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*Cedargrove School closed 1929.*

History of the  
Pottsgroves

## SCHOOL DAYS, SCHOOL DAYS

"School days, School days, dear old golden rule days,  
Readin' and 'ritin' and 'rithmetic,  
Taught to the tune of. . ."

The Hickory Stick? Ask any of the old timers around Upper Pottsgrove, and they will explain those words to you. Even as late as 1929, some of the teachers in the Upper Pottsgrove School District used those long, stinging branches to keep order in the classroom.

Today the hickory stick and the form of punishment it meted out have gone the way of walking miles to school, having the biggest kid in class stoke the wood stove, lining up at recess in front of the outdoor toilets, and sending students over to the neighboring farm for water.

Yes, all those things once were part of the educational process in Upper Pottsgrove, even the water part. Students at both Chestnut Grove and Cedar Grove Schools had to go to the neighbors' homes for water. The youngsters at the Cedar Grove School, on the corner of Gilbertsville and Snyder roads, got their water from the farm which belonged to Harry Grandy, father of Virginia Geiser and Marjorie Nettles, both of whom presently live on State Street. The farm is now owned by the Rev. and Mrs. John Althouse.

The long walks to school ended for some Upper Pottsgrove students in 1929, but only to areas designated too far to walk. Mr. Grandy, the same farmer who provided those kids with water, started busing students in 1936.

Some things haven't changed for Upper Pottsgrove students, however. If you wonder what happened to Marble Tournaments and Hobby Day - well, everything doesn't last - but the Spelling Bees, trips to museums, festivals, May Day, which is now called Field Day, picnics and dances as well as health concerns, hearing tests, physical examinations, and vaccinations all go back to the beginning of education in the township. Upper Pottsgrove school students have been doing the "in things" for years!

Here are some highlights regarding education in Upper Pottsgrove Township:

The Cedar Grove School was conveyed to the Pottsgrove School District by deed August 9, 1852, and the Chestnut Grove School was conveyed by deed February 21, 1853. During those early years, the teachers earned \$35.00 a month, school was in session just six months, and the school board met in private homes.

Pottstown was still part of Pottsgrove so there were other schools in the Schuylkill River Valley. However, in 1890, distribution of funds were made by the Montgomery County judges to Pottstown and Pottsgrove school districts, probably because of the change in the borough's boundary line. Expenses and appropriations for the Ringing Hill and Center school buildings were shared by Lower and Upper districts. Tuition was paid to Lower Pottsgrove and Pottstown for township students attending schools closer to their homes. In 1888 Upper Pottsgrove District purchased one-half acre of ground on Glasgow Road just above the stone quarry for \$150.

The turn of the century brought some notable changes, including the enforcement of a "County Dog Tax" which brought Upper Pottsgrove and other districts some shared revenue. In 1917 the school session was increased to seven months and school was closed for one week due to the diphtheria epidemic.

Within the next ten years, the Vaccination Law and Compulsory Attendance Law were enforced, a truant officer and census taker were hired, teachers' salaries grew to \$100 a month and the school session increased to eight months.

Then in 1927 a bond was floated for the construction of a new consolidated school building at a cost of \$16,000, including the purchase of the land. The General Election was held at the public house, also known as the Halfway House.

Construction of Upper Pottsgrove School was completed in 1929 and both the Chestnut Grove and Cedar Grove school buildings were sold at auction. Today Chestnut Grove School is a private home and Cedar Grove School has been a chapel for many years.

The 1930's brought some options to the area's high school students. They could attend Pottsgrove High School or North Coventry School (which later became part of the Owen J. Roberts School District.) Other students were part of an agreement between the school board and the township solicitor who was to offer the annex portion of Upper Pottsgrove to the borough of Pottstown for the sum of \$6,000 cash and one year's free tuition for the students attending Pottstown High School.

In 1940 hot meals prepared by a WPA-provided cook began for all students, with a request for parents to pay only what the food cost, if they could afford it.

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Also during this decade, diphtheria toxoid was administered to all students, with their parents' consent; Defense Bonds were purchased with Sinking Funds; drinking fountains were installed; teachers' salaries went up to \$163 per month, and war time (Daylight Savings Time) was adopted.

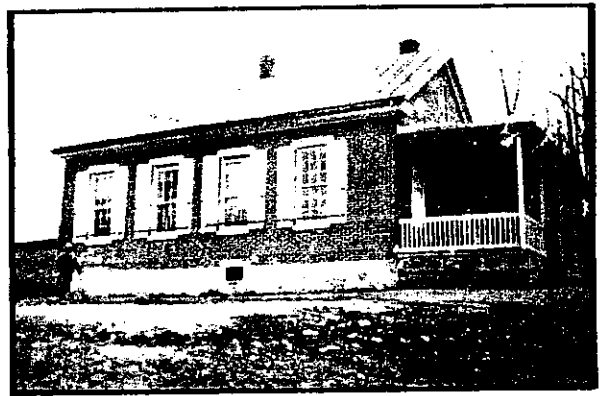
Additionally, teachers were requested to demand written statements from the parents of students who wished to leave the school grounds to go to a public eatery; I.Q. tests and reading tests were administered; a ditto machine was purchased with candy funds; an audiometer machine was purchased for hearing tests; and subscriptions to The Weekly Reader began.

In 1946 Edith Emery volunteered her services as a substitute teacher on the strength of her college degree without any teacher training. The County Superintendent who had the power to grant emergency requests, did so, and she was elected a substitute. Edith still lives in the township, on Chestnut Grove Road.

The following year a number of cases of pink eye and ringworm were noticed. That same year the principal asked the school board for a ruling on girls wearing slacks. The decision was left to the discretion of the teachers.

By the end of the decade Upper Pottsgrove School became so crowded that its eighth grade students as well as high-school students were sent to Pottstown, and plans were approved for a community-donated cafeteria building for the school.

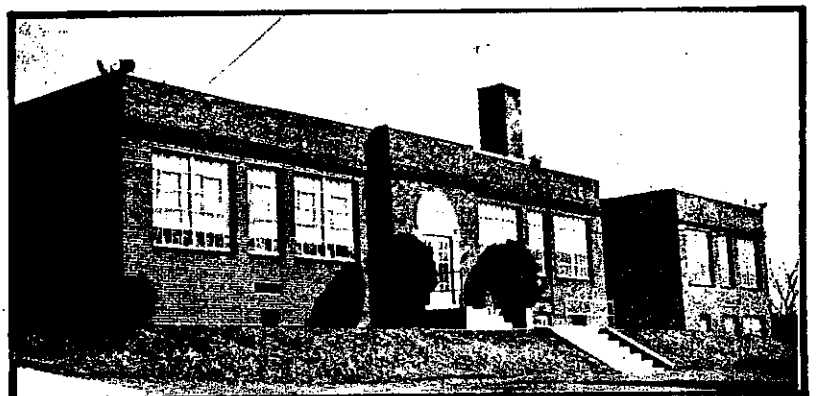
During the early 1950's, Upper Pottsgrove students were attending high schools in Pottstown, Boyertown and West Pottsgrove and some big changes began taking shape for school children in the township.



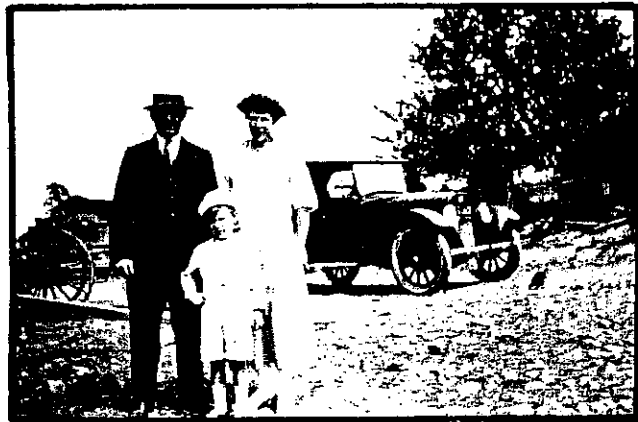
*Chestnutgrove School.*

In October of '53, Lower, Upper and West Pottsgrove School Boards met with the County Superintendent to discuss a merger. After a varied discussion a decision by all three boards was reached on the following points: The three townships would work out a plan for a three-district consolidation; the school administration would work out a thorough study on the costs of a three-district venture, and the three districts would continue to cooperate with Pottstown on planning a program for the four districts. The plans would include classes for kindergarten through grade 12. In April of '54, a resolution was passed to agree to a merger with Lower and West Pottsgrove.

Most of the Upper Pottsgrove school board meetings during the early 1960's dealt with the finances, exonerations, delinquent taxes, etc. as the district was in the process of reorganization. The board's final meeting took place June 14, 1966, and students living in Upper Pottsgrove Township became part of the Pottsgrove School District, which was organized in 1955-56.



*Upper Pottsgrove Elementary School closed 1973.*



*Luther Boyer, his wife and son, Ernest. Long time tax collectors.*

*Have you seen any snakes lately? They are still around in certain areas of Upper Pottsgrove Township, but not nearly as prevalent as they were in the earlier days of the township. There was a farm on what is now the Old Orchard Drive development. They burned the hill in order to plant an orchard, and in so doing, killed about 125 snakes.*



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*Take me out to the ballgame.* We would be remiss not to mention the Pottsgrove Little League. Because of the dedication to our youth, a number of our residents have provided many many volunteer hours to build, prepare and maintain the fields. Needless to say, coaching and transporting the boys to and from the games demanded, and still does, a lot of volunteer hours. For current program information call John Kochel (327-1440) or Gary Hess (326-2981).

*Were you one of the teenagers or young adults who patronized Hartwell's which later was taken over by and known as Filby's on Farmington Avenue in the late 30's and the 40's?* It was the "place to go" to see your friends, dance to the music of a jukebox and enjoy one of their specialties - a chip steak sandwich for 25 cents. Booths rather than tables were popular then.

*How did Fox Hill get its name?* There is a story to it somewhere, but the long and short of it is that a lot of fox were trapped here.

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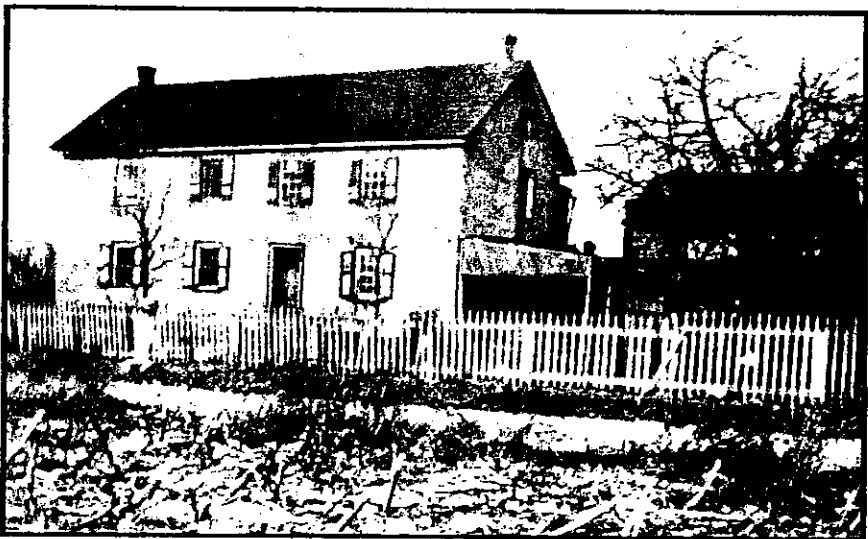
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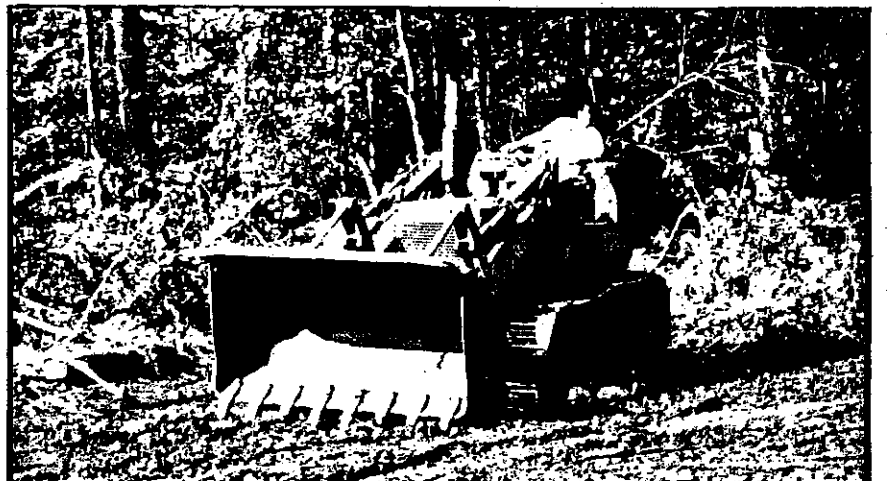
*The oldest scene* of continuous activity in Upper Pottsgrove is the Halfway House. It opened in 1727 and gained its name for its location - half-way between Pottstown and Boyertown. In addition to serving travelers food, drink and lodging, it included a store and a barn where public auctions were held at one time. The barn and store later burned down.

The Halfway House was noted for its seafood dinners. Even though ownership has changed numerous times, the name has remained the same.

The Halfway House also served as "the public house" where elections were held, and who knows how many great business deals took place there!

Additionally, the tavern served as a stop-over place for cattle drives from the railroad station in Pottstown to "points west," a feat that caused great consternation to some residents along the way. They complained of the stench left by the cattle in route and often demanded something be done about it. Eventually, something was done about it. The drives stopped when transport by trucks came into vogue.

Today, in addition to serving the area as a good place to dine, Halfway House also stands as a marker for giving directions to newcomers in the township. Four roads intersect at the historic building on Farmington Avenue where Pine Ford, Gilbertsville and Maugers Mill roads all deadend into the avenue.



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*Originally, the Bliem Estate, in 1780, 202 acres, now  
Sunnyside Farms.  
Now owned by Al Piazza.*

*Sussell Park* was located on Snyder Road and was opened by Dr. Sussell, the dentist. He built two lakes and tried to fashion an amusement park somewhat like Sleepy Hollow Ranch in the early 1940s.

*The Pottstown Quoit Club* was located on Yarnall Road and was a very popular club for about 30 years.

Has anyone seen the sign: "Amos Baker, The Harness Maker"? For many years, it hung on a building on Orlando Road.

*The Pines* in the early 1930s was the scene of an auction house run by Gordon Levegood and Ralph Richards. Many of the farmers sold their produce at the green frame one story building which was located just north of Diamond Street. Later, Bert Bickel built her home on that ground. She started the restaurant business in the three-story building next to the auction house when she moved down from the Halfway House, where she worked for number of years for Jimmy Sides. Bert Bickel's "The Pines" was like a household word when it came to seafood.

*Civil Defense* was headed by Anthony Morello as director for almost 30 years. Kenneth Iatesta is now in charge of the program which includes the title of Emergency Management Coordinator. Mike Zacek, Ken Fenstermaker, Bill Means, the firemen and our police force are members as well.



### SOME UPPER POTTS GROVE FAMILIES

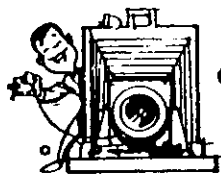
*Upper Pottsgrove Township is a family-oriented community, and some of those families have been around here for generations. While new families are always welcomed into the Township, it is fitting to salute those old-timers and their offspring for staying here, helping to lay a good foundation for later generations to continue to grow and prosper, and in so doing, paving the way for the newcomers. Here are some interesting facts about them.*

The five-generation family to "settle in and stay put" the most is surely the Kummerers. Back in the mid-1800's, John H. Kummerer bought 68 acres of prime farmland between Pine Ford Road and Farmington Avenue for the sum of \$5,500. He and his wife first lived in a log house on the property, which also included a cold cellar, called a cave. Eventually they built and moved into the big three-story farmhouse in which his great grandson, Robert "Bob" and his wife, the former June Mauger, now reside.

John H. and his wife, Mary Alice (Mock) had seven children, including William Mock Kummerer, who farmed the family property after his father's death. William married Esther Bickel, and they had two daughters and one son. The son, John Bickel Kummerer married Ellen Spohn and they had six children. Three of the children are deceased. Daughter Marie Prout lives on Chestnut Grove Road, while daughter Ruth Richards lives in Pottstown.

Bob moved out of the farmhouse when he and June married, first living in

## Orlando's Photo



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Pottstown and then in Kenilworth. Then Bob built the house on the farmstead where Charles Albright now lives. In 1963, he returned to the family farmhouse, bringing with him June and their two children, Linda and Robert John. Linda had a home built on a portion of the family farm which her father deeded over to her. And now, she is raising a fifth generation of Upper Pottsgrove citizens on the Kummerer farmstead.

Altogether, 16 Kummerers have been born in the big old farmhouse. June regrets that their two children were not born there, but she is proud that they have grown up in the house and proud that Bob's and her grandchildren are growing up on the farmstead.

Christopher Hollenbach, who has resided in the Township the longest, was born in 1904 and is head of a four-generation family. He came to America with his parents from Austria/Hungary in 1908 and first lived in Steelton, PA. The young family then moved to Upper Pottsgrove in 1913. For two years they lived on Maugers Mill Road and then moved to North Hanover Street. "Chris" and Bertha, his wife of many years, still reside on the family farm on Hanover Street. All four generations presently reside in the township.

Among Upper Pottsgrove Township's three-generation families are the Ludys, Greskos, Bealers, Majkas, Schaeffers, Meekers, Prouts, Boerners and Mosers.

Without the help of the Bealers and Maurice Meeker, with their brawn, muscles and big machines, the Township would not have shaped up so quickly. Wilmer Bealer and Maurice Meeker served on the governing body of the Township for many years.

The resident who most deserves the title of "Mr. Upper Pottsgrove" is the late John F. Prout. For more than thirty years Mr. Prout served the Township as an Auditor, Secretary/Treasurer, Supervisor and Commissioner. He served the community with diligence, integrity and loyalty and was recognized for his service in 1974 when the municipal building was named the John F. Prout Municipal Building. Charlotte Prout, his widow, and two of their sons, John and Tim, still operate the poultry farm on West Moyer Road.

Many residents who served the township in some official capacity during the first half of this century still make their presence known, either in person or through their descendants who have remained here.

For example, residents named to the Upper Pottsgrove School Board from 1919 to 1959 included John D. Kummerer, truant officer John Schwenk, John Meeker, Christopher Hollenbach, Harry Overholtzer, Robert John, Claire Smith Burden and Anthony Morello. In addition, Kummerer and Meeker were elected directors while Hollenbach served as president of the board as well as a member of the School Authority.

Schwenk also provided some labor as well as sold wood to the school. Maurice Hartenstine, father of Janie Mitchell, provided the labor in the new consolidated school building and was chairman of the Cafeteria Association.

Other members of the John family involved in township education were Mildred and Polly John who began teaching at Upper Pottsgrove School in 1927 and 1931, respectively.

The records also show that Ruth Meeker was enumerator in 1951, Hazel Levan was township secretary from 1964 through 1969, John Levan was the police officer from 1963 through 1968, Herbert Geiser was assessor in the late 50's and early 60's and Virginia Geiser served as tax collector and treasurer from 1966 to 1985.