

WINTER 2020 NUMBER XXXXI

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE HOMER-CENTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# ODYSSEY

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## OLD-FASHIONED CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION 12.06.2019



The Historical Society, again, participated in Homer City's Old-Fashioned Christmas Celebration and Bazaar by staffing a booth: selling baked goods and raffling three baskets, a homemade quilt and set of L.E.D. candles. Working at the booth were **Wayne and Fran Jennings, Rita Jones, Josie Loughner and Charlotte Sipos**. Donations of baked goods and raffle items were made by **Helen Bush, Wayne and Fran Jennings, Denise Jennings-Doyle, Rick Jones, Rita Jones, Denise Liggett, Josie Loughner, Helen Nymick, Dick and Sara Orr, Ted and Dora Predko and Charlotte Sipos**.

Among the winners of the Society's raffle items were **Lea Dean, Melissa (Park) Hollingshead, Denise Jennings-Doyle, Rick Jones and Ted Predko**.

The annual celebration organized by the Homer City Women's Club with help from the Homer City Area Business Association (HCABA) and hosted at the Homer City Fire Hall brings together many community groups to kick off the Christmas season in the community. It includes a Main Street parade, an opportunity for local children to share their Christmas lists with Santa Claus, food and craft booths and a bonfire.

It also includes the announcement and presentation of the Borough Citizen of the Year Award by the HC Police.. This year's recipient was Society Lifetime Member **Sherry Renosky**. She was jointly nominated by the Society and the Homer City Area Business Association for her work on the HC150 Celebration and the Hoodlebug Festival Committee, coordinating the Homer-Center Marching Band Alumni Night, directing the Indiana County Leader's Circle participation in last year's Chamber of Commerce After Hours -- hosted by HCABA at Disobedient Spirits -- and restoring the tradition of lighting a community tree at the Old-Fashioned Christmas Celebration. In addition to the Good Citizen plaque, Sherry was also presented with \$50 in gift certificates by the Homer City Area Business Association.

**Congratulations, Sherry!** (See photo above, left with Mayor Arlene Wanatosky. Sherry and Chief Anthony Jellison. Photo courtesy of Anthony Frazier.) ■

**PLEASE NOTE: ANNUAL-INDIVIDUAL DUES OF \$10.00 WERE PAYABLE AS OF JANUARY 1, 2020. REMIT DUES TO TREASURER, HC HISTORICAL SOCIETY, PO BOX 42 HOMER CITY PA 15748-0042.**

THANK YOU TO THE SPONSORS OF THIS ISSUE OF ODYSSEY (ALL LIFETIME MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY):

**HELEN BUSH, GRACETON, PA & RUSKIN, FL**  
**RICHARD DOMENICK, MACOMB, MI & SUMMERFIELD, FL**  
**DEBBIE SIVULICH MAGLEY, LEAGUE CITY, TX**

*New members and affiliates, recent donations and other gestures of support for the Society:*

- Jim Bier, Peachtree Corners, GA: Cash Donation
- Debbie Sivulich Magley, League City, TX: Newsletter Sponsorship
- Richard Domenick, McComb, MI: Cash Donation(s); Newsletter Sponsorship
- Sherry Renosky, Homer City, PA: Lifetime Membership
- Helen Bush,, Graceton, PA: Cash Donation, Two Newsletter Sponsorships
- Rob Plowcha gifted his three brothers with annual-individual memberships: Ed and Bill, both of Homer City, PA, and John , Powhatan, VA.

*Also....*

Congratulations to the **Homer-Center High School Wildcat Marching Band** for taking **first place** at the Region XI Tournament of Bands! Adding to the honor is that the band has taken first prize *three years in a row* !!! ▪



Another tradition at the Old-Fashioned Christmas and Bazaar is Santa Claus lighting the community Christmas tree prior to taking to his chair in the Homer City Fire Hall to meet with local children and learn what items are on their Christmas wish lists. *Photo, above, courtesy of Anthony Frazier.* ▪

**LIFETIME MEMBERS**

1. Maxine Bartlebaugh
2. James Nix Bier
3. Debbie and Dave Bork, Sr.
4. Audrey Dudash Burt
5. Helen Bush
6. Lance Bush
7. Mike and Sheila Charnego
8. Bill and Joyce Clark
9. Jim and Christina Costello
10. Jim and Christine Cummins
11. Richard and Aileen Domenick
12. Vivien Domenick
13. John Dudash, Sr.
14. Ron and Patty Evanko
15. Dick and Rose Gnibus
16. Thomas and Virginia Gnibus
17. Betty Jean Greb
18. Bill and Sherryl Huseonica
19. Wayne and Fran Jennings
20. Rick Jones
21. Rita Jones
22. Marcia Kovalak
23. Paulette Domenick Longmire
24. Dave Loughner
25. Josie Loughner
26. Debbie Sivulich Magley
27. Mickey and Helen Nymick
28. Dick and Sarah Orr and family
29. Lea Palermo
30. Jim, Andrea, & Adam Pettenati
31. Tim and Darlyn Linka-Pettenati
32. State Senator Joe Pittman
33. Ted and Dora Predko
34. Dave Reed
35. Sherry Renosky
36. Elizabeth Will Richards
37. Elva Scott
38. Clyde "T-Bone" and Isabel Silveri
39. Maria Silveri
40. Ken Sivulich
41. Betty Lou Snyder
42. Bob Walbeck
43. Don White
44. Agnes Zomestsky

**LIFETIME BUSINESS AFFILIATES**

Accent Fuels, Inc.  
Fast Times Screenprinting And Sign Co.  
Mains Chiropractic  
S&T Bank/Homer City Office  
Walbeck Insurance Agency

**HONORARY LIFETIME MEMBERS**

John Busovicki  
Rick Fabin  
Vivian Supinka

## SAY HELLO (AGAIN) TO THE “HELLO GIRLS,” PART ONE



*Six members of the U.S. Army Signal Corps preparing to ship off for France in 1918, where they and 217 other women served as switchboard operators.*

If someone takes the time to tour Homer City and Center Township to view all the veterans' banners, it is apparent that the vast majority of them honor those who served in the Second World War and the decades that have followed. Only here and there can one find a banner dating to the *First World War*.

The scarcity of banners from this conflict that ended in 1918 stands to reason in that it is now more than a century in the past. In another sense, however, it underscores how the Second World War has overshadowed and caused Americans to reinterpret the First World War. We no longer call it the Great War -- as contemporaries did -- but instead now see it as an opening chapter or dry run for the Second World War.

The profound and transformative impact of the

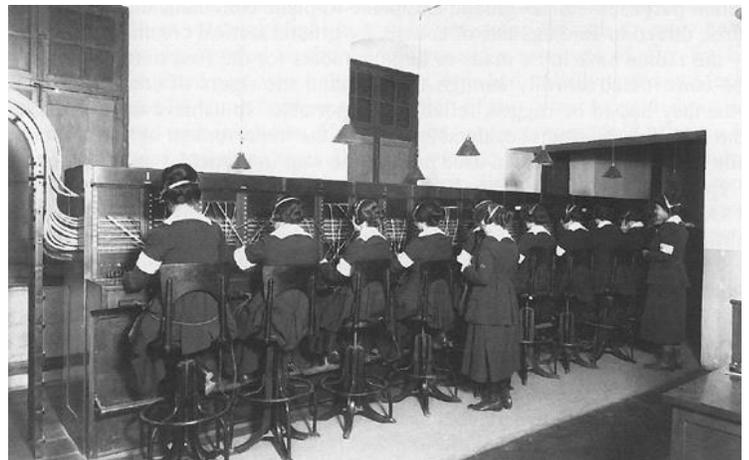
Second World War on the United States, moreover, often makes it seem as if it were America's first *modern war*: engaging in global affairs, fighting alongside allies, making use of the country's industrial capacity and technological assets, mobilizing civilians and recognizing roles for women in the war effort.

In fact, the United States saw all of these *modern* attributes of war in place when the country participated the First World War. And the example of the **U.S. Army Signal Corps Female Telephone Operators Unit** -- colloquially known as “**The Hello Girls**” --underscores this fact. But like the war itself, the Hello Girls are often forgotten as women's involvement in World War II in branches of the service such as the WACs and WAVES is seen as novel and unprecedented.

Just as strategies to maximize industrial output

and insuring an adequate food supply at home during the First World War were impressive, they were also novel undertakings and called for some improvisation. Sending American troops abroad and coordinating with allies were new for the United States military, and the logistics of doing so fell to General John J. “Black Jack” Pershing (1860-1940). As in so many other aspects of the war, making use of women in the war effort called for imagination and outside-the-box thinking on Pershing's part, and they proved indispensable to his plans to deploy an American asset to his campaigns on the Western front: the country's expertise in telephone systems.

By the time that the United States entered the First World War, the country's telephone network (“the Bell System”) was already decades old. Pershing saw communication as crucial to fighting a modern war, so he saw the creation of telephone exchanges in France and, to a lesser extent in England, as integral to the war effort. Initial attempts to train existing members of the U.S. Army Signal Corps proved cumbersome and time-consuming. Managers, engineers and technicians from the Bell System were commissioned as officers to bring their expertise to America's war effort. But Pershing initially made the same mistake as the civilian Bell System did: employing men to operate the exchanges and facilitate long-distance communication. **CONTINUES NEXT PAGE.**



*Hello Girls at their switchboards in Chaumont, France during World War I.*



*General John Pershing reviews members of the U.S. Army Signal Corps Female Telephone Operators Unit in wartime France.*

In the earliest years of America's Bell System in the nineteenth century, the first operators were mostly men. Through trial and error, it was learned that women for a variety of reasons were generally better at connecting calls via the complicated system of cables and jacks on a manual branch exchange. (On average, women were five or six times faster and three times more accurate than their male counterparts). Very quickly, telephone operator became an almost exclusive female vocation. In the days before direct dialing, callers became accustomed to hearing "Operator, hello" on the other end of the line, and soon the term "hello girls" entered the American lexicon. As early as 1889, the term appears in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by Samuel Clemens ("Mark Twain") suggesting it

was already in common usage. After the Great War, however, the term became more and more restricted to those women who served in the Army Signal Corps, that opportunity created by the extraordinary powers granted to Pershing as commander of the American Expeditionary Force.

Prior to the First World War, the United States had never fought a sustained, overseas war with the world's other Great Powers. Americans had believed that the country, separated from the Old World by two oceans, allowed the country to ignore the periodic conflicts involving European countries and their overseas empires. But, after the Civil War, the United States had an empire of its own and increasing interests overseas. And, even before formally entering the First World War, the United States saw threats close to home and to American interests abroad due to Germany's use of unrestricted submarine warfare and Germany's overtures to Mexico (in the so-called Zimmermann Telegram). So, a nation with little experience in international conflict and the complexity of modern warfare vested its faith in Pershing's ability not only to lead, but also to improvise as necessary in pursuit of victory.



*Chief Operator Grace Banker receiving the Distinguished Service Medal,*

After determining that members of the Signal Corps were not up to the job of operating the manual exchanges (and that men under his command were reluctant to do what was considered "women's work,") Pershing moved quickly to integrate female Bell System operators who were also fluent in French. His call for women to join the U.S. Army Signal Corps was published in newspapers across the country. Pershing ignored the protests of his immediate subordinates who believed that women had no place among the ranks.

At a time when many American women did not have foreign-language training in American public schools, many of those qualified for these positions were college graduates (when French was considered a proper subject for college-educated women). Still others were immigrants from France or French-speaking Québec and other parts of Canada or the children of such immigrants.

While other women volunteered in various capacities to do their part for the war effort, the peculiar arrangements set up by Pershing's plans distinguish the Hello Girls as the first official women soldiers in U.S. history (although that status would later prove less clear than first imagined). Experience as a telephone operator and fluency in French qualified them for these positions,

**CONCLUDES THIRD PAGE FOLLOWING.**

# THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN



The Historical Society will once again offer the **Jack E. Loughner Memorial Scholarship** to a graduating senior at Homer-Center High School. Interested students can contact the Guidance Office to obtain application materials for this award presented at this year's Awards Night at Homer-Center High School.

## IN MEMORIAM



Longtime Society member  
**JULIA KOTZUR**  
passed away on 11.23.2019

Lifetime Society member  
**BETSY WILL RICHARDS**  
passed away on 01.15.2020

The Society extends its  
condolences and deepest  
sympathy to the family and  
friends of both of these  
members.



# MEANWHILE AT THE CABOOSE-MUSEUM....

On Saturday, May 23, the Historical Society will host members of the local chapter of Walkworks for a tour of the Caboose-Museum and to offer a starting point for their sojourn on the Hoodlebug Trail in the Homer City area. Scheduling will mean an early start to the Caboose-Museum's 2020 season (requiring an earlier-than-usual, annual clean-up by members in mid-May).

Walkworks is a state-wide program overseen by the PA Department of Health in conjunction with University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health Center for Public Health Practice to create a network of fun, fact-filled, community-based walking routes and walking groups. In Indiana County, Walkworks is coordinated by the Indiana County Office of Planning and Development. For more info: [www.icopd.org/indiana-county-walkworks-program.html](http://www.icopd.org/indiana-county-walkworks-program.html)



# IT'S NOT JUST A HOMER CITY THING!



Left: Federico Flores, Jr. at the San Francisco de Asís Church in Taos, New Mexico. Right: Amy Ivory at Trinity College Old Library in Dublin, Ireland.

## **SOCIETY BRIDGE- NAMING INITIATIVE: AN UPDATE**



The first week of December, Act 102 of the Pennsylvania General Assembly was signed into law. It had been amended to name bridges across the Commonwealth, five of which are located in Indiana County. The naming of one of those bridges for HCHS '80 alumna, physician and astronaut Dr. Patricia Hilliard-Robertson (1963-2001).

The initiative to name the bridge after Patti, initiated with Society President Ted Predko and supported by the Society, moved forward with Senator Don White and Representative Dave Reed and then with their successors Senator Joe Pittman and Representative Jim Struzzi. In the meantime, the Society had Fast Times Printing make a banner for Patti using the same format as that used for the Banners for Veterans Project.

After consultation with Patti's family, a dedication ceremony for the bridge-naming and the installation of the banner at a location will be held this spring. Details to follow.

## *Correspondence*

Dear Fellow Society Members:

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Homer-Center Historical Society -- along with the Homer-City Business Association -- for nominating me for the Homer City Borough Good Citizen of the Year Award 2019.

Receiving this award was truly a great honor and a surprise as part of this year's Old-Fashioned Christmas Celebration.

I appreciate being recognized by this great community. I am Homer City Proud!!

Sherry Renosky

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Dear Folks of the Historical Society:

Thank you for your financial support for the men residing at Tomorrow's Hope (transition home for homeless vets).

Your money was used to help buy winter gloves for each man.

Our church hosted a Christmas pizza party for the guys, then gave each one a bag of gifts and a quilt or afghan.

Warm Christmas wishes for you!

Diane Green

Brush Valley Chapel & Friends of the Church

## **HELLO GIRLS, conclusion.**

but first they were issued uniforms and given small-arms and other combat training. And, like their male counterparts in the Army, they were subject to the Military Code of Justice. They were, in every sense, enlisted personnel.

While there was some resistance to Pershing's project, Pershing himself considered the Hello Girls a crucial asset in fighting a modern war: keeping communication viable across hundreds of miles on the Western Front and in southern England.

In the end, 223 women served in the **U.S. Army Signal Corps Female Telephone Operators Unit** before returning to civilian life at the war's end. As it turned out, however, the end of the war hardly marked the end of their story.

**END OF PART ONE. CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE.**



## **LOOKING BACK: 100 YEARS AGO**

This photo includes all twenty-six members of the Graceton School, 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade class of 1920 (as noted on the back). The teacher pictured on the far right in the second row, was Mrs. Fiscus.

Class members are not identified other than Mary Edna Hicks, later Mrs. John H Jones of Lucernemines. She is fifth from right in the second row.



The Homer-Center Historical Society, Inc.

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



**PLEASE NOTE:**

**AFTER THE SOCIETY'S ANNUAL WINTER HIATUS,  
REGULAR MONTHLY MEETINGS WILL RESUME ON  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2020 AT 6:30 PM AT THE  
HOMER CITY FIRE HALL.**