



# SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

This issue concludes the fourth year of this newsletter. As we try to include a greater portion of historical articles than is perhaps typical for this type of publication, we hope you find it enjoyable and informative. By all means, share it with your friends and family—both those close by as well as those whose home is afar but whose heart remains in Sharpsville. (And, if you missed any of the past issues, they may be found along with many items of interest in the Archives section of our website, [sharpsvillehistorical.org](http://sharpsvillehistorical.org).)

While the pamphlets written for the town's 50<sup>th</sup>, 75<sup>th</sup>, 100<sup>th</sup>, and 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries, as well as the three county histories (the last published in 1909) form a basis for Sharpsville's history, so much more information is now available. The thoughtful donors of photos, artifacts and documents to the Historical Society's archives have swelled our collection to over 1,600 items. These, together with the transformational change brought on by the ongoing digitization of newspapers and other publications, provide the material that so greatly expands and enlivens the story of Sharpsville.

But we know much more is out there. That diary, photo or scrapbook—plus that special memento—so often provides a glimpse of life neglected by the "official" histories. We also plan to embark on an oral history project within the coming year.

So, if you have languishing in the attic an item that may perhaps shed light on our shared history—or if you would like to tell us *your* story—please share with us.

### Membership Report

The following new members have joined since the last newsletter:

Tom Yasnowski Peg Hicks  
Ben Jackson Robert Eckles

The support of our new, renewing and lifetime members keeps the Society running and is greatly appreciated.

### Upcoming Events

## Quilt Show

April 30<sup>th</sup> 10<sup>am</sup> - 3<sup>pm</sup>

Sharpsville Historical Society  
Headquarters

Quilt Judging ~ Refreshments ~ Quilt raffle



### GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIPS

Presque Isle Casino, Erie March 23<sup>rd</sup>  
Rocky Gap Casino, Cumberland, Md. April 20<sup>th</sup>

Call 724-813-9199 for info and reservations



CHAUTAUQUA BUS TRIP FEATURING A CONCERT BY

## The Four Tops and THE TEMPTATIONS

Saturday June 25<sup>th</sup>

Call 724-962-2392 for info and reservations



Please also support Area Community Theatre of Sharpsville's quality productions, showcasing local talent.

The enduring Broadway hit

## My Fair Lady

March 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup>

Pierce Opera House

call 724-815-4388 or go to [actsharpsville.org](http://actsharpsville.org)

## Traces of Lost Sharpsville

### The “Little Jim” Church

This recently acquired photo postcard shows a long-lost and previously unidentified building in Sharpsville. Despite the rural character of the view, several clues show it to be the United Brethren Church which stood on 6<sup>th</sup> Street at the corner of High Street.



The United Brethren Church was first organized in September 1866 with thirty members. For the first two years, the Methodists allowed them use of their church; for the next several years they used the Canal Company’s storehouse on Water Street. (At the time Water Street ran perpendicular to the present Water Street.)

The building shown here was erected in 1884 at a cost of \$1,500 and was dedicated on June 2, 1885. Declining membership—until only six were counted in 1905—allowed the building to fall out of repair. Through the efforts of Rev. A.B. Sprague \$850 was spent rebuilding the structure. It was re-

dedicated August 20, 1907 and by the following year membership had increased to 70.

It was referred to popularly (including by the congregation) as the “Little Jim” church. Why the odd name? There were a number of churches in our section of the country so-named, and as best we can tell “Little Jim” was a generic reference to a poor boy who lived in the tenements. The collection of tenement dwellings across the street is thus, we presume, the basis of the church’s name.

On February 16, 1920 the congregation moved into their newly built brick church at the corner of Ridge and 8<sup>th</sup>, presently home to the Sharpsville Church of the Nazarene. The old building was sold to the Shenango Furnace Co. which foresaw the need to acquire additional property for future expansion. Indeed, in the 1910s much of the area west of 6<sup>th</sup> Street, besides the Shenango Furnace office building, consisted of tenements and duplex dwellings. By the latter half of the next decade, much of this was cleared out and replaced by buildings of its subsidiary, the Shenango-Penn Mold Co.

The Shenango Furnace’s original office building was built in 1905. It stood on the west side of 6<sup>th</sup> Street, about where the main gate to the Shenango stood. With the expansion of the complex (mainly to accommodate their new Penn Mold division), this building was torn down, along with several tenements. It was rebuilt in 1926 across the street on the lot occupied by the church. The photo shown on page 4 of the original building is deceptive because the new office building resembled the old one.

Three years after the departure of the United Brethren, the church became home to the Second Baptist Church of Sharpsville. Founded in 1916, they met their first four years in Ina Nelson’s storefront at 404 N. Mercer Avenue, and then from 1921-23 at a house (that was formerly the old schoolhouse) on the corner of High Street and Mercer Avenue. When they were profiled in a 1924 newspaper supplement for Sharpsville’s Golden Anniversary, the accompanying photo clearly shows as their home the Little Jim church. Yet two years later, a city directory shows their address across the street at 502 High Street

The discrepancy is unraveled when we examine a Sanborn Fire Insurance map for 1929. It shows a church with an identical outline as the Little Jim, just with the building physically moved across the street.

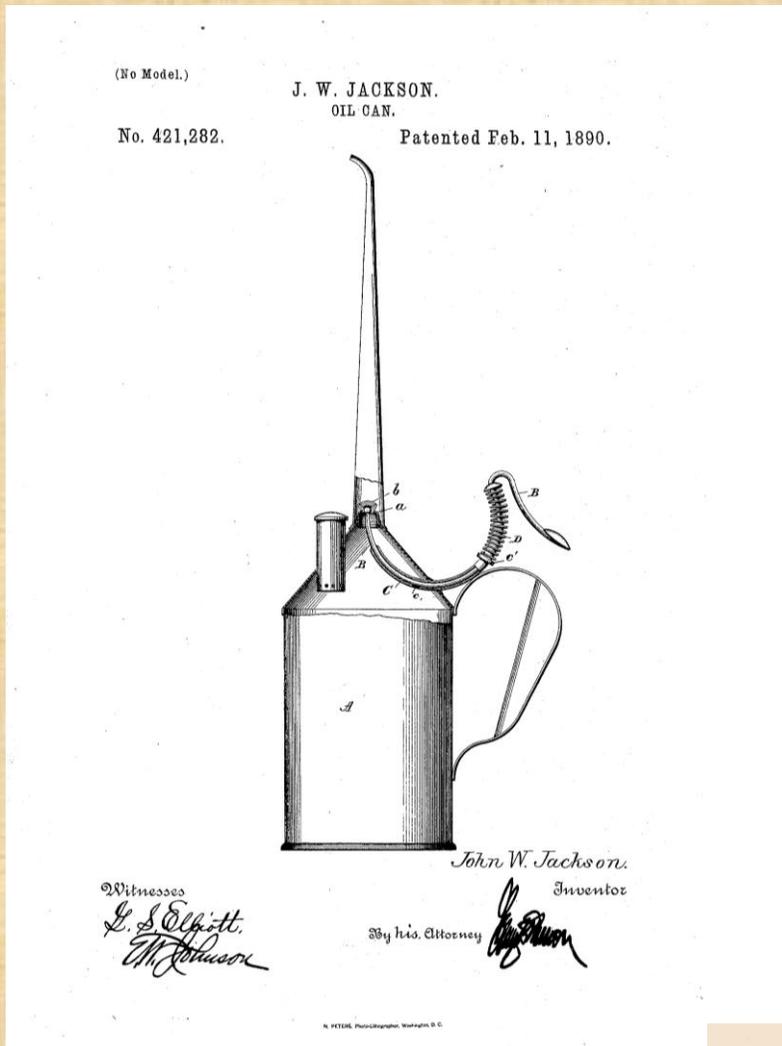
Adding to the confusion, the 1924 newspaper article refers to the church not as the Second Baptist but as the Colored First Baptist. (The other First Baptist Church, whose home has been on Union Street since 1967, at the time stood on “Baptist Hill” on Church Street, in the building they erected in 1872.) The name is perhaps jarring, for today we expect our churches to identify themselves by their tenets and not their congregants. There is somewhat of a parallel in the era’s names for other churches in the Valley: for example, St. Joseph’s German Catholic Church or the Welsh Congregational Church, though these names were often as much

Cont’d. on page 4

## Uniquely Sharpsville

### The Jackson Oiler

Born at the now-abandoned Mercer County town of Big Bend in 1855, John W. Jackson came to Sharpsville via New Wilmington in 1872. The Sharpsville of that day was a busy railroad town and Jackson, a tinner by trade, was sought out by the engineers who passed through for the long-spouted oil cans he fashioned for them. In time, his experiments yielded a design with an innovative self-closing valve, with his first patent granted in 1884. The famous Jackson oiler, in demand by railroad men across the country, was the born. By 1891, Jackson quit general tinsmith work to take up full time the manufacture of his oiler. The shop stood on Mercer Avenue, above the intersection with Shenango Street, near the entrance to the present-day shopping plaza.



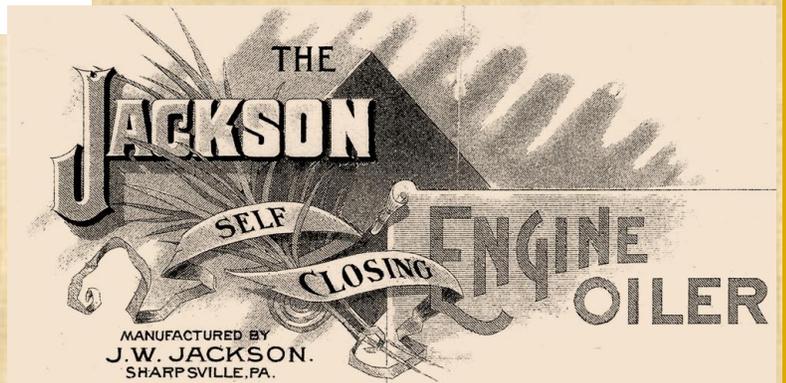
The long-spouted standard oil-can lacked a self-closing mechanism, and as it easily tipped over, it was apt to spill its contents. The Jackson Oiler, in its most typical model, had a spring mounted button that connected to an interior valve that controlled the flow of oil, and thus prevented any accidental leakage. Also in the Historical Society's collection is a less-common, shorter model. While it did not include the self-closing valve, it did introduce an improved nozzle and interior filter, and was patented in 1897. With each can stamped with the registered trademark "JACKSON" and "J.W. Jackson, Sharpsville, Pa.," their wide distribution to railroads across the country brought recognition to the town.

A meticulous man of quiet disposition, Jackson's workshop was at all times spotless. He never expanded to mass production, preferring that all manufacture be under his direct supervision, lest any inferiority arise in the workmanship of his product.

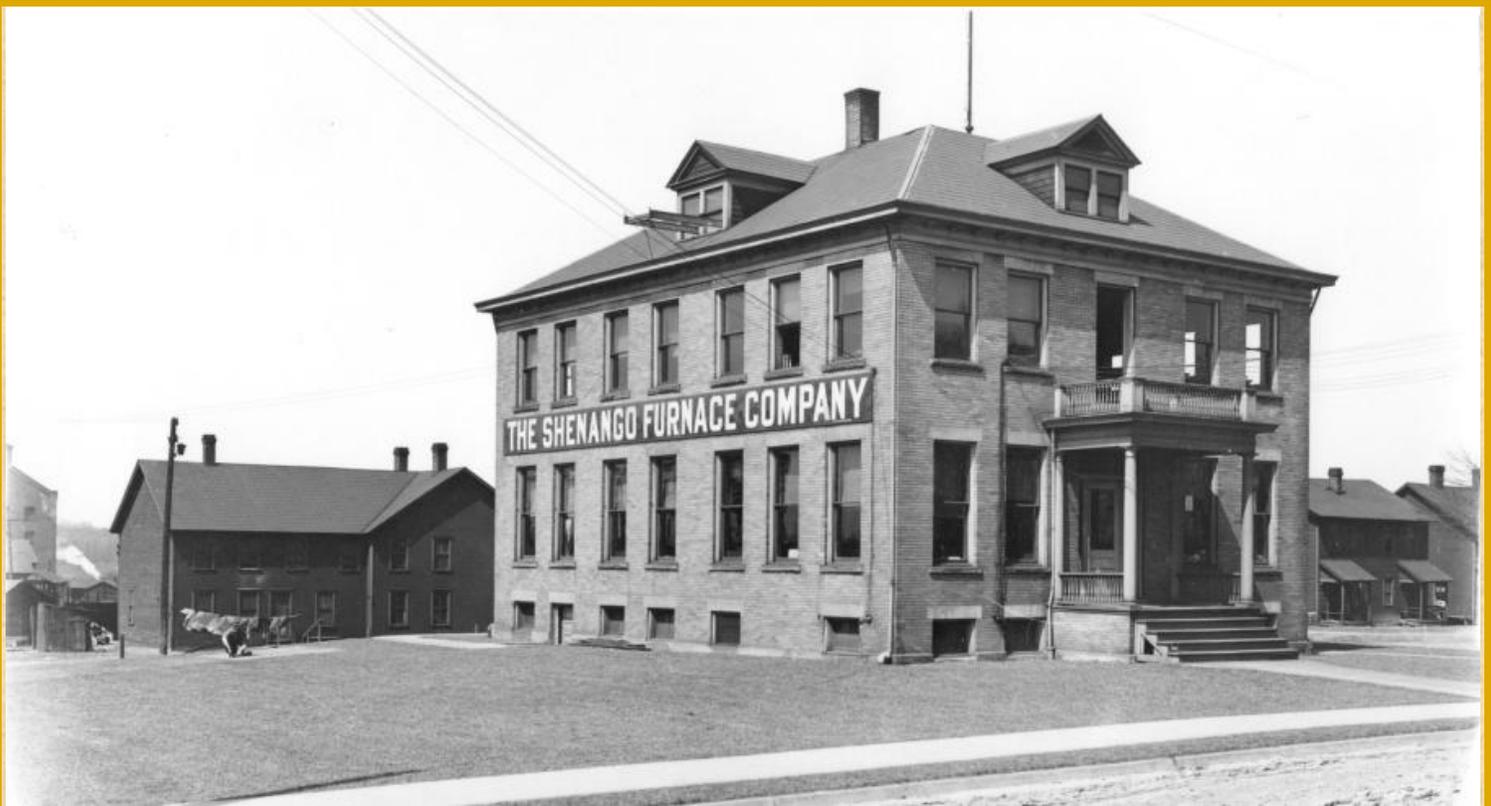
Jackson died in 1926. His son, John A. Jackson, continued the business, though on a reduced scale, until his death in 1955. One reminiscence from the 1950s was that he would sometimes let the neighborhood kids "come in and look around if [they] had shoes on and did not ask too many questions."

Diagram from patent application, February 11, 1890, for the most typical example of the Jackson Oiler

Active in civic affairs like his father, John A. Jackson fell dead in Riverside Cemetery as he was preparing to deliver his annual address for the town Memorial Day observation. The speaker's platform at the cemetery was erected in his honor.



Detail of Jackson's letterhead, from the golden age of commercial illustration



The Shenango Furnace Company consolidated the old Spearman, Douglas, and Mabel Furnaces, making Sharpsville the centerpiece of its far-flung industrial enterprise. Their office building here was built in 1905 at a cost of \$9,000.

### The Little Jim Church, cont'd.

markers of language as ethnicity. Yet, the “Colored” appellation indicates a deeper division. While differing in kind and degree from the *de jure* segregation of the South, a *de facto* segregation nonetheless existed in the North. It also reminds us, that despite what is implicit in the Gospel and explicit in Paul’s preaching to the Galatians, of a sad truth that Martin Luther King observed decades later: “the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning.”

So, with the lot on the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> and High cleared around late 1925 to make room for the new Shenango Furnace office building, the Little Jim church was moved across the street. The structure stood there until 1943, when the Shenango Furnace (who retained ownership under lease to the Second Baptist) tore it down with the neighboring tenements to make room for their parking lot. The Second Baptist found temporary quarters the following year in a shanty in Bombeck’s Coal Yard. In 1946, their present church at the corner of Walnut and High Streets was begun with services held in the basement until the building’s completion in 1951.

### With Gratitude

Our recent Mystery Dinner Theatre was a great success—both as a fun event for the community as well as financially for the Historical Society. Our sincerest appreciation for their talent and hard work goes to director Maria Ackley, accompanist Maureen Murray-Jaklic, and the performers Sarah Puhala, Lawrence Latsko, Rob Whiting, Alan Anderson, Maria Ackley, and Jacob Elliott.

Much thanks also to St. Bartholomew’s Church for use of their social center (as well as to the men of the Holy Name Society who made sure interior renovations would not interfere with the performance) and to Rita Sloan Catering who provided our delicious meal at cost.

We also received a donation from:

**Stan & Ruth Alfredo**

### Contact Us

website: [www.sharpsvillehistorical.org](http://www.sharpsvillehistorical.org) email: [sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com](mailto: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