Committee called an emergency meeting; he had a contact at the University of Delaware's Museum Studies Program, who could provide the MHS with a summer intern. The meeting was a response to Clewell's shortened hours but actually served as the first step toward a

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membership. It is logical to assume that the MHS, in this case, was not unlike other societies who were constantly looking to increase mediocre membership numbers.

<sup>68</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the MHS, 1978, Nazareth, Pa.

professionally trained staff. In the summer of 1982, Karie Diethorn was hired by the Society as their first curatorial intern. The internship lasted 10 weeks; in that time Diethorn accomplished many goals. She was able to set up a registration system and develop a cataloging system for every object on the museum. She identified and addressed some significant preservation problems in the collection and developed a curator's manual for future reference that explained her system of cross-filing. Essentially, in one summer, a college intern accomplished more professional curatorial activity than any of her predecessors had accomplished in the entire history of the organization.<sup>69</sup>

As Diethorn's internship concluded the MHS found itself, once again, in need of a curator. For the next year, as the Society searched for someone to fill the position, volunteers continued to lead school tours of the Whitefield House and its exhibits, and worked on the day-to-day operations of the museum, albeit on a scaled back level. In February, 1984, Beth Pearce of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina was hired on a one year contract as a museum consultant. She stayed for five years. Pearce was a graduate of Salem College in Winston-Salem, NC, with a bachelor's degree in American Studies. She also had extensive experience as an archivist, as well as experience in archaeology. Pearce continued the work of cataloging the museum and library objects, as well as running the museum and working on the new newsletter, "The Moravian Historian," that the board created just before her arrival.

At the Annual Meeting in 1989, the MHS noted that Pearce left her position to return to graduate school in South Carolina. The Library and Museum Committee,

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<sup>69</sup> Executive Board minutes, September 23, 1982, Nazareth, Pa.

recognizing that the needs of the society were greater than those that could be met by volunteers, suggested the need for a full-time executive director, who would help with all functions of the Society.<sup>70</sup> In September of the following year, Susan Dreydoppel was hired as the full-time executive director. Dreydoppel had been highly recommended for the position. Prior to her return to Pennsylvania, she had been the executive director of the Carver County Historical Society in Waconia, MN for seven years. She was a graduate of Moravian College with a degree in history, had worked at various historic sites, was a member of the MHS and was married to Otto Dreydoppel, who had just been hired by the Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, PA.<sup>71</sup>

Hiring an Executive Director brought new life to the MHS. Over the next eighteen years, the Society continued to make the transition into a professional organization. The new Executive Director immediately organized the volunteers to assist her in completing projects in the Museum including maintenance of the collections, creating new exhibits, publishing the newsletter, and running museum tours for the public. Also in 1990, Dreydoppel, recruited her first intern from Moravian College. This action led to a long, continuously-running internship program that trained historians who have moved on to locations such as the Moravian Museum of the Historic Bethlehem Partnership in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. and Ft. Ticonderoga in New York.<sup>72</sup> In 1997, the MHS Board of Managers approved the hiring of a much-needed curator. This action allowed the Society to develop its education

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<sup>70</sup> Minutes of the 132<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Moravian Historical Society, Tuesday, October 12, 1989, Nazareth, Pa.

<sup>71</sup> "Looking Backward, Moving Forward: 150 Years of the Moravian Historical Society," presentation by Susan Dreydoppel, at the 150<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Moravian Historical Society, October 14, 2007, Nazareth, Pa.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

programs further. In conjunction with conducting school tours on a regular basis, the curator developed a school program that, in some ways similar to Gurney Clemens's idea at the HSBC, brought history to the schools by conducting presentations about Moravian history as other historic topics. Often, the executive director and curator dressed in colonial-era Moravian style clothing.

Eventually, the school program grew to allow the purchase in 1999 of the Andrew Kern House from the Nazareth School District which had been using the nineteenth century building for its business office. The goal was to create a center where students could learn about the Moravian Andrew Kern and local history through the study of archaeology, architecture and other hands-on projects. Renovation of the house began in 2000 and the newly-formed education committee, consisting of board members as well as the curator, developed a program.<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, the economic impact of the 11 September 2001 attack trickled down to the MHS.<sup>74</sup> Donations to the Society began to dwindle and state and federal grants became more competitive as funding for history and other humanities programs were cut back on a national level. The Board of Managers could not supply the education committee with the financial support needed to open and run the program and discussed the possibilities of laying off the curator and selling the Kern House. In 2005 the curator resigned recognizing that his position the MHS was in jeopardy. However that was not enough to save the Kern House. Eight years after its

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<sup>73</sup> The author was briefly involved with the committee.

<sup>74</sup> Susan Dreydoppel, interviewed by the author, 13 November, 2007, Nazareth, Pa. The devastating terrorist attack on 11 September 2001 resulted in the deaths of thousands of Americans. Although there was an initial burst of charitable activity in the aftermath of the attack, many Americans insulated themselves from the chaos of society at the time, retreating into their homes and to their families, resulting in a devastating effect on many charities and nonprofits.

purchase, the house sits, unused. Dreydoppel fears that the building will be sold, as MHS finances have been stretched for several years.<sup>75</sup>

Other projects undertaken by the curator included instituting computerized collections management, using a computer software program called PastPerfect, cataloging the society's documents and creating an archival index, maintaining the building, and installing a climate control system. These tasks were in addition to researching and developing exhibits in conjunction with the executive director. The accomplishments of the executive director and the curator between 2000 and 2005 demonstrate the professionalization of the organization. Based on an examination of the board minutes and an interview with the executive director, however, it appears that the more the director and the curator accomplished, the less involved the Board of Managers became. While this behavior may be typical to of many boards, a problem developed for the MHS: the staff was leading the society into a new phase and the board could not keep up with the transition. Because the board is the governing body of the MHS, the board members' lack of understanding of both the needs of the society and their own crucial roles in the society's success unfortunately led to the resignation of the curator. His resignation brought a temporary halt to many museum projects, which undermined the professional advancement of the organization.

At the same time, as the director and curator had been instituting more professionalized museum practices, financial support for the museum and its programs was diminishing. Income from admission and membership had decreased, as had sales in MHS gift shop. The increase from investments was not enough to make a substantial

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<sup>75</sup> Dreydoppel interview.

difference, and fundraising, other than recruiting and retaining members, was almost non-existent.<sup>76</sup> The board has done little to bring in funds for the society and has cut back on educational programming due to lack of staff and volunteers; therefore applying for grant money to run the programs is of little use if there is no one to run them. The days when donations from the ‘little box at the door’ paid the maintenance bills have long passed. While much of the financial distress of the society can be traced to the board’s lack of attention to the matter, Dreydoppel believes that the financial problems are also partly due to the national economic conditions, as many other, larger (and better funded) historic sites such as Old Sturbridge Village and Colonial Williamsburg are also struggling financially.

Currently, the paid staff of the MHS consists of the executive director and a part-time assistant. Volunteers and paid docents assist at the MHS with school tours and help to set up exhibits, but it is not enough to maintain the professional status the executive director and the curator had established. Only with a “professional” board, one that truly understands the needs of the society and has the ability to raise needed funds, as well as the need to contribute time and hands-on work, will the situation improve. The current state of the MHS all but negates the progress Dreydoppel had made in transforming the MHS into a professional historical society. Although the MHS did not fit Kammen’s time line, by the 1980s it was starting to fit the model of a successful historical society. The fate of the MHS is currently unknown as Dreydoppel submitted her resignation in January of 2008. The former executive director worries most about the collections which

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<sup>76</sup> Moravian Historical Society proposed budget, 2007-2008, reviewed at the 2007 annual meeting, Nazareth, Pa.



include thousands of volumes of Moravian text, a Tannenberg organ built in 1776, several Haidt paintings and a mission artifacts collection spanning three centuries and six continents.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the current dreary outlook, there is still hope for the MHS. In recent years, term limitations for board members were implemented and the by-laws were changed to allow non-Moravians to sit on the Board. Sixty percent of the board must be Moravian, however.<sup>78</sup> A few younger members have also been recruited to the society, bringing with them a much-needed fresh, modern perspective regarding governance and leadership practices. The most significant obstacle to overcome, however, is the society's approach to fundraising. According to Dreydoppel, the board needs to assume more responsibility in that respect. Membership dues and admission to events no longer turn a profit. Without a more professional approach to board responsibilities, the society will continue to struggle.

Until things do change for the better, however, it seems that the initial fears of the founding members of the society were justified. Words spoken by the first board president in 1858 sum up the mindset that has lasted far too long: "In this country we are told to move with the age, but whether the age can be justified in its movements, no one ever pauses to reflect."<sup>79</sup> As more programs are cut every year, fewer people will have a reason to support the society and it will become more difficult for it to function effectively. Not until the 1970s was the MHS able to start making the necessary changes

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<sup>77</sup> Moravians came to America as a missionary group in the eighteenth century. Eventually their work extended beyond the United States to countries all over the world.

<sup>78</sup> Dreydoppel interview.

<sup>79</sup> *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society, 1857-1858*; James Henry is of the same Henry family of Jacobsburg, mentioned later in this paper.

to begin functioning in the manner of other historical societies who had been anticipating and responding to their changing communities, evolving and developing over time. Unfortunately, as the MHS staff worked to professionalize the society, the board maintained an amateur, provincial mentality, prohibiting the complete transition of the organization into a successful, professional historical society.

### **The Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society**

Forty nine years after the founding of the MHS and only eight years (not counting the 1869 charter) after the founding of the HSBC, on March 26, 1906 a group of men from the city of Easton met at the local Assembly hall with the intention of forming a historical society. Within a month, the founding members elected officers, adopted a constitution and by-laws and discussed “further organization and the enrollment of new members.”<sup>80</sup> Although a clear motive for forming a historical society is not stated in the minutes, the founding members and their early actions meet the standard characteristics in Kammen’s local history model for that time. Members were well-educated upper class business men who felt compelled to preserve their local history.

In the early years of the NCHGS, members focused on writing and presenting papers on local history as their method of preservation. Members presented their papers to each other at meetings held at the Easton Public Library. On occasion, and later in their history on a more regular basis, local historians would also be invited to present papers. Academic and public historians were both included. Later, the society reprinted many of the papers in pamphlet form for the purpose of generating revenue.

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<sup>80</sup> Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meetings, 1906-1918, p.5, Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society, Easton, Pa. Hereafter cited as NCHGS minutes.

October of 1906 saw the beginning of a tradition mirroring that of the HSBC: the annual outing. For their first outing, members of the society visited the nearby Moravian Historical Society in Nazareth. The purpose was also similar to that of the HSBC. Members enjoyed visiting other historic locations and sharing ideas and information with each other. According to the NCHGS librarian, Mrs. Jane Moyer, eventually the outings were about showing newer, smaller organizations how to effectively establish themselves in their community.<sup>81</sup> As the NCHGS, members took their role seriously.

By November, 1910, the president of the NCHGS announced that the organization had been incorporated under Pennsylvania state law. Members continued to present papers at meetings and had also begun to collect artifacts. As the society lacked a permanent home, artifacts were stored at the Easton Public Library. In 1916, the society entered into a five year lease with the First Reformed Church located at the corner of Church and Sitgreaves Streets in Easton, Pa. Although the site was rented, the NCHGS now had a place to call home.

Awareness of the society's role in preserving the county's connection to national history came in 1917. The minutes for 11 September of that year made reference to World War I. The board suggested "that the Committee and Biography meet with the President to evolve a plan to collect and preserve the records of Northampton County pertaining to the World War."<sup>82</sup> What records were collected, if any, were not noted in subsequent minutes. By the 1920s, the NCHGS discovered the general public. The minutes from 5 September 1924 were written as if the board had experienced an

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<sup>81</sup> Jane Moyer, interviewed by author, Easton, PA, March 5, 2008. Mrs. Moyer has been the librarian of the society for over 70 years.

<sup>82</sup> NCHGS minutes, 11, September, 1917, Easton, PA. p. 100.

epiphany. They were surprised that the public had expressed an interest in the collections of the society. Recognizing the potential, the secretary wrote, "It [having the society open] would also be a source of information to the young, and would stimulate things historical." The board immediately appointed a committee to generate a flier to be mailed to Easton residents and other towns in the county. This flier also had a detachable membership application.<sup>83</sup> Although it took almost a year to prepare an exhibit at the Church and Sitgreaves headquarters (the minutes do not say why, nor do they say how the public became interested in the first place), their enthusiasm paid off. The public was definitely interested in what the NCHGS had to offer.

The public's enthusiasm may have encouraged the society to publish its first book. In 1926, the board voted to write and publish *The Scotch-Irish of Northampton County*.<sup>84</sup> The book was very popular and eventually, all of the copies were sold, save the one owned by the society. By 1928 the minutes reported a membership total of 500. The days of upper-class white men reading papers to one another were long gone. That same year, the NCHGS learned that Mary Mixsell, a resident of Easton, bequeathed her house at the corner of South Fourth and Ferry Streets to the society. Included in the bequest were family portraits and \$1,000. The society was still renting space from the church and accepted the bequest; after twenty-two year, they had a permanent home.<sup>85</sup>

While it appears that at this point, the NCHGS was following the Kammen Model, it was not; while the NCHGS engaged the public with a new book and an exhibit,

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<sup>83</sup> NCHGS minutes, 5 September 1924.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 4 June 1926. This book, written by local historian John Cunningham Clyde, has been used by scholars, from the time of its first publication in 1926 to the present day. See, Jane T. Merritt, *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700-1763* (University of North Carolina Press: 2003). The NCHGS is looking into reprinting the book.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 28 June 1928.

resulting in an increase in membership, they did so because the public was seeking the society. In Berks County, the HSBC actively sought out the public for membership. While the NCHGS continued to grow, for a significant portion of the twentieth century community involvement was a result of the community asking for the society's participation, not the other way around.

However, having a permanent home allowed for activities the NCHGS otherwise could not undertake. In 1929 the Society decided to open its doors to the general public on Sunday afternoons during the month of March. Moving into a new building also allowed the board to sort and organize the 6,000 books and artifacts in their collection. Although the new house was exciting, it also required insurance and maintenance. The onset of the Great Depression had a direct impact on the society. The president's report of 1932 noted: "Due to the period of readjustment through which we are passing, we are compelled, for economic reasons to postpone some of the plans which we had for the past year."<sup>86</sup> The board decided that until the economic situation changed, they would not have the Mixsell House open to the public. On a positive note, the society continued to look toward the future, recognizing the need to grow and create a library. Despite hard financial times, the house still needed maintenance. The minutes for 1936, noted that WPA workers were going to repaint and make repairs to the house.

The 1940s brought another fresh start for the NCHGS. Membership, which had dropped to 379 in 1938, had jumped to 406 by 1941. The society also took what they had learned from the Depression years and reevaluated their finances. They established a finance committee and revised their budget. Such actions certainly led the society on the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, NCHGS minutes, Annual Meeting, 22 January 1932.

path to becoming a more professional organization.<sup>87</sup> At the Annual meeting in 1942 the society listed accomplishments for the year: annual outings to “places of historic interest” continued, the public had become more interested in the society’s new library, and the society set a goal to restore membership to 500. Perhaps the most telling statement was that the society recognized the need for more space. “[There is a] need for a larger and safer quarters ... The need for a modern museum, fireproof and burglar-proof becomes more pressing each year.”<sup>88</sup> Despite their successes, the NCHGS could not avoid the constraints brought on by World War II. By the end of 1943, due to gas rationing, the society had to cancel all scheduled outings and other trips until otherwise notified. The minutes from 1943 also reveal wartime concern of a much deeper nature. The threat of an attack on the Home front seemed very real as the executive committee “...decided to renew the war-damage insurance for one year.”<sup>89</sup> By the late 1940s, however, the society took another positive turn.

Twenty years after the Mixsell House opened as the new home of the NCHGS, the adjoining home owned by Mary Illick was donated to the society in 1948. The generous donation met the society’s needs for more space, particularly for the growing library. The librarian now had more room for organizing and cataloging the books, and additional rooms upstairs provided storage for artifacts.

For the next several years the NCHGS continued with what had become their standard range of activities: house tours, lectures, library service, and genealogy. The Kammen Model for the progression of local history still does not apply to the NCHGS.

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<sup>87</sup> NCHGS minutes, 13 January, 1942.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 23 January 1942.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, June 1943.

Although acquiring the Illick house was certainly progress, the society did not change or truly move forward from their regular activities. Other than house tours and lectures geared more for adults, the society offered little in the way education. The society did publish a few books, but they were more expensive to purchase than a quarterly publication or newsletter would have been. With only one paid staff member and a board that was not yet looking to the future, the NCHGS was still a long way from becoming a professional historical society.

The 1960s included the onset of urban renewal in Easton which brought new life to the NCHGS. Librarian Jane Moyer recalls that in the mid-sixties, the City of Easton wanted to demolish the buildings in the society's block for parking, a retirement home, and other new buildings. Demolition would have included the Mixsell and Illick houses. The NCHGS fought and eventually won, saving its home. All but one other home on the block were demolished to make way for development.<sup>90</sup> Easton's story reflects that of so many communities that undertook urban "renewal" through demolition; a program that was supposed to bring progress instead destroyed the sense of community and connectedness in the neighborhood. In 1972, the society reported its first robbery: eight thousand dollars worth of artifacts were stolen.<sup>91</sup> Since the alarm system was no longer a sufficient deterrent for thieves, the board voted to convert part of the second floor of the society into an apartment for the curator and his wife. Joseph Malia was hired as the resident curator in 1972. Details of his background and qualifications are not in the minutes. The Librarian's Report for 31 January 1973 also notes that due to the "changing

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<sup>90</sup> Moyer interview.

<sup>91</sup> NCHGS minutes, Curator's Report, 27 September 1972.

status of the neighborhood” it would no longer be possible to work the regular research hours in the library.<sup>92</sup>

The energy crisis of the 1970s also contributed to a decline in activity at the society. In January, 1974, the board reported that no school tours had been scheduled.<sup>93</sup> Later, when several tours were scheduled, many groups cancelled because they exceeded the maximum number of thirty per group. The reduction in school tours did provide the NCHGS the opportunity to address building issues. The nineteenth century structures that housed the society needed constant attention. The exterior and interior needed fresh paint and there were several maintenance issues that had to be addressed. Activities at the NCHGS during the seventies did not come to a stand still, however.

During this time, the society also participated in local bicentennial events. In 1972 the board appointed a bicentennial committee and a tour guide committee. Not much else is mentioned in the minutes about them until 1976 when the Easton Area Bicentennial Commission approached the NCHGS about participating in a local walking tour program with the help of local Girl Scout troops.<sup>94</sup> Other than the occasional mention of the fact that the tours actually occurred, very little is mentioned in the minutes about bicentennial activities. Financially, the society fared well during the bicentennial events. Sales of books and pamphlets increased dramatically, as did tours. However, the society recognized that the increase in sales and attendance was temporary. In fact, the anticipated decrease in sales for 1977 forced the society to consider the possibility that

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, Librarian's Report, 31 January 1973. "Regular hours" were Saturdays and a few hours during the week.

<sup>93</sup> School tours were a consistent program throughout the seventies; however, as minutes from the nineteen sixties were not accessible at the writing of this paper, the writer has been unable to determine when the tours began. Regardless, even before the gas shortage, school tours were not a reliable source of income for the NCHGS.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, Tour Guide Committee Report, 28 January, 1976.



they would have to ask the county for an increase in their allotment, and increase membership dues, as well.<sup>95</sup> Eventually, the society did ask Northampton County for an allotment increase (they were denied) but they voted against increasing membership dues. Any progress the society had made in becoming more professional was beginning to slow down.

At the same meeting in 1976, the board discussed their current state and rationalized the decision to keep their situation unchanged. Regardless of the fact that they needed more financial support, they were unwilling to address the issue of low visitor turnout to the museum or to create any new programs to generate revenue. An entirely volunteer-run society, the NCHGS (with the exception of the curator) did not think they could afford to have the kind of paid staff other societies had to run programs. The board concluded, “We do fulfill our most important function by conducting school and other groups through the museum by advance appointment...”<sup>96</sup> Never mind that the society, on average, had only scheduled one tour per month.

Again the NCHGS falls outside of Kammen’s local history model. Due to the bicentennial, Kammen argues, there was a renewed interest in local history. The preservation movement was well underway, perhaps a response to the urban renewal of the previous decade. *Roots*, the best seller of author Alex Haley had been made into a miniseries that struck a chord with Americans. The study of genealogy experienced a revival as well. In the mid-seventies, state arts and humanities were established and local grants were available for like-minded sites.<sup>97</sup> With more people interested in local

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, December 1976.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Kammen, *On Doing Local History*, 37, 164, 165.

history, the NCHGS had an opportunity to engage citizens of Northampton County with their history, and they missed it.

By the late 1970s school tours continued to decrease. This time, the reason given was “budget cut-backs in the area of field trips.” Countering the decline in school tours, the librarian proposed catering to the recent interest in genealogy by offering classes on doing family histories. The first class was held in 1978; twenty three people signed up and completed six sessions. Moyer’s idea was a success. A second class was held in 1979 and then continued for several years on an occasional basis.<sup>98</sup>

For the next twenty years, the NCHGS functioned at a plateau. The library remained open for genealogists and researchers, and they continued to conduct school tours and host lectures. It was not until 2000 that the society began to make its final attempt at transforming into a truly professional historical society. Current Executive Director Colleen Cunningham Lavdar was a board member at the time and was also employed as the executive director of the Nazareth Chamber of Commerce. Internal problems within the board occurred when the former director wanted to relocate the society to Nazareth, an idea that did not sit well with the predominantly Easton-based board members. While Lavdar admits to not being a “good” board member, in her opinion, she was on a long-rang planning committee that gave her insight into the potential of the NCHGS, and she became more involved. She also found herself disagreeing with the former director’s suggestion of moving the society to Nazareth. Eventually, amidst other internal conflicts among board members, the director left. In time, the board president left, followed by several other board members. Although she

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<sup>98</sup> NCHGS minutes, December 1978, 1979.

recalls this time being particularly tumultuous, it was also the perfect time to implement significant change.<sup>99</sup>

Lavdar was hired as the new Executive Director in 2005. Although she had no prior experience working in the field of public history, she had twenty three years of business and management experience as a former employee of Bell Atlantic. . Immediately, she and the remaining board members discussed various ways to refocus and restore the board. A strained relationship with the local community, caused in part by personality conflicts between some former board members, translated into lack of local support in a financial sense as well as in terms of volunteer support. Lavdar and a few others knew that if the society was going to survive, they needed to remedy the problems with the board. Finally, the board unanimously decided to resign their positions and form a fiduciary board. This rare decision made by the board has proven to be a boost for the society.<sup>100</sup> The NCHGS reworked their mission statement to read, “Preserve the Past, Serve the Present, Shape the Future of Northampton County.” The society is fulfilling that mission by continuing with research and genealogy, publishing a quarterly newsletter, and most importantly, rebuilding community relationships and developing a new museum. Easton Area Industrial Land Development donated funds for the society to match (which the society has accomplished), for the renovation and conversion of the Sigal Building in downtown Easton to become the new museum of the NCHGS. The new museum will house permanent and changing exhibits as well as ample, climate-controlled storage space for the archives. The library, overflowing in its

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<sup>99</sup> Colleen Cunningham Lavdar, interviewed by the author 4 February 2008, Easton, Pa.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.* The new board carried three members from the old board for continuity.

current state at the society, will also have room to grow. The library and collections will be cataloged electronically for easier access for researchers. Storage and cataloging are particularly important as the society currently holds more than 35,000 items in its collection ranging from books, photos and maps to textiles and German art.<sup>101</sup>

After 100 years, the NCHGS has discarded the dusty historical society stereotype of the past and moved into the twenty-first century with new direction, goals, and a new attitude about local history.

### **The Jacobsburg Historical Society**

Just north of Easton and Nazareth, tucked in the woods of the Jacobsburg State Park, sits a homestead. The site, dating to the early days of the nineteenth century, was that of the Henry family of gunsmiths. Today, the site is home to the Pennsylvania Longrifle Museum, housed in the original Henry Homestead, Henry's Forge, and the Jacobsburg Historical Society, headquartered in the early Victorian John Joseph Henry House near the Homestead. Despite its Victorian appearance, the JHS is only 35 years old.

The JHS is the perfect example of the local history revival of the 1970s. In 1972 a small group of ambitious citizens met to form the Jacobsburg Historical Society. Their goal was not to merely preserve history; it was to save it from eminent domain. Most of the Henry property was within the boundaries of the state park. Park authorities felt that a lake would enhance the park and developed a plan to flood the area including Henry property. Over one hundred years of local and national history was slated to go underwater. According to Joseph DiGerlando, founding member of the JHS and current

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

officer of the executive board, this decision was made just after the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation completed Route 33, the highway that connects the Lehigh Valley to the Poconos. The land for the highway was acquired through eminent domain, and had forced families out of homes and angered the local community.<sup>102</sup> The fact that the state park system now wanted to flood an area that local citizens knew to have historic significance that renewed existing community resentment and opposition.

Founding members of the JHS knew that they had to prove the historic significance of the site. They immediately established research, archaeology and restoration committees. They also invited the local community to a “Walk through Henry’s Woods,” allowing citizens to see for themselves what they could lose if they did not fight to keep it. On 15 October 1972, the JHS hosted their first walk in the woods. While members expected a “decent” turnout for the event, they were thrilled when approximately 400 visitors showed up for the walk.<sup>103</sup> DiGerlando notes that early success of the society was a combination of the right timing and the right people. Founding member and first president of the board Catherine Beers worked for Lafayette College and was also a member of the American Association of University Women. Her personal and professional connections, combined with cooperation from the Bushkill Watershed Association and the NCHGS (although the NCHGS never mentions this in their minutes) formed an effective grassroots campaign to preserve the history and nature of the site.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Joseph DiGerlando, interviewed by the author, 24 March 2008.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid; “The Jacobsburg Record,” March/April, 2003. vol. 30, no. 2.

By 1973 the state of Pennsylvania recognized the JHS recognition as a historical society. The organization had also joined the AASLH, adopted a logo, and published a newsletter the society eventually named “The Jacobsburg Record,” to keep society members informed of activities. The society also applied to the Pennsylvania Historic Museum Commission (PHMC) for recognition of the Henry site as a historic district. All of this was done without a permanent society headquarters. According to the March 1973 “Record,” the JHS was granted permission by the Nazareth Library to store reference and research material there. This was only temporary as, “long-range plans include a permanent facility to house and properly display all our findings...”<sup>105</sup>

The archaeological digging, research and writing undertaken by volunteers paid off in 1974 when the board announced that the PHMC accepted the JHS application and “agreed that the area has historic importance.”<sup>106</sup> Proving the historic significance of the site with the support of the PHMC was enough for the state park to abandon the plan to flood the area. The grassroots efforts of the community had worked. Now that the Henry property had been saved from flooding, the JHS could focus on preservation. They also turned their attention toward raising funds. The board restructured membership categories and organized their first colonial craft fair in 1975, an event that proved to be a success for many years. The board also planned a “members only” open house at the Henry Homestead.

Also in 1975, the archaeology committee, led by amateur archaeologists Joe and Virginia Lopresti, cultivated a relationship with the Archaeological Laboratory at Muhlenberg College to learn more about proper methods and practice. The relationship

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<sup>105</sup> “The Jacobsburg Record,” March 1973. vol. 1.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, December 1974 vol. 2 no. 8

with Muhlenberg proved to be an asset over the years as the Loprestis led many digs on the Henry property. Before they could dig, however, they needed to clear the years of debris, leaves, and brush that had accumulated at the dig locations. This led to the board establishing clean-up days not only for the archaeological sites, but for the rest of the property as well. The JHS still hosts a spring and fall clean-up.

The JHS involvement in bicentennial activities was minimal; however, the society did apply to the Pennsylvania Bicentennial Commission for a grant. It was reported in May, 1976 that the JHS had been awarded the grant of \$11,460 for the purpose of archaeological studies. The JHS used the grant to hire a professional archaeologist to oversee the digs.<sup>107</sup> By 1977, the JHS succeeded in having the Jacobsburg Historic District placed on the National Register of Historic Places. That same year, the board began planning for the restoration of the Henry Homestead and applied for a PHMC grant to fund the project. The society's plan for the Homestead was to use it as the JHS headquarters and as a museum.<sup>108</sup>

In the spring of 1978, the JHS announced that the PHMC approved their grant application and allocated \$40,000 to the JHS "to assist in the preservation of the Henry Homestead," with the caveat that the JHS had to match the grant.<sup>109</sup> The society immediately began a capital campaign to raise the funds, setting a goal of \$65,000 -- \$15,000 more than the grant required. December of 1978, the "Record" reported that the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, May 1976, vol. 4, no. 1; June 1976 vol 4. no. 2. The hiring of a "professional" archaeologist remains a bit of a delicate subject among some founding members today. The JHS consisted primarily of volunteers with little to no formal training in history or archaeology, and many saw little value in academic credentials. Hiring a professional was seen as a way to "appease the State."

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, January/February 1979, vol. 7, no. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, March/April 1978, vol. 6 no. 2.

society had raised about \$56,000 in cash and pledges.<sup>110</sup> By June of 1980 the JHS had met its goal; the society had raised \$65,257 for the renovation of the Homestead. All of the funds raised were used for the project. As the renovation progressed the JHS began working with the education department of the state park to bring their school tours to the Homestead to learn about local history.<sup>111</sup> This was the society's first attempt at creating an education program for children.

The 1980s was a decade of growth and development for the JHS. Not only were they hosting school tours at the Homestead, but they also added a Black Powder Shoot and a Primitive Encampment in 1981. The Black Powder event was competitive, while the encampment was a mix of colonial and civil war era re-enactors life in their respective periods of history. That same year, the JHS revised their Constitution and by-laws. The new purpose stated:

The purpose of this organization is: the discovery, collection, preservation, restoration, and presentation of the history, historical artifacts, buildings, documents, grounds and all material which will illustrate and demonstrate the history and culture of Jacobsburg, the Henry Gun Factory Site, Henry's Woods and related areas."<sup>112</sup>

With a new, thorough purpose in hand, the JHS demonstrated that they had the same determination in 1981 that they did in 1972. In 1983, the Benade House, another building on the property that was named for a Moravian bishop who once lived there, opened to the public as a historical and interpretive center this site. While the Henry Homestead was the headquarters of the JHS and a museum, the Benade House functioned as a visitor's center and a location for historic interpretation as well as some discussion of

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, January/February 1979, vol 7, no 1.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, January/February 1981, vol. 9, no. 1

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, July/August 1981, vol. 9, no. 4.



environmental history. The JHS, in conjunction with the state park, began hosting “Twilight at Jacobsburg,” on Sunday evenings in the summer. The concerts proved to be a nice way to strengthen the bond between the JHS and the surrounding community. The “Twilight” concerts were held at the amphitheatre of the state park and remained very popular for many years.<sup>113</sup>

Work on the society’s first publication also began in 1983. JHS member Charles M. Sandwick Sr. (also a NCHGS member) had been writing the history of the society in the form of research papers. He and the board decided to publish the history in book form, and the board established a publications fund.<sup>114</sup> By 1985, the society’s first book was published: *Jacobsburg: A Pennsylvania Community and Its People*. That summer roughly two hundred copies of the book sold. While the JHS celebrated the success of Sandwick’s book the board, who had become quite proud of their summer craft fair, found they had to cancel the event due to lack of response from the crafters.

The JHS’s decision to cancel the craft fair marks a turning point in the society’s history. Ultimately, while the craft fair was an entertaining event, its purpose was not just to showcase local crafters, but to draw attention to the historical society and garner enough support to save the site from flooding. By the early 1980s, as already stated, the society’s focus had changed and was moving away from just raising awareness, and toward development of a more professional historic site. Work on a joint education program continued as the Jacobsburg State Park became the Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center, and part of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources,

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, May/June 1983, vol. 11, no 3.; Although the concerts were a huge success, the JHS never used the event as a fundraiser. Ticket money was donated to another nonprofit organization not mentioned in the minutes.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, November/December 1983, vol. 11, no. 6.

Bureau of State Parks. By early 1986, the organizations formed a joint mission statement addressing both historical and environmental aspects of the program.<sup>115</sup>

For the first time in the fall of 1985, the JHS also began offering gunsmithing classes for adults.<sup>116</sup> For a registration fee, JHS members could enroll in hands-on classes to learn how make their own Henry-style rifles. The black powder shoot and the primitive encampments, in conjunction with the gunsmithing classes, added a new dimension to the JHS. The Henry rifle making business and the history of the rifles themselves was gaining popularity among members. Also, people who were interested in military and gun history, as well as reenacting were joining the society. Gradually, the long rifles became the calling card of the society.

As “the guns” (as some people still refer to them) gained popularity the archaeology program that had been a mainstay of the JHS came to a screeching halt. The January/ February 1986 edition of “The Jacobsburg Record” announced,

1985 has proved to be the last year for the Virginia and Joe Lopresti archaeological digs in Jacobsburg areas controlled by the state. The new law indicated only professionally trained archaeologists may recover artifacts within state-owned lands.<sup>117</sup>

The Loprestis, who had been conducting digs since the creation of the JHS and had completed training for amateur certification in archaeology, never acquired the further training and credentials to become professional archaeologists. The work that they accomplished during their thirteen years of digging was significant. With the help of volunteers and students they located foundations for, and mapped, the entire original Jacobsburg Village that was affiliated with the gun works. They recovered and identified

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, September/October 1985, vol. 13, no. 5; May/June 1986, vol. 14, no. 3

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, July/August 1985, vol. 13, no. 4.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, January/February 1986, vol. 14, no. 1.

thousands of artifacts. It is clear that the State of Pennsylvania had developed a different set of standards from those that the JHS had set for themselves. In the past enthusiasm, interest, dedication, and hard work were all that was required of society members to accomplish their goals. In a field that had become more professional by the mid-1980s, those qualities would prove to not be enough.

In 1989, the JHS took another step toward its own professionalization as a historical institution; they adopted their first budget.<sup>118</sup> Prior to 1989 there had been a treasurer who managed finances, but the society had never established an actual budget with dedicated specific amounts of money for particular expenses. The JHS had \$18,000 in 1989, which was budgeted to cover maintenance, operating expenses of the Homestead, programs, printing and mailing.<sup>119</sup> Later that year, the JHS would be thankful that they had their finances in order.

Mary Henry Stites, charter member of the JHS (and also a very active member of Nazareth's Moravian Historical Society), and a Henry descendant, passed away in 1989 leaving her home, properties and Henry gun collection to the society. While the JHS was honored to be remembered by Mary, the board was fully aware of the added responsibility they also inherited. In early 1990, the board addressed its members:

Mary Henry Stites asked us to maintain this property as a perpetual memorial to keep alive the story of the Henry family and its operation of the gun factory, as well as its contribution to the community in which it lived. Today we not only have the same program to attend to, but in addition have the care and operation of an enlarged area consisting of three houses and 25 acres of which we are the owners.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, March/April 1989, vol. 17, no. 1

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, January/February 1990. vol. 18, no.1

Mary's residence was built by John Joseph Henry in the 1830s and sits across the street from the Homestead. The JJ House, as it is commonly referred to today, currently displays Victorian-era Henry furniture and artifacts on the first floor, and houses the JHS office and collections on the second and third floor. By April, 1990, the society signed the paperwork for the transfer of the deed to the house, and held their first meeting in the permanent headquarters.<sup>121</sup>

According to board member, William (Bill) Henry Atherton, for the next several years the JHS focused on encouraging society members to volunteer, and inventoried everything in the collections and the JJ House.<sup>122</sup> Despite the society's success and attempts at professionalization, maintaining volunteers had become a growing problem by the mid-nineties. While there is no official explanation for the lack of volunteers during the 1990s, there is one possibility. Jim Wilson, Environmental Education Specialist for the Bureau of State Parks (Jacobsburg site), and lifelong resident of the area recalls that as the JHS began to focus their programming more on the Henry guns and gunsmithing, many members who joined the JHS "in the early days" let their memberships lapse or volunteered less because they simply were not interested in guns.<sup>123</sup> Excerpts from newsletters of the time reflect the lack of volunteerism: "Assuming full responsibility of the Stites Estate has greatly expanded the need for volunteer skills." "Since the same few volunteers had to bear this additional load [printing the newsletter], many things, including getting the Record written fell by the

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<sup>121</sup> Some collections were moved from the Homestead to the JJ House as the second floor of the Homestead was converted into an apartment for Bill Atherton, who acted as a caretaker to the site. A large portion of the collections had been stored at the homes of various JHS members. Gradually, those artifacts were brought to the JJ House as well.

<sup>122</sup> William Henry Atherton, interviewed by the author, 14 March, 2008, Jacobsburg, Pa.

<sup>123</sup> Jim Wilson, interviewed by the author, 21 March, 2008, Jacobsburg, Pa.

wayside. We do not apologize...” “Many of us joined the society because we believed in its purpose. But believing is not enough. We must all work to achieve its purpose.”<sup>124</sup> Work is exactly what active members continued to do.

The Gunnery committee attended gun shows and similar events, carrying with them a portable display of Henry rifles, history of the Henry family, and the JHS. Attending these events drew more attention to the society. On site, the society began offering open-hearth cooking classes in the summer kitchen located outside of the JJ House. In 1995, the society added monthly summer festivals with differing themes to their growing list of programs. The JHS also recruited three volunteers for specific “jobs:” a volunteer coordinator, grounds keeper, and a publicity coordinator.<sup>125</sup>

In 1997, the JHS was awarded a PHMC Technical Assistance Grant that provided a museum consultant to offer guidance in long-term planning and direction. According to Bill Atherton, the consultant was just what the society needed at the time. With his help, the society reworked its mission statement and created a long-range plan that included the creation of a museum on the premises.<sup>126</sup> Plans for the Pennsylvania Longrifle Museum began in 1998. In 2000, the JHS was awarded a matching grant for \$100,000 from the state for the renovation of the Henry Homestead and another \$30,000 in 2003 for the installation of exhibits.<sup>127</sup> Although the Homestead had been renovated in the eighties, the new museum boasted a more specific purpose in keeping with the revised mission. The new museum provides a broader historic context supporting the significance of the

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<sup>124</sup> “The Jacobsburg Record,” July/August, 1991, November/December, 1991, May/June 1992.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, March/April 1995, vol. 23, no. 2.

<sup>126</sup> Atherton interview.; The revised mission statement read: “To preserve and present the art of making early American firearms and the character of the individuals and community that created and sustained that enterprise.” “The Jacobsburg Record,” May/June 1997, vol. 25 no. 3.

<sup>127</sup> “The Jacobsburg Record,” March/April 2003, vol. 30, no.2.

Henry family's role in United States History as well as in the local community. The museum is currently open to the public.

In the twenty-first century, programs have remained a popular and vital function of the JHS. Interpretive programs included lectures on ice harvesting, Lenape Indians, the slate belt, and Moravian culture. Off-site programs such as gun shows, lectures and informational booths at events such as the Kutztown Folk Festival also continued.<sup>128</sup> In 2003 the JHS received a donation of the Nicholas Hawk Gun shop from a family in nearby Monroe County. Plans are currently underway to reassemble the shop on JHS property for the purpose creating a small museum interpreting early nineteenth century gun manufacturing.<sup>129</sup>

In 2007, the JHS hired their first executive director, Jan Ballard, whose background as a certified archivist will prove to be an asset to the society, as will her grant writing abilities. Future plans include the reconstruction and program development of the Nicholas Hawk Gun shop, rebuilding membership, better efforts at fundraising, cleaning and restoration work on the JJ House, creation of a library, better organization of the archives, and development of new programs. The society is still struggling to recruit new volunteers, but the board and executive director are constantly researching new methods of recruitment. At its current phase of professionalization, it is easy to recognize the similarity between the MHS and the JHS. As the MHS hired professional staff, the board became less involved, therefore stagnant in its own development and many board members have been unable to fulfill their responsibilities. The JHS is in the process of

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.; Ice harvesting was done by the Henry family for their own use as well as for sale. The Lenape Indians were the indigenous tribe in the eighteenth century. Jacobsburg lies in the slate belt.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, May/June 2003, vol. 30, no. 3. Nicholas Hawk was another local nineteenth century firearms manufacturer who purchased gun barrels from the Henry business.

finding the balance between the board's responsibilities and those of the executive director. While Ballard will be responsible for grant writing and program development, the board cannot abandon its financial responsibilities, either. The JHS is also trying to maintain a balance between the "gun enthusiasts" and the rest of the Henry history. Atherton recognizes the importance of professionalization: "We need 'cultural adjustments' for future growth." There is more than gun history at Jacobsburg. He also acknowledges the need for more "business-minded people. We need to have awareness – need to evolve into something beyond what we are."<sup>130</sup> As long as the JHS continues on its current path, it will only become more successful in achieving its goals.

### **Conclusion**

At various points in their respective histories, the Historical Society of Berks County, the Moravian Historical Society, the Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society and the Jacobsburg Historical Society followed at least part of Kammen's local history model. Kammen argues that local history, as a topic of study, had its beginnings in the early nineteenth century. As American society changed, so did the manner in which local historians did history. Local historians changed from being "patrician historians" to professionally trained historians. While focusing on the broader topic of the development local history, it is appropriate to apply Kammen's observations to the development of historical societies – the organizations ultimately responsible for the local histories of their communities. Were these organizations able to adapt to the changing world around them? How did the boards of directors handle professionalization? What were the results of their ability to adapt or not adapt?

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<sup>130</sup> Atherton interview.

The Historical Society of Berks County follows Kammen's model almost perfectly. The development of a research library, publication of *The Review*, the hiring of professional staff and the creation of education programs all coincided with changes that were happening within the profession of local history on a national level. The board of directors consistently sought out assistance from members of the society as well as other community groups to help solve their problems. Their foresight and willingness to adapt to the changes happening around them locally and nationally fostered positive growth in the society, creating a smooth transition from a group of upper class amateur historians to a professional historical society.

The HSBC publication, *The Historical Review*, and its subsequent reformatting, is a prime example of how the HSBC adapted to changes in the community that were the result of national trends. Acknowledging the need to reach a broader audience, *The Review* was available to both members and non-members of the society. In accordance with Kammen's model, as the public schools began to focus on local history, and the needs of the general population changed, editors of *The Review* lightened the format. Of the need to appeal to the general public, historian Constance McLoughlin Green stated in 1940,

Local historians should not only write for the initiate and for the compiler of general history, they should also write for the general public. History for the historian alone would be like law for the lawyers ... The popular and the scholarly are not necessarily incompatible."<sup>131</sup>

While the HSBC recognized the benefit of appealing to a broader audience with *The Review*, the NCHGS and MHS continued to focus primarily on their members. Both

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<sup>131</sup> Constance McLoughlin Green, "The Value of Local History," in Carol Kammen *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice*, (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 1996), 98.



organizations had published articles and books, and had exhibits open to the public, but neither organization was particularly interested in engaging the public in history in the same manner presented by the HSBC with the publication of *The Review*.

The MHS, which in 2007 celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and the NCHGS, which in 2006 celebrated its centennial celebration, showed few signs of professionalization until the seventies and eighties, just as the JHS was formed. Both of the former organizations were fairly stagnant in their roles as historical societies, focusing on genealogy and writing articles. Any interest in the local community, outside of membership, was minimal. Kammen's model, with regard to the late twentieth century is certainly reflected in both the MHS and the NCHGS: the board of directors of both organizations gradually realized that by engaging the public in their local history, through educational programs and access to publications, the societies would become more successful. Both societies hired professional staff: a curator at the NCHGS and a curatorial intern and a museum consultant at the MHS. It was not until the 1990s that either organization hired an executive director.

However, two other factors also determined success or failure for all four organizations: the board and fundraising. The HSBC maintained a balance between a highly active board of directors and, over the years, various paid staff. Both groups simply worked together to accomplish the goals of the society. From creating an editorial board for the purpose of publishing *The Review*, to supporting and working with the curator as he developed educational programs for the local school children, to working on a variety of other projects throughout the history of the organization, the HSBC board of directors has always recognized the need to be active stewards of the society.

Throughout its history, the board of the HSBC has always understood the importance of fundraising. The largest fundraising event held by the HSBC was the capital campaign for the new building in the late 1920s. Otherwise, funds predominantly came from memberships, use of the library, grants, donations, and investments.

The Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society began in a similar manner to the HSBC. Both organizations were founded by well-educated, upper class men who noticed their communities were changing, and who had time to do something about it. Although the HSBC and NCHGS both initially focused on doing research and producing history papers, the HSBC almost immediately began focusing on broader goals: to establish membership, find a permanent location, create a library, collect artifacts, and develop a publication. The NCHGS for many years primarily focused on presenting papers at meetings. It took the NCHGS ten years to find a “home,” therefore, creating a library or exhibit was not even a possibility until 1916. Even after they moved into the church property at Church and Sitgreaves Streets, it took until 1924 for the NCHGS to begin to make the transition from presenting papers written mostly by amateur historians to expanding their goals to incorporate the general public by opening their first exhibit. Although it was the general public who approached the society about viewing the collections, the fact that they had a building to host such events also allowed the society to recognize the potential for new programs. Despite the public’s interest in the organization, membership in the NCHGS, for a time, was exclusive; if they did not want a certain individual, that person was not voted in.<sup>132</sup> On the other hand, the HSBC pilgrimages and the NCHGS outings were popular, educational events that fit the

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<sup>132</sup> Moyer interview.

Progressive Era mindset of the early twentieth century. Progressives were interested in sharing their expertise. Knowledge was no longer a solely a hobby for the upper class. It was important that everyone had access to, in this case, history. Also, as industry consumed urban areas with noise and pollution, Progressives quickly became interested in the opportunity to take leave of the cities for outdoor travel excursions to view different landscapes.<sup>133</sup> The pilgrimages and outings fit nicely into this model.

Another difference between the NCHGS and the HSBC was that at the NCHGS, the board of directors did everything, as the organization did not have paid staff until the late twentieth century. Everyone was a volunteer. Not recognizing the value of paid, professional staff prohibited the NCHGS from advancing until the nineties. Fundraising was never a central focus of the NCHGS either. County allotments, membership dues, investments and donations were the main source of income until the twenty-first century. By that time, internal board and staff issues led to a complete reorganization of the society. In the last few years, the NCHGS has reinvented itself, and one could argue, created a new model of “instant” professionalism for historical societies. According the executive director, the current success of the society could not have happened without the resignation of the former board of directors.<sup>134</sup> By resigning, the old board has given the NCHGS the opportunity to correct the society’s past problems and plan for the future with a fresh start: the new, more professionalized board and executive director have rebuilt the strained relationship with the local community and the county, have developed new programs, fundraisers, and have developed plans for a new museum.

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<sup>133</sup> Ed Slavishak, “Jay Horace McFarland: Simple Best of Civilization,” lecture presented at “City as Utopia: Bethlehem and Beyond” conference, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa., 11 April, 2008.

<sup>134</sup> Lavdar interview.

The Moravian Historical Society had similar origins, but with a twist: the Moravian religion. While founders of the MHS watched changes happening in communities around them such as immigration and industry, the fact that the town of Nazareth had been closed to non-Moravians had sheltered them from much of the direct impact of that change. Unless an immigrant was Moravian, he or she could not live in Nazareth. The town's decision to allow "strangers" in was difficult enough for some, but the added news of doctrinal changes in the Moravian faith created a real sense of fear not seen in Berks County or Easton. Changes in Moravianism over the previous twenty years, including the modification or discontinuation of several religious observances, was particularly upsetting to devout members of the Church.<sup>135</sup>

Of the three organizations, the MHS was the only society to comment in the board minutes on their motives for forming. Not only do their fears of losing their church and community as they knew them appear in the earliest board minutes, but are discussed at the first annual meeting and subsequently published in the first volume of *Transactions*. The MHS founders believed that they were at risk of losing their identities if they didn't do something. Once established, however, the MHS was more like the NCHGS than the HSBC. They focused on writing articles and collecting artifacts. It took the MHS fourteen years to move into a permanent home. Like the NCHGS, having a space to exhibit was a small step toward professionalization. Rather than simply collecting artifacts and writing, the MHS could begin cataloging, organizing, and preserving their collections.

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<sup>135</sup> *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society, 1857-1858*, Nazareth, Pa.

The MHS was not unlike the NCHGS with regard to fundraising and board complications. For most of the society's history, the board did everything from collecting and cataloging artifacts to conducting school tours. Upon hiring an executive director, and eventually a curator, the board became more and more inactive (with a few exceptions, of course) perhaps assuming that their stewardship was no longer required. Furthermore, the board failed to aggressively pursue fundraising. Donations, membership dues and investments no longer cover the expenses of the society. After the resignation of the curator in 2005, the executive director was not able to absorb all of the professional tasks of a museum administrator, curator, and educator, as well as development director without the support of the board. The resignation of the curator and subsequent resignation of the executive director indicate that the board has several problems to address; specifically their inability to adapt to and/or meet the needs of the society. The MHS might need to evaluate the NCHGS model of professionalization. The current state of the MHS indicated that the professional ability of the director outgrew the professional capacity of the board. It could be time for a board reorganization, to create a board with the professional capacity to support the current professional organization of its museum and programs. Losing the executive director makes this an urgent matter. The MHS can move forward as it has in the past, jeopardizing the integrity and fate of the organization, or the society can work to improve the board's professional capacity and involvement. MHS, like other struggling historical societies, must ultimately recognize that in order to be successful, their board must be more involved, as those in the other societies were, in the professional changes occurring

within their organization, as well as acknowledging the financial and professional demands of their ever-broadening responsibilities as stewards of Moravian history.

The Jacobsburg Historical Society also fits Kammen's model for the time of its founding. While the JHS was nowhere near the level of professionalization Kammen refers to for the 1970s, one can argue that the preservation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the upcoming bicentennial, and the revitalized interest in local history directly affected the grassroots effort of the society's founders. Historian Michael Wallace also supports this argument. In the 1960s and 1970s, "grassroots museums sprang up around the country to preserve and commemorate local heritages. Many were amateur enterprises with an anticommercial ethic."<sup>136</sup> Whether they knew it or not, the JHS was part of a larger trend. The early success of the JHS supports the argument that success or failure of these historical societies is influenced by changes in the world around them, and their responses to those changes. While the founding members of the JHS were amateurs, they were also activists. They not only had to collect artifacts and information to save the Henry property, they had to use that research to prove their argument. By viewing themselves as stewards from the moment they committed themselves to saving the property from eminent domain, the board of the JHS demonstrated their understanding of their responsibilities at the time.

The JHS hit the ground running in 1972, although the road was not always smooth. The passing of Mary Henry Stites in 1989 and the society's altered focus on guns left many members longing for "the good old days." The board was divided into

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<sup>136</sup> Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," in *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, ed. Susan Porter Benson, et.al., (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 137-161.

two factions: the remaining founding members who, almost twenty years earlier, had succeeded by using passion and determination, and new members with professional backgrounds who wanted to take the society in a new direction. The awarding of several grants and a long-range plan that included a focus on the Henry family and the community, as well as on the gun-making industry, breathed new life into the society. The hiring of an executive director in 2006 has also provided the JHS with a fresh and assertive voice.

The successful adaptation of historical societies to develop from the amateur organizations of the late nineteenth century to the professional societies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is essential for the survival of local history as well as the societies themselves. The ability of the board of directors of each society to recognize how and when those changes should happen is an integral part of the professionalization process. Not adapting to change is detrimental to the success of the society. According to Kammen, “it is easy to accept local history as it has been done in the past—undefined, lacking in context, full of potential ... history appears to be accessible to anyone, with time and interest to invest.”<sup>137</sup> Part of the appeal of local history is that anyone with an interest can “do” it. Such was the case with the founders of early historical societies. Kammen notes that one of the differences between the amateurs and the professionals is the ability of the professionals to understand the events happening in the present, as well as to have an interest in studying the past.<sup>138</sup> This concept is important for historical societies because to understand the present is to understand the audience (i.e. the general public, students, and members) for local history. Successful programs that engage the

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<sup>137</sup> Kammen, 1.

<sup>138</sup> Kammen, 179.

historical society's audience in history translate into success for the society. A historical society can only run successful programs with the support of a professionalized, engaged, board of directors. By applying Kammen's model of the development of local history to the development of four historical societies, it is clear that the societies that fit into the model have been more successful than the one that did not.



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## Vita

Tiffany Ann Fisk-Watts was born 29 December 1975 in Albany, New York to Gary James Fisk and Marie Carmella Fisk (Sandone) was raised in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and Morton, Illinois. She graduated from Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, with a B.A. in English and minors in music and professional writing in 1998. Upon returning to the Lehigh Valley in 1999, Tiffany worked in publishing as an editorial intern and writer, and later as a writing tutor and ESL instructor. Her writing has been published nationally, as well as internationally. After Marrying Brenton Watts in 2005, and after much encouragement from her husband, she decided to pursue her life-long interest in history and apply to graduate school. After completing her degree in May, 2008, Tiffany plans to pursue a career in the field of public history, concentrating on educational history programs for children and colonial foodways interpretation. She is also interested in working to bridge the gap between academic and public historians.

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