



# SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

**A**s part of our effort to educate the public on local history as well as to make membership in the Historical Society more interesting and enjoyable, we plan to expand the number of meetings with public programs to several per year. Note that the regular business meeting (which admittedly is less than compelling) will not be included when we have the special programs. Watch for email alerts or newspaper announcements for future programs.

We have held recent programs featuring old postcards of the Shenango Valley and a talk by a Professor of Art History on the architect who designed the Society's headquarters building. November's meeting includes what promises to be an engaging presentation by a member of the Cherokee Nation on the Native Americans of our area.

Of course, we are eager to hear any suggestions you have for future programs related to local history.

### A Look Back

*From an interview originally published in The Herald in 1979, George F. Mahaney, Jr. recalls Sharpsville as it was in the early 1900s.*

#### Reminiscences of George F. Mahaney, Jr.

In 1915 there were only three places in all of Mercer County licensed to sell liquor and beer. Judge A.W. Williams granted all three licenses . . . all of them in Sharpsville.

George F. Mahaney, a lifelong Sharpsville resident who has a law practice in Sharon, listed these as three hotels: Knapp House, his father's hotel on Main and Walnut streets; Welsh House owned by Martin Welsh on Fourth and Main, and Pierce House, owned by James Pierce where the plaza is located now on Mercer and Shenango streets.

#### Special Street cars

"All three followed the laws and regulations set for them," Mahaney said. "Special street cars would come in from

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### Upcoming Events

**Special General Membership Meeting**  
November 5<sup>th</sup> 7:30p.m.

Featuring a presentation by Gene Allison about the  
American Indians of our area  
No Business Meeting—Open to All  
Of interest to young and old alike

Cleveland Symphony Trio  
Sunday November 11<sup>th</sup> 3:00pm  
Pierce Opera House

Bus trip to Seneca Niagara Casino  
with Wayne Newton Concert  
Wednesday December 5<sup>th</sup>

Christmas Concert with the Madrigal Singers of the  
Shenango Valley Chorale  
Saturday December 15<sup>th</sup> 7:30pm  
Sharpsville Historical Society Building

### Items for Sale

A popular Christmas gift!  
**Scenes of Old Sharpsville**

a DVD slideshow featuring 100 photos of Sharpsville  
in years past—\$10



Coming in 2013!

### SHARPSVILLE MEMORIES

a DVD featuring the Sharpsville in 1940 movie (last available on VHS tape 13 years ago), remastered from the original film, along with a newly available film of a Firemen's Convention & Parade held in Sharpsville in 1950.



We also still have Coverlets and Commemorative Glass  
Plates available—only a few left!

Please see our website for photos and ordering information.

### Test your knowledge of our town

Sharpsville High School sports teams adopted the name Blue Devils in 1934. What were they called prior to that?

answer on back page

## Reminiscences of George F. Mahaney, Jr. (cont'd from page 1)

Sharon on Friday and Saturday nights to bring Sharon patrons to these hotels. They would start coming from 5 and 6 p.m., just packed with people who were literally hanging on the running boards. But the law said the hotels couldn't serve liquor after 9 p.m., so they didn't.

"My dad had a car and often on Saturday nights, he took some of the young fellows to Youngstown to continue their partying. But he never served liquor to them after 9."

Mahaney's father also was George F. Mahaney. He was born in 1878 in Erie, but lived in Sharpsville from age 4. His work for the Shenango Reservoir earned him the name of "Mr. Sharpsville."

Son George Mahaney has a lot of good memories of Sharpsville. He remembers the street car and the motorman who sometimes slept in it because it ran until 12:30 a.m. and he had to start taking people to work at 5:30 a.m.

### **Pullman trains**

Mahaney recalls people getting on a Pullman train on the Erie Railroad at the foot of Mercer Avenue to go to New York. "That went out in the early 1920s," he noted, "but we youngsters got a kick out of seeing the Pullman porter.

"There was a preponderance of meat markets in downtown Sharpsville in the early 1900s," he said. "Lamont's, Burchart's Sam Faber and Jim Rose sold nothing but meat, all of it cut fresh. "There were four in our family and we could buy 1½ pounds of veal for 45 cents. We youngsters wanted to go to the store because our parents would give us 50 cents and we'd get to keep the nickel. Of course, there was no pre-packaging of meat like there is today and we'd ask for what we wanted then wait until the butcher cut it."

### **Horse and wagon deliveries**

"Holland's, Mehl's and Byerly's just sold groceries. There also were horse-and-wagon deliveries of groceries and the kids knew the names of all the horses—Wallace, Hoban, Flossie Muscarella. Some residents would buy milk at the stores, but Deneen's Dairy started to deliver and that caught on. An 'ice cream man' made the rounds in a little horse-drawn buggy. We got a small cone of ice cream for a penny or a large cone for a nickel. We could choose chocolate, strawberry and vanilla."

"One man delivered ice in a horse-drawn wagon. There were three livery stables in Sharpsville, one on Second Street, one on Main between Walnut and Mercer streets and one on Mercer Avenue. Salesmen and others would rent horses and buggies there to take their girls on dates. Once a fellow decided to give the street cars some competition and drove a jitney to Sharon, charging a nickel fare.

"For many years Sharpsville had only two policemen, Alex 'Sandy' Anderson, chief, and Albert 'Pincher' Green. At one time we had a motorcycle cop, Tony Stigliano who was still around in the early mid-1920s."

### **Unpaved streets**

"Most of the streets were dirt. Only Main and Mercer streets were paved. Then in the 1920s, they paved Walnut and Ridge with brick." Mahaney recalls several poolrooms in town. The Parkway had 10 pool tables and couple of billiard tables.

There wasn't too much electricity then, so gas lights were prevalent. There weren't too many street lights, but a lamplighter would make rounds and light those every night. "I remember when we got our electric lights in the early 1900s," Mahaney said. "Red lights were installed every three or four blocks. These would signal the policeman on the beat that he had a phone call at the station."

Most stores downtown close on Wednesday afternoons, but that was when the merchants held "Sharpsville Days" at Conneaut Lake and at Buhl Farm Park. "We'd go to Conneaut Lake by train and take our picnic baskets," he said. He recalled the New York-Chicago Run on Erie Railroad and four trains from Erie to Pittsburgh daily on the Pennsylvania Railroad. There was plenty of entertainment in Sharpsville. A movie theater was under Parkway Billiards Hall and Pierce's Opera House was on the third floor of McDowell Bank. Sharpsville High School graduation was held there in 1914.

### **Vaudeville acts**

"They would bring in vaudeville acts, have church plays and any other entertainment for the time," Mahaney noted. Saturday matinees cost a dime and included such serials as "The Mysteries of Myra," starring Pearl White. "That was a must," Mahaney said. "Serials like the 'Perils of Pauline' would run for 13 or 14 weeks. Poor Pauline was left at the end of the movie about to be mugged or hanged or come to some other horrible fate at the hands of villains. You absolutely had to go back to see what became of her. The Gable Theater opened in Sharpsville in the late 1920s. It was owned by Charles Gable, uncle of the actor Clark Gable.

The popular picnic place of the day was Maple Grove on the west side where the Baptist church has campgrounds near Pritchards Corners. Picnics were always popular then. "There was a speedway that packed spectators in on the east end of town (Irish Town), but that was before my time," Mahaney said. "They had horse races, then ballgames on the high school football field. The baseball field was at the Boiler Works field where Sharpsville Steel Fabricators are now. I played football on the field where the 13th Street playground is now. There was another ballfield, called Joyce Field."

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## Reminiscences of George F. Mahaney, Jr. (cont'd from page 2)

Mahaney said Sharpsville residents were generally conservative and great church-goers. They reared big families on small wages, but all the old-timers died owning homes.

### Home cost \$2,000 to \$3,000

“They could buy an average sized home then for \$2,000 to \$3,000. They paid for it, and had a few dollars left when they died. That’s as much or more than people have today because of today’s high prices.” Mahaney recalled when cigarettes cost a nickel a pack, ice cream sodas costs a dime or 15 cents. There were a couple of ice cream parlors, one owned by Dick Patterson originally on Shenango Street and then on Walnut Street. He had a Japanese garden in the back yard. There were plants and Japanese lanterns and a platform which would seat 40 to 50.

People were civic minded, Mahaney said. “They had a Sharpsville Improvement Association (like today’s Chamber of Commerce). It [sponsored] Sharpsville Days. In 1924, they had debate clubs and would bring in lyceum choruses and lecturers, much like they do at Lake Chautauqua, N.Y., now.

“Juvenile delinquency was not a problem as it is today. About the only ‘bad’ thing kids did was to dump outhouses at Halloween. But that wasn’t considered delinquency; that was considered sport.”

“The post office was located between two railroad tracks because everything came by train. If the post office were on one end or the other of the track, mail might have been blocked,” Mahaney noted.

### Basketball games

In December 1920, the first of the so-called modern-day Sharpsville basketball games took place, Mahaney added. “The high school basketball team played New Wilmington High School at Westminster College. Two full passenger train loads of fans went to New Wilmington. The railroad put on two coaches and there was standing room only. Sharpsville businessmen played the preliminary game against New Wilmington businessmen. “Sharpsville won the game. In the last second of the game, Nick Mehler shot a basket that hit the lights and went in the basket. Final score was 15-14.”

## From the Archives

*This contemporary account of the funeral of General Pierce illustrates both the ostentation of Victorian funerals and the high esteem with which he was held.*

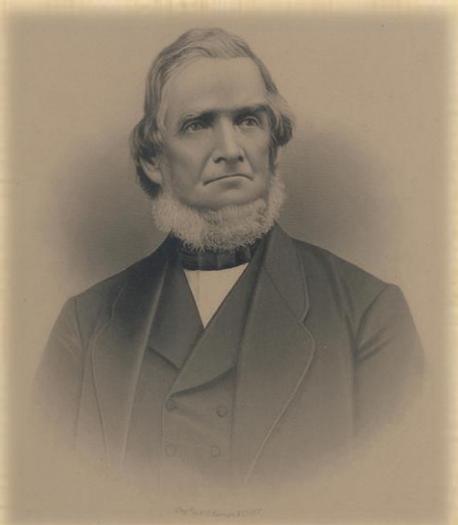
### The Funeral of General James Pierce

Friday afternoon, at one o’clock, was fixed as the time for the obsequies. All the business houses in Sharpsville were closed and work generally suspended during the day. An hour or more before the time announced for the ceremonies to begin numbers of carriages could be seen on their way to the residence of the deceased [Mt. Hickory, on Keel Ridge Road]. By one o’clock a very large gathering of people had assembled, many of them, however, being unable to gain admission to the house on account of the crowd present. The casket was placed in the library, and the religious services were conducted in the hall, at the door of the parlor. The Universalist choir opened the services by singing “We shall know each other there,” after which Rev. S.H. McCollester, President of Buchtel College, Akron, Ohio, read a portion of Scripture and offered up a fervent prayer to the Throne of Grace. Rev. Charles Shipman, of Girard, then delivered a very sympathetic, eloquent and appreciative sermon, at the close of which the choir sang “He has gone to the silent land.”

The pall-bearers were Hon. Wm. L. Scott, of Erie; Major J.W. Ormsby, of Sharon; Dr. Wm. Gibson, of Jamestown; Dr. J.M. Irvine, of Sharon; Samuel Sherman, of Albion, Erie county; Alex. Nimick, of Pittsburg; Judge Maxwell of Greenville; John Phillips, of Neshannock; John McCleary, of New Castle; A. McIntyre, of Neshannock; Hugh Young, of Hermitage; Robert Oaks, of Oakland; Seth Hofius and A.J. Nickel, of Sharpsville.

Mr. Sherman, one of the pall-bearers, was the first person with whom Mr. Pierce became acquainted when he settled in Erie county.

The procession, as it slowly wended its way to Riverside cemetery, which is about three miles from the residence of the deceased, presented a sight seldom seen in this section. Its entire length was fully a mile, 250 carriages being in the procession. Every follower seemed impressed with the idea that he had lost in the deceased a personal friend. On arriving at the burial-ground, the school children, numbering about three hundred, were formed in line and sang “Bright Jewels” as the procession passed in, after which they marched by the casket and took a view of the corpse.



Here is the same building seen, at left, shortly after its construction in 1885, and, on the right, shortly before its demolition for Urban Renewal in 1972. Standing at 44 East Shenango Street (in front of the present Sharpsville Plaza), it was originally occupied as the W.F. Hazen drugstore. William Hazen died young at age 40, just four years after opening the store. Over the years, it housed a bakery, a wholesale liquor store, and a candy store. By 1930, the building was home to Lazo Drljaca and his National Plumbing Co. until his death in 1963, and then to various apartment dwellers in the building's final decade.



## Collections Update

The following have been recently added to our collections:

**Don & Lorraine Greer** donated blueprints and production records from the Sharpsville Slag Co., and two items from breweries that once operated in the Shenango Valley—the Union Brewing Co. of Sharon and the Mercer County Brewing Co. of Farrell.

**Bill Fabrey** shared with us digitized aerial photographs of Sharpsville from the 1920s and 40s.

**Gregg Smith** allowed us to make digital scans of his historic postcard collection of Sharpsville, with most from 1905-15.

**Clayton Ruminski**, a YSU graduate student researching the early furnaces of the Shenango and Mahoning Valleys, shared with us an outstanding collection of digitized photographs of Sharpsville furnaces and ironworkers from the 1890-1920 time period.

## Wish List

Funds for the following items are currently being sought:

- 1) 15" or larger digital photo frame (\$129)
- 2) restoration of and protective framing for our 1860 wall map of Mercer County (\$450)
- 3) Sponsorship of 2013 Cahill Dunne concert (\$750)
- 4) Refinishing of floor at Historical Society (\$3,000)

Donations in whole or in part toward any of these projects would be greatly appreciated.

As a 501(c)(3) organization, donations to the Historical Society are tax deductible.

## With Gratitude

If you were able to attend the recent performance of *La Traviata* at the Pierce Opera House, we're confident you thoroughly enjoyed the virtuosity of the singers and musicians, the staging that brought Verdi's libretto to life, and the rich sound and intimacy with the performers the historic interior makes possible. The Historical Society is proud to co-sponsor, along with Valley Lyric Opera, performances like these.

The cost of bringing professional-caliber opera productions to the Shenango Valley is daunting, even with a packed house like we had at the September performances. Nonetheless, Dr. Francisco Cano (local allergist/immunologist and founder of Valley Lyric Opera) has generously shared the revenue from the event with the Historical Society. Dr. Cano's generosity for this and past operas has allowed them to be not only an artistic success but a financial success for the Society as well.

## Contact Us

website: [www.sharpsvillehistorical.org](http://www.sharpsvillehistorical.org)  
 email: [sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com](mailto:sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com)  
 or 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  
 (7:30pm for meetings with public programs)

Answer to quiz question: Either the "Big Blues" or the "Blue & White".