

Paradise Past

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PARADISE
Historical
Society

SPECIAL EDITION

A Summary of the History of Paradise Township

This summary of the history of Paradise Township, Monroe County, Pennsylvania is based on *Life in Paradise* an 88-page, illustrated booklet published in December, 2023, to celebrate the Township's 175th year.

For a copy (\$15.00 plus shipping) contact John Layton at ldlayton@ptd.net

Prehistory of the Area

Evidence of human activity in what we now call Paradise Township goes back 5,000 to 7,000 years. From their villages along the Delaware River, native people traveled upstream to hunt and fish

— leaving ancient spear points, arrowheads, grinders and other tools at the meeting point of Paradise Creek, Forest Hills Run, and Swiftwater Creek, among other locations.

This land was later part of the notorious "Walking Purchase," opening it to non-native people. Family groups of European immigrants came north from Northampton County seeking opportunity. The first settlers arrived in the early 1820s, and many of their names are still common here — Bush, Learn, Transue, Hilgert, Bowman, and Nauman among them. Adventurous visitors had been passing through even earlier, staying at The Antlers (now Woodfield Manor) before 1808.



Lenape Artifacts from the
Collection of Jefferson Ross

Early Life

The new settlers found good fishing and hunting, and timber for building, barrels, and lumber. Logging was the first industry. The bark of hemlocks was used in tanning leather, huge pines were harvested for ships' masts, and abundant chestnuts became everything from flooring to shoe pegs. Grist mills and sawmills were built for both domestic and commercial use, taking advantage of the powerful creeks.

As land was cleared, agriculture grew, and through the early 1900s, "farming" was the most common occupation in the Census.

A subsistence farm might have chickens, a pig, a milk cow, and a team of horses, along with a vegetable garden and corn- or hayfields. People dammed small waterways to harvest ice



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Summer
COLLECTING, PRESERVING
& DISSEMINATING PARADISE HISTORY

Early Life

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in winter. Pear and apple trees were prized resources. Members of the community traded skills and goods with one another, built churches and cemeteries, such as St. Paul's in 1856. The Ace Store in East Swiftwater was founded in 1890, a center for local commerce and gossip. Elsewhere in the township, mink and fox were raised for their pelts, and by 1901, Paradise Brook Trout Company was founded, selling fish and their eggs locally and to the outer world. An elk preserve was established in Devil's Hole about 1910, though the captive animals did not thrive.

Paradise Township was officially created, carved out of Price Township, in 1848. With abundant fresh water and good (if rocky) soil, farming had created a settled community life. As the loggers moved on, the railroad workers arrived. Artisans, tradesmen, and shopkeepers came, too, seeking opportunities to provide needed products and services.

Serving the Growing Tourist Trade

The coming of the railroad in the 1850s changed everything. Many railroad workers were housed at Paradise Inn. Built in 1835, the Inn still stands at the heart of Paradise Valley, having welcomed generations of workers, tourists, artists and actors.



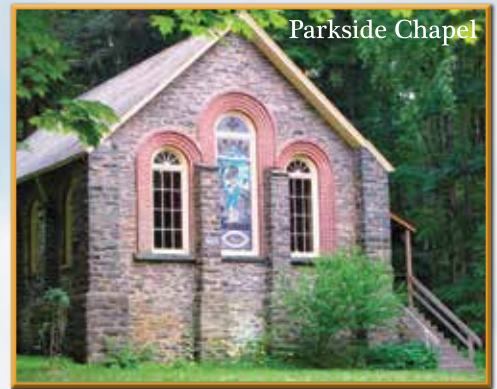
The Paradise Inn

With tourists arriving at the Henryville and Cresco stations, every farm family with a room to spare saw the opportunity to earn some cash by offering simple accommodations. The Ace Store, for example, expanded to offer rooms at "The East Swiftwater," advertising clean air, pure mountain water, and home-cooking. Boarding houses led to inns, lodges, and hotels — and the resort industry was born.

The Paradise Valley "downtown" area hosted the Rudolph (forerunner of Pocono Mountain Inn "PMI"), The Oriental (later Crescent Lodge), the Nearbrook, and other hostelryes. In Swiftwater, travelers also stayed at the 1888 Forest House, and the Fanseen family home of 1882 eventually grew into today's Mount Airy Lodge.

Right across Paradise Creek from the train station, the iconic Henryville House was established in 1842. Its location was perfect for appealing to the booming interest in fly fishing. Also along the creek was the Parkside hotel.

Regular visitors to these two hotels helped to found the lovely Parkside Chapel, still in use today, and listed on the National Historic Register.



Parkside Chapel

The western part of Paradise toward Mount

Pocono offered everything from elegant lodges to family bungalows to health spas, including the Wiscasset, Montanessa, Ontwood, Meadowside, and the Gables.

Post offices opened in Swiftwater in 1836 and in Paradise Valley in 1851; others were located over the years in Henryville and Paradise Falls Lutheran Association. Combined with the railroad, new roads, and paved roads, post offices offered expanded access to the outside world — both for visitors traveling to the area, and for locals shipping their produce and products to New York City, Philadelphia, and beyond.

This access to the wider world gave scope to local artists such as Edna Palmer Englehardt and her sisters, actors such as Joe Jefferson and Barton Hill, and entertainers such as Enzo Stuarti and Eddie Bracken who found inspiration and audiences here. Thousands of acres of woods and pristine trout streams turned hunting, fishing, hiking, winter sports, and the outdoor life generally into profitable businesses. Public lands and parks were created by the Township in later years, continuing the tradition.

Landmark Organizations and Attractions

Pocono Biological Laboratories was founded in 1897 by Richard M. Slee as a smallpox vaccine laboratory in Swiftwater. Called simply "the drug company" even today, the company is now Sanofi-Pasteur, a multi-national manufacturer of vaccines. Most of the property is in Pocono Township, with a small foothold in Paradise.

Devils Hole Sanitarium existed briefly, built in 1910 and burned in 1911. Foundations and chimney still stand.



Paradise Falls

Paradise Falls Lutheran Association, founded in 1922 on former farmland, began as a cottage community for Lutheran pastors and

their families. The property centers around the private dam-made Lake Crawford and Paradise Creek, with about 80 cottages on both sides of route 191 in Paradise Valley. A camp for girls operated there, but was washed out by the Flood of 1955.

Niering's Garage is an enduring institution in Paradise Valley, marking its 90th anniversary in 2025. It was built by Harry Niering, Sr., later operated by Harry Niering, Jr., and now by third-generation Pete Niering. As a local gathering place, opinions on many subjects are provided, free of charge.



Now outlawed for cruelty, dancing bears were once brought from Andorra in the Pyrenees, to small towns, including Paradise Valley. This photo, c. 1920s, is believed to have been taken on route 191 close to the location of Niering's Garage.

Robert Ross started *Ross and Ross Garden Center* in 1932 as an herb farm and landscape service on Bush Road. His son Jefferson and Jeff's wife Dawn (Dippre) opened the garden center in Paradise Valley in 1972. It continues as a full-service garden center and landscaping service operated by their son Wayne.



Linda Ross Besecker began *The Lavender Farm* in 2012, across the road from Ross and Ross, raising and selling lavender and lavender products, along with an Enchanted Forest and event venue.

From the 1950s, *Bob Blackwell* owned a gas station at Carlton Road and what is now route 940. Mary Ellen and John Flood bought the gas station in 1967, and later sold to Paradise Stream. In 1989, the Floods' son Michael developed a nursery and garden center on the four-acre parcel. Farm products and local produce are also sold there in season.

Son Peter owned the adjoining 30 acres, where the stone and dirt pit operation continues off route 940.

Memorytown on Grange Road was a family attraction dating from 1947. The resort Paul and Mae Asure built on former marshland encompassed a complex of rental cabins, hotel, shops, tavern, antiques store, Civil War-era print shop, candy store, and other attractions. A real estate developer, Anthony Maula, purchased the property in 2012 and converted it to a venue for country weddings.

The Pennsylvania Dutch Farm was adjacent to Memorytown and included a petting zoo, bakery, hay rides, seasonal haunted house, displays of Amish life and other family-oriented attractions. It was



operated by Jim and Jewel Roch until about 1988 and then by Al and Carole Johnson. The Dutch Farm closed in 1997.

Carsons Riding Stable along route 611 was the the longest operating riding stable in the Pocono Mountains. Later called *Paradise Riding Stables*, the business was founded by Phillip and Eleanor Carson in 1960 and later operated by their son Kenneth until 2007.

Al and Carole Johnson owned and operated *ELJ Riding Stable* on route 940 from 1975 - 1994. The business is now called *Mountain Creek Riding Stables* and has been under current ownership since 1994. Trail rides are provided through woodland near Paradise Stream resort.

Kasa's Pizzeria was a small pizza chain in the area, owned by Michael Kasapov, an immigrant from eastern Europe. It opened in 1978. Dave Buchter, the owner since 1985, added a video-rental business. After a fire, the business was rebuilt in 1999 and expanded. The restaurant displays dozens of historical images of Paradise on its walls.



A photo shop near Kasa's was owned by the partnership Coffman and Meyung, and under different ownership was called *Memory Studios*. The shop offered retail camera services and photography for events at nearby resorts. Michael Bolock purchased the property and converted it into a funeral home, with a crematory added later. In 2022, it was sold when the owner retired, but continues to operate under the name *Bolock Funeral Home*.

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Landmark Organizations and Attractions

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In 1987, Tim Rosengrant opened *Tim's Auto Body* on commercial property near his house. As it grew, the business moved to the shopping area near the pizzeria, where it continues to offer full-service repairs.

According to Al Johnson, the building that today houses *Bliss Beauty and Body Co.* was previously the site of Jacob and Astrid Keuler's real estate offices. Paradise Valley Bakery operated in that location from 1991 through 1993, followed briefly by a delicatessen.

The main business district ends with a gun shop and dry cleaner at the stoplight on route 940. Near the northern intersection of route 390 and route 191 are Barn Door Antiques, Campbell's tree company, a small strip of stores and Carrazza's bar and restaurant (formerly The Coach House and before that The Hickory Valley ham house). Continuing north on route 191/390, *Mountain Landscaping* occupies the former Callie's Pretzel Factory location.

At the southern end of Paradise Valley in the 1940s, *The Lighthouse* was a luncheonette, bar, and dance hall located across what is now Route 191 from the Henryville House.



The Henryville house swimming pool was located there, too, along with a gas station and the Post Office when Lucy Henry was postmaster. Greyhound buses stopped there. The Lighthouse was severely damaged in the Flood of 1955, and then converted into *Patrick Henry Antiques*, run by Cathy Tolman. In the early 2000s, the Henryville Flyfishers bought the property and eventually demolished it.

Just south of The Lighthouse on the west side of route 191, Fred Kirsch built the *Lone Pine Inn* bar and restaurant in the 1930s. There were also rooms to let. In the early 1950s the Lone Pine Inn became an antique shop. It is currently the headquarters of the Henryville Flyfishers.

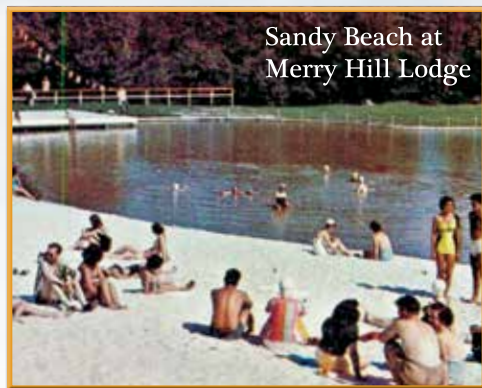
Honeymooners and Resorts Expand Tourism

After World War II, the Poconos became known as the "Honeymoon Capital of the World" — and Paradise had its share in the boom.

Farm on the Hill was established in 1945 by Rudolf Von Hoevenberg. He and his family ran it until 1965. Located at Red Rock Road and Bush Road, the resort offered private cabins and a pool. Later owners included Bill and Barbara Lord, who also operated a candle shop on the property. The name *Farm on the Hill* is inscribed on a stone pillar at the entrance, though it is no longer a vacation property.

Paradise Stream Resort, a former motel on route 191 and Carlton Road, became part of the Caesar's properties along with Cove Haven. In 1971, Paradise Stream was purchased by what is now Cove Pocono Resorts. The resort offers a restaurant, nightclub, and varied accommodations; some are two-story suites with private sauna, pool, and champagne-glass hot tub.

A stay at Merry Hill Lodge and Cottages was a prize on CBS tv's "Bride and Groom" show in 1951. Established about 1938 by John Heinemann, the resort was owned by former fashion model Viki Young Fossa from 1948 through 1968. She took pride in the excellence of her table. There was "terrace dancing" under the stars and a sandy beach at the "lagoon."



Other small, family-run operations provided accommodations to honeymooners, such as Whispering Hills on Grange Road and Cordial Cottages (originally Marcello Farms) on Carlton Road. Other businesses provided ancillary services, such as resort and aerial photography and photo finishing by Coffman & Meyung's Color Laboratories, and restaurants.

Across Carlton Road from the Ace Store in East Swiftwater is Chestnut Grove. Established in the 1880s, it was first called East Swiftwater House. Frequent mention of the property is made in *Hettie Ace's Diary*.

By 1948, it was called Chestnut Grove, owned by Otto Schafer. Ads offered accommodations for vacationers and honeymooners, including meals, starting at \$7 daily. In 1974 Chestnut Grove Lodge was sold by Irmgard and Nathan Fessenden to New Yorkers Sam and Carolyn D'Alessandro. Members of the Daniels Resort family in Barrett Township operated the resort into the early 2000s. It is now a private religious retreat.

Peter Rossi owned Pocono Gardens Lodge, built in 1940, at the intersection of route 390 and 940. Statues, fountains, an elaborate archway, buildings, terraces and railings were all made of



concrete. Situated along a stretch of the Paradise Creek on Keokee Chapel Road, it operated as a honeymoon hotel, with the obligatory heart-shaped tubs. In 1971 Mount Airy Lodge acquired the property, but its heyday was past, and it closed in 2000. Louis DeNaples bought it in 2005 and demolished the buildings. The 333 acres remain undeveloped.

Developed by Louis DeNaples of Scranton, today's Mount Airy Casino Resort and Spa is marketed as a "premier adult resort." The property includes restaurants, slot machines and poker, bars, spa, pool, a dam-built lake on the Forest Hills Run, golf course, and public hiking trails. Located in Paradise Township's "Resort Overlay District," about half of Mount Airy's 1,056 acres are subject to a conservation easement held by the Township that limits potential development, and requires Mount Airy to maintain the hiking trails for public use.

The Green Book, published 1936 - 1964 to help Black Americans "vacation without aggravation" includes a listing for Lang's Orchard Cottage in Henryville. Research suggests that the property known today as Amanda's, at the corner of Hunter Farm Road and route 715, was once called Orchard Cottage.

The hotels, inns, and resorts described here are only some of the accommodations in Paradise over the years. There were many others, about some of which we know little more than their names.

Houses of Worship and Cemeteries

Early settlers worshipped in private homes until 1826, when the log-built Presbyterian Lutheran church, off Red Rock Road, was established.

It was used until 1856. The structure is gone, but the small associated cemetery remains, maintained by Paradise Township. Gravestones bear names of the Township's earliest European settlers, and oral tradition says that a number of Indigenous people are buried in unmarked graves.



The first Evangelical Church meeting was held in Paradise in 1838, but a church was not built until 1851 or 1852, Keokee Chapel United Methodist Church. The cemetery contains some of the oldest graves in the township.

According to *History of the Swiftwater United Methodist Church*, Paradise Methodist Church (1851 - 1892), was located to the east of the intersection of Carlton Road and what is now Red Rock road. By 1920, the church was gone, and the land returned to farming.

The first church at the site of the present St. Paul's Church was a small building that faced Schoolhouse Road, erected in 1856 at a cost of \$800. The current church was built in 1887. For many years until the early 2000s, the church held a blueberry festival in July that drew people for miles around.

Construction on Parkside Chapel began in 1893 and was completed in 1894. The owners of the Henryville House and Park House were instrumental in building the

Chapel, which provided a place of worship for guests and residents. The Chapel has no running water or electricity and continues to celebrate non-denominational Protestant worship, open to the public, every summer. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Paradise Valley Lutheran Association has conducted Lutheran services in their Social Hall during the summer since the early 20th century. Today visiting pastors lead the services.

The Villa of Our Lady, across Woodland Road from today's Mount Airy golf course, was a Roman Catholic retreat house and monastery for Bernadine Franciscan nuns, overseen by the Scranton Diocese. It operated from 1905, closing in 2020.



Most Holy Trinity Parish Roman Catholic church is in the former Monsignor McHugh school on Route 390, consecrated in 2022. The parish resulted from merging St. Bernadette's in Canadensis, St. Ann's in Tobyhanna, and St. Mary's in Mount Pocono.

In 2000, the American Zen Buddhist Temple - Vairocana Monastery was established on Route 940 in northern Paradise Valley. The Venerable Ta-Yu, a Buddhist nun from Taiwan, taught fundamentals of Mahayana Buddhism there.

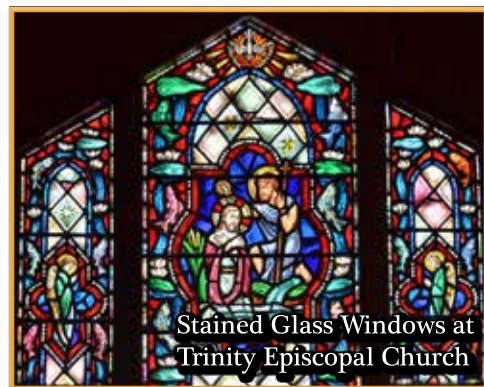
Korean Presbyterian Church of Pocono (PCA-Korean) is located on Wood Acres Drive off Route 390.

Assembly of God/Innovation Church, established in the 1990s, is located on Route 940.

Paradise Valley Baptist Church, established in the 1990s, is located at the corner of Koerner Road and Route 390.

A Catholic church is believed to have existed in Henryville, located on the west side of Route 191 just south of route 715. Made of stone, it was built close to the creek and was too damp to be useable. It was destroyed in the Flood of 1955.

Trinity Episcopal Church near Mount Pocono was founded by a group of summer vacationers to our area, just as Parkside Chapel was, and at about the same time. Trinity's building was designed by prolific church architect Thomas P. Lonsdale and built in 1896, replete with beautiful stained glass windows by Nicola D'Ascenzo.



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Schools

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Prior to 1834, children were educated at home as there were no organized schools. The Paradise school district began in 1849, with directors Tobias Setzer, David Edinger, Andrew Storm, Peter Dorblaser, and John Storm.

For at least two of the first Paradise schools, farmers provided land and conveyed it to the board of directors for school buildings. One-room schoolhouses existed in Paradise Valley, Northern Paradise, Henryville, and Paradise/Swiftwater. Eventually the district consolidated the schools into one newly-built school on Upper Swiftwater Road. For high school, Paradise students were bussed to Barrett.

In 1955, eight separate small school districts in our area merged. The Pocono Mountain Joint School opened in 1961 with 850 students in grades 7 through 12. Known as "The Jointure" when it first opened, the official name was changed to Pocono Mountain Junior/Senior High School in 1964. At the end of the 2001-2002 school year, the school district was split into Pocono Mountain East and Pocono Mountain West.

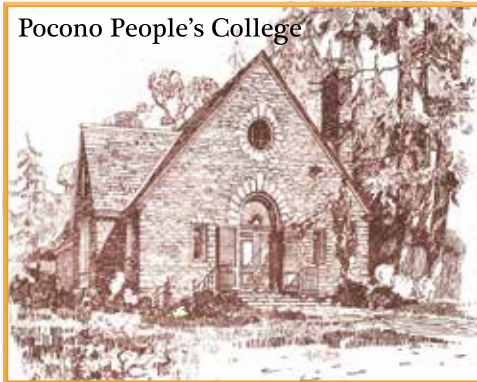
Pocono People's College, which promoted itself as a "folk school for men and women seeking knowledge and spiritual growth," was located at Hunter Farm in Henryville. Founded in

January 1924

by Dr. Henry

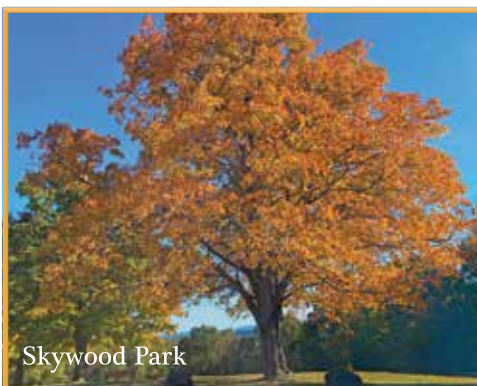
Hulbert and Danish educator Dr. Sorn A. Mathiasen, it had a wide-ranging curriculum and attracted the attention of W.E.B. DuBois. Though enrollment grew each year, Pocono People's College folded with the onset of the Depression in 1929.

Pocono People's College



Weather, the Flood of 1955, and Pandemic

Weather in the Township is typical of temperate areas of the country — warm summers, cold winters, and moderate temperatures in spring and fall. Conditions are uniquely good here for excellent fall color, another attraction that brings "leaf peepers" from around the world.



Paradise Township has a lower incidence of tornadoes and earthquakes than the national average. Blizzards were recorded in March 1958, February, 1978, January 19, 1961 (20 inches of snow), and March 1993 (12 - 14 inches of snow). Average snowfall in the Poconos is 50 inches in a season.



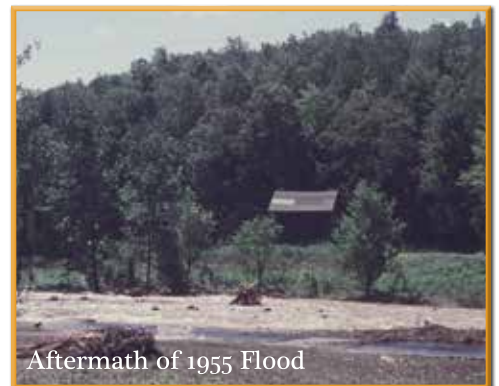
Snowfall extremes in Paradise vary from little more than 15 inches in a season to over four feet in a season. Trees falling on buildings are rare.

The Township has experienced many nor-easters, tropical storms, and hurricanes including Sandy. But the outstanding weather event of the Township's history was the Flood of 1955. 1955 was an active year for hurricanes nationally. In the Poconos, summer drought conditions prevailed even after a little rainfall in early August.

That changed when Hurricane Connie saturated the ground from August 11 - 15. Then, Hurricane Diane barreled through on August 17 - 20, dropping heavy rain on our already saturated region. Together, the back-to-back storms dumped close to 20 inches of rain on the area.

Early settlers and later arrivals liked being near water and often built houses along the creeks. Earthen dams were common, both for practical reasons such as power for mills and for swimming and fishing. As the floodwaters of 1955 grew in the upper reaches of the watershed, creeks rampaged through their valleys, bursting dams, ripping out trees and buildings, and accumulating more and more debris.

The No. 5 train traveling west from Hoboken, New Jersey, left Cresco Station toward Mount Pocono Station, but stalled between Cresco and the Devils Hole at about 7:00 p.m. on August 18. Fire inspector Forest



Evans spotted the train on the tracks near his home — and warned the engineer to back up to Cresco. The fear was that the train might tip over into the raging waters of the Devils Hole Creek. The train was backed up. All 250 passengers were safe.

Under normal conditions, a culvert through the base of the railroad embankment that spanned the small valley of the Devils Hole Creek allowed the creek to flow through. As the rain poured down, debris blocked the culvert, and floodwaters filled the creek valley like a lake. A horrified eye-witness, Donald Williams, said “stumps and tree limbs were bobbing at eye level.” Finally the enormous earthen wall was overwhelmed, and the rubble-laden water roared downstream carrying everything in its path, pounding down the Paradise to the Brodhead and into Stroudsburg.



Devastation at the Devils Hole railroad crossing led to catastrophic damage downstream. Here the railroad tracks are seen hanging in air.

More than 100 people lost their lives in the flood. Many were lulled into a false sense of safety as the flood waters at first seemed to abate, only to return with a vengeance after the failure at Devils Hole.

The Covid Pandemic

Before vaccines became available, local news sources reported about 1,300 covid cases in Monroe County, with about 100 deaths in 2020. Numbers in 2021 were difficult to find, and less reliable. Anecdotally, everyone knew of people who had the virus — neighbors, family members and often themselves — but it seems impossible to determine the exact number of cases or deaths in Paradise.

Paradise Historical Society, along with most other organizations, suspended meetings during the worst of the pandemic. PHS sent out an occasional email newsletter, called *Paradise Flash*, to help keep members informed.



Paradise resident Kathy Buckwalter worked at a local hospital during the pandemic. Lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) at the beginning of the outbreak forced many essential workers to improvise: Note the plastic trash bags she used as PPE from knees to feet.

Just as in the Township's earliest days, people fleeing Covid were drawn here by our fresh air and water, scenery, and outdoor life. At the peak of the pandemic, people from New York, Philadelphia, and environs bought properties in Paradise as quickly as they came on the market, often without seeing them in person. With many schools and businesses operating remotely, owning a country place offered less crowding and potentially safer living. In some neighborhoods, the newcomers became full-time, permanent residents.

Paradise Today and Tomorrow

Since its founding in the 1800s, the changes in Paradise Township are many. But we are still a small, welcoming community.

Our commercial center has changed and grown, becoming more service oriented. Boarding houses have been replaced by Airbnb-style rentals and private clubs catering to anglers, hunters, and nature lovers. Small family inns have faded away, replaced by accommodations like Mount Airy Casino and Resort, Paradise Stream Resort, and Woodfield Manor. Few farmers remain, and many residents commute to New York and Philadelphia instead of making their living locally.

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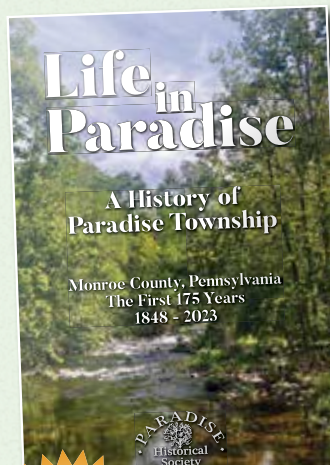
Paradise Historical Society
P.O. Box 94
Henryville, PA 18332

Paradise Today and Tomorrow

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Our population has grown to many times that of the 1800s, yet the outdoor life is as available as it ever was to all who choose to enjoy it, visitor and resident alike. You still can't go far in Paradise without crossing a healthy creek or stream, glimpsing a ridgeline of native hemlocks and oaks, or catching a sunlit valley view. These natural surroundings, pure water and air, large tracts of preserved public land, and miles of trails continue to draw visitors in every season — and lift the spirits of all who share them.

May this summary of Paradise Township's history inspire future generations to tend carefully this special place. [PHS](#)



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Summer 2025