

# The Inkwell

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45 East Corydon Street, Bradford, PA 16701

October 2012

The official newsletter of The Bradford Landmark Society



It's sad to realize that another summer is over, and we are in the midst of fall, heading into winter. This is an excellent time of year, though, to settle in and do some inside projects. Thinking about researching your family tree? Winter is a great time to start. The Internet has made it much easier to do research, but if you don't know where to start, stop into the Herbig Bakery at

45 E. Corydon and talk to Molly Lindahl, our genealogist. She is an expert at tracking down those lost ancestors, and can give you pointers on how to find them. Thinking about reading some good books? The Landmark has several great books on local history, available at the Bakery, or at the Main Street Mercantile. And it's a great time to clean out those old photo-

graphs, papers, and school yearbooks. Think about donating them to the Landmark Society. We are always looking to complete our school yearbook collection, both the Central Christian Rambler, and the Bradford High School Barker. And we LOVE old photographs, especially of old buildings, trains, trolleys, events, stores, schools, and early oil scenes.

## Happy Halloween from the Landmark!

This edition of the Landmark has some great stories of Halloweenie type things—graveyards, ghosts, and yes, petrified people. It also has some great photographs of the

Beaver Day clean up and fix up day that was held recently at the Crook Farm. We plan on making this a bi-annual event; it's a great way to get some needed repairs

and projects finished with a little bit of money, a whole lot of volunteers, and a great time by everyone. Plan on joining us next spring, but first, enjoy autumn!



## News from the Herbig Bakery

It's membership renewal time! If you haven't received your official invitation to renew your annual membership, please call the Landmark at 362-3906. Being a member of the Landmark means supporting the continued research and understanding of the history of Bradford and its people.

And there's more:

- The opportunity to help support the preservation of the history of the Bradford area.
- Advance notice of programs, events, workshops, and special events.
- A quarterly newsletter, *The Inkwell*, outlining the news of the society and offering entertaining and educational articles on local history.
- Members are entitled to vote at our annual meeting, and are eligible to serve on the board of directors.
- Volunteer opportunities at the Herbig Bakery, or at the Crook Farm

Membership is very affordable; just \$10 for a basic membership, \$25 for a family membership, \$100 + for a patron membership. The growth and development of the Bradford Landmark Society depends upon people like you who share an interest in the rich heritage of our city.

Payment is very easy, too-cash, check, money order, or through PayPal, Call us at 814-362-3906.

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## Birth and Death Records

Working on your family tree? Did you know that you can now access Pennsylvania state birth and death records, from 1906 to 1961 online? Recent legislation passed in February 2012, Act 110, allows for births from 1906 and deaths from 1906 to 1961 to become available to on the Internet.

To access these records, go to [www.health.state.pa.org](http://www.health.state.pa.org), and click on "Birth and Death Certificates." Indices are available online in PDF format and are searchable by the name of the individual and year of event. However, the actual birth and death record certificate must still be requested from the Department of Health. Sometimes, though, just knowing the correct birth or death date can be of immense help in research.

Records prior to 1906 are kept on the county level, or in Bradford, in large books at City Hall. The Courthouse, Register of Wills office, has most of the county births and death records up to 1906. But the City of Bradford kept their own records, which are handwritten. This past year, however, the Landmark staff has begun the task of scanning, and indexing these city records. We borrow the books, scan the pages, then have each page typed into an Excel format. Eventually, all scanned records will be merged into one large, easily searchable database.

Its exciting news for genealogists and researchers. Statistical analysis of some of the records already has revealed interesting facts about Bradford, from 1881 to 1906. Categories in each birth book list names, ages, father's name, mother's name, occupations, origin of births, ages of the parents, numbers of other children and the name of the doctor whom delivered the child. The death books contain names, father's name, mother's name, age at time of death, cause of death, and place of death. An analysis of this information will show us which nationalities settled here in those years, what the primary causes of death were, who was born overseas vs. here in the United State; and where did they live, etc. Exciting stuff for historians!

## Beaver Day at the Crook Farm, October 6, 2012

This year, for the first time, the Landmark decided to host a “Beaver Day” at the Crook Farm. What is a “Beaver Day” you ask? Well, it’s a bunch of volunteers, all working like "beavers" to get the Crook Farm in shape for winter.

Boy Scouts do it at Elk Lick Boy Scout Camp twice a year, spring and fall. And since there were several projects that needed doing at the Crook Farm, we thought we’d emulate the scouts and hold our own Beaver Day, Crook Farm style.

Under the direction of John Costik, plans were made about 6 weeks in advance. Projects were picked out, supplies purchased, and volunteers rounded up. Home Depot in Allegany, NY gave us a very generous donation of paint, primer, boards, nails, tools, roofing, shingles – really, all sorts of items that we would need to really make a difference in our “to do” list. ARG donated a big barrel of lemon oil, rakes, shovels, work gloves, paint thinner, and painting supplies. Bisett Building Center let us borrow several of their planks for our scaffolding, and Dan Ross lent us his power washer.

The date was chosen – Saturday, October 6 – and volunteers started showing up. The Tuna Valley Trail men – Gene Cornelius, George Sanfilippo, and John Shinaberger – built the front porch of the farmhouse; a dozen University of Pitt students did everything from roofing the outhouse to painting the candle shop and the back porch of the farmhouse; Boy Scout Troop 416 boys hauled firewood, helped with the fire, the weeding, and all sorts of stuff. Being boys, the dirtier they got, the more fun they had! Community members and members of the Bradford Landmark Board of Directors sorted books, made lunches, cleaned, sanded, painted and helped in any way they could, while Bob Harris, UPB’s master gardener, pruned several of the large bushes that were encroaching on the house. Linda Brocius and her husband Dick worked like, well, beavers at clearing away a huge growth of bramble bushes, weeds, small trees, and brush by the tractor shed and digging out the roots after Gene Cornelius used his power trimmer to smash through some tough brush; Tom Palz, scoutmaster, made two new wooden doors for the back shed by the barn; Molly Lindahl cut trees, trimmed shrubbery, and helped to scrape, prime, and paint the candle shop roof, and Tom Jones and JoAnne Thomas straightened up the barn’s loft and the main floor. At the end of the day, we were thrilled at what we had accomplished:

- Carpenter Shed - bad boards replaced, window trim painted, building treated with lemon oil.
- Candle Shop – roof scraped, primed and painted; all window trim, door, and rake boards painted dark green, building washed with algae/mold deck wash; loose broken boards behind candle shop burned.
- Farmhouse – porch boards replaced; back porch painted with solid hide deck stain, bench from back porch has been washed with algae/mold deck wash, primed and will be painted dark green.
- Schoolhouse – books sorted into piles, in readiness for winter storage in totes.
- Woodshed – all firewood and miscellaneous scraps and trash emptied out, wood restacked; all weeds and misc. stuff removed from around the shed.
- Tractor Shed – all brush and weeds cleared out, both sides of building.
- Outhouse behind house – floors painted, toilets repaired and new seats added, power washed inside, washed with algae/mold deck wash outside; sprayed with lemon oil, roof torn off, and re-roofed with wood shingles.
- Barn – back shed doors replaced; upstairs in loft area organized and cleaned; lower barn floor area straightened up.
- All brush, loose boards, and burnable trash burned.

We definitely plan on hosting another Beaver Day next spring. Thinking of helping? We can sure use you!

Check out some photos taken during the day. Don't they look like they are having fun?



Some happy workers at Beaver Day at the Crook Farm.





# Murder Mystery in Irishtown

A strange occurrence on September 21, 1925 on the South Penn oil lease in Irishtown, just outside Lewis Run, may or may not have been a murder.

A worker, Dewey Griffin, discovered what appeared to be the bones and remains of a woman's foot inside his tool box. Horrified, he called the Bradford police and soon Coroner Heffner and Officer Ferko were on the scene. They made a thorough search of the premises for the remainder of the body, but only found some bits of paper and some cloth, seemingly daubed with blood. A woman's blue serge coat was also found in an out-house nearby.

Further investigation and questioning of the oil field workers followed, who admitted that they had found what they assumed to be a human skull near the lease boiler house two weeks previous, but "attaching no significance to the discovery, threw the skull away."

Workers also told police that there had been a really offensive odor around the boiler house approximately two weeks previous as well, but again, they attached no significance to the smell.

Police theorized that a murder had indeed taken place, and the body had been cremated in the boiler. The lease was in an isolated section and the boiler was large enough to contain a human body. The boiler was fired with gas, and a body stuffed inside would have been quickly consumed.

Coroner Heffner made inquiries to see if there had been any women reported missing in the vicinity, but no one had been reported missing. The mystery seemed unsolvable, but Heffner promised a thorough investigation.

Less than two weeks later, some information came to light that may or may not have explained the controversy of the bones found in the toolbox.

Local residents insisted that the bones were actually that of a bear, shot the previous winter by LeRoy Eschrich. Eschrich had shot the bear, and cut off one of the paws, giving it to his dog. This occurred very near the location where the bones were found.

Dr. H. Irwin Woodhead of Bradford, however, who examined the bones, stated that he still thought that the bones were those of a human being, being too thin to be that of a bear.

The mysterious bones were never fully identified, and there was never an explanation as to why such bones ended up in Griffin's toolbox, why a skull was found nearby, and what exactly that funny smell was.

Murder or Mystery? You tell us!



## The “Unexplained, Odd, and Weird“

Several weeks ago, a small headstone was discovered in the barn of the Crook Farm. It was broken in several pieces, but when put together correctly spelled out the name of a small child who died in 1842. Now, how it got to the Crook Farm is uncertain but from what we ascertain it has been there at least 10 years, tucked away in the corner of the barn. It was brought back to the Bakery, where we attempted to find out who this small child had been.

What we found surprised us. The stone reads “Horace W., son of W.R. & B.P. Fisher, Died January 1, 1842, Aged 4 years, 6 mo., 15 da. It turned out that his parents were William R. Fisher and his wife, Briceus Pantha Fisher, who came to Bradford in 1837, and built a sawmill on the Tuna Creek and later a homestead, which still stands and is known today as the Fisher Inn on East Main Street. They had 11 children, five of whom died either in infancy or as very small children. Horace was one of those five children. And here is where the “unexplained, odd, and weird” part of our story begins.

Molly Lindahl, our genealogist and expert on Oak Hill cemetery, discovered that the bodies of Horace and the rest of his family are currently buried in Oak Hill. But originally, William Fisher (who died in 1889), Pantha (who died in 1885), and their deceased children were buried in the old Littleton Cemetery, now known as Hanley Park.

That early cemetery, Bradford’s first, held the remains of many of Bradford’s early settlers, but due to its location along the Tuna Creek, graves that were located near the water, down low, were often flooded each spring.

In 1884, it was decided by City Council to move the graves to Oak Hill. Oak Hill had been created in 1883 encompassing 17 acres of land on higher ground that overlooked the city. Due to the poor condition of Littleton Cemetery - and by the 1890s, overcrowding with nearly 500 graves -it was decided to move all the bodies to Oak Hill. Transfers began in 1885 and continued for the next 20 years.

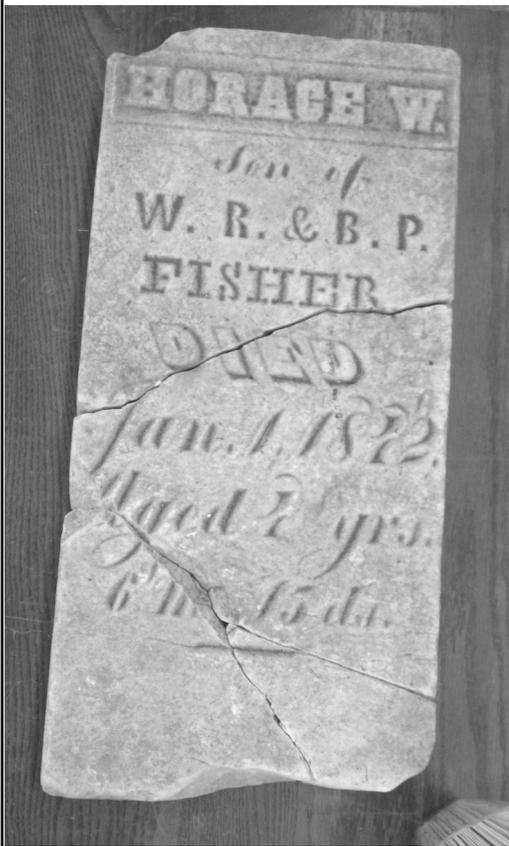
The removal and transfer of the Fisher family was scheduled for March 15, 1896. But once again, our story takes a strange and odd turn. On that Saturday, grave diggers arrived at the grave site to begin the removal process, but when an attempt was made to lift the coffins to the surface, they were surprised to find that the coffins were almost unmovable. After considerable effort, one of the caskets was brought to the surface and the cover removed. One glance inside the coffin explained the unusual weight. The remains were petrified. “From the top of the head to the bottom of the feet, the body was as solid as marble and in perfect state of preservation. The features were

lifelike in their naturalness and even the clothing was petrified. One after another, the bodies were lifted from the earth and when each was examined it was found to have turned to stone.”

One of the bodies, which had weighed 200 pounds in life, weighed nearly 400 pounds when exhumed. It was supposed that the location of the gravesites, so near the creek, and the mineral properties of the water had caused the petrification. It was said that other petrified bodies has also been moved from the Littleton cemetery.

Eventually, all members of the Fisher family were successfully moved to Oak Hill. But that still doesn’t explain why, or how, the Landmark Society came into possession of little Horace’s stone. It may have been forgotten during the transfer in 1896; it may have “fallen off the wagon” as it was moved, or sadly, it may have been stolen at some time in the past. There is no record of how we received it.

For whatever reason, we hope to have his stone restored and returned to its rightful place in Oak Hill.



## Buried Alive?

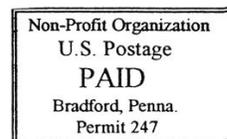
The Victorians had a great fear of being buried alive, which peaked during the cholera epidemics of the 18th and 19th centuries. Coffins were even designed with a special mechanism to prevent premature burial or allow the occupant to signal that they have been buried alive. Most consisted of some type of device for communication to the outside world such as a whistle, flag, or cord attached to a bell that the interred person could ring should he revive after the burial.

This might have been useful in February 1887, when it was reported in the Bradford Era that a young man named Eddie Covell, of Corydon, was nearly buried alive (or was he?) following an accident in the oil fields. Covell, age 16, was found dead on the top of an oil tank near Kinzua. He had a habit of going up to the top of the tank to see how the well was producing, and evidently was asphyxiated by escaping gas.

Preparations were made for his burial, and it was while services were in progress that signs of life were discerned in the supposed corpse. The body was removed from the casket and medical help summoned. The Era reported that “Yesterday, the lad was alive and on the road to recovery. His was a narrow escape from being buried alive.”

But it was a premature hope. The Era reported the next day that “Eddie Covell, reported as having returned to life, is dead. The report was caused by the unusual warmth displayed by the corpse. After repeated tests with a galvanic battery, the doctors decided that the boy was indeed dead and thus ends Kinzua’s latest sensation.” The galvanic battery used to try to shock Eddie back to life is the basis of today’s electric shock or defibrillation.

Bradford Landmark Society  
45 East Corydon Street  
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Return Service Requested



*Happy Halloween*