



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

The trauma of the plant closures in the Valley in the 1980s was part of the de-industrialization of America and ended 115 years of innovation in and prosperity from the making of iron and steel here. In the years since, there have been periods of optimism and feelings of renewal; nonetheless, the overarching sense has been nostalgia for “what once was” and a sentiment that we are a place “left behind.”

In recent years, researchers here and in Europe have increasingly turned their attention to “Left Behind Places” in hopes of understanding the causes of decline and to help develop public policy to remedy it. An analysis this summer by the think-tank Economic Innovation Group (EIG) gained significant attention. EIG is a bipartisan group focused on addressing geographic inequality and economic decline in America.

They analyzed population and economic statistics starting in 2000. In their definition of “Left Behind” counties, those included had growth rates of population and median income in the bottom half during the years 2000-2016. (Surprisingly, Mercer County didn’t make the cut, though Crawford, Venango, and Erie counties as well as most of Northeast Ohio were counted as “left behind.” Still, we share much with our neighbors.)

Between 2016 and 2019, EIG found that the counties studied had average annual job growth less than a third of the national rate. However, between 2020 and 2023, jobs in the Left Behind counties grew more than four times faster than in the four previous years. Moreover, new business creation has caught up to the rest of the nation. And, while population decline has continued, last year it has slowed to almost-even. That’s the good news. The researchers admit it is too soon to tell whether these post-pandemic statistics indicate a Renaissance in the heartland or is a fleeting recovery. Plus, we are still a long way off from recovering the jobs and population lost since 2000 (let alone 1980). Still, these findings are encouraging and should counter the pessimism many here fall into.

A continuing availability of good-paying jobs coupled with broadened “quality of life” amenities, obviously, are needed to attract and keep people in the Shenango Valley. And those maintaining a defeatist attitude should recognize our community’s positives and not wallow in a self-imposed misery based on a false nostalgia. Objective measures show that things are improving both locally and nationally. While there is still work to be done, you and your neighbors should, most of all, have hope for yourselves and our town.

Upcoming Events

GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIP

Rivers Casino Pittsburgh, Nov 13th

Call 724-813-9199 for details



Visit our booth at Buhl Park Founders Festival
Saturday November 2nd Noon to 6 p.m.

Open House

As a reminder the Historical Society is open
the first and third Saturday of the month
from 1:00p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Come see the unique architecture—both interior and exterior—of our historic building and a large display of our artifacts, documents, and photos of Sharpsville history.

Our basement display has expanded and may include items you may have missed on a prior visit.

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 but
will be changing to the Fourth Monday starting in
January.

A Look Back

Many today—from both sides of the political spectrum—complain of government overreach. The assumption is that it is a trend from more recent decades, and that the “good ol’ times” of yesteryear had more of a live-and-let-live ethos. Nonetheless, the August 21, 1889 edition of *The Sharpsville Advertiser* published this flurry of fourteen ordinances that had been passed by an apparently “activist” Borough Council that summer. Preceding the commentary, the title of each begins, “An Ordinance”:

- 1) FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE PEACE IN THE BOROUGH OF SHARPSVILLE. This ordinance addressed public intoxication, using profane, obscene or vulgar language in public, and disorderly conduct.
- 2) RELATING TO THE INJURY OR DESTRUCTION OF RAILINGS, LAMP POSTS, FENCES, &C. IN SHARPSVILLE, PA.
- 3) RELATING TO TAXES ON DOGS AND BITCHES AND TO REGULATE AND RESTRAIN THE RUNNING AT LARGE OF THE SAME IN THE BOROUGH OF SHARPSVILLE. A dog license law was first enacted in 1874, though collection of fees appears to have been very haphazard with long gaps in the license record. The 1889 ordinance continued to distinguish between male (\$1) and female (\$2) dogs. It also discouraged having more than one dog since the fee for the second dog was \$5, for the third \$10, etc. (with everything doubled for females). Prohibited were dogs running at large, unmuzzled, during the months of July, August, or September. Disturbingly, the High Constable was empowered to kill and bury any unmuzzled stray that was caught.
- 4) FOR THE BETTER PROTECTION OF SHADE AND ORNAMENTAL TREES IN THE BOROUGH OF SHARPSVILLE, PA. Prohibited was the tying of horses to trees as well as the cutting, injuring, or destroying of shade or ornamental trees, evergreens or shrubs. While it had a worthy goal, the wording seemed overly broad as it applied to any such tree or shrub in the Borough.
- 5) TO REGULATE SWIMMING OR BATHING IN THE CANAL, RIVER, OR STREAMS IN THE BOROUGH OF SHARPSVILLE AND TO PROHIBIT THE INDECENT EXPOSURE OF PERSONS. A couple of comments here: at this time the canal existed only in disconnected sections and so was a standing pool of water and blamed for outbreaks of malaria here—hardly an inviting place for a dip. Secondly, the custom at the time was for boys to swim naked. (In indoor pools, until the mid-twentieth century and even later, boys or men usually swam naked.) While outdoor skinny-dipping may have been confined to the secluded swimming hole, the Society has one photo from around 1920 showing four boys at Sandy Beach, with one in a swimsuit and three in the altogether. This was in apparent defiance of the ordinance which forbade swimming “when naked or partially naked” during daylight.
- 6) TO REGULATE THE EXHIBITION OF PLAYS, SHOWS, MOUNTEBANKS, JUGGLERS, AND ALL OTHER EXHIBITIONS WITHIN THE BOROUGH OF SHARPSVILLE. The text of the ordinance also included legerdemains and musical entertainments. It expanded on an 1883 ordinance that first set license fees for such shows. Under this new Act, the license fees were now at the discretion of the Burgess, with no fee for a concert for charitable purposes or a scientific lecture. Any show of an immoral nature or tendency was prohibited. We are not sure if some risqué act had come to town and prompted this response.
- 7) TO PROHIBIT THE USE OF THE SLING-SHOT IN THE BOROUGH OF SHARPSVILLE. All that can be guessed is that some kid must have used one to whizz something past a councilman’s head.
- 8) TO PREVENT THE RUNNING AT LARGE OF HORSES OR ANY OTHER ANIMALS IN THE BOROUGH OF SHARPSVILLE, PA. For fifteen years, Council had wrestled with the running-at-large question—adding prohibited animals, and adding and altering seasonal or time-of-day exceptions. This ordinance eliminated the night-time exception for the running-at-large of the milch cow.
- 9) TO REGULATE THE RUNNING OF RAILROAD TRAINS, CARS AND ENGINES IN THE BOROUGH OF SHARPSVILLE, PA. This set a speed limit of six miles per hour. A steep fine of \$25 up to \$100 was set.
- 10) TO PROHIBIT FAST OR FURIOUS RIDING OR DRIVING WITHIN THE LIMITS OF THE BOROUGH OF SHARPSVILLE, PA. This was before the Automobile Age, and since horse carriages don’t have speedometers, subjective observations are necessary. The phrasing in this context was fairly common during the era, and is of course reminiscent of the *Fast and Furious* movie franchise that began in 2001.
- 11) AUTHORIZING THE BURGESS OR ANY JUSTICE OF THE PEACE OF THE BOROUGH OF SHARPSVILLE TO COMMIT TO THE LOCKUP OR STATION HOUSE OF SAID BOROUGH IN SAID BOROUGH GIVING THEM CONCURRENT JURISDICTION. This is the earliest reference to a “lockup or station house” in the Borough. The town hall (now home to Sharpsville Floral) was not built until 1902. Where the miscreants would have been held is not yet known.

- 13) TO PREVENT THE OBSTRUCTION OF SIDEWALKS AND STREET CROSSINGS &C. IN THE BOROUGH OF SHARPSVILLE, PA. This disallowed people from collecting together in a crowd to the extent it impeded free passage along sidewalks or in crossing the street. In addition, crowds gathered in front of public buildings or places of business were unlawful once directed to disperse by the Burgess, High Constable or Police.
- 14) FOR THE BETTER PRESERVATION OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES IN THE BOROUGH OF SHARPSVILLE. This was the longest of the ordinances, with 13 sections addressing a broad range of public health concerns. It prohibited throwing out putrid or decaying animal or plant matter in yards or streets. (Before the wide acceptance of the germ theory of disease, many diseases were attributed to miasmas from decay. So even the backyard compost pile would have been suspect.) Regulations for slaughterhouses were set out. Regulations were also included for places which would emit noxious odors, “such as tanneries, slaughterhouses, refineries, or manufactories of starch, glue, leather, chemicals, fertilizers, gas &c. &c.” The regulation of “bone or horse-boiling” establishments was addressed in its own section. (Then, the ubiquity of the horse would necessitate facilities to dispose of the remains.) Section 5 laid out restrictions on the accumulation of manure at livery stables, placement of privies and outhouses, and placement and construction of pig-pens. The next section enumerated fourteen diseases deemed to be communicable. Quarantine was mandated for persons afflicted with a communicable disease. Public funerals were prohibited for persons who died of “Asiatic cholera, small-pox, typhus fever, diphtheria, yellow fever, scarlet fever or measles;” private services were required to limit the attendance to as few as possible. Household members of those suffering from small pox, diphtheria, scarlet fever or measles were directed to abstain from “places of public amusement, worship or education and, as far as possible, from visiting other private homes.” Disinfection of the clothing, bedding and furniture or those with communicable disease was required. Mandatory smallpox vaccinations for minors was addressed in Section 10. Prohibited was the sale of watered-down or adulterated milk, or of unwholesome meat, fruit, or vegetables.

How many of these ordinances are still on the books is not known. So, you better watch it!

Items for Sale

Traces of Old Sharpsville

A thoroughly researched history of Sharpsville with short, readable articles grouped into themed chapters and many photos — \$40

Charcuterie Boards

Engraved with images of Pierce Mansion, First Universalist Church, Jonas Pierce House, or the Santa Visits Every Home Sign — \$40 each

Santa Collection

Featuring images of Sharpsville’s beloved Santa visits

Mugs — \$15

Ornaments — \$15

T-Shirts — \$20

Bookmarks

Engraved with the 150th Anniversary Logo — \$5

Available at shops throughout town or contact 724-877-9958 or visit sharpsvillehistorical.org

Think of Christmas gifts for those who have moved away! And, we still have limited quantities of:

Natural Stone Drink Coasters featuring lithographed scenes of Old Sharpsville — \$5

CAT’S MEOW art portraits of the First Universalist church or Pierce Mansion — \$10

T-Shirts with the Historical Society Logo S-M-L — \$12; XL and above — \$15

Scenes of Old Sharpsville vols. I & II DVDs each containing 100 captioned photos of Sharpsville in years past — \$10 ea.



Here is the bar at Erme's restaurant in December of 1964. Mike Erme opened his restaurant in 1936 on Sixth Street (about where Muscarella's parking lot now stands). It was a popular place, serving homemade pasta and other delicious Italian meals (at a time when Italian food was somewhat of a novelty to non-Italians).

With Gratitude

We received a significant bequest from the estate of dedicated Board member, **Robert Rannard**.

BUY-A-BRICK

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 will be placed in the town park.

Collections Update

- Ruthann Black** donated a 1930 edition of a previously unknown newspaper in town, *The Sharpsville Civic Weekly*.
- Patty Hanley** donated a scrapbook of the Sharpsville Women's Club's Valley "10" pageant in the early 1980s.
- Debra Erme Cotton** donated photographs from the Erme family (including that above), school photos, and an 1864 violin primer.
- Larry McAdams** donated a number of product photos and brochures from the Sharpsville Steel Fabricators.
- Laurel Alexander** donated a road sign from the Sharpsville Women's Club.
- Mary Alice Chrastina** donated photographs of fire scenes and building the town infrastructure in the 50s and 60s.
- John Liptak** donated documents and souvenirs from the 1974 Sharpsville Centennial.
- Mark Gill** donated several 19th-century editions of *The Sharpsville Advertiser*, more recent clippings, and school class photos.

Odds & Ends

Fallout shelters

Once a common sight, this fallout shelter sign on Chestnut Street in Sharon may be the only one left in the Shenango Valley. (In Sharpsville, we recall the signs at the old Middle School—formerly the High School—on Ridge Avenue.)

A relic of the Cold War, it is instantly recognizable to anyone who grew up in the era and is a reminder of the real threat of nuclear war that loomed with the Soviet Union. The Department of Defense unveiled the program in September 1961. Buildings that would serve as shelter from radioactive fallout following a nuclear attack had to be of substantial construction and able to accommodate a large number of people. A Federal architect-engineer would survey a building for inclusion in the program.

The program was instituted by the Kennedy administration initially in hope of providing shelter to 20 million Americans following an attack. During the 1960 Presidential campaign, the problematic morality of private fallout shelters was raised. After the election, A *Twilight Zone* episode “The Shelter” dramatized the dreadful decisions of whether to let neighbors into one’s own fallout shelter. Moreover, Nelson Rockefeller—whom Kennedy saw as a likely 1964 contender—pushed the idea of expanding Civil Defense and public shelters. The issue was debated within the White House in 1961, and publicized in information fed to *Life* magazine, which then added a sensationalized slant.

Prior to the 1960s, some shelters, mostly in large urban areas, were left over from World War II and were often marked with a large “S” character. A few shelters were built after the Soviets tested their first atomic bomb in 1949, but there was no national program. While the devastation from conventional bombing of Germany and Japan was without precedent, the atomic age added the danger of radioactive fallout that would affect communities far from the blast. Indeed, the program was never intended to provide shelter from blast; instead, protection from radiation was intended. Each shelter would have a minimum capacity of 50 persons. Shelters were not confined to basements. The central core of high-rise buildings offered sufficient shielding from radiation, and provided the most square-footage for the program. (Survivability was based on a shelter receiving 2.5% of the radiation encountered outside.) While not all shelters were so stocked, the plan was to provide two weeks of supplies in each shelter. By the end of 1964, shelter space for 121 million people had been identified, with agreements with the building owners arranged for about half that number.

The sign in Sharon is faded from the black and bright yellow of the original sign. Robert W. Blakely, a civilian employee of the Army Corps of Engineers, is credited with its iconic design. While similar to an emblem for radiation already in use, the design, colors, and materials were chosen for maximum durability and identifiability from a distance.

The first sign, designating a shelter capacity of 1,730, was unveiled in White Plains, N.Y., on October 4, 1961. As the 1960s progressed, over one million signs would be attached to buildings, hallways, and lobbies throughout the country. The posting of a sign at a new shelter made a good photo-op for local politicians. Later, peace activists would tear down signs for the publicity and subsequent arrest.

While the program was still trying to identify additional shelter space in 1970, federal funds to stock them with supplies ended in the mid-1960s. Throughout the 1970s and into the early 80s, the program gradually faded away, with the spaces and supplies abandoned to the building owners.

While the threat of nuclear war with both traditional foes and rogue states remains, détente with the Soviet Union and its subsequent collapse, moved the worry well back in the American mind-set. Now, the idea of fallout shelters seems almost quaint. Yet, signs not removed for maintenance or remodeling (there was no formal decommissioning) remain throughout the country. They serve as reminders of an era when “The Bomb” was a chief concern of the American public.

