



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

For the past year and a half, we have been meeting quarterly with the other Historical Societies in the county—Grove City, Greenville, Hermitage, Sharon, Jamestown, and Mercer County—along with the Gibson House Manor in Jamestown. These meetings are productive sessions where we exchange ideas and work toward strengthening efforts to promote local history in the area.

As part of this cooperative effort and in recognition of the America250 celebration, the Mercer County Historical Society has prepared a booklet and made up a program to publicize all the county historical societies.

The program includes a description of all the above-mentioned historical societies in the county, plus the six additional sites run by the Mercer County Historical Society as well as all three sites in Greenville. If you get to all the places and a stamp on the free booklet, you will receive a membership in the Mercer County Historical Society. A visit to 10 out of 13, gets you a commemorative T-shirt. This initiative will go through the end of the year, so if you want to participate, a summer drive through the county is a great time to start.

While we usually focus on the history of Sharpsville, South Pymatuning, and Clark, much of the history of the other communities in the county is closely entwined with ours. Sharon and Hermitage are obvious, but, for example, the Canal Museum in Greenville, has the best information and displays of the Erie Extension Canal that was so vital to our development. Grove City has an interesting virtual reality tour of coal mining. While the mining that took place in that end of the county, was a little different, it is still instructive, since local coal was so central to the development of Sharpsville.

So, stop by the Sharpsville Area Historical Society during our hours (1:00 to 3:00 the first and third Saturday of the month) and get your packet and the first of your stamps toward collecting them all.

Upcoming Events

SHARPSVILLE 250TH CELEBRATION

Sharpsville Plaza ≈ July 2nd ≈ 5:00-10:00

Bands, Food Trucks, Vendor Tables

Come visit the Society's Booth

≈ ≈ ≈

Return of our

ICE CREAM SOCIAL

Town Park ≈ Sunday July 19th ≈ 4:00-7:00

Summertime Treats, Music and Historical Tours

≈ ≈ ≈

GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIPS

Seneca Niagara Casino, July 16th

Live! Casino Greensburg, August 19th

Two-night Getaway to Bally's Atlantic City

Casino, September 9th, 10th, 11th

Call 724-813-9199 for info and reservations

Open House

As a reminder the Historical Society is open
the first and third Saturday of the month
from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

**Special Hours during July to coincide with the
Borough Independence Day Celebration and
our Ice Cream Social: Thursday July 2nd
5:00-8:00, and Sunday July 19th 4:00-6:00.**

BUY-A-BRICK

Please consider an "In Memory of" or "In Honor of" brick for a loved one.

4" x 8" bricks with three lines of inscription—\$75 8" x 8" bricks with six lines of inscription—\$125

The bricks will be placed in the town park. See our website for order forms.

A Look Back

K.O.K.A

Readers of this newsletter might recall a profile in the September 2015 issue about the Sharpsville Junior Republic. (A re-edited version was also featured in our book, *Traces of Old Sharpsville*.) It was one of several “Junior Republics”—like George Junior Republic in Grove City—that sought to instill in boys a sense of responsibility by forming largely self-governing clubs or schools modeled after a civic government. This was just one of several attempts to remedy what was a moral panic at the time: the “Boy Problem.” Street gangs, truancy, and crime were thought to be symptoms of a changing society affecting the upbringing of youth, with our once wholesome, stable agrarian society replaced by the vices and temptations of cities, tawdry dime novels, and the suspect mores of immigrants. America faced a similar panic over juvenile delinquency in the 1950s, with comic books and “race music” leading astray the new demographic of teen-ager that arose in the post-War prosperity. Indeed, today, the fear is of a generation of “lost boys,” young men and teens, adrift due to online isolation and gender roles that are no longer clear.

The story of the Sharpsville Junior Republic remains not only an interesting reflection of a larger social movement in this country, but it also provides a clue to the following photographs. These are part of the large collection of glass plate negatives taken by William H. Snyder in the years 1911-1915, and which have been featured in recent newsletters. The glass plates were in undated paper sleeves labelled “K. of K. A. at Orangeville”. In a couple photos, a boy is wearing a sweater with the letter KOKA. What might these initials mean?



It turns out K. of K.A. or K.O.K.A stands for “Knights of King Arthur.” Like the Junior Republics, this was another fraternity aimed at the social improvement of boys. It was founded in 1893 by William Byron Forbush, who had first brought the “Boy Problem” to national consciousness, in his influential 1901 book by that title (with several later editions). He was a Congregationalist pastor and prolific author. In addition to *The Boy Problem* and more strictly religious books, he published *Child Study and Child Training*, *The First Year in Baby’s Life*, *Guide Book to Childhood*, *Dramatics in the Home*, *The Government of Young Children*, *Manual of Play*, and, with the cringeworthy-title, *Sex Discipline for Boys in the Home*.

That there was a local group here is confirmed by an August 1911 newspaper report of a Sunday School picnic of the First Baptist Church of Sharpsville at Pine Hollow. There, “at 2:30 p.m. the Knights of King Arthur and the [Baptist] Brotherhood will play ball.” A junior division of the Knights was organized November 29, 1913, by Rev. Clyde Donaldson of the First Baptist. It was aimed toward boys ages 10-14, with twenty members enrolled. This

K.O.K.A., cont'd.

report notes that Rev. Donaldson is also in charge of senior boys, of which there are more than twenty members. “Mr. Donaldson has been successfully engaged in boys work for the past nine years and therefore feels fully capable of taking care of your boys.” While this may seem to indicate that a K.O.K.A. was here nine years prior, further details from this newspaper report make a 1911 founding more likely. The junior boys are promised a camping trip the next summer, and the senior boys “have been in camp the past three years.” In any event, the photographs capture one of these camping trips. (Note also that a Castle, as each local group was termed, was organized at New Castle in 1910, at the same time a Boy Scout troop was founded there.)

The report of the founding of the junior division of the K.O.K.A. in Sharpsville expands further with requirements for enrollment: 1) To be a regular attendant at Sunday School. Going to the church of which his parents are members, 2) He must attend preaching services, 3) He must refrain from the use of tobacco in any form, 4) He must try to govern his temper and refrain his lips from evil speaking, and 5) He must try to do a kindness for some one every day. This local report and the photos give the impression of an outdoorsy club with simple tenets. The handbook Forbush wrote, the *Boys' Round Table: A Manual of the International Order of the Knights of King Arthur*, however, includes nearly 200 pages of detailed instructions for a model constitution and rituals—thoroughly imbued in chivalric romance—songs, photos of members in knightly costume, and an appendix with paraphernalia available for purchase. Incorporating a summer camp and “out-of-doors” “quests” and “tournaments,” were encouraged, but the main activity of the club would be during indoor meetings in the fall through spring.

That two competing clubs for boys, the Knights and the Junior Republic, were located in our small burgh at the



same time, should not be surprising since it was the Golden Age of Fraternities. At its peak an estimated 40% of adult men belonged to one or more fraternal orders, with Sharpsville home to many such societies at the time: the Masons, the Odd Fellows, the Knights of Pythias, along with at least eleven others met here in the decades from 1890 to 1930. (Some, admittedly were of fleeting existence.) Renowned historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr. described Americans in a seminal 1944 essay as a “Nation of Joiners.” So, it should not be surprising that this urge of men to meet in societies with arcane rituals should be extended to their sons. Indeed, many men’s fraternal organizations had junior orders to accommodate younger ages; moreover, a plethora of denominational youth groups were formed during this

Cont'd on page 5

Restoration Update

We accomplished a significant milestone in our project to restore our headquarters building, built in 1884 as the First Universalist Church of Sharpsville, and recognized on the National Register of Historic Places. When we acquired the building, the floors in the vestibule, sanctuary, and Sunday School room were covered with a green indoor/outdoor carpeting. When the carpet was removed, revealed were later additions of an unsightly brown floor paint—that lifted in places to reveal an even uglier orange color. Through a generous bequest from the late Bob Rannard, a devoted and active Society Board member, we were able to remove this later paint and bring the flooring to a look more consonant with the original interior. (The chancel flooring shows its original faux graining which we plan to restore in the future.) Note that the floor refinishing—done by Adam Giglio of Chavara’s Wood Finishing—required us moving and repositioning of 21 pews as well as other many bulky items. Much thanks to the Society members and student volunteers, Toren Ross, Bella Soloski, Luke Adkins, and Rodger Henrickson. Below are some before-and-after photos.



Items for Sale

Santa Collection

Featuring images of Sharpsville’s beloved Santa visits

Mugs — \$15

Ornaments — \$15

T-Shirts — \$20

Charcuterie Boards

Engraved with images of Pierce Mansion, First Universalist Church, or the Jonas Pierce House — \$40

Bookmarks

Engraved with the 150th Anniversary Logo — \$5

To purchase these and other items, call 724-877-9958 or visit sharpsvillehistorical.org

K.O.K.A., cont'd.

time. As for organizations formed specifically to address the “Boy Problem” many continue in full strength today: Big Brothers (1904), Federated Boys’ Clubs (1906), Boy Scouts of America (1910), and 4-H (1912). In addition, there were many lesser-known groups such as William George’s Junior Republic (1895), Woodcraft Indians (1901), Sons of Boone (later called the Boy Pioneers of America, 1905), and Boy City (1906).

What is surprising, though, is that the Knights of King Arthur is today almost entirely forgotten. Its 1893 start preceded Robert Baden-Powell’s founding of the Boy Scouts in England in 1907 with the Boy Scouts of America start in 1910. Moreover, Baden-Powell’s vision is considered to have been borrowed largely from Forbush’s K.O.K.A as well as another American group, the Woodcraft Indians. Indeed, the older organization, the Knights, Forbush claimed in 1910 to be the largest for boys in the world. By 1916, he estimated a total youth membership of 125,000—mainly in America but also Canada, Mexico, England, Jamaica, and New Zealand. These were spread among over 3,000 Castles, as well as 350 Courts of the Queens of Avalon (an affiliate group for girls) and 200 Camps of the Brotherhood of David (as the junior division for boys was called). A biographical entry for Forbush in 1922 estimated membership at 130,000. Yet, these impressive numbers were rapidly outstripped by the numbers of Boy Scouts: 140,414 in 1915 and 182,645 in 1916.

In a strange twist, the group representing the American epitome of boys’ outdoor adventure and reflecting the self-reliance of a New World frontiersman, the Boy Scouts, is an import from England. Meanwhile, the homegrown group, the K.O.K.A., drew its inspiration from the legends of medieval Britain.



Contact Us

website: www.sharpsvillehistorical.org
email: sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com

see our website for officers’ names and contacts

Headquarters: 131 N. Mercer Ave., Sharpsville, Pa.

Mailing address: 955 Forest Lane, Sharpsville, Pa. 16150

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

Collections Update

John Stanton donated a scrapbook with clippings of Sharpsville sports in the 1920s and 30s.

Elaine Bertolasio donated a suitcase with Marine Corps decals her father Raymond Bertolasio took with him to fight in the Pacific Theater in World War II.

Tamara Sakony donated several Sharpsville school photos from 1940s and 50s and photos from Shenango Furnace.

Dan Shannon donated an employee badge from the Valley Mould & Iron