



of Bluffton & Pandora

P.O. Box 5

Bluffton, OH 45817

Schumacher Homestead
8350 Bixel Rd.

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MEMBERSHIP

Annual Household \$30

Annual Sustaining \$100

Life \$1,000

Swiss Community Historical Society
PO Box 5, Bluffton OH 45817

SPRING 2025

From the Swiss Settlement



**\$1 million raised to create Heritage Center
at Schumacher Homestead**

Notes from the President

By Gary Wetherill

It's getting close! After ten years of planning, dreaming, fund raising, and toil, we are closer to calling the Heritage Center done. I would like to thank those who raised funds, planned, and worked. We couldn't have done it without you. I also would like to give a HUGE thank you to our donors who, together, gave a million dollars. We can't thank you enough!

Swiss Day is planned for the last Sunday in June. We are hoping to have it at the Heritage Center, so we may reschedule to the end of July if the building is close to completion.

We are looking to expand our outreach for other sources of income beyond member dues and donations.

We recently received an \$8,600 grant from the Visit Greater Lima Association to create some videos that will allow handicapped visitors to virtually visit the upstairs, attic, and cellar of the Schumacher House. We also set up an informational table at Wood County's "Early Ohio on the Portage" event May 2-4, 2025.

Volunteer Spotlight: Judith Hilty Kingsley

By Susie Gratz

Judith Hilty Kingsley has connections to our community going back to her early years. Her parents, Herman and Celia Hilty, were both descended from Swiss settlers and spoke Swiss fluently. Herman was one of the founders of the Swiss Community Historical Society. As children in the 1950s, Judy and her sisters, Ann, Rachel and Suzanne, experienced early Swiss Day celebrations. Then held on the grassy area south of Musselman Library, Judy remembers “we reveled in our heritage.” They enjoyed special foods like “knee patches,” which are a deep fried pastry, music by Bertha Hahn on her zither, and running around playing with friends.



After being away from Bluffton for several decades, Judy returned in 1989, along with her husband Phil and two young sons Daniel and Michael. She taught at Bluffton College and pursued additional coursework at Bowling Green State University in the mid-1990s. An anthropologist, Judy became interested in her heritage once more and designed a research project seeking to determine why use of the Swiss-German language declined so rapidly between her parents' generation and her own. The resulting paper discussed several reasons. First, the impact of World War II led to anti-German sentiment, which resulted in the vandalizing of churches in the Settlement. Second, around that same time people from the Settlement began to spend more time in town. Parents asked their children to translate and, at times, endured some rather rude name-calling. Third, some of the Swiss people left farming and ran businesses, such as selling farm implements or cars.

By the late 1990s Phil Kingsley had become actively involved with SCHS, and Judy eventually joined him. She served as food coordinator for the Fall Festival for several years. She also participated with the annual New Year's Eve carolers, who sang traditional German songs at Mennonite Memorial Home, Maple Crest, and Willow Ridge. Both Judy and Phil served on the Board of Directors, with Phil becoming President. After Phil's death in 2015, Judy took on that role until late 2020.

Judy was on the board when the Bixel-Basinger barn, now known as the Heritage Center, was purchased. Paraphrasing Judy's words, she said the Society wanted to create a living history museum where people could come, not only to observe, but also to participate in the way of life as it would have been in the Swiss Settlement during the mid to late 19th century. Her hope is that we can promote SCHS not just for people of Swiss descent, but

for anyone interested in the history and culture of the Bluffton-Pandora Swiss community.

The Swiss Community Historical Society wishes to express its deep appreciation for Judy Kingsley's ideas, efforts, and leadership over these many years. Thank you, Judy!

Editor's note: If you would like to see (and bake!) a recipe for Knee Patches, you can find it at www.sweetleisure.com/2020/04/knee-patches/



Curator's Corner

By Keith Sommer

The Swiss Community Historical Society's new Heritage Center barn frame has an interesting and varied history. It was originally constructed in 1855 in Richland Township section 9, at 9745 Philips Road, south of Ebenezer Mennonite Church.

It is classified as a Pennsylvania type of forebay bank barn with post and beam timber frame construction, which was very common in the Swiss settlement. To prepare building materials, large timbers were shaped by hewing them with axes and smaller items were cut on an up and down/reciprocating water powered sawmill, which ran at about 150 strokes per minute. Some lumber was also sawed by a steam powered circular saw; these kinds of boards can be seen in the granary room.

To start construction, stone masons would lay up foundations, piers and retaining walls, using stonemason's chisels, spalling/face hammers, drilling hammers, and mason's trowels for laying courses of rubble limestone/dolomite. This work by hand would have taken time and learned skills, resulting in a barn that was a work of art.

Second Saturdays

The June 14, 2025 event will feature a interpretive demonstration of basic blacksmithing, including processes, tooling, and miscellaneous old and new display items, as well as some reference books. Keith Sommer will be demonstrating.

The July 12, 2025 event will feature a Hunting and Trapping theme. This will include period correct firearms and traps with related items. Also being displayed will be photos of some local Swiss hunters and their stories. Tom McCullough and Keith Sommer will be presenting.

The August 9, 2025 event will feature hearth cooking by using a back fire and pulling hot coals forward under a cast iron pot. Hearth cooking can be used for roasting, boiling, frying, stewing, heating water for washing, etc. Gary Whetherill will be demonstrating.



The public is invited to attend these events. Period-costumed docents will be on hand for guided tours of the air conditioned house, as well as the summer kitchen, garden, workshop, Heritage Center, and barn.

Private tours may be arranged for Mondays-Saturdays by contacting Susie Gratz at gratzds@roadrunner.com or calling 419-358-4822 and leaving a message.

Admission is \$5, free for members and anyone under age 17

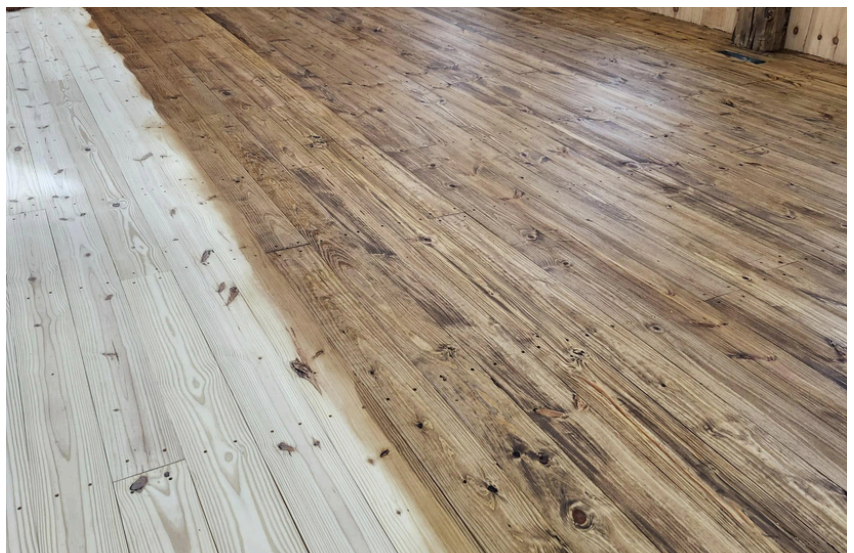
These events will take place at The Schumacher House, 8350 Bixel Road, Bluffton from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Heritage Center homestretch

A big thank you to all those who have donated, money, time or resources for the Heritage Center. We are in the home stretch! Finishing up bathrooms, trim, painting, and other small details. Outside we hope to begin landscaping very soon.

You, our members, are making this dream a reality. Many of you have stopped by for a visit and are so pleased with the project. But as one donor just told me recently, "It's better to give with a warm hand rather than with a cold one; then I can see and enjoy my gift."

If you have any questions about giving to the Heritage Center project, or estate giving, you can call Julie Stratton at 419-302-0369.



Media & Memberships

Come find us on Facebook at "Swiss Community Historical Society!" The page is regularly updated with information and photos and is the best way to stay up to date on events.

Did you know that the Swiss Historical Society has a YouTube account? You can search for "Bluffton Pandora Swiss Historical." Videos on this page cover many topics, with the docent training videos being the most recent addition.

MEMBERS - please remember to renew your memberships. Thank you for being a part of keeping our area's Swiss history alive!

If you are reading this newsletter in paper form but would prefer to receive it via email, please contact Ed and Nancy Yeager at committee.Nedcab1@gmail.com.



**SWISS COMMUNITY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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