



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

The Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission recently released a report outlining the economic value of historic preservation in Pennsylvania. The results are quantified both through economic analysis and public opinion surveys, with studies by other states coming to similar conclusions. Among the report's findings:

- Counting only restoration projects that involve federal tax credits, an average of \$534 million annual economic activity in Pennsylvania is created.
- Heritage Tourism supports 37,000 jobs statewide.
- Historic buildings are one of the primary ways to preserve an area's unique identity and sense of place.
- Rehabilitation of historic buildings capitalizes on the "embodied energy" of existing structures, and avoids the more environmentally costly route of constructing new buildings and using up open space.
- Historic preservation contributes to the mending and safeguarding of older communities and structures, improves housing stock and stabilizes working class neighborhoods.

Whether support comes from public monies or private contributions, preservation of our local historic resources should be seen as an investment that will pay off in increased economic activity and a better quality of life.

Upcoming Events

**Bus trip to the Meadows Casino
Wednesday April 3rd**

Call 724-813-9199 for reservations



The opera **Rigoletto** in August and the Irish singer/storyteller **Cahal Dunne** in October. Both will be held at the Pierce Opera House.



Also at the Pierce Opera House are the quality productions of Area Community Theatre of Sharpsville

Rodgers' & Hammerstein's *South Pacific*

March 15th, 16th, 21st, 22nd and 23rd at 7:30pm;

March 17th at 2:00pm

From the Archives

Gleanings from an early book of Borough Council Minutes

In the Historical Society's possession is a book of minutes of Council meetings, from 1881 to 1886, showing a way of life at times utterly foreign to our own. A few extracts:

September 24, 1881: a resolution was adopted mourning the death of President Garfield and requesting that businesses be closed from Noon to 6 p.m. on the 26th.

Feb. 14, 1882: "a Petition requesting the Burgess & Town Council to investigate the cause of Malarial disorder within the Borough was presented"

A follow up May 15, 1882 reported that Dr. E Cutter of New York is "offering his services to examine into the sanitary condition of the Town and ascertain if possible the cause of Malarial Fevers. . ."

August 14, 1882: Acknowledgment of a petition "remonstrating against one O. Byers keeping or causing to be kept in a building on Furnace street a material known as Fertilizer or Guano and requesting Council to take some action up on the matter and have it moved at once."

The following month, an ordinance was passed prohibiting the storing of Sea Fowl Guano or Phosphate within the Borough.

July 21, 1883: "Moved and carried that the Secretary notify Luther Gaines to remove his Hogs from the corner of Mercer Avenue and Water Street where he now has them in an old cellar."

May 10, 1886: "That the Borough rent to the Sharpsville Independent Brass Band the town hall at \$2.00 per month."

Also included within these pages is a dog register for the years 1874 and 1880. It lets us once again know the canine residents of the day, such as David Reed's Setter named Queen, Charles W. Rapp's rat terrier Jack, and J.B. Wilson's yellow terrier Turk.

Test your knowledge of our town

Sharpsville High School had four undefeated football teams, but only one season both undefeated and untied. What year was it?

answer on back page

Sharpville Inventors

Clifford A. Nickle

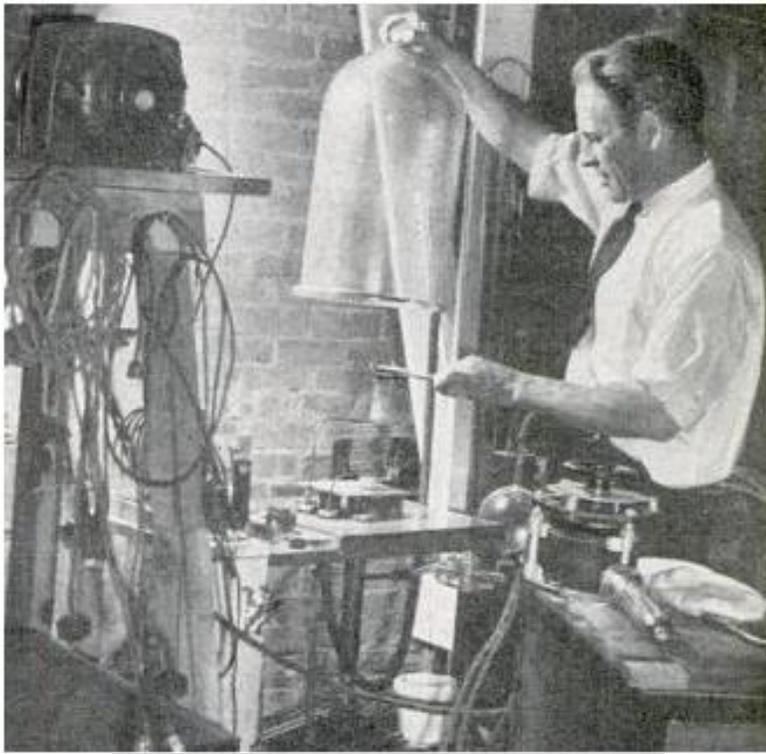
Clifford A. Nickle, prolific inventor, was born May 6, 1894 to Andrew J. and Margaret (Augustine) Nickle and grew up on Walnut Street, Sharpville. His keen and inventive mind showed itself even during his youth when he built his own telephone. Interested in photography, Clifford rigged up his own camera and was even able to take color photographs at this early date. Fluent in Latin, he often stumped his teachers; he graduated first in his class of 15 at Sharpville.

He was a good football player, and an even better pitcher, once pitching a triple header in 1912. His prowess in intramural wrestling at college earned him the title of "Strong Man".

In 1918, Clifford graduated from Pennsylvania State University, where he was valedictorian of his class. His 96% grade average was, at the time, the highest in Penn State history. Clifford was awarded a graduate fellowship, but declined it to enlist in war service.

After his service in the First World War, he began work in 1920 for General Electric. Clifford transferred to GE's research lab at Schenectady in 1925 where he began work under the celebrated engineer Charles Steinmetz.

In 1926, he and Dr. Robert E. Doherty (of GE, and later president of Carnegie Institute of Technology) wrote a paper that significantly advanced the theory of synchronous machines, a key question in electrical engineering. Clifford received the Coffin Award at General Electric, the highest honor the firm bestowed on its engineers.



Nickle working in his basement laboratory

Twenty-one patents bear his name and cover such varied applications as a time-delay switch, a non-corrosive soldering flux, aluminum reflectors, a microphone, a magnetic core, a method for making abrasive material, and a coffee-maker. Some of his most important work was in GE's development of the fluorescent light.

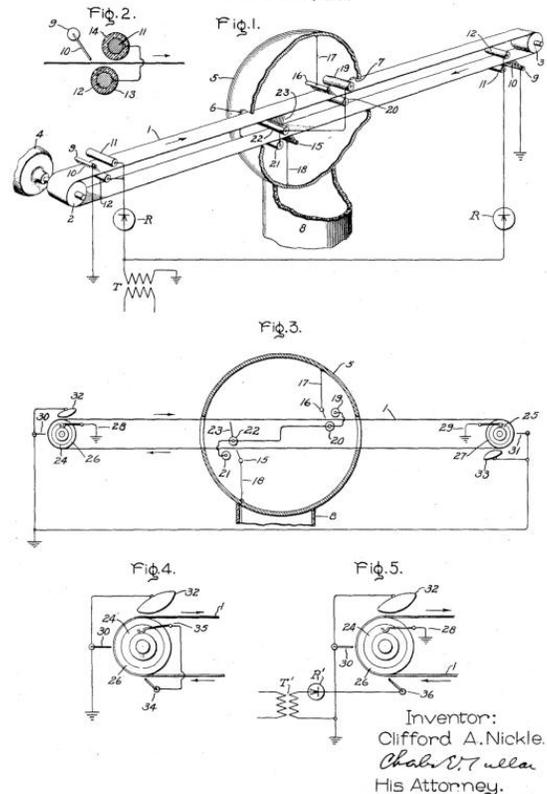
Popular Science featured him in a 1941 article, "Cellar Scientist", where he is profiled as a stereotypical reclusive inventor—working alone in his home's basement, and often unseen by his colleagues for days. Clifford, a pioneer in the commercial production of synthetic diamonds, was able to produce them in his cellar lab, which was even equipped with a furnace capable of producing 6000 degrees. His death was noted in *The New York Times* who called him "one of the ablest and most resourceful inventors in America".

This remarkable man unfortunately died too young, succumbing to a two-year illness at age 48. He was survived by his wife, Addie (Hawks) Nickle of Elk and Potter County, and a son Clifford.

Feb. 13, 1934.

C. A. NICKLE
ELECTROSTATIC MACHINE
Filed March 2, 1932

1,947,220



Inventor:
Clifford A. Nickle.
Charles V. Tuller
His Attorney.

Drawing from one of his many patent applications

Traces of Lost Sharpsville

Movie Theatres in Sharpsville

The first motion picture to be shown in Sharpsville was exhibited in the storeroom of Burckhart's Meat Market, though the exact date is not known, nor is the person who brought the movie to Sharpsville.

Harry Hamilton opened the first real nickelodeon April 8, 1907 in the storeroom of A.D. Palmer's shop at 15 N. Walnut St. (A nickelodeon was the name of the first indoor spaces for projecting motion pictures; small and simple, they were usually converted storefronts. Despite the song, it was not something you "put a nickel in.") Richard Patterson opened a competing venture shortly afterwards in a store on Shenango St., with Clyde Becker joining the field in a building near 6th Street. Patterson and Becker soon closed their establishments, and E.W. Allen bought the Hamilton enterprise May 15, 1909. Two years later, he moved his business over to Park Hall at the corner of Park Way & Shenango, remodeling a large store space in that building, and eventually naming it the Colonial Theatre. Over the next decade, the movie house had four successive owners—Charles H. Ruggles, Edward A. Catron, J.R. Hazel, and Charles R. Blatt, who purchased it March 28, 1921. Though it closed around 1929, the Colonial had been the second theatre opened by the Blatt Brothers, who would come to own a chain of two dozen movie houses and drive-ins in Western Pennsylvania.

While details are unclear, the Pierce Opera House is also thought to have shown motion pictures in addition to stage performances. An intriguing clue is found in its old ticket booth—long closed up and forgotten until the building's remodeling during the past decade. Much like a time capsule, the walls of the booth are plastered with posters from such stage plays as "The Runaway Wife," "Missouri Girl," and "The Black Diamond Express." There are also, however, three undated posters from "Howard & Garing's Moving Pictures."

The Ritz Theatre opened June 1924, in time for Sharpsville's Golden Anniversary. It was then described as modern, up-to-date in every way, and absolutely fireproof. The building included two storefronts, initially occupied by Harry Solomon's confectionary and Mrs. Carnes' millinery. The owner was Charles Gable, noted locally as the uncle of Clark Gable; he also owned the Gable Theater in Sharon. Remembered for "his diamond rings and a powerful hoarse voice," Gable operated the theatre until 1940 when ill health forced him to turn over management to Andy Seamon. Seamon then purchased the movie house from Gable's estate in 1950 and ran it until the about 1965. The Ritz was fondly remembered for its Saturday matinee serials.

The long-vacant building collapsed July 11, 1995. Its foundation stands next to Jerry's Tavern (the former Glen-Rose) on Main Street.

Building Update

With last year's roof replacement yielding a permanent fix to the interior water damage that has troubled our historic headquarters building off-and-on over the years, we have now been able to embark on repairing and repainting the interior walls. Home Depot was able to accurately match the original 1884 paint color from a plaster sample that had been hidden under a recently removed heating duct.

Work has now been completed with Reardon's Quality Painting of Masury doing a first-rate job. They were able to meet the challenges of high ceilings, difficult-to-access areas, and unstable areas of plaster, all while working neatly and carefully around our collections and pipe organ. We recommend Reardon's highly.

Upcoming restoration projects will include electrical upgrades, refinishing the front doors, and refinishing the flooring. We also hope to raise sufficient funds this year to repair and repaint the building's exterior wood trim.

Further down the road, we plan to restore the building's original stained glass windows and make repairs to its pipe organ, the oldest such instrument in Mercer County.

While much of the Historical Society's work in collecting, preserving, and publicizing local history relies on volunteer labor, your support will also allow us to continue the restoration of our headquarters—built in 1884 as the First Universalist Church of Sharpsville. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this building is the fourth oldest church and the fullest expression of High Victorian Gothic architecture in the Shenango Valley, as well as a nationally significant example of the Akron Plan of church design. As we progress, the building can be utilized more and more for displays of our historical artifacts, performances and social functions, and to help both young and old regain a sense of community.





This photograph, from around 1930, was taken from the top of the Shenango Furnace Co.'s No. 1 Furnace. It looks eastward along the Pennsylvania Railroad lines with the plant of the Sharpstown Boiler Works (later Sharpstown Steel Fabricators) to the right. By zooming in on your computer monitor, some of the numbered landmarks can be recognized:

- 1) the steeple of the Methodist Church and the tower of the Jonas Pierce House
- 2) the Big Cut Bridge, with the Penna. RR station in front
- 3) the steeple of what was then Grace Evangelical & Reformed Church
- 4) the Deeter School with its belfry
- 5) the steeple of the old Presbyterian Church
- 6) the old Town Hall (now Sharpstown Floral) with its belfry for the town fire bell.

Items for Sale

Coming later this year . . .

2014 COMMEMORATIVE WALL CALENDAR featuring twelve rarely-seen photos of old-time Sharpstown along with other nuggets of historical information.

Advertising support for this project is requested. Help us recognize the Borough of Sharpstown's 140th anniversary and the Historical Society's first 20 years.



still available

Scenes of Old Sharpstown

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

With Gratitude

A donation was received since the last newsletter from:
Donald & Winifred Eichelberger

The following made gifts in memory of Dr. Edward Falk:

Patty Boyd & Family
Helen E. Petrich
Grand Valley State University
Caregivers Plus Home Health Care

We also recently received a significant donation that will allow us to continue with interior restoration of our historic headquarters from:
Ralph & Carol Mehler

Collections update

The following have been recently added to our collections:

Bill Fabrey donated some additional photographs of Sharpstown in the 30s and 40s.

Bob Verholek donated a glass milk jug from the Easthill Guernsey Farm.

Joe Palo donated a History of Castro dei Volsci (where many of Sharpstown's Italian families originated) and a 1927 photo of funeral mourners in front of St. Bartholomew's.

Mela Pompa Garofalo donated a photo of funeral mourners in front of St. Bartholomew's from the same era.

Contact Us

website: www.sharpsvillehistorical.org
email: sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com
or see our website for officers' phone numbers

Headquarters: 131 N. Mercer Ave., Sharpstown, Pa.
Mailing address: 955 Forest Lane, Sharpstown, Pa. 16150
Meetings are held the First Monday of the Month
at 7:00pm at our headquarters

Answer to quiz question: the 1946 squad was 10-0-0. The other seasons included ties—1924 was 7-0-1, 1926 was 8-0-3, 1934 was 9-0-1.