

# Laurel Messenger



Historical and Genealogical Society of Somerset County  
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Issue I, 2017

## The Saga of Somerset's Purple Martin Birdhouse

### 100+ Years ... And Counting

*(Sometimes inspiration for a Laurel Messenger article springs from unusual circumstances. In this case, I was at Herring Motor Co. when I noticed a large, old-time photo hanging on the lobby wall. [See accompanying article on Page 6-7.] The photo was taken on the Diamond in Somerset in 1917, and as I examined it, I noticed a martin house. 'Wow,' I thought, 'there's been a birdhouse on the Diamond for a long, long time. I wonder when the first one was erected.' And so the research began – and this article is the result. – R.B.)*

By **RON BRUNER**

It has been more than 100 years since the first purple martin house was installed on the "Diamond" in Uptown Somerset. In the intervening years, it has been rebuilt/replaced a number of times, been the subject of countless newspaper articles, and the focal point in a war of words between Somerset and the tiny town of Griggsville, IL.

More about the latter later (see accompanying article on Page 3), but first some history:

"The first purple martin birdhouse in Somerset was placed on the diamond in front of the old Belmont Hotel in 1908. It cost \$60," according to an article in the Somerset Daily American on April 25, 1988. That story goes on to give a brief history of the birdhouse:

"In 1920, the Somerset Sportsmen, one of the oldest, if not the oldest organized sportsmen club in the state, assumed responsibility for the construction and maintenance of the birdhouse.

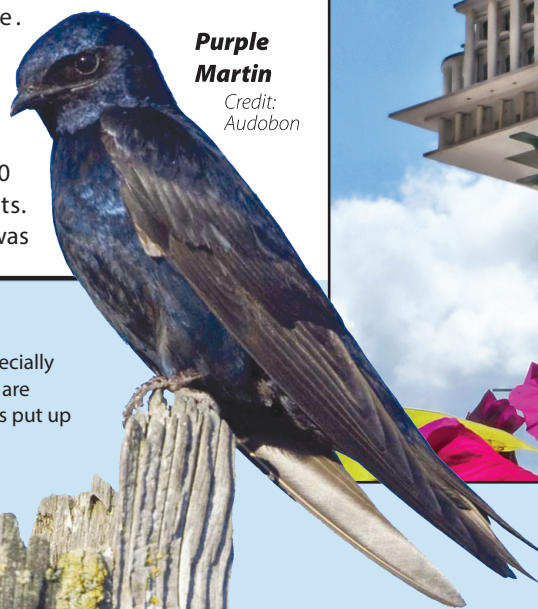
"In 1923, the club replaced the old house with a new structure, which was an exact replica of the \_\_\_\_\_ county courthouse.

The house cost \$125, was seven stories high and had 150 compartments. The house was

replaced again in 1939 at a cost of \$186.

"At a Somerset Borough Council meeting in 1961, borough secretary Dan Cassler asked Somerset residents to assist the sportsmen with donations to rebuild the birdhouse. Over \$400 was collected toward the \$550 needed for

**Continued on page 2**



**Purple Martin**

*Credit: Audobon*



**The current martin house is located on the northeast corner of the Diamond.**

### PURPLE MARTINS 101:

- Member of the Swallows family.
- Graceful in flight.
- Musical in its pre-dawn singing.
- Long-distance migrant.
- Most winter in the Amazon Basin.
- Feeds on a wide variety of flying insects.
- Usually nests in colonies, especially in the East, where almost all are multiple-roomed birdhouses put up for them.

Source:  
www.audubon.org

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# The Saga of Somerset's Purple Martin Birdhouse continued

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the project. The new house was built by William Baher.

"In 1978 another house was built, this one by James R. Brant. This year (1988) he constructed another one which was given in memory of Mason R. Wilhelm Jr. by his wife, family and friends." The caption on a photo accompanying the article indicates that birdhouse was installed at the borough parking lot along Edgewood Avenue behind the Somerset FOE.

Although for years there have been other, smaller martin birdhouses erected in and around Somerset, the one on the Diamond has always gotten the most attention.

### BACK TO THE DIAMOND

In the early 1990s, Brian Kiel, then owner of Frank's Pizza on the Diamond, decided he wanted the birdhouse back on the Diamond and set out to find out about it (Somerset Daily American, August 31, 1994). Through his efforts and that of Somerset, Inc., along with public financial support, a new 120-room home for the martins was built by his friend Rodney Houck, owner of RoJen Cabinets in nearby Sidman, based on the original "Capital" design. It was a festive day when the new birdhouse was unveiled September 10, 1994 during dedication ceremonies that included speeches

and a proclamation. (See accompanying story on Page 4.)

### 1908 POSTCARD

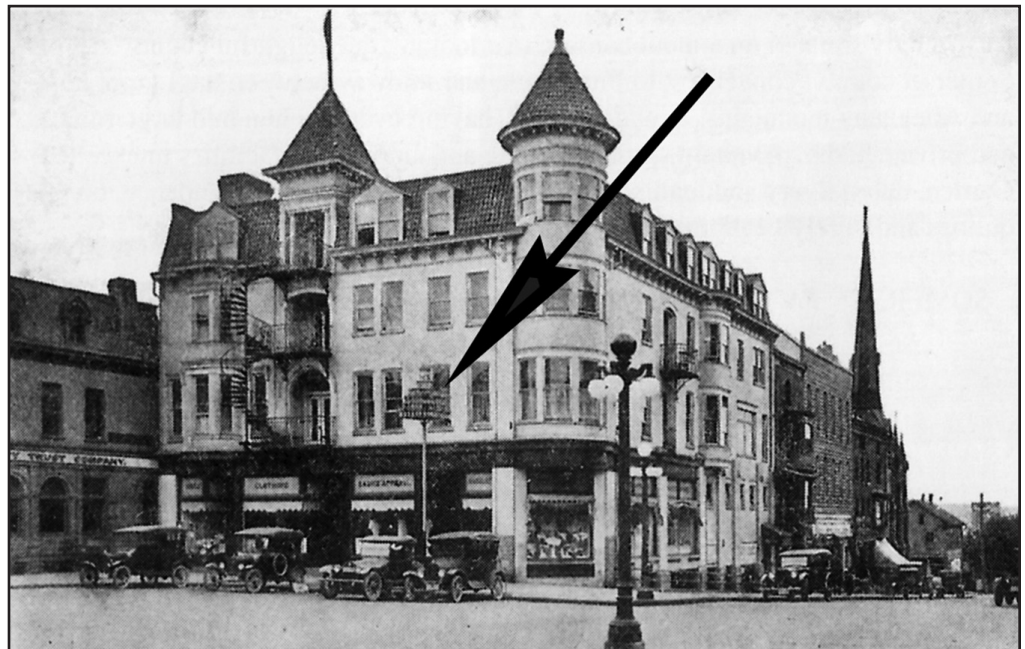
The earliest photograph of a birdhouse on the Diamond that I found was dated 1908. It appears on a postcard being offered for sale on Ebay of the old Belmont Hotel. The birdhouse is clearly visible, although it was a much more modest domicile for the purple martins than what is available to them today. By 1915, a

considerably larger birdhouse shows up in another photo of the Belmont that appears in the Somerset Bicentennial Book (Somerset Borough, Past & Present, Celebrating 200 Years). Actually, there were two birdhouses on the Diamond for a period of time. When examined with a magnifying glass, the 1917 photo referenced earlier reveals two birdhouses. One resembles the "1908" house and the other appears to be of the "Capital" design.

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Belmont Color 1913



1915 Belmont Hotel wArrow

## Laurel Messenger

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# 'War of Words' Over the Birds

BY RON BRUNER

Somerset's decades-long love affair with the Purple Martin sparked a long-distance war of words with the town of Griggsville (IL) in the 1970s. An article in the Somerset Daily American on Sept. 13, 1972 was headlined: 'Martin Capital' Title's Filched.

Excerpts from that article by staff writer Mary Ream:

"Somerset has a rival for the esteem of the purple martin.

"Long reveling in the friendly relationship between the purple martin and its residents, Somerset is proud of its claim to the title, Home of the Purple Martin.

"But the Griggsville (Ill.) Wild Bird Society publishes a monthly newspaper called "Purple Martin Capital News." On what, we would ask, does Griggsville base its claim? The newspaper made no mention of a purple martin bird house – and certainly nothing as impressive as Somerset's courthouse-styled house on the Diamond.

## NOT VERY HOMEY

"The Griggsville editor ran a picture of 170 martins perched on an antenna. That's a lot of martins, but an antenna is not much of a home.

"Perhaps Griggsville owes its claim of Purple Martin Capital to J.L. Wade, a Griggsville industrialist, who, according to the "Purple

Martin Capital News, sponsors the Griggsville Wild Bird Society and "has become known as the nation's foremost authority on the purple martin."

"And maybe, if Somerset erects another purple martin multi-room dwelling on the Diamond, the Griggsville purple martins will fly on over to Somerset next year for their summer nesting. Family housing is a big item with birds.

"Goodbye, Griggsville ... Hello, Somerset."

It's not known if or when Griggsville responded to this salvo of words, but about 18 months after the foregoing was published, the battle for the "title" was still a topic of conversation. Daily American writer Dorothy Kantner led off her May 18, 1974 column, called Rutchin' Around, with these words:

"This is going to be a "Gripes of Wrath" column, and we mean "gripes," not grapes.

"It seems Somerset is losing some of its distinctions; other localities are stealing its thunder.

"For example: Last week Adeline Harrison had saved for our special benefit some pages from "Changing Times, about the Purple Martin. For a long time now Somerset has been the town with the Martin House on the Diamond, and the returning martins made headlines each year. According to this article a town with the ridiculous name of Griggsville, Ill., claims now to be the Purple Martin Capital of the World" and the article has the effrontery to further state

"disregarding the prior claim of Somerset, Pa., which was already billing itself as 'The Home of the Purple Martin.'"

"Our Purple Martin House on the Diamond has long been a distinguishing mark of our town, and has been replenished a number of times. It graces a postal card and it is famous to all Somerseters, past and present. Griggsville, dig up another bird! Try a cuckoo!"

## FAST-FORWARD 40+ YEARS TO 2017

The website RoadsideAmerica.com (Your Online Guide to Offbeat Tourist Attractions) bills Griggsville as the Purple Martin Capital of the Nation. Furthermore, it lists no less than nine states that have towns claiming to be the "Purple Martin Capital" (of their respective states).

And so, the battle for the "title" goes on ... and on.

One final note in fairness to Griggsville: It should be noted that it is a unique town whose industry is the manufacture of purple martin living quarters. Over the years, it has installed more than 5,000 birdhouses along the city streets, including a 562-apartment high rise that reaches a height of 70 feet. And, a book by J.L. Wade, first published in 1966 and entitled "What You Should Know About the Purple Martin ...," devotes 240 pages to Griggsville's role in making the purple martin "America's Most Wanted Bird."

# The Saga of Somerset's Purple Martin Birdhouse continued

Continued from page 2

Apparently a new one was installed in 1926; the caption on a photo in "Sketches of Somerset" says the photo was taken the day after the birdhouse's erection in the Spring of 1926.

Newspaper archives are sprinkled with stories about the birdhouse: About being taken down for the Winter, put up in the Spring, the arrival of the first purple martins, etc. In the mid 1960s, one article was headlined "Where Is the Martin Birdhouse?" It seems that when it was taken down for cleaning and storage in the Fall, it was stored in someone's garage, but no one could remember whose garage. Shortly after that article was published, the missing birdhouse was found.

## ATTRACTS ATTENTION OF VISITORS

Local residents aren't the only ones who are intrigued by the birdhouse and its residents. The Chatter Box column in the Daily American (July 24, 1951) included this item:

"MARTINS MAKE HIT – A man and his wife, passing through here recently, were so taken by the sight of the martin house on the diamond that they alighted from their automobile and took pictures of it. Irwin Shapiro, businessman, learned they were from California. Seems that in their travels they had never seen anything of the kind to catch their fancy like the martin house and the flower boxes. The westerners said that on their way home they would tell travelers, coming east, not to miss visiting Somerset, where flowers bloom and birds have their home in the streets."

A few months later (September 12, 1951), the Chatter Box column carried this similar report:

"THEY LIKE SOMERSET – Real Estater George Darr tells of meeting a much-traveled couple from St. Louis, who were interested in the street flower boxes, wanted to know who was responsible for them, also asked about the martin house, how many families it would accommodate, etc. The visitors by the name of Sullivan said they had a home in Virginia and

spent their winters in Florida – in other words they get around, and when they pronounced Somerset one of the most interesting towns they had visited, it carried weight."

On another occasion (Daily American, September 3, 1953), an official with the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture happened to pass through Somerset while on vacation, was "very much impressed by its attractive features," and said: "Two things in particular caught our attention. One was the large birdhouse on the square and the other was the flower pots attached to the lamp posts." He subsequently requested photos of them that he planned to use in a department publication.

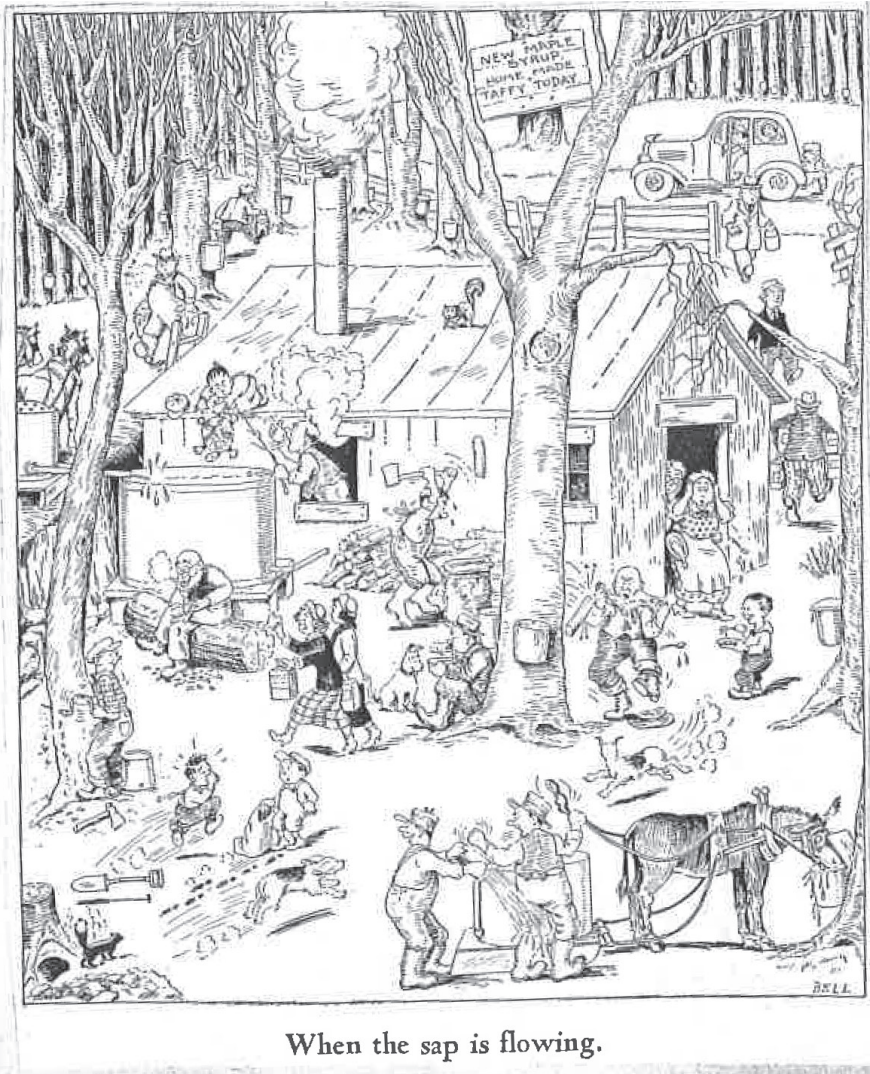
Over the years the number of purple martins inhabiting the birdhouse has fluctuated with various reasons theorized, ranging from the smell of paint to lack of insects for the birds to feed upon. In any event, the Winter canvas covering it (to keep sparrows, etc., from taking it over) will soon be removed, and local residents will keep a sharp eye for the return (hopefully) of America's "Most Wanted Bird."

# Spotza from the kettle

*From the Somerset Standard; Thursday March 23, 1899 — An account of a Somerset County Spotza party in 1899. Such events brought out a lot of people for socializing and a good time after the long winter.*

A party of eight or ten gentlemen from Somerset drove to the home of Mr. Josiah Woy last Friday evening, upon Mr. Woy's invitation, to witness the interesting performance of stirring off a kettle of sugar, and to partake of the delicious spotza, available just before the stirring off point is reached. The generous host had everything in readiness upon the arrival of the party, and standing around the kettle of boiling sweetness each member thereof was furnished with a cup of clear cold water and a spoon and told to help himself. The picture of a party chewing the clear and crystal-like spotza thus obtained may be readily imagined, for it is a somewhat common one in this county at this season. Then came the interesting stirring-off, in which several members of the party who were sugar-makers in the long ago, took part. When the golden product of the maple had been fully developed the party took leave of the genial host, and hied (headed) homeward with smacking lips. If you have not been at a sugar boiling you should embrace the first opportunity to get there.

## Maple Season in Somerset County



When the sap is flowing.

A maple sugaring cartoon that ran in the Somerset Daily American circa 1940 and produced by the Bell Syndicate. The Bell syndicate was founded by John Neville "Jack" Wheeler (April 11, 1886–October 13, 1973) an American newspaperman, publishing executive, magazine editor, and author. He employed some of the most noted writing talents of his day. The Bell syndicate attracted comic strip artist Bud Fisher and cartoonist Fontaine Fox. The maple cartoon is indicative of the style and type of cartoon work they produced.

Several clever activities are drawn into the cartoon. Look closely to see a boy dropping a turtle into the holding tank, some boys and a dog encountering a skunk, a mule drinking out of a keeler, and other activities.

## MAYOR PROCLAIMS 'PURPLE MARTIN DAY' IN SOMERSET

WHEREAS, the Somerset Area has historically been home to a large population of Purple Martins who migrate through the area annually, and;

WHEREAS, the Purple Martins have historically come here because of the large number of Purple Martin birdhouses built for them by human beings who live in the area, and;

WHEREAS, a large Purple Martin birdhouse resembling the Somerset County Courthouse was erected on the Somerset Diamond early in the twentieth century, providing a focal point for Purple Martin migration, and was widely recognized as a symbol of Somerset, and;

WHEREAS, the original birdhouse was removed after considerable deterioration, and a second birdhouse erected in its place in 1961 was also later moved, and;

WHEREAS, no birdhouse has been on the Diamond for a number of years, and;

WHEREAS, Frank's Pizza, a local Somerset business, has spearheaded a campaign to fund restoration of the birdhouse according to the original early twentieth century plans used when the first "Capitol Style" birdhouse was built by the Jacobs Birdhouse and Manufacturing Company of Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, and;

WHEREAS, Rodney Houck of Sidman, Pennsylvania has completed a reconstruction of the original birdhouse at approximately 512 cubic feet and 800 pounds, exactly according to the plans, and;

WHEREAS, the reconstructed birdhouse is to be unveiled at its historic location on the Somerset Diamond during ceremonies to begin at 3 p.m., September 10th, and;

WHEREAS, "Purple Martins Make Good Neighbors,"

NOW THEREFORE, I, William P. Korn, Ph.D., Mayor of Somerset, do hereby proclaim September 10, 1994 to be Purple Martin Day in Somerset, Pennsylvania, in commemoration of a fine history, good interspecies relations, the reconstruction of an historic element of Uptown Somerset, the rededication of an important local symbol, and the reestablishment of lodging accommodations for our fine feathered friends on the historic Somerset Diamond.

PROCLAIMED THIS 6TH DAY  
OF SEPTEMBER, 1994  
William P. Korn, Ph.D.  
Mayor of Somerset

# Looking Back: 100 Years Ago

*(The year was 1917. Nationally, Page 1 headlines reported the events of World War I and America's decision to declare war on Germany. Locally, life went on as usual, although the war intruded in some unexpected ways. The following collection of brief news stories from 1917 is a random compilation of interesting "tidbits" about Somerset County gleaned from newspapers around the state. – Ron Bruner)*

## POTATOES LEGAL TENDER IN SOMERSET GROCERY

SOMERSET, Pa., Feb. 26. – The market value of potatoes in Somerset has been inflated to the extent that the starchy tubers are supplanting the precious metals as a medium of exchange. For two bushels of potatoes one of the leading grocery establishments in the town advertise that they will give the following merchandise:

"Twenty-five-pound sack of flour, pound of coffee, two pounds of evaporated peaches, ten cakes of soap, 100-pound oyster shell box of poultry powder, twenty-five-pound calf meal and a washboard." – Harrisburg Telegraph, 2/26/1917.

## ONE DEAD, THREE HURT IN SOMERSET STORM

SOMERSET, Pa., June 7. – One man was killed, three persons were injured and many buildings were razed when a windstorm of cyclonic proportions swept across the Allegheny Mountains near Buckstown late yesterday, cutting a path 20 rods wide and a mile long.

The dead man was Charles Stutzman, farmer, of Buckstown, whose skull was crushed when his barn was lifted from its foundations.

The injured are Henry Spangler, farmhand; Wilson Stutzman, 8 years old, and Samuel Synder, farmhand. – Pittsburgh Daily Post, 6/8/1917.

## COAL MINER GETS GOOD WAGES

SOMERSET, Pa., Nov. 11. – Lawrence B. Finzel, aged 45, of Hooversville, near here, is believed to have earned the highest wage during the past month of any coal miner in the history of the industry in Pennsylvania. Finzel, it was announced here today, received \$347.92 last month. With a hundred percent car supply it is said, he could have earned even more.

If Finzel could maintain this wage for an entire year, his annual pay would amount to \$4,175.04, and with the increase allowed in the Central Pennsylvania field, effective November 1, it is believed he would earn at least \$5,000. – Tyrone Daily Herald, 11/12/1917.

## MAPLE SUGAR BELT BUSY

SOMERSET, Pa., March 31. – The maple syrup time is at hand and the sap is running. Somerset County, in the very heart of the sugar water belt of the United States, is bustling with activity and sugar camps have sprung up by the hundreds. – Pittsburgh Press, 4/1/1917.

## HELP WANTED ADS

WANTED – Male help as attendants in hospital with \$30.00 per month to start with. Board, washing and laundry with increase, immediate and regular employment. Somerset County Home and Hospital. Somerset, Pa. – The York Daily, 11/23/1917.

POLISH, Slavish, Hungarian and colored miners for Somerset County, Pa. 3½-ft. coal, slope mines, open lamps, non-union mines, steady work, pay 75c ton pick work, run of mine, and 50c loading after machines; fare paid and moving with two months' free rent if miners work 90 days. Keystone Employment Bureau, 1124 Penn Ave. – Pittsburgh Press, 4/3/1917.

## JUDGE RUPPEL PROHIBITS WAR TALK IN SALOONS

SOMERSET, Pa., April 25. – Judge W.H. Ruppel, of Somerset County, has issued a decree instructing all saloonkeepers to prohibit war discussions in their places of business. The penalty for violations of this rule will be the revocation of licenses. – Indiana Patriot, 4/28/1917.

## MAY STOP BREWERS AS A WAR MEASURE

### Government Takes Notice of Low Coal Output Due To Excessive Drinking

SOMERSET, Pa., Oct. 1. – Judge W.H. Ruppel called together the licensed liquor dealers of Somerset County and representatives of fraternal and social organizations to tell them that the United States Government demands a cessation of diminished coal production caused by excessive drinking by miners on pay days, Sundays and holidays, and that unless better conditions are created in the coal fields the Government will cut off the manufacture of beer like it did that of whiskey, as a war measure.

Judge Ruppel said coal operators also complained, but added specifically that Federal authorities sent a representative to him demanding that drink shall not interfere with the production of coal on Government and ally contracts. The Court also stated that the licensed liquor dealers have generally observed the Court's orders, which are for early closings and closing on many holidays, but that the clubs and speak-easies are open after 9 o'clock at night and on Sundays. – Allentown Leader, 10/1/1917.

## SOMERSET BARS WOMEN BARTENDERS

SOMERSET, Pa., March 14. – Somerset County liquor licenses have been granted. All new applications were refused and sixty-seven old ones renewed. There were five new petitions. Women bartenders will no longer be tolerated, Judge Ruppel says. – Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger, 3/14/1917.

## SOMERSET GIVES \$2,100 TO NATIONAL GUARD UNIT

SOMERSET, Pa., Sept. 3. – When Company C leaves Somerset, the commissioned officers will have a fund of \$2,100 with which to purchase little luxuries for the soldiers. The greater part of this fund was subscribed by the citizens of Somerset who, by the way, did handsomely by the boys in other ways through the contribution of food, comfort kits, etc. – Harrisburg Telegraph, 9/3/1917.

## BLACK HANDERS KILL MERCHANT

SOMERSET, Pa., Jan. 14. – Edward Dimarco, aged 40, a wealthy Italian merchant, was murdered by three members of a black hand gang last night while driving through a woodland six miles from Somerset. The assassins drove his team to the Lincoln highway, where they fled eastward in an automobile. Their identity is unknown. Dimarco leaves a wife and six children.

The victim had received a series of black hand letters during the past two years. The last, a month ago, demanded that \$400 be placed under an oak tree near the scene of the murder. Tracks in the snow revealed a number of murderers and disclosed the fact that the storekeeper's team was driven to Jennerstown, where a high-power car was waiting.

Robbery was not the motive for the crime because more than \$100 which he carried was not taken. – Indiana Gazette, 1/15/1917.

(Subsequent news articles in other newspapers reported that between \$500 and \$600 carried in the victim's wallet had been stolen, and that \$100 in a bag was overlooked by the assassins. Dimarco had been en route from his store in Acosta to his home in Bell. Authorities also theorized that the victim had been shot with his own 44-caliber pistol which was missing. One newspaper said: "The foreign element in the mining regions are terrorized by the "black hand," and information of any kind is secured with difficulty.")

(Editor's Note: The term "black hand" referred to gangs of extortionists who preyed on immigrants, particularly wealthy Italian ones. Typical black hand tactics involved sending a letter to a victim threatening bodily harm, kidnapping, arson or murder. The letter demanded a specific amount of money to be delivered to a specific place. It was decorated with threatening symbols like a smoking gun, hangman's noose, skull, or a knife dripping with blood, and in many instances was signed with the symbol of a hand imprinted or drawn in thick black ink.)

# Picture Taken in 1917 Shows Many People

(SOMERSET DAILY AMERICAN, APRIL 28, 1952, PAGE 1)

BY RICHARD FREEMAN

A four-foot long photograph taken of the Somerset diamond in 1917 has been placed in the Somerset American window for a few days.

The photograph is the property of the Somerset Red Cross office and was taken on the occasion of Red Cross Day, July 28, 1917. The photographer, E.M. Pletcher, formerly of Somerset, was cleaning out his office in Latrobe a few years ago and ran across it.

He sent it to Mrs. Jane Friedline, executive secretary, who had it framed and hung in the Red Cross office.

### EXCELLENT CONDITION

Except for two creases where it was folded for mailing, the photograph is in excellent condition. It has faded a little, if any, and is exceptionally clear.

Several hundred persons gathered on the diamond are pictured in the photo and the faces of most of them are sharp and may be easily identified.

Some of the building(s) and businesses on the diamond have changed greatly, and some are remarkably similar to present-day Somerset. The P.A. Schell and Co. hardware store is located where McCrory's is today. The Geo. S. Miller cash hardware store occupies the site of Penney's today.

The Somerset Music Company is over Trent's market next to Spangler's. Oehling's

pharmacy is now changed. The Main street side has the Heffley porch in the photograph. The County Trust company and People's Bank buildings have changed little. The Belmont hotel where Penn Furniture is now located has a porch facing Main street in the photo.

### MARTIN HOUSE

The Martin house looks the same on the picture although at that time it sat on a pole closer to Center avenue. A smaller bird house is next to it.

In the picture are the soldiers of Company C before they went overseas in World War I. In the front center of the picture are girls and women in Red Cross uniforms. Red Cross week banners are stretched across all four intersections. American flags are flying and girls and women are holding Red Cross flags.

The photography apparently was taken with a circular camera. It takes in all four corners of the diamond. The cameraman apparently was standing about in the position of the new Milady's shop. A few faces are blurred, probably because the individuals moved.

### YOUNG GIRLS

The following persons were identified at random. In most cases, their names are listed as they were known at that time:

In Red Cross uniforms: Emily Cook, Marian Gasteiger, Mary Sweitzer, Veloy Picking, Elizabeth Black, Myra McCrum, Anne Phillips, Rosetta Platt, Elizabeth Hay, Louise Sanner, Rebecca Kiernan, Elizabeth Kooser.

Clara Huston, Marie Bundy and Allison

Uhl, Harriet Holderbaum, Mrs. Joseph Levy, Mrs. Norman E. Knepper, Mrs. Marion Sellers, Miss Maggie Eicher, Miss Nellie Kooser, Marie Winters, Margaret Louther, Edith Baush and Alice Varner.

### OTHERS IDENTIFIED

Others: Judge Francis J. Kooser, Frank M. Sanner, Mrs. E.E. Kiernan, Mrs. Marian Knepper, Mrs. George J. Platt, Mrs. Jean King Ferner, Mrs. May C. Biesecker, Miss Mary Baer, Mrs. Laurence M. Phillips, Mrs. Herman H. Hodge, Ruth Ferner, Dr. H.I. Marsden, Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Black, Charles F. Uhl and daughter Henrietta, Mrs. Flora S. Black, Anna C. Scull, Mr. and Mrs. Alex Groff, Charles F. Cook, Dr. Hiram King, Attorney Louis Colborn, Capt. W.H. Sanner, Attorney Virgil R. Saylor, Mrs. Lottie Kantner, Mr. and Mrs. Watson Frease, and George J. Platt, in the window above the People's bank building.

### YOU, TOO, CAN SEE THIS PHOTO

The photo described in this article currently is in the possession of Trish Herring and has hung for many years in the "lobby" of Herring Motor Co. along Neilan Drive, Somerset.

The photo has been loaned to the Historical Society and will be on display at the Somerset Historical Center until April 1, 2017.

# Tinsmithing class being developed by Society

One of the strengths of the Society is their craft and trades educational programs. Built upon the traditions of Mountain Craft Days, the Society has found that the local area has retained many skills pertinent to the early trades. We have log hewers, timber framers, stone masons, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, coopers, and other tradespersons that enables us to offer unique workshop experiences. It is not uncommon for us to draw upon several artisans to work together on specific projects. The woodworkers to build wooden components and metal workers to fashion iron pieces and so forth. So that we don't use or wear out original and often rare tools, the Society often calls upon our craft community to help reproduce tools or equipment needed. This relationship affords the Society to offer some very unique classes and workshops that might be difficult to offer in other museum settings.

The HGSSC is currently developing a tinsmithing class that will be taught by local tinsmith, Tinman Roy(Phillips) using traditional tools and techniques. Several years ago, Phillips received a grant from the Society's Craft Perpetuation Fund to learn tinsmithing from a former Mountain Craft Days artisan, Greg Petersma. He travelled to Canada and spent several days learning the basic techniques and how to use the hand tools for tinsmithing. Since then, he and his wife Sharon demonstrate their skills at Mt. Craft Days and numerous other festivals. They have produced hundreds of tinware items and made numerous reproductions of original pieces.

The Society is currently gathering and/or making the tools that will be needed for the tinsmithing class. Mark Ware and Kim Ankeny have been forging, piecing, and welding reproduction creasing and forming swadges(swedges) at Ankeny's machine shop near Jenners. They are patterning them after an original tool owned by Phillips. Ankeny has also been reproducing hard-to-find coopering tools for the Society to sell through their coopering school that is held each spring. He has been instrumental in assisting the Society with various metal projects and is quick to volunteer his expertise and equipment for special projects. The tinsmithing tools were a special challenge since old and new technology was meshed together to produce the tools that were made with some modern metal working techniques, but will do the same job as those of 200 years ago. These tools will afford workshop participants an opportunity to experience the craft using a hard-to-

acquire tinsmithing tool.

The bench plate that holds the creasing and forming swage is also being reproduced. Bill Rearick, one of our musicians at Mountain Craft Days is a pattern maker by trade. He fashioned and donated a wooden bench plate pattern that we can take to our local foundry. The foundry will use the pattern to make a sand mold of the plate and cast them in ductile iron. The bench plates will be affixed to a wooden bench for holding a variety of tinsmithing tools, including the creasing and forming swages.

The Society will also offer bench plates for sale through their Museum Shop.

The class will be held later in 2017. Watch our Laurel Messenger, schedule, facebook, or website for more details as they take shape.



**Creasing and forming swage (top) made by Kim Ankeny and Mark Ware for use in a new tinsmithing workshop at the Somerset Historical Center. The bench plate (bottom) was cast from a pattern made by Bill Rearick, a patternmaker by trade but also a talented fiddler and square dance caller for Mountain Craft Days each year.**



**Arrows in upper right corner pinpoint locations of two martin houses (visible in original photo with magnifying glass). This photo of Red Cross Day on the Somerset Diamond was taken by E.M. Pletcher in 1917 and belongs to Trish Herring of Herring Motor Co., Somerset. Actual photo is approximately four feet wide.**

# Curator's Corner

BY JACOB A. MILLER

Wallace and Mary Bishop were the parents of five children: Kathryn, Anna Jean, Helen, and Wallace Jr. Their first born, son Ray, died as an infant. Wallace and Mary (Gretz) were married in Connellsville, Fayette County, PA and moved to Somerset Borough sometime before 1920. A collection of their family papers that document Wallace Jr. and Jean's involvement in World War II made its way to the Historical Society through the donation of Cheryl Spangler.

Wallace Bishop Jr. was born in 1919 and was a 1937 graduate of Somerset High School. For a time after graduation, he worked as a driller in a local stone quarry. He entered active service in 1942, first training as an Army Engineer before transferring to the Army Air Corps, receiving his wings and commission on November 3, 1944.

Shortly after, Wallace married Thelma Shumaker in a ceremony in Somerset. They spent time in Charleston, South Carolina, until Wallace was assigned to England to join the 489th Bomber Group in Suffolk, England. In his letters from there, Wallace writes about the cool, damp weather and tells his family to think of his as being "on vacation...studying the geography of Europe by the request of Gen. Doolittle."

On July 31, 1944 Wallace Bishop left on a mission to bomb a chemical factory at Ludwigshafen, Germany. As the flight neared Dudweiler, the bombers started taking flak from German defensive positions. Another B-24 collided with Bishop's plane causing it to lose control in what is known as a "flat spin." The bomber crash landed, killing Bishop and four members of his ten-man crew. Three others survived to become prisoners of war.

It was several months until the Bishop family back at home learned what happened to Wallace Jr. The family hoped that he survived the crash and was taken as a prisoner of war. Finally, in October 1944, the confirmation of Wallace's death arrived from the War Department.

Jean Bishop was ten years older than Wallace. A 1927 graduate of Somerset High School, Jean worked as a stenographer in the County Commissioners office until joining the Women's Army Corps on July 30, 1944, one day before Wallace Bishop's fateful flight. Part of her service

was spent in Frankfurt, Germany, roughly 110 miles from where her brother's bomber fell. While she was stationed in Frankfurt, she spent some time in addition to her regular duties trying to find where Wallace was buried. A letter home in May 1946 is hopeful that she found his grave site, but she felt that she is "still of the opinion that these boys killed in action should be left with their buddies and not taken home as so many families are doing."

Wallace Jr. is listed as being buried in the Lorraine American Cemetery & Memorial in Lorraine, France. There is also a marker for him in the Somerset County Memorial Park near other members of his family. Jean Bishop returned to the United States and worked for the United States Department of Health and Human Services. She helped dedicate the Somerset County World War II memorial in 1950. Jean died on January 8, 1993 and was buried with her family at Memorial Park.

The collection also included photographic prints and postcards of Shanksville area subjects and postcards and photographs of the Bishop family. It enters the collection as accession HS2016.17.



**Cpl. Anna Jean Bishop in uniform.**



**Wallace and Thelma Bishop posing in front of the Somerset Junior-Senior High School (now Patriot Manor).**



**2nd Lt. Wallace Bishop in uniform.**

# President's Message

Spring brings about many sweet thoughts. In the Laurel Highlands, as the snow begins to melt many of us think about the trees budding and the renewal of life among the trees and flowers. However, those of us in Somerset County begin pondering about the sweet taste of maple syrup. The time of warm days and cold nights brings about the movement of the maple sap and a need to "tap the tree."

Pennsylvania ranks 7th in the nation in maple production producing over 50,000 gallons of maple syrup. Somerset County is one of the top producers in the state. With such a large and important "off-season" agricultural endeavor, it is wonderful that the Somerset County Maple Producers have created an annual Maple Taste and Tour of various maple camps throughout the entire county.

From Boswell to Salisbury over a dozen maple camps open their doors to hundreds of visitors to sample the sweetness of their labor and inform the spectators about the process of "Syrup and Sugaring." The Somerset Historical Center has been an enthusiastic participant

in the Maple Tour. Last year over 250 people visited the Center during the two days.

Coming to the Center visitors would be able to engage with our staff and volunteers as we take them through three earlier stages of maple production. From Kettle cooking to our 1860's sugar camp and museum, patrons interact with skilled artisans producing implements used to gather and process the maple sap. While on the visit, guests participate in a tasty "Spotza" party. Savoring the sweet flavor of the taffy like maple syrup.

Recently, an Eagle Scout with the help of several volunteers and local businesses (Shaffer Block, 84 Lumber, and Highland Tank) converted an old garage on the Haupt Homestead into a working early 20th century maple camp. Families and groups interested in renting out the Haupt House and participate in an authentic educational experience can learn the process of making maple syrup an actually take home the sweet fruits of their labors.

Please consider marking March 11th-12th on your calendars and treat your senses to a

tremendously tasty experience and participate in the Somerset County Maple Producers Maple Tour.

**Christopher Zaroni,**  
President of HGSSC

## Society receives technology/ collections management grant



**Curator Jacob Miller using the  
Digital Conversion Equipment**

A grant from the Earl and Jeanne Berkey Fund of the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies was received for a digital conversion project. This grant allowed the Society to purchase a special camera lens and equipment to convert 35mm slides in their collection to a digital format and to save them on an external hard drive. With the new changes in technology, it was becoming more difficult to copy or view the 35mm slides. The new equipment will provide an easier access and storage for viewing and publication of images.

## Library books donated

Researched and donated by: Patty Jesko Staetter, Romulus, MI  
The Family of James and Barbara (Romesburg) Firl;  
The Family of Leonard and Catherine (Geiger) Ferrel; and  
Descendants of James and Elizabeth Ferrell.

Two archival boxes of genealogical information compiled by Carol (Pettenbrink) Collins. (Mrs David Collins) that include the following family files:

- |                |                |            |
|----------------|----------------|------------|
| • Anderson     | • Hochstetler  | • Northrop |
| • Bohn         | • Hutchinson   | • Parnell  |
| • Bowers       | • Klingaman    | • Ringler  |
| • Cook         | • Lehman       | • Shockey  |
| • De Neis/Nice | • Lichenberger | • Tresler  |
| • Eisenmanger  | • Linsenbigler | • Troutman |
| • Geiger       | • Lint         | • Uhl      |
| • Hertzler     | • Miller       | • Whipkey  |

## Recent Acquisitions

HS2016.17 Shanksville photograph collection and Bishop family papers from Cheryl Spangler; HS2016.18 land warrant dated 1774 in Shade Township from Maryan Williamson Yoder; HS2016.19 Owen Glessner Green Acres farm photographs and ephemera from Donna Glessner; HS2016.20 collection of Martin Johnson cooperage acquired by purchase.



## 2016 HGSSC Annual Giving Drive Donors:

Anna Adams  
Robert Kim Ankeny  
Robert and Roberta Antram  
Rodney and Linda Barkley  
Donald Barron  
Joseph and Vickie Beer  
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Zion Hoffman Evangelical  
Lutheran Church

## 2016 Mountain Craft Days Sponsors

1st Summit Bank  
Allied Milk Producers  
Ameriserv Financial Bank  
Augustine Die and Mold Inc.  
Augustine Plastics Inc.  
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Beer Ream Co.  
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Guy Chemical Company Inc.  
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Kings Restaurant  
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Pine Grill Restaurant  
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Somerset Rural Electric  
Somerset Trust Company  
Snyder of Berlin  
Cooperative, Inc.  
The Exchange Club of Somerset  
Tri Star Motors  
Westridge Properties  
Wheeler Family Charitable Foundation

## 2016 Educational / Program Volunteers:

Elder Montgomery  
Elder Seagon  
Joan Ankeny  
Bonnie Baer  
Janet Barclay  
Mary Boland  
Gary Burkett  
Jan Bowman  
Cameron Carr  
Madedan Dibert

Irvin Fleegle  
Margaret Foreback  
Sandra Millin  
Cheryl Millward  
Betsy Mitchell  
Ron Musser  
Jennifer Pettit  
Roy Phillips  
Sharon Phillips  
Randy Pletcher

Chris Saunders  
Dean Shaulis  
Shirley Shaulis  
Asenath Sipe  
Richard Sturtz  
Judy Swank  
Doris Thomas  
Shirley Tallion  
Joel Zelenske  
Donamae Zwick

## Schedule of Events:

### MARCH

**4:** VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND SIGN UP

**11 & 12:** MAPLE TASTE AND TOUR

**11:** PYSANKY EGG WORKSHOP

**25 & 26:** 1700 WOMEN'S CLOTHING SEWING WORKSHOP

### APRIL

**1:** LHOAF'S MAD HATTER TEA PARTY

**3:** ANNUAL MEETING

**22:** COMMON THREADS SYMPOSIUM

**28 - 30:** SCHOOL OF COOPERING

### MAY

**6:** MOMMY AND ME WORKSHOP

Visit our website or Facebook page  
for more info.

## 55+, Unemployed, Need a Job?

Check into the SCSEP (Senior Community Service Employment Program ) administered through the AARP foundation. The Somerset Historical Center is a site that is eligible to host employees through this program! Enjoy history and supporting the Historical Center's mission while getting paid! We can use customer service, clerical, and custodial workers. This part-time training program enables you to train and get paid for your training while you look for employment. Age, income, and residency requirements apply. If interested call AARP at 814-254-4147 or the Center at (814)445-6077.

# Jr Historians Learn about Civil War Living History and Make 19th century Hussifs!

BY KASEY ROSS,  
EDUCATION COORDINATOR

On December 28, 2016 and January 4, 2017, the Jr Historians met at the Haupt House to discuss living history and sew a small project. I invited my friend, Jarrad Fuoss, to join me in sharing some of our living history experiences with the Jr Historians. We related how participation in Civil War reenacting has helped us develop skills in public speaking, historical research and networking. After our talk, the Jr Historians began work on making hussifs.

Originating in the 18th century, a hussif, also known as a housewife, was a personal sewing kit. Before mass production of sewing kits, hussifs were made from leftover fabrics at home. They were made from cotton, linen, wool or sometimes even silk. They contained needlecraft tools and materials such as needle, thread, pins, thimble, beeswax, buttons, etc.. A common misconception is that women were the only ones to sew and have need of such things. However, most military men carried their own sewing kits in the field. Soldiers and sailors were encouraged to work on their needlecraft skills to be able to mend their uniforms, apply patches and other insignia as well as to help prevent boredom. Most hussifs were made for the soldiers by their loved ones back home, so it was common for the sewing kits to be made from scraps of floral fabrics in "girly" colors.



**Jarrad Fuoss and Kasey Ross help a group of Jr Historians cut out fabric for their hussifs.**

Even today, it is not unusual to find sewing kits in the personal belongings of our military men and women. Although these kits look different from their predecessors, they still serve the same purpose of making repairs and applying patches.

For this project, each Jr Historian received a hussif pattern drafted from examples of originals, as well as an informative packet

with history and instructions to make the hussif. Using reproduction fabrics of their own choosing, the Jr Historians employed historical hand sewing techniques and modern sewing machines to construct their hussifs. For many of the students, this was their very first time sewing. By the end of the second meeting everybody proudly left with their own personal sewing kit!

## COMMON THREADS: Theme for joint partnership between Laurel Arts and Somerset Historical Society.

On Saturday, April 22, 2017, Laurel Arts and the Historical and Genealogical Society of Somerset County/Somerset Historical Center will present Phase 1 of a joint partnership called "Common Threads". We will celebrate the wide variety of domestic, historical, and contemporary fiber arts and the artists who make them during three events!

The first event, scheduled 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on April 22, is a symposium at Somerset Historical Center. Fiber artists will be on hand to display and/or sell their work. Melinda Zongor from the National Museum of the American Coverlet will make a presentation. There will also be a flax scutching/fiber processing demonstration by the Somerset Historical Center and other hands-on fibers activities.

Admission tickets are \$5, and can be purchased in advance by visiting the Laurel Arts web site ([www.laurelarts.org](http://www.laurelarts.org).) You may also pre-purchase a lunch, catered by My Girls Deli & Catering, for \$10.

Act 48 hours can be obtained by educators who attend this event.

The second phase will be hosted by Laurel Arts on the grounds of The Philip Dressler Center for the Arts, 214 S. Harrison Ave., Somerset.

Fiber artists have been invited to participate in Makers Market, an arts and crafts fair the weekend of July 8 and 9. While there is a vendor fee for those who want to set up a booth, there is no admission charge to attend this family-focused event.

Common Threads will culminate in an exhibit at the Dressler Center from August 22 through September 23. Fiber artists will have an opportunity to show their work in a gallery setting. An open house and reception is scheduled from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday, August 25.

The Somerset Historical Center will have an exhibit entitled "Unravelling the Woof." Visitors can follow the woof (weft or thread woven through the warp threads on a loom when making cloth) as it is unraveled to reveal the numerous processes it had to undergo before weaving on the loom. The exhibit will include historic fiber processing techniques and early textile equipment, much of it made by Somerset County artisans and craftpersons. The Center's exhibit will open to the public on June 22 with a members reception on the evening of June 21, 2017.

## Join us for the Maple Taste and Tour Weekend on March 11 & 12 2017!



*Linda Marker and Joel Zalenski re-enact maple sugaring in the 18th century.*

The Center will be a stop on the sweet Maple Taste and Tour as part of the Somerset County Maple Producer's weekend of exploring and experiencing maple sugar camps around Somerset County. The Center will offer free samples of that "Toothsome" taffy treat that we call spotza and freshly stirred maple sugar! You can also see three eras of maple sugar camps and learn about the fascinating history of Somerset County maple production. Stop in anytime between 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Free event!

You can also visit 16 other maple sugar camps that will welcome visitors to experience their maple operations. Many of them will be offering tasty samples and you can see various operations of modern maple sugar production. You will be amazed at the technology and science that is now being used by maple producers! Visit their website at [www.somersetcountymaple.org](http://www.somersetcountymaple.org) for a full listing of participating camps and more information.