



# SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

If Sharpsville and the greater Shenango Valley are to thrive, if we are to keep our sons and daughters from moving away after graduation, economic opportunities are of course necessary. Just as vital, though, is developing the quality of life here. Along with other cultural, recreational, spiritual, and social resources, we see the Historical Society as a small but important element in contributing toward a thriving community.

While a “quality of life” includes engaging activities and events, even more basically, it develops when a sense of belonging is instilled. Part of that spirit comes from knowing both how we as a town got to where we are today, as well as what sets us apart from an increasingly homogenized landscape. What we as a Historical Society are trying to do is to tell our community’s story and so create a sense of belonging for all—both lifelong residents and relative newcomers.

### Upcoming Events

Special General Membership Meeting  
September 10<sup>th</sup>, 7:30p.m.

Featuring a talk and slide-show of antique  
postcards of local scenes by Gregg Smith  
No Business Meeting—Open to All

The opera *La Traviata* at Pierce Opera House  
September 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>

Gambling Spree Bus Trip to Wheeling Downs  
October 10<sup>th</sup>

Cleveland Trio at Pierce Opera House  
November 11<sup>th</sup>

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.

Neil Simon’s *The Prisoner of Second Avenue*  
October 26<sup>th</sup> -28<sup>th</sup> and November 2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup>

### Collections Update 1000!

While several documents and artifacts had been donated to the Historical Society in its early years, our collection got a huge boost with the July 2004 donation of Pete Joyce’s archive of Sharpsville history that had been displayed at the VFW. From that point, cataloguing our materials—along with digitizing as many items as practical—was started in earnest. Since then, we have received a number of collections—large and small—of photographs, pamphlets, books, artifacts, newspaper clippings, and other documents. We are proud to announce that we have just surpassed a count of 1,000 catalogued items.

The following have been recently added to our collections:

**Barb Vasconi** donated a collection of Sharpsville High School Yearbooks from the 70s and 80s.

**Ken Robertson** donated diplomas from 1930 and a panoramic photo of convention-bound Shriners at the train station.

The **Sharpsville Area School District** donated an 1860 and 1888 report on local districts in the state, as well as a more recent study of school consolidation.

### Engaging the Community

Members Bill and Nita Jackson have generously underwritten a History Prize contest open to all Sharpsville High School Juniors and Seniors. Entrants will submit a semester-long research project dealing with the history of the Sharpsville area. Projects can take a variety of formats such as oral history interviews, power point presentations, research papers, and so forth. We plan on the finished projects to be shown to the public at the Historical Society, with cash prizes awarded to the winners.

We thank Superintendent Mark Ferrara, High School Principal Kirk Scurpa, and History teacher Mike Kalpich for their enthusiastic support in the launch of this program.

### Test your knowledge of our town

Which church congregation is the oldest in Sharpsville?

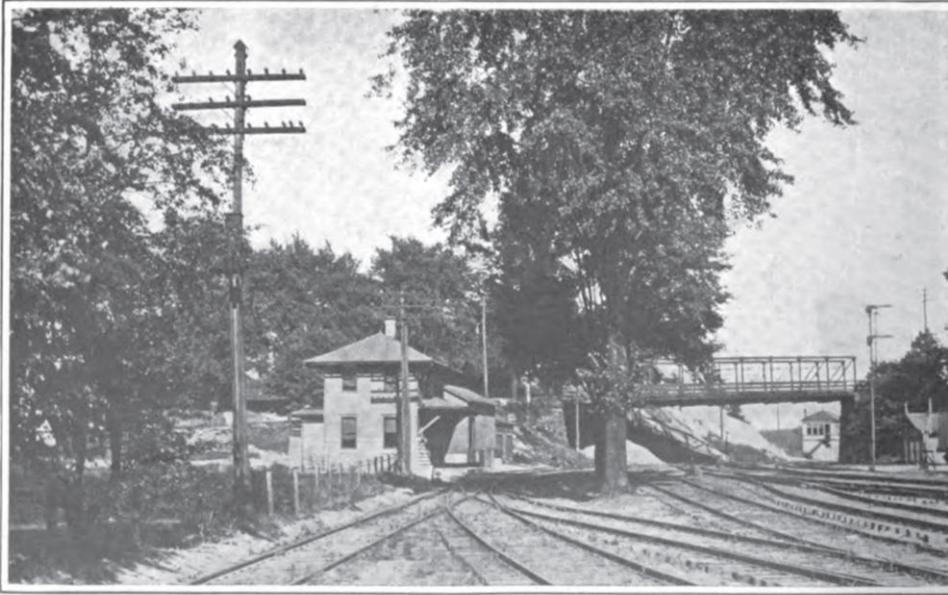
(Answer on third page.)

## Traces of forgotten Sharpsville

### Trees Between Railroad Tracks

To an increasing degree railroad corporations are giving evidence of a sense of

beauty which is strong enough to compete even with their desire for economy. An



MAPLE TREES BETWEEN RAILROAD TRACKS AT SHARPSVILLE, PA.

interesting example is shown in the accompanying picture. When the lines of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad were run thru Sharpsville, Pa., the engineers found that two beautiful silver-leaf maple trees barred the way of a straight road thru the town. It seemed as if the trees were doomed, but tree lovers petitioned the company to let them grow.

In order to grant the request of the tree lovers, the corporation had to make a curved

track, which would necessitate an expenditure of many hundreds of dollars for additional land. Contrary to expectation, however, the railroad company yielded to the plea for preservation, so that now Sharpsville, Pa., is unique in the possession of a simple little railroad station made beautiful by trees growing between the adjoining tracks. Travelers who are tree lovers remember this little spot long after places of greater importance are forgotten.

This article was included by Dr. Charles D. Percival in his 1913 book, *The Trail of the Bull-Dog*. The Bull-Dog was Percival's nickname for the Abbott-Detroit automobile he drove 50,000 miles throughout North America as publicity for the automobile's endurance. (The "endurance test" was a fairly common stunt during this early era of the automobile.)

Percival's book described the natural wonders and interesting sights and curiosities he encountered on this travels, with selections—such as this about Sharpsville—reprinted in magazines and newspapers across the country. (The article seen here is reproduced from the September 1916 edition of the trade magazine "The American City".)

The view is behind the present Sharpsville Plaza looking toward Mercer Avenue. One tree at least may be seen still standing in an aerial photo from 1937.

## From Our Archives

### Reminiscence of the Mercer Avenue neighborhood in the 1940s and 50s

*From a 1997 letter by Jack Emerson to the Historical Society . . .*

With great interest I read the article sent to us about the work being done on the homes there. On May 3, 1947 my family moved to 26 N. Mercer Ave. and I sure saw a lot of changes in 25 years.

As a kid we would sometimes go into Bloch Bros. store and all were there to watch the night McDowell's grocery store, next door, burned down—next building in the row was the Post Office.

As kids attending the same church we were always wary of Ms. Savilla Lee—she had a big black car and driver and at any sign of mischief would call your parents. But one day in the early 50s outside of the old drug store (across from the present day) the faithful collie dog Laddie that followed me without restraint everywhere and waited outside with the greatest of patience was under attack from the county dog catcher. To the rescue was Ms. Lee who gave that dog catcher a tongue lashing to be remembered. . .

Everybody knew that dog—Chuck McCracken at the news stand gave him candy and Dr. Dave at the other drug store would stop what he was doing and make and feed him a small ice cream cone.

I know the old parsonage well—I went to school with Johnny Mayberry and his father was Pastor.

The Pierce house—I watched as Mercer Ave. was dug up for new pipes and repaved from old brick. The home had a large yard which fronted on Mercer Ave.; the large flagstone sidewalk which was lined with large trees bordered Mercer/Shenango Streets. The drug store/doctor's office are there now. Flagstone from the sidewalk was used to edge the banks of the parking lot behind the office.

Johnny Jackson's tin shop was still open in the 50s on Mercer Ave, and would now overlook the new post office. He would sometimes let us come in and look around if we had shoes on and did not ask too many questions.

The old Pierce Mansion as there too—before the housing—Vol fire dept had carnivals there.

Eight years ago two large porch stones carved/edged from the mansion were still in the back yard of 26 N. Mercer Ave. My father pulled them home with a 46 Plymouth when the mansion was destroyed—set on blocks for benches.

## A Look Back

### Moving the Memorial Stone

Work on moving the huge boulder from the Wishart Farm started in Jan. 1930. The large stone was loaded on a huge sled and towed down the hill to the Sharpville & New Wilmington Railroad, which ran parallel to the Wishart Farm. It was then loaded onto a flat car and brought to town. The stone arrived in Sharpville on Mar. 4, 1930. There have been many estimates made of the weight of the stone, ranging from nine to fifty tons. The granite boulder was finally estimated to be around 26 tons. The stone was placed in the town park on April 30, 1930, by contractor A.W. Bombeck. The stone was unveiled and dedications was held on May 29, 1930.



One of the finest gatherings ever held in Sharpville was assembled for the dedication. The stone was unveiled by S.C. Foster and Watson Rood, Civil War veterans, which was followed by a parade. Several thousand people were assembled near the Legion Home. The streets near the Legion Home were illuminated with flood lights. At the close of the program the Salute to the dead was given by the Sharpville Legion Rifle Squad. The fine music was furnished by Sharon, Greenville, and Grove City Bugle and Drum corps.



Leonard Lawton, Harry Reichart, Harvey Reichart

The memorial was erected by the citizens of Sharpville by their contributions. The bronze plate was designed by Matthews Co. of Pittsburgh.

The memorial committee was: Burgess George Mahaney, chairman, Mead Clark, Alfred Laycock, John E. Joyce, A.W. Bombeck, Paul Borthwick, Tom Wilson, George Hittle, James Black, and J.H. Rickard. The work was under the direction of Harry (Sandy) Rickert of Sharon.



Memorial in the park, 1930; Harold Reichard on the left

Answer to quiz question: The First United Methodist Church of Sharpville (originally the Methodist Episcopal) was first organized in 1836.

## Volunteer

### Opportunities

Two of our upcoming events—the opera *La Traviata* (Sept. 20th and 22nd) and the Cleveland Trio concert (Nov. 11th) will require ushers and persons to staff our concession stand. Please contact us if you can spare a couple hours to help.



In cooperation with the Mercer County Historical Society, we plan to underwrite completion of a project to microfilm and digitize the editions of our town's newspaper, *The Sharpville Advertiser* (1870-1918), held by both historical societies.

Volunteers are needed to photograph the newspapers using the apparatus at Mercer. No special skills are required.

If you are interested in helping to make accessible this important historical resource, please contact us.

## Membership

### Report

The following new lifetime members have joined since the last newsletter:

Rod Alexander

Katie Jackson

Mr. & Mrs. Frank E.

Simmen, Jr.

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

Here are Bill & Gloria Hazlett and their son Bud portraying the town's founder, James Sharp, his wife and son during the 1949 Diamond Jubilee pageant at the football field.



This is perhaps a somewhat sanitized depiction of Sharp's family life. From a tale going back at least to a Current Topics Club talk of 1904:

"Mr. Sharp was very ambitious to build up a town, so much so that he established two households of his own. His first or 'old wife,' lived downstairs, and wife No. 2 lived upstairs in the same building. Although living close to much water, things waxed warm sometimes and the old man seemed to be in hot water continuously. To make matters worse, some of his creditors had the presumption to send the Sheriff down from Mercer with a document that aroused Sharp's ire, whereupon he took wife No. 2 (and H. Greeley's advice) and went west in the fall of 1847."

## More About

# La Traviata

If the upcoming performance, sponsored by the Historical Society, of the opera *La Traviata* intrigues you, please read further about the work and production.

Giuseppe Verdi, arguably the greatest of all opera composers, premiered *La Traviata* at Venice in 1853. Since then, it has remained a perennial favorite. Interwoven with captivating music and thrilling arias, the opera begins with Violetta, at first warily because of her disreputable past, accepting the love of the young noble Alfredo. Though unmarried, their happy life together is interrupted when Alfredo's father convinces her to leave her love to avoid a family scandal. Later, at a ball, Alfredo sees Violetta with a former lover on her arm and flies into a rage. He then despairs at the insult he has given Violetta after he learns her love has been true. Though Alfredo at last finds her again and vows they will never part, Death prevents him from keeping his promise.

The show, produced by Valley Lyric Opera, will feature a combination of local and New York talent, with all singing at a high level of virtuosity. Stage director will be Jason Budd, with Tristan Cano and Brian Holman serving as conductor/pianists.

If your Italian is a bit rusty, English supertitles will be projected above the stage, making it easy to follow along with the singing and the plot.

The Pierce Opera House, if you haven't visited it, is a historic venue featuring beautifully restored woodwork, excellent acoustics, and a warm intimacy between the audience and the stage. Modern climate control and conveniences have been introduced to this 141 year old local treasure.

Tickets are available at Muscarella's, Sharpsville Floral, Mehler Insurance, Sharpsville Boro Building or by calling 724-962-5757 or by visiting our website.

## With Gratitude

As a 501(c)(3) organization, donations to the Sharpsville Area Historical Society are tax-deductible.

Funds we raise are directed toward utilities and maintenance of our headquarters, built 1884 as the First Universalist Church of Sharpsville and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Donations are also currently earmarked for painting and plastering interior walls and for refinishing the front doors. As funds become available, we hope to refinish the flooring, make electrical upgrades, repair and repaint exterior woodwork, and restore the stained glass windows.

Support is also sought to expand our historical displays and to create educational outreach programs.

## Contact Us

website: [www.sharpsvillehistorical.org](http://www.sharpsvillehistorical.org)

email: [sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com](mailto: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

Meetings are held the First Monday of the Month at 7:00pm at our headquarters

*(Note September's meeting is delayed a week due to Labor Day.)*