



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

During a recent trip to Pittsburgh, a visit was made to the mansion of Henry Clay Frick. Frick became fabulously wealthy with his dominance of coal and coke production, and by later joining forces with the Carnegie Steel Company, where he served as its president. While not as large as other Gilded Age mansions, it was nonetheless opulent—it was even fully wired for electricity four years before the White House. Tours had once focused on the architectural details and the lifestyle and art patronage of the family. This was done mainly in deference to Frick's daughter, who had donated the property to the Trust that runs it. She died in 1984 at age 96 and was keen on rehabilitating her father's reputation. More recently, though, the tours have included a discussion of the 1892 Homestead Massacre, where seven workers and three Pinkerton agents died in an assault by the private police Frick sent, in an attempt to break the strike at the steelworks in Homestead.

This is not, however, some out-of-place introduction of a “woke” narrative. The Homestead Massacre was probably the most salient aspect of Frick's life. Because of it, at the time, he was reputedly “the most hated man in America,” so much so that he moved his family to Manhattan in 1901. To ignore it, would be a puzzling omission. In the tour, the life of a steelworker is given for context, including a display of their lunchpails in which they had to fit the 7,000 calories a day—much of it bread and lard!—needed to fuel their grueling toil. The portrait given of Frick is complex: the grief of the early death of children, his stinginess toward the household staff and his extended family, and his survival of an assassination attempt. While he bears much responsibility for the killings at Homestead, it is possible that Frick was set up to be the fall-guy by Andrew Carnegie, who was always eager to burnish his reputation and was conveniently in Scotland at the time.

All this is mentioned against the background of recent headlines of a concerted effort to whitewash history—in our schools, in our National Parks, and at the Smithsonian. While pride in your community and your nation is a worthy sentiment, it is not advanced—indeed it is even damaged—by turning a blind eye toward the more difficult or complex elements of our shared history. You can likewise be proud of your family, even though there might be plenty of black sheep in it. Here in Sharpsville, for example, we have noted the appalling number of industrial accidents a century ago, while at the same time that we were a pioneer in the Safety Movement. And, while records are scarce, we have tried to tell about the indifference, and sometimes violence, toward immigrants here. It is important that we know the story of your fellow townsfolk who otherwise might be forgotten.

Since humans are all imperfect, one should not expect the history of a town or nation to be perfect. To do otherwise would be to confuse actual history with juvenile fables.

Upcoming Events

AMERICA 250

BIRTHDAY

BINGO BASH

Sunday, October 18th

Bingo starts at 2:00 ; doors open at 1:00

St. Bartholomew's Center

311 W. Ridge Avenue

Prizes—Raffles—Food—Fun



GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIPS

Seneca Allegany Resort & Casino

September 24th

Northfield Park Casino

October 15th

Call 724-813-9199 for details

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.

Come see the unique architecture—both interior and exterior—of our historic building, and a large display of our artifacts, documents, and photos of Sharpsville history

Our basement displays have been recently expanded and may include items you may have missed on a prior visit.

A Look Back

Remains of the Slackwater Dam

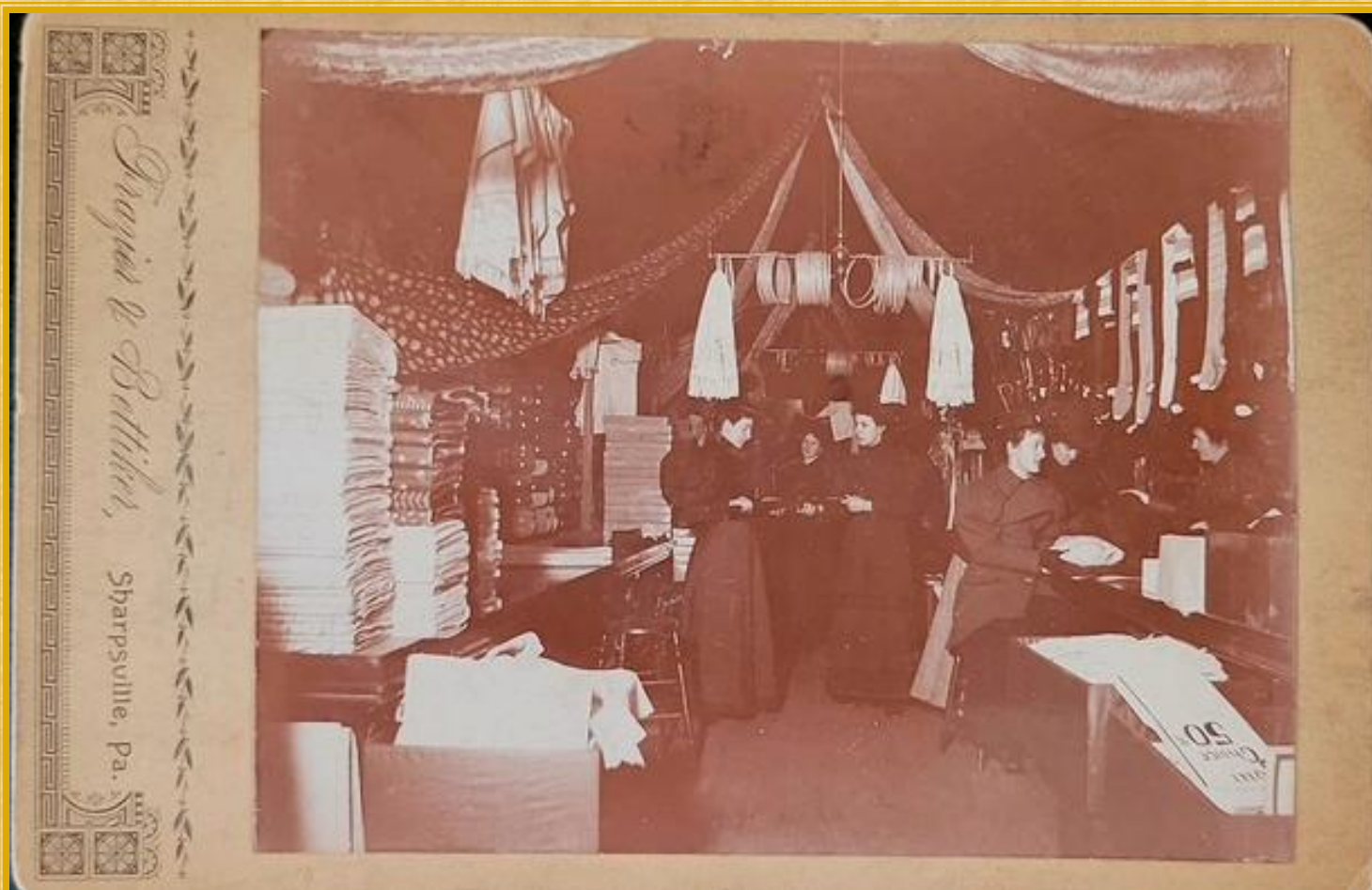
As two historical markers note, Sharpsville is home to the last remaining lock of the Erie Extension Canal (also known as the Beaver and Erie Canal). When the canal was completed in 1844, it opened up trade between Lake Erie and south to the Ohio River at Rochester and initiated the Shenango Valley's forthcoming prosperity. On the upstream side of the lock, a dam was also built in 1839. It regulated the flow of water into the lock and allowed for a section of the Shenango River, the "Slackwater," to be navigable to Clarksville, where the boats re-entered the canal. This Slackwater area was known for its beauty and, even after the canal was closed, it allowed steamers to take passengers to the pleasure grounds of Shadyside and Trout Island. Flooding in 1904 washed away much of what was called the Slackwater Dam or State Dam and halted navigation. This flood also swept away the bridge at Mercer Avenue by the feed mill. It in, fifteen who were standing on the bridge fell into the raging river. "Four unfortunates were Italians whose name cannot be accurately learned," as one newspaper account put it, died in the calamity. (The bridge that most of us remember was rebuilt later that year and torn down in 1986 when it was replaced by the current Walnut Street span.) The great Flood of 1913 took away what remained of the Slackwater Dam. This photo, thought to be from 1914, though possibly before the March 1913 flood, shows the remaining timbers which formed the dam. (The signalman's house along the Erie & Pittsburgh Railroad is visible at the top of the hill. Its foundations can still be seen along the walking trail.)



While part of the abutment to the dam on the far side of the river remains, one would hardly think that there would be any traces of a structure 187 years old, and mostly destroyed over a century ago, would be found.

Pennsylvania canal researcher, Neil D'Urso, however, has brought to our attention that indeed some remains could exist. While he focuses on the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal, his 26-minute video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xo15RKi-gik> is very informative for us in Sharpsville. In it, he shows a section of criss-crossed timbers visible in the in the Kiskiminetas River where the river was dammed to connect it with the Main Line canal at Leechburg, Pa. While we lack the complete foundation D'Urso's drone footage shows, we can still see, as shown below, some remaining timbers from our Slackwater Dam. The photos below reveal those near where the dam connected to the canal lock on its upstream side, as well as a submerged timber in the middle of the riverbed.

Cont'd. on page 6



Five days before his untimely passing, founding board member of the Sharpville Historical Society, and its long-time President, Gregg Smith shared this cabinet card photo he had acquired. The photographers, Frazier & Bettiker, operated between 1892 and 1894 (when Frazier went solo). Various clues indicate that it is Emma Neville's millinery shop, which operated on Park Way.

With Gratitude

In July, we revived our Ice Cream Social—an annual community event we had hosted since 1999. The pandemic interrupted it in 2020 and 2021, and the last year we ran it, 2022, had poor turnout due to cool weather and some drizzle. This year, we were smiled upon with perfect weather (and the smoke from Canadian wildfires clearing); a good turnout was the result. We could not have done the event, though, without the help and equipment lent by the members of

Our Freedom Chapel

Many thanks also for contributions by and help from

Sharpville V.F.W.

Joy Cone

Sharpville Dairy Queen

Sharpville Borough Street Department

BUY-A-BRICK

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

4" x 8" bricks with 3 lines of inscription—

\$75

8" x 8" bricks with 6 lines of inscription—\$125

The bricks will be placed in the town park.

Contact Us

website: www.sharpvillehistorical.org

email: sharpvillehistorical@hotmail.com

see our website for current board members

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

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

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

Hiding in Plain Sight

When the Sharpsville Steel Fabricators closed in 1985, they were the oldest industrial business in the Shenango Valley. Founded as the Sharpsville Boiler Works in 1860, they were renamed the Sharpsville Steel Fabricators in 1938; their plant at Main and Sixth is the current home to Sharpsville Container Corp. The firm had a wide range of manufactures: boilers, of course, but also bridges, blast furnaces, oil storage tanks, truck-mounted water and oil tanks, and various industrial steel fabrications. The oil storage tank business led them into a related field, but one that would eventually cause them grief—manufacture of gasoline dispensers (or pumps). (The firm's history was given in the March 2020 edition of this newsletter, with an expanded version in our book *Traces of Old Sharpsville*.)

The Sharmeter, as they branded their dispensers, was the subject of twelve patents. The most important was the introduction of the automatic nozzle control, the now common feature by which a trigger on the nozzle controls flow of fuel. While getting into the field in 1927 near the beginning of the Automobile Age offered plenty of opportunity, it brought with it serious problems for the firm. This was a highly-competitive industry, with thin profit margins. Moreover, the Sharmeter incorporated a metering mechanism made by the Neptune Meter Co. of Long Island City, N.Y.; it would bring six years of headaches. A dominant firm in the industry, Wayne Pump Co., claimed that Neptune infringed on their patent. Despite assurances by Neptune that they would prevail, the Sharmeter's sales suffered, with customers wary of purchasing an infringing product. Eventually, Neptune lost the case and the Boiler Works, along with several firms that used the Neptune Meter, were forced to accept Wayne's crippling terms. This essentially put the Sharpsville Boiler works out of the gasoline dispenser business.

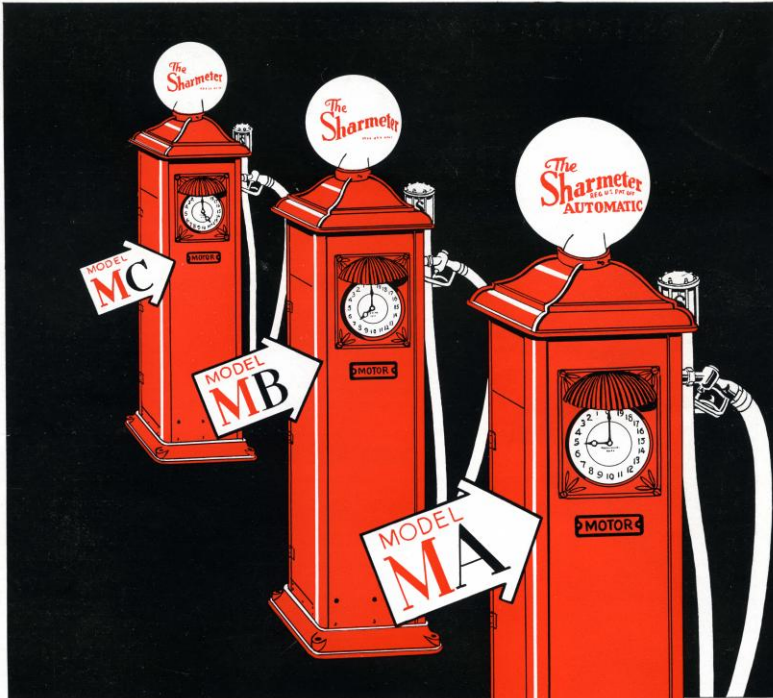
It is not known how many Sharmeters were manufactured, but today they are very rare and highly sought by collectors of petroliana. It comes as a surprise that two of these dispensers are prominently displayed in downtown Sharon, in front of Quaker Steak & Lube.



Hiding in Plain Sight, cont'd.

While the original Sharmeter markings on the dispenser are missing (and with the glass globes showing the brand of gasoline replaced), the body of the dispensers, along with the distinctive scalloped cowl, match the Sharmeter M-series in the sales brochure. The dial also matches a Sharmeter dial we have access to (though note the company logo was not always present in earlier models).

Bulletin M6



Now
A COMPLETE LINE
ALIKE OUTSIDE—DIFFERENT INSIDE

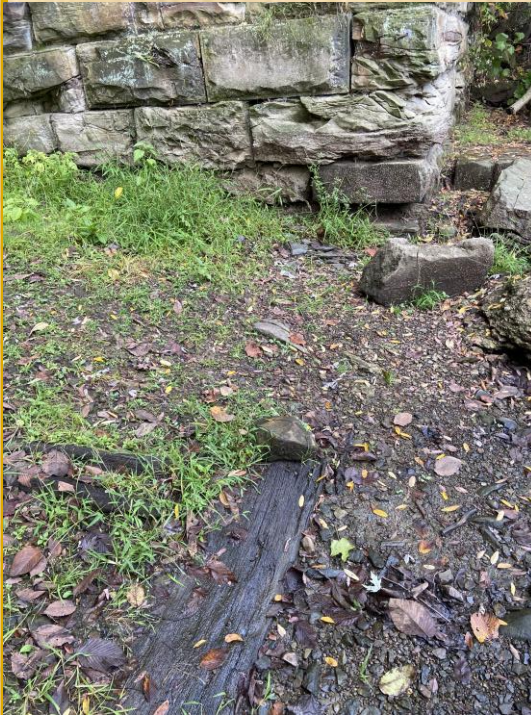
All in the same dress . . . but
with distinct operating features
that provide a Sharmeter for
every individual requirement.



This photo, courtesy of Eric Bombeck at *The Way It Was*, shows the Sharmeter dispensers in 1957 at the original Connely Blvd. gas station, Dave Hackett's Amoco. It is today the core of the Quaker Steak & Lube complex.



Slackwater dam, cont'd.



Dams of this era were of the timber crib design. Heavy timbers formed the walls and foundation of the dam with the space between filled with rubble. Either gravelling or planking the upstream side of such dams was done to mitigate leakage. While timbers required periodic replacement, if subject to constantly wet conditions, their lifespan was lengthened. Below is a plan of the timber frame for such a dam. It was likely drawn in 1828 for a dam next to a lock on the Monongahela near Pittsburgh.

