



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Against long odds, Sharpsville resident Rod Alexander has succeeded in preserving an important part of Sharpsville history.

The Kelly Road Bridge, built in 1897, is a significant example of an early and complete pin-connected, Parker through-truss bridge. Of this type, only three 19th examples survive in Pennsylvania. Iron truss bridges, once so common in the Shenango Valley, are fast disappearing as re-construction costs and the dimensions of modern vehicles make them obsolete. Yet, the elegance of their engineering, and, yes, their aesthetics, make them worthy of preservation—especially for rare types like the Kelly Road Bridge.

While the entire bridge cannot be saved, the two end-sections (with their important dedicatory plaques) will be. They will be erected in a new riverside park sold well below appraised value to the Borough by the Grandy family, and sandblasted and repainted. Much of the original stonework from the abutments will be saved as well.

Rod's fight involved a slog through a morass of bureaucratic regulations and convincing officials at the municipal, county, state, and federal levels. While the Historical Society supported Rod's years-long efforts, the time and energy he devoted to the project were his alone.

The 1963 demolition of Manhattan's magnificent Penn Station is usually cited as galvanizing a nascent historic preservation movement. As the estimable art historian Vincent Scully described the historic station's underground replacement: "One entered the city like a god. One scuttles in now like a rat."

Yet, for humbler structures or those with significance only to a local area or a particular feature, the question on what to save is less clear-cut. So, kudos to Rod Alexander as well as the Borough Council (especially the late Jack Cardwell) and the Grandy family who saw the value in preserving the Kelly Road Bridge for our town.

Upcoming Events

GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIPS

Wheeling Island Casino May 17th

Jack's Casino, Cleveland June 21st

Three days/two nights

Seneca Niagara and Seneca Allegany Casinos
September 19th – 21st

Call 724-813-9199 for info and reservations



Join us for a performance of

Aretha Franklin

Chautauqua Institute

June 24th

Cost \$105, includes motorcoach transport

Order soon—Tickets are limited

Call 724-962-2392



ANNUAL ICE CREAM SOCIAL

AT MAHANEY PARK

Sunday July 16th



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

"The funniest farce ever written"

NOISES OFF

May 19th-20th- 21st

Pierce Opera House

call 724-815-4388 or go to actsharpsville.org

A Look Back

Airport Enthusiasm

When we initially encountered Sharpsville Postmaster Franklin Clary in the May 2014 edition of this newsletter, he was first to come to the aid of the French round-the-world pilots who made an emergency landing in a field in South Pymatuning in 1928. Clary also performed valuable services telephoning the French Consul in New York on behalf of the aviators Costes and LeBrix.

Clary seemed to have a knack for finding downed fliers. Just two weeks after this incident, he responded within twelve minutes to give a helping hand to a large Fairchild's airplane owned by the Weeks Aircraft Corp. of Milwaukee that had made a forced landing on the Vernon farm. Twenty years before that, Prof. Alex Thurston, aeronaut of a hot air balloon, landed at the farm of Fleming Perrine in Worth Township, and Clary was on the scene with alacrity.

Whether it was these chance encounters or something else that awakened within Postmaster Clary an interest in aviation, he dove in head-first with his typical intensity. The Costes and LeBrix excitement made clear the great need of an airport—at the very least an emergency landing strip—in Sharpsville. Clary noted that in the prior two years eight planes had landed at the Vernon or Maciejewski farms in South Pymatuning. Much of his argument was based on a claim of unusual meteorological conditions in the vicinity which caused the forced landings. He also noted that Sharpsville was in the path of a heavily-frequented air-mail route.

While the hubbub of the Frenchmen's landing generated keen initial interest, Clary's attempt to convince Sharpsville Council and business leaders to get behind an airfield ultimately proved unsuccessful. Realizing the project was too costly for one community, the idea was then pushed to make building an airstrip a joint effort of Sharpsville, Sharon, and Farrell. Clary found a strong ally in the editor of *The Sharon Herald*, which gave a full-throated endorsement of this plan. While the Sharon Chamber of Commerce was at least interested enough to seek a grant, the local governments remained resistant to Clary's lobbying for a municipal airport. (As he put it, their "lethargy" and lack of an "aviation vision" stood in marked contrast with "wide-awake Greenville," which would soon build its own municipal airport.) Clary did make contact with Cleveland investors who came here to inspect sites for a private airport, though that effort apparently proved likewise fruitless.

In the meantime, L. G. Mason of Sharon announced in April 1928 the opening of an aircraft sales agency, the first in the county, dealing in the American Eagle make. He built a small airfield, also called American Eagle, in what was then Hickory Township at the corner of Frampton Road and S. Keel Ridge Road. An air show was held there in September, and attracted at least thirteen entrants. But perhaps the Shenango Valley did indeed lack an aviation vision, for we find that by February 1929, Mason had moved to Montgomery, Alabama, managing the municipal airport there.

Clary did succeed in having placed on the roof of the Sharpsville High School (later the W.P. Snyder Middle School and now the Trailblazer Building) the word "Sharpsville"—spelled in bright chrome yellow letters 12 feet high and one foot wide. An arrow, 65 feet long, pointed to the emergency field at Hartford, Ohio and gave the distance. The Sharpsville sign followed on the heels of a similar one erected on the roof of the News-Telegraph building in Sharon. Both were recognized by the Daniel Guggenheim Fund for the Promotion of Aeronautics.

Since Clary applied himself to his position of Sharpsville Postmaster with an above-average earnestness, it is of little surprise to find he was a keen advocate of air mail. Besides his frequent reference to mileage and poundage of air mail cargos when promoting a local airport, Clary also sponsored an Air Mail Day, on May 10, 1928. For stamp collectors, it featured a special postmark from the Sharpsville post office, and for Clary it was a way to publicize the town. While it appears that Washington sent late word that the special postmark was disallowed, it arrived only after over 5,000 self-addressed envelopes had poured in from across the country.

Given how commonplace air travel is today, we forget the excitement that aviation's new era promised. Nine years before Clary's exertions for an airport here, we have the following diary entry describing the first airplane to be sighted flying over Sharpsville:

Wednesday April 23rd, 1919—A lovely clear sunshiny blossom-scented April day! An airplane passed over Sharpsville about noon to-day. Everywhere people were out to see it. They are a most wonderful, an awesome thing. It is as if one were viewing something from another world. And indeed one is! One hears a whirring as of a thousand wings, then a putt, putt, putt, putt, it comes, over the tops of some trees nearby, its great planes grey as it increases

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Institutions

The Town Park

Our town park, officially Mahaney Park, was established in 1916 on a half acre at the corner of Shenango and Walnut. A description of the borough “beauty spot” given in 1924 notes, even then, the large shade trees and benches throughout offering respite on a hot summer day. Josiah Keats was its caretaker who kept the lawn and plantings neat and who planted the large flower beds so they were always in bloom. A large stone fountain, 35 feet in circumference, was the park’s outstanding feature. The pool at its base contained in 1924 one hundred eleven goldfish—27 old ones and 84 young ones—who were fed daily by the caretaker.

In Pete Joyce’s reminiscence of Sharpsville in the 1920s he recalls the park as being “home to Turkey Murphy, the Blair Boys, Mike Tobin, Pete Johnson and many others.” While it is still home to regulars, they perhaps don’t provide the local color an earlier generation did. “I think our greatest loss is that we no longer are producing characters,” Pete Joyce lamented. Among the characters he missed were the aforementioned park denizens as well as old Skin Troutman and young Skin, Reptile High Tree, Pete Lyden, and Squaw Long.

Yet, even though 1916 is given as the date for the park’s official founding, there was certainly a park there earlier—as evidenced by the street Park Way and the building known as Park Hall. (For those too young to remember, Park Way was a dog-leg that ran on the eastern side of the park, where the parking lot of the Sharpsville Plaza is now. Park Hall was a public meeting hall with storefronts on the first floor. It stood on the corner of Park Way and Shenango Street from at least 1873 until it was torn down for Urban Renewal in 1972.) Old maps show the lot described as the “common” A reference in 1888 to Triangle Park here is likely this same area, given the shape of its outline.

On the other hand, during these early years, the area appeared to lack the care and landscaping of a proper park, since the tracks of the Sharpsville Railroad once cut through it. An 1896 notice even announced: “The city park is advertised for sale for back taxes. It was set apart some years ago by General James Pierce for a town flat and never deeded and still belongs to the Pierce estate.”

Its official name, Mahaney Park, was bestowed by Borough Council in 1953, in honor of long-time Burgess George Mahaney (Sr.). Before that, it was sometimes called Legion Park as the old American Legion Post originally met in Park Hall before moving to a building on the other side of the park across Walnut Street.

As described in the September 2012 edition of this newsletter, the large stone war memorial was erected in 1930. Major remodeling to the park was done in 1997. This included the demolition of the fountain (which was long out of use), erection of the gazebo and new walkways laid. As a reminder of what was once Sharpsville’s principal industry, the

ingot mold was placed in the park in 2001. Despite these changes, the park remains as much a restful “beauty spot” as was described 93 years ago—thanks to its careful tending by the Borough Street Department. (Though it must be admitted they no longer have the chore of counting goldfish.)



Mahaney Park, with its fountain and the buildings on Park Way, around 1965.



Sharpsville American Legion Post #162 was instituted in 1919 with their original headquarters in an upper room on Park Way. In 1925 they purchased from the Shaner family the building that had been Locke's Garage. This building, on Walnut Street opposite the present entrance to the plaza, was the Legion's home for many years until its demolition (depicted here) in 1973. They then moved in to the old Italian Home on Main Street.

For decades, the Legion has given strong support to our veterans as well as other local charities. Please consider joining as a member to keep our local Post going.

Airport Enthusiasm, cont'd.

the distance between itself and earth. A puff of white smoke from the exhaust. It drops, drops, sailing almost over our heads. The sun glints on its shining surfaces. One shades his eyes for a moment, but lo! it is gone, and is far away now in the distance heading south. One recovers consciousness of one's surroundings. . . . What a day in Sharpsville! What a touch from the outside world! What will it mean? What does it portend? . . . Mr. Agnew has spent the afternoon gazing up at the sky and ruminating. Not a bit of doubt,—he sees whole squadrons of airplanes in his imaginings! Please forgive me, Missis Diary, for my outburst! It is the first aeroplane that we have ever seen.

Perhaps, though, the true title of local aviation pioneer belongs to the young adventurer whose May 1910 experiment is described in this newspaper report: "After reading accounts of recent flights by aviators and emulating them and the late Darius Green, George Miller, the fifteen-year-old son of G. W. Miller of near Sharpsville, attempted a flight from the roof of his father's barn with a home-made biplane this morning. He has a broken right arm and serious internal injuries in consequence. The 'airship' was made in the barn and hauled to the roof. The boy strapped various parts of himself then slipped off the barn. Instead of gracefully sailing out into space he dropped like a shot. When rescued from a mass of wreckage he was unconscious."

With Gratitude

Our recent Murder 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 directors Ron Reed and the performers Megan Donaldson, Lindell Bridges, Marguerite Kautzman, Sarah Puhala, Pete Santimauro, Rob Whiting, Maria Ackley, Jacob Elliott, and Tanner Yake.

Much thanks also to St. Bartholomew's Church for use of their social center and to Rita Sloan Catering who provided our delicious meal at cost.



For the past two years, ONE Federal Credit Union (formerly Meadville Area FCU) has sponsored our concession sales for first-night performances of ACTS productions. Cumulatively, their support has benefitted the Society with proceeds of \$1,157.

Please see them about opening an account (in the old McDowell Bank space in Sharpsville) as they are a strong supporter of our community.

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

Building Update

We continue to make progress in the restoration of our headquarters, built in 1884 as the First Universalist Church of Sharpsville. The painting and repair of the exterior woodwork, begun last fall, is resuming this spring. Over the winter, Respond Enterprises has restored and painted the ceiling of the Sunday School room which most recently had a flaking, textured skim-coat of plaster that, with several coats of paint, obscured the original stenciling. The stencil pattern recreates the original design with certain interpolations based on educated guesses.

Much thanks to Bob Rannard and Cherie Bibler for their painstaking work of painting the stencils and to Derek Bibler who custom cut the stencils.



In addition, rebuilding of the front steps and installation of Victorian-styled handrails, will soon be underway.

Our members and friends have generously given consistent support towards the building's restoration. Among the projects for which we are still seeking funds:

Restoration of the James Pierce memorial stained glass window: \$4,350

Restoration of the James Morford memorial stained glass window: \$4,750

Rebuilding the decorative brickwork of the north chimney: \$8,300

Refinishing of basement to accommodate expanded display space: \$10,000

Refurbishing of the pipe organ (the oldest in Mercer County!): \$19,300

Repainting of exterior brickwork: \$7,000