

**CURATOR'S REPORT**  
**THE BERLIN AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**MARCH 10, 2026**



**NEW BALTIMORE SCHOOL**

**DESTROYED BY FIRE! PICTURE SUPPLIED BY  
MARY ANN (STIFFLER) DICAMILLO**

**NEW BALTIMORE**

# PRINCIPALS



**ELLWOOD PAUL VARNER, SR., PRINCIPAL, WITH JAMES M. CASSEL, SUPERVISING PRINCIPAL, AT THE BERLIN BROTHERSVALLEY HIGH SCHOOL. PICTURE FROM THE 1958 BERVALON YEARBOOK.**

**D** id you ever wonder what happened to Elwood P. Varner, who is listed in the 1957, 1958, and 1959 editions of the Bervalon as the Principal of the Berlin Brothersvalley High School? John Chobany is featured in the 1960 Bervalon as the succeeding Principal. After leaving Berlin, Mr. Varner became Supervising Principal at Chestnut Ridge Joint Schools, Assistant Superintendent of Towanda Schools, and Superintendent of Purchase Line Schools (1967-1978). In retirement he operated a dairy farm near Cherry Tree with his youngest son, Ellwood P. "Woody" Varner, Jr. (1957-2025) who was born while Mr. Varner was Principal at Berlin. Mr. Varner and his wife, Adeline (Hallow) Varner were parents of five children.

Ellwood P. Varner (1920-1994) was a World War II veteran with service in the South Pacific. He was a combat officer and company commander in the Pacific Theater of Operations. He served in the Marine Corps for six years, reaching the rank of Captain. He was a graduate of Conemaugh High School and a 1942 graduate of Manhattan College where he attended on a full football scholarship. He began his teaching and coaching career at Richland Township in 1948. He later held teaching and coaching positions at Elders Ridge and Ligonier prior to becoming Principal at Berlin Brothersvalley High School.

# What we know about Stonycreek

## Township milking barn fire



Several fire departments battled an early morning barn fire in the 9100 block of Glades Pike Feb. 17.

MADOLIN EDWARDS/DAILY AMERICAN

### Madolin Edwards

The Daily American  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Part of a milking barn was destroyed in an early morning fire Feb. 17 in the 9100 block of Glades Pike in Stonycreek Township.

Berlin Volunteer Fire Department Chief Bill Miller said the call came in at 12:19 a.m. He said the owner was awakened by someone along the road blowing their car horn. He checked to see who was blowing the horn and saw the glow of the fire in the barn.

Miller said when firefighters arrived, the roof on the front part of the barn had already collapsed. The room held the large milk tank and office area for the farm, he said.

"We made a quick knockdown and saved the milk parlor and the rest of the barn," he said. "We looked for hot spots for a while. Everybody did a good job."

No injuries were reported, and no animals were inside the barn at the time of the call, Miller said. The Pennsylvania State Police fire marshal is investigating. Miller said the cause of the fire is undetermined at this time.

The Berlin fire department received help from Listie, Friedens, New Balti-

more and Shanksville fire departments.

The fire was confirmed knocked down at 1:25 a.m. Miller said the department returned to service about

1:30 a.m.

"Thanks to the neighboring departments for their tankers, engines and manpower to help," he said. "We pro-

ected the other barn and propane tanks that were close to the milking barn. Saving the rest of the barn the way we did - that was important."

ONE OF THE  
BARN ON  
THE DOUGLAS  
HILLEGASS  
FARM NEAR  
ROXBURY.

SOMERSET  
DAILY AMERICAN  
STORY BY  
MADOLIN  
EDWARDS

**TOM BAKER DONATED THESE PHOTOS FROM THE FORMER SNYDER'S OF BERLIN PLANT.**



# Future still unresolved for Berlin's snack plant

Officials: No word from Our Home on plans for factory as production appears to wind down

**BY DAVID HURST**  
DHURST@TRIBDEM.COM

BERLIN - Production inside the Our Home snack food plant in Berlin appears to have ceased, but questions continue to circulate about the property's future.

Friday marks the beginning of the closure process for the New Jersey-based company's Somerset County operation, according to a layoff notice filed with state Department of Labor & Industry officials.

The Somerset County commissioners and Berlin Borough officials said they have still gotten no response from Our Home as to the company's intent for the facility.

And while state Rep. Carl Metzgar, R-Somerset, has fielded calls from a half-dozen businesses expressing "serious interest" in the property, it's too soon to predict whether it will lead to a sale, he said.

Please see **BERLIN, A2**

## BERLIN

Continued from A1

Any discussions between Our Home and prospective buyers would be private matters, Metzgar added. But he's "hopeful" there's dialogue occurring.

"At this point, any hope that we could avoid an interruption of (work) at the facility, that doesn't seem possible anymore," he said.

The next best option would be that another business can make an offer enticing enough to acquire the 186,000-square-foot Stadium Street facility.

The factory operated for generations as Snyder of Berlin, although it has been owned by larger snack-makers, including Utz, until 2024.

Our Home bought the facility in April 2024, and nearly 100 workers were employed making products such as "Good Health" snacks.

The company indicated the Berlin workforce would be laid off this week, with a final closure projected by the end of the year.

Our Home communications officials have not returned messages for comment.

Gary Estnick, a Brothersvalley Township resident whose daughter is among the employees now out of work, said employees were given two weeks' severance pay.

He said a small number of staff have remained at the plant to sanitize the factory and its equipment now that production has ended.

Residents initially hoped that another company might swoop in and keep production going - or that Our Home might simply be aiming to negotiate a more company-friendly deal with its workers. As it turns out, that wasn't the case, said Estnick, who is a member of Berlin's historical society.

"It's just too bad ... the way it worked out," he said.

Our Home continues operating a facility in Lititz, Lancaster County.

As of Thursday, the Berlin plant was not listed for sale on any commercial real estate sites.

Berlin Borough's executive treasurer, Traci Horning, said the borough hasn't received any updates from company representatives since Our Home filed its mandated Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act notice in December.

"All we know is that (Friday) was supposed to be the last day," Horning said last week, referencing the layoff notice. "We're not hearing anything."

Metzgar said state officials, including his office and Gov. Josh Shapiro's office, are willing to do their part to "incentivize" a deal that will get the facility back in operation again - if Our Home wants to part with it.

But given that the facility is shutting down, "it seems like it's in everyone's best interest ... to try to figure out a solution," he said.

*David Hurst is a reporter for The Tribune-Democrat. Follow him on Twitter and Instagram @TDDavidHurst.*

**PRODUCTION CEASES AT OUR HOME SNACK FOOD PLANT IN BERLIN. (FEBRUARY 2026)**

# SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

WHAT DID THE H. STAND FOR IN **H. VIRGIL GRUMBLING'S** FIRST NAME? HE WAS A FORMER SUPERINTENDENT OF THE BERLIN BROTHERSVALLEY HIGH SCHOOL.

WHAT BECAME OF **RUTH JOHNSON** - FORMER HOME ECONOMICS TEACHER AT BERLIN ROTHERSVALLEY HIGH SCHOOL - AFTER SHE LEFT BERLIN?



Ruth Johnson, B.S.  
Home Economics

DID YOU KNOW THAT **MARJORIE ANKENY** - A FORMER ECONOMICS TEACHER AT BERLIN BROTHERSVALLEY HIGH SCHOOL - RESIDES IN SOMERSET, WHERE SHE IS THE WIDOW OF MAX ANKENY?

**ON FEBRUARY 20, 1792**

President George Washington signed an act creating the United States Post Office Department, the predecessor of the U.S. postal Service.

---

## DONATIONS AND UPDATES

We are greatly saddened that Berlin's long-time employer **Snyder of Berlin**, production taken over in recent years at the plant of **Our Home**, officially closed its snack food plant in February 2026. Items donated by Tom Baker, who worked there for 49 years included 4 framed pictures of the plant showing expansions during the years; a framed potato chip bag with the Snyder name; and 1 framed photo of a Snyder delivery truck. Also donated was a scrapbook of news releases, many snapshots taken inside the plant with various employees; 2 Snyder publications; 3 VHS tapes; and a slicer unit used at the plant. Three generations of some families found employment at the plant. A sad time for this long-time Berlin employment facility. Two long-time Snyder employees, **Leanna Coughenour** and **Karen Bittner** placed the pictures in an album which they organized and labeled.

We've learned that **Russel Love**, editor of the South Penn Railroad books and maps that we sell, has died. **Carolyn Payne** has been working at digitating slides into useful electronics. **Blane Quinn** donated a collection of 1940s Bervalon yearbooks. **Esther Hauger** donated a number of older posters. **Terry Rhodes** donated a Charlie McCurdy glass coffee mug and an advertising pen for Blubaugh Supply Company.

Thank you to our volunteers!

**DAVID R. HAY, CURATOR**



**JENNA (ZORN) OGBURH**



**THOMAS LOWRY, ANITA (WALKER) HANKINSON,  
CINDY (GEARY) FLAMM AND ROBERT ANSELL**

**REPRESENTING:**

- JENNA OBGURN - NORTHAMPTON TOWNSHIP**
- TOM LOWRY - STONYCREEK TOWNSHIP**
- ANITA HANKINSON - ALLEGHENY TOWNSHIP**
- CINDY FLAMM - STONYCREEK TOWNSHIP**
- ROBERT ANSELL - BERLIN**

# **THE NEWEST BOARD MEMBERS OF THE BERLIN AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**