



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Thank you for the wonderful feedback to the first issue of our newsletter. We hope you continue to find it interesting and something you want to forward to your family and friends. We also want to know any topics of interest you would like us to cover.

A quarterly publication schedule was initially planned, but with the material that we have—and that continues to be donated to us—we'll now try to do this every two months.

Upcoming Events

**Bus trip to Peter, Paul & Mary Concert at Chautauqua
July 27th**

**Gambling Spree Bus Trip to Casino Niagara
August 8th**

**The opera *La Traviata* at Pierce Opera House
September 20th and 22nd**

These are important fundraisers for the Historical Society as well as enjoyable events. Please support them.

Also at the Pierce Opera House are the quality productions of Area Community Theatre of Sharpsville (ACTS), showcasing local talent.

***Rodgers & Hammerstein . . . A Musical Revue*
August 24th and 25th**

**Neil Simon's *The Prisoner of Second Avenue*
October 26th -28th and November 2nd - 4th**

All these events enhance the quality of life in the Shenango Valley. Your support helps them to continue.

Test your knowledge of our town

Kiondoshawa was an 18th century chief of the Pymatuning Indian tribe of this area. His name meant flying-fish and was lent (under various spellings) to three places or things with a local connection. Do you know any?

(Answer on last page.)

Tell us your story

Everyone has a story to tell. Unfortunately, these stories are often lost when people move away or pass away.

Written records from the 19th and early 20th centuries—whether published histories or newspaper accounts—while valuable, often omitted mention of large swaths of the population: namely, if you were poor, spoke little English, or black, there was little chance then of finding your name in a biographical sketch, obituary or elsewhere in the newspaper, outside the police blotter or report of a mill accident. The impolite detail or anecdote was also something unlikely to be included in the written chronicle. Most importantly, though, the pattern of everyday life just wasn't worth recording at the time. Only in retrospect, when things are no longer as they once were, do we realize routine events are something future generations should know.

For example, among the items we've received are a letter that described growing up on Mercer Avenue in the 40s and 50s and a biography of Sharpsville native Clifford Nickle, an engineering genius who had 21 patents to his name. Even the short anecdote is valuable because it so often enlivens the "official" record. For instance, when the Welch House (a tavern and rooming house at the corner of 4th and Main) burned in 1954, we've been told the first person to raise the alarm with the fire department was ignored because he was one of the town drunks. Or, how Wallace Pierce—one of the General's five sons and who, like all save one of his brothers, had six fingers on each hand—liked to go into department stores and ask to try on gloves.

Small town life rarely involved events of national import; nonetheless, its stories are vital to an full understanding of the past—our past. So, we are eager to know about the disappearing ethnic tradition, the fond recollection of the old neighborhood, the characters (and there were plenty) that used to fill the town—even tell us the anecdote that can only be revealed now that the statute of limitations has expired.

Not every story will be pleasant: the ethnic or racial discrimination, the everyday danger of factory work, the battlefield horrors witnessed by our veterans, the way we coped with poverty and economic depression. But all stories are necessary to fully understand our town and ourselves.

So if you or someone you know have favorite memories, jot them down or record them, and let us preserve a copy. (If you prefer, we can assist with an interview.) It doesn't matter if it is long or short, from the 1930s or more recent. We aren't looking for a literary work, just a plainspoken story.

Collections Update

The following have been recently added to our collections:

Bud & Dawn Hazlett donated a number of items, including school photos from 1910-23, tax receipts and receipts on the letterhead of various town businesses from 1890-1904, and photos and Victoriana—1800-1920s.

Marjorie Thompson donated a black silk dress worn at the 1930 graduation of her mother-in-law Annabelle Downing.

A grant from the Sharpsville Area Historical Society has allowed for the digitization of **Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps** held in the collections of the Penn State University Libraries. These maps, covering Sharpsville for the years 1886, 1895, 1900, 1905, and 1912, will soon be accessible, free of charge, in the Archives section of the Society's website: www.sharpsvillehistorical.org.

The Sanborn Maps are an important resource for historical research and preservation and well as genealogical and architectural research. They show the outlines of each building in town, details of their construction and occupancy, as well as the streets, alleys and other features of the town's landscape. More on this valuable addition to our resources will be covered in an upcoming newsletter.

We are appreciative of all contributions to preserving and understanding the history of Sharpsville and the surrounding communities. Remember we are happy to scan your old photos if you wish to keep the original.

Membership report

The following new members have joined since the last newsletter:

Dave Nickle
Mary Courman
Nancy Finney

The following have renewed their membership:

Robert Verholek
Karin Tillotsin
Virginia Lange

The support of our new, renewing and lifetime members keeps the Society running and is greatly appreciated.

Traces of forgotten Sharpsville

Streets that have disappeared

More than landmarks, more than natural features, a town's streets shape our perception of its geography. So it may come as a surprise that this seemingly permanent framework of a town isn't so unchangeable after all. Old maps, census records, and city directories mention a number of Sharpsville streets that have been re-named, re-routed or no longer exist.

Until around 1900, Walnut Street was called Mercer Street. (There was still a Mercer Ave.) It originally ended where the railroad tracks once crossed it, and was later extended to Shenango Street, and then past High Street to what was Water Street. Running off Shenango Street was Depot Street (along the east side of the Mahaney Park where the Sharpsville Plaza parking lot is now). This was a portion of what was subsequently called Park Way, with a dog-leg connecting it to Walnut Street added later.

Furnace Street was called North Furnace until sometime after 1912. There was another Furnace Street which was a little further up (behind High Street Pub); it was originally called Hemlock Street. Water Street, which currently comes north off High Street near the power substation, originally ran off Mercer Ave. and connected with Walnut.

Bridge Street ran down the hill from the middle of Hickory Street and connected with the Kelly Road Bridge. This was long before High Street was extended to the same spot.

In 1880, company houses are found on streets named after each of the blast furnaces that stood nearby at the time—Douglas Rd., Mabel Rd., Spearman Row, Mt. Hickory Row, Allen Row, and Old Furnace Row. There was also a Templeton Street located near the feed mill; presumably, it was named for Chambers Templeton who owned the mill at the time.

Prior to 1900, the part of Main Street after it makes its bend between 7th and 8th was called Trout Avenue; it was likely named for Michael Trout, local politician and industrialist. Running parallel to Main from 1st to 6th was Railroad Street; it connected the present dead-ends of North 1st, 2nd, etc.

The 1919 City Directory lists some streets we haven't been able to locate: Ellis Road, running east from 80 N. Mercer Ave.; Walnut Alley, north from 62 Main; Thornton Ave., heading south-west from 423 Ridge; and Knight Ave., running west from Thornton Ave. These were perhaps named alleys. A 1934 map lists two alleys that for a time earned a name. The alley that runs in-between Ashton and Ridge was called Whitla Alley. At the tail end of 18th Street was Hughes Alley, which has only recently disappeared from maps.

In 1912, Nin-Ten Avenue was shown in between Ninth & Tenth. It was a "paper street", though if it extended further south, it would have included part of present day Franklin Avenue. A 1934 map includes a number of paper streets: Elm Street and East Street intersected in the middle of the block bounded by Twitmyer, Walnut, Covert, and Mercer. Glenn Street was a stub off of Thorn. Milliken Avenue was to extend through the woods all the way to Mercer; Eagan Street was to run off that extension and connect with Walnut. Crescent Alley was laid out as a quarter circle across where the R&L Carwash had recently stood. Hillside Avenue was to run parallel to Pryde, Martin & Coleman on Goat Hill. Before Forest Lane was built, it was designated Maple Court.

An index to a 1929 map also lists projected streets of Beupel Place, Colton Place, and Dyer Court. Where they were is presently a mystery.

From Our Archives

Among the topics we are asked about most is Trout Island.

Here is a colorful vignette written by Mairy Jayn Woge and originally published in The Sharon Herald in 1955.

Trout Island Was Famed Recreation Spot in Old Days— Outing Center for Valley Was Closed by Flood in 1913

In the half century following the Civil War, one of the most famous of downtown Sharon characters was hulking, black bearded Carver Trout. A dreamer and wanderer, he lived in a cramped apartment on Silver St. in Sharon.

Carver Trout was the only son of “Mike” Trout, energetic, prosperous industrialist, politician, school director, newspaperman. Dapper “Mike” owned a pretentious red brick mansion in Hickory Township.

Carver liked to hunt and fish. In 1874, his indulgent father bought him an island.

Trout Island is a four-acre slab of flat wooded land. It is formed by the Y-splice of Pymatuning Creek and the Shenango River, three water miles northeast of Sharpsville. At the island was the stonework of Lock 11 of the old Beaver and Lake Erie Canal.

In 1889, Commodore Bill Steese bought a share of the island. He transformed the stagnant “pools and ponds of the Erie Canal” into a showplace, the preferred summer picnic ground of western Mercer County.

250-Pound Irishman

Straight from Ireland, Bill Steese was red haired, clamorously good natured, and weighed 250 pounds. He once stated that he would rather be with his friends than go to Heaven; yet spearheaded a barroom collection for a Presbyterian minister that he admired.

His wife, Anna Belle, was tall, spare, and an inimitable cook. Their only son, Jim, piloted the river boat to Trout Island.

The Steese family lived in the big, unpainted, immaculate John Fell farmhouse, opposite the island.

Trout Island Farmhouse was noted for its chicken dinners. On the menu was chicken, mashed potatoes (Irish potatoes), new corn, Mrs. Steese’s biscuits, and pie, watermelon, or ice cream – all the customer could eat for 50 cents. Host Bill Steese supervised the dining room wearing a white shirt, blue trousers, and in his bare feet.

A massive baseball diamond was blocked out near the house. The commodore always planted a cask of beer at third base.

Trout Island was only 30 feet from the mainland. At the Steese dock was a rope ferry. A cable straddled the river. Picnic-goers could pull themselves back and forth on a thick wooden platform. A floating rope bridge also spanned the river.

Bill Steese maintained a fleet of shipshape rowboats—rental, 25¢ an hour.

The flatboat, Oneida, was built at the old Robinson Brothers furniture plant on Second St. in Sharpsville. The first boat to Trout Island had been a cumbersome double-decker showboat, the Kiondashawa.

Boating on the Shenango was a hazardous undertaking. On July 4, 1896, the ferry boat to Nancy’s Island, near Pulaski, pitched over during a storm with 30 passengers aboard.

Boat Carried 25

The Oneida was a sleek 25-foot paddle wheeler. She was covered by a drab cloth canopy. Wooden seats lined her side rails. The Oneida could carry 25 persons per load to Trout Island. The craft was operated in turn by Bill and Jim Steese and Frank Newport. The boat landed at the foot of Shenango St. in Sharpsville. Slack water from the old dam, a remnant of the canal, permitted good navigation to the island. Three miles upriver, it took the Oneida 40 minutes to make the climb. The Erie Railroad also ran excursions to a platform built near the Steese farmhouse.

Bill Steese hauled picnic tables into the island groves. From the ancient trees, he hung big swings as high as a two story house and wide enough to seat two adults or three children.

Most celebrated spot on Trout Island was the rectangular log-finished dance hall. To protect the dance floor from the roaring spring and fall floods that immersed the island, it had been constructed on a balcony, had to be reached by a steep flight of stairs. Huge wooden flap windows could be opened or closed. Orchestras were imported for dances; the most popular, the valley Mandolin and Guitar Club directed by Miss Cora B. Fuller.

A refreshment stand and dining hall were on the first floor of the lodge—top selling items: Dishes of ice cream, slices of watermelon or pop, birch beer or lemon, at a nickel a bottle.

Beer was peddled from sheds throughout the island. There was a secluded section for Sunday School picnics.

Cabin for Campers

For weekend campers, Bill Steese constructed a two-story log cabin. Beds were heavily screened with mosquito netting.

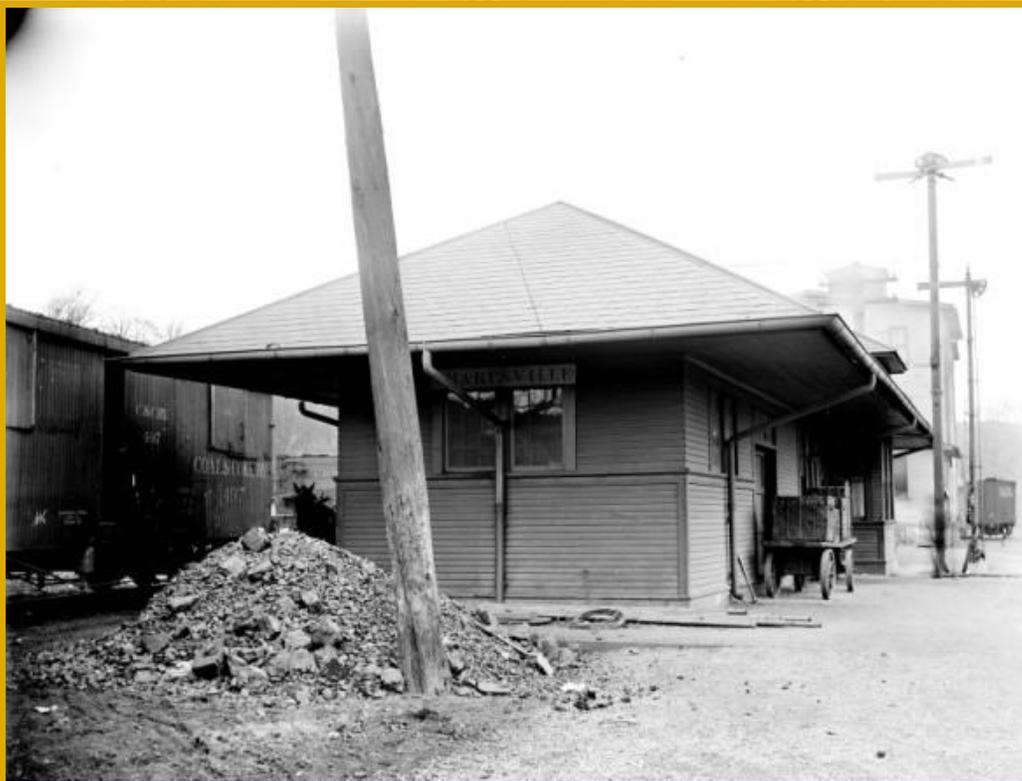
The ground under the Trout Island trees was always wet and slippery. Mosquitos were prevalent at the island. One recollection is that “we would eat dinner and fight mosquitos until it was time to go home.”

The usual picnic outfit should have been competent protection. The men wore stiff white shirts and flannel trousers; the women, a shirtwaist with a starched collar, heavy dark skirt, sailor hat, and black cotton or lisle stockings.

The biggest event of the Shenango Valley summer social season was the annual stag picnic. It was held at Trout Island around July 4. Businessmen from all over the area attended. The picnickers pitched horseshoes; played cards, baseball; sang; ate lunch; drank beer, and listened to political speeches. It was an institution for two decades.

Bill Steese sold the island in 1906. It operated until 1913 when the Beaver and Lake Erie dam was washed away. Boating was impractical and Trout Island was deserted.

In Commodore Bill Steese’s times, it had been synonymous with charm and hearty cordiality. And 7000 valley persons remembered it so.



The Erie Railroad station, seen here from about 1909, along with the depots of the Pennsylvania and the Sharpsville Railroad, was once one of three stations in Sharpsville. It stood along the tracks that follow the river, across Mercer Avenue from the Feed Mill (which can be seen in the background).

This building replaced an earlier structure that burned to the ground in February 1902. (Misfortune struck again the following February when a passenger train derailed near this station, killing the engineer.)

The sign for 'Sharpsville' that can be seen in this photo back under the eaves was recently donated to the Society by Ange Garofali. Several years ago, he had noticed it nailed up in an abandoned treehouse along the river and rescued it.

With Gratitude

Donations were received since the last newsletter from:

Drs. Robert & Kathy Piston

Stephen Feltovich

Gregg Smith

Mela Pompa Garofalo in memory of Dean Alexander

Daryl Paddock—Daryl's Lock & Key

Special thanks to the following who helped make our recent ice cream social a success:

Dean Foods

Bruster's Ice Cream

Sharpsville Police Department

Sharpsville Borough Street Department and

Borough Manager Ken Robertson

We also wish to recognize the following advertising sponsors in our upcoming events programs

Dean Foods

Rich and Ann's Past Times

Building Update

Boy Scout Troop #45, under the direction of **Zac Coryea** as his Eagle Scout project have completed the rebuilding of the stone retaining wall at our headquarters as well as mulched and improved the drainage around the building.

Thanks to Zac and all the guys for a professional-looking job.

Engaging the Community

Members of the Historical Society donated \$50 to the recent Soap-Box Derby race in support of the Greater Pennsylvania Super Kids organization.

While details are still being worked out, the Historical Society along with Area Community Theatre of Sharpsville and Dr. Francisco Cano (owner of the Pierce Opera House) have proposed to Borough Council to fund the erection of a Community Bulletin Board sign in Sharpsville.

Contact Us

website: www.sharpsvillehistorical.org

email: sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com

or see our website for officers' phone numbers

Headquarters: 131 N. Mercer Ave., Sharpsville, Pa.

Mailing address: 955 Forest Lane, Sharpsville, Pa. 16150

Business meetings are held the First Monday of the Month at 7:00pm at our headquarters, with general interest meetings held periodically through the year.

Answer to quiz question:

- 1) The former camp for local Boy Scouts (near New Hamburg) was called Camp Kiondashawa.
- 2) A paddle-wheel boat to Trout Island was called *The Kiondashawa*
- 3) A ca. 1895 map labels the island in the Shenango River (between the lock and the present-day dam) as Kendoshawa Island.