



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

The Shenango River was recently voted Pennsylvania's River of the Year. A strong showing online by area voters made this possible, with a \$10,000 grant to the Shenango River Watchers for events along the river this year the prize.

Yet, unless driving over a bridge in Sharpsville or Sharon, or taking the back-way to Sharon via River Road and Water Avenue, one usually has little encounter with the river in everyday life. Of course, those who like to fish are well acquainted with the river and summertime brings plenty of boaters to the Reservoir.

We may not, moreover, be aware of how deeply engrained the river is in the history of our communities. The earliest settlements were shaped by the Erie Extension Canal, which used the river in certain navigable sections and otherwise paralleled it in this section of the canal. Sharon and Clarksville became true towns because of the canal's commerce, though somewhat less so for Sharpsville. When the Age of Rail eclipsed the Age of Canals, the tracks often followed the old tow-paths; otherwise, river valleys still made for the level grade desired by the railroads. The two principal railroads connecting Sharpsville with the wider world, the Erie & Pittsburgh and the Atlantic & Great Western (to use their original names) each used one of the river banks upstream of Sharpsville, and both used the eastern bank downstream from town. The river also met the water demands of industry, as evidenced by the pump stations for Sharpsville's various furnaces. Unfortunately, we are left with the legacy of decades of industrial pollutants, either discharged directly into the Shenango or else leaching into it by sites along the river.

Shadyside and Trout Island, both along the Shenango and with Sharpsville the launching place to them, were the Shenango Valley's principal recreation areas from 1870 to 1905. Campgrounds along the river, like "Big Eats," continued the tradition decades further. The construction of the Shenango Dam and Reservoir, while nominally for flood control, transformed and expanded the recreational uses of the river.

So, as the weather warms, consider renting a kayak at Carried Away Outfitters in Greenville for a peaceful couple of hours down the Shenango. Or, you don't even have to risk getting your feet wet to watch the water roar through the gates from the Dam overlook or to walk along the riverbank or walking trail and look up to see a heron, osprey, or even a bald eagle.

Credit for the recent revival of the Shenango, both environmentally and recreationally goes to the Shenango River Watchers. The group, founded in 2001, deserves as much community support as possible. Besides removing 1.5 million pounds of trash from the river, they've cleared the way for kayakers and hikers, and have advocated for a cleaner waterway—the historic artery that gave life to the Shenango Valley.

Upcoming Events

GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIPS

Rivers ~~Casino~~, Pittsburgh May 19th

Seneca Allegany Casino, Salamanca June 23rd

Seneca Niagara Casino, July 21st

Call 724-813-9199 for info and reservations

*Participant are encouraged to have their
COVID-19 vaccination*



Our historic headquarters is back to being open to visitors. Come see our displays on the first and third Saturday of the month.

1:00pm to 3:00pm



Our monthly meetings have also resumed. The first Monday of the month at 7:00pm



As always, interesting items may be viewed under the Archives section of our website

www.sharpsvillehistorical.org

Contact Us

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see our website for officers' phone numbers

Headquarters: 131 N. Mercer Ave.,
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Sharpsville, Pa. 16150

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

Odds & Ends

Research into the history of Sharpsville, brings to light items of interest but that include too little information around which to craft a narrative, or which do not provide enough material for a full article. From time to time, we'll include these short items that are most worthy of note.

Cornerstones and Time Capsules

Most are intrigued by time capsules. What treasures from the past will be found when the time capsule is opened? Even if one lowers expectations to merely being curious about the items our forefathers thought were representative of the time, where the contents are recorded, they are often disappointingly commonplace. Record of four Sharpsville time capsules have so far been found.

On August 24, 1873, the cornerstone for St. Bartholomew's Church was laid "according to the impressive and solemn ritual of the Catholic Church," with Bishop Mullen presiding. The event began with the "following Societies, preceded by the Sharon Brass Band, . . . , viz., Irish Americans of Hubbard, Ohio, Ancient Order of Hibernians, of Sharon, and the St. Peter's of Hickory Corners. It was estimated that about two hundred and fifty men were in line. After marching through the principal streets, they proceeded to the ground, followed by a large number of persons." Within the cornerstone was placed a "tin box, containing the names of the present Pope, the President of the United States, and the Governor of this State, together with coins of different value, and certain records of the church." Note that this structure burned in 1886 (to be replaced with another church which was condemned and torn down, before being replaced with the present building). Unknown is whether the contents of the tin box survived the fire.

October 12, 1882 marked the beginning of the construction of the First Universalist Church, now home to the Sharpsville Area Historical Society, and which generated the following report: "The corner stone of the First Universalist church of Sharpsville was laid with appropriate ceremonies on Tuesday. The box placed in the stone contained the Bible, revised edition of the New Testament, a number of journals, among them being a copy of the Herald, and a proof set of the national coins." The cornerstone remains solidly attached to the building, along with, presumably, the cornerstone's contents.

Ten years later saw the laying of the cornerstone of the Third Ward School, more usually known as the Seventh Street school and later as the Robison Building. Members of the Sharpsville Lodge and six others, under the auspices of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania conducted the ceremony. Various school officials delivered addresses and the large number of school children present sang several selections. Among the "articles deposited in the corner-stone was a copy of *The Dispatch* of May 25, 1892; proof coins from the mint of the year 1892, Masonic documents and local papers." Unclear is whether the items within the cornerstone were rescued when the building was torn down in 1965 and replaced with the present Seventh Street School building.

Finally, as part of the lead-up to our nation's Bicentennial celebration, a time capsule—an approximately two-foot tall cylinder—was placed in Buhl Farm Park on May 25, 1976. A newspaper report does not detail its contents, other than it contained "mementos of ten area communities." Sharpsville's share of the mementos is not known. A stone, with a commemorative plaque near Shelter #2 at the Park marks its placement. The event was held in conjunction with a parade (witnessed by an estimated crowd of 10,000) and other events at Buhl Park: children's games and other recreation, band concerts, food stands, a mock recreation of a battle of the French & Indian War, and fireworks. Opening of the time capsule is scheduled for 2076.

1917's Crime Wave

A recurring theme in these newsletters is that a close examination of the records shows that the "good old days" really weren't so great. Nonetheless, Police Chief Anderson's concerns in 1917 seem to evoke those of the police chief of Mayberry, N.C. portrayed on television by Andy Griffith. In January of that year, Borough Council ordered the Chief "to strictly enforce the following borough ordinances: Slingshot, driving or riding on the sidewalks, fast driving on the borough streets, cattle running at large on the streets, peace ordinance, prohibiting loafing on the streets, spitting on sidewalks, peddling without a license, curfew ordinance, traffic ordinance, and 1916 dog ordinance."

On the other hand, there would be two murders in Sharpsville in 1917, so Council's concern that loafing and spitting should be priorities for the police may have been less than realistic.



The Great Depression affected Sharpsville as much as the rest of the nation, if not more, since we were home to the cyclical iron industry. Here we see residents living near the Shenango Furnace and Penn-Mold gleaning for scrap iron out of the slag being dumped. Today it is understandable that everyone had to do whatever was necessary to “make do.” Yet, when the photo was given to us around 75 years after it was taken, the donor asked that we not publicize that her family is pictured here. The embarrassment of their poverty—though shared by so many during era—still lingered after all these years.

Collections Update

Rod Alexander donated trophies from Sharpsville’s 1963 undefeated Valley Varsity baseball team.

Bob Supplee donated school letters from the 1950s for football, orchestra, and band.

Laurel Alexander donated a digital photo of the Pierce Mansion and carriage house in winter.

Art Williams donated a book on the history of Camp Reynolds he had recently completed. Copies may be purchased by calling the author at 724-588-8900 or online at campreynolds.com

If you have a document, artifact or photograph relating to the history of Sharpsville, let us know. We can also scan items if you want to keep the original.

Commemorative Bricks

Please consider an “In Memory of” or “In Honor of” brick for a loved one.

4” x 8” bricks with three lines of inscription—\$75

8” x 8” bricks with six lines of inscription—\$125

The bricks would be placed in the town park.

Stop at Mehler Insurance or call 724-962-2392 or email sharpvillehistorical@hotmail.com

In Memoriam

Patty DeJulia served as a board member of the Sharpsville Historical Society for many years. Her recent passing is deeply mourned.

Odds & Ends

The Belle of the Italian Settlement

A shocking headline appeared in a 1913 edition of *New Castle News*: “Kidnap Bride At Sharpsville: Belle of Italian Settlement Spirited Away by Three Unidentified Men.” The article continues, “Pretty 18-year old Mrs. Frank Desante, the belle of the Italian settlement in Sharpsville, was kidnaped and mysteriously spirited away late last night by three men. Up to the present time, no trace of the woman has been found and warrants are out for the arrest of the three alleged abductors. As the young bride stepped out on the porch of her brother’s home in Mercer avenue, she was seized by two men, one placing his hand over her mouth to prevent her from making any out-cry. She was carried off and turned over to a third man, who took her away. The husband of the missing woman, who is in Toledo, O., has been informed of the abduction.”

The next day’s *Sharpsville Advertiser* added that the victim, née Gievaniania Rose, had been married only a week before by the Justice of the Peace, with another ceremony scheduled soon at St. Bartholomew’s Church. The assailants were identified as Rocco Paluppo (who took her away) and Vincenzo Vilotunno and Joe Campagnio (who initially seized her). Paluppo had formerly lived at the Rose family home. The husband’s absence in Toledo was for the purpose of buying furniture, though it was speculated that it was all a scheme for her to get away before the sacramental marriage took place.

Whether any arrests were ever made is not known. Frank, however, did return from Toledo and the couple had their church wedding as scheduled, Father Miller officiating. In their marriage license and later records, Frank is listed with the more familiar surname DeSantis. Giovannia Rose, according to the marriage license, was not quite the young belle of eighteen but was twenty-nine. In the 1930 census the couple is found living on Hickory Street with six children. Reflecting the fluidity of spellings and Anglicization of the names of the immigrant generations from Italy, her 1965 death certificate lists her name Johanna Rosati DeSantis.

Horace Greeley

A visit by a Presidential candidate is an honor for any town and indicates it’s “on the map.” John F. Kennedy’s 1960 visit to Sharon is well-remembered by area residents, though it’s disappointing that his itinerary didn’t include a stop in Sharpsville. (Or did it? A recent issue of *The Way It Was*, cites a claim from a caller to Eric Bombeck’s local radio show that JFK spent little of his overnight stay at room 331 of the Shenango Inn, but was instead up all night playing poker in Sharpsville!) Alf Landon, the West Middlesex native, kicked off the Eastern swing of his 1936 Presidential campaign with a huge rally on Tam-o’-Shanter Golf Course.

Sharpsville, though, did have one Presidential campaign stop, though one needs to go all the way back to 1871. Horace Greeley, was the famed editor of the *New York Tribune*, and widely credited with the advice “Go West, young man.” (Whether he actually originated the phrase is in dispute.) He was one of the original organizers of the Republican Party and from his pulpit on the newspaper editorial page, forcefully urged Emancipation but alternately castigated and lauded Lincoln during the War. After the War, though, he became much more of an accommodationist with opponents of Reconstruction. For those disaffected with President Grant’s administration, the Liberal Republican party was formed with Greeley as its nominee. Democrats, too, endorsed the Greeley nomination so as not to split the vote against Grant. Grant won re-election decisively.

Greeley’s visit here was on July 6, 1871, where he “made a short address from the portico of the Pierce House, on the importance of protecting home industry, and was listened to with great attention and remarks were highly appreciated. After viewing our town and its iron establishments, he returned to Sharon, where he was to lecture on the subject of “Self-made Men”—a theme on which perhaps no one is better qualified to speak.” (The Pierce House was the hotel on Park Way, later remodeled into the Park Way Apartments.) The reference to protection of home industry relates to Greeley’s support of protective tariffs. That issue, in the latter 19th century, was highly divisive, with manufacturers, like the iron men of the Shenango Valley, in support of high tariffs. Agricultural regions in the South and the West, dependent on exports, however, favored a reduced tariff.

The newspaper report mentions that, “For the pleasure of this visit our citizens are indebted to General Pierce.” This is somewhat curious when one remembers that the General had always been a staunch Democrat who was now supporting a Republican, albeit a candidate of a splinter faction of the party and a fellow supporter of tariffs. A deeper look, though shows that Greeley and Pierce were both of the Universalist faith. With origins in New England, the denomination’s distinguishing tenet was universal salvation, for which they received scorn from adherents of other Christian denominations. Like many of the faith, Greeley converted from the Congregational church (successors to the old Puritans) to Universalism in the early 1830s; Pierce appears to have joined a Universalist church after he left New Hampshire. Other parallels between the two men are striking: both were born less than five months apart and only about 40 miles away from each other in New Hampshire. Greeley went to Erie, Pennsylvania in 1831 as an apprentice at *The Erie Gazette* before heading back East to New York City later that year. Pierce, too, went to Erie County, settling in Cranesville in 1845, before coming to Mercer County two years later.

Whether they became acquainted only at the time of Greeley’s candidacy or at some point earlier is not known.