



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Hot metal has returned to Sharpsville! With the opening of Davis Alloys here (in the old Integrated Fab building), we are once again a place where the orange-red of molten metal is being smelted and cast. Granted, their operation involves secondary smelting of metals to produce specialty alloys and not primary smelting of ore. Still, they have revived a tradition here that dates back to 1846 when the Blanche Furnace was first put in blast, and which continued through an era when the glow of nine furnaces lit the nighttime sky, and to the mighty enterprises of the last century—the Valley Mould and the Shenango. We should also mention that Right Pointe, a manufacturer of asphalt and concrete additives, will soon open a plant in the former Bennington Furniture building. Together with retail and service firms that have recently come to town, existing businesses that have expanded, and a couple of projects that are on the drawing board, the current business climate here gives reason for optimism.

Attracting businesses that pay a decent wage is a necessary part of building a thriving community. Equally important, though, is the development of cultural, recreational, spiritual, and social resources here. The business executive who decides whether to relocate a plant here considers not only the available workforce and infrastructure but whether this is a good place to raise his family. Our sons and daughters who have honed their skills at college will hardly want to move back to their hometown if there is “nothing to do.” Even more broadly, beyond engaging activities and events, a community’s “quality of life” depends on developing a sense of belonging: 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.

Which brings us back to economic considerations. The quality-of-life resources that can attract businesses here are just as dependent on those firms’ good-paying jobs. Whether it is an escape-the-room recreation like the new Locked in the Sharpsville Plaza, or our local shops and restaurants, or the local non-profit organizations that fill so many needs, they can only thrive with the support of Valley residents. So, even if you aren’t right now in the market for some cobalt-chrome ingots from Davis Alloys, try to support locally owned and operated firms and organizations in your purchases and charitable giving. It will circle around and help all of us.

Items for Sale

A perfect Christmas gift!

Natural Stone Drink Coasters

featuring lithographed scenes of old Sharpsville
17 different choices

\$8 each, any 4 for \$30

available at Mehler Insurance or through our
website at www.sharpsvillehistorical.org



Coming soon!

The 1940 movie of Sharpsville—previously released on VHS—now digitized on DVD from the original film. Will also include film of the 1950 Firemen’s convention and parade.

Watch for details.

Upcoming Events

OPEN HOUSE AT THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

131 N. Mercer Ave., Sharpsville

Sunday, November 22nd 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

COME SEE OUR COLLECTIONS AND THE VICTORIAN INTERIOR OF OUR HISTORIC 1884 BUILDING.

We will also be collecting electronics for recycling.

Accepting: cell-phones, computers, laptops, gaming systems, handheld games, DVD players, stereo amps, digital cameras, flat-screen monitors, and printers.

No tube-type monitors or televisions.



GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIP

Rivers Casino Pittsburgh November 18th

Call 724-813-9199 for info and reservations

Traces of Lost Sharpsville

Truxall City: Our Neighbor to the North

You can be forgiven if you can't quite picture our neighboring town of Truxall City, since it existed only in the dreams of one Ephraim Truxall. It was to be located along the Erie & Pittsburgh rail line (where the Trout Island walking trail is now) between Sharpsville and Clark.

While his later career gives rise to suspicion that he was merely a promoter of overblown promises, Ephraim Truxall was a man of definite accomplishments. Born in 1851, he began work at an early age as a laborer in the rolling mills of Pittsburgh, eventually rising to management. As general manager of Wheatland's Continental Iron Works, he earned acclaim for turning around that persistently unprofitable plant during his short tenure there (1902-03). Several patents are credited to him.

The land along the Shenango River, along the Slackwater upstream from Sharpsville—Shadyside and Trout Island—was long the valley's playground. By the turn of the century, though, the area had seen better days and investors drew up unrealized plans to improve and modernize it, along with construction of a splendid hotel. In 1906, Truxall bought 325 acres near Trout Island where he proposed building an amusement park. He announced an elaborate scheme to convert the area into the finest picnic grounds in western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio. Damming and dredging of the Shenango River would again make navigation to Trout Island possible. In addition to boating and swimming there would be athletic parks, dancing pavilions, theatres, and race courses.

Success of the plan hinged on the extension of the streetcar line. In those days of the automobile's infancy streetcars were the principal means of transportation in towns and cities. Indeed many early amusement parks, also called "trolley parks," were owned by the streetcar lines as a means of attracting fares on the weekends. For Truxall's proposal he formed the United States Development & Manufacturing Co., with shares proffered locally and a contest to name the park held. Ten dollars in gold and a share of stock was the prize, with the name chosen "Sans Souci Park." Ultimately though Truxall was unsuccessful in getting the Sharon to Sharpsville streetcar line to extend its route past the populated areas almost to Clarksville. Instead, a few months after Truxall's purchase, a competing firm formed with plans to build an amusement park on the Sharon-Masury border. As only a short spur off the main line was needed, the streetcar company apparently saw support of that location as making more business sense. Originally called Roseville Park it was renamed Idlewild Park in 1908 and lasted until around the time of the First World War.

Undaunted, Truxall added to his acreage and re-imagined this pleasure ground as an industrial park and model city. In 1910, he boasted that 2,500 lots had been laid out with a third of the them sold and that fourteen industries had committed to locating in what he grandly named Truxall City. Noxious industries, such as a tannery and blast furnace, were turned away. All homes would be built of masonry, and the development would include a plant to supply cement blocks for the houses. (Concrete blocks with a rusticated face to imitate limestone were first introduced in 1904 and were in vogue for homebuilding in the early part of the century.) Among the other industries that were slated to come here were a silk plant, a cotton factory, and a Belgian glass concern that would take advantage of the "inexhaustible supply" of glass sand nearby. None were built.

By the latter part of the decade, Truxall's grand scheme had been trimmed to the establishment of one firm, Yankee Steel Company. Like his past press releases, Truxall hinted that construction of the modern steel plant was just around the corner, delayed only by a temporary increase in the cost of labor and materials. Yet there is no evidence that any structures were ever built. Indeed, a few years later, a shareholder in the Yankee Steel project arrived here from his home in Natrona, Pa. to check on the progress of his investment. He was disappointed to find it nonexistent with the suggestion that the scheme was a swindle.

One wonders if this pattern of grand proposals never to be realized did not become a running joke here. In a jocular "Class Prophecy" that was at one point a ritual among graduating seniors, Ruth Webster, Sharpsville High '23, imagines her classmates in the far off future, with the town now called Truxall.

Yet the dreams of riches between Sharpsville and Clarksville persisted. In 1920, a company was organized to drill test wells for oil in the vicinity and the following year an automobile plant was rumored to be built on a portion of the Truxall City site. In actuality, however, Truxall sold his Yankee Steel acreage in 1920 to Furness Corporation. That company, based in Chicago, had learned that a large deposit of fuller's earth had been discovered here. (Fuller's earth, a variety of clay and known for its oil-absorbing properties, is most familiar as the substance that makes cat litter. It finds use in a

wide variety of applications in the chemical, cosmetic, pharmaceutical, and other industries.)

Indeed the deposit was described as the largest in the country and practically inexhaustible. Echoing the publicity for Truxall City, fifty homes and a workforce of three or four hundred men were projected. Unlike the nearly two decades of plans and promotion, however, the Furness Corporation did actually erect a building, install machinery and go into operation—processing 9 tons a day—though with a workforce of only fifteen men.



The fuller's earth plant, between Sharpsville and Clarksville, 1922

Yet by 1928 the plant was closed with the buildings and equipment being sold off. Closure of the plant was likely the result of the untimely death of Furness Corporation's owner, Charles Furness Hatley, in 1924. (Ephraim Truxall had died two years earlier.)

Presumably this "inexhaustible supply" of fuller's earth remains here, awaiting the efforts of an entrepreneur to extract it.

A Look Back

Neighborliness

Many have described and decried the apparent decline in civic engagement and sense of community in America over the past few decades. While the causes and remedies for this fraying of common purpose and experience are debated, a reminder of the neighborliness that was once taken for granted is shown in this 1945 article from The Sharon Herald. It describes a neighborhood club formed on Mayfield Road. One clue, however, to what made mid-century life here so different from today is the extraordinary number of kids that lived then on those two blocks. The natural sociability of children, it seems, was the catalyst for interaction among the adults.

Leave us dwell for a moment on the subject of "Neighbors" — particularly the Mayfield Road Neighbors of Sharpsville, Pennsylvania.

About 30 families live together in mutual contentment on the two-block street north of Buhl Farm between Sharpsville's Seventh and Tenth streets. Most of them have two or three children and there are 54 kids in all.

Mrs. Cliff Miller and Mrs. Jack Bramble got to know each other because their offsprings played together. They decided that maybe it would be a good thing if all the parent on the street got well acquainted. So they got up a party of the neighbors and it was held three months ago at Schuster's.

Permanent officers were elected then. And since no one has run off with anyone's else wife or poisoned anyone's else dog since, it was decided to hold a Christmas pow-wow. This was duly done Saturday night at the Sharon Herald lodge with 50 attending.

The children, who were really the *raison d'être* (remember your high school French?) for the club were left home with a brigade of baby sitters. Five families couldn't go because of flu or other reasons.

Dutch Mehler, president of the outfit, toastmastered the dinner. It was arranged by Mrs. Cliff Miller, secretary; Mrs. Russell Moore, treasurer, and others like Mrs. Doc Camp and Mrs. Dan Barnes . . . and their husbands, of course.

Mehler was picked as president three months ago, it seems, because he was a pioneer settler on Mayfield, which was then part of the Western Reserve. Crude drawings on the curb stones and fossilized cigarette butts indicate his first cabin in the wilderness was build near the end of the Paleolithic Era. Later, he bought the land from the Indians for a trunkfull of old insurance policies.

But we digress . . .

Ted Thomas was chairman of the program Saturday night. He and his wife put on a mind reading act, Mrs. Mary Louise Walsh did a hot rhumba, a Reindeer Race was held with pari-mutuel betting and Santa Claus, disguised as

cont'd on page 4



This photo shows a familiar corner, Walnut at Ridge, currently home to Moore's Auto Sales & Service.

Taken around 1930, the Pennzoil station was built in the Storybook style common at the time for filling stations and was operated for many years by Samuel Templeton, and later by his son Lauren.

The photo is from the Sharpsville Boiler Works collection. For a number of years they manufactured the 'Sharmeter' gasoline dispensers that are pictured here.

Neighborliness, cont'd.

Cliff Miller, gave out presents.

The Neighbors figure on holding a clam bake next summer.

Since the first organization party, some of the fathers got a bulldozer and dug a skating pond behind the Bramble and Roy Smith properties on the south side of the road for use of the little kids who use chiefly two-runner skates.

There's talk of putting in a baseball diamond nearby next summer.

Thus is being organized and directed a neighborliness for which Mayfield Road has been famous for years — especially since it was paved.

The writer once went to Mayfield Road to cover a news story but rapped at the wrong door by mistake. A party was going on. The host invited him in. The neighbor to be interviewed happened to be there and the matter of getting the story was [handl]ed with dispatch.

More Upcoming Events

Please also support the quality productions of the Area Community Theatre of Sharpsville, showcasing local talent.

a 1950s style musical variety show

Christmas at the Pierce

December 19th and 20th

Pierce Opera House

call 724-815-4388 or go to actsharpsville.org

Preservation Alert!

We recently received news that the Pentecostal Holiness Church at 240 Church Street, in the face of declining membership, has closed their doors. Built in 1872 as the First Baptist Church of Sharpsville, the building is the oldest church, and one of the oldest structures, in Sharpsville. Though it has undergone remodeling, it still retains many original features, and has been home to Pentecostal Holiness since 1968.

While everyone's preference is that the building remain as a church, if that is not possible, the Historical Society is most interested in assisting with plans for adaptive reuse and preservation of the architectural elements with any potential buyer.

With Gratitude

We recently received donations from
Barb Berle and Gail Hanes

Contact Us

website: www.sharpsvillehistorical.org email:
sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com

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