



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

The Historical Society recently hosted a tour for the seventh-grade class of Sharpsville Middle School. Guides led groups of students to eleven stops through the older part of town. Besides pointing out some of our early and interesting—and likely overlooked—buildings, the tour included a pamphlet that told the stories behind the structures and, where relevant, connected our local sites to broader historical themes. We are grateful to the Sharpsville Area School District and especially to Principal Heidi AbiNader for initiating this project and giving us an opportunity to pass on our town's history to the next generation.

As important as it is for our kids to know about their community, we need to remember that history—especially local history—is a means for all of us to connect with each other. That is precisely the mission of the Historical Society—to *strengthen a sense of community by connecting the people of the Sharpsville area with their shared past.*

For local history is more than merely the preservation of some old buildings or photographs. While those are worthy goals in and of themselves, beyond that, they are a means to a greater end of developing this shared sense of community. So much of this idea of belonging that we all want is created by a common vocabulary: what is a coffee stir or an ingot mold, who was Harry Peibly or General Pierce, or where was the Shenango Furnace or the Canal. So, when you and your neighbors share this common knowledge, you end up being connected not so much to the past but to a place—Sharpsville.

Upcoming Events

ANNUAL ICE CREAM SOCIAL

AT MAHANEY PARK

Sunday July 10th

4:00 - 7:00

Get together with your neighbors for music, entertainment, hot dogs, ice cream



GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIPS

Seneca Niagara, July 20th

Cleveland Horseshoe, August 17th

Rocky Gap Two-Night Trip, Sept 29th-Oct 1st

Call 724-813-9199 for info and reservations



Please also support the quality productions, showcasing local talent, of Area Community Theatre of Sharpsville



Pierce Opera House September 16th - 25th
call 724-815-4388 or go to actsharpsville.org

Items for Sale

Natural Stone Drink Coasters

featuring lithographed scenes of old Sharpsville
17 different choices
\$8 each, any 4 for \$30

Scenes of Old Sharpsville

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

A Look Back

The Oldest Pipe Organ in Mercer County

In 1995, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Sharpsville put their building up for sale. (With its cornerstone laid in October 1882, it was built as the First Universalist Church of Sharpsville and is now home to the Sharpsville Area Historical Society.) The newly-formed Historical Society saw the urgent need to preserve this architectural gem, since if it were sold to an investor, architectural elements—above all, the pipe organ—would undoubtedly have been stripped from the building.

This instrument was present at the building's dedication on February 10, 1884 and was featured in a special concert given the following month by Mr. S.B. Whitely, assisted by Mr. R. Williamson and Miss Emma Strawbridge. While there is mention of a pipe organ in 1874 at Sharon's Second Presbyterian Church, Sharpsville's is likely the second organ in Mercer County and certainly the oldest still in existence.

The instrument was built as Opus 227 by the Pomplitz Church Organ Company of Baltimore. August Pomplitz came to this country from Rothenberg, Germany in 1851 and became a respected builder of pipe organs. Following his death in 1874, his widow Louisa continued the company with her brother John W. Otto, though with declining production and another partner brought on for a short time. After 1887 there is no longer a record of the company.

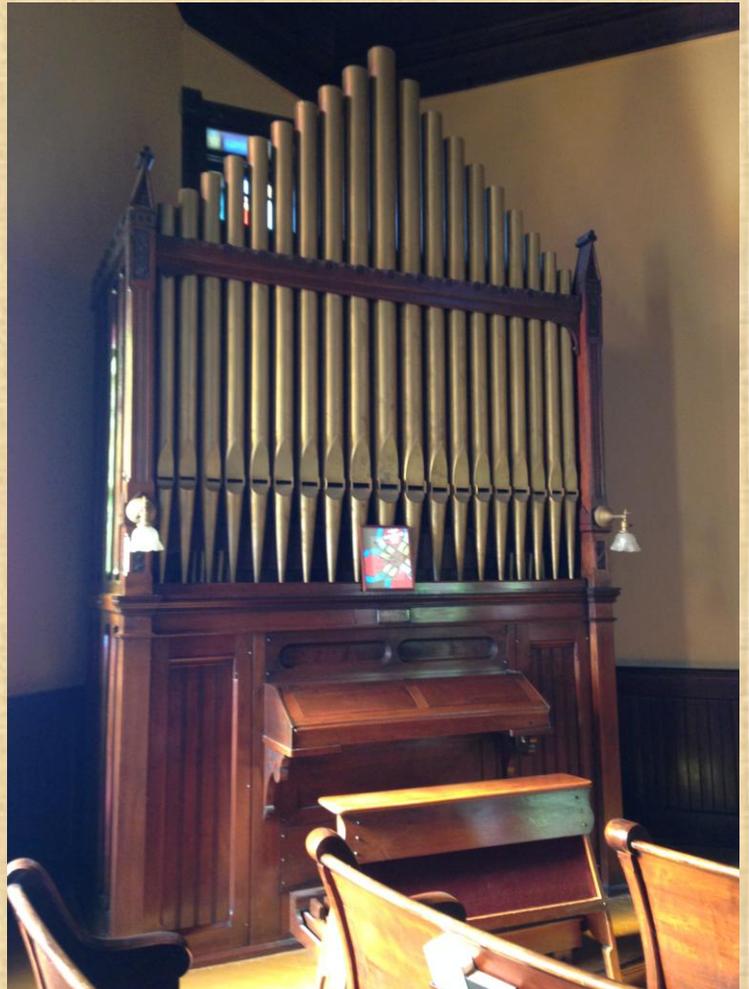
Why this Baltimore firm was chosen by Chloe Pierce, whose munificence built the First Universalist Church, is easily answered. Two years before the cornerstone to the church was laid, her son, James Buchanan Pierce, married Albertina Pomplitz, daughter of August and Louisa. But how James met Albertina remains a question, especially given the difference in geography as well as their class and ethnicity. (A similar unexpected match occurred the following year between Albertina's sister, Emma, and Thomas B. Stillman, soon to be Professor of Chemistry at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey. We can speculate that James B. Pierce, who attended Stevens from 1874-1877, may have become friends with Stillman, a graduate student there at the time.)

What is known is that Chloe Pierce visited Baltimore in the autumn of 1882 to buy furniture for the mansion. It is likely that she visited the Pomplitz Church Organ Company then.

A plaque affixed to the organ dedicates it to the memory of Chloe Pierce's sister, Abida H. Bolles, who died in 1881. It retains its original stoplist and tracker action. An electric blower, however, at some point replaced the original hand-pumped bellows. As a boy in the late 19th century, Peter Fromm turned the crank that pumped the bellows. For his labors, he earned the princely sum of a penny a day, though he "liked to hear the lady play."

For many years, the organist at the church was Jerome Morford, who was born in a log house on the Koonce Farm three miles east of Sharon in 1865. Despite being blind from birth Morford became "one of the most talented musicians in Mercer county," as he was so eulogized on the front page of *The Sharon Herald* upon his death in 1936. He was accomplished on the violin—winning a district "old time" fiddlers' contest in 1929—as well as the piano and organ.

The late Frank Stearns of Greenville took a special interest in this instrument. He gave wonderful concerts here and obtained the instrument's recognition by the Organ Historical Society in 1984.



Traces of Lost Sharpsville

The Flue Dust Furnace

By 1875, Sharpsville's nine blast furnaces had been completed. The ensuing years would see them change hands, be renamed, and rebuilt as larger, more modern furnaces. (For a brief time, though—between the construction of the second Mable furnace in 1880 and the replacement of the two Mt. Hickory stacks by the Claire in 1885—ten furnaces stood here.) However, until the consolidation of the Douglas, Spearman, and Mabel furnaces by the Shenango Furnace Co., later followed by the slow death of the others, this number remained stable: that is, until the appearance of the furnace of the Northside Iron Company, also known as the Flue Dust Furnace. (This, though, is not to be confused with the "Shoo-Fly Furnace," a nickname from 1871 for the Douglas Furnace here.)

Erected in early 1902, with its first blast that summer, on the hillside between the Shenango Furnace Co. and the river, its dimensions were much smaller than the typical blast furnace of the day. (It had a 35 foot stack and 7½ foot bosh compared to the 80 foot stack with 20 foot bosh the Shenango Furnace built six years later. Its blowing engine was procured from a long disused charcoal furnace in Cumberland County, Pa. This was the famous Weimar blowing engine, first of the high-speed types, that was displayed at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876.) In its conception the venture was experimental and attempted to smelt the vast tonnage of flue dust that lay in large banks at Sharpsville and elsewhere. Flue dust is expelled from the top of the blast furnace during the production of iron and is captured from the hot exhaust gases. It is composed principally of iron oxide, with the iron content as high as 10%. As a waste by-product, it was free except for the cost of cartage. The entrepreneur who could successfully utilize it as a replacement for ore would enjoy a significant cost advantage.

Among those behind the venture were Scott A. Robinson, Charles Blair Kantner, and Andrew Nickel. These men were no strangers to Sharpsville business and industry. Nickel, son of one of Sharpsville's prominent furnacemen, served as superintendant of the Spearman Furnace here until 1898 when he was made manager of the Sharpsville Furnace. About the time the Northside was started, he had left the Sharpsville Furnace and opened a hardware store in town. Though he later entered the coal trade in Mercer County, Kantner spent a career as bookkeeper for the blast furnaces here, and was described in 1897 as an expert in furnace practice. Robinson, though, was not a blast furnace man. He was one of the Robinson boys—sons of Thomas G. Robinson, who had run a planing mill and then branched out with his sons into the manufacture of furniture. The brothers even ran Sharpsville's own electric generating plant. Scott later went on to become a funeral director, as well as an insurance and real estate agent.

Initial problems were met with both the placement of the doors for charging the furnace with flue dust as well as their failure to seal properly, so production relied on standard ore for a time. A reconfiguration was made, but the difficulty of balancing placement of the flue dust and the blast of hot air remained. Others would later find the solution to lie in

sintering the flue dust; sintering involves mixing the dust with a binder and heating it to form it into pellets—thus eliminating the problem of the dust blowing around in the furnace. A sintering plant was built in Hubbard, Ohio in 1907, though it would be decades before the use of sintered flue dust became a regular, if minor, component of iron production.

Ultimately, like the many attempts before it, the experiment at Sharpsville was admitted to be a failure, with the business closing in 1905. The loss of investment was heavy—over \$80,000.



The Northside Iron Company's furnace in 1903.

Ritz Theatre

Phone 2018

SHARPSVILLE, PA.

SHOWS FOR FEBRUARY

SAT.—2, one day only

Robert Stack, Joy Page in
The Bullfighter & the Lady

SUN., MON.—3, 4 (in Technicolor)

Danny Kaye, Corinne Calvet
On the Riviera

TUES., WED.—5, 6 (in Technicolor)

Gregory Peck, Virginia Mayo
Capt. Horatio Hornblower

THURS., FRI.—7, 8

Tyrone Power, Susan Hayward
Rawhide

SAT.—9 one day only— (Basketball At It's Best)

The Harlem Globetrotters

SUN., MON.—10, 11 (in Technicolor)

Randolph Scott, Janis Carter
Santa Fe

TUES., WED.—12, 13

James Cagney, Phyllis Thaxter in
Come Fill the Cup

(over)

THURS., FRI.—14, 15 (Double Feature)

Roy Rogers - **North of the Great Divide**
also Bowery Boys in **Triple Trouble**

SAT.—16 one day only

Vera Ralston, John Carroll
Surrender

SUN., MON.—17, 18 (in Technicolor)

Clark Gable, Ricardo Montalban
Across the Wide Missouri

TUES., WED.—19, 20

Gene Tierney, Glenn Ford in
The Secret of Convict Lake

THURS., FRI.—21, 22 (in Technicolor)

Joel McCrea, Chill Wills
Cattle Drive

SAT.—23 (Double Feature)

No Questions Asked
Tim Holt Western

SUN., MON.—24, 25 (in Technicolor)

Dennis Morgan, Virginia Mayo
Painting the Clouds with Sunshine

TUES., WED.—26, 27

Michele Morgan, Henri Vidal
Fabiola

THURS., FRI.—28, 29

Bobby Driscoll, Martha Scott
When I Grow Up

1967
2/28

Perhaps some old memories may be rekindled by the movies and stars listed on this advertising card for Main Street's Ritz Theatre. It dates from 1952. By this time, the Ritz was a second-run theatre as these movies were first released the year before.

Collections update

Sharpsville Area School District donated sports trophies dated 1927-1943 as well as some team photos and portraits of Principal Robison and Principal Hedglin.

Bob Disko donated ashtrays from Lamont's Lounge and the Sunrise Inn.

Marilyn Linzenbold donated the advertisement shown above listing movies playing at Sharpsville's Ritz Theatre during February 1952.

Del Moore donated an "Honor Permit" school hall pass from 1957.

Greg Perrine donated a magazine ad for a fire truck manufactured by Sharpsville Steel Fabricators.

First United Methodist Church of Sharpsville donated a large original drawing by noted local artist Dan DeBonis.

Bob Verholek donated a large promotional banner from Catron Group, Inc. and a ca. 1920 blank log book from Valley Mould & Iron.

More Collections

Augie DeFratte donated a photo of the interior of the Harvey Reichart Barber Shop on 6th Street.

Mary D'Urso donated a 1925 newspaper clipping about the "Safety First" movement's origins in Sharpsville.

The Society also acquired eight slides showing the 1972 demolition of buildings in Sharpsville for Urban Renewal.

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 at 7:00pm
at our headquarters

**JULY MEETING ONLY: CHANGED TO JULY 6TH
DUE TO INDEPENDENCE DAY**