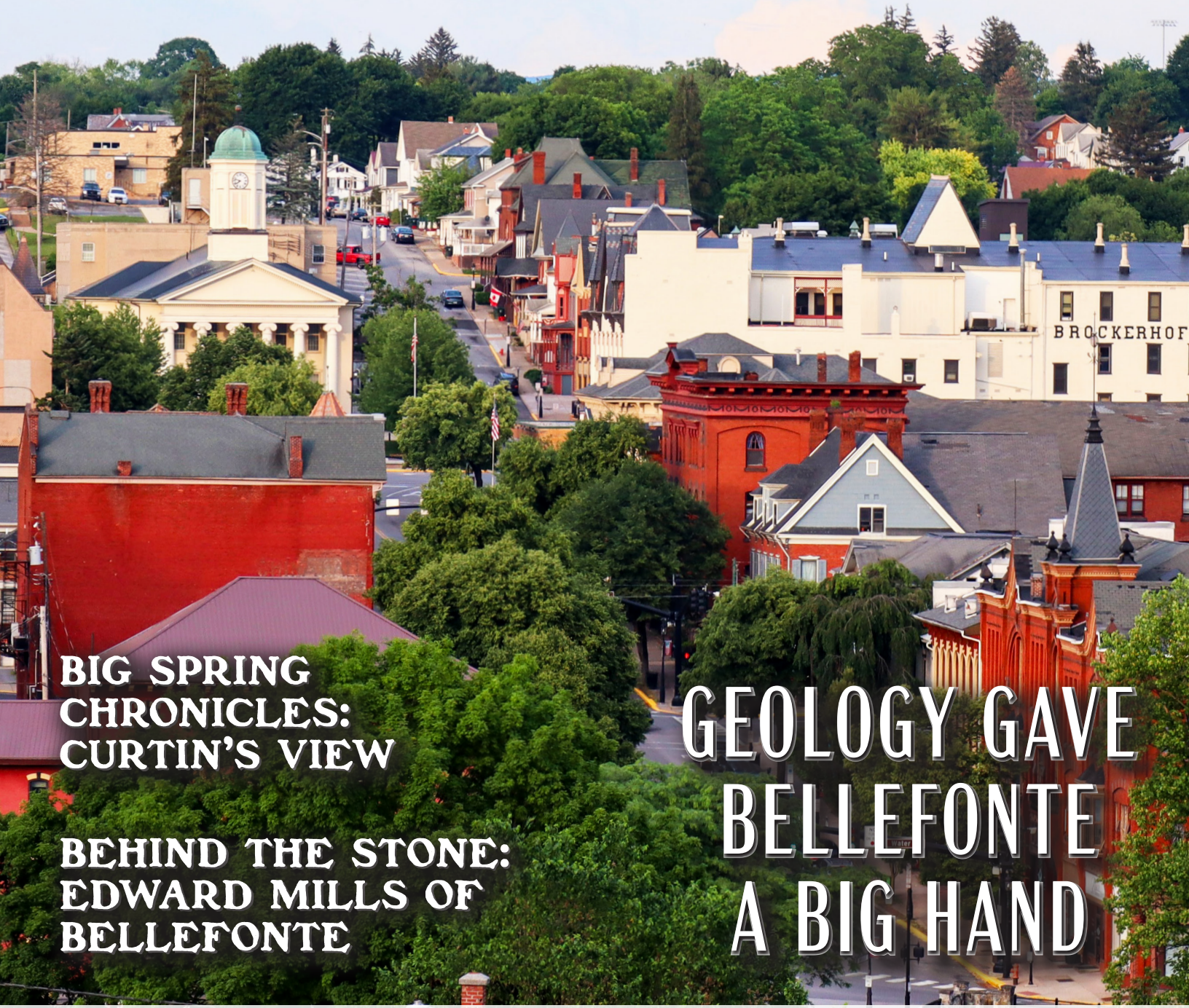
Issue No. 6 | Summer 2026

The Bell



GEOLOGY GAVE BELLEFONTE A BIG HAND

BIG SPRING CHRONICLES: CURTIN'S VIEW

BEHIND THE STONE: EDWARD MILLS OF BELLEFONTE

A Publication of the Bellefonte Historical and Cultural Association

From the Editor



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I am delighted to be the new editor of *The Bell*, a journal I see as a celebration of the spirit of Bellefonte, connecting Bellefonte of yore with Bellefonte of today; from its foundation in iron, lumber, and bricks to its present revival as a vibrant home to art, music, parks, and restaurants.

I invite you to join in the communal project that is *The Bell*—it is for and by all of us Bellefeutians and those who love Bellefonte. Give us your art, your poems, your photographs, stories, and memories. What are things about Bellefonte that have always interested you, or that you want to explore further, or strange or mysterious things you come across on your walks or see every day? Architecture, flora, fauna…?

There are so many quirky, old, interesting things going unnoticed by us that I thought it would be fun to institute a community scavenger hunt. We'll put a picture on the back of the journal, and you, reader, should find it. Those who can locate the item should write in and tell us where it is located, and from all the correct answers we will pull one at random—with that winning person getting a free membership to the Bellefonte Historical and Cultural Association, which comes with a subscription to *The Bell*. This prize is transferable in case the winner already has a membership.

This current issue brings us a return of Holly Hopkins's *Big Spring Chronicles*, this installment imagining what Andrew Curtin might have seen as he looked over Bellefonte of the 19th century in all its bustling glory—many buildings quite familiar to us today. And Charles Young has a new *Behind the Stone*, gleaning tidbits from the record of Edward Mills, buried in Union Cemetery but brought to life for us through Young's detailed research. Ralph Seeley gives us a glimpse of John Ardell, Bellefonte's lumber magnate who built the gorgeous Linn Street home we know now as "Our Fair Lady."

Please write me with your thoughts and ideas, I look forward to having many conversations.



Katie Novak
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Photo by Carla Cipro

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.

Table of Contents

2 From the Editor

5 President's Page

6 Behind the Stone: Edward Mills

10 A Bellefonte Lumber Baron

12 Geology Gave Bellefonte a Big Hand

16 Events Calendar

18 Big Spring Chronicles: Curtin's View

20 BHCA Is Looking Out For Your Mind

22 Backyard Memories: Beginning Beekeeping

25 Scene Around Bellefonte



COVER PHOTO CREDIT: Carla Cipro

President's Page

WHITHER BHCA?

Our membership is approaching one hundred individuals and families, the recent *Civil War Weekend in Bellefonte* was declared a success by participants, our Jitterbug Contest drew a big crowd during the Bellefonte Cruise, this year's *Summer Sounds* is off to a great start, our slowly developing new website is almost ready, we have money in the bank, and just about everybody loves our new journal, *The Bell*.

Right now, things are looking good. However, just a few years ago, BHCA had dwindled to a shadow of its earlier self. We stopped holding Board meetings and collecting membership dues. Fewer and fewer people showed up at our monthly meetings. Our old guard was getting really old and in some cases dying. Realizing our problem, we rallied. We amended our bylaws, found some new directors, and started gathering dues paying members. These new members and directors generated new initiatives. One new member became the founding editor of *The Bell*, and she turned it into something far beyond the little newsletter we originally intended. A new director who had been an art teacher started our very popular Art in the Open program. A dedicated Civil War reenactor joined BHCA and piloted the development of Camp Songer, the reenactor encampment which is the highlight of our *Civil War Weekend in Bellefonte*.

The new people brought in fresh ideas and extra energy. They revitalized BHCA. The big changes we made to our governance structure led to those new faces around the table. Unfortunately, the changes created another problem because new doesn't last. We amended our bylaws to promote turnover among the people managing BHCA and reaped the benefits. But now, it's time for many of those former new people to be replaced by a fresh tranche of even newer people. In the early days of BHCA, officers held onto their leadership positions for decades. Under our new rules, no one can continuously serve on our Board for more than four years. Theoretically, that's a good thing. Practically, it means we must scramble to find fresh directors to keep BHCA thriving.

Every February, the BHCA Board elects all its officers. I'm term limited and must leave the Board. Our Vice President, Romayne Naylor, is in the same situation. While I'm confident both of us will stick around as productive members, both Romayne and I have been quite active and will be missed. Unfortunately, no one seems anxious to take our places. Happily, our new Treasurer and new Secretary can stick around for a few more years, but we need to find a President and a Vice President.

Ideally, the work of BHCA takes place in committees, and we have a bunch of them. Our standing committees include the Programs Committee, the Promotion and Communications Committee, the Development Committee, the Historic Preservation Committee, and the Finance Committee. We also have ad hoc committees that oversee major events and programs. Accordingly, we have committees for Summer Sounds, the Civil War Weekend in Bellefonte, the Victorian Christmas Arts and Crafts Show, and *The Bell*. Most of these committees were created when we rewrote our bylaws and many are underpopulated.

As BHCA's activities expand and its old guard fades away, more people are required to further our mission. Right now, we could use extra hands in the areas of fundraising, budgeting, communications, architectural preservation, website management, event planning and management, and overall programming.

I know that Bellefonte is brimful of people possessing skills BHCA could use. A caravan of entrepreneurs, accountants, fundraisers, scholars, business people, artists, bankers, musicians, crafts people and writers winds through our charming downtown every day. BHCA's future flourishing, and perhaps even its survival, depends on finding and attracting a half-dozen talented individuals who will share some of their time and expertise with us so that we can make Bellefonte even more interesting.

If you like reading *The Bell*, catching a pop concert at the Gazebo, shopping at the Victorian Christmas Arts and Crafts Show, listening to poets, authors and historians, or you enjoy some of the other programs BHCA brings to Bellefonte, please consider joining us. Many hands make light work.

If you are moved to help us keep a good thing going, please contact me at cbproduce@comcast.net or (484) 331-4856.



Behind the Stone: Edward Mills

By W. Charles Young



Edward Mills gravestone, photo credit FindAGrave

Edward Mills was born in (approximately) 1832 in Pennsylvania. He appears in the 1850 census as living in the Bellefonte household of Sarah Hutchison, a Black woman aged 40. It is not stated as to whether Sarah was a relative. He is listed as being an eighteen-year-old laborer, with his brothers living there too: Lewis (age 22), Thomas (age 21), and William (age 13).

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, the Federal government relied on volunteer enlistments to fill the ranks of the army. The Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, authorized the recruitment of Black men by the Federal army, and those men were further encouraged to enlist by Frederick Douglass. Nonetheless, at that point in the war, volunteers of all colors were lagging. Thus Congress passed a conscription act, and all eligible men were required to register for the draft by the beginning of July 1863. Edward Mills registered on July 1 in Bellefonte. That registration recorded him as 32 years old, an ostler*, and married. Edward had married Sarah Ann Williams in 1857, and they would have a daughter, Emma Isabella Mills, born on February 6, 1864.

One month later, Mills was drafted into the Federal army on August 13, 1863. He was assigned to Company K, 6th United States Colored Infantry (USCI). Mills reported to the regiment at Camp William Penn in Philadelphia, where the regiment received its first training. On October 14, 1863, the 6th USCI left for Fort Monroe on the Virginia Peninsula and was assigned to a camp in the vicinity of Yorktown, Virginia. The regiment's time in the Yorktown area would last until May 1864.

While there, the 6th continued its training, built fortifications, and participated in several raids conducted by Federal troops. During this period, they were assigned to a brigade of Black troops that included the 4th, 5th, and 22nd USCI commanded by Colonel Samuel A. Duncan.

While at Yorktown, Mills's comrades reported him as suffering from respiratory problems.

The 6th saw their first serious combat on June 15, 1864, at Bailor's Farm in Virginia, against Confederate cavalry as they moved towards Petersburg, Virginia. On June 16, they participated in the capture of five Confederate fortifications on the outskirts of Petersburg with Brigadier General Edward Hincks's all-Black infantry division. Mills would survive both major combats unscathed.

The Black division was next utilized on fatigue duty digging the Dutch Gap Canal to pinch off a loop in the James River and bypass Confederate fortifications. Much of that summer was spent digging. In late September of 1864, Lieutenant General Ulysses Grant planned to attack both ends of the Confederate line around Richmond and Petersburg as a diversion to aid Major General Philip Sheridan's offensive in the Shenandoah Valley. One result was the Battle of New Market Heights involving Mills and the 6th USCI. Duncan's 5th and 6th USCI were chosen to lead the morning attack on September 29. One historian, James A. Price, described the stakes in his book *The Battle of New Market Heights:*

> *In the predawn darkness..., a blue-clad host was preparing to attack a strong line of Confederate entrenchments.... At this late stage of the war, officers had learned that the distance between an attacking column and its objective had to be covered as quickly as possible—men stopping to fire their muskets would slow down the advancing foot soldiers and expose their comrades to murderous fire from the enemy position. No, this line of Rebel trenches would have to be taken with sheer grit, determination and at the point of the bayonet.*

A second concern for the USCI was that the Confederacy declared "...slaves in flagrant rebellion are subject to death.... They cannot be recognized in any way as soldiers subject to the rules of war....summary execution must therefore be inflicted on those taken...." The message was clear: if a Black soldier was found wearing the uniform of the United States, he could be sent back into slavery or killed outright. Companies A and K of the 6th were sent forward as skirmishers, and the attack went forward. The 5th and 6th Regiments got to the enemy breastworks and were repulsed. Hohman's brigade of Black troops attacked next, pierced the rebel line, and drove the Confederates away. The bravery of the USCI was noticed. Twenty-four members of the two Black brigades were awarded the Medal of Honor for their courage. The 6th USCI suffered 210 casualties out of 367 men engaged.

Edward Mills was shot in the left leg and taken to the Fort Monroe hospital, where he stayed until his discharge in September of 1865. The length of his stay was not due to the gunshot wound, but his noted respiratory issues.

Mills died in Bellefonte on April 5, 1866, another casualty of the tragedy of the American Civil War. In his wife's efforts to acquire a pension for Edward's service, several affidavits were collected concerning his respiratory illness. Dr. George Potter swore in an affidavit of October 1871 that "consumption was the sole cause of his death and was contracted while in the service of the United States." Sgt. Charles Garner of Company K also confirmed that cause of death and added that Mills "...was unable to perform any kind of manual labor in consequence of his said disease."

Generations later, Edward Mills's nephews would go on to form a groundbreaking musical group—the Mills Brothers.



**An ostler is a man who looked after horses for people staying at an inn.*



Eastman Wise: ***Summer in Central Pennsylvania***, gouache, watercolor and collage

HISTORIC BELLEFONTE, INC.

"Celebrating A Timeless Heritage"

Historic Bellefonte, Inc.

PO Box 14, Bellefonte PA 16823

HBI is a not-for-profit, charitable organization.

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.



A Bellefonte Lumber Baron

By Ralph Seeley

The first lumbermen in the Black Moshannon area were William Underwood of Unionville in 1853, and Henry Prentiss of Maine in 1854. Underwood over-reached; he went bankrupt in one of the regular financial "panics," was pushed out of the local Quaker meeting, and ultimately left Pennsylvania for North Carolina. He was succeeded in 1874 by the most industrious lumberman of the era, John Ardell of Bellefonte.

Ardell expanded the 5,500 acres he acquired from Underwood to about 8,600. He partnered with another entrepreneur of Bellefonte and Wilkes-Barre, named E. M. Sturdevant, in both the lumbering and other Bellefonte businesses. In 1879, he built a large steam-powered sawmill not far from the present-day Black Moshannon park headquarters.

Ardell had a vertically integrated business empire at Black Moshannon: he controlled and provided for all facets of his operation. The output of boards and beams from his steam mill was carried by wagon down to Julian and put on railroad cars there. Then the wagons carried the flour back up to the Black Moshannon area—the flour that had been milled at his business in Julian, run by his brother.

Ardell employed many teamsters (one hundred and fifty, at one point in time) from around the area, mostly from the hollows below the Allegheny Front and from the townships east of the Bald Eagle ridge. There was, most likely, an equal number of men manning the timbering and sawmill operations.

Some of the workers may have come over the Rattlesnake Pike from the Philipsburg direction. Some of the food and feed probably came from other farms in the Bellefonte/Nittany Valley direction, in addition to that coming from the Bald Eagle Valley. Everything had to be brought into the operation. The workers lived in a linear village of temporary housing along the Beaver Road, and at a place called the Farm Camp on the present airport grounds at Black Moshannon.

Ardell himself visited his lumber enterprise from Bellefonte. First, he lived in a home on the corner of Allegheny and Linn Streets, but William Frederick Reynolds bought the lot and demolished Ardell's house to build the Reynolds mansion in 1885. Ardell had already built his second house further up on Linn Street, a fanciful Second Empire house at 313 E. Linn Street, constructed in 1880-1884. It still stands today, beautifully restored—now known as "Our Fair Lady".

How did John Ardell oversee his operation on the Allegheny Plateau from the secure and pleasant environs of Bellefonte? He must have had several foremen for the different parts of his operation, plus at least one bookkeeper, all on site. Ardell had to check on the operation periodically. Could he manage to do that in a one-day round trip, pulled by a spanking team of splendid horses, or was he forced to stay overnight in the rough accommodations of the tavern at the ford over Little Moshannon? How did he get the payroll to the operation? Did it go by armed guards on the stagecoach? The answers to these questions await further research.

After Ardell, further development of lumber tracts west of the Allegheny Front was done by entrepreneurs from Philipsburg.

For further reference: See Greate Buffaloe Swamp, by Ralph Seeley, third edition, which is housed in the Centre County Library & Historical Museum, Paterno Library of Penn State, and Schlow Centre Region Library.



John Ardell's former home – now known as "Our Fair Lady Bed & Breakfast" (Photo by Tamara Schuster)

Geology Gave Bellefonte a Big Hand

By Philip Ruth

As Bellefonte pedestrians can attest, ours is an exceptionally hilly borough. Promontories abound, and some slopes are impressively steep. Bellefonte's hilliness has defined its character from the town's late-eighteenth-century inception. The first major publications to profile the borough—Sherman Day's 1843 *Historical Collections of the State of Pennsylvania*, and Israel Rupp's 1847 *History and Topography of Northumberland, Huntingdon, Mifflin, Centre, Union, Columbia, Juniata and Clinton Counties, Pa.*—included illustrations of the town as seen from a rise near the present intersection of N. Allegheny and W. Linn Streets. Text accompanying the 1843 illustration declared the borough "so placed on and among the hills as to present rather an irregular, but picturesque, appearance."

Bellefonte lies within what geologists call the Valley and Ridge Province of the Appalachian Mountains, created over vast spans of time as tectonic forces drove up mountains once higher than the Himalayas, then allowed them to be worn down into gentler waves. When you climb a Bellefonte hill, you are walking up the

Bellefonte, the county seat, is delightfully situated on elevated ground near Spring cr., in the midst of a limestone valley, abounding in the elements of mineral and agricultural wealth. The town, although regularly laid out, is so placed on and among the hills, as to present rather an irregular, but picturesque appearance. When seen from the hill near the academy, it has much the aspect of a European village. The annexed view was taken from near the Milesburg road, north of the town.



Bellefonte.

View of Bellefonte circa 1843, from Sherman Day's Historical Collections.



View of Bellefonte circa 1847, from Israel Rupp's History and Topography of Northumberland, Huntingdon, Mifflin, Centre, Union, Columbia, Juniata and Clinton Counties, Pa.

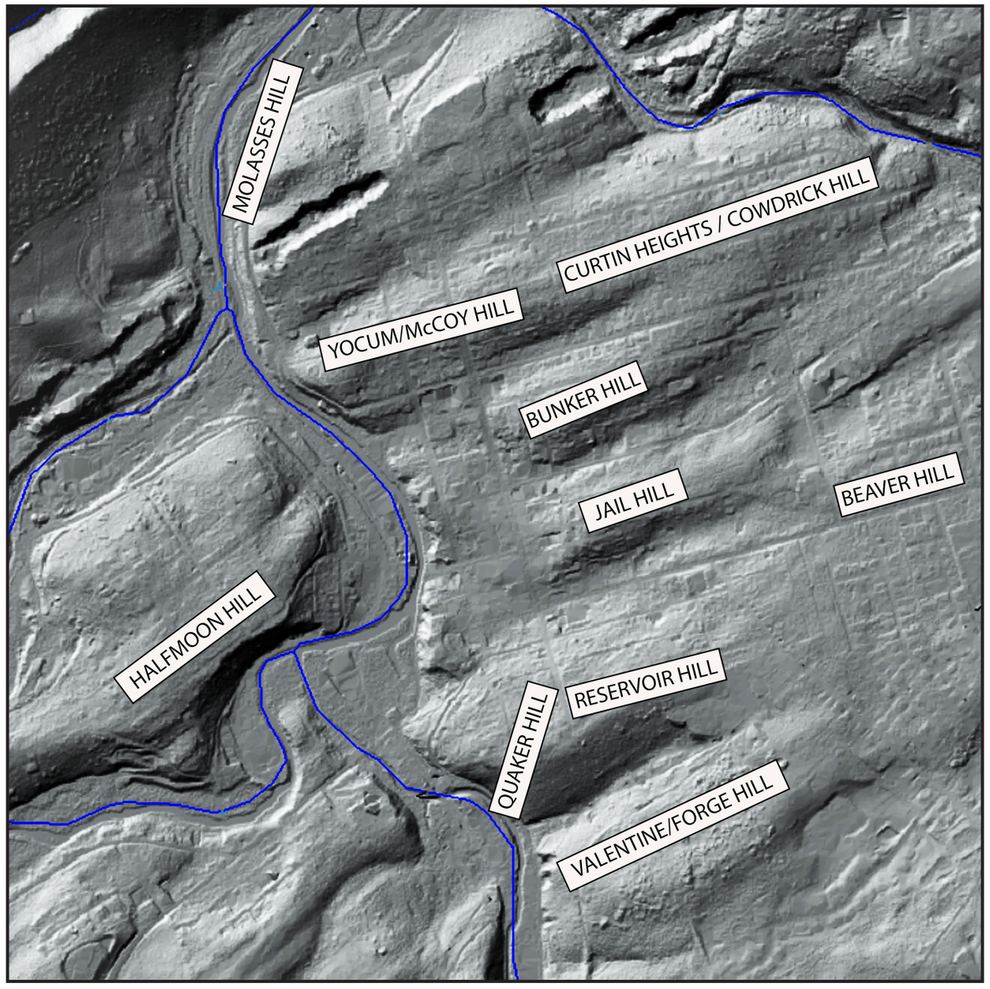


1870 Northward view of Bellefonte from Reservoir Hill

tilted, weathered edge of one of those ancient rock layers. Beneath much of the borough, the bedrock is limestone and dolomite—remnants of ancient ocean floors later compressed into rock that dissolves readily in slightly acidic rain and snowmelt. As water percolates underground it slowly eats away this rock, creating cavities and springs that sometimes trigger small surface collapses. Instead of a smooth valley floor, this process produces a broken landscape of knobs, slopes, and sudden dips—the "irregular" topography for which Bellefonte is famous. Over millennia, Spring Creek has sharpened that relief, cutting a channel that left some surfaces stranded high as hills while others became creek-side benches. From this long interplay of rock, water, and time emerged the grid of pitched streets, perched neighborhoods, and sweeping views that inspired Bellefonte poet Julia Spicher Kasdorf to nickname her adopted hometown "San Francisco of the East."

Years ago, while trying to sort out early warrant maps, surveys, and metes-and-bounds descriptions for the first division of the Spring Creek watershed into land tracts, I downloaded a hillshade relief image of the Bellefonte area. On that shaded surface a pattern of spines and flats emerged that looked roughly like a hand: Halfmoon Hill as the broad thumb, Talleyrand Park as the palm, with "fingers" pointing northeast through the borough's midsection. Those fingers are spines of erosion-resistant rock—Bellefonte's famous hills.

I wondered what names had been applied to—or epithets hurled at—those hills over the years. I soon learned that folks have been curious about that for years. In an article published in the November 18, 1959, edition of the *Centre Daily Times*, Bellefonte historian J. Thomas Mitchell reported being "asked at different times why apparently fixed names seem to be applied to the elevated portions of the town of Bellefonte." His research revealed that "about the time of the Civil War, one of the schoolteachers of the town began to emphasize the fact that Bellefonte, like Rome, was built on seven hills." The schoolteacher "styled these places as follows," wrote Mitchell, who then identified *eight* hills:



"**Bunker Hill**" was that section centering at Lamb and Ridge Streets. At that time it was the section devoted principally to the shacks inhabited by Negro families. . . . The reason for the name I have not been able to discover.

"**Jail Hill**," of course, was where the wreck of the County jail now stands.

"**Reservoir Hill**" was where the town authorities were beginning to build the water reservoir when the [Civil] war broke out.

"**Halfmoon Hill**" [rising west of the railroad tracks] still retains that title. The long hill is literally shaped like a half-moon.

The land at western Curtin St. was known by several names. "**Yocum Hill**," or "**Yocum's Woods**," was one style. [Seth H.] Yocum had purchased all the old "McCoy and Linn" farm north of Curtin St. He had been our member of Congress for one term [1878-79]. It was also referred to as "**McCoy Hill**" because of [Frank] McCoy's big brick home facing the creek [now addressed as 299 W. Linn St.].

The section of eastern Curtin St. was variously known as "**Curtin Heights**" or "**Cowdrick Hill**." [Morris] Cowdrick built what was then the isolated brick house now the property of Judge Arthur Dale [363 E. Linn St.]. For years eastern Linn St. was the "lane to the Armor farm" and Cowdrick's house was "out in the country" in those days.

"**Beaver Hill**" was at the eastern end of Bishop St. where the [Hugh N.] McAllister residence still stands.

"**Quaker Hill**" completes the list and is marked by the graveyard enclosed by its high stone wall."

I placed labels over those promontories on my relief map (see illustration).

I also labeled a couple of hills not mentioned by either the unidentified mid-nineteenth-century schoolteacher or historian Mitchell, perhaps because they stand on the edge of town. One is Valentine Hill (a.k.a. Forge Hill), which overlooked Reuben Valentine's stately "Burnham Place" estate and the Valentine and Thomas Iron Works along Logan Branch. At the opposite (northern) end of Bellefonte, N. Allegheny Street extends southward from Route 144 by climbing Molasses Hill. According to a contributing author of *Bellefonte: Fountain of Governors (1976)*, the hill was named sometime "before 1900 when this route was heavily used for traffic to Milesburg, [and] it was decided to rebuild the roadbed. It was scraped and loads of new soil were spread. However, most of the soil was red clay. When it rained, the hill became a sticky mess on wagon wheels, boots, etc. The mud was like molasses. To solve the problem, many wagon loads of slag from Harmony Forge were spread over the road, then tamped into the bed, but the name Molasses stuck."

No doubt some of these hills were known by other names now long forgotten. I stumbled on one such name—mercifully consigned to the scrapheap of history—as I researched the history of the long-gone African Methodist Episcopal Zion log church on E. Logan Street between S. Penn and S. Ridge Streets (that history appears in the blog archive of Black History in Centre County, Pennsylvania at https://blkctrco.psu.edu). The cluster of humble houses built in that vicinity by Bellefonte's earliest Black residents in the 1830s and 40s—extending from the south side of Bishop Street up to a ridge at the eastern end of Reservoir Hill—constituted an enclave that some Bellefontians referred to as "N _____ Town." The ridge, by extension, was "N_____ Town Hill."

Today, most of us navigate Bellefonte's hills in cars and may not consider the challenge these hills represented to housekeepers, laundresses, cooks, gardeners, and coachmen who traversed them to serve the needs of finer homes, then returned to their own small cottages on one hill or another. In 2024, Felecia Davis, Penn State associate professor of architecture, helped create a mobile art installation about Black settlement in Bellefonte, displayed in The Print Factory, as part of her work as a co-founder of the Black Reconstruction Collective. She was struck by the fact that Bellefonte's four largest Black neighborhoods were located on four different hills (Halfmoon, Reservoir, Bunker, and Jail Hills). In many American cities, Davis noted, Black communities tended to cluster on bottom land, near water. Professor Davis hopes to continue this inquiry into Bellefonte's topography and social history, exploring how the borough's terrain shape lives and neighborhoods.

2026 EVENTS CALENDAR

July 5	Summer Sounds in the Gazebo, Anchor & Arrow (BHCA)
July 12	American Pioneer Revolutionary War Days (BHRR & Curtin Village)
July 12	Bingo on the Bald Eagle (BHRR)
July 12	Summer Sounds in the Gazebo, Tommy Wareham (BHCA)
July 18	Bellefonte in Bloom Bouquet Crawl (Downtown Merchants)
July 19	Summer Sounds in the Gazebo, Walter Survivor (BHCA)
July 26	Summer Sounds in the Gazebo: Deacons of Dixieland (BHCA)
August 2	Summer Sounds in the Gazebo: Bellefonte Community Band (BHCA)
August 3	Art in the Open begins: paint available at the Bellefonte library and available through September (BHCA)
August 7-8	Bellefonte Arts & Crafts Fair (HBI)
August 9	Summer Sounds in the Gazebo: Nittany Valley Wranglers (BHCA)
August 13	Lecture: Benjamin Franklin and the Revolution at Home, Carla Mulford (BHCA)
August 16	Summer Sounds in the Gazebo: Jonny Bull (BHCA)
August 23	Summer Sounds in the Gazebo: Denny Taylor (BHCA)
September 4	Out Loud in Bellefonte: Abby Minor, local launch of Infinity Ballot (BHCA)
September 10	Lest We Forget: R. Thomas Berner will present John O'Hara and me (BHCA)
October 2	Out Loud in Bellefonte: Shara McCallum, local launch of Behold (BHCA)
November 6	Out Loud in Bellefonte: Writing about Place, an evening with Gabeba Baderoon (BHCA)

More information on these events can be found on the websites of the sponsoring organizations. Non-profit organizations may submit events for inclusion in future listings to Katie Novak, bellefontebat@gmail.com. Submission does not guarantee publication.

CONTACTS FOR VOLUNTEERS

Bellefonte Historical & Cultural Association (BHCA)

Membership
Civil War Weekend
Jitterbug Contest
Joseph Griffin:
cbproduce@comcast.net

Art in the Open
Kathy Breidenbaugh:
breidengaugh.k@gmail.com

Summer Sounds
Tom Wilson:
centretainment@verizon.net

Sunday Afternoon Chamber Music Series
Victorian Christmas Arts & Crafts Fair
Jim Dunne:
jhdunne@comcast.net

Bellefonte Historical Railroad Society (BHRS)

Volunteers
bellefontetrain.org/membership

Train Rides
bellefontetrain.org/train

Bellefonte Intervalley Area Chamber of Commerce

Janie Provan: Jprovan124@gmail.com, 814-355-2917

Downtown Bellefonte, Inc. (DBI)

thomascrist73@gmail.comt

Historic Bellefonte, Inc. (HBI)

Volunteers
First Responders Weekend
Historic Bellefonte Cruise
Halloween Parade
Pat McCool:
PAMP@dejazzd.com

Santa House
Downtown Decorating
Christmas Tree Lighting
Romayne Naylor: 814-571-0106

Bellefonte Arts & Crafts Fair
Juanita Lose:
fair@bellefontefair.org

Hometown Heroes Banners
250 America Parade and Celebration
Deb Burger: 4vets@comcast.net

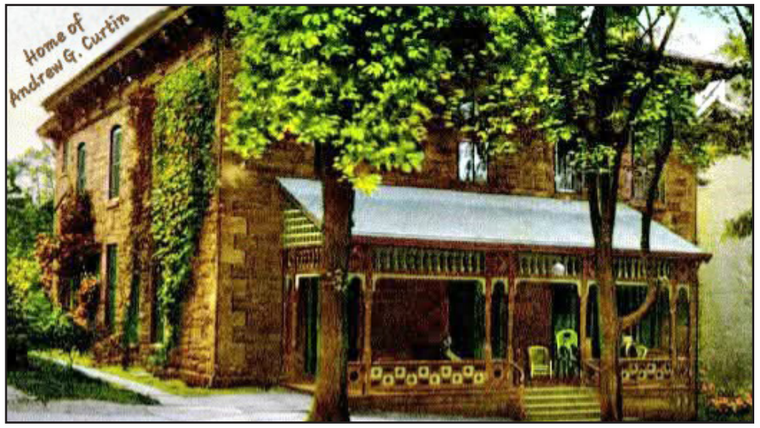
Bellefonte Victorian Christmas
Dave Provan & Phil Breidenbaugh:
christmasinbellefonte@gmail.com

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.

Big Spring Chronicles: Curtin's View

By Holly Hopkins (with contributions from Larry Boone)

Andrew Gregg Curtin, memorialized in bronze, stands high on a granite pedestal in front of the Centre County Courthouse. His likeness gazes down High Street, as if surveying the growth of his hometown, and the generations he hoped would benefit from the decisions he made. Talking about this with my friend Larry, we started to wonder what Bellefonte looked like in the era of Curtin. If two hundred years ago he stood where he stands now, what would he have seen?



Andy, as his friends and family called him, was born April 22nd, 1815, in a stone house on the corner of what is now Allegheny Street and Cherry Lane. As a child, he would have been able to see the Courthouse (built in 1806) from a bedroom window. His home, and probably other Federalist style residences would have existed long before the Brockerhoff House Hotel (1866), built on that corner and still standing today. He may have played with the grandchildren of Colonel James Dunlop, whose house was one of the earliest built (1795) just down High Street. Andy attended the prestigious Bellefonte Academy (1805), built high on a hill overlooking the big spring, where he was educated in Latin, grammar, mathematics, science, geography, music and athletics. He attended preparatory schools in Harrisburg and Milton, was accepted into the Dickinson School of Law in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and graduated in 1837. He returned to his parents' home, now known as the Curtin Mansion (1831), was admitted to the Centre County bar, and opened a law office with his partner John Blanchard on Allegheny Street. This would have been the same block where the Crider Exchange building (1889) stands now.

While Curtin's heart was always in Bellefonte, his view changed in order to improve not just his community, but his state and eventually the nation. He entered the political field in the early 1840's, campaigning for the Whig party and then the newly formed Republican party across Pennsylvania. By 1845 he was appointed Secretary of the Commonwealth and Superintendent of Public Instruction by Governor Pollock. Curtin was a strong supporter of the Union war effort and presidential hopeful, Abraham Lincoln. He accepted the nomination for Pennsylvania's fifteenth Governor in 1860, sharing the win with Honest Abe who became the sixteenth President of the United States. So close became their relationship, that on April 10th, 1861, Curtin received a personal letter from the Executive Mansion stating "I think the necessity for being ready increases. Look to it." The Civil War began two days later. Curtin personally organized the famous "Pennsylvania Reserves," a volunteer force of more than fourteen thousand men who saved our nation's capital from Confederate capture following the battle of Bull Run. He secured Lincoln's attendance at Gettysburg and was seated beside him as he delivered his famed address. He helped implement proper burial grounds like the Soldier's National Cemetery and proposed state funded schools for children who were orphaned during the war. It is no wonder his honorary title was "The Soldier's Friend".



After the war and his term as Governor was over, Curtin gladly retired home to Bellefonte and built a large limestone house on High Street (1868) with a view of the mountains. By this time, he and his wife Katharine had eight children; the youngest would have been nine years old. He had his personal desk sent home on the train, and it is still displayed by the Elks, who have used his residence as their lodge since 1909. His retirement from politics was short lived, as President Ulysses S. Grant appointed him to be the United States Minister to Russia from 1868-1872. A final political calling involved a switch to the Democratic party and serving three terms in the House of Representatives until 1887. In the autumn of his life, he was regarded as a true hometown hero. Governor Daniel Hastings was quoted saying "When silver-haired Andy Curtin appeared on the streets of Bellefonte, every child smiled upon him, and every dog wagged his tail."



Photo by Holly Hopkins

At that time, Curtin would have seen a town filled with massive architecture and bustling residents (population approximately 4,000). Records show he had an account at the First National Bank (1873), which he likely visited before shopping at the Bush Arcade's (1887) shoe store, tin shop, bakery or apothecary. Chances are he frequented the Hofbrau restaurant (1887) and the Garman Opera House (1890) for some good food and entertainment. He may have spent time enjoying a few libations at the Bush House (1869), where he could also see the newly built passenger train station (1889) and watch the steam engines puffing away. On Sundays he worshipped at the First Presbyterian Church (1870) where he served as an elder and trustee. His final Sunday spent in Bellefonte was October 7th, 1894. The Temple Court building was finished that same year; and like Andrew Gregg Curtin's legacy, it still exists today.

I invite you to stand in the center of town and take time to appreciate how lucky we are to be in Bellefonte. Better yet, look for a new cafe or a small business you've never visited before. It may not ensure that you'll be cast in bronze, but it will certainly make someone's day!



BHCA Is Looking Out For Your Mind

By Joseph Griffin

Human experiences are wondrously varied. Some episodes in our lives are ephemeral, like a sunset, a fleeting expression on a face, or a beautiful musical passage. Their meaning belongs to a moment. But other things that happen to us are long-lasting, deeper, slower, and profoundly connected with other phenomena.

BHCA trades in both kinds of experiences. We're best known for our ephemeral offerings: Summer Sounds concerts in Talleyrand Park, Sunday Afternoon Chamber Music concerts, authors reading their work at Out Loud programs, and even the Jitterbug Contest. Performers perform, the audience experiences the performance, and then it's over. Hopefully wonderful, but assuredly transient.

On the other hand, BHCA strives to present abiding programming. Consider our sometimes heroic efforts to preserve Bellefonte's historic architecture. Could there be a more explicit instance of fighting ephemerality? In fact, we sometimes side with the past against the present.

BHCA also promotes enduring experiences through subtler programming. Over the past few years, BHCA has embraced painting, literature, and history to complement its performing arts and historic preservation efforts. Although we trust these newer programs are valuable in themselves, they serve a deeper purpose. Painting, literature, and history nurture a vital component of the human psyche threatened by the modern world – our precious attention. These three disciplines anchor us in the formerly benign stream of consciousness that now grows ever more rapid as technology floods our minds with distractions.

Dr. Gloria Mark of the University of California, Irvine has studied the attention spans of Americans on workplace screens for decades. In 2004, her team determined that the average attention span of workers was about two and a half minutes. By 2023, it was down to 47 seconds, and half the workers studied had attention spans of less than forty seconds.

Other researchers have noted a near-universal loss of reading skills among children and adults around the world. At least part of this deterioration is related to our attenuated attention. Many people find themselves no longer able to read a long complex text with comprehension. We have learned to skim, to take in small bits of text served up by our phones, to rely on short AI explainers, and, increasingly, to depend on short-form video. This erosion of our ability to read deeply shoves us relentlessly toward superficiality. Surely, if we can no longer imbibe whatever is complex and subtle, neither can we originate it. Our intellectual and spiritual diet of highly processed, easy-to-absorb ideas and images must inevitably lead to a simplified and childlike interior. The powers and perceptions granted to us by six thousand years of increasing human sophistication are now at risk. Dispensing with the intellectual apparatus developed over the past few millennia is bringing us closer to the sensibilities of our prehistoric ancestors.

A concrete example may be helpful. Abraham Lincoln famously debated Senator Stephen Douglas seven times in 1854. The format for each debate was straightforward: one candidate would speak for an hour, his opponent would have 90 minutes for rebuttal, and then the first would respond for another half hour. These confrontations were of great popular interest, taken down by shorthand, and printed in newspapers across the nation. Imagine a modern listener attending to this sentence uttered by Lincoln well into the second hour of the first debate.

> *I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world - enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites - causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity, and especially because it forces so many really good men amongst ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty - criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting that there is no right principle of action but self-interest.*







Remembering the Biden/Trump debates from 2024, you can judge for yourself how much rhetorical progress we've made in 170 years.

Of course, BHCA can't stay the falling tide that threatens to ground our spirits on the muddy bottom of human consciousness. Nevertheless, it can provide needed encouragement and appealing opportunities to buttress the very powers of attention that modern technology has been undermining. Let's look at what's on the menu.

BHCA's *Art in the Open* program will be offered again this August. Participants receive a canvas and a collection of paint and brushes. Then, they complete a painting to be exhibited at the Bellefonte Library during September. In 2025, around fifty people spent quality time working on their canvases, exercising not only their art but also their attention. You can't paint a picture without paying attention to it. The same can't be said for watching a video about painting.

History of any sort is not at all ephemeral because it tries to hold on to the past long enough to explain it. This year's *Civil War Weekend in Bellefonte* featured ten scholarly lectures about the causes, prosecution, and consequences of the American Civil War plus an extensive sale of books about it. Those books and lectures demanded considerable attention to follow and understand them. The *Weekend* was a veritable festival for focused attention.

BHCA offers occasional lectures at the Bellefonte Library requiring far more attention than a *TikTok* session. Sometimes the lectures are historical, such as Carla Mulford's talk on the educational philosophy of Benjamin Franklin or Phil Ruth's illustrated lecture on the early years of the AME congregation in Bellefonte. Other lectures are part of the *Lest We Forget* series about deceased twentieth-century American authors. Its goal is to encourage people to read wonderful books that have slipped out of the current literary conversation. So far, we have only discussed John Steinbeck and F. Scott Fitzgerald, but there are many future possibilities. We hope to offer talks on Toni Morrison, Ernest Hemingway, John Updike, William Faulkner, J. D. Salinger, James Baldwin and others. Deep reading is likely the most effective antidote to what's ailing our ability to attend.

A distinctive celebration of the art of reading occurred last September when BHCA staged a public reading of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* outside the Bellefonte Library. Ten dedicated readers invested over three and a half hours reading this little masterpiece in public from start to finish.

By its very nature, the Bellefonte Historical and Cultural Association looks longingly into the past. Where else would you search for history and culture? BHCA is part of no vanguard, unless it be that minor margin of society concerned with preserving the social, spiritual, and intellectual prowess developed by our ancestors but threatened by our technologies. Fortunately, BHCA provides plenty of enlightening entertainment while manning the bulwarks guarding the human soul against the encroaching machines. Put down your phone and think about it.

Backyard Memories: Beginning Beekeeping

By Katie Novak

The bee man's wife called me Monday afternoon from a cell phone in the bee van and said, "We're back from Georgia and we've got the bees - we'll be home at 5:30, and you can pick them up tonight or tomorrow". We weren't quite done constructing the hives as they'd returned much sooner than expected, but Alex drove to Loganton and got the bees and we stayed up late that night hammering and painting and gluing and constructing the two hives. The bees were in two boxes on the floor in the basement where we worked, and the cats went wild, crouching in front of them with their tails snapping back and forth, batting their paws at them until I finally closed them in a cabinet to spare them. The bees, I mean.



Photo by Katie Novak

The next evening after work we took the hives, or "supers," to the backyard and Alex set about making sugar water, as you have to feed newly installed bees until flowers bloom. The sugar water should be a 50% solution, simple enough, but Alex had gotten some fancy recipe using thyme and chamomile from the organic bee lady he'd been talking to, and suddenly it was this huge, time-consuming procedure where he had to measure everything by using all the pots and graduated containers in the house.

I said, "Do you want the thyme in a tea strainer?"

"No, she said she just throws it in." I doubted him, but sprinkled it straight in.

We weighed whether to add medicinal chemicals, decided yes we should and added them, which became a whole new measuring production.

At this point I'm really starting to worry out about daylight, it's stop-and-go raining, and our three-year-old daughter is beginning to melt down which is making Alex increasingly tense. It's 7:15 and the kitchen is a mess and we're still not ready. At 7:40 I call the neighbors and beg them to take the child so we can get the bees in. They do, and Alex and I don our bee gear (mine never came so I was wearing Alex's which was much too big and frustratingly falling over my eyes; Alex wore his Dad's), and went outside at dusk in a drizzle, feeling full of trepidation, as you might imagine.

The bees travel in a pine frame box which is about the size of a small shoebox. The front and back are metal screening tacked onto the wooden frame, and there are hundreds of bees in there. Alex thought thousands but I'll stick by upper hundreds - but who knows? The two boxes were buzzing like mad and radiating heat. Fascinating, but also disturbingly horror-movie-ish.

You don't have to smoke the bees the first time you put them in the hive because they're already in shock from being moved around in a cage, but you should spritz them heavily with the sugar water, because they can't do much without cleaning themselves, so they're otherwise occupied from aggression. There is a covered hole at the top of each box with a nylon ribbon coming out of it. This is attached to the Queen's cage-within-a-cage. You have to take the top off the box, pull the food can out which has pinholes and sugar water in it, and then you pull the nylon ribbon and the Queen's cage comes out. That is a little box about the size of a rosin box for a fiddle bow. It's also screened on one side, and the Queen is in there with her abdomen painted with a red dot so you know Who She Is, and then there are a couple worker bees in there to serve Her. There is a hole at the end, and it is plugged with "candy" (not really in quotes because it is candy), and then a little cork. You have to pull the cork out with a nail, then use the nail to put a hole through the candy, trying not to impale the Queen. You put that in the hive upside down so the bees can get used to Her smell, and they all eat away at the candy until in a couple days they have freed Her. That's the plan, anyway.

So Alex pulls out this tiny little nail. Keep in mind, it's getting really dark, bees are doused but vaguely active, and human tensions are high. (It's also totally interesting and exciting.) I see him fiddling with the tiny little nail and I mutter about how it's not big enough, which it isn't, so I go into the house and downstairs to get an appropriate, large nail. Alex makes the hole, we put Her in, then knock the box with hoi polloi bees out into the hive. I'm worried that they're going to drown in their feeding trough and so putting little twigs in there (they said keep things floating in birdbaths or any water on the premises so the bees don't drown - they say bees don't drown - they say so many contradictory things). Alex gets testy



Photo by Katie Novak

because I'm leaving the hive open too long with my fussing so we put it together, and go to the next one, which I'm going to do.

First, the organic thyme leaves which were not put in a strainer clog the sugar water spritzer nozzle, so I can't spray and my bees aren't as docile as they might be. Then, the nylon ribbon becomes detached from the Queen's cage and it falls into the pit of bees, so I have to put my hand all the way into the box to retrieve it. I'm highly nervous and wanting to strangle my spouse with his last minute, into-the-dark feel-good herbal concoction. I dig my gloved hand in there, and bees are crawling all over it, and I'm realizing I was careless about putting on my glove, because we'd been vacillating on gloves/no gloves, and I just decided to throw one on my left hand last minute. So bees are crawling between my glove and sleeve and I'm doing everything I can to stay calm and cool. I very slowly and carefully pull the Queen's box out from the teeming cluster, and...and...Alex starts slapping his pockets and saying "Wait... where'd I put the nail..." He starts uselessly shining the flashlight on the five trillion decaying, wet leaves on the ground. I said tersely "go get another one *right now*."

He runs back in the house, and as I anxiously wait, carefully holding the Queen, I start feeling bees on my legs under my pants. I'm freaking...I'm freaking...and then I feel them in my crotch. I was wearing my post-maternity cords and they're quite roomy and hang low, so I knew it wasn't like when you see a roach and you can't stop thinking roaches are crawling on you. I knew I had a crotch full of bees. Then, I felt a sting above my ankle, and then, a sting on the inside of my upper thigh—that nice soft spot which rubs right against the one on the opposite leg. On some people. On me.

So I'm sitting there saying "Okay, stay cool. You've got a crotch full of bees. You're getting stung. Just remain calm." And as my (still only two) stings are swelling with pain, my head is swelling with fury, thinking of every time Alex has slapped his pockets and gasped "WHERE'S MY WALLET?!?! Oh, here it is." "WHERE ARE OUR TICKETS?!?!?! Oh, here they are." I'm thinking of every tool of mine I find lying around not returned to its proper place, and all those items which are inexplicably missing when I need them most desperately. The anger has made my head swell into a big, red, steam-filled pressure cooker and Alex comes out of the mud room and I open my mouth and out comes, for all our neighbors to hear: "F--K YOU ALEX!!! *F--K* you and your *NO NAIL!!!*"

Of course Alex just says "Huh?" and I tell him I'm getting stung and he takes the Queen from my hands and I'm going "I gotta take my pants off...I gotta take my pants off..." and I'm unzipping and pulling down my pants in the backyard and Alex is saying "Get away from the bees!! Get away from the bees!!" and pushing me and I'm freaking 'cause I don't want to move "DON'T MOVE ME!!"

Finally I just waddle away from the bees like a kid with a pile in her diapers, and I drop trou, and some bees come flying out and I calm down and decide all's well and button up and go back to the hives. Alex was putting them all in and we were done, and I didn't get stung again. *And*, I was kind of happy to have been stung because that's what you fear and it wasn't too bad. Now I don't have the fear anymore. I mean what could be worse than bees in your crotch stinging you near your privates? Frankly, it's worse than what I'd feared.

The whole thing was over and I was kind of high from the excitement and am now totally obsessed with the bees and woke in the morning wanting to run out and look at them. But from this point on it's more of a production because you have to get the smoker going any time you open the hives.

After we got them installed and I was all bright-eyed about it, Alex, a man who derives no joy from any process, only from results, said "That was really stressful." As if *he'd* had a crotch full of bees. And later, when we were putting the dishes in the dishwasher Alex found a bee crawling on my collar which must have been there for a couple hours. I think they like me.

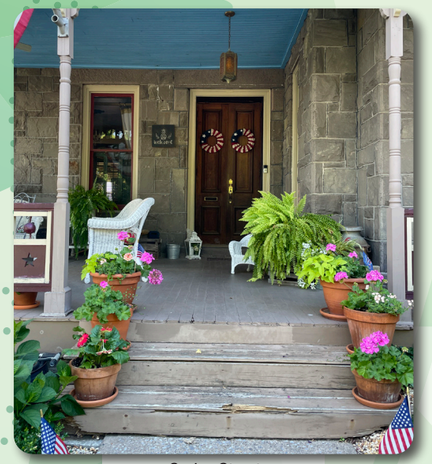
Scene Around Bellefonte: Front Porch Container Gardens



Curtin Street, child's fairy garden



Spring Street



Spring Street



Curtin Street



Lamb Street



Allegheny Street

Bellefonte Art Museum and **The Print Factory**
are proud to launch

Window Keeper: Civic Workshops

a community-centered initiative developed by Pennsylvania Humanities
that invites participants to reflect on the founding ideals of the United States.

Through discussion, close reading, and creative writing, community members will engage with both the historical context of the Declaration of Independence and contemporary perspectives on civic life as the nation celebrates the 250th anniversary of the Declaration.

Led by Penn State English Professor and poet Julia Spicher Kasdorf, the workshops will encourage participants to explore themes of freedom, justice, representation, civic responsibility, and the evolving meaning of democracy in America.

Two workshops will be held:

Bellefonte Art Museum
Thursday, September 17th
6-8pm

The Print Factory
Saturday, September 19th
1-3pm

Each group will be limited to 12 participants, who must register in advance. The workshops are free to adults and do not require previous experience in creative writing. Participants will have opportunities to share reflections, create original writing, and engage in thoughtful community dialogue. Kasdorf will be available to work with participants after the workshop if they wish to submit their pieces of writing in a statewide publication.

To register for the workshops,
visit the websites of the sponsoring organizations:

https://bellefontemuseum.org **https://www.printfactorybellefonte.org**

Window Keeper: Community Workshops is an initiative of PA Humanities. Support is provided in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, Pennsylvania state legislators, the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, and individual donor Randall Miller.



Bellefonte Historical and Cultural Association

MEMBERSHIP FORM

FIRST NAME* MIDDLE INITIAL LAST NAME*

PHONE NUMBER*

EMAIL ADDRESS*

MAILING ADDRESS

**Required Fields*

BHCA is not yet able to accept electronic payments.

Your $20.00 membership payment accompanied by this form can be mailed to:

BHCA
PO Box 141
Bellefonte, PA 16823

Bellefonte SCAVENGER Hunt



Where in Bellefonte is this burglar bell located? Let us know, and we will pull one from all correct answers received and give the winner a free membership to The Bellefonte Historic and Cultural Association. This brings with it a subscription to *The Bell*. This membership is transferable if the winner is already a member. Pass it on!

Answers or comments:
bellefontebat@gmail.com

BELLEFONTE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 141
BELLEFONTE, PA 16823