

Issue No. 4 | Winter 2025

# The Bell

A Publication of the Bellefonte Historical and Cultural Association

**CULTURE**

**Festivities,  
Music, and  
Literature**

**HISTORY**

**Stories  
Behind  
Architecture**

**COMMUNITY**

**Contributors  
of  
All Ages**



From the Editor

Reflecting on how this beautiful and interesting edition came to be, the European folktale *Stone Soup* came to mind. Perhaps you remember the story, too, about hungry travelers who stopped at a village for help but found that its residents were suspicious of strangers and would not share their food. Taking a different tack, the travelers told the villagers they were making a delicious stone soup, and they just needed a little something extra to improve its flavor. In short, each villager contributed a different ingredient, and the soup of water and stone evolved into a hearty meal.

Charging BHCA members and past contributors to *The Bell* for what I hoped for in the winter edition felt similar to being a hungry traveler in that folktale. The deep, straight-sided body of my pot — this empty winter edition — was made up of the months December, January, and February. What happened, happens, or will happen in those months? The water in my pot consisted of blank sheets of paper ready to be filled with what the contributors wanted to share. The grey, tasteless stone in the pot was my uninspiring reminder of the due date.

To my delight – and hopefully yours as well – our *Stone Soup* became a hearty meal flavored with beautiful photos (see their credits); interesting articles about historical buildings (pgs. 8, 16, 20 and 24) and local tradition (Victorian Christmas, of course! See pg. 6.); poems from Teresa Stouffer (pgs. 10 and 27) and two new-to-*The Bell* poets (pgs. 19 and 22); and two new seasonings: meaningful essays (pgs. 12 and 18) and an enticing book review (pg. 11).

The literary, historical, architectural, and cultural ingredients that were

added to this pot were created by people of school-age to retirement age. Not only do they offer something to every reader’s taste, I think this edition reveals a bit more about BHCA: it is a welcoming, community-based non-profit. Not all of our contributors are members of BHCA, but it is my hope that they will join BHCA soon. As seen in this edition,

these volunteer contributors have so much to offer! Please consider this as BHCA’s invitation to contributors and readers alike to join BHCA and share an ingredient or two of your own.

Peace,

*Sharon*

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Mission

*The Bellefonte Historical and Cultural Association exists to improve the lives of all Bellefonte residents and their nearby neighbors through opportunities to participate in and enjoy programming that explores Bellefonte’s rich history; promotes appreciation and preservation of our town’s historic architecture; and enriches the sensibilities of visitors and residents through literary, performing, and visual arts.*

Front cover: photo by Carla Cipro and logo by Ashley Crosby  
Photo by Sharon Weisser





Table of Contents

2

From the Editor

5

President's Page

6

Big Spring Chronicles:  
Victorian Christmas Origins

8

An Elegant Residence

10

Cowdrick House Orange-  
Cranberry Scones Recipe

11

A Stroll in  
Jane Austen’s World

12

Sentimental Spoon

14

Events Calendar

15

Contacts for Volunteers:

16

The Gatehouse: The  
‘Scariest’ House in America

18

Stop and Listen

19

Ode for Rose

20

Behind the Stone:  
Daniel G. Bush

22

The Bush House is Burning

24

The First St. Paul AME  
Church: 50 Years from  
Foundations to Flames

27

Membership Form

2025-2026 Season

OUT LOUD IN BELLEFONTE

First Fridays at the Print Factory  
130 S. Allegheny St., Bellefonte, PA

2026

February 6 @ 6 pm

Erin Murphy

non-fiction book launch

April 3 @ 6 pm

Gabeba Baderoon

writing from South Africa &  
State College

May 8 @ 6 pm

Open Mic

hosted by Carmin Wong

State College Poet Laureate

Out Loud in Bellefonte is sponsored  
by the Bellefonte Historical and  
Cultural Association and hosted by  
the Print Factory.





President’s Page: Meditation On the Letter “A”

The name of the esteemed organization that publishes *The Bell*, the “Bellefonte Historical and Cultural Association” is admittedly cumbersome, so we usually refer to it as “BHCA.” There can be no doubt that we are Bellefonte-centric and that surely justifies the “B.” A casual look through any issue of *The Bell* will uncover articles about the history of our town and the people who have lived here. These plus our recent *Civil War Weekend in Bellefonte* certainly warrants the “H.” Just about all our programming — literary lectures, poetry readings, Art in the Open, pop and chamber music concerts, our recent public reading of *Animal Farm* — falls under the category of culture, and so we explain the “C” in our name. But how about that “A” representing “Association?”

BHCA was formed half a century ago by a group of like-minded people who knew one another. Consequently, they associated naturally without benefit of Bylaws or meeting agendas. After discovering their common interests, they formed an organization to promote the things they cared about. The founding mothers and fathers of BHCA were a creative lot. They started a documentary film forum, helped a fledgling light opera company, and threw Victorian themed costume parties at their homes. Back in the seventies and eighties, BHCA amounted to a bunch of friends getting together to do what they enjoyed. But how

about today? Is BHCA really an association or is it more accurate to call it a nonprofit pursuing its historical and cultural mission?

Regrettably, BHCA is an association in name only. Certainly, those who come to our meetings get along nicely, and many members are friends with other members. But most of us are strangers to one another. We are not a congregation. Our members tend to be more interested in the projects and activities of BHCA than in their fellow members. While this is no flaw, it does suggest an opportunity for development.

People who take the trouble to join BHCA do share common interests and would probably enjoy knowing one another. Perhaps BHCA should develop centripetal programming to forge connections among members, viz., salons, lunch groups, and strolling societies organized around topics of interest or tours to local cultural and historical resources. Would visiting the 1849 Advent Church in Milesburg, the Matson Museum of Anthropology, the Palmer Museum of Art, the Milesburg Museum, or the Centre Furnace Mansion with some companionable BHCA members interest you? Perhaps we can go beyond our occasional member socials to help us know one another.

In *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Robert M. Pirsig distinguished the “real university” from its

more evident legal and physical manifestations, claiming that the “real university” was a “Church of Reason” whose primary goal was “truth as it’s revealed by the process of rationality.” However useful a university might be to its community, its primary allegiance should be to truth over public service. I hesitate to follow in the footsteps of Mr. Pirsig, who was institutionalized as a mental patient, but he expressed a beatific vision. Could we establish a *Church of Culture*, founded on the doings of BHCA? Could our organization become more than the programming we offer? Could it be a spiritual basecamp for the exaltation of what makes us human, those feelings, impulses, and understandings that separate us from both the animals and AI?

BHCA does a more than decent job promoting music, the visual arts, literature, dance, historic architecture, and local history. Truly, we do make Bellefonte more interesting. Maybe it’s a fool’s errand to imagine we could recapture some of the camaraderie that unified and enriched our founders half a century ago. Let me know if you think we should try. Cars and computers have improved greatly over the decades, while something far more important has wilted. I’d love to believe that history and culture can be used for a higher purpose in Bellefonte.

By Joseph Griffin





# Big Spring Chronicles: Victorian Christmas Origins

Like making sugar cookies for Santa, stealing a kiss beneath the mistletoe, and trimming the tree, Bellefonte's Victorian Christmas weekend has become a timeless and treasured tradition. To understand this event's enduring impact on our local culture, we must travel back to the beginning. According to the first chair of the Talleyrand Park Committee, True Fisher, in December of 1974, their group decided to try the old-fashioned holiday tradition of door-to-door caroling as a way to fundraise for the construction of Talleyrand Park. Participants dressed in Victorian era outfits, and it was so well received by borough residents, they planned to continue doing it every year.

David Bliss, an advertising representative for the Centre Daily Times, said the first official Victorian Christmas was named and held in 1981. A committee of nine very dedicated people was formed with Forest "Benny" Benford as co-chair along with his brother-in-law, David Woodring, Sr. of Woodring's Floral Gardens. Guy Keller, the manager of Wolf Furniture and owner of a model train hobby shop, was a driving force for the event, hoping to support downtown merchants leading up to the holiday season. As the treasurer of their new committee,

David recalls that they chose a weekend in mid-December to hold the event and sold shares of Bellefonte Victorian Christmas Inc. stock to raise funds and anticipation. Downtown proprietors painted scenes on storefront windows, dressed in period clothing, and offered special holiday deals. The first year was small but well attended, and by 1982, Victorian Christmas was growing and guaranteed to be an annual event in Bellefonte. Aside from the downtown decorations and caroling, there were historical walking tours, a community choir concert, and horse-drawn carriage rides.

Barbara Paden, a talented vocalist and choral director, visited all the churches in town, recruiting members of their choirs to create one large community choir that would perform during Victorian Christmas. Their debut took place inside St. John's Catholic Church on Bishop Street, chosen for the amazing acoustics, large choir loft, and vast seating. After that first year or two, though, the concert became so popular, it was always standing room only.

Darrell Furfaro, who was the assistant manager of Schaeffer's Hardware, became an enthusiastic Victorian Christmas committee member along with his wife Judy. They introduced the idea of horse-drawn carriage rides through town. The committee purchased a vintage three-seat surrey wagon in beautiful condition from Brookville, Pennsylvania. A few years later, Darrell was contacted by Bud Curtin, a descendant of Governor Andrew Gregg Curtin, who showed him photographs of his personal single-



Holly Hopkins

horse carriage when it was used in Bellefonte's Sesquicentennial Parade in 1956. It had been stored on the Curtin family property, unfortunately exposed to the elements and broken down into piles of metal and wood. Bud knew it was a long shot but thought if it could be restored, and it would be perfect to use for the Victorian Christmas carriage rides. Darrell made it his mission to research the carriage and find someone to help restore it to its former glory. He was successful, and Governor Curtin's carriage transported elated passengers around the Diamond, traveling back in time. It is currently on display at the Curtin Mansion.

Martha Nastase and members of Bellefonte Women's Club were proactive in the formative years of

Victorian Christmas. They decorated trees, lampposts, railings and windows through town, every garland and bow made by hand. The perfect fir tree was then selected and placed in front of the courthouse to be trimmed. The Grand Ball was planned and held at the Nittany Country Club in Mingoville, with an allotment of two hundred tickets for live music, dancing, a variety of libations and a lavish three-course meal. The event sold out almost immediately. Holly Woodring set the scene as the formally dressed attendees were greeted by hundreds of poinsettia plants cascading down the grand staircase. The annual Grand Ball was eventually moved to the second floor of the Bush House and continued to sell out year after year.

In 1985, WTAJ produced a television special hosted by News Anchor Tom Casey showcasing the weekend-long Victorian Christmas celebration in Bellefonte that year. The opening night ceremonies included announcements by Chamber of Commerce Director and Mainstreet Coordinator Kevin Clark and a proclamation on the courthouse steps by Mayor Gino Fornicola. They highlighted horse-drawn carriage and train rides, a community theatre production, demonstrators making crafts and toys, street performers, and a lengthy interview with beloved historian Hugh Manchester. Antique machinery was on display inside the bottom



Holly Hopkins

floor of the Brockenhoff Hotel including an old horse-drawn pumper truck on loan from the Undine Fire Company. Tom Casey took the viewers on a tour of the Austin Furst residence built in 1864, and helped decorate a traditional Christmas tree with popcorn, candy and homemade ornaments with the owners, the Jacobs family. His next stop was a ladies social gathering, a proper tea party in the parlor of Rebecca Valentine Pugh's house which was owned by the Uhler family; she was the widow of Penn State's first president, Evan Pugh. While walking downtown, everyone he stopped to talk to was dressed in vintage clothing, even the Bellefonte policemen dressed up for their shifts

like British bobbies, wearing long coats, top hats, gloves and carrying night sticks.

While reminiscing on what he had witnessed over the weekend, Tom Casey said, "In Bellefonte, they take care of their history. They celebrate it. They live it. And we are lucky enough to be here to see it!" Four decades later, it still rings true.

The 44th Annual Bellefonte Victorian Christmas will be held on December 12th-14th this year, and will feature choir concerts, tea parties, cordials, cookie crawls, a model train and village display, a gingerbread house contest, pop-up performers, a festival of trees, horse-drawn carriage and train rides, reenactments, a live nativity, the Arts & Crafts Show held at the YMCA, the Winter Market at Talleyrand Park, and multiple food vendors. Details are available at [bellefontevictorianchristmas.com](http://bellefontevictorianchristmas.com).

If you've never experienced an old-fashioned Christmas in Bellefonte, this year would be the perfect time to gather your family from near and far to see what you've been missing!

By Holly Hopkins

*Holly Hopkins is a local dental hygienist, historian, and author of Big Spring Chronicles which can be borrowed from the Centre County Library and purchased at the Belle Mercantile.*



provided by Darrell Furfaro



Holly Hopkins



# An Elegant Residence



Scott Pistner

“Mr. J. Calvin Harper, with his interesting family, will move into his superb new residence on East Linn Street on July 1” - thus began the June 7, 1883, article in the *Centre Democrat* under the heading “An Elegant Residence”. (photo by Scott Pistner)

In 1883, Morris Woolverton Cowdrick built the third brick residence that stands in a row along East Linn Street, an excellent example of the Queen Anne Victorian style popular in the United States at that time. The home was built for John Calvin “J.C.” and Laura Graham Harper who moved in in July of that year with their three children - Clarence, Arthur, and Helen.

J.C. Harper was born in Miles Township, enjoying the benefits of farm life in his early years but given the advantage of studying at the normal schools at Centre Hall and Rebersburg. He began teaching in 1872, and

in 1876, was appointed deputy prothonotary. After three years as deputy prothonotary, he was elected prothonotary in 1878, and reelected in 1881. At the close of his second term, he began to read law and was admitted to the bar. He was elected as recorder of deeds of Centre County in 1896, and entered the insurance business representing Aetna and Hartford. He was affiliated with the Democratic Party and served as a member of the Town Council from 1906-1912, holding the office of president for three years. He also served as president of the Logan Fire Company. Laura was a school-teacher until their marriage when she became a homemaker. The Harpers resided on East Linn until 1892. The successive owners were both Centre County judges – Judge Henry “Harry” Keller and Anna Mary “Nan” Orvis (owners from 1892 – 1935), and Judge John G.

Love and Martha Cameron Whitmer (owners from 1935 – 1966).

When my husband and I purchased this home in 2018, our main objective as caretakers was to sustain the physical structure and surrounding property, ensuring that all would be passed to future generations to do the same ad infinitum. The secondary goal was to share this magnificent structure with the community we’ve decided to call our home. With these goals in mind, we created a social media presence in 2019, under the name Cowdrick House in honor of the man who built so many amazing structures within Historic Bellefonte.

Cowdrick House Bed and Breakfast, LLC was the final step in our multi-year plan. We filed paperwork to formally establish Cowdrick House as a legal entity with the goal of opening a seasonal bed and breakfast and mi-



Music Room, Scott Pistner



Dining Room, Scott Pistner



Harper Room, Scott Pistner



Living Room, Scott Pistner

cro-venue space. Never ones to follow the leader or to buy into trends, our bed and breakfast was not to be a space with jacuzzi tubs and king-sized beds, rather a nod to the authenticity and timeline of this home’s first three owners whose names appear on Cowdrick House’s three guest rooms - the Harper, Keller, and Love.

At Cowdrick House, we strive for an immersive experience for our guests. Our rooms are carefully curated with a mix of period, reproduction, and new pieces – all fully functional - to create the sense of stepping back in

time while retaining high levels of modern convenience.

We hope to officially open our doors for business in the 2026 calendar year and have already been graciously welcomed by the other fabulous bed and breakfast owners here in town. This year will also mark our third appearance as guest hosts for high tea in conjunction with Bellefonte Victorian Christmas, December 12 through 14, 2025. (Specific times can be found at [bellefontevictorianchristmas.com](http://bellefontevictorianchristmas.com).)

Like the little black dress in fashion, it’s good to have a core recipe in your

collection that can be adapted for multiple uses. Our basic scone recipe can be easily adjusted to a variety of sweet or savory ingredients - and can even be mastered by a novice in the kitchen. We serve scones with every tea at Cowdrick House, including this variation which is perfect for the holiday breakfast or brunch table. Enjoy!

By Mike Hawn

Mike sits on the Board of Directors for BHCA and operates Cowdrick House with his husband Scott. You may contact Cowdrick House at [cowdrickhouse@gmail.com](mailto:cowdrickhouse@gmail.com).



## Cowdrick House Orange-Cranberry Scones

2 cups flour  
3 tablespoons sugar  
1 tablespoon baking powder  
½ teaspoon salt  
½ teaspoon cardamom  
1 tablespoon grated orange zest  
5 tablespoons cold butter  
½ cup dried cranberries  
1 cup heavy cream coarse sugar

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

In a large bowl, whisk together flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, and cardamom.

Add orange zest and butter, cutting in the butter until it resembles coarse meal with a few larger chunks (you want some larger, pea-sized hunks of butter – the heat from the oven will hit the butter creating steam pockets to help lift the scones and make them light and airy).

Stir in the cream and dried cranberries.

Working quickly, dump the dough onto a floured surface and lightly lift and press together for a few seconds until everything sticks together – you do not want to knead or overwork the dough.

Press the dough into a circle 9" wide and 1" thick. With a floured knife, cut the dough into 8 wedges, or you may use a floured round or other shaped cutter.

Place the wedges onto an ungreased baking sheet, brush tops with heavy cream, then sprinkle with coarse sugar.

Bake for 12-15 minutes until light brown.

Serve your scones warm with clotted cream and jam.



Scott Pistner



Grandma's vestibule -  
pine boughs climb the bannister  
the breath of Christmas

By Teresa M. Stouffer

Photo by Scott Pistner

## A Stroll in Jane Austen's World: A Review of *Persuasion*

This December marks Jane Austen's 250th birthday. While not well-known in literary circles in life, she has more than made up for it in historical significance. How Miss Austen and I have never crossed paths in my reading life is beyond me, especially working at the Centre County Library. However, with such an occasion coming up, it seemed a good time to dip my toes into her world.

*Persuasion*, Jane Austen's last completed novel before her death in 1817, was published posthumously later that year in a set with *Northanger Abbey*. It was the first time she had been published under her own name, as her previous novels had been published anonymously, and it included a biographical note by her brother, Henry.

As the novel begins, we are introduced to the Elliots, led by the absurdly vain Sir Walter. He is a baronet and a widower with three daughters, two of whom still live at home: the eldest daughter and his favorite, Elizabeth, and the middle daughter, Anne, whom he barely notices at all. His youngest daughter, Mary, has married and moved out of the ancestral home. Sir Walter has handled his finances poorly since the death of his wife, and the family must rent out their estate and move to Bath to continue to live in the manner to which they have been accustomed. He and Elizabeth are both keenly concerned about their social standing. Anne has no interest in going to Bath and plans to go with Lady Russell, a family friend and mother-figure to Anne, in several months. However, her very needy sister, Mary, insists on Anne coming to her home in Uppercross to tend to her first. While there, we are introduced to a slew of relations and acquaintances, including the return of Anne's former fiancé.

Anne had previously been engaged at the age of 19 to a sailor, Frederick Wentworth. However, she was persuaded by Lady Russell to end it as he was considered below her station.

Anne had genuinely loved him and thought she had come to terms with the loss. When he reappears in her life, successful now as a Captain, her feelings are reawakened, and the central questions of the novel come to the forefront. Was it wrong for Lady Russell to persuade Anne all those years ago, or was it better in the long run that she had been persuaded? It becomes a study of psychology and manners as we, through Anne's eyes, try to discover if he still has feelings for her. This is a novel of second chances, but to call it merely a romance does it a disservice. The romance is an underlying thread, a simmering hope and tension throughout the other events of the novel.



Jane Austen by  
Cassandra Austen, 1870 reduit

Though told in third-person perspective, we are following Anne and her thoughts, and she has a lot to say about the society of the time. Through witty and incisive but often biting observations, she shows us the shifting social hierarchy. It's hard not to notice that the most admirable and likable characters are not highborn, but the naval officers and those in their social circles who are now able to enter high society.

I have seen it said that *Persuasion* is Austen's most mature novel. And with a leading character the ripe old age (at the time) of twenty-seven, it at least has themes for a more mature audience. This is not about the sweet bloom of youth and new romance. Instead, it is a rather melancholy reflection on lost love and grappling with choices made. It's also about women's roles in society at that time. Anne has a host of admirable quali-

ties: she's intelligent, capable, well-read, patient, and empathetic, and yet her family and society at large overlook her. She is viewed only in her usefulness to others. No one asks nor cares about her wants, needs, or feelings. In being so often overlooked, Anne is very observant. Surrounded by people who lack any self-awareness, it is from her perspective that we see the other characters.

As one who normally reads mysteries and thrillers, I feared this would be dry, too romantic, or tedious. Instead, I found myself marveling over the writing: complicated, yes, but artistic, descriptive, clever. *Persuasion* deserves to be read at least twice to understand and appreciate the language fully. It is a stroll of a novel, not a heart-pounding sprint. It is meant to be savored. Despite the slow pace, I found it very engaging, and Anne really resonated with me. I also found myself, like the love interest, in - *half agony, half hope* - regarding whether the two main characters would get together. Perhaps I am more of a romantic than I thought, or perhaps this is the draw of Jane Austen. More than two centuries later, her characters are still relatable, if not in circumstance, in personality and feeling. It's hard not to wonder what more Jane Austen would have had to say had she lived longer. If you have never taken the opportunity to read Jane Austen because you assume her books are too romantic or lack depth, I highly recommend giving this one a chance.

To celebrate Miss Austen's 250th birthday, the Centre County Library in Bellefonte will have some programs honoring her work. These include Tea Time Cinema on December 15th, where we will have tea and watch the 1999 film *Mansfield Park*; a virtual book club to discuss this book, *Persuasion*, on December 17th; and a virtual Film Talk on December 19th to discuss the 1995 film *Sense and Sensibility*.

By Ashley Hoover  
Assistant Branch Manager  
Centre County Library/Bellefonte



Sentimental Spoon *The true story of my 50-year relationship with one piece of tableware*

*Can a piece of cutlery connote a life long-lived and tumult survived? Could a simple shiny spoon say more than memories or pictures in an album? Let me tell you.*

Fifty-seven years ago, my new wife and I set up housekeeping in our grad student apartment. We didn't have much money, but after buying the plastic plates and glasses, we decided to splurge on a set of stainless-steel tableware. We liked the silky smoothness and calm contours of the knives, forks, and spoons in the eight-piece place setting. We figured they would last forever and keep gracing our table into the decades ahead.

We took good care of those utensils, and after graduate school, found some pretty china plates to sit proudly alongside them in our dining rooms as we migrated from Pennsylvania to Massachusetts to Maine to Ohio to Kentucky and finally back to Pennsylvania. A few of the fine plates shattered along the way, but the stainless steel was sterner stuff and survived without a scratch.

After almost two decades of wandering, we settled down, buying an ancient farmstead on a good piece of land next to a covered bridge. Our stone house was primitive, older than America, and exactly where we wanted to be. The handsome tableware didn't get shown off much while we worked ceaselessly at our jobs, never entertained, and used just two place settings at our evening meal.

For seven years, we settled into our old home, sometimes speculating about the years ahead, when we could retire from our demanding jobs and become real country mice, without urban errands or professional obligations to bestir our simple days. Our shared dream made old age attractive.



Joseph Griffin

**A cancer diagnosis stopped that daydream cold.** For a few months, my wife feared, struggled, and cried. And then she died.

Mortgage insurance gave me the farm free and clear. But what was the point? I had no plan for the rest of my life. After scattering my wife's ashes widely across our 26 acres, I listened to the fields and the whispers in the abandoned barn. I quit my job and became a vegetable farmer. By the sweat of my brow, I took emotional possession of the fields I had only owned on paper.

I started small at one farmers' market. But I liked what I was doing and invested my time and money. I bought tractors, greenhouses, irrigation equipment and hired a helper. Soon, we were attracting interns who moved into the rambling farmhouse where once my wife and I had lived alone. I had company; eventually, lots of company. Some seasons, five or six people were working and living on the farm. They broke my plates and lost my forks and spoons, but never knives — most of us were vegetarians; we had little need of them.

I remarried and gained a new wife and a stepson: more broken plates and lost flatware. Once, I found spoons in the compost pile and another time a fork while cleaning the ashes from a wood stove. If we were making omelets, we were certainly breaking plenty of eggs.

After ten stimulating years, my farm failed.

My second wife got sick, recovered, and left, never to return.



"day's end at the farmstead" - Joseph Griffin

My stepson grew up and went to college.

After twenty-five years in the old farmhouse, there was much to think about. Solitude is good for reminiscing. While taking stock of my life, I also considered my kitchen. From that eight-piece place setting, my personal emblem of optimistic young adulthood, there survived five knives, two forks, and one teaspoon. Alone in my farmhouse, I needed only one place setting.

The teaspoon was my favorite. It had touched my dead wife's lips and stirred her coffee. The dirty fingers of a dozen farmhands had been unable to defile it, and it was a survivor, like me. It sparkled, I suppose, because it can't remember.

Twelve years ago, I sold the farm to a neighbor. I couldn't afford to live there anymore and am happy knowing the old place is in stronger and more competent hands. I live in a small house in the town where I was born. I'm surrounded by memories embedded in the books and furniture that have traveled with me for decades.

Of all the material possessions I have left, nothing compares to my sole surviving teaspoon. It seems as smooth and shiny as the day two young newlyweds bought it fifty-seven years ago.

I stir my coffee with it every morning and remember.

By Joseph Griffin



Carla Cipro

**Bellefonte Sunday Afternoon Chamber Music Series**

2025-2026

Trinity United Methodist Church  
128 W. Howard St., Bellefonte



Sundays, 2:30 PM  
Free Admission



Sept. 28 Curtin Family Chamber Ensemble

Nov. 23 Whistle Tones Flute Quartet

Feb. 8 Anne Sullivan, harpist

March 15 Callanish Irish Band

April 12 Jessica Pearce, horn  
Benn Carrasquillo, trombone

May 17 Vienna Serenade  
performing music of Old Vienna

Sponsored by the Bellefonte Historical & Cultural Association <http://bellefontearts.org/>



# Events Calendar

Nov. 29 – Dec. 21	Santa House on The Diamond (HBI) Santa arrives at noon on Saturday, November 29 Open Saturdays and Sundays, 1-4pm Open December 13 and 14, noon – 4pm Open Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6-8pm
December 12 – 14	Bellefonte Victorian Christmas (HBI) bellefontevictorianchristmas.com
December 12 – 14	Bellefonte Art Museum open during the Bellefonte Victorian Christmas Weekend
December 13	Arts and Crafts Show at the Bellefonte YMCA, 9am-5pm (BHCA)
December 13	7th Annual Winter Market, Talleyrand Park, 10am-4pm (DBI)
December 13	Train Rides: Sugar Plum Limited (BHRS) bellefontetrain.org/train
December 15	Tea Time Cinema, 1999 film <i>Mansfield Park</i> 5pm, Centre County Library in Bellefonte centrecountylibrary.org/bellefonte
December 17	Virtual Book Club discusses <i>Persuasion</i> 6:30pm, Centre County Library/Bellefonte centrecountylibrary.org/virtual-programs
December 19	Virtual Film Talk of the 1995 film <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> 1pm, Centre County Library/Bellefonte centrecountylibrary.org/virtual-programs
Dec. 14, 20 & 21	Train Rides: Candy Cane Express (BHRS) bellefontetrain.org/trains
December 14 – 22	<i>Hanukkah</i>
December 25	<i>Christmas</i>
Dec. 26 – Jan. 1	<i>Kwanzaa</i>
December 31	<i>New Year's Eve</i>
February 6	Out Loud at The Print Factory: Erin Murphy, 6pm (BHCA)
February 8	Sunday Afternoon Chamber Music: Anne Sullivan, harpist Trinity UMC, 2:30pm (BHCA)
March 15	Sunday Afternoon Chamber Music: Callanish Irish Band Trinity UMC, 2:30pm (BHCA)

April 3	Out Loud at The Print Factory: Gabeba Baderoon, 6pm (BHCA)
April 5	<i>Easter</i>
April 5	Easter Parade (BHCA)
April 12	Sunday Afternoon Chamber Music: Jessica Pearce, horn and Benn Carrasquillo, trombone Trinity UMC, 2:30pm (BHCA)
May 1-3	Civil War Weekend (BHCA)
May 8	Out Loud at The Print Factory: Open Mic hosted by Carmin Wong, 6pm (BHCA)
May 10	<i>Mother's Day</i>
May 17	Sunday Afternoon Chamber Music: Vienna Serenade Trinity UMC, 2:30pm (BHCA)
June	Summer Sounds begin – details to follow (BHCA)
June 19-20	The Cruise (HBI)
June 20	Jitterbug Contest (BHCA)
June 21	<i>Father's Day</i>
August 1-31	3rd Annual Art in the Open (BHCA)
September 1-30	3rd Annual Community Art in the Open Walk Exhibit (BHCA)

## Contacts for Volunteers:

### Bellefonte Historical & Cultural Association (BHCA)

*Arts & Crafts Show at the Victorian Christmas*

Jim Dunne, jhdunne@outlook.com

*Easter Parade*

Joseph Griffin cbproduce@comcast.net

*Civil War Weekend*

Joseph Griffin cbproduce@comcast.net

*Jitterbug Contest*

Joseph Griffin cbproduce@comcast.net

*Art in the Open*

Kathy Breidenbaugh, breidenbaugh.k@gmail.com

*Summer Sounds*

Tom Wilson, centretainment@verizon.net

### Victorian Christmas

Dave Provan and Phil Breidenbaugh

christmasinbellefonte@gmail.com

### Bellefonte Historical Railroad Society (BHRS)

For volunteers:

bellefontetrain.org/membership

For train rides:

bellefontetrain.org/train

### Historic Bellefonte, Inc. (HBI)

*Santa House*

Romayne Naylor, 814-571-0106

### Downtown Bellefonte, Inc. (DBI)

*Christmas Tree Lighting*

*Winter Market*

Lorraine Mulfinger, 814-548-7532

mulfinger@downtownbellefonteinc.com

### The Print Factory

printfactorybellefonte.org

*The Bell* is a quarterly publication of the Bellefonte Historical and Cultural Association (BHCA), a nonprofit organization founded and incorporated in 1976. BHCA is a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)3 of the I.R.S. Code. Official registration and financial information about BHCA may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, (800) 732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.



# The Gatehouse: The ‘Scariest’ House in America



Kat Momenzadeh, Retta, and Ed Choma, credit to Scariest House crew member

On a cold weekend in March, my husband and I moved ourselves and our two children – a 4-year-old and a 1-year-old – into the Gatehouse. We had put an offer in just before Christmas of 2024, never thinking that we would get a house so historically significant to Bellefonte. Boy, were we shocked when all that quirky charm was suddenly *our* quirky charm– and also, there was mold under the kitchen.

As we all know, the Gatehouse is the literal gate to the Union Cemetery. Our property line is six feet shy of the closest gravestones. I suppose some people are unnerved by cemeteries, but I’ve always found them peaceful. I love moseying around and reading gravestones– someone’s entire history chiseled into a few words on slate and limestone. We had a vision for the Gatehouse; it would take a lot of time and a lot of work, but we’d brush off the dirt and cobwebs, finish the time capsule of half-finished projects and cobbled together temporary solutions, save the splintery 200-year-old floors... and the

inside could match the outside. It just needed a little love.

And a lot of elbow grease.

On the Sunday of moving in, we got a call from our realtor about an HGTV casting representative reaching out to inquire about the house. The very next day, Matt Maris, our brave and fearless local historian, also received inquiries from HGTV casting reps. We had a piano stuck in our moldy kitchen, no heat in the bedrooms, and a dresser we could not get up the stairs–but HGTV *really* wanted to cast our house in their Halloween television special, *Scariest House in America*. Apparently, cemeteries are scary. Who knew?

We were a little nervous about accepting but thought it would be good for local tourism. Our weekends became dedicated to sparkling up the house, our timeline shifting from years to weeks. We take a lot of pride in Bellefonte and how hard the previous owners worked to get the house to this point. It’s no small thing to take on a major fixer-upper,

and each owner does the best they can to leave it better than they started. We wanted to at least trim the ivy and scrub the floors.

A production contractor began to come out every few weeks to “Measure Important Things” – his name is Ian; our kids called him Thor. We began getting emails about our design preferences, something that the production team assured us all the applicants received. The production team would need one day in April to film, no actually one day in the beginning of May, no actually the end of May and they’ll need two days. We took, cancelled, and rescheduled personal days a dozen times and glimpsed a whole new world of production efficiency.

The big day came on May 15th– Retta and a whole production crew from *Scariest House in America* rolled up to our little house in Bellefonte to film. For the six minutes we’re featured on the episode titled “Apparitions of Appalachia,” we filmed for two hours, plus had the crew in and out of each room filming transitions

all day. We were putting the kids to bed while they were still filming outside. On the second day of filming, the crew told us that they’d only need us for about ten minutes and the rest of the time we’d just be hanging out while they did additional shots of the house.

They lied. (In retrospect, all the signs were there.)

This was when we learned not only would we be showing our “scary” house to America, but we won a home renovation by Alison Victoria. In fact, Alison jump-scared us so badly, I tried to karate chop her. (I’m bad with surprises – there was confetti.) (I do not know how to karate chop.) We filmed with Alison where we told her our wish list (kitchen counters and a dishwasher – maybe even an upstairs shower!), and she expanded on our wish list, because she had a significantly higher budget than us. These were professionals; we were just along for the ride.

And then we changed our clothes to start Demo Day.

That’s right, “Surprise, You Win!” Day and “Demo Day” are actually The. Same. Day. And Mike from production had just told us five minutes ago that the movers would be here in three days to put all of our stuff into storage. Also, we’d need a place to live for 8 weeks. And actually, did

we mind if they kept the crib for staging?

Then we took out the bathtub and knocked down a bathroom wall.

The children, blessedly, agreed to a shower that night.

We are lucky enough to live in a community where people have your back. I like to think I handled these transitional days with dignity, poise, and grace, but probably leaned more towards anxiety, dread, and takeout. My family is eternally grateful to all the people who helped us during those days of frazzled logistics and dashed bedtime routines.

We saw the house again at the reveal in July, and the house had transformed. We could barely recognize it as ours. The camera crew directed us where to go, but there’s just so MUCH, and I reacted too quickly and had to repeat my reaction, or reacted to staging furniture instead of room design (which, I’ve learned, is wrong), all while the contractors are giving us directions about sod and basement access, and we are VERY aware we are being filmed and edited for national television, and it’s approximately a million degrees inside and I just want my couch back... I hope we represented our family and community well. By the end of the day, we were totally numb. It was a lot. We did our best. When the crew left and the movers brought our

stuff back, and the books were facing the right way out, and the art was back on the walls– the house felt like ours again. Ours, but better. Ours but finished in a way we would never have been able to do.

The house no longer looks like it did in the final episode– the art is weirder, the rugs are brighter, there’s toys on the floor and we probably forgot to make the beds this morning. It’s not perfect, but it’s ours and we love it. Alison Victoria took our vision and made it happen in a way we never could. And still left space for us to add the texture and details to make it our own.

Back in December, we told the executrix of the Gatehouse estate that this house seemed impossible– like something that ought not be real outside of a story. Who could know this statement would foreshadow the upcoming whirlwind where this impossible house also led to an impossible privilege. We feel so blessed and humbled by this experience, and beyond grateful that the local contracting and paint teams– Bellefonte Building Supply and Paint Ninjas– loved the house as much as we do. They never forgot that a family would be moving back in after the television crew left.

Also, Retta liked my lipstick. I’d call that a dream come true.

By Kat Momenzadeh



Kat Momenzadeh



## Stop and Listen

I walk from the main road to the ornate fountain and stop, holding Mochi's leash in one hand and scratching his head with the other. I look up ahead to see a woman in a white floral lace gown. Straps off her shoulders, shaking with laughter from something the man next to her says. The man, obviously her groom, wraps an arm around her, and his lips stretch into a smile, infected by her laughter. A photographer tells them which way to turn their bodies or which way to tilt their heads. This makes me wonder about their story. If it had started here in Bellefonte. I imagine how my love story will turn out. If I will find a charismatic man to marry, or if I'll go on my own adventure and come to discover more about myself and life and nature.

I turn my attention away from the couple to see children on the swings, some climbing the playground. I recall being the same size as the little ones swinging and playing pretend. I remember whispering into the ear of a metal "phone" and waiting for my friend to reply. Only memories now, but then to us it was an expedition to space, or a spy mission.

Further behind the playground, I see the train that always idly sits there, no longer in use but a reflection of what our town used to be. I continue my walk, turning right, the dog trailing close by. I walk through a small opening of grass, walking around the couple, not to get in the way of their pictures. My gaze flicks over to a gazebo where a man sits, speaking passionately. He waves his arms around to emphasize his point. His eyes are wide. Others huddle around the gazebo, seeming to be listening intently. He smiles at me as I pass by which makes me consider stopping to listen. But Mochi tugs on, urging me otherwise.

I continued forward, pulling Mochi away from a stick he was sniffing. We come up to a ledge, and I peer down into a body of rushing water. I look downstream to see places where the water gets caught on large rocks, causing what looks like miniature waterfalls along the creek. I can't see the fish from here, but I know they're there. I turn toward the entrance to the suspension bridge, the one that shakes slightly—the bridge that my friends and I used to jump on to scare each other, as young children. That thought stays on my mind as I cross the bridge and spot ducks sitting on the ledge. An older man sits there, watching the ducks as they creep closer to him with each toss of old cereal that he tosses towards them. His eyes widen at the sight of two little kids running through the flock. A few fly away while others run off to the side, used to the torment of small children. Bellefonte has a lot of wildlife and like the stream that runs through town, the people stay connected with nature. I finally find myself at the end of the bridge. A variety of rumbles and wooshes are heard on the other side of the running creek to my left, a cool breeze kisses my face and hands. Significantly, but not surprisingly different from the hot and sunny day yesterday. I walk down the trail, leash in hand, admiring the color changing leaves, withering and drying, the beige and brown blur of fluff in my peripheral, pink tongue hanging out. I continue to walk along the dirt path, ducks moving out of the way of me and the canine at my side. A hefty tug of the leash wrapped around my wrist rubs against my skin, catching me off guard. He growls at the birds, now scattering. I tug him back gently, scolding. When I look back up, I see another fountain.

The town is called Bellefonte, the beautiful fountain, after all. I realize this town that I was sort-of born into isn't all about the grand history, or famous landmarks, or even the things that people once did, but about the little moments that mean different things to different people.

A town that demands you to stop and look around.

By Yana Vovchenko  
*Sophomore*  
*Bellefonte High School*

*Photograph by Carla Cipro*



## Ode for Rose

*(for Rosina Maria Coraggio, Rosie Corage, Rose Plozner, 12/1/1928-1/13/2020)*

Rosie, born at home on Hunky Hill in Pleasant Gap among yards of chickens, gardens, arbors for wine, tenth child of Elena and Giuseppe, twenty years off the boat from Salerno, who rented their house for ten dollars a month but owned a radio according to the 1930 census, neighbors to Alterios, Penlios, Pighettis, Tenalios, and John Willikan, a Black man Rose recalls by name.

Rosina became Rose, Angelo became Rusty, Vito became Dewey, Carmella became Caroline became Coxy, Nunziad became Nancy, even Giuseppe became Joseph, who opened Joe's Sandwich Shop on West High Street in Bellefonte next to the old Bonfatto's.

Rose lived upstairs and worked in the shop until they sold out. Frances Plozner delivered fruit from the Baltimore docks and also brought bottles of wine for Joe, so only a matter of time 'til the wedding at St. John's, sister Nancy as maid of honor, Toby Plozner, best man. The wedding party at Joe's Sandwich Shop for the reception.

Francis and Rose built a home on West Beaver with a garage, patio, green shutters, and a "P" on the aluminum screen door. They grew tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, peppers, zucchini, peppers, watering it all with rain they saved in a barrel. Rose soaked peppers in oil for sandwiches or to eat plain on bread, they were that good! Once, Rose ate a pepper so hot, her water broke, and Suzy was born.

Nancy owned the Hofbrau—a beer joint next to Saint John's—and Nancy and Ro made the hot wings that made everyone thirsty. Long John Silver's every Friday for fish; Tuesdays and Sundays, Ro played bingo at the Undines and St. John's, her dauber hovering over as many cards as they'd let her buy. When she hit the jack pot, Ro did her happy dance.

Rose cooked at Bellefonte Elementary where a mean lunch lady blew a whistle and stood the bad kids against the wall. But Rose danced the funky chicken, and everyone laughed. She spiced up canned sauce, stirred up stuffing balls for Thanksgiving. *Everyone liked me because I was so damn nice.* After 37 years in the school, when Rose retired at 80, they asked her to stay. *They knew they had a work horse.*

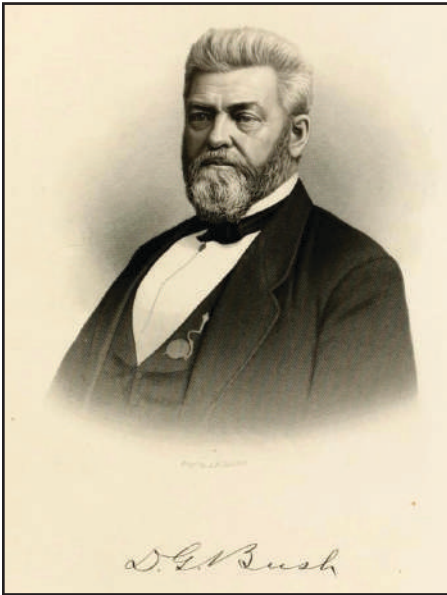
Grammy Rose made The Easter Pizza and The Christmas Stromboli, which you must wash down with a whiskey slush. *You only live once; I hope to be the life of the party.* The day doctors pulled staples from her shoulder, Rose in a wheelchair gulped down a tiny cup of drugs, *My birth control pills! I'll drink to that!*

Rose, snow is finally melting in Bellefonte; the maples on Allegheny will soon open tiny, red buds. The lot where you grew those peppers, where you kicked balls with grandkids, has grown over in lawn. *We had a great life, didn't we?* Rose asked that day she spoke with a stranger, *Oh, we celebrated everything!*

Julia Spicher Kasdorf  
*Photograph by Steven Richards*



# Behind the Stone: Daniel G. Bush



Credit Linn's History of Centre & Clinton Counties

Twenty years ago, “February 8, 2006, was a day that few Bellefonte residents will ever forget. The crisp morning started off innocently enough, but at 7:00am the daily bustle was interrupted by the shriek of fire whistles and sirens. A fire had broken out at the Bush House.... More than 150 firefighters from over 20 companies responded. The fire

spread quickly throughout the building, a result of its antiquated design and lack of an adequate fire suppression system.... By the next morning, the once proud Bush House was a crumbled smoking shell of its former self. An emblem of Bellefonte’s heritage was gone forever...The cause of the fire was most likely tied to the building’s outdated electrical system.”<sup>1</sup>

The Bush House was the centerpiece of Daniel Griffen Bush’s business empire. Its notoriety went far and wide. “A large number of guests are soon to arrive and take up their summer residence at the Bush House,” noted the *Centre Democrat*. “A party from Richmond, Va., will lead the van, on the 25th of this month. Several parties from Philadelphia and Baltimore will follow suit. Through July and August this fine hotel will

<sup>1</sup> Central PA History, “February 8, 2006 was a day that few Bellefonte residents will ever forget, Facebook, February 8, 2020, [www.facebook.com/CentralPAHistory/posts/february-8-2006-was-a-day-that-few-bellefonte-residents-will-ever-forget-the-cri/](https://www.facebook.com/CentralPAHistory/posts/february-8-2006-was-a-day-that-few-bellefonte-residents-will-ever-forget-the-cri/) 872216586540831.

contain a gay throng of visitors, who, together with the large number of persons permanently boarding there, should be able to furnish sufficient entertainment to give a pleasant summer to all.”<sup>2</sup> On October 2nd, “Two hundred and sixty-eight persons dined at the Bush House,” providing evidence that the food might have been as good as the accommodations.<sup>3</sup>

Daniel Griffen Bush influenced the present day appearance of Bellefonte more than any other resident in the 19th century. His legacy is found in such names as the Bush Arcade, Bush Addition and the now lost Bush House Hotel.

Bush was born March 26, 1826, in Granville Township, Bradford County, Pennsylvania. He was orphaned at the age of 16 and went to work on an uncle’s farm. Until that age, he was largely self-taught. The farm job gave him some money and the ability to attend school three

<sup>2</sup> *The Centre Democrat*, June 5, 1879

<sup>3</sup> *The Centre Democrat*, October 9, 1879



Postcard with Bush House on the left, Fred Smith Collection

months a year. Dissatisfied with farming and having learned much on his own, Bush began teaching in New Albany, Bradford County, for ten dollars per month and board. At the same time, he began reading law with Ulysses Mercur in Towanda, Pennsylvania. At the end of the first term of teaching in 1847, he left to attend Whitestown Academy near Utica, New York. He struggled financially as a student. Despite working for various farmers during his free time, he was only able to spend two semesters at the Academy. In 1848, he taught in Owego, NY, and the following year he taught in White Deer Valley, Lycoming County, Pennsylvania. While teaching, he became acquainted with Pelton’s Outline Maps. He went to Philadelphia to ask for a job from Cale Pelton who hired him to be the state agent for Pennsylvania; working in this position to 1856, when he arrived in Bellefonte.

Upon arriving in Bellefonte, Bush completed reading for the law and was admitted to the bar in April 1857. He married Louisa Tomb of Jersey Shore on December 16, 1858, in her family home. By the 1860 Census, the Bush’s had an eight-month-old daughter, Elizabeth (Lizzie). His net worth on the census was \$5,000 in real estate and \$3,000 in his personal estate. Bush’s fortune accelerated in the post-Civil War economic boom. He invested heavily in real estate and building projects. In 1867, he built a spacious Victorian home on Spring Street and a large business building, the Bush Arcade, on High Street. The following year he erected the Bush House Hotel on High Street. In 1869, he constructed a business block opposite his hotel known as the McClain Block and three brick houses on Spring Street. Over the years Bush would build upwards of sixty frame homes as well. According to the 1870 Census, Bush had added two sons, George and Harry, and his net worth had skyrocketed. The census listed his real

estate value at \$180,000 and his personal estate at \$40,000.

Bush also threw himself into various business ventures in Bellefonte. He invested in establishing the Glass Works in 1868. In 1873, he was instrumental in establishing the Bellefonte Car Works in town for the railroad industry. Bush purchased \$10,000 worth of stock in the company and served as its president. Bush also tracked down a person interested in establishing a nail works in Lock Haven. He redirected the entrepreneur to Bellefonte, gathered a group of influential townsmen, and helped establish the nail works in Bellefonte with General James Beaver at its head. One enterprise that did not pan out was an attempt to establish a narrow-gauge railroad to be entitled the Bellefonte, Buffalo Run and Philipsburg Narrow Gauge Railroad Company. While that did not come to fruition, the idea did in 1885 as a standard gauge rail line, the Bellefonte Central. Another 1873 project established a paper mill near the planning mill dam in partnership with “Messrs. Batchelor and Fisher of Lock Haven and Shively of Luzerne County.”<sup>4</sup> Bush also worked with other businessmen in Bellefonte, including Andrew Curtin, “for the transfer of a knitting machine company from Philadelphia.... The machines will be manufactured here [Bellefonte] and the work will give steady employment to about three hundred men.”<sup>5</sup>

January 23, 1879, Bush threw the social event of the year when his daughter Lizzie married Charles L. Callaway of Baltimore, Md. “When the hour arrived for the ceremony, St. John’s Protestant Episcopal Church was filled with the *elite* of Bellefonte and several distinguished guests from a distance.” The bride wore “a heavy claret-colored embossed satin, made with elaborate taste.” From the church the wedding party and guests adjourned to Daniel Bush’s

<sup>4</sup> *The Centre Reporter*, June 5, 1873

<sup>5</sup> *The Centre Reporter*, December 23, 1873

residence where he held the reception for the 125 guests. “The morning following the wedding flattering notices appeared in the *Philadelphia Press* and other city journals,” signaling the success of the event.<sup>6</sup>

Daniel G. Bush passed away September 23, 1886, after a lengthy illness. His impact on the community was noted in his obituary, his death “...removes from our midst one of the biggest-hearted, liberal-minded and enterprising citizens this section of the state has ever had. In his death, Bellefonte loses one who has done more to build up the town, to enlarge its business facilities, to add to its real wealth, and to improve it in every way, than all the other capitalists combined.”<sup>7</sup> Bush was laid to rest in Union Cemetery.<sup>8</sup>

By W. Charles Young

<sup>6</sup> *The Centre Democrat*, January 30, 1879

<sup>7</sup> “Daniel G. Bush,” USGenWebArchives, files. [usgwarchives.net/pa/centre/bios/bush-dan-g.txt](https://usgwarchives.net/pa/centre/bios/bush-dan-g.txt).

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Bush’s residence still exists, although greatly altered, as the V.F.W. in Bellefonte. The Bush Arcade burned down the year he passed. It was rebuilt in 1887 by his estate. The Bush House Hotel burned down in 2006. The McClain Block opposite the hotel was torn down starting in 1964 to establish Talleyrand Park. His home building largely survives on Spring Street and in Bush Addition (Valentine and Water Street area)



Daniel Bush gravestone, Credit to FindAGrave



## The Bush House is Burning

by Jimmy Ehrenfried, a fifth grade student at  
Bellefonte Elementary School who was  
watching the fire out of a classroom window  
on the 3rd floor, February 8, 2006

The fire is brightening up my eyes,  
everyone cries  
and I am frozen like the breeze from my  
toes.  
The smoke is crying, so am I.

I am inside the school.  
The smoke is churning.  
The Bush House is burning.  
The fire is laughing in my face,  
but I am happy that everyone is safe.

But the fire is at home base.  
The smoke is rising.  
Everyone is hypnotized.  
The fire fighters fight and fight,  
but the fire is too bright.  
People smoke.  
It feels like the Devil is poking  
us in our eye.  
But the fire just won't die.



HISTORIC BELLEFONTE, INC.

*"Celebrating A Timeless Heritage"*

**Historic Bellefonte, Inc.**

PO Box 14, Bellefonte PA 16823

HBI is a not-for-profit,  
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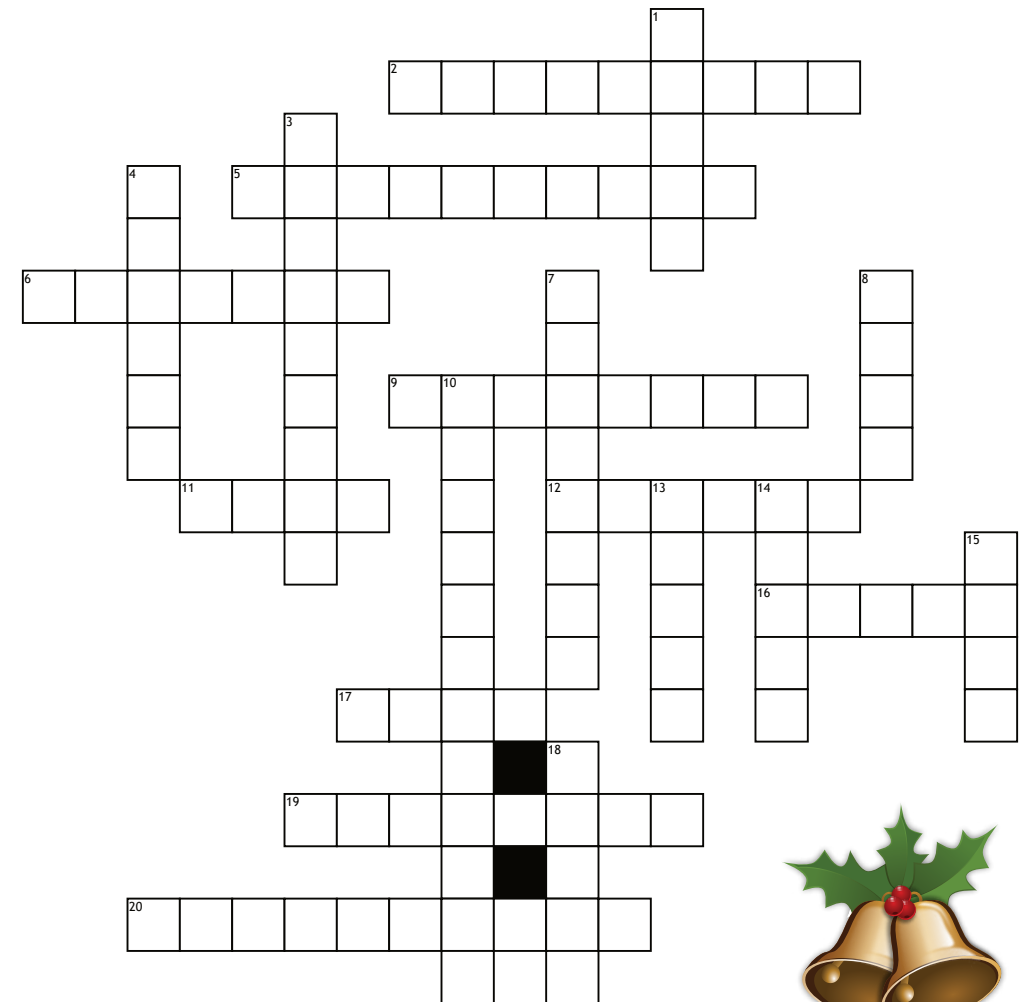
***Dedicated*** to the revitalization of  
Bellefonte and the preservation of  
the Borough's rich Historic,  
Cultural and Architectural Heritage.

***Through a volunteer structure,***  
HBI serves as an umbrella  
vehicle to coordinate community  
efforts to carry out its mission.

We are looking for a few good  
***Volunteers***  
for various tasks on our committees.

**Please feel free to attend**  
our monthly meeting at 6:30 pm  
on the second Thursday  
of each month at the  
Bellefonte borough offices

## 2025 Winter Edition



### Across

2. Bellefonte \_\_\_\_  
Christmas  
5. \_\_\_\_ Park  
6. Sunday  
Afternoon \_\_\_\_ Music  
9. horse-drawn \_\_\_\_  
11. Daniel G.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
12. author Jane \_\_\_\_  
16. \_\_\_\_ Claus

17. a form of  
literary art

19. Table of \_\_\_\_

20. Morris  
Cowdrick's middle  
name

### Down

1. Out Loud @ The  
\_\_\_\_ Factory  
3. Scariest House,  
The \_\_\_\_  
4. Arts and \_\_\_\_  
Show

7. Spice in  
Cowdrick House  
recipe

8. ice \_\_\_\_

10. art of designing  
buildings

13. essay  
"Sentimental \_\_\_\_"

14. a short piece of  
writing

15. St. \_\_\_\_ AME  
Church

18. \_\_\_\_ Cemetery

Across: 2. Victorian, 5. Tallieyrand, 6. Chamber, 9. Carriage, 11. Bush, 12. Santa, 17. Poem, 19. Contents, 20. Woolverson - Down: 1. Print, 3. Gatehouse, 4. Crafts, 7. Cardamom, 8. Rink, 10. Austen, 16. Santa, 17. Poem, 19. Contents, 20. Woolverson - Down:



# The First St. Paul AME Church: Fifty Years from Foundations to Flames

When Pastor P.E. Paul and lay leaders of Bellefonte’s St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal (AME) congregation went to bed on Saturday night, February 19, 1910, they expected to wake the next morning to wintry weather and another busy Sunday morning of worship and Sunday school with upwards of sixty parishioners in the congregation’s church on Halfmoon Hill. Perhaps there would be further discussion of how to mark the upcoming fiftieth birthday of that modest frame structure perched on the north side of St. Paul Street.

Certain senior members of the St. Paul flock—including long-time steward Abraham Valentine (“A.V.”) Jackson—could recall the church’s construction and festive dedication half a century earlier. Workmen had begun raising limestone foundation walls for the building late in 1859, setting hewn stones on a shelf of rocky ground created by blasting out a chunk of Halfmoon Hill. It was hardly an ideal construction site, but it had been donated to Bellefonte’s fledgling AME congregation for the purpose of church-building, and the congregation’s two-dozen members—some of whom had only recently escaped or been emancipated from slavery below the Mason-Dixon Line—had no means of acquiring a larger or more level building site.

The donors of the church parcel were Quaker ironmaster and mill-owner William A. Thomas and his wife Eliza, owners of most of Halfmoon Hill’s northeastern end. They lived in a stone farmhouse dubbed “The Wren’s Nest” on the west side of Spring Creek north of the construction site. In a 1909 history of the St. Paul congregation, church secretary William Mills described ironmaster Thomas as “a wealthy white gentleman, a member of the Society of Friends, and also an un-

questionable friend to the negro race. . . . [He was] also a bitter opponent to human slavery. . . . So strong was the sympathy of Mr. Thomas and his estimable companion, Mrs. Eliza Thomas, toward the fugitive slaves that their own fine private residence often afforded a shelter and hiding place for many men, women and children fleeing from the cruel hand of slavery.”

According to William Thomas’ great-grandson and biographer J. Thomas Mitchell, a dozen years before donating ground for the building of an AME church on Halfmoon Hill, the ironmaster had, “with the aid of several of his abolitionist friends, erected on his own land [immediately south of the future church parcel] a frame ‘Meeting House and School House’ for the negro population of Bellefonte, and also set aside a small tract of his land south of the new meeting house and school to be used as a settlement for these people.” The Quaker ironmaster was thus the first well-to-do Bellefusian approached in 1859 by trustees of Bellefonte’s AME congregation intending to furnish the congregation with a “more commodious” and church-like structure. Headed by the Rev. William Waugh Grimes—a noted abolitionist and Underground Railroad agent who had just been appointed “traveling pastor” for the AME Church’s Lewistown Circuit, which included Bellefonte—the building committee prevailed on Thomas to donate an adjoining plot of ground for church construction, and to help fund the building project. Within a few months, a foothold had been blasted out of Halfmoon Hill, and workmen were laying a firm foundation for a proper church.

Early in that process, Pastor Grimes led the small but enthusiastic congregation in a cornerstone-laying service. This involved congregants

placing financial offerings in a cavity carved into a block of limestone before it was mortared into a conspicuous position on the foundation wall. A.V. Jackson, then a lad of 10, slipped a whole precious dollar into that cavity, as he recalled many years later at an anniversary celebration. He had to confess, though, that shortly after the cornerstone-laying he had become “financially embarrassed, and [thinking] that his contribution still remained in the stone, determined if possible to get it out. He made the effort to get his dollar,” only to learn that the offerings placed into the stone “had been taken out and applied to the building project.” This confession “caused considerable laughter” among Jackson’s listeners.

The frame superstructure of the AME church was completed in the spring or early summer of 1860. Pastor Grimes and the building committee scheduled a dedication service for Sunday, July 29, 1860, inviting AME bishop Daniel A. Payne to deliver the dedicatory sermon. By the time of his ordination as the AME Church’s sixth bishop in 1853, Payne had served as a leader in the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, providing food, clothing, and temporary shelter for fugitives from slavery. He also assisted freedom seekers in escaping to Canada, which did not recognize the U.S. Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

At the dedication service held in the new church on Sunday, July 29, 1860, Bishop Payne was joined by Pastor Grimes, the Revs. James D. Lynch and Alexander W. Wayman of the Baltimore Conference, *Christian Recorder* editor Benjamin T. Tanner, and “a large concourse of people both white and colored,” according to William Mills. Mills’ report is confirmed by an article published a few days after the dedication in Belle-

fonte’s notoriously anti-abolitionist *Democratic Watchman*, which noted that “a large number of our white population attended the services. The preaching is represented as of a high order [and] the state of church finances is said to be in a promising condition.” “Excellent preacher” Bishop Payne lingered in Bellefonte long enough to deliver a sermon in Bellefonte’s Methodist Church, at the invitation of its pastor.

A drawing of the new AME church published in the *Democratic Watchman* depicted an open-gable-roofed frame building approximately 24 feet tall, 24 feet wide, and 48 feet long, standing on stone foundation walls rising approximately eight feet from the ground along the earthen cartway called “St. Paul Alley.”

This was the building—with late-nineteenth-century improvements including electrification, furnace heating, and the addition of a “basement story” for Sunday school and administrative use—in which Pastor Paul and his congregation expected to gather on Sunday morning, February 20, 1910. They woke that day, instead, to the smell of smoke and a terrible commotion in the church’s vicinity. Rushing to the scene, they found fireman playing streams of

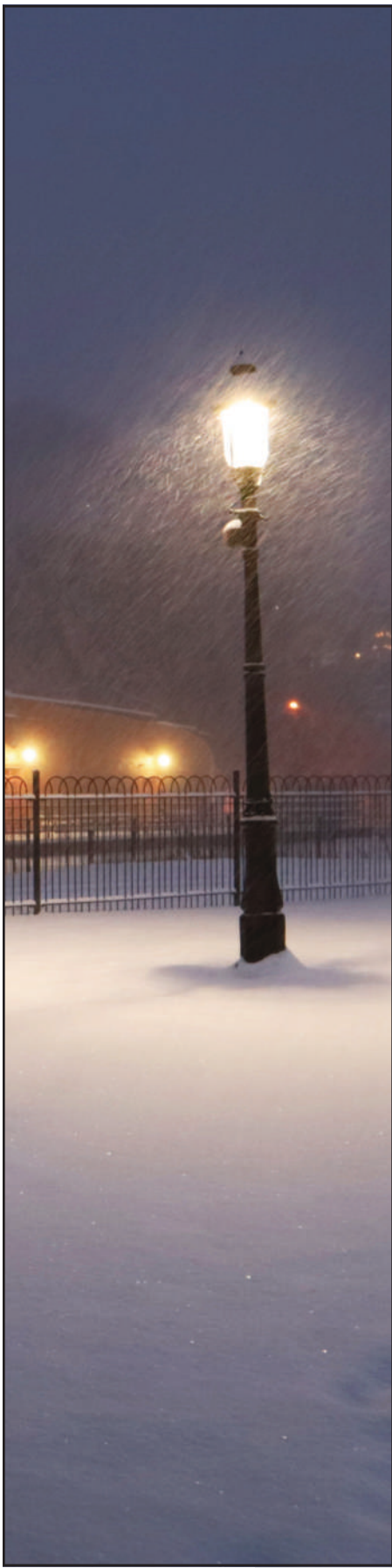
water over the fully-engulfed building, and “when the flames were finally extinguished, all that was left of the building were the blackened ruins of two walls, and these so badly damaged that they will have to be taken down,” the *Bellefonte Republican* reported. “It is supposed that the fire was caused by a spark from the furnace in the basement.”

The rising of the 50-year-old church’s brick replacement over the course of the next eight months will be related in a future article. For more history of Bellefonte’s AME congregation, see my “Roots of Bellefonte’s African American Methodist Episcopal Church” posts on the Black History in Centre County blog ([blkctrco.psu.edu/project-blog/blogarchive](http://blkctrco.psu.edu/project-blog/blogarchive)).

By Phil Ruth



First St. Paul AME Church illustrated in 1895, *Democratic Watchman*



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26



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