



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

3000

Our archive of Sharpsville history now contains over 3,000 items. Among the wide range in the collection are: school and team photographs, newspaper clippings, furniture, garments, uniforms, books, mementos from town anniversaries, movies, photos of blast furnaces, railroads, and street scenes, items manufactured here, artifacts from shops, business promotional items, and diaries. They span 17 decades from an 1846 hand-drawn map of Mercer County to souvenirs from last year's 150th Celebration.

This milestone is all the more remarkable considering that for nearly the first decade of the Society's existence, we had probably less than 100 items in our archives. Starting in 2004, with a donation of over 300 items that Pete Joyce and Gene Blair had previously displayed at the VFW, our collection started to grow—and has ever since, thanks to the generosity of over 200 donors.

We imagine there's still quite a bit more out there, and would especially like items pertaining to ethnic history, businesses of the town, labor, and glimpses of everyday life. (Though, as a general rule, we want things that relate to Sharpsville's history not things that are merely old.)

Our main challenge is to be able to better share this with those here, the Sharpsville native who now lives afar, as well as the researcher whose interests intersect with our town's history. Digitization of photos and documents continues, and we are currently considering partnerships that will allow remote access. The displays at our headquarters continue to be expanded, including those in the basement area which give a narrative context. In addition, we aim to make the archives more accessible in other formats—such as this newsletter—as well as in DVDs, our book, brochures, our website, and future walking tours.

After all, these items represent a piece of your history.

Contact Us

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email: sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com

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

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

Meetings are held the Fourth Monday of the Month at 7:00pm

Upcoming Events

GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIP

Wheeling Island Casino, Nov 12th

With a side trip to the Oglebay Festival of Lights

Call 724-813-9199 for details

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 displays have been recently expanded and may include items you may have missed on a prior visit.

Collections Update

Mary Ann McCracken donated a school desk (with it's inkwell and a fountain pen) that once stood in the Hazel Dell one-room schoolhouse in South Pymatuning. She also donated a book about Mercer County One-Room Schoolhouses.

Eric Bombeck donated ten issues of the Sharpsville Advertiser (ranging from 1873 to 1912).

Carol Mehler donated a 1961 promotional calendar advertising the Sunrise Inn, Sharpsville.

Sandy Knight donated movie films of the 1940 and 1943 Armistice Day parades here. These have been digitized and captioned and can now be see on YouTube.

A Look Back

Our First Ordinances

Through the kind permission of the Mercer County Historical Society, in recent months we have been scanning their microfilmed copies of *The Sharpsville Advertiser*. The town newspaper is an invaluable source of history, especially about Sharpsville's early days, and the holdings at Mercer greatly expand the number of issues that have been in our possession.

As we were reminded by last year's 150th celebration, 1874 was the year Sharpsville was incorporated as a borough. Since there is a complete run of the *Advertiser* issues for that year, reports of the excitement in the lead-up and following the event was expected. Instead . . . little or nothing is contained in the paper. (Granted, it was a weekly of only four pages and was of the ready-print variety. Ready-prints were a way for small-town and rural newspapers without the resources for a full staff of reporters to produce something approaching a complete edition. The front and back—pages 1 and 4, plus much of page 2 arrived pre-printed with national and international news, serialized fiction, and national advertisements. Page 2 did have some local ads, with page 3 containing the local material as well as a good amount of local ad space.) In the May 27th and June 3rd editions there were two legal notices. One was that at the "Court of Quarter Sessions held had Mercer on the 21st of May, A.D. 1874, it was ordered and decreed that the Judgment of the Grand Jury in relation to the incorporation of the Borough of Sharpsville be confirmed." The second gave an Election Notice that on June 9th at Room No. 2 of the Public School House, an election would be held for one Burgess, six Councilmen, three Auditors, one High Constable, one Judge of Election, two Inspectors of Election, one Assessor, one Justice of the Peace, six School Directors, and one Constable. Sharpsville thus has two birthdays: the May 21, 1874 court decree and the June 9, 1874 election of the first officials.

There wasn't even a follow-up to say who was elected.

We must wait until the July 15th edition until we find something of interest. Here, a legal ad is printed outlining the first ordinances enacted in the new Borough. They do one better than the Bill of Rights, numbering eleven. While it cannot be expected that a small community would need to deal with the loftier principals addressed by the framers of our Constitutions, the topics garnering the most attention of the inaugural Borough Council may leave you scratching your head. They dealt with the following:

The first ordinance gives no mention of freedom of religion, speech, the press, or of peaceable assembly. Instead, a license is required for persons showing or exhibiting "natural curiosities, works of art, jugglery, plays, or theatrical performances." The second prohibits "any manufactory, art, trade or business which may be noxious or offensive to the inhabitants of its vicinity." Reasonable, but lacking a definition of noxious. This like, all the ordinances, specified the fine for infraction.

Ordinance Number 3 prohibited the depositing in or near any water passage of any culvert, gutter, or side-drain of any rubbish or other matter that shall impede the free passage of water. This was followed by one forbidding the deposit, throwing, or casting of "ashes, brush, rubbish, decayed vegetable matter, or any filth whatsoever" on streets or public grounds. Dumping of ashes on the streets—unpaved at this time—was allowed with permission.

Number 5 prohibited driving any horse, beast, wagon, or other vehicle on the sidewalk. After that, the running at large of hogs was prohibited. (The question of the running at large of the cow would soon take up the attention of the borough council with ordinances, repeals, and revisions over the course of several years.) The seventh ordinance required the removal of the accumulation of filth from any "barn, stable, yard, or privy" that became offensive to citizens in its vicinity.

Section 8 prohibited "coasting or riding upon hand-sleds, upon the sidewalks in said Borough." Number 9 specified a ten dollar fine for any person who "shall hereafter undress himself, or make any indecent exposure of his person, so as to be exposed to public view within sight of any person within said Borough. Sidewalks, at the time, were few and far between and consisted of wooden planks: hardly an ideal spot for sledding. And, one wonders, was public nudity much of a problem then?

Next there is a remonstrance against any person "who shall furiously ride or drive any horse, mare, mule, or gelding, within the limits of this Borough, or who shall, by reason of fast or furious riding or driving any of the animals aforesaid, endanger the person or property of another . . ." In essence, no speeding. This shared with the second ordinance the highest fine of \$50.

Finally, the dog law. It required, within 30 days, for every "dog or bitch" to be licensed, and to securely muzzle their dog during the months of July, August, and September. (This muzzling requirement was widespread across the country and derived from a belief that rabies was more prevalent during these months.) The High Constable had the duty to kill and bury any unmuzzled dogs found running at large. Moreover, any unpaid license fee (\$1 for a male dog, \$2 for a bitch), would result in the High Constable killing and burying the family pet. We assume this cruel ordinance has been repealed.

Pictures of the Past

Here are more selection from the glass plate negatives taken by William H. Snyder that were featured in recent newsletters. Unless otherwise noted, they date from around 1914. (Zoom in on your computer to see better detail.)



This is what you would see if, 111 years ago, you were standing on Mercer Avenue a few paces up from High Street looking toward the old Racquet Club.

On the one smokestack is painted "Alice Furnace Valley Mould & Iron Company." Indeed most of the industrial buildings there were part of the VMI complex, then the largest ingot mould foundry in the world. Near the center of the photo is the blast furnace and skip hoist of the Alice itself. The Claire Furnace is to the right of the photo.

In the foreground, strewn throughout the complex are the tenement dwellings of the furnace workers.

Sharpsville's First Baptist Church was built in 1872, on Church Street, on "Baptist Hill." The building is currently the home of the congregation of the East Side Church.

When it was built, the church had a center steeple with a pointed spire. It was, however, substantially remodeled in 1915. The main sanctuary stayed the same, but the entrance was changed to a corner entry, with new steeple having a truncated, crenellated top. A large stained-glass window was installed on the south-facing wall. Except for some modern remodeling at the top of the steeple, the church exterior looks now much like in this photo.



Photos of funeral mourners surrounding an open casket were a common tradition among Southern and Eastern European immigrants during this time.

This is identified as being at the Claire Furnace, and that the man was killed there. The deceased, in all likelihood, was Rody Dimmu, a 26-year old, born in Austria-Hungary. On March 28, 1916, he fell from a hoist at the Claire furnace and fractured his skull. The appearance of the priest and the trefoil crucifix suggest Rody was of the Orthodox faith.

Workplace deaths were then all too frequent, averaging about one each year here during the first two decades of the twentieth century.



"Grandpa's store" with Grandpa

The Nelson family recently donated two decorated metal toleware tea dispenser bins from the shop of their great-grandfather J. J. Mehl. In the 1880s he had opened a dry goods and grocery store on Mercer Avenue. Above is a photo of Mr. Mehl himself seated in front of a long array of the bins. The floor bins at the bottom and the top row match the artifacts we now have in the photo to the left. They have rotating labels with different types of tea on each. (The middle bins in the photo seem to list different types of coffee.) The number of bins, each for a different variety, indicate that Sharpshillites of the time were tremendous tea drinkers. Printed on the bins is the manufacturer: Norton Brothers, Chicago, Ill., patented May 2, 1878.



With Gratitude

We received a generous donation from
Laurie & Jason McCourt
in memory of **Martha Simons**

In Memoriam

Gregg S. Smith was a founding board member of the Sharpshill Area Historical Society and its first president. He continued to serve on the board and for many years as president. He devoted much time and energy to preserving Sharpshill's history, and was instrumental in acquiring and passionate about preserving our historic headquarters.

Besides being a fount of knowledge about the town's history, his outgoing, pleasant personality made him the well-known face of the Society.

Gregg's recent passing is deeply mourned.

Pictures of the Past

Here we see a Halloween party, with most in some sort of costume (there is an accompanying photo where they are wearing masks). Of particular note is the banner and the sashes urging “Votes for Women”—perhaps the theme of the party. It is somewhat surprising that, what would not become a national movement until two years later, found some support in our out-of-the-way town. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment, allowing women the right to vote, was ratified.



After the resort at Trout Island fell into disrepair and was not revived, several small camps sprung up along the Shenango, between Sharpsville and Clarksville.

Among these was Camp Sleepy Eye. Of course, in that era, everyone was better dressed for a riverside outing than they would be today. If you zoom-in closely, you can see a phonograph is playing in the middle of the group.

(Note the glass plate negative was broken off in the corner.)



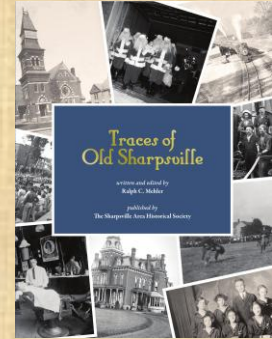
Pictured here is George Swan with his son on a horse-drawn carriage. They are on Sixth Street, with High Street to the left. The building in the background was the United Brethren Church that once stood there.

Items for Sale

Christmas Gift Ideas!

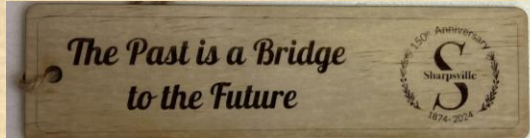
Traces of Old Sharpsville

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



Bookmarks

Engraved with the 150th Anniversary Logo — \$5



Charcuterie Boards

Engraved with images of Pierce Mansion, First Universalist Church, or the Jonas Pierce House — \$40



Santa Collection

Featuring images of Sharpsville's beloved Santa visits
Mugs — \$15 Ornaments — \$15 T-Shirts — \$20



Some items are in limited quantities, so order early to ensure availability for Christmas
Contact 724-877-9958 or visit sharpsvillehistorical.org

We still have limited quantities of:

Natural Stone Drink Coasters featuring lithographed scenes of Old Sharpsville — \$4

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

T-Shirts with the Historical Society Logo M-L — \$12; XL and 2X — \$15