



# The Gretna Chronicles NEWSLETTER



Summer Edition 2007

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

By Fred Buch

In the three short years of its existence, the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society has made great strides forward. You, the members of the Historical Society should be proud, for without your support and the work of the Board of Trustees, it would not have been possible. Now we face even greater challenges that I will speak about later. Each one of you is important in meeting these new challenges. I am sure that your love for Mount Gretna and your desire to preserve it for yourself, your children, grandchildren and great grandchildren will encourage you to participate in helping us reach our new goals.

Having a museum where we may collect, preserve and display artifacts of Mount Gretna's past is only a small part of our desire for this organization. Our collection of these items continues to grow as folks give the Historical Society artifacts and documents of interest.

Our collection has many important documents relative to Mount Gretna history. These documents are being scanned into our computer and will be available for anyone to read.

Numerous residents of the community have already given their recollections of life in Mount Gretna. Many of these individuals have given permission to share these taped oral histories. They will be available on tape and CD for your listening pleasure and research in our library.

## Summer Programs

All Programs are Free of Charge/Donations Gratefully Accepted

**Friday, June 15 - 7:30 PM**

**9<sup>th</sup> Annual History of Mount Gretna Presentation:**

Video production of Jack Bitner's Annual History of Mt. Gretna. Co-sponsored with the Pennsylvania Chautauqua Summer Programs. Chautauqua Hall of Philosophy

**Friday, June 29 - 7:30 PM**

**Memories of the Encampment**

Co-sponsored with the Pennsylvania Chautauqua Summer Programs. Chautauqua Hall of Philosophy

**Saturday, July 7 - 7:00 PM**

**The Charcoal Burners of the Cornwall Iron Furnace**

Presented by Jack Bitner at Cornwall Manor. Co-sponsored with the Pennsylvania Chautauqua Summer Programs.

**Sunday, July 8 - 2:00 PM**

**If these Campmeeting Cottages Could Talk.**

Presented by Irene Rollman. Co-sponsored with the Mount Gretna Community Library. Campmeeting Tabernacle

**Friday, August 24 - 7:30 PM**

**History of the Gretna Men's Club**

Presented by David Miller. Co-sponsored with the Pennsylvania Chautauqua Summer Programs and the Gretna Men's Club. Chautauqua Hall of Philosophy

**Monday, August 27 - 6:00-8:00 PM**

**Children's Craft Program: Turn of the Century Games.**

Instructor: Chris Resh.

For children of all ages! Co-sponsored with the Pennsylvania Chautauqua Summer Programs. Free. Call 964-1830 for information and registration.

It would be a tragedy of major proportions if new people purchased property in Mount Gretna and proceeded to ruin the architectural integrity and heaven forbid, demolish a historic cottage and replace it with something out of character. Those not familiar with architecture and restoration need to be made aware. How? Education! The majority of tradesmen do not have the expertise to recommend the ideal materials for a special community like Mount Gretna.

The Mount Gretna Area Historical Society plans to offer remodeling/restoration workshops, as a free service to property owners. We will have available names of qualified tradesmen who

can provide architectural services, and contractors, plumbers, electricians, heating and air conditioning specialists, roofers and landscapers. For the do-it-yourselfer, we will provide guidance.



To make this all a reality, we need to have a headquarters for the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society. In hopes of making this happen, my wife Ruth and I purchased a cottage in March 2006 right next to the playhouse at 206 Pennsylvania Avenue. We asked the Board of Trustees if they were interested in purchasing the property, at our cost, for the Society Headquarters. The committee, then seeking a home for the organization, recommended to the Board of Trustees that they begin a Capital Campaign to purchase the property. The board unanimously accepted that recommendation.

Having handled property acquisition and design for the new library/research center and museum renovations at the Historical Society of the Cocalico Valley in Ephrata, I have the experience of knowing the requirements for housing small to medium size historical organizations. To keep moving forward with this project in Mount Gretna, I began the renovation of the cottage at 206 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Last fall, the cottage was lifted 10 to 12 feet in the air by professional house movers. The ground under the entire cottage and porch was excavated to make room for a basement archive area and vault. Block layers installed footers and built the block walls of the basement and vault. The cottage was returned to a new foundation after a concrete floor had been poured into place.

Throughout the winter months all new plumbing was installed for the kitchen and handicapped accessible restroom, all electrical wiring was replaced by February 1, 2007 and the building now complies to all safety codes and has a fully operational security system.



*Work is continuing on the Society's future home on Pennsylvania Avenue in Mt. Gretna.*

By March, the new electric heat-pump was installed along with a humidifier and a dehumidifier to handle, separately, the vault and archives areas in the lower level and the display area on the first floor. The second floor, which is almost all original construction, will remain unheated as it has been for over a century. Exterior walls of the first floor were reinforced, insulated, dry-walled and covered with Philadelphia board paneling.

The new fire-proof concrete vault is located under the entire front porch and will house items from the collection when they are not on display and during the winter months. The vault area will determine the humidity for the entire archives and first floor.

The later part of May was dedicated to exterior backfilling and landscaping. Until all of the work has been completed and inspections by the Department of Labor and Industry are satisfied, the facility will remain closed.

On your membership applications, many of you indicated that you would be willing to volunteer for some of the items listed. We have your names and selections on file. Since there was no building available to us, there was no need for volunteer help. As we occupy the new facility, a new list of volunteer jobs will be compiled and sent to those who offered their services previously. At that time, those interested in being a volunteer can select their areas of interest.

Your program committee has prepared a menu of excellent programs for the summer months. Be sure to attend all of them!

## *Did you know?*

Pennsylvania is the birthplace of Little League Baseball and home to the Little League World Series.



## GUARD DAYS AT GRETNA

by Tom Meredith

It has been well known in Mount Gretna that summer encampments of the Pennsylvania National Guard were part of the area's early history, but until Jim Seltzer made his presentation at the January 28 meeting of the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society, details of that early experience were not so well known.

Jim is known to many Society members and to Mount Gretna residents as the moving force behind the restoring and relocating of the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry monument to "The Point" in the Timber Hills area. Jim's father served in the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry during the Mexican border operations in 1916-1917 and through World War I, when the unit was renamed the 509 Machine Gun Battalion. Thus, there are strong family ties between the Seltzers and the Pennsylvania National Guard.

Jim's professional career was in the Regular Army, graduating from the Military Academy at West Point as an engineer officer, being named a Rhodes Scholar, and later earning an advanced engineering degree at Purdue University. As a Regular Army officer, Jim had no direct contact with National Guard affairs, although the family relationship was always a connection. So when he was asked to do a program on the National Guard experience at Mount Gretna, he willingly undertook a major research project on the topic.

Jim's presentation in the Mount Gretna Fire Hall on January 28 was a model of clarity and organization; the photographs and postcards he included produced a visual effect that had many of the military veterans in the audience muttering, "That's it – just like the one I had – remember it well."

National Guard history in Pennsylvania goes back to the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the establishment of the Philadelphia Associators under the direction of Benjamin Franklin, but National Guard history in Mount Gretna begins in 1885. In June of that year, Robert Coleman's workers began the construction of the dam that created Lake Conewago. It took a year for the lake to fill up, but the first Guard units arrived on July 25, 1885

at Camp Siegfried (each summer encampment was named for the governor of Pennsylvania, and an engraving of the Guard personnel at Camp Siegfried is one

of Jack Bitner's proudest possessions). Two years later, the Guard and the camp were honored when General Phil Sheridan reviewed the troops. Such a review, often by the governor of the state, and once, in 1890, by President Benjamin Harrison, marked the conclusion of military training for the summer.

As Jim pointed out, there were many social interactions between the guardsmen and the summer residents of Mount Gretna. The governor's review is one that is well remembered by those with childhood memories of Mount Gretna. There were frequent band concerts, and when residents heard the martial music, they flocked from Chautauqua to the parade ground, known today as Soldiers Field. There were boxing matches from time to time, and the cavalry units held races over a quarter mile track, part of which has become today's Village Lane. There were occasional dances held at Hotel Conewago. All these were more or less formal interactions between the "citizen soldiers" and the citizens. (And if you talk to some of the older residents, it becomes clear that there were many less formal, more personal interactions.)

The July, 1924 issue of the Army and Navy Journal contains a full description of the Guard's training site at Mount Gretna. It encompassed some 3000 acres, stretching out beyond Lawn, where the cavalry troops were stationed. The monument to the elite "Governor's Troop" can be found at the foot of Conewago Hill, where the road splits. There were 25 staff houses, 3 individual kitchens for the troops, and 3 rifle ranges, including a 1000 yard and a 1000 inch range, and a machine gun range. There were 3 reservoirs for drinking water, and two miles of railroad sidings.

## *Did you know?*

Pennsylvanians  
invented ketchup, the  
Marshmallow Peep and  
soft pretzels.





The postcard photos that Jim found and projected for the audience showed many scenes that were familiar and unfamiliar: the path of Timber Road, easily recognizable, did not look familiar with soldiers' tents lined up precisely along each side. And the many photos of soldierly activities – lining up for a meal, washing mess kits, and (especially) marching, brought forth from many audience members audible sounds of recognition and familiarity.

It was 1935 when the Pennsylvania National Guard, in need of much more than 3000 acres, moved its training site to Indiantown Gap. All buildings and facilities were removed to the Gap, where today the Rangemaster's house has been converted to a museum and contains some memorabilia of the Mount Gretna years. In 1985, a Commemorative Review was held in Mount Gretna, and the sounds of a military band and the shouted orders of the officers were heard once more echoing over Soldiers Field.

## WEB TALK

by Shawn Harbaugh

The world (as in World Wide Web) has a new resource for connecting with the Society and local history: [www.MtGretnaHistory.org](http://www.MtGretnaHistory.org). Here one can find a complete listing of upcoming Society events, historical content, membership and contact information, past newsletters, and more. Developed and maintained through volunteer efforts, the site is considered an accessible, cost-effective, and timely means of reaching the community.

Content additions planned for summer 2007 include a delightful collection of early postcard images and an interactive map highlighting locations of historical significance. The latter item is being created with the hope of facilitating educational walking tours of the area. Pictures and descriptions of the Society's collection of artifacts and memorabilia are also being evaluated for inclusion.

Anyone with a suggestion for site content is

## *Did you know?*

Pennsylvania has the most rail trails in the nation.

encouraged to forward their ideas to [webmaster@mtgretnahistory.org](mailto:webmaster@mtgretnahistory.org). We look forward to your visit!

## CHAUTAUQUA FOR CUBA

by Deborah Hurst

When you look at the events for 2007 sponsored by the Pennsylvania Chautauqua, one can find various crafts, book reviews, science programs, yoga and a program on America's immigrant migrations. An examination of the Philadelphia Times from July 1896 describing the events is eye-opening. An article from that time indicated that a Gretna day started out with everyone wearing overcoats which were removed later indicating it was still cool at that time of year. Rev. George Willis Ely of Columbia and the Rev. O.C. Pflenger of Elizabethtown presided over the morning session of the assembly. While we have concerns about Iraq, there were similar concerns at that time about foreign policy with the question submitted to a vote of the Chautauquans. "Resolved, That in the Cuban struggles our sympathies are with the Cubans".

Everyone thought the cause of the Cubans would win but few were prepared for the overwhelming majority indicated with only three votes out of several hundred being cast against the Cubans. Other activities of the day included a discussion on the novelist, George Elliot, by several individuals. Rev. C. L. Fry opened with a series of events in the life the novelist followed by a description of some of her major works. At 11:00 AM, Dr. William H. Harrison gave his first lecture on the anesthetics-ether, chloroform, nitrous oxide gas - also one of the local anesthetics, cocaine. He illustrated how these agents were manufactured and focused on how they were used in the surgical practices of the day.

After lunch, there were lectures on Chapman Beamont and Fletcher, the English dramatists, the stars and the modern conception of flowers. A presentation on Roman sanctuaries was followed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Historic Piano and Song recital. Furthermore, the article reported on arrivals in Mt. Gretna. Individuals mentioned included Dr. R.V. Hefstor, a fellow of Columbia University and Professor H. Clay Deaner of Lebanon Valley College. Miss Jeannie Hopkins of Chepachet, RI., Miss W.H. Wilson and family of Philadelphia was said to have arrived to take a cottage for the summer.



Another arrival was a Professor Reddall who offered three money prizes for a Grand Spelling Bee to be held in the future. There was a list of others but this gives an example of the variety of individuals who arrived that long ago summer in Mt. Gretna.

Note: The information for this article was gleaned from a newspaper article and every attempt was made to determine the correct spelling. Additionally, the article was provided by Arlene Althouse.

### **MT. GRETNA'S ORAL HISTORY**

*By Jack H. Anderson*

Have you ever had a relaxed conversation with a friend or acquaintance and shared a story about Mt. Gretna? Have you shared your knowledge of the history of a cottage, or an event, or an old Mt. Gretna tradition? What was your summer like in Mt. Gretna in times past?

In recent years oral history has emerged as a useful means of recording and preserving the unique memories and life experiences of people whose stories might otherwise have been lost.

Mt. Gretna has touched the lives of many people in so many ways and everyone has stories they can tell. The oral history project of the Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society offers an opportunity for people to do just that...to tell these stories in a relaxed conversation, and assure that they are preserved as part of the collective memories of Mt. Gretna.

You can help the oral history project in the following ways: (1) suggest persons you think we should interview to collect their oral history; (2) become an oral history interviewee and share your own remembrances; (3) become an oral history interviewer for the Society; or (4) help the oral history project in other ways. Call Jack Anderson, 964-1975.

### **BUSINESS MEMBERS**

We especially appreciate the support of the following local business firms and ask that you give them your support.

#### **The Jigger Shop**

A Summer Tradition since 1895  
Mt. Gretna

#### **Le Sorelle**

Serving lunch and breakfast  
Mt. Gretna

#### **Remember When**

An Unusual Gift Shop  
Mt. Gretna

#### **Designer Window Fashions**

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Hershey

#### **Mount Gretna Realty**

Serving all your real estate needs

#### **Roland Nissley Architects**

Architectural Services in Mt. Gretna

#### **Thomas Harlan Esquire**

Legal services in Mt. Gretna and Lebanon

#### **Chef on the Go**

Catering your event from Mt. Gretna

#### **Buch Church Organ Company**

Custom built church organs  
Ephrata

#### **Hoaster Gebhard & Co.**

Serving your insurance needs  
Lebanon

#### **Timbers Dinner Theatre**

Mt. Gretna's place for dining & entertainment

#### **Mount Gretna Lake and Beach**

The place to swim & tan in Mt. Gretna

#### **Becky's Gift/Rental Cottage**

Enjoy a vacation in a Mt. Gretna cottage

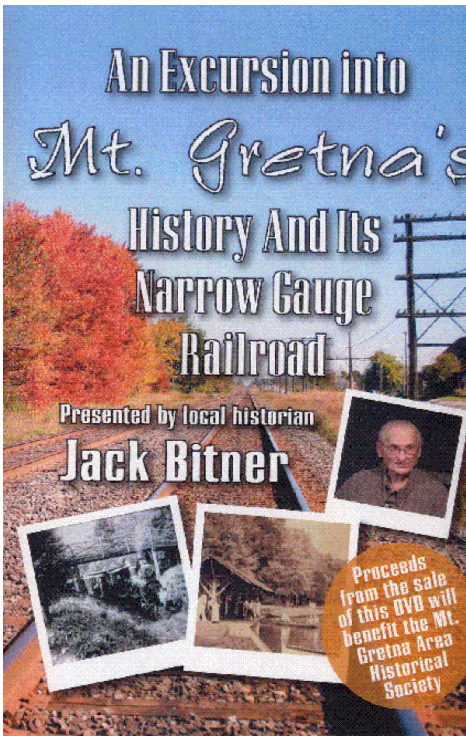
## *Thank You!*

The Society wishes to thank  
all newsletter writers for their  
contributions and hard work.

Ted Martin, Editor



www.mtgretnahistory.org



### MOUNT GRETNA AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Enjoy Jack Bitner's history of Mt. Gretna on a two DVD boxed set which includes the early history of the Chautaugua and the Narrow Gauge Railroad. The boxed set is only \$29.95. Order today or have it shipped for only \$4.00 more.

#### ORDER TODAY

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