



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Historic preservation can be a tricky subject, especially when it comes to more recent buildings. The demolition of the Shenango Valley Mall is a recent, local example. Just because you went there in its 1978 hey-day to buy your jeans at Rivet and have a sundae at Sweet William's, doesn't mean it should be preserved as a monument to your nostalgia. But as the Hermitage city planners and the architects have promised, the replacement will be in a park-like setting where one can buy a fast-food chicken sandwich. Still, it's better than our mall's sad demise with only four or five tenants and walkers getting their steps in outnumbering the shoppers.

But what if it turned out that this were one of only a dozen malls left in America? One could imagine a fight to save this disappearing legacy of Americana—even if it were economically unfeasible. A similar thing happened with the closely packed 19th century shops on Main Street, USA (with offices or apartments in the two stories above). When it was realized they might be gone, efforts began to preserve them, with downtown revitalization efforts in Sharon and Greenville good local examples. These areas were built for different times—customers arriving mainly by foot or by streetcar. With the automobile age, parking became an issue. With the mall (or the Hickory Plaza), there was no parallel parking or parking meters. Now, with the internet age, unlimited selection, lowest price, and home delivery (often free, and with free returns), the retail-centered malls are likewise threatened.

Thriving areas, of course, don't have these pressures to tear down the old and build with the new. Or, do they? The once-heralded, 1985 post-modern Horton Shopping Plaza in San Diego was torn down in 2020.

Any demolition requires a second look. While brick, block, and steel can be recycled, the energy that went into producing them is not renewable. And what was once thought the ghastly taste of our forebears is now esteemed: it was once overwrought Victoriana, then Mid-Century Modern, and perhaps now the architecture of recent decades, that have gotten a second-look and will continue to spur preservationists. The steel-truss bridges that were once so ubiquitous here, likewise received recognition only when it was realized they were quickly disappearing. (Here, Historical Society member Rod Alexander, led a singular effort to save portions of the 1897 Kelly Road Bridge, preserved in the new Canal Street park.)

Remembrance of our past, whether a century-and-a-half or a quarter century ago, is what brings us together as a community. Your Society hopes to spur these memories of our built environment, whether featured in this newsletter, our walking tours, visits to the Society Headquarters, or our book.

Upcoming Events

"I Love Lucy"

Bus Trip
July 24th

Join us with a guided tour of the Lucy & Desi Museum, the National Comedy Center, and the LucyTown Tour in Lucille Ball's hometown of Jamestown, NY. Includes a buffet lunch at a recreation of Ricky Ricardo's Tropicana Club.

Call 724-813-9199 for info and reservations

With Gratitude

We received generous donations from:

Petie Kelly-Zipay
Ralph W. & Carol R. Mehler
Ann Morris
Sharron Stanton

Contact Us

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

see our website for officers' phone numbers

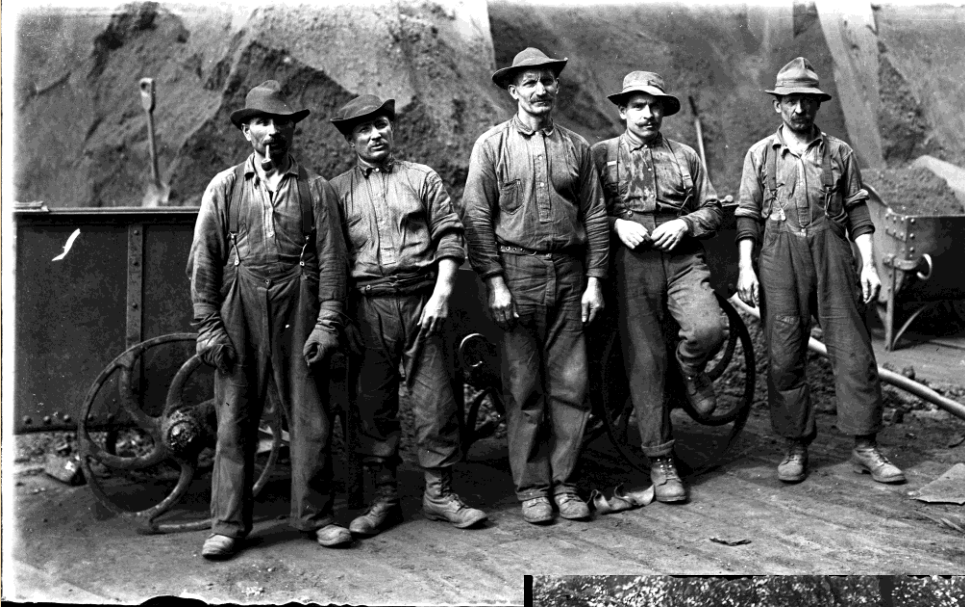
Headquarters: 131 N. Mercer Ave., Sharpsville

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

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.

A Look Back

The collection of glass plate negatives taken by William H. Snyder in the second decade of the twentieth century was described in the last newsletter. Here are some additional scans of those negatives of life here around 111 years ago. (Zoom in on your computer to see better detail.)



This group of hard-working men is described as McCracken's crew of bottom fillers at the Shenango Furnace No. 4 (which was previously the Mabel Furnace). They shoveled the ore into the bottom of the blast furnace (the coal and limestone were fed in from the top). At least two instances from this decade report that the pile of ore behind a bottom filler shifted, suffocating the worker to death.

Sunday School picnics, as described in the newspapers of the day, were big events. Here is a summer picnic for the Sunday School of the Presbyterian Church in 1911, held at an unidentified campground, presumably along the Shenango River.



Clara Hadley is shown here at a telephone switchboard, likely in the office of the Shenango Furnace. She is listed as a bookkeeper in a 1913 City Directory, so directing telephone calls was among her clerical duties.



Here is the Sharpsville High School Baseball team. Note they were able to round out the nine with a newcomer still wearing his New Castle uniform. Interscholastic sports weren't fully established in Sharpsville until 1921. Until then, the fielding of a team depended on their ability to raise funds.

This may be the squad mentioned in a 1914 newspaper article: "The [Sharpsville] high school baseball team held a practice Monday evening after school under the direction of Coach Mehler. The suits which are dark blue, trimmed with white, were ordered last night."

Here is the Town Park and the almost forgotten street of Park Way behind. The photo dates from August or September of 1915. While the park was officially established in 1916, we see here the stone fountain (demolished in 1997). Prior to the Borough acquiring the property, it had been an unofficial park, usually referred to as Legion Park (since the American Legion once stood nearby).



The photo is labelled "boys swimming in Pine Hollow 7-12-14" The water seems to have been deeper then and from the number of photos of kids and parties of young adults, Pine Hollow seemed to be a much more popular spot for rambling or taking a dip.



Here is a more recent photo, not from the glass plate negative collection. On the night of February 7, 1964, after two explosions, a spectacular fire broke out in the storeroom of 416 N. Mercer Avenue. Four men were carried out of the building, with three treated at the hospital for burns. Flames then spread to the adjoining home at 420 N. Mercer, with high winds carrying sparks across Furnace St. which set fire to the empty building at 410 N. Mercer that once housed Weiner's Café. In icy temperatures the Sharpsville Fire Department battled the flames and smoke that billowed hundreds of feet in the air, with utility poles destroyed.

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

Santa Collection

Featuring images of Sharpsville's beloved Santa visits

Mugs — \$15

Ornaments — \$15

T-Shirts — \$20

Charcuterie Boards

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

Bookmarks

Engraved with the 150th Anniversary Logo — \$5

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

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

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.

More glass plate negatives



Here is William McClure inspecting a newly-built wood trestle at the Valley Mould & Iron, July 19, 1914. He is listed as a carpenter living at 22 S. 8th Street in a 1913 City Directory, so he was presumably the builder of the structure.

In the decades when winters were reliably colder, the Shenango River would freeze over, with ice skating a popular pastime. This photo taken January 27, 1912 shows a group of teens (along with some younger siblings). Compare the modes of dress: natty every-day wear of 1912 to the shabbiness of the present-day. Many of the male skaters have collared shirts and ties. The gals have smart skirts, with one even with a muff!



This is the Current Topics Club meeting of February 10, 1914. Some of the members are in Colonial garb, so the event presumably had a Washington's Birthday theme. Our best guess is that it was held in a room of the Pierce Opera House.

The Current Topics Club was organized in 1901 and was in existence as late as 1959. Their meetings were more of a literary or educational character and Sharpville's worthies were counted among its members.