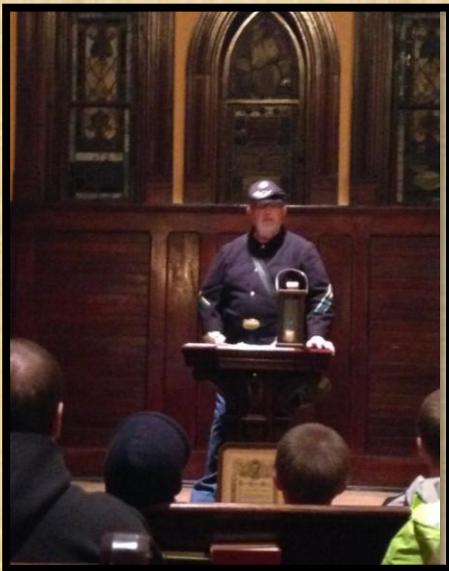




SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Corporal Price Dilley, Co. B, 140th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry captivated an audience of both young and old at the Historical Society this past month.



The portrayal, by Civil War re-enactor Dan Dilley gave an authentic glimpse of the motivations and everyday life of an actual soldier from Mercer County who fought at Gettysburg.

As part of our effort to educate the public on local history as well as to make membership in the Historical Society more interesting and enjoyable, we hope to continue to expand the number of meetings with public programs. Watch for email alerts or newspaper announcements for future programs, like the upcoming talk Nov 3rd.

Of course, we are eager to hear any suggestions for future programs related to local history.

Test your knowledge of our town

The five sons of General James Pierce—Jonas, Walter, Wallace, Frank and James B.—all shared a distinguishing physical trait. What was it?

Upcoming Events

Presentation by Rick Fleischer on local railroad history and Sharpsville's importance as a rail hub at our November meeting
7:30pm November 3rd Historical Society Headquarters



Gambling Spree bus trip to Cleveland Horseshoe Casino November 19th
Call 724-813-9199 for info and reservations



Christmas Concert with the Madrigal Singers of the Shenango Valley Chorale
Saturday December 20th 7:30pm
Sharpsville Historical Society Building



Bus trip to see **PHANTOM OF THE OPERA**
February 28th Benedum Center, Pittsburgh
Cost \$120/person. Reservation deadline is Dec. 5th
Call 724-962-2392 for information and reservations.



Area Community Theatre of Sharpsville (ACTS) production
Stephen Sondheim's musical comedy

COMPANY

Two weekends: November 7 - 9th and 14th - 16th
Pierce Opera House

Membership report

The following new members have recently joined the Society:

Patricia Rowlands Boynton David Amos
Becky Schulze Ann Morris Laurel Alexander
Lindell Bridges Janice Davis

The following have renewed their membership:

Robert Verholek Greg Perrine Cindy Alexander
Sue Long Karin Tillotsin Robert Rannard
Clara Wilson Virginia Lange Gail Hanes

Commemorations

South Pymatuning's 100th Birthday

Next month will mark the centenary of the creation of Mercer County's youngest township—South Pymatuning. While of course settlers first came there long before, in the 1790s, it had been up until 1914 part of Pymatuning Township. (Actually, the creation of the county's townships follows a somewhat complicated history. Mercer County was first divided into four townships, with Salem comprising the northwest quadrant. Pymatuning Township was created out of the southern part of Salem in 1802. It then lost its eastern half with the formation of Delaware Township and a southern section to Hickory Township.)

By 1914 a perhaps long-simmering discontent among the southern and western residents of Pymatuning arose over the management of the township and distribution of taxes. An increasing division in the township was also reflected when, in the prior decade, the Greenville newspapers started reporting news separately for East Pymatuning and West Pymatuning. But above all the April 25, 1914 decision to build the township's first four-year high school in Transfer—a location considered inaccessible by those who lived in the southern and western parts of township—prompted the movement to secede.

You may wonder why the school district lacked a high school well into the twentieth century. Unlike the borough school districts in Mercer County at the time, township districts were slow to adopt the idea of a high school. With compulsory attendance required between ages 8 and 16, the law at that time contemplated just eight grades of instruction. (An exemption was even made for those ages 14-16; they did not have to attend if regularly employed.) In rural districts, moreover, school attendance was not required for students living over two miles from the schoolhouse. (A two mile radius centered on Transfer—site of the planned high school—encompasses nearly all of present-day Pymatuning Township but very little of South Py.) Even in the borough, the notion of four-years of high school was not full ingrained. At this time, Sharpville was only graduating fourteen students a year from its high school.

The issue of township division came to a head June 5, 1914 when a group of residents on both sides of the issue met at the home of John Nelson. After much debate, they resolved to press for a division of Pymatuning township, and an attorney was retained to draw up the necessary petition. The law required the petitioners to represent at least 25% of the assessed value of the township. The list of over 160 signatures—including many names still prevalent in South Pymatuning—was accepted by Judge A.W. Williams at the June 1914 Quarter Sessions at Mercer.

In the meantime, the current township supervisors—now unsure of Pymatuning's eventual population and tax base—had to put on hold the contract to build the planned high school at Transfer.

An election was scheduled for August 4, 1914, with the notice required to be posted in not less than ten public places throughout the township. The final vote tally was 242 for division of the township and 181 against. The southern precinct voted overwhelmingly for the measure and the northern one overwhelmingly against, with the western and southeastern precincts providing narrower majorities in favor of secession.

A court decree dated December 7, 1914 ratified the vote and fixed the borders of the new township. December 7th is thus considered South Pymatuning's birthday. The first supervisors appointed by the court were David Scott, Sam Gearhart and T.M. Young and among their first order of business was to bring suit after negotiations broke down with Pymatuning Township over an equitable division of assets. While the old township argued that a strict reading of the statute required only a division of liabilities, the court at Mercer ruled on June 26, 1916 that the new township was due 60% of the total assets (which consisted mainly of the prior year's tax collections and road equipment).

The township's borders remain unchanged until preparations began for building the Shenango Reservoir. The section of the township south and east of Clarksville was annexed by the Borough of Clark in 1960, as much of that town's original area would soon be underwater. In addition, of the 15,000 acres of land purchased by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, South Py lost a larger portion than any other municipality, putting a substantial dent in the township's tax base.

Nonetheless, for descendants of the pioneer settlers and newcomers alike, what constitutes the township—what makes it a community—is not its changeable borders but the people who live and work in South Py.

The centennial will be commemorated at a worship service at South Pymatuning Community Church on Sunday December 7th at 1:30 p.m., with light refreshments afterwards. The celebration will continue in 2015 with a spaghetti dinner at a date to be announced and a community picnic on July 25th. Commemorative T-shirts are on sale for \$10 at the Township Building on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

A Look Back

Clary's Circus Folk

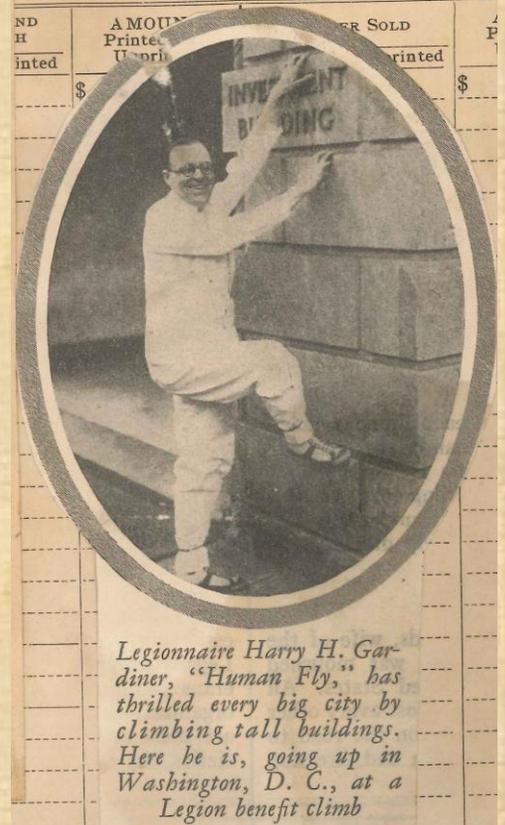
"Gardiner has done it again," was the remark after Harry Gardiner, The Human Fly, scaled the three-story First National Bank Building (Pierce Opera House) here, stood on his head after reaching the top, and climbed back down. The estimated crowd of 5,000 responded with both gasps and applause. Entertainment was provided by the Bugle and Drum Corps of the Sharon American Legion. While a few others would perform similar stunts using no special equipment, Gardiner was the original. His first climb was in 1905 and over his career he reached the top of over 700 buildings. Gardiner's performance at Sharpsville—sometime in the 1920s—was sponsored by the Sharpsville American Legion Post as a fundraiser for their building fund. To further give his local hosts their money's worth, when Gardiner reached the second floor of the building he unfurled a large banner advertising the school bond issue that was up for vote the next Tuesday. He even followed up his ascent with a brief talk in support of the school bond. The following day he climbed the top of the town park's 75 foot flagpole, applied gold leaf to the ball at the top, and scraped and painted the rest of the pole—labor free of charge.

The account is from a newspaper clipping pasted in the scrapbook Sharpsville Postmaster Franklin Clary. How the Human Fly landed here was through his acquaintance with Clary thirty years prior when they were together at the Barnum & Bailey Circus. Prior to his coming to Sharpsville and before he assumed his postal duties, Clary worked various circuses—not as a performer, but as a publicity advance man. (Indeed, throughout his life he had a nose for publicity and made sure the newspapers were kept abreast of every improvement in the Sharpsville Post Office as well as his assorted enthusiasms.) He never lost his fondness for the circus though, and saw to it to find a seat under the big top about ten times a year.

Clary was a booster for what he termed high-class shows and was not shy about expressing his opinions to the newspapers and *Billboard* magazine, often under the moniker "Uncle Dudley." He lamented, after one show, "the way the so-called pitchmen and bold, bad med[icine] men have ruined this great Shenango Valley" by the complaints and charges of fakery following a medicine show." Not only did the medicine show survive into the 20th century, but Sharon was ready to ban all such outdoor shows as well as carnivals and circuses. The town fathers opted instead to grant permits to the better-quality organizations. Partly on Clary's recommendation, the first permit was granted to the Rubin & Cherry Shows who set up on the Thornton Avenue circus grounds. Their "clean show" won the praise of many including Sharon's mayor. On larger issues, Clary opined to editors of *Billboard* on his prediction of a revival of the minstrel show and that employment as a sideshow attraction should be reserved for those who could not find work in any other field.

A visit here resulting from another circus connection was described under the singular newspaper headline "Postmaster Introduces Midgets." Mike and Ike, "celebrated midgets," with the Zeidman & Pollie circus that had recently played in Sharon paid an "official visit" to Clary at the Sharpsville Post Office, arranged by Mr. Pollie, a lifelong friend of Clary's. For more than an hour they shook hands and answered questions from the crowd of more than 800—regarded as one of the largest reception committees ever gathered in Sharpsville. Mrs. Mike and Lord Leo, two other midget performers, were also in attendance.

"Freckles" Barry—child actor Wesley Barry, star of silent movies—was another of Clary's show-biz connections. Clary once worked with Barry's father in the Great Adam Forepaugh Shows. After playing a three-day engagement at the Columbia Theatre in Sharon with his troupe, Hollywood Harmony Hounds, Barry came to visit Clary in Sharpsville where a large crowd waited to meet the star. The number that came out was said to have exceeded that which greeted Mike and Ike.





Here is Charles N. Oates standing in front of his store, Sharpville News Depot, at 14 Parkway, around 1909. (The building and street are now but a memory.) Next to him is a peanut roaster made by The Bartholomew Co.

Oates came to Sharpville in 1901 from Wampum, Pa. He previously held jobs with the railroads. Here, he resided at 214 Main and also served on the School Board.

Oates later moved his store to North Walnut Street. There, he still sold newspapers, magazines and candy—and with a popcorn machine stationed out front.

Collections update

The following have been recently added to our collections:

Bob Verholek donated the photograph above, promotional items from Wade D. Mertz, Snyder & Freeman and Cattron Group, as well as a history of the Erie Extension Canal.

Jim Bowers donated a bank guard's badge, probably from the 1940s, from the old First National Bank of Sharpville.

Milan Matijevich donated a Class photo of composite vignette portraits of the Sharpville High School Class of 1943

Kevin Walko donated a similar Class photo of the Class of 1942 plus school memorabilia from the late 1930s early 1940s.

John & Patricia Knause Emerson donated a facsimile reprint of the 1873 Atlas/1877 History of Mercer County and a photo of the 1976 fireman's funeral procession for Dutch Rapp.

Tom Toth donated correspondence from 1921-2 among James B. Pierce and state and borough officials dealing mainly with automobile headlight glare on Lamor Road.

Jill Cattron donated an original 1877 History of Mercer County.

Harold McCracken donated four Sharpville High School yearbooks from the 40s and 50s with graduation programs.

Gail Nitch Hanes donated a DVD of an illustrated history of Sharpville she made for her Class of 1964 reunion.

The Mercer County Historical Society donated a copy of their 2000 pictorial history of the county and a print depicting various historical landmarks throughout the county.

With Gratitude

We recently received donations from:

Patricia Rowlands Boynton
Gail Nitch Hanes

As a 501(c)(3) organization, contributions to the Society are tax-deductible.

Contact Us

website: www.sharpsvillehistorical.org

email: sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com

see our website for officers' phone numbers

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

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

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

Answer to quiz question:

The Pierce brothers were each born with six fingers and six toes on each hand and foot.

Building update

The past two months have seen significant progress in our efforts to restore our headquarters, built in 1882 as the First Universalist Church of Sharpsville and recognized by the National Register of Historic Places as the fullest expression, locally, of High Victorian Gothic architecture and as a nationally significant example of the Akron Plan of church design.

In the building's sanctuary, the carpeting—installed sometime in the 1960s or 70s—has been pulled up and removed. (This also required removing and reinstalling the pews.) Lying beneath is a painted floor. The treatment of the floor in the chancel shows a grain decoration, imitating the strongly contrasting grain of white oak. The main part of the sanctuary has two coats of paint with the first coat the original layer. While a varnished floor may perhaps have been expected, it turns out that at the time the building was finished in 1884, durable floor varnishes had not yet been developed and a painted floor was



typical. We will eventually have the floor refinished and repainted to replicate the original appearance.

A second, long-awaited project is the refinishing of the front doors, both the double-doors at the main entry as well as the side door to the Sunday School room. Marty Lanich has stripped several layers of paint and old varnish and has expertly repaired damaged areas, splicing in reclaimed walnut lumber donated by Dr. Alfred Joseph. A new finish along with Eastlake hardware matching that in the rest of the church make for stunning entrances to this architectural gem. The side door has been re-installed and the double-doors will be completely shortly.

The project was financed in large part by a donation from Bill and Nita Jackson in memory of Bill's brother, Charles Benjamin Jackson.

While we have funds to continue additional projects, we will need to rely on the generosity of our members and friends to complete the building's restoration.

Among the projects that have not yet received funding are:

- Electrical upgrades
- Repair of stained glass windows
- Rebuilding of the front steps and installation of Victorian-styled handrails
- A new sign for the front of our building
- Refurbishing of the pipe organ (the oldest in Mercer County!)
- Rebuilding the decorative brickwork of the chimneys

As our building restoration progresses we will be able to utilize the space more and more to:

- Expand our existing displays of local history, with the aim of keeping regular hours;
- Expand our use of the building for suitable performances, lectures, and other community functions
- make it a focal point for the borough, complementing other historical properties nearby, and an attraction for visitors.