

Pannebakker Familie Views

A Newsletter for the Pannebakker Family Association

RE-LIVING A STORY

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Artifact collection at Pennypacker Mills tells of inhabitants, times in which they lived

By Walter Ault

Samuel Whitaker Pennypacker was multifaceted. He was well-educated, industrious, a successful lawyer and became a respected judge. He also served a term as governor of Pennsylvania (1903-1907), becoming one of the more accomplished leaders in state history.

He was also one of the most avid artifact collectors of his era, known worldwide for his ability to make a deal.

Many of Pennypacker's priceless artifacts can be seen at Pennypacker Mills, the colonial revival mansion on Haldeman Road that was the governor's home from 1900 to 1916. But allow plenty of time on your visit because Pennypacker amassed a huge and varied collection of artifacts.

"We have 55,000 items," said Linda Callegari, Pennypacker Mills' assistant administrator, "with 35,000 of them being the paper variety."

Along with the governor's personal papers and family scrapbooks and diaries, there is an original document signed by George Washington, letters from William Howard Taft and Teddy Roosevelt, even a document bearing William Penn's signature.

The mansion is also full of beautiful old furnishings, nearly all of which belonged to the Pennypacker family.

"This house is very much about the governor's life and his family's lives," said Callegari. "Ninety-five percent of what you see here belonged to the Pennypacker family."

In 1718, Hans Jost Hite built a gristmill and a small house on what is now the Pennypacker Mills estate.

In 1747, the new owner of the property, the Pawling family, sold the house to Peter Pannebacker (in Dutch, maker of tiles), who enlarged the house in the 1760's.

Peter's son, Samuel, inherited the property in 1770 and much happened there in succeeding years. George Washington and his troops encamped there twice and wounded soldiers were often brought to the property for treatment and rehabilitation. Susanna, a niece of Samuel, died when her dress caught fire in a soldier's campfire.

The property stayed in the Pennypacker family until the time the governor bought the house and 140 acres of land from Josiah Hunsicker. Samuel W. Pennypacker bought the mansion as a summer residence and hired well-known architect Arthur Brockie to make major changes to the house.

A basement was dug and a furnace added, supplying central heat. A wrap-around porch was also built, which, Callegari explained, "served as a kind of outdoor living room." Further additions included a hallway, a parlor and servants' quarters.

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PENNYPACKER MILLS

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On the first floor are beautiful furnishings in the formal parlor. There is also an old pump organ and a large fireplace decorated with Mercer tiles from Bucks County.

Among the notable items in the elaborately decorated library are a Remington typewriter, an antique letterpress and Civil War weapons and ordnance. There is also a collection of ancient Bibles, a grandfather clock and a few family stereoscopes.

In an adjacent hallway there is a Regina music box, circa 1850 – with the original tin disc – still in working condition.

The Pennypacker family lived well. Not only did they have central heat, but also hot and cold running water, which most contemporaries lacked.

“They had all the comforts. They lived a good life,” Callegari said. “Visitors must have not only been comfortable, but also very surprised at what they saw.”

One of the remarkable features of the dining room - along with the wallpaper reproduced from samples left behind – is the reflective paper on the ceiling that, as Callegari explained, “bounced light around and brightened the room.”

The second floor has an exhibit area with a wide range of items the governor and his family accumulated.

There are Etruscan medicine bottles, Native American arrowheads, copies of political cartoons, political campaign buttons, paintings and prints.

There are family keepsakes and heirlooms and souvenirs from the family’s many trips around the country and abroad.

There is even a picture frame made from a piece of wood from “Old Ironsides,” the USS Constitution.

“There are many beautiful and interesting things in this house,” said Callegari, “and there is a story behind every one of them.”

“The written material in the collection is incredible,” Callegari continued. “The Pennypacker family recorded everything they saw and thought and it is an excellent record of the times.”

As governor, Pennypacker had a long list of accomplishments. In just four years he established the state police, the Pennsylvania Departments of Agriculture and Forestry, the Department of Health and the Museum and Archives Commission.

He constantly promoted reforms and laws were passed during his administration concerning child labor, mining operations and honesty in food labeling.

Pennypacker is also responsible for the building of the state capitol building in Harrisburg and had the first stretch of paved highway completed in the state.

Montgomery County took over control of Pennypacker Mills in 1980, purchasing the property from the governor’s grandson, Samuel II.

The Pennybaker DNA Project is proceeding. Several family members have joined since the last newsletter. If you are male and carry the Pennypacker surname, or a different spelling of the name, please consider joining. As an incentive to join, we are offering to help with the cost of the DNA testing by waiving dues for a period of time, depending on how many markers you have tested. If you are interested, please contact Bruce Pennypacker for further details. If you are without internet access, or are unsure how to set up the testing, I would be happy to assist you. All you have to do is contact me by email, phone or regular mail.

Each edition will feature stories about our family members. We’d love to hear about you! Let us know what you’ve been up to. Articles could be autobiographical or tell us about the kids, grandkids or maybe about that big trip or the book you just had published. Send your story, with pictures if you wish, to the editor.

Electronic Update

OR

How the Association is planning on using existing technology!

Well, it's finally happened! We've decided to get with the plan and go electronic. What does that mean? For one thing it means that those of you who would like their newsletter sent to them via e-mail instead of snail-mail will have that option. All you have to do is send an e-mail to the editor requesting the change. Once the editor has your request, and your e-mail address, you will be added to a group list for mailing. Those of you who would like to continue receiving the newsletter the "old fashioned" way, do nothing and the newsletter will continue as before. Besides making for faster and more efficient delivery, this change will save on postage, eliminate several steps in preparation and cut down on the use of paper. So, if you are interested in making the change to e-mail delivery, send an e-mail to, throwcoach@gmail.com.

Another part of the plan is to develop a family web site. We had a web site several years ago, but discontinued it because very few people were actually visiting the site. Anyone interested in being involved with the web site, please contact the editor at the above address. We are looking for ideas about what to include on the site, as well as having a need for someone to be the webmaster. Eventually, the newsletter, and past editions of the newsletter, will be made available on the web site for all to view at their leisure.

A Personal Plea for HELP

Speaking of the newsletter, when I took over the job of editor, I was under the impression that I would have help. Help in the manner of someone else to write some of the articles, an assistant editor or two! Several people have, in the past, contributed articles, and I thank them from the bottom of my keyboard! Please, if you like to write, or if you are interested in researching stories for publication, or if you would like to see your name in print, let me know and you will be instantly made famous as an assistant editor of this glorious publication!

Message from the President

I saw a patch of black in the driveway the other day, until it snowed again and covered it up! It's been a long and cold winter and it isn't over yet. I hope all of you are staying warm and cozy in your homes, and looking forward to the warmth of Spring.

The Family Association does maintain an extensive genealogical database, compiled over many years by several dedicated family researchers. Since the database includes living individuals, we will not "give away" the entire database, or publish it on the Internet. Your privacy is assured! However, we are willing to help those who have a specific question about their lineage. With each birth and death within the family, our database becomes more out-of-date. For the benefit of future generations, we ask that you send us notification of these events. Please send requests for information, or family updates to the editor of this newsletter.

Remember, when you turn 80, you no longer have to pay dues. So, if you've already turned 80 or are about to, please let us know so that we can make the proper adjustment in our records.

The Pannebakker Family
Association

Officers

President: Ron Mitchell
N202 County Road B
Kewaunee, WI 54216-9520

Vice President: Vacant

Secretary: Marcea (Marcy) P. Kligman
4170 Summit Way
Marietta, GA 30066-2346

Treasurer: Bill McNeary
102 S. Stark Street
Charleston, MO 63834

Membership: Jonathan Stayer
644 Wheatlyn Drive
York, PA 17403-2953
(717) 854-7112

Newsletter: Bruce Pennypacker
201 Shady Brook Drive
Langhorne, PA 19047

Board of Directors

Susan Costantini, Royersford, PA
Patricia Journeay, Lyons, CO
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Jack Pennybacker, Decatur, AL
Bruce Pennypacker, Langhorne, PA
Patricia Rutins, Arlington, VT

Newsletter comments or questions:

Bruce Pennypacker
throwcoach@gmail.com
(215) 380-1748



The Pannebakker Family Association is an out-growth of the family reunion held at Pennypacker Mills, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania on July 2-4, 1999. The reunion celebrated the 300th year wedding anniversary of Hendrick Pannebecker and Eve Umstat, in Germantown, Pennsylvania in the year 1699.

In the words of the Steering Committee of the reunion, "We hope that the 1999 Pfannebecker-Umstat Reunion will lead to the growth of a family association, which will provide a forum for conversation, collection and preservation of information, and a sense of lasting community among the heirs of this rich cultural heritage."

Editor, Pannebakker Familie Nieuws
201 Shady Brook Drive
Langhorne, PA 19047