

Schuylkill River Heritage Center

Phoenix Columns

Summer 2020

The 1918 Influenza Epidemic meets Covid 19: An Unexpected Coincidence at our March Event

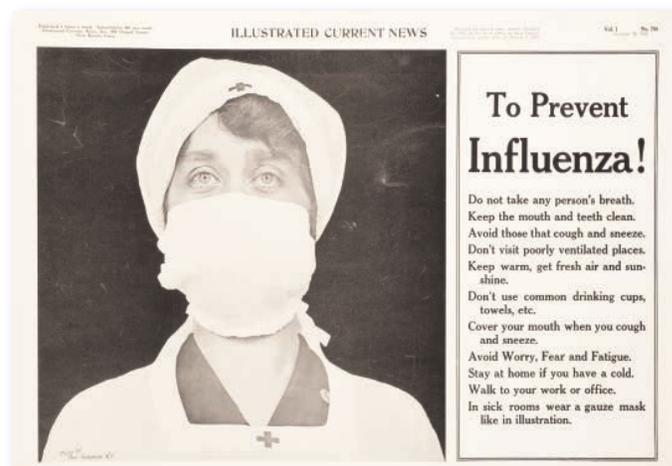
Last fall, after taking an extraordinary tour at the College of Physicians - Mutter Museum in Philadelphia, we planned a March 2020 event to tell the story of Medical Maladies along the Schuylkill River. **Dr. Robert Hicks**, the Chair of the History of Medicine at the College of Physicians, and newly retired Director of the Mutter Museum, accepted our invitation to give a presentation he wrote called: ***Spit Spreads Death: The Influenza Epidemic of 1918-19 in Philadelphia***. He gave his presentation on Thursday, March 12th, just as the Covid-19 pandemic was beginning to make its way across the ocean to the USA. We have learned over the past several months that there are many parallels between the difficult times we are facing now and what happened just over 100 years ago.

In 1918 WWI, also known as the Great War, was at its height with each side hoping to achieve victory by the end of the year. However, in the spring of that year, both German and American soldiers were greatly affected by what was called the Spanish Flu that was spreading across Europe. The German offensive was halted because about 500,000 German soldiers were infected by the flu. The Allies launched a counter-offensive, but there were about 25% of US and other allied soldiers infected with the flu as well. Ironically, it was the spread of the flu across the world that led to the Armistice that was declared on November 11, 1918.

As the US soldiers returned home over the summer, many army camps became infected by the flu. With military camps located across the US and soldiers traveling across the country, the flu struck people of all ages in all areas. It affected almost a third of the US population and there were 675,000 deaths. Worldwide, this influenza virus killed as many as 100 million people. This number was more in one year than the Black Death had killed in a century! President Woodrow Wilson did not provide the national leadership needed and even censored information so the public was not fully informed about the epidemic.



This archival image at Camp Funston, Kansas shows how overcrowded the facility was with soldiers infected by the flu virus.



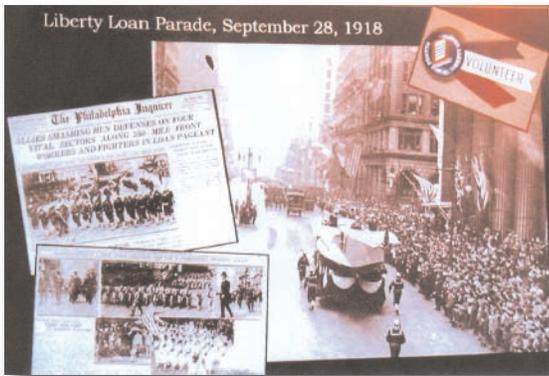
Shown here is a New Haven, CT news article that advises people how to avoid catching the flu.

A second wave of the flu occurred in the fall of 1918. Dr. Hicks explained that the outbreak in Philadelphia was due to a parade that was held on September 28th to sell bonds for a “Liberty Loan Drive” to help support the war effort. Despite being warned to cancel the parade because a large crowd of people might become infected, Dr. Wilmer Krusen, Philadelphia’s Director of Public Health, didn’t think it would be much of a problem.

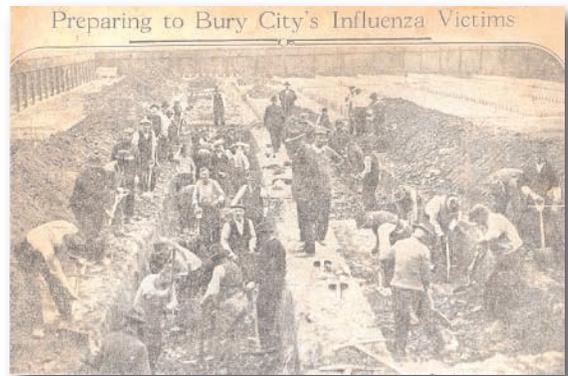
Dr. Krusen was wrong. Two days after the parade, he was forced to announce that there was an epidemic as the daily death count started to explode. By the end of October, over 12,000 people in Philadelphia had died, and over the next few months the death toll reached over 20,000. Philadelphia had a higher death rate than any other American city during the pandemic.

Dr. Krusen finally started to try to deal with the epidemic, but there was an infrastructure failure. There was a shortage of hospital beds, and many of the city’s medical and surgical staff were still away; serving in the war in Europe. There were volunteers, supported by Dr. Krusen, who helped the nurses and medical staff. Patients were laid on beds of straw and poor immigrants helped to bury the dead in mass graves since there was a shortage of cemetery plots.

People were told to wear gauze masks, but many did not do so. Many cities and towns began to discourage public gatherings. There was no vaccine to cure the disease at this time. Just as Hydroxychloroquine was recommended earlier this year for Covid-19, an array of strange remedies such as camphor amulets, red pepper sandwiches, removing tonsils and inhaling chloroform were suggested as cures. This global pandemic brought about many changes. Scientists began studies to identify the flu virus and the first vaccine was finally licensed in 1945. Many more public health facilities and hospitals were established as a result of this world-wide tragedy.



This image shows part of the parade route that was six miles long. There were over 200,000 people who attended and everyone received an Honor button.



This archival newspaper clipping shows the digging of mass graves.



*SRHC members who attended this event are shown here (l to r) **Harvey Bomberger**, **Martha & Duane Parker** and featured speaker **Dr. Robert Hicks**.*



*Other attendees pictured here are SRHC members (l to r) **Jim & Joan Moore**, **Lee Berger**, and **Barbara Pruyn**.*

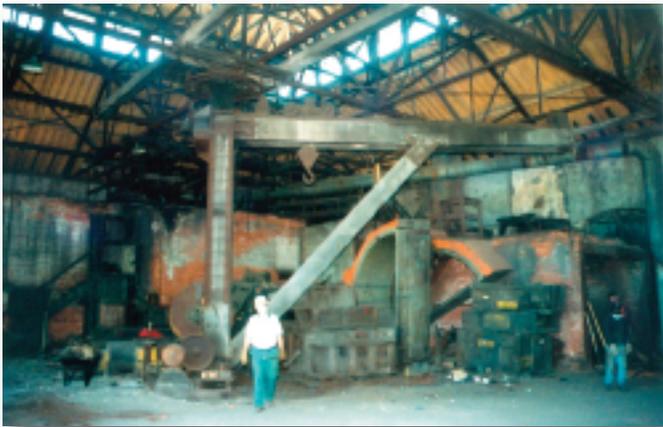
HONORING TOM CARNEVALE AND LAUREN EUSTIS

In February this year, the SRHC Board members voted to honor **Tom Carnevale** and **Lauren Eustis** at our Heritage Award Celebration this fall. Unfortunately, The Covid-19 pandemic has precluded our being able to host a large gathering in 2020.

Lauren and Tom have done so much creative architectural work to reinvent and adaptively reuse significant historic places in the greater Phoenixville region.



These photographs recognize their talents and give them the respect they deserve for preserving the historic integrity of these special buildings and making them come alive once again!



In 1999, Tom and Lauren developed the architectural plan to restore the iron trusses that support the roof as part of the Foundry Building's restoration.

The former Bull Tavern is an historic landmark that was built by hand in 1734. It even hosted George Washington and his generals. Respecting its history, it was restored and transformed by Tom & Lauren into the Valley Veterinary Hospital, which continues to serve the community at this new location.



The 1903 iconic Colonial Theater is located next door to the 1924 former National Bank of Phoenixville and later, the Evening Phoenix newspaper. This building is now part of the Colonial Theater. Thanks to Tom and Lauren's creativity, this expanded space provides concession counters for refreshments, two theaters for films and live presentations, an outdoor garden and gathering place on the roof, as well as an upstairs gathering place above the lobby that now serves all three theaters.

NEW INFRASTRUCTURE FOR OUR INTERACTIVE EXHIBITS

Along with the challenges associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and the mandate for all museums to be closed to protect everyone's health and safety, the SRHC was faced with our three interactive exhibits suddenly becoming dysfunctional earlier this year. Thanks to **Miller Designworks**, we learned that the Adobe Flash drives that had been installed when we opened in 2008 needed to be replaced with the current HTML5 current technology. **Miller Designworks** has now completed this transformation thanks to the wonderful supportive donations provided by **Aqua America, Phoenixville Federal Bank & Trust, PECO, and Schuylkill Highlands**.



WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Mr. Andrew Belton

Mr. James Brazel

Mr. & Mrs. Mary Jo & Tom Brown

Mr. & Mrs. Larry & Anna Mae Galbraith

Mrs. Billie Goldstein

Mr. & Mrs. Charles & Lynne Henry

Mr. Michael Kalavik

Dr. & Mrs. Frederic & Diane Liss

Ms. Tamela Luce & Mr. Tom Joyce

Mr. Peter Stankoff

Mr. & Mrs. Joe & Joann Thomson

HONORING PHOENIXVILLE'S LEGACY

There have been many tragic injustices that have occurred against people of color in America. The Schuylkill River Heritage Center is a non-profit organization whose mission is to educate everyone about Phoenixville's and the Schuylkill River's historic inclusive legacy. We respect and welcome everyone and tell the stories of those who came to seek a better way of life. No matter where you came from, where you went to pray, or what color you were;

EVERYONE COULD GET A JOB AT THE MILL!

This sign features Debbie Mitchell, an lifelong Phoenixville resident, who was a wonderful community leader. It was installed in Renaissance Park while the mural wall is bare at this time. This was done to express our respect for everyone in the regional community and to honor Phoenixville's legacy of inclusiveness and social justice.

DEBBIE MITCHELL
OUR HEROINE

A portrait of Debbie Mitchell, a woman with short, dark hair, wearing a yellow top. The portrait is set within a rectangular frame with decorative corner elements.

Debbie Mitchell was an extraordinarily inspirational leader in our community and is pictured on the Phoenixville Mural. She served on Phoenixville Hospital's Board of Directors and was a leader at the Bethel Baptist Church, which was founded in 1919.

Debbie Mitchell is a symbol of Phoenixville's multi-color and multi-cultural legacy of respect and inclusiveness for all.

The **Schuylkill River Heritage Center**, as a non-profit cultural organization, is proud to honor this heritage at our museum at The Foundry and by the images portrayed on the Phoenixville Mural.



Please join us...

David Blackburn, the Site Director at Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, with degrees in both Anthropology and Cultural Resource Management and 32 years at the National Park Service will present

Transatlantic Connections: The Iron Trade between Pennsylvania and England in the Colonial Era

Thursday, September 10, 2020 at 7:30 PM

at the

Schuylkill River Heritage Center

The Foundry Building

2 Main Street

Phoenixville, PA

Admission is Free for Members

\$5.00 for Non-Members



*Hopewell Furnace
National Historic Site*



*An historic bridge crossing the
Severn River*



Joanna Furnace



*The Derby Furnace - a UNESCO
World Heritage Site*

RECREATING THE PHOENIXVILLE MURAL

Along with the Covid-19 pandemic and having to reinvent our interactive exhibits, the 90 mile an hour winds on April 30th ripped off a major portion of the Phoenixville Mural from the wall. Our insurance claim and private donations and have successfully met the full cost for replacing the mural.

Michael Webb and Meg Saligman, the artists who painted the original mural, were unavailable to repaint the mural, but they and the Philadelphia Mural Arts Coalition recommended Mural Provisions, led by Ben Volta. The SRHC has engaged him to replace the mural. He will use a mural cloth material which is coated with an emulsion that will permanently bond the mural to the wall so that something like this never occurs again. A warranty and insurance plan have also been provided by Ben Volta. He will also apply a gel topcoat to the mural which contains ultra violet light protection.

Ben Volta took down the remaining portion of the mural left on the wall and is currently working on recreating the mural using the new material. The installation of the mural will begin in mid August and is expected to be completed by mid- September. Total Rental is once again helping to support the cost for the installation. We appreciate everyone's patience and loyalty!



This image shows the wind damage from the severe storm on April 30th



Ben Volta provided several mural samples for the mural committee in early July. This is a photo of the sample that the committee approved.

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE HERITAGE CENTER

Thursday, September 10th at 7:30 PM

David Blackburn, the Site Director at Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, will present the story of the historic transatlantic connections for iron-making between England and Chester County.

Thursday, October 15th at 7:30 PM

Daniel Campbell, President of the Society for the Preservation of Mills, will give a presentation about historic mills in Chester and Delaware Counties.

Tuesday, November 10th at 7:30 PM

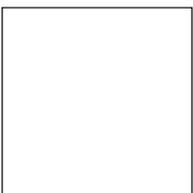
Parks & Trails Throughout the USA featuring **Steve Elkinton**, who worked at the National Park Service for 36 years.

Tuesday, April 13, 2021 at 7:30 PM

Mary Ellen Heisey, an SRHC member and a respected ornithologist will give a presentation about birds along the Schuylkill River.

The SRHC hopes to reopen on **Friday, August 7th**, limiting the number of visitors and requiring masks. We will be following guidelines set by Chester County and Governor Wolf's order to not accept visitors from those states where the Covid-19 cases have increased.

We hope everyone is staying safe and healthy!



Schuylkill River Heritage Center
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