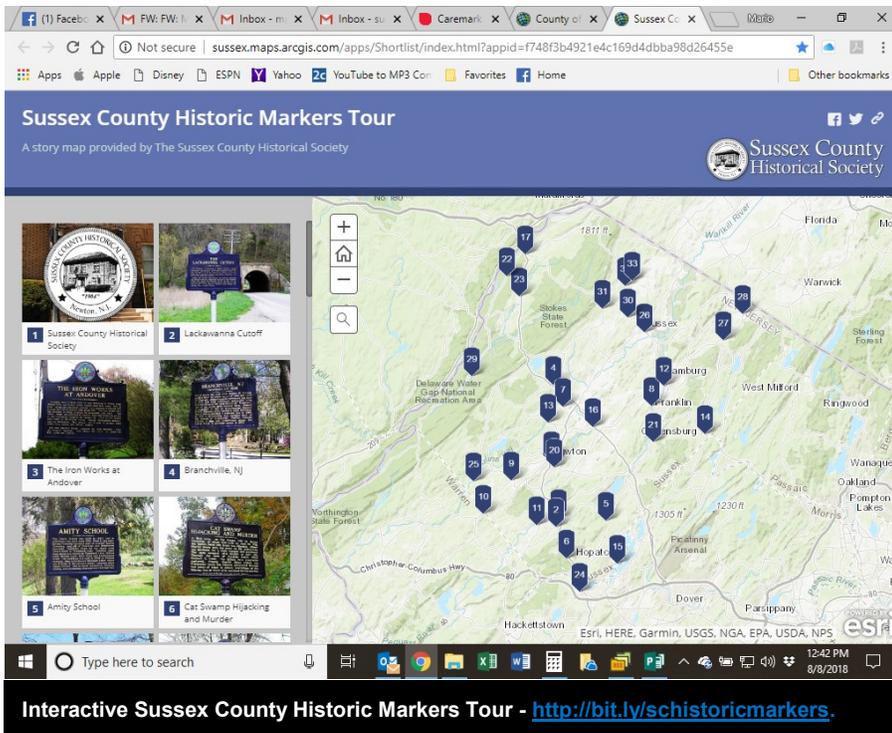


## Message From The President

Hello to all members. I hope that all is well. Well it sure has been a crazy year so far. A pandemic, riots and protests in the streets. It kind of makes you just want to fall asleep for the rest of the year and hope that 2021 is better. Hopefully it will be but we still have some time this year to make things better. Obviously there has been little to no activity anywhere on the local history front. We had to cancel our annual meeting and Sussex County History Day which was due to happen in September. I am hopeful that we may be able to have the annual meeting later this year, but only if we can do it safely. I would love to hear from you about some ideas of what we can be doing during these times to keep exploring our local history. I am trying to think of a few and will e-mail you my thoughts for your opinions. As always feel free to contact me at [swhistoric@gmail.com](mailto:swhistoric@gmail.com) or thru our website [swhistoric.org](http://swhistoric.org). Have a wonderful and safe summer.—Mario

**2020 Annual Meeting date TBD.**



### In This Issue

- Peter Decker—Founder
- Camp Windy
- Wantage—Part 2
- SWHS Membership application

# Peter Decker - Founder of Deckertown



**200th Anniversary Decker Plaque**

Born in 1711 in Ulster County, NY he set out as a young man of 18 years old, to find a suitable place to settle. A place that he could cultivate and farm. So in the 1720s he set out across the Kittatinny Mountains into Wantage. He had friends in Wantage, William and Stephanus Tietzort (Stephen and William Titsworth) who lived along the banks of the Clove since 1704. He stayed with them off and on for a couple of years around 1729 while looking for that perfect spot to settle. They probably were with Peter when he decided on the location for which he would settle. Imagine this pioneer, probably dressed as most pioneers of the time did in buckskin trousers, a scruffy shirt and some sort of homemade hat, passing thru out what would be later be dubbed Deckertown after him. He probably roamed this land many times before finally deciding on a piece of land that would suit him. But where? Of course, fresh clean drinking water must be in good supply for any location to be chosen. Two come to mind. There was one location where a spring of water bubbled up on the current Spring Street (Corner of Spring and the current day #93 Main Street). (The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary dedication plaque erected by the Sussex Grade School 8<sup>th</sup> grade class in 1934 is pictured above). The other location considered was the current #28 Hamburg Avenue property (By Munson Street area). (The PD 1749 initialed rock is shown on the next page. It was found in the basement of the home and the homeowner decided to mount it out front for all to see). The choice was probably the now Hamburg Avenue property because the spring that was located nearby was the Indians favorite and when they occupied the area, fed their village. Surveys handed down over time also suggests this is the site. I do not know who researched the Spring Street site for authenticity for the creation of the plaque but Charles E. Stickney, a noted historian at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seems to agree with the Hamburg Avenue site. You can also see the confusion as to what year Decker actually settled Deckertown as the plaque says 1734 and the stone has 1749 inscribed on it. That is why when people ask me when it was settled, I say 'it depends on who you ask, anywhere from 1732 to 1749'. The whole of Deckertown was included in this tract of land. He would wait a while until he got married to build his house. His wife to be, Lecentje Osterhout, (Her name was later 'Americanized' to Magdalena) was a resident of Kingston, NY.

It is said that they were married in Ulster County, though no record of it or of the exact date could be found. It was probably at or around 1732, when Peter would have been 21 years old. If this is true, then the earlier 1934 date probably makes sense as to Deckertown's founding. There are no records that I have been able to locate to prove this.

Once again, the exact date of Peter and Magdalena actually settling in Deckertown gets cloudy at this point. In a Centennial Address by Edsall, it is said that they entered the town together in 1734, however in a historic sermon by Reverend Kanouse, it was said to be 1740. In either case, they began to build their homestead. Most probably a home that was made of logs, they may have had the help from neighbors like Stephen and William Titsworth of the Clove in building it. They would go on to have 10 children, five daughters and five sons. Over time up to 80% of the inhabitants of Deckertown were either related by blood or marriage to the Deckers. Decker worked as a surveyor. On November 20, 1753, Peter Decker was commissioned as a Justice of the Peace by the King of England thru the first house of common pleas in Hardwick, which was then part of Sussex County, now is in Warren County. In January of 1772, the first recorded road in Wantage was laid out at Peter Decker's house. It would run from Deckertown through Woodbourne then to Beemerville. It is said that Peter Decker died in 1773 but there is no record of that or the year of death for Magdalena. They were buried in what was then a cemetery on the hill behind where the Crescent Theatre parking lot now stands, and the Sussex Public School in 1904 was (until it was razed in 1776). When the cemetery was abandoned, some of the remains were removed to other places but some of the graves of the early pioneers of the area were either unmarked or marked only with a slab of flagstone, unmarked.

Around 1883 Harrison Street began to be excavated and in doing so, many remains from that old cemetery that were still there began to be exposed. No one knows whose remains they were but they were gathered up and reburied elsewhere. No one knows if Peter and Magdalena are still together, side by side as originally buried, if their remains were exposed in the Harrison Street excavations and moved, or if they are still somewhere up on that hill above the theatre parking lot on Harrison Street. It does not seem to be a fitting end to a man that birthed a town, which would go on to become a very prosperous town as both Deckertown and Sussex at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 1900s.



**PD 1749 inscribed stone found at Hamburg Avenue**

# Sussex-Wantage Historical Society

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**Executive Board of Directors**

**Mario Poggi - President/Secretary**

**Robert Holowach - VP/Treasurer**

**Russ Eaton - VP**



The Wantage Outing Club, formed by Sussex Boro residents in 1893, summered at 'Camp Windy' on the east shore of Sand Pond, now called Lake Rutherford (Renamed about 1897). They had a long term lease from the Rutherford family the original owner of the land. Even the purchase of Lake Rutherford by Sussex Boro for the use of its water supply could not make them relocate. They had to honor their lease. Finally in 1924, the lease was up and they no longer summered there. The cabins that you see behind these folks were purchased from Philadelphia after their use as temporary polling booths. Some were fixed up very nicely and made great accommodations indeed. Picture c1910.

*SUSSEX, N. J. Woodbourne Falls*



**Woodbourne Falls - Wantage**

## **Wantage Township (Part 2)**

So here we are in the new township (well it was actually a precinct at that time, it will be incorporated as a township on February 21, 1798) of Wantage in 1754. It was created by a commission appointed by the courts in the newly organized County of Sussex (June 8, 1753). At that time, Newton and Walpack made up the lands of the entire county, except for what is now Stillwater and Green townships, which was part of Warren County then. They would be added in later. At this time in Wantage, from around 1750 and 1765, speculators and surveyors would scout the lands of Wantage to see if anything looked like it would be worth investing in. They found cabins of some of the early settlers spotting the area. Wantage was known as a wilderness back then, and the land was thought to have so little value that they decided to just leave these settlers be. In fact, if they were asked by a settler, the surveyors would survey their tract of land and just hand them a deed for it on the spot. Many people became instant landowners this way. The land was considered worthless so why bother going thru the process of trying to get any money for it as they knew that they probably didn't have much money anyway. However, there was a part of Wantage that perhaps thought upon as of having some potential, as well as perhaps having a small community of settlers or at least the potential of growth. Woodburn (Woodbourne today but Woodburn was still used into the 1900s). In a deed dated March 30, 1753 from James Alexander to Johannis Dirckse Westbrook for the Woodburn Mill property states that the Proprietors (British landowner) in 1746 agreed to give him three acres for a garden if he would erect a mill for the convenience of its inhabitants. He did erect that mill and in being compliant with this arrangement had the use of the land for a mill and garden for the rental fee of one ear of Indian corn per year, if it was requested of him at all. The fact that in 1746, a Proprietor would make a donation of land for a mill, saying it was for the convenience of the inhabitants says pretty clearly that there was enough people there to require a mill being built and/or it was an area that was being set up to attract settlers, and perhaps others who want to purchase land to it. So, what of the local government at this time. What matters were of concern to the people that would be brought to their officials for remedy? What concerns of the officials were there for them to remedy in this new precinct? I don't know. Why? Because there are no meeting records or minutes from its inception in 1754 thru 1810. Really. Nada.

## Wantage Township (Part 2) cont.

I went to the Wantage Municipal Building myself to verify this. Sure, enough it is true. Nobody knows where they are. The clerk there did bring out the first book that they did have. It was 1884 and it had the number 1 on the cover. So at least 1884 to the present is available. But what of the meeting records between 1811 thru 1883? Wantage Township doesn't have them. The meeting records from 1812 thru 1850 were copied by Kate Koons Potter, who was the Historian of the Chinkchewunaska chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, in 1936. I do not know what became of the original set. Perhaps they were too damaged and got destroyed. But thanks to her, we do have a record from 1811 thru 1883. From them we know that there was an annual meeting, not bi-monthly like we see now. This meeting would be held in a local home in Wantage or Deckertown. Yearly elections would also be held at a local home, which would continue into the 1850s. Sometimes they were held over two days in two different homes, starting the first day for several hours in the first home, then continuing in another home later that day. From the 1818 minutes concerning the election, it read "Election to open at Henry Beemer's at 10AM and close at 3PM and to open at Bowdewine Decker's the same day at 4PM and close the next day at 11AM to open the same day at 12 N and close as the law permits". These were probably locations at two different sides of the township which would assist in reducing some travel times for people. They could go to the one that was closer to them. It appears that Wolves were a problem for the people of Wantage up until about 1831 as there was a bounty as high as \$35 for killing one. That was a nice chunk of money at that time. Life itself would have been very difficult in the early years. Wantage was a wilderness. It would be difficult to get around or to fell trees to mark out a spot for a farm. You had to be self sufficient as much as possible. Everything was very labor intensive. As the 1800s started to roll along, Deckertown was beginning to emerge as the economic engine of Wantage. It was becoming the place that you could go to purchase goods, parts, textiles, farm supplies, entertainment and more and the railroad was coming to town. Wantage was the epidemy of determination, hard work and it would soon start to form a community in balance with nature and humans.

This brings us to the end of part two. Look for Part 3 in the Fall 2020 - Winter 2021 edition of The Fountains.



**SUSSEX-WANTAGE**  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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**2020 APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP (JANUARY 1, 2020 THRU  
DECEMBER 31, 2020)**

**CURRENTLY MEMBERSHIP TO THE SUSSEX-WANTAGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY IS  
\$10.00 (PLEASE MAKE YOUR CHECK OUT TO SUSSEX-WANTAGE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY AND MAIL TO THE ADDRESS ABOVE OR APPLY ONLINE AT  
[WWW.SWHISTORIC.ORG](http://WWW.SWHISTORIC.ORG) TO PAY BY CREDIT CARD USING PAYPAL)**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT US \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT IS/WAS YOUR OCCUPATION \_\_\_\_\_

DO YOU HAVE ANY HOBBIES \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT INTERESTS YOU MOST ABOUT HISTORY \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE OUR MEETINGS TO INCLUDE \_\_\_\_\_

WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO BE A VOLUNTEER ON ONE OF OUR PROJECTS - Y N