

Mayor of Souderton Dan Yocum Mayors Memo!



There have been many books written about Souderton; “History of Souderton” in 1930 by Henry Landes, “Half Century of Progress” in 1937, “Souderton Diamond Jubilee” in 1962, “The History of Indian Valley & It’s Bank” in 1976 by John Ruth, “Some Local History of Franconia Township” in 1979 by Henry Hagey, “Willing Inhabitants” in 1981 by Joyce Munro, “Seeing Souderton” in 1987 by Phil Ruth, “The Diaries of William Souder Hemsing” published by Union National Bank in 1987, “A Century of Progress” in 1987, “Warmth & Sustenance”, published by Moyer & Son in 1994, “Images of America: Souderton” in 2011, and “Celebrate Souderton” in 2012.

I’ve read these books cover-to-cover. My passion is Souderton and its history. That was instilled in me by my grandparents Harold & Sally, who I’ve mentioned several times in these Mayors Memos. Like so many local families, they played a part in Souderton’s history and I am immensely proud to be doing the same.

John Ruth waxes poetic in his closing paragraph of “The History of Indian Valley & Its Bank” when describing his upbringing in Souderton, riding the Liberty Bell Limited trolley, working at Schoeneman’s Factory and Hunsicker’s Funeral Home, buying his wedding suit from R.E Hope Clothier, and going to the dentist at Earl Stover’s on E. Broad Street:

“By such unheralded ways are we wedded to a place, because it is here and we are in it. This is what it means to be alive and conscious. It has been woven into the texture of our minds. We must cherish our community, as God’s gift to us, and learn to shape it more closely to His beautiful design”.

Despite nothing of national significance ever happening in Souderton, so many have chosen to write about because it is truly a special place. Souderton has maintained its sense of togetherness and small-town charm, long after many other places have lost their definition of community. Yet every one of these publications focuses on a similar theme; change.

Souderton certainly has seen a lot of changes over its long lifetime. From unexplored wilderness, Souderton changed to become a small outcrop of farms, homes, and dirt roads on the outskirts of Franconia Township. That is the Souderton my great-great grandfather knew. In the mid-1800’s with the advent of the railroad, Souderton changed to become a booming little metropolis of industry and business, employing hundreds in the cigar-making industry and supporting the various retailers that came with it. That is the Souderton that my great- grandfather knew. At the turn-of-the-century through the Post-War Era, Souderton changed again to become a hub of textile manufacturing. The Granite Hosiery Mill on Green Street made one of the first nylon stockings in America. They, along with many other manufacturers, were the primary employers in town. That was the Souderton my grandfather knew. As shopping malls killed Main Street America, Souderton changed again to a quiet bedroom community. A charming place to live and raise a family, but with little industry or entertainment. If you wanted to do something after 4pm, you’d get in the car and leave our town. That is the Souderton that many of us knew.

And that Souderton was a wonderful place! Unlike so many small towns of its age, Souderton maintained a pride and nostalgia for its heritage. During the last several decades, there have been essential businesses

holding our community together which laid the foundation for the success we enjoy today. We are incredibly fortunate to have Univest headquartered in our downtown for nearly 150 years. Moyer & Son has been here for even longer. The Montgomery Theater recently celebrated its 30th Anniversary. Wellingtons Sporting Goods has been a staple up and down Main Street for decades. Tilly Mints Tea Room has served thousands of patrons in their 15+ years nestled on Chestnut Street; just to name a few. There was and is a lot to be proud of! And Souderton is now changing again. That sleepy little town described above is not the Souderton that the next generation will know.

We are quickly becoming a destination. In the last 10 years, once-vacant buildings are now thriving businesses. There are now as many as seven places to buy alcohol in our one-square mile town; a far cry from the fabled tale of the “Mennonite Mafia” buying up liquor licenses to keep Souderton dry. New young families want to live here, and people from outside of Souderton come here to spend their time and money. The last vestiges of open space in the Borough are disappearing to development.

CONCERT SUNDAES

Every Sunday at 7pm in Souderton Community Park through August 4th. Visit Concert Sundaes on Facebook to learn more about the lineup this season!

THIRD FRIDAYS

The third Friday of each month at 6pm through October. Main & Chestnut Streets.

Souderton management changes too. Mike Coll will grace the pages of Souderton history for his decades of service to our community. He was followed by a six-month tenure of Stacy Crandell, who resigned in April, and we have the pleasure of welcoming Sara Jarrett-Eaton as our Acting Borough Manager. Though I cannot discuss specific personnel details of these last few months, I can say that Sara is an incredible asset to Souderton and my hope is that she will be here for many years to come. Further, for the first time in seven decades, an attorney from the law firm of Landis, Hunsberger, Gingrich, and Weik will not be representing Souderton as our Solicitor. This was a friendly and mutual decision as we welcomed the firm of Begley, Carlin, and Mandio LP, who specializes in municipal law.

While the faces on Souderton Borough Council change, I am proud that to say that we have never lost the mindset that was reported about Council at the 1987 Centennial in *Seeing Souderton*: “Council meetings are normally lonely affairs monitored by only a reporter or two; as might be expected in a town rarely racked by dissension. According to business leaders, Souderton has been blessed with efficient and cooperative Council members over the years; people with more interest in the well-being of the borough than in their own political advancement”.

Change is hard. The final chapter of *Seeing Souderton* reads “One man’s idea of progress is another man’s idea of decline”. I am writing this to thank all our residents, long-time and new, for keeping an open mind about the possibilities for our community. My family has lived here for nine generations so I too have nostalgia for “the way things used to be”. But with an open-mind, good things can happen. Souderton has been facing change head-on for generations. We are a town with a reverence for our past and a strong vision for our future. Thank you for playing *your* part in this chapter of our shared Souderton story.



REMINDER: The Borough no longer performs curbside weed-spraying. Please help keep Souderton beautiful by maintaining the weeds on your curb & sidewalk. Help a neighbor if theirs is in need!