

# HAYCOCK HISTORICAL NEWS

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## HAYCOCK PROFILES: DICK GIESKE

by Michele Malinchak

Dick Gieske's passion for nature was firmly rooted in his childhood. Growing up in Haycock during the 1950's, the great outdoors was his textbook and he learned by exploring every inch of it. Whether hunting, fishing, swimming or searching for arrowheads, Dick developed a keen appreciation of nature.

Though Haycock was the perfect setting for boyhood adventures, not everyone appreciated its rural quality. "Property was cheap back then," Dick said, "but no one wanted to live in Haycock in the 50's. Anyone who did was called a stump jumper."

Dick's family, consisting of three sisters and his parents, moved often. At one time they occupied the stone house at Lake Towhee, now the park ranger's home. Today Dick and his wife, Ann, live in a house his father built in 1964 on Old Bethlehem Road. Married 45 years, the Gieskes have three children and have lived in the home since 1980.

To earn money as a boy, Dick would hunt fox and sell the skins that brought four dollars a piece. Red fox were more valuable than gray, later bringing anywhere from \$25 to \$75 dollars. He also trapped muskrats, mink, raccoons and weasels, selling the fur in Trumbauersville. In addition, he sold snapping turtles to the Roy Ann Diner on Route 309 for soup. Eventually, concerns over salmonella led the FDA to end that practice.

However, money was not Dick's sole interest in trapping the animals. Fascinated with biology and animal behavior, he studied their individual scents and growls. Sometimes, after skinning an animal, he would dissect it to learn about its organs and what it had eaten.

Perhaps the fondest memory Dick had was not of an animal he trapped, but one he adopted. One night a bad storm broke as he was riding his bike. He saw a raccoon accidentally drop the baby she held in her mouth. The mother scurried into the woods and Dick picked the baby up and shoved it into his shirt. When he got home, he fed it goat's milk from one of his sister's doll bottles. Dick named him 'Rackie,' who grew to be 35 pounds and behaved much like a dog. He slept on Dick's bed and rode on his bike to the school bus stop, holding onto Dick's back. Rackie patiently waited in a maple tree until Dick returned from school and then they rode home together.

While Dick had other raccoons and even a skunk and possum for pets, they never measured up to Rackie.

Another treasured memory was swimming with his friend, Bob Knapp in Benny Sirkit's pond. The pond, now under Lake Nockamixon, was located by the present day boat ramp (for-

merly Stover's Dam). It was full of big bass and the boys often had to chase away water snakes so they could swim.

Chief One-Star lived in a small house near the pond and gave riding lessons at Camp Kahagon, which was located across from Cappie's on Route 563 towards the lake. Once, the chief gave a bottle of his special liniment to Dick, a cure-all for whatever ailed you. "I was afraid to try it," Dick said. "I gave it away, but I wish I had it today."

The boys would swim up until October. "What I loved," Dick said, "was bringing Ivory soap and bathing in creek water. Nothing was so refreshing and nobody was back there."

Dick attended the Mt. Airy School as well as the Church School, now the Grew home, across from Haycock Elementary School. In 1962, he graduated from Quakertown High School where he played football. Dick remembered coming home from practice seeing only one car on the road.

His father worked at Bethlehem Steel and for a rubber company in Quakertown. He also built houses with Herbie Sutter, and when Dick turned 15, he went to work for Herbie. In addition, he drove a tractor and loaded tomatoes grown by the Calabrette family that were sold to the Campbell's Soup Company.

Dick also helped build Route 313 and installed drainpipes on 5th Street in



Quakertown.

He then joined the navy, serving four years in the V2 division on the U.S.S. America. As an aviator boatswain's mate, Dick operated equipment that launched aircraft off the ship's flight deck. He sailed the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, visiting Spain, France, Turkey and Greece.

After returning home, he worked for Merck Sharpe and Dohme at West Point (Lansdale). His jobs included equipment cleaner, formulator and filling orders for vaccines in the warehouse. He worked there for 29 years until his retirement in 1995.

Then, Dick drove a school bus for Palisades School District for five years. He'd greet each child that got on the bus and always gave out candy. "There's a little kid in me," he said.

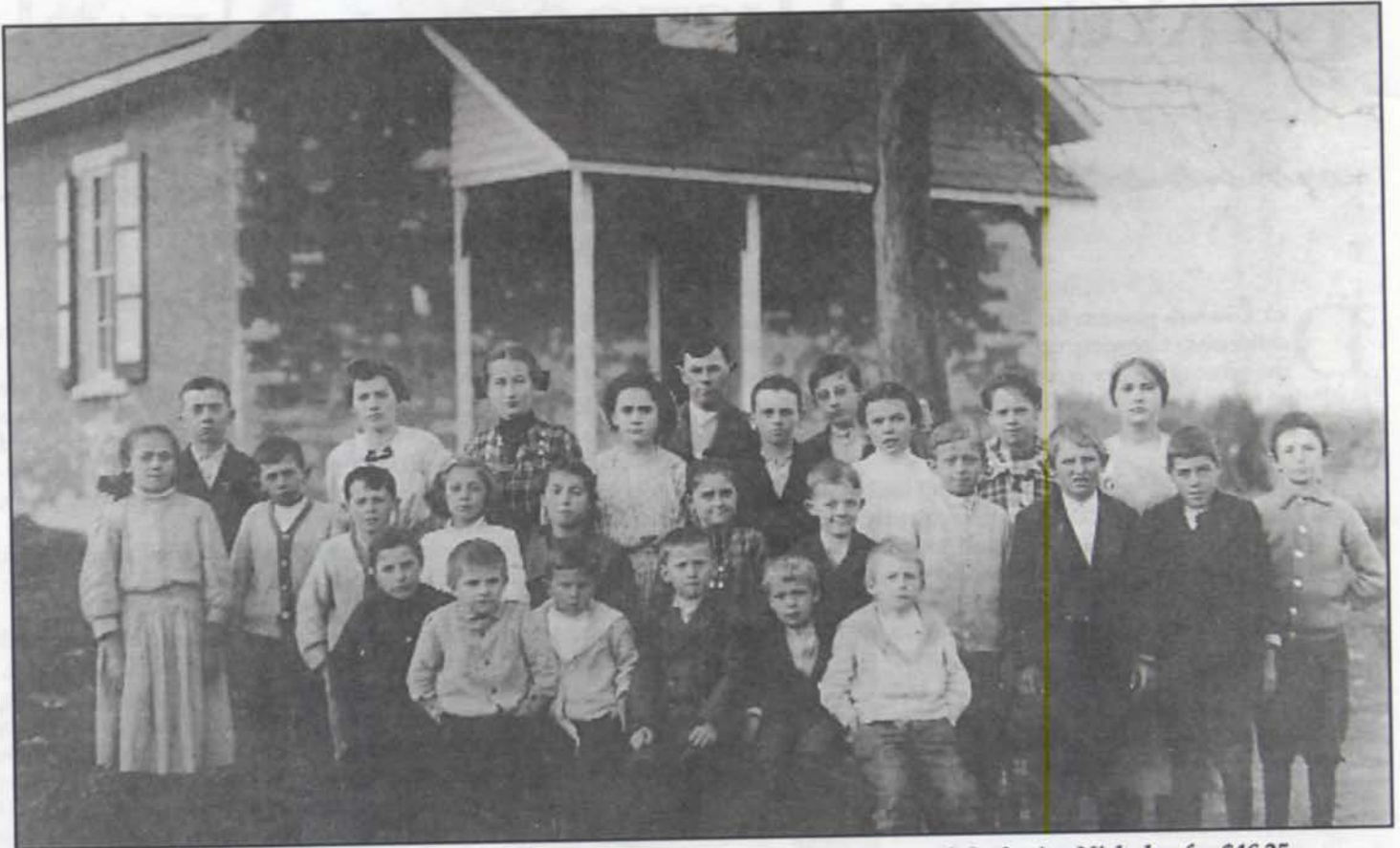
Today, he enjoys taking care of his property and keeps most of it wild to attract birds and other animals. Everything is planted to either feed or shelter wildlife. "People might say it looks like heck, but that's what the animals like," he said.

He and his family still go hunting, though he won't hunt fox anymore because of his concern about rabies.

Now 66 years old, Dick's philosophy is the same as it was growing up — "If you take care of nature, nature takes care of you."

# HICKORY GROVE SCHOOL

Photo Submitted by Pat DeWald



*Hickory Grove School was built in 1876 or 1877 on land sold by Albert and Catherine Nicholas for \$46.25. It closed and became a private residence in 1942. It was torn down in 1968 in preparation for the land being flooded by Lake Nockamixon.*

## IN MEMORY OF IVAN BELAC

by Chris Handschin



for him this September. The couple had been married 52 years last September.

For those of you who didn't know, Ivan and Loretta operated Belacraft Pottery together for many years and had been a huge attraction at our Kringle Christmas Shoppe. They had become quite popular as pottery artists who make the "Leaf Impression pottery". Haycock Historical Society had recently

commissioned them to create our 2009 Collector Plate which will be the American Chestnut Leaf.

As a community outreach, husband and wife would often visit schools and attend community events equipped with clay and pottery wheel to show children how to throw pottery. Loretta worked with the kids to stain, glaze and fire the pieces while Ivan worked the pottery wheel, showing them techniques of working with wet clay, using only his hands to guide them as he was blind. For all who witnessed this, it was an unforgettable vision of selfless conviction and tenderness to watch him guide those little hands to turn a bowl or a vase. The Belacs would often fire these at their own expense and return with them whenever possible so that the little creators could fully appreciate their accomplishments.

Ivan was a member of the Lehigh Valley Craftsman Guild. He also belonged to Saint Isidore's Catholic Church in Quakertown where he was a former church lector and choir member. He will be greatly missed by all.

# SOCIETY NEWS

## SOCIAL EVENTS COMMITTEE

On September 22, 6:30 p.m., the Fall Start-up meeting will be held at the home of Nancy & Henry DePue at 968 Deerwood Lane in Haycock. Anyone interested in joining our FUNd-raising team, participating in Kringle VI planning, is welcome to attend.

### Summer Member Hootin' Nanny

Our covered dish picnic at Tohickon Campground Barn on 7/26 was attended by nearly 40 of our members, all of whom enjoyed great music and a wonderful assortment of foods during the fun and relaxing social. Our sincere thanks to Jim Deegan and his family, owners of the Tohickon Campground & Sheard's/Clymer's Mill, who donated the use of the Tohickon Campground Barn for this event.

The event was inspired by the concentration of great musicians and talent here in Haycock. Our society wishes to extend thanks to our very gifted members and friends: Gordon Allem and his band (Strings & Things), Steve Applegate and friend, Bill Meir, Ed Bauer, Ron Bevilaqua, Rich Laughlin, & Tom Schnabel and friends for providing their five-star musical talents for the Haycock Historical Society picnic.

### Bill HB931

Haycock Historical Society Officially endorsed Bill #HB931 which calls for computerization and declassification of birth records of 100 years or more and death certificates of 50 years or more. Many other states have already made these records public. We encourage members to go online to organizer Tim Gruber's website to learn more about it. Download forms letters & send your personal endorsements to our government officials. <http://users.rcn.com/timarg/PaHR-Access.htm> Opening these files up for genealogic research would be a valuable aide to anyone tracing family history.

### Chestnut Leaf Featured in Collector's Plate for 2009

Members Ivan & Loretta Belac, (Belacraft) were commissioned early this year by the Haycock Historical Society to provide our 2009 Commemoratives. The 75 plates will highlight the American chestnut leaf, from the tree that once blanketed Haycock Mountain as well as the entire Northeastern Region of the United States. An April 2010 presentation is slated to highlight the history of the American chestnut and efforts to bring it back. Sadly, Ivan Belac died on 8/10/09, but Loretta has vowed to continue with the pottery as well as the commission in the style she and her late husband perfected. It was Ivan's handiwork that created the urn (pictured below) for our deceased HHS Officer, Sue Kleiner-Grew. The couple had participated in every one of the Haycock Historical Society's Kringle Christmas Shops, providing their unique leaf-impression pottery.



### Sue Kleiner-Grew Memorial Fund

The Memorial Urn was presented to Sue's husband Jim in August. A memorial book, honoring Sue's life with pictures, poems and member thoughts is in still in progress, slated to be published in the fall. Late entries are still being

accepted. Contact Chris Handschin to add an entry. (215) 536-0364 or [chandschin@verizon.net](mailto:chandschin@verizon.net)

### Marketplace

Please contact our treasurer, Richard Landgreen for the exact dollar amount netted by this event held on May 30.

### Cemetery Cleanup

Plans are underway to clean up the old cemetery located at the corner of Thatcher and Union roads behind the farmhouse. For more information, contact Henry DePue at 215-536-5103.

## RESEARCH COMMITTEE

The 2009 fall research committee meetings will be on Wednesday evening, a change from Thursday evening. We will meet September 23 and October 21 at 7:00 p.m. at the home of Pat DeWald, 204 Pullen Station Rd. Come and find out how to research your home or learn about Haycock's past.

## SOCIETY MEETINGS

September 17, Frances Waite, "Tracing the History of your House"

October 15, Pat DeWald, "Life and Times of General Paul Applegate"

November 19, Ilze Celmina Diaz, "Latvian Culture and Customs"

March 18, Ed Tice, "The Doan Gang"

April 15, Michael Webb, "American Chestnut Restoration after the Blight"

May 20, Carol Schroding, Master Gardener

Meetings are held at 7 p.m. at St. Paul's Lutheran Church across from the Haycock firehouse in Applebachsville.



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**Gary Krause**  
Certified Remodeler  
(610) 847-5253

170 Buck Run Road  
Quakertown, PA 18951

**HHD  
USA**