



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Visitors to our headquarters building—both for events held there as well as for our regular hours—are impressed by the step back in time its High Victorian architecture imparts. Repeat visitors find continued interest in perusing the 388 photos, documents, and artifacts we have on display, many of which may understandably be overlooked on a first visit.

This building, erected 1882-1884 as the First Universalist Church of Sharpsville, is recognized for its local historical connections and for both local and nation architectural significance by the National Register of Historic Places. Yet, as we point out to visitors our building's remarkable survival of most of the 20th century's modernizing urges, they may not grasp the full extent of our restoration efforts. So you may realize the fruits of our fundraising efforts, please consider this brief recap.

Purchase of the building in 2000 was done at a cost of \$60,000. Not counting a number of maintenance projects in intervening years, our first major restoration was in 2010, with the installation of thirty historically-appropriate laminated glass storm windows. The following year the badly deteriorated slate roof (which had been tarred over) was replaced with synthetic slate shingles matching the alternating bands of square and beveled shingles as well as the exuberant Victorian black and red colors of the original roof. This was followed by repair of the interior plaster and repainting to match the original color scheme and restoration of the original walnut entry doors. Restoration of the stained-glass windows was accomplished in 2015-17. Decorative brickwork on one of the chimneys was recreated in 2015. Restoring and repainting the exterior woodwork (including steeplejack work on the tower) was begun in 2016. Rebuilding the deteriorated front steps with sandstone monoliths and installation of cast-iron Victorian handrails followed. These complemented the new signage that was consonant with the building's architecture. The ceiling of the Sunday School room was restored in 2017 with the original stenciling recreated. Finally, the original Pomplitz pipe organ was restored last year.

In addition to the original purchase price, we have spent a carefully monitored \$200,611 on the building's restoration.

For 2019, we aim to finalize restoration of the building's exterior woodwork, upgrade the electrical wiring, and to begin re-pointing the brickwork. These projects will cost over \$20,000. Going forward, priorities will include refurbishing of the basement area and constructing expanded displays of Sharpsville's history (since the 388 items on display represent less than a fifth of our entire collection).

Since historic preservation is a neglected focus for governmental or foundation grants, please consider a gift to the Historical Society so we can complete these goals.

Upcoming Events

GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIPS
Seneca Niagara Casino, July 17th
Mountaineer Casino, August 14th

Call 724-813-9199 for info and reservations



ANNUAL ICE CREAM SOCIAL
AT MAHANEY PARK

Sunday July 21st

National Ice Cream Day!



Join us for a performance by the incomparable

Diana Ross

Chautauqua Institute July 5th

Cost \$125, includes motorcoach transport

Call now! Only a few tickets are left!

Call 724-962-2392

Items for Sale

Natural Stone Drink Coasters
featuring lithographed scenes of old
Sharpsville ~ many different choices

\$8 each, any 4 for \$30

Cat's Meow Keepsakes

First Universalist Church

\$15 each

Traces of Lost Sharpsville

The Mighty Shenango

The anti-trust legislation and court decisions of the Progressive Era made illegal horizontal concentrations of business. The term “horizontal” here means business-combinations at the same stage of production so that monopoly or near-monopoly conditions would prevail. Standard Oil’s dominance of the oil-refining business is a classic example. Vertical integration, on the other hand, was and still is permitted in most cases. “Vertical,” here, refers to successive stages of production, so that, for example, an oil company can be active in drilling, refining, and retailing. A free-market remains since vertical integration allows competition at each stage.

Sharpville’s Shenango Furnace Company provides an exemplary model of a vertically-integrated industrial enterprise. What is less of a comprehensive history of the firm, what follows is more a description of its far-flung interests. Its founder, William Penn Snyder, Sr. was a friend and associate of various Pittsburgh steel barons and was called the “keenest pig iron trader that ever lived.” Carnegie Steel requested that he provide the “Snyder averages” of basic pig iron sales, which for many years served as pricing benchmarks for various contracts in the industry. He even declined an offer to head U.S. Steel. Though significantly smaller than such behemoths as U.S. Steel, Bethlehem Steel, and Republic Steel, the Shenango was a significant player in the industry and the scope of their integrated operation rivalled that of its much larger competitors.

Ore, of course, is the most basic input to the production of iron. Before the organization of the Shenango Furnace Co., Snyder started acquiring iron ore deposits in Minnesota’s Mesabi Range. (The company’s pioneering role in



A Shenango Furnace Co. shovel is loading ore cars at the Shenango Mine near Chisholm, Minnesota

developing this celebrated ore-field is described in the March 2019 edition of this newsletter.) The mining enterprises in this then relatively undeveloped region involved not only the extraction, but required the building of company towns for the workers. The first open-pit mine, the Shenango Mine near Chisholm, Minnesota, operated from 1904 to 1952, shipping over



Working the ovens at the Wilpen Coke Works

17 million tons of ore during this time. The Webb Mine, near Hibbing, Minnesota opened the following year and has produced a comparable amount of ore. In 1929, the mining properties were transferred to Snyder Mining Company, with Crucible Steel brought on as sizable shareholder. Other mines included the Tioga and Virginia Mines, an interest in the Mahoning mine, and in 1951 a sizeable investment in the Whiteside Mine at Buhl, Minnesota. By 1959, the company had an interest in seven mines (Shenango, South Tener, Webb, Virginia, Whiteside, Godfrey, and Martin), but by 1962, the count had dropped to two (Webb-Sellers and Whiteside).

In addition to a lesser amount of limestone, coal,

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The Mighty Shenango, cont'd.

specifically coked coal, is the other component in iron manufacture. Shenango Furnace owned 1,300 acres of coal fields in the Ligonier region of Westmoreland County. The mines were centered around the village of Wilpen, with its three dozen homes, school house, office and pay station, and store built to accommodate the miners. (The name derives from SFC's founder, William Penn Snyder, Sr. He was obviously proud of his onomastic connection to the old Quaker, as the name persists among his descendants. William Penn Snyder III, died in 2015 at the age 96. W.P. Snyder V is still living. The contraction also lends its name to Wilpen Hall, the Snyder estate in Sewickley Heights, Pa.) Coal production reached 115,000 tons in 1910; 131 men were employed in coal and coke there. In 1918, 300,000 tons of coal were consistently produced, and coal and coke employment was 150.

The coal was sent to the coke ovens Snyder built at Wilpen. They were first operational in 1907. A full battery of 400 ovens was reported as being built, though statistics show perhaps no more than 167 were in operation. The installation avoided purchase from H. C. Frick Co.'s near-monopoly in coke. Remains of the coke works can still be seen here. In 1958, SFC re-entered the coking business with purchase of the Lucerne Coke Ovens to supply the Sharpsville furnaces.

Rail transport from the coal and iron ore mines was one element of its production that the Shenango did not control. The transport of iron ore, however, is mainly by water from the Great Lakes ports of Duluth, Minnesota to Cleveland or Ashtabula, Ohio. Here, the firm made its mark by operating an important fleet of Lake Ore carriers. Described as the elder Snyder's favorite business venture, the first ship, *William P. Snyder* was launched in 1906, followed the next year by a larger ship, *Wilpen*, which included an electric organ and expansive guest quarters. Three more ships were built—*Shenango* (1909), *Col. James M. Schoonmaker* (1911) and *William P. Snyder, Jr.* (1912)—the second two at the time the largest bulk freighters in the world. The first two ships were sold in 1926. The *Shenango* was sold in 1958 and replaced the following year by the *Shenango II*. These remaining three ships were sold 1967-69 to Pickands, Mather & Co. The initial ship, the *William P. Snyder*, ended up being refitted as a Great Lakes cement carrier. It was retired in 2013 after over a century of service. The *Schoonmaker* is presently berthed at the National Museum of the Great Lakes in Toledo.

The destination of this ore was the centerpiece of the firm, its blast furnaces at Sharpsville. Snyder along with his friend and mentor, the Pittsburgh industrialist Henry W. Oliver, and others, formed the Shenango Furnace Company in May 1899 and embarked on the production of iron with the purchase of the two stacks of the Douglas Furnace at Sharpsville. These were renamed the Shenango No. 1 and 2. Two-and-a-half years later, the No. 3 furnace was added with the purchase of the Spearman Furnace. The last of the furnaces up on the hill, the Mable, was acquired in 1905, and renamed, unsurprisingly, the No. 4. In the meantime, Snyder's chief partner Henry W. Oliver died in 1904; the Shenango Furnace Co. was reformed two years later with Snyder the principal owner.



The *Schoonmaker*, restored and repainted in the Shenango fleet's colors, berthed as a museum ship at Toledo, Ohio

He then embarked on a program of modernization. The two old Douglas stacks, last rebuilt in 1879 and 1881 were replaced in 1908 with a single furnace, the new Shenango No. 1. (Because the original No. 2 was not rebuilt, that name was never used again.) A new No. 3, replacing the Spearman last rebuilt in 1895, was torn town and erected in 1915. The 1888 Mabel, rechristened as the No. 4, continued to be used until it was torn down in 1924. The remaining two furnaces, enlarged to meet

The Mighty Shenango, cont'd.

modern production benchmarks (with the No. 3 able to out-perform its rated 750 tons per day output and actually produce 1,000 tons), would each serve over another half-century and define Sharpsville's skyline.

The raw pig iron produced by a blast furnace has few uses on its own. Most is destined for making that most useful alloy of iron—steel. With no steel-making operation of its own, the Shenango Furnace Co. was considered a merchant iron-maker, meaning its output was sold to other firms. While steel-makers numbered among its customers, the firm was unusually situated with a user of raw iron close-by. Thomas D. West came to Sharpsville in 1891 and started a foundry under his name. Through his experiments, which were expounded in his many writings, he became the country's foremost expert on large ferrous castings. Applying quality control based on metallurgical science, he reduced the rate of failure on these castings, chiefly ingot molds, and added to Sharpsville's fame as not only for its blast furnaces, but for its foundry. After West left town in 1909, his firm was renamed Valley Mould & Iron Co. By 1917, it was recognized as the largest ingot mold foundry in the world.

The Valley Mould was located in the area flanked by present-day High and Canal Streets, between Mercer Avenue and the river. The West Foundry initially used iron re-melted in a cupola furnace, but, in a 1904 innovation, began using molten iron direct from blast furnaces, though it's unclear which ones. Even after the Valley Mould purchased the adjacent Alice Furnace from Youngstown Sheet & Tube in 1910, its foundry used the iron from the nearby Shenango and Claire furnaces. (The Alice, last remodeled in 1882, perhaps could not keep up with the demand of its sister foundry or maybe its product was never suitable for the foundry, but it was put out of blast around 1921.) The Shenango Furnace, of course, was happy to supply a

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Engaging the Community

The Historical Society recently conducted our fourth annual tour of historical sites in Sharpsville for the seventh-grade class of the Sharpsville Middle School.



In May, the Sharpsville Area Education Association (Teacher's Union) used the historical society's building to host well-attended community forum for the candidates running for school board.

With Gratitude

Our headquarters was opened up to our third annual Quilt Show which was again very well attended.

Many thanks to the entrants who brought their quilts for display and congratulations to Ann Stigliano who won best-in-show. We would like to especially thank Jeannie Goodhart who donated a quilt for our raffle and the best-in-show prize.



We recently received donation from
Kathleen Fair and Ann Stigliano

Collections Update

Ann Stigliano donated a quilt made around 1800 in a log cabin near Grove City (along with documentation of its provenance).

Gary Yonchak donated five 1871 editions of *The Sharpsville Advertiser*.

Patricia A. Claiborne donated a ca.1970 cookbook compiled by the ladies of the First Baptist Church.

Kevin Walko donated a portrait of Samuel Curtis Foster, Sharpsville's last living Civil War Veteran, and who stood guard over Lincoln's casket.

Rod Alexander donated a 1963 Sharpsville High Yearbook.

Contact Us

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see our website for officers' phone numbers

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Meetings are held the First Monday of the Month at
7:00pm at our headquarters

The Mighty Shenango

large customer with its molten iron travelling in ladles by rail cars that exited SFC's plant at 6th Street and followed the tracks along Shenango Street then curved down toward High Street. A diary from 1916 described the transport from the nearby vantage of a home at the corner of Church and Cherry Streets: "I go to sleep listening to the throbbing of the blast furnaces and wake up at night to find my room filled with the glare from the midnight train which carries molten iron from the furnace to the foundry."

Despite appearing to be mutually beneficial, this arrangement was not without acrimony. It, moreover, involved a third party—the Sharpshville Railroad. Originally built to bring the once burgeoning output of the block coal fields of Hickory, Neshannock, and Bethel to Sharpshville for shipment elsewhere and for use in the furnaces here, the railroad was long in a state of somnolence. By 1920s, the coal fields had long been exhausted, and the line was reduced along its main route to transporting farm supplies and college students to New Wilmington. Yet it still controlled some key trackage within Sharpshville, including the half-mile link between the two plants.

Though seemingly trivial, VMI wanted the Shenango to absorb the 25¢ per ton freight charge. (It is not known whether this represented a sudden increase or an above-market charge.) The other point of contention was Valley Mould's insistence that SFC buy back the "kish," or slag left at the bottom of the ladle. Unable to get its way, Valley Mould basically picked up and moved their massive



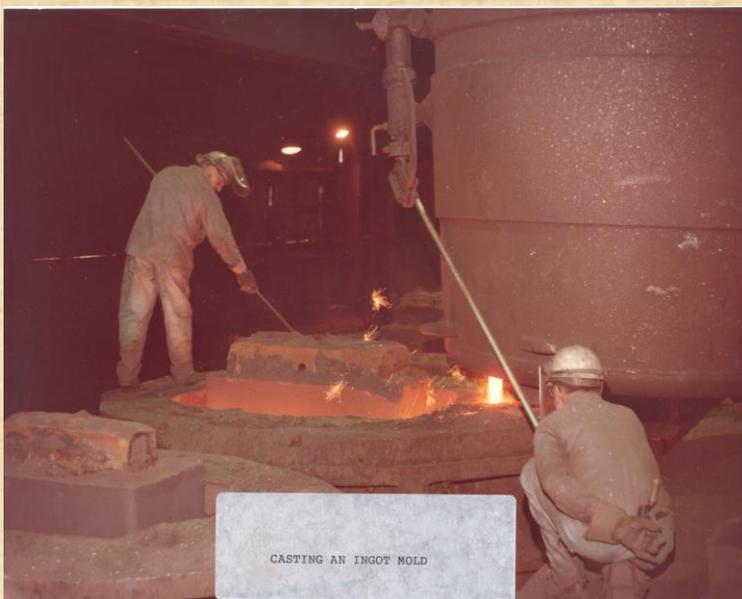
Shenango Furnace workers atop a furnace, ca. 1908

operation to nearby Hubbard, Ohio in 1926. An office and cupola operations remained in Sharpshville for another five years. The Sharpshville Railroad was also a casualty of this dispute and was liquidated in 1931.

With loss of a key customer, the Snyders' firm saw opportunity and purchased the Penn Mold Company of Dover, Ohio. An experienced producer of ingot molds, the equipment and employee expertise were transferred to Sharpshville and operated as the Shenango-Penn Mold Co. Buildings were moved from a plant at Black Lick, Pa. (In 1956, the Penn Mold

was no longer a subsidiary firm but was merged into Shenango Furnace Co. A further corporate change occurred in 1962 when Shenango, Inc. was created in partnership with the Pittsburgh Coke & Chemical Co. Soon afterwards SFC bought out the interest of the Pittsburgh Coke & Chemical, with Shenango, Inc. becoming the wholly-owned operating subsidiary of the parent Shenango Furnace Co.) The hot metal from the Sharpshville furnaces found a ready use in making these molds, and the new operation grew to be one of the most important sources of ingot molds and stools in the country. By 1955, 88% of the output from Shenango's two furnaces were destined for its foundry here.

The beginning step in the manufacture of molds is the construction of a wooden pattern. While outside firms



Iron being poured to form an ingot mold at Sharpshville, 1976

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The Mighty Shenango

like General Woodcraft were relied upon, the Shenango did have its own pattern shop—yet another element of the firm’s integrated operation.

Transport costs became an increasing concern for the firm, especially for a heavy, low-value (at least on a per ton basis) products like ingot molds. This prompted Shenango Furnace to open a second ingot mold foundry on Neville Island in 1939. Located on the Ohio River near Pittsburgh, it benefitted from its proximity to the Pittsburgh market and a significant cost advantage barge traffic offered compared to molds that had to be shipped by rail or truck. By 1954 the new facility was producing 39% of the company’s ingot mold output. By that year the combined output at Sharpsville and Neville Island commanded about a third of the market for ingot molds and stools. While initially relying on a supply of hot metal from a furnace elsewhere on the Island, by about 1970, Shenango, Inc. had its own blast furnace to supply the foundry. A coke works was added around 1962.

The same motivation was behind the 1963 opening of a third foundry in Buffalo, New York, here to gain direct access to Great Lakes shipping, as well as to the Canadian markets.

One last division of the Shenango Furnace Company requires mention, though it does not fully fit in with their otherwise integrated operation. When the Penn Mold’s ingot mold operation was moved to Sharpsville, the Dover plant was not completely abandoned. Smaller ferrous castings continued to be made here. In addition, a centrifugal casting department was established. This made precision bronze castings, such as printing rolls or sleeves and bushings for ships’ propellers. For their work supplying the Navy during World War II, they won the coveted “E” Award.

This sprawling array of enterprises defined the Shenango Furnace Company for much of the twentieth century. Indeed, it defined much of Sharpsville’s identity during this time, with 820 employees here in 1949, and the Middle School building named for William P. Snyder in 1963 and the football field named in honor of long-time plant superintendent James M. McCracken in 1974. Yet, the integrated operation gradually shed its parts.

In 1925, the Wilpen coal mines and coke works were sold. The revived coking operation at Lucerne was shut down in 1972. The shipping fleet was gone by 1969. Iron ore mining faced decline as the once seemingly-endless Mesabi Range deposits became exhausted. The last Snyder mine was closed in 1971. The No. 1 Furnace at Sharpsville was torn down on January 8, 1970 after having been out of blast for several years. The No. 3 Furnace went out of blast on September 28, 1968. Its stack was demolished in July 1976. While a blast furnace still stood at Neville Island, the company’s operations were for the most part restricted to the ingot mold foundries. In Sharpsville, once the Shenango no longer had a source for molten iron from its own furnaces, the foundry had the hot metal shipped from Republic Steel in Youngstown and from Sharon Steel in torpedo cars. The ingot mold operation continued to thrive during the 1970s, and Sharpsville even merited a multi-million dollar investment with the installation of two induction furnaces. (They re-melted iron which partially offset the need for hot metal from Sharon Steel.) Still that operation would face lessening demand as steelmakers changed to continuous casting. Nor could it survive the hollowing-out of American industry and depression-level unemployment here in the early-to-mid-1980s, even as Ronald Reagan was proclaiming “Morning in America.” The Buffalo foundry was first to close in 1982. Shenango, Inc., the operating arm of Shenango Furnace Company, was sold by the Snyders to the Aloe family’s Boggs Corporation in a leveraged buy-out in 1986. Boggs Corp., later renamed Shenango Group, was unable to turn a profit and declared bankruptcy in 1992. Neville Island’s foundry and furnace had been shut down in December 1990 and Sharpsville’s in 1993. (The Sharpsville foundry would be reopened as an employee-owned venture, Sharpsville Quality Products, and run for several more years.) The Dover operation was shut down in 1989, with production moved to a buyer in Terre Haute, Indiana. The coking plant at Neville Island was sold to DTE Energy in 2008 and somehow, despite incurring heavy fines for air pollution, was the last to go. It was shut down in 2016 and the plant imploded in 2018.

Few physical remains of the sprawling Shenango complex at Sharpsville still stand, and the feeling of loss and lament that the hundreds of workers exiting the gate at the whistle are now mere ghosts is repeated in mill towns across the country. But in no way was it all for naught. The decades of wages, taxes, and donations paid by the Shenango Furnace Company built many of the homes and much of the town infrastructure we now see. Indeed, the labor and capital at each stage of Shenango’s operation—ore dug in Minnesota, shipped through the Soo Locks, made into iron at Sharpsville, and poured as ingot molds—lives on in the steel sinews of this nation.

