

SPRING 2017

The Gretna Chronicles NEWSLETTER

MGAHS Chair Report

By Susan Hostetter

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Dear Society Members, Happy spring! Like the plants in our garden, the Society is again getting ready to go in to full bloom with plans for a busy summer season. This year, Campmeeting and the Pennsylvania Chautauqua are celebrating their 125th birthdays.

Back in 1891, Robert Coleman was approached by representatives from Stoverdale regarding sale of land to them to begin a new Campmeeting in Mt. Gretna. They received approval of their charter in March 1892. Likewise, the organizers of the Pa. Chautauqua received their approved charter in January 1892. The rest, as they say, is history.

To celebrate, a 125th Anniversary Committee of the Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society was formed. Its first event, Treats and Trivia, attracted almost 90 participants eager to test their knowledge of events from 1892 and Mt. Gretna trivia.

Other events planned are a skating party in the Mt. Gretna Roller Rink, (formerly the Farmers Encampment/Exhibition Hall). Don't skate? Me either, but I'll be there to learn about Mt. Gretna. (continued on page 7)



Can you spy the albino squirrel living near the museum?

Chautauqua and Campmeeting 125th Anniversary Celebration Continues

Events planned in honor of the 125th Anniversary

April 2: Community Skating Party sponsored by the Lloyd Family, at the Roller Rink.

May 20: Join the ice cream social sponsored by the Jigger Shop, at the Hall of Philosophy.

June 16: History of the Pa. National Guard in Mt. Gretna

July 23: 1890 Worship Service at the Tabernacle

July 25: Mt. Gretna Photo Scavenger Hunt ☞



A membership gift to the MGAHS is a great way to celebrate the 125th! ☞

The Little Red Cottage on Brown

By Don Kensinger

“Oh, by the way, this cardboard tube also comes with the cottage. It was given to us when we bought the property from Dave and Darleen Eckert in 2004 and it’s our understanding it has been passed down from the original owner to each succeeding one.”

My wife, Vicki, and I had just purchased the little red cottage on Brown Ave. at the close of 2012 when the previous owners, Peter Czeck and Paula Wagner, presented us with this unexpected package. Upon



The author and his banner

opening the tube, we discovered a 6’ x 2’ oil skin banner

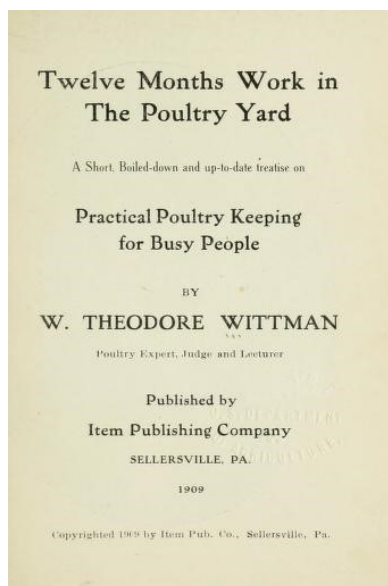
containing the words “NAVAJO RUGS.” We looked at each other, reread the banner and returned our gaze one to the other. Since the early 80s, I had been collecting and researching Navajo rugs. Even before we had known of the cardboard tube, we had planned to adorn the walls of our new home with our own collection of Navajo rugs. Immediately, we were determined to research and discover the connection this Mt. Gretna property had with Navajo rugs. The excitement of owning our new home suddenly increased exponentially.

We soon came to learn that the original owner of 215 Brown Ave. was W. Theodore Wittman (1886-1941). In October 1906, Mr. Wittman purchased Lot #91 from the Pennsylvania Chautauqua for the grand sum of \$50.00. The deed required Mr. Wittman to construct a cottage or “dwelling house” within two years of the purchase of the lot. Assuming that Mr. Wittman abided

by this stipulation, we concluded that the original dwelling was indeed erected on the lot before October 1908. The house was destroyed by fire and replaced by a craftsman structure some time prior to 1922. Word has it the kit building traveled to Gretna via train, was hauled up the hill and assembled where the first had burned.

Our research reveals that Mr. Wittman was quite an interesting person. We uncovered a 1913 Pa. Dept. of Agriculture Bulletin that shed light on some of the details of Mr. Wittman’s life. The author writes,

(continued)



Theodore Whitman’s book and portrait

Cottage on Brown

“W. Theodore Wittman was born in 1868 on a farm in Lehigh County. As a small boy he was particularly interested in poultry and fruit growing and has always since retained a strong interest in both these branches of agriculture, constantly studying and working in both. He is now a Poultry Judge with a national reputation and his name is constantly appearing in the better classes of poultry journals as a contributor to the poultry knowledge of the day. He has written several books on poultry keeping that are largely advertised and have commanded a big sale. As Superintendent of the Poultry Department of the Greater Allentown Fair he has built up there one of the very finest and best displays of pure breed poultry to be seen anywhere in this country, greatly stimulating the interest in better poultry among farmers and others throughout eastern Pennsylvania and thereby enhancing the market value of their poultry and poultry products enormously.”

Mr. Wittman's first connection with Mt. Gretna is found in the *Reliable Poultry Journal* dated September 1898. This article indicates, “Theodore Wittman, from Allentown PA, gave a lecture at the Poultry Show Season at Mt. Gretna held August 15-19, 1898. His talk was entitled, *What is the Best Utility Fowl?*”

The notoriety of Mr. Wittmann is evident in two articles we found. *The Pennsburg Town and Country* newspaper on Saturday April 13, 1904, contained an article entitled: **Eggs Bring \$144 a Dozen at Allentown.** “W. Theodore Wittman, the chicken fancier of Allentown, on Tuesday, received an order for a dozen of brown Leghorn eggs for hatching purchases at \$144.00. This is a world's record price for a dozen of eggs.” And on December 17, 1905, *The New York Times* published, (continued)



The cottage on Brown Ave. and a Navajo rug sample.

A Hidden History (Cont.)

“W. Theodore Wittman, who has won scores of prizes for brown Leghorn chickens, has sold his flock of 130 birds to General Edwin. A. McAlpin, who will place them on his stock farm in Ossining, NY. For one hen Mr. Wittman received \$750.00.”

In 1909, Mr. Wittman authored **Twelve Months Work in the Poultry Yard**, a short, boiled-down and up-to-date book on practical poultry keeping for busy people. He was credited as a poultry expert, judge and lecturer. Copies of this book can still be bought on the internet.

The Reading Eagle published an article on January 24, 1914, which spoke to Mr. Wittman’s expertise. “Mr. Wittman won his spurs by winning the first prize for Brown Leg-horn, the blue ribbon of American poultry prizes, at the Madison Square Garden Show for two successive years. No man is in more demand for judging poultry shows and he is rated one of the four best in the United States and Canada.”

The Lebanon Semi-Weekly News, issued 13 April 1922, page 8, reads “Returned from Tour of California and Will Summer at Mount Gretna – Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Wittman, of Allentown, returned from an extensive tour of California and have taken up residence at Mt. Gretna for the spring and summer. While on the Pacific coast, Mr. and Mrs. Wittman spent a week at the home of Dr. Charles W. Borland, a former Lebanon dentist. Dr. and Mrs. Borland are now living at Long Beach.” This visit serves as a connection Mr. Wittman had with the west.

Perhaps it was in Long Beach that Mr. Wittman developed an interest in Navajo rugs. One of the best-known traders with the Navajo was J. L. Hubbell. Mr. Hubbell began trading in Ganado, Arizona at the Hubbell Trading Post in 1878. In addition to the “mother post” in Ganado, the Hubbell family owned 30 other trading posts at one time or another. In the spring of 1921, Hubbell’s brother-in-law, Forrest M. Parker, began operating the Arizona Navajo Indian Rug Co. in Long Beach, California. While this store had limited success, and was short lived, closing in 1922, one wonders if this trading post may have contributed to Mr. Wittman’s interest in Navajo rugs. On December 6, 1940, and again the following week, Mr. Wittman took out a Classified Advertisement with the *Lebanon Daily News*, which read:

“NAVAJO RUGS – something different.

Famous, beautiful, long wearing.

All hand-made. Various sizes. \$5.00 up. Also,
fine Indian Moccasins, Blankets, Jewelry.

W. THEO. WITTMAN – Indian Trader

West End Brown Ave., Mt. Gretna, PA

Open Evenings”

Less than a year later, on April 5, 1941, W. Theodore Wittman died.

Those of you familiar with Mt. Gretna no doubt know of the totem poles on Brown Ave. Three large totems surround the cottage owned by Tim Flowers, which happens to be located beside the little red cottage on Brown. The earliest of the totems has an interesting bit of history. According to Mr. Flowers, “As I was told, the pole was located on the Brown Ave. side of your home and I have surmised that was Mr. Wittman’s “calling card” to attract attention of many passers-by. I believe his Indian rugs were just



Totem poles on Brown Ave.

Cottage on Brown

laid about and for purchase. Years after his death and with several renters in your home, my dad was in touch with the landlord and offered to purchase it and move it. It was moved in the '60s, I'd guess, and there it stays until I have it pulled down or before it falls down."

Tim provided written documentation indicating "This totem pole was carved by Native American near Sitka, Alaska, circa 1925." Such provenance suggests Mr. Wittman may have sold Indian artifacts as early as 1925.

Regarding Mr. Wittman, Tim shared, "He was quite a fellow, a noted poultry judge from Allentown and instrumental in that country fair each year. He and his wife retired to Gretna and lived in your cottage. Nancy Besch would have recollections of him, I think. I guess selling Indian mementos became his hobby in retirement."

Additional information concerning Mr. Wittman was conveyed to me during a March 2016 telephone conversation with Ruth Paul, who with her husband, Stanley, currently lives in Bethlehem, Pa. From the time she was born, Ruth spent her summers living in the cottage on the corner of Brown and Lehigh Ave. This cottage is currently owned by Ned and Emily Wallace. Ruth recounted, "I recall Mr. Wittman well. I remember him going out west to the Navajo Indians and bringing back rugs and jewelry and selling them from his cottage. The one totem pole that is now next door was Mr. Wittman's."

When asked if she might know when Mr. Wittman began his Indian business, Ruth said, "I was born in 1920 and as a child of 5 or 6 I recall him selling things."

Ruth wanted to make sure I knew about Mr. Wittman's moss. "Mr. Wittman didn't want anyone walking on it and he would sweep it every day. Woe to anyone who stepped in it."

"Mr. Wittman would go food shopping and when he returned home, he would call for his wife to come and unload the food from the car and carry them into the house. He didn't help her take the groceries in, he remained in the car. He had a garage on the other side of Brown where he parked his car."

"All were in awe of Mr. Wittman. You didn't want to aggravate him. He had a granddaughter my age and I would go over to their house. His wife was pleasant, but he had a temper."

In July 2016, I had the privilege of meeting Ruth and Stanley Paul. We again entered into conversation about Mr. Wittman, and Mrs. Paul shared a story that appeared to be fresh, if not raw, in her memory. She recalled playing the game "Boodle" (a form of Rummy) at the Wittman's, "Mr. Wittman said I cheated. Now my mother taught me never to cheat. I left that house and never went there anymore. I never went back."

When I first meet people, I frequently ask them to share their passions; those things near and dear, the things that get their juices flowing. The answers are fascinating and typically meaningful discussions ensue. Of course, when asked about my passions, Navajo rugs are near the top of the list. As the result of such conversations, I've discovered other owners of Navajo weavings who call Mt. Gretna their home. I enjoy seeing their collections, hearing where and when the rugs were purchased and learning their provenance. Those neighbors of which I am aware include: Nancy Besch, Lois Herr and Stinson Stroup.

A long-time cottage owner on Harvard Ave., Nancy Besch recalls Mr. Wittman when she was a young girl. Similar to Ruth Paul, Nancy remembers being reprimanded by Mr. Wittman if she strayed off the path in front of his home and stepped on his much-loved moss. Nancy's parents purchased several rugs from Mr. Wittman - rugs that are currently part of her collection.

Lois Herr resides on Lancaster Ave. She shared the following about her rug. "As best as I can understand, my great grandmother, Rebecca Stober Hassler, probably bought the rug during a 1923 train trip across the country. I know she was at the Grand Canyon where rugs were sold and at the Fred Harvey Restaurants along the railroad. I don't think the rug was bought in Mt. Gretna, though I've heard from Nancy Besch there was a man selling such rugs during the early years. It is more likely that it was bought on the trip and sent home, for they were used to using the railroads to send things. They wouldn't have carried it, for they were on and off the train a lot after those sites." (*continued next page*)

Cottage on Brown (continued)

Lois's rug is a fine example of the "Old Crystal" style. The black, white, gray and tan colors are natural, while the red is aniline dyed. For a rug reported to be nearly 100 years old it is in quite good condition.

Stinson Stroup lives on Brown Ave. In addition to collecting Navajo rugs, Stinson has an impressive selection of Southwest pottery, including Acoma, Santa Clara and Zuni. His three rugs include a very large historical Crystal rug woven between 1920 and 1930, a Ganado Red and a Storm Pattern. Each was purchased by Stinson during trips to the Southwest.

Another interesting twist to this story developed from information provided by Stephen Gible, owner of a cottage on Harvard Ave., next to the Mt. Gretna Playhouse. Steve related that a well-known former Gretna cottager, Bertha Brossman Blair, had an extensive collection of Navajo Rugs. Mrs. Blair was a former Chair, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Denver and Ephrata Telephone and Telegraph Company. An August 1937 Directory of Chautauqua Property Owners, compiled by Atreus Wanner and reproduced by Clarence Schock, "for free distribution among Chautauqua Cottagers" lists Miss Bertha Brossman as the owner of lots 254 and 255 on Brown Ave. Also listed on Brown Ave. was W. Theodore Wittman owner of lots 91, 260, 261 and 262. The Bertha Brossman Blair Collection of Navajo rugs is currently housed in the Fralin Museum of Art located on the campus of the University of Virginia. One wonders if Mr. Wittman sold his neighbor up the street some of these rugs.

If there are other Gretnaites out there who own Navajo Rugs, and I'm sure there are, I'd love to hear from you. One never knows, perhaps the rug you own was sold out of the little cottage on Brown Ave. by W. Theodore Wittman. ☞

Mt. Gretna—Then and Now: The Fountain

Mt. Gretna's rich history extends back since its establishment by Robert Coleman as a picnic park. From those early years, Mt. Gretna has grown into a community of seven diverse neighborhoods, many historic buildings, well-known sites and scenic landscapes.

Some of these sites, buildings and landscapes remain largely unchanged from their early days. Others look vastly different. This "Mt. Gretna – Then and Now" column highlights one of these sites – the Fountain – that dates from the early years of Coleman's Mt. Gretna Park.

The photo, above left, shows the Fountain, which was a popular meeting place for people visiting Robert Coleman's Mt. Gretna Park. The steps to the left led to the train station platform for the Cornwall & Lebanon Railroad, which brought many visitors to the Park and to other sites in Mt. Gretna. To the right of the Fountain was Main Ave., which served as the entrance to the Park. The park was located south of the current Lebanon Valley Rail Trail and north of present day Rt. 117. In the above right photo is the Fountain as it appears today, with the spur path running from Timber Road north to the Rail Trail. ☞

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(continued from pg. 1) **Chair's Message** Gretna's oldest building and to watch my friends show off their skating skills (or not). Rumor has it that Lois Herr's great grandmother, Rebecca Stober Hassler, one of the planners of the Hall, will be in attendance to give a short talk on the building's history.

Thanks to Don Kensinger for his research on Mt. Gretna's Navajo Rug collection. This is the kind of story we love to catalogue and share with others. Call us to share your story.

The week of July 23-29 has been designated as *Gretna Days*. Look for events related to turn-of-the-century events/culture all that week. Oct. 14 brings Oktoberfest with a special beer brewed for the occasion by Mt. Gretna Craft Brewery. We wrap up the year with a cookie exchange at the fire hall and tree lighting at the Peter Hewitt and Walter McAnney residence on December 2. Hope to see many of you at these events! ☞



Winners of the Treats & Trivia Contest, which was the first event celebrating the 125th Anniversary, shown at the conclusion of the event are, from left, Bob Rader, Kristi Donahue, Penny Shoop, Brent Walley, Don Miller, Carole Miller, Kathy McKenna and Larry McKenna.



Join Us!

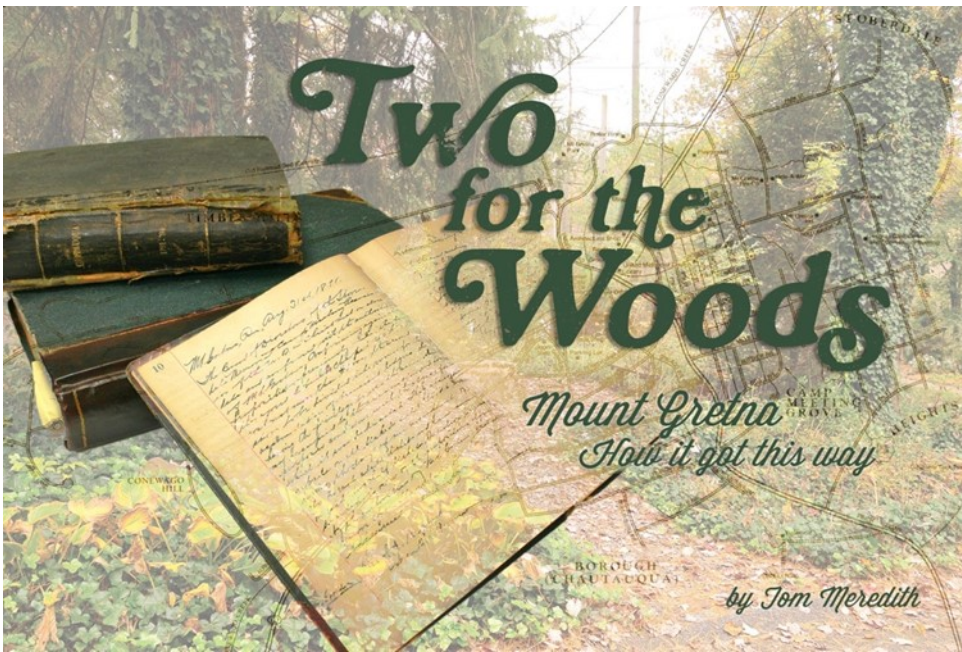
Sat., June 10, 2017 9 am—noon

Cottage & Historic Home Improvement Show

Mt. Gretna Fire Hall

Free admission

This show will bring together contractors, landscapers, interior designers and numerous other businesses providing cottage and home improvement and restoration services and products of interest to cottage and historic home owners in Mt. Gretna and surrounding communities. ☞



New Book Release Two for the Woods

The new publication, *Two for The Woods*, written by former Mt. Gretna Tom Meredith, goes on sale May 20 at the 125th anniversary *Sweet Treat* event sponsored by the Jigger Shop. Cost will be \$25 or \$20 for Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society members.

Written in the same format of photo and text spreads as his earlier book, *Listed!*, it tells the story of “fraternal twins,” the Campmeeting and Chautauqua, responding to the challenges of creating real communities in the

woods -- responses that were sometimes similar, sometimes different.

With more than fifty photographs, some of them generously lent by Max Hark’s great-granddaughter, the past and the present become visible. Written especially for the 125th anniversary celebration, *Two for The Woods* captures the “spirit of Mt. Gretna” as the “twins” grow from birth to maturity.

Call 717-964-1105 or email the Historical Society at info@mtgretnahistory.org to order. Books will also be available at the Historical Society Museum and all Historical Society programs this summer. ☞

Lots of great activities to celebrate the 125th Anniversary

Join us for many exciting events to celebrate the 125th Anniversary of Mt. Gretna. (See lists on front and back pages.)

We have a proud history and many opportunities to learn more about what makes our town so wonderful. Please try to attend at least one activity to experience, share and build community with your neighbors.



SKATE DATE

Learn about one of the Mount Gretna’s oldest buildings, and enjoy one of Mount Gretna’s oldest pasttimes--roller skating--while listening to organist Kathy Long Collins!

APRIL 2, 2017

5:00-8:00 p.m.

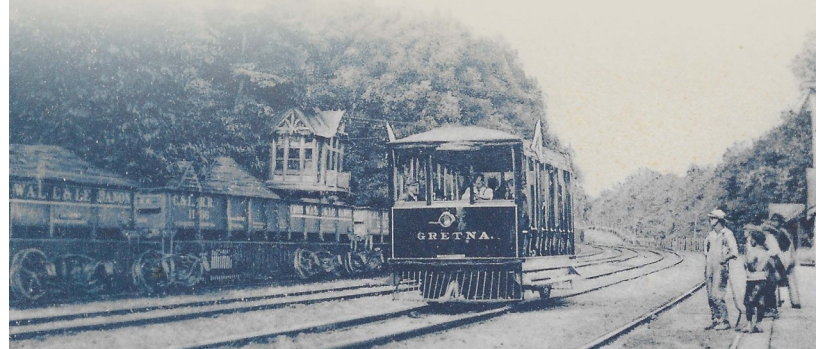
ADMISSION: \$1.25

In keeping with the celebration of Mt. Gretna’s 125 years

WHERE: SPONSORED BY:

Mt. Gretna Roller Rink

The Lloyd Family



For more information email: info@MtGretnaHistory.org

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Mt. Gretna, PA 17064
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Hershey Psychological Services

431 East Chocolate Ave.
Hershey, PA 17033
717-533-5311

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PO Box 5
Mt. Gretna, PA 17064
717-964-2305

Jigger Shop

PO Box 520
Mt. Gretna, PA 17064
717-964-3175

Jonestown Bank & Trust

PO Box 717
Jonestown, PA 17038
717-865-4246

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Taylor Miller Pipe Organs

26 East 10th Ave.
York, PA 17404
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Timbers Dinner Theater

350 Timber Road
Mt. Gretna, PA 17064
717-964-3601



*Thank you to our Constant Contact
sponsor, Gretna Moves
717-507-9249*



Visit the Historical Society Museum in the heart of Mt. Gretna

We welcome children to take part in museum scavenger hunts. Here several young museum visitors seek items in the Campmeeting dollhouse recently generously and carefully restored by Mt. Gretna resident Eleanor Sarabia.

*Visit the Society's home at
206 Pennsylvania Ave., Mt. Gretna
Museum Summer Hours
Saturday & Sunday
1pm—4 pm*

*Research Library
by appointment.
Call us at
717-964-1105*

Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society

P.O. Box 362
Mt. Gretna, PA 17064

The Society's Home is
206 Pennsylvania Avenue in Mt. Gretna
717.964.1105

We're on the web!
www.mtgretnahistory.org



Mark Your Calendar!

Programs:

Sun., April 9, 2:00 pm, at the Mt. Gretna Fire Hall

'A Pennsylvania Dutch Appetite: The History of Local Food Culture.'

Presenter: Jean-Paul Benowitz. Historian, Elizabethtown College, Director of Student Transition Programs.

Fri., July 7, 7:30 pm, Hall of Philosophy

'A View of 1892' Take a step back in time to the era when Mt. Gretna was founded.

Presenter: Ron Hontz

Fri., Aug. 4, 7:30 pm, Hall of Philosophy

'A Hidden History: Coleman's Railroads and Amusement Park.'

Presenter: Dr. Pat Gibble

History Walks:

Sat., July 8, 11:00 am, The Chautauqua Grounds.

Meet at Mt. Gretna Information Center. Ron Hontz

Sat., July 22, 11:00 am, – The Campmeeting. Meet at corner of parking lot behind the Tabernacle. Ron Hontz ***Donations Appreciated!***



*Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society promotes the Campmeeting and Chautauqua 125th Anniversary with special commemorative cottage and light pole banners. Orders are accepted and are available for purchase by cottage owners, homeowners and businesses who would like to help celebrate and promote this milestone anniversary. **Cost:** \$100 per banner, Sales tax included. Questions? Email us at info@mtgretnahistory.org or call 964-1105 and leave a message.*