



# SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

**O**ur appeal to the community to help restore our historic headquarters building's original Pomplitz pipe organ has met with great success. Three grants and sixteen donations—along with our various fundraising events—have brought us to about 75% of the cost of this \$20,000 restoration project.

We knew it would be a stretch for a small organization in a small town to meet this ambitious fundraising goal. For us to come this far, we are truly gratified at the outpouring of community support for not only this special project but for those who, year in and year out, support our mission through donations and fundraisers.

(In order to complete the project, we had to redirect some funds originally intended for other restoration projects: electrical upgrades and brick repointing. So, we are still accepting donations toward the pipe organ restoration project. Please contact us if you would like to help.)

We are thus proud to announce completion of a major stage of the ongoing restoration of the First Universalist Church of Sharpsville: restoration and placing into full operation its historic Pomplitz pipe organ. (Information on the organ's history can be found in the July 2016 edition of this newsletter.) Work was done by master organ builder Vic Marsilio of Victor Organ Co. of Austintown, Ohio, with electrical work done by I.C. Electric of Sharpsville.

The opening-up of the instrument for cleaning and repairs revealed the all-mechanical action of the tracker organ with its dowel rods and leather straps. A quiet modern blower replaces the noisy, ca. 1910 blower.)

An inaugural performance on the refurbished organ will be at our October screening of the silent version of *The Phantom of the Opera*, with live organ accompaniment. The organ will also play a major part in the upcoming Poe Event in October. Suggestions for its use in future programs at the Society will be most welcome.

### Upcoming Events

## The Phantom of the Opera

The original film of this iconic classic with live accompaniment on our

**NEWLY RESTORED**

**1881 POMPLITZ PIPE ORGAN**

OCTOBER—WATCH FOR ANNOUNCEMENT OF DATE

CALL 724-962-5757 FOR TICKETS



## TALES OF THE MYSTERIOUS & UNCANNY AN EVENING OF EDGAR ALLEN POE

October—Watch for announcement of date

Sharpsville Historical Society Building

CALL 724-962-5757 FOR TICKETS



## GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIPS

Wheeling Island Casino October 17<sup>th</sup>

Rivers Casino, Pittsburgh, November 14<sup>th</sup>

Call 724-813-9199 for info and reservations



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

*A Musical Revue:*

PLACES AND FACES TO REMEMBER

September 28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup>, October 5<sup>th</sup> -7<sup>th</sup>

Pierce Opera House

call 724-815-4388 or go to [actsharpville.org](http://actsharpville.org)

## A Look Back

### Baseball beginnings

During the latter decades of the nineteenth century and for over half the twentieth, baseball was the country's dominant sport—outshining football and basketball both in participation and spectators—and earning the title “The National Pastime.” It is thus unsurprising that the first sports teams here were baseball clubs, as the ardent Sharpsville sportsman, George Mahaney, Sr., recounted in a 1923 interview. Organized ball games, at least, were first the province of independent adult teams rather than scholastic or youth squads.

There seemed to be no lack of ball fields in town. Mahaney recounts that the older men used the diamond back of the old Erie & Pittsburgh Railroad Station (behind the current Sharpsville Center Plaza). This was possibly the Junction Park referred to in 1897 accounts of ball games here. Another field was located on the southwest corner of Mercer Avenue and Shenango Street, before the original Odd Fellows Temple was built there. He also mentions a field near the original office building of the Shenango Furnace (near the main gate off Sixth). This is likely what was usually termed the “Boiler-shop Field” (after the land surrounding the Sharpsville Boiler Works, before they expanded in the 1920s). It was mainly used by the youths of Sharpsville for a pick-up game. A later addition, after baseball here had become a more organized sport, was Speed way Park, a combined race track and ball diamond. It stood at Union and Walnut.

Pete Joyce, in his reminiscence of Sharpsville in the 1920s, adds a couple more diamonds to the list. “The best baseball was played at Joyce Field, near Leona and Hazen now.” He also mentions the ball park at Shenango and Walnut (about where the former Catron, Inc. building stands).

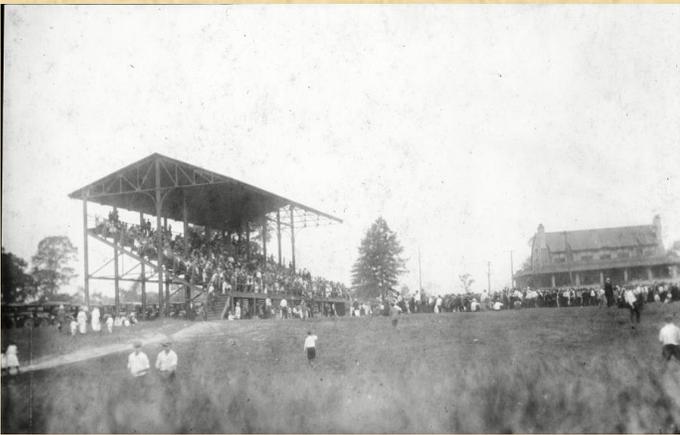
Chilly Doyle, the famed sportswriter for the Pittsburgh papers, recalled in 1924 that he “developed an unfounded love of baseball at the old ‘Indian Playgrounds’ and the ‘Boiler-shop Field’.” We also hear that in the early 1920s, games were played at the old Troutman Field on Mercer Avenue, where the Georgetown Apartments now stand.

At Buhl Park, what is now Shelter #2 was originally built as a grandstand for a ballfield (you can see the slope of the seating in the slope of the present-day roof). Before that, however, the Buhl Park baseball field stood on Forker Blvd. across from the Country Club, where the Club's No. 1 Hole now lies. (The area later became part of the “Dum-Dum's” course. In 1938, however, the Buhl Trustees ceded this section of Frank Buhl's bequest to the private club so it could expand to 18 holes.)

In the early days, good pitching was apparently in short supply, though with no lack of slugging, as some of the scores

resembled a high scoring football game. In 1896, the Mercer Grays defeated the Sharpsville Imperials 38 to 27; an 1877 score had the Sharpsville club defeated by an Orangeville nine 53 to 11. (The Orangeville team was nicknamed the “Whey Bellies” in an apparent reference to the cheese factory in the village.)

Some early teams were organized around the furnace companies. An 1871 account reports the Douglas Furnace beat the Mt. Hickory Furnace team (55 to 41!). The Ore Shovelers of the Spearman furnace were playing in 1896. Even in 1916, the Shenango Furnace Co. was fielding a team, as shown in the photograph below.



The old grandstand and athletic field at Buhl Park (now the No. 1 hole of the Sharon Country Club course)

Other teams were organized by their neighborhood or ethnicity. The “Church Hills” must have lived up around Church and Cherry Streets at “Baptist Hill.” The “Irishtown Stars,” lived in that so-called area on Walnut and Twitmeyer, west of Mercer Avenue. The “Little Potatoes,” we can presume were another group of Irish living elsewhere. The “Ben-Hurs,” however, seemed to be named after the immensely popular 1880 novel (from which the 1959 movie was adapted). Around the turn of the century, the Sharpsville Hustlers were the premier team in town.

Cont'd. on page 3



## Baseball beginnings, cont'd.

The town went without an independent adult team for a few years after, but play was resumed in 1916, with Fr. Michael A. Miller, pastor of St. Bartholomew's, as the coach. The priest was an energetic man. He played ball at Cornell and then at St. Bonaventure, and counted among his teammates there future Hall-of-Famers John McGraw of the New York Giants and Hughie Jennings of the Detroit Tigers. (Jennings holds the single-season hit-by-pitch record.)

In 1920 and '21 the Sharpsville A's played at the old Troutman Field, but apparently just for those two seasons.



The Sharpsville A's Baseball Club, ca. 1920

The last of the adult baseball clubs was the Sharpsville Giants, who made their debut during the 1930 season on the Buhl Park field on Forker Blvd.

Nowadays, scholastic and youth baseball is thought of as the norm locally, with the adults relegated to softball. High School baseball is said to have begun in the 1930 season, with Red Johnston as the first coach and a league championship that inaugural season. Indeed, in our list of Sharpsville High sports scores, baseball's records begin that year. Yet, we find mention of a Sharpsville High baseball team playing in 1912 and 1914. At that time, though, when scholastic sports were still in their infancy, organizing a team was an uncertain prospect from

year to year. Both financial support and student interest were inconsistent. A 1915 school publication notes, "We have a lot of good baseball material in the high school," but "we have not organized a team this year for some reason." Another problem is recounted in George Mahaney's 1923 interview. About ten years prior he coach the high school baseball team—"one of the finest squads in the valley". But "as a result of skipping school one afternoon their suits were taken from them by the school board and up until the last few years there have been no High School sports." Old school newspapers tell of teams in 1923 and 1924 but not in 1922, 1926 or 1927. Yet despite these spurts and starts, The Sharon Herald reported in 1924 that "Sharpsville was the first school in the county to place baseball on the same plane with basketball and football."

American Legion ball was started nationally in 1925 to provide provided organization and instruction to teen boys, replacing sandlot games with makeshift equipment. Sharpsville had Legion squads as early as 1929. For younger boys, Little League began in Williamsport, Pa. in 1939. Little League teams from Sharpsville first played in 1951, as part of the Hickory Township Little League. In 1953, Sharpsville established its own Little League with four teams with games played at the High School Athletic Field. In 1970, the Sharpsville Little League Complex opened on 15th Street. Diamonds for each of the three age divisions were built.

Each generation will, of course, claim its own teams and baseball heroes as the best Sharpsville ever produced. Of note, however—in the era before the farm system and a clear distinction between minor and major league teams—Sharpsville natives Bill Shannon and Chalmers Schell played pro ball in the 1920s. All-around sports great "Jabby" Ellison played in the Cleveland Indians farm system after graduating from Sharpsville in 1948. But the town was also once home to the rarest of baseball talents. While switch-hitters are fairly common, the switch-pitcher is exceedingly uncommon. (Only handful of major-leaguers claimed this skill.) Yet we hear in 1932 of "Lefty" Furin, pitcher with a Sharpsville baseball nine who "hurls right-handed and southpaw with equal facility. In a recent game he took left and right hand mitts to the box with him and alternated his pitching wing to best fool the batter before him."



George Mahaney with Little Leaguers and parents, ca. 1959



This photo dates from June 28, 1917 and shows a fire at Dickson's Furniture Store. (The view is looking up E. Main Street with the store positioned behind the current Borough Building.) Heavy damage, estimated at \$25,000, ensued. If not for the efforts of the Sharpsville Fire Department, aided by Sharon's, the fire would have quickly spread to the buildings nearby.

(Thanks to Debbie Christian for the photo and to Ed Getway for his research on the fire.)

### **With Gratitude**

In July, the local community was once again brought together by our annual Ice Cream Social, with a continuation of our Outstanding Citizen Awards. Honored were:

**Dick & Jackie Lou Phillips**  
**Bob Radford**

Thanks to all who helped make the event a success, especially:

**Bruster's Ice Cream    Dean Dairy    South Py Dairy Queen**  
**Sharpsville Borough Street Department**  
**Sharpsville Volunteer Fire Department    Cindy Cox (clowning)**  
**Tom & Jeanie Goodhart (kiddie tractor pulls)**

and performers

**The MissElanreous Dance Studio    The Grace Notes**  
**Karen Elder's Y's Guys & Gals    Violet Poorman**

In addition:

**Petie Zipay    Rita Sloan    Cindy Cox**  
for food donations

The Chinese Auction we introduced this year was a great success. Please patronize the following businesses who donated items for the Auction:

**Joni's Styling Salon    Breakfast at Tiffany's    Palo Floral**  
**Lock, Stock & Barrel    Marchelloni's Pizza**  
**Muscarella's    Thelma's Sports Nook**  
**First National Bank (Sharpsville Branch)    D'Onofrio's**  
**Sharpsville Floral    Rita Sloan Catering**  
**Karrie Johnson Photography    Lori's Hair Boutique**  
**Area Community Theatre of Sharpsville**

### **Collections Update**

**Ann Morris** donated a mid-century cast-aluminum street sign of Mayfield Road.

**Fran Pavcik** donated seven class photos, 1<sup>st</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades, from the 1930s.

**Tony Liscio** donated a Shenango, Inc. worker's hardhat.

**Jill Mild Bance** donated metal roof flashing stamped R.D. Alexander & Son, Sharpsville from a 19<sup>th</sup> barn in Hermitage.

**Charles Flynn** donated his WWII uniform including boots, hat, and service cap and his twill bomber jacket. Also donated was his boy scout uniform and hat. A family album was lent to us from which scenes from Sharpsville in the 30s and 40s were scanned.

**Debbie Christian** donated digital copies of family portraits from the Robinson and Radford families as well as the photo of the fire shown above.

**Mariellen Heim Loman** donated a furnace superintendent's 1892 notepad detailing the rebuilding of the Mabel (we think) Furnace, a deed by which the Corps of Engineers acquired land for the dam, and other documents.

**Rod Alexander** donated eight Sharpsville High yearbooks.

## Traces of Lost Sharpsville

### Sam Sing's Chinese Laundry

A newspaper report from 1910 provides this startling notice: "Sam Sing, who has conducted a laundry at Sharpsville for thirteen years, returned to his native country. It is estimated that his wealth is close to \$50,000, and he saved it all at the washtub."

From about 1880 to 1940, the Chinese laundry was an institution across the country, even in small-town America. Even more so, it remains an emblem of America's economic opportunity contrasted with racial bigotry, yet set against a background of the poignant loneliness of the laundryman.

The first arrival of the Chinese here is announced in the January 2, 1895 edition of *The Sharpsville Advertiser*: "A Chinese laundry is about to be opened on Main Street in the building formerly occupied by Gus Sturgis as a barber shop." This is presumably the same location of a Chinese laundry noted for years afterwards in maps and city directories on the north side of Main between Walnut and First.

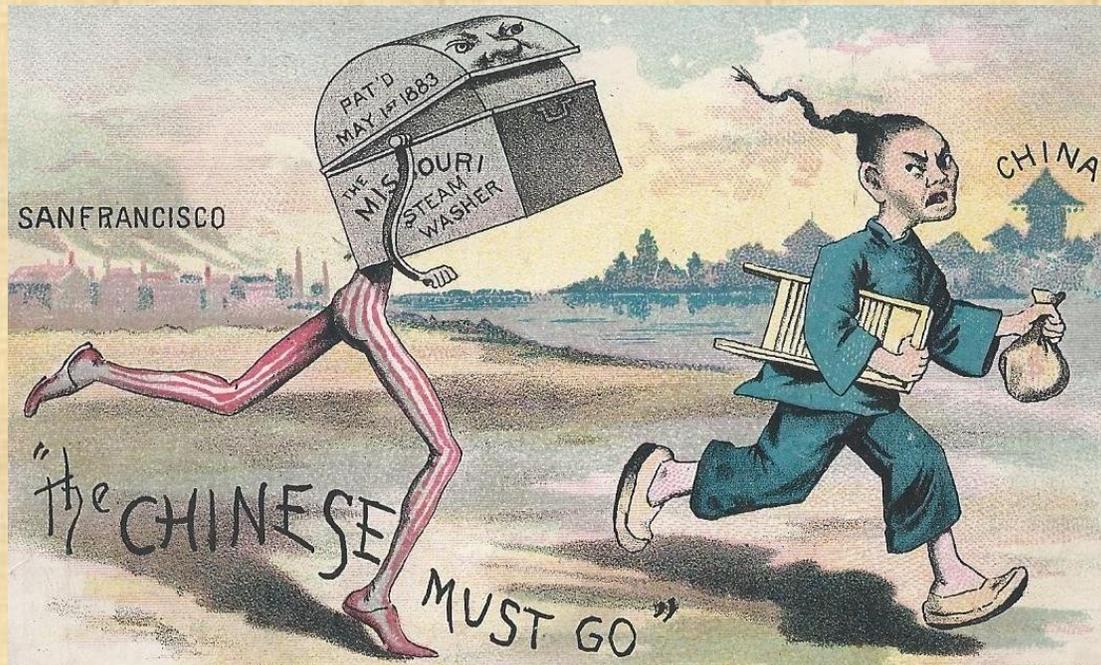
Unlike the large-scale immigration here from various European countries, it is unexpected that Asian immigrants would find their way to a small interior town, far from Pacific coast ports or the Chinatowns of the Eastern cities. Yet, we find traces of a Chinese laundry here for almost three decades. The 1900 Federal Census lists two men born in China and both laundrymen: Yee Gee and Yee Sen. Sam Sing appears here in eight city directories from 1903 to 1926. A Sam Yee is listed as operating the Sam Sing Laundry in the 1928 Directory. The 1910 Census lists Sam Sing as age 51, born in China. Neighboring communities—Sharon, Farrell, Greenville, Mercer, and Grove City—also list their own Chinese laundrymen, with Sharon having two and Farrell, three to four such establishments.

The chief competitor to the Chinese Laundry was the Steam Laundry. The Chinese establishment relied entirely on hand-washing, certainly more labor-intensive, and thus reliant on the lower rate of pay the immigrant was willing to work for. The Steam Laundry, on the other hand, was identified with American ownership and capital investment. While Sharpsville did not have a Steam Laundry plant, an 1887 newspaper ad lists a receiving station for the Troy Steam Laundry. An 1899 ad lists a receiving station for Greenville's Crescent Laundry.

A 1919 City Directory for Sharon lists five laundries. Two are Chinese laundries—Yee Hang's and Yee Wah's. To emphasize by their names the qualities which, by implication, the Asian establishments were not, the others were: American Laundry, United States Laundry, and Sanitary Wet Wash.

The first Chinese immigrants came to California from the impoverished Guangdong province. The arrivals, most of whom did not intend to stay, were lured

at first by the 1849 gold strike, and then by jobs building the Union Pacific railroad. The economic depression of 1873, however, intensified the existing animosity towards these unfamiliar miens. Moreover, the cheap labor they were willing to supply led to a scattering of Chinese immigrants across the country. Nonetheless, during the middle to latter 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of Chinese remained in the West, where riots against the Chinese were not uncommon. Violence and the shouts of "The Chinese Must Go!" were repeated in various towns by white



In some sort of science-experiment gone wrong, an Uncle Sam-Missouri Steam Washer cyborg chases the caricatured laundryman back to China, in this advertising card.

## Sam Sing's Chinese Laundry, cont'd.

rioters. Another aspect preventing assimilation of the Asian laundryman into mainstream society was that most of the immigrants were men, with anti-miscegenation laws as well as Chinese taboos against interracial marriage discouraging establishing families here. Yet the greatest impediment to the new arrivals establishing themselves and building wealth and family and community ties was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. With only an exception for merchants, all Chinese (including prior residents returning from abroad) were barred entry to the United States. Laundrymen were not considered merchants. Excepting of course the centuries-long history of governmental law, policy, and action against African-Americans and Native Americans, the 1882 Act remains a singular instance of a Congressional statute based solely on ethnicity.

Against this background, how did the Chinese immigrant become identified with the hand laundry? There was no tradition of a clothes washing trade, certainly by men, in China. Since the work was drudgery, it remained one of the few occupations open to the Chinese after better jobs were closed off to them in the West. A general shortage of females in the pioneer West allowed an unfulfilled demand for what was traditionally women's work. This economic niche at first peculiar to California and mining communities was later found relevant across the country, as an emerging middle class created a demand for commercial providers to take over domestic chores.

The most poignant aspect of the life of a Chinese laundryman was his isolation. In the Shenango Valley, those able to reach their countrymen by street car could be counted on one's fingers. Some may have been betrothed or even married to a beloved in China, but the Chinese Exclusion Act foiled plans to bring a spouse here (or to meet other eligible Chinese women). The meager income washing clothes generated, likewise, may have discouraged marriage. As a consequence, the laundryman's status as a "confirmed bachelor," even if not by choice, led to suspicions about his morals and perhaps designs on the young.

In Sharpsville, we do not have any reports of serious abuse of the Yee brothers and Sam Sing; though, it is hard to imagine that an imperfect English syntax, an appearance alien to those of European ancestry, and the town's familiarity with few, if any, of his countrymen, would not result in snickers, suspicion, or even downright hostility among the townsfolk. Pete Joyce, in his reminiscence of Sharpsville in the 1920s, recalled: "Then there was Sam Sing the Chinese launderer. We all believed Sam had designs on us as we collected our fathers' collars. We never knew how or why, but fear is inherent and can play tricks on little boys and girls." In Marion Kitch's 1916 diary entry she merely notes a foreignness among the "motely crowd" attending the "picture-show" in town—"all types and classes, down to the 'Hunkies' and the Chinese laundryman, the former smelling strongly of garlic and the latter of some Chinese herb."

By 1930, no Chinese are living in Sharpsville. In a 1930 City Directory of Sharpsville, Isadore Trotzky, of 512 W. Main—several blocks up from the old Chinese Laundry, is listed as a dyer and cleaner. By then, census records show Chinese laundrymen remaining in Farrell, Greenville, and Mercer. With Mercer's Wing Lee dying in 1936, the 1940 census showed only Farrell and Greenville as home to the disappearing institution of Chinese laundryman. This declining number locally paralleled the demise of the Chinese hand laundry as an American institution.

Ironically, this coincides with the 1943 repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Pearl Harbor won us staunch allies in the Chinese in the fight against the common enemy of Imperial Japan. All of a sudden, the generalizations of a "Yellow Peril" from a half century prior caused Americans to make distinctions between "good" East Asians (our allies) and "bad" East Asians (our foes). In 1941, a local newspaper reprinted an article originally appearing in *The New York Herald-Tribune*, that expressed an about-face from earlier attitudes toward the Chinese:

The little item about Geyne Sun, the laundryman of 25 Doyers Street, near what used to be called the 'Bloody Angle' of Chinatown, may serve as a reminder of the contributions which Chinese laundrymen have made to American civilization and to international relations. It seems that Robert Flick, a sailor, had lost his laundry ticket. He had only an hour to make his ship. Geyne Sun looked at the laundry mark on Flick's undershirt, then began to open packages, finding Flick's on the tenth try. He refused a proffered dollar, saying: 'No money. Hit Japs.' It is a neat story, but not remarkable.

The Chinese, for all the talk about 'no tickee, no washee' (a thoroughly wise and businesslike precaution, by the way), have made an honorable reputation for themselves. And they have always been courteous, even when faced with the gibes of the ignorant and foolish. Is there any way of measuring how much the Chinese laundrymen, scattered in towns small and big and little from one end of the United States to the other, have contributed to the friendly feeling which

cont'd. on page 7

## Sam Sing's Chinese Laundry, cont'd.

Americans have for China? It must have been a tremendous influence. Many a middle-aged man who whoops it up for china has buried, probably in his subconscious, the memory of some dealing, perhaps long ago, with the bland and gracious proprietor of a Chinese laundry—and this memory is uniformly agreeable.

So, did Sam Sing make it back to China in 1910, with a trunkful of cash? The short answer is 'no'. With the average laundryman earning just \$50 per month, there is no way he could have accumulated \$50,000. Instead, the report sounds like a local rumor of profits gained unscrupulously. (Note in the cartoon above, the fleeing laundryman clutches his bag of money.) Sam Sing returning to his native land, on the other hand is entirely possible. Many Chinese went to visit family in their homeland; some even returned to enter upon an arranged marriage. (Memorizing the persona of a merchant to get past the interrogations of immigration officials—or else bribes—allowed re-entry to the United States after 1882.) Now, whether the proprietor of the Sharpsville laundry left and returned to America presents a different puzzle. The name "Sam Sing" persists in Sharpsville from 1903 to 1926, yet it is entirely possible that it was a sort of trade name. Sam Sing can be translated as triple victory—with triple a common intensifier in Chinese. Likewise, many laundries were named "Sam Lee" and "Sing Lee": triple profit, or victory-profit. Some laundry owners did have these names (or at least a phonetic approximation), but the other senses rely on the puns possible in Chinese. (For example, the character for the surname "Lee" sounds like the character for profit.) It is unfortunate that the census enumerator skipped over the address for Sharpsville's 1920 census, as no Sam Sing or other launderer is recorded. So, we don't know whether the 51-year old gentleman recorded in the 1910 census remained in Sharpsville, just 10 years older. It could even be that the Sam Yee listed as the operator of the in the 1928 city directory is the Yee Sen of the 1900 census. Given that barriers of language and culture prevent a full accounting of the lives of the era's Chinese immigrants, we may never know what became of Sam Sing.

## Building Update



Seen here is some of the mechanism of our pipe organ, when it was opened up for its restoration. Called tracker action, it has been largely replaced with direct electric action or electro-pneumatic action in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though it has enjoyed something of a revival in recent years due to the old system's better responsiveness to an organist's touch.

## Contact Us

website: [www.sharpsvillehistorical.org](http://www.sharpsvillehistorical.org) email: [sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com](mailto: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

**Because of Labor Day, the September meeting will be held September 10<sup>th</sup>**