



# The Gretna Chronicles NEWSLETTER



Fall Edition 2007

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

By Fred Buch

Wow! What great summer programs we had. Both the Campmeeting and the Chautauqua had numerous programs of great interest and high quality. The attendance was probably the best in recent years.

As many of you know, the Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society prefers to work with the Chautauqua, the Campmeeting and Cornwall Manor in presenting various summer programs. Rather than run competing programs, we have found it very beneficial to co-operate with other groups. With the many summer programs in both locations, scheduling can be difficult. Additionally, we enjoy working with folks in these locations who do not regularly participate in other historical society programs.

The Historical Society, under the Chairmanship of Roland Nissley, had a wonderful celebration

sit down dinner. Congratulations to Jack. Along with Jack's son and daughter, guests were invited to share remarks following the dinner. Lastly, Jack spoke about his life and his love for Mt. Gretna.

Prior to Memorial Day, we were able to do some major landscape work in the front of the Historical Society headquarters. This after spending the winter and early spring working



inside. Again, we had a display on the porch during the Art Show featuring The Carousel Organ and a display case of artifacts.

Many of you asked me when the building would be open. I hesitated to say that I didn't know. There was just so much work that needed to be done for the sake of the structure and to fulfill the requirements of the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry. It seemed like every time we turned around something new was added to our list of things to be done.

of Jack Bitner's 90th Birthday at the Timbers on Monday, July 16th. Over 130 relatives and friends came to celebrate this event at a tasty





In order to keep the overall cost of this project as low as possible, we had a very fine carpenter craftsman who could work alone. When we had a question about code requirements, our own Vice President and architect Roland Nissley was available on ten minutes notice to be on the jobsite with his recommendations as needed.



The painting done by one of my employees, Bob Trautman, John Smith and myself reduced the cost of the project to only the paint itself.

By mid-August, we could see the light at the end of the tunnel. The first floor was 98 percent finished and the lower level was about 87 percent complete. The September and October meetings of your Board of Trustees were held in our Board Room where there is comfortable seating for 18. On Friday, September 7, we had our final Labor and Industry inspection. We passed with only a few minor changes to be made. We are now approved to use the facility.

## *Did you know?*

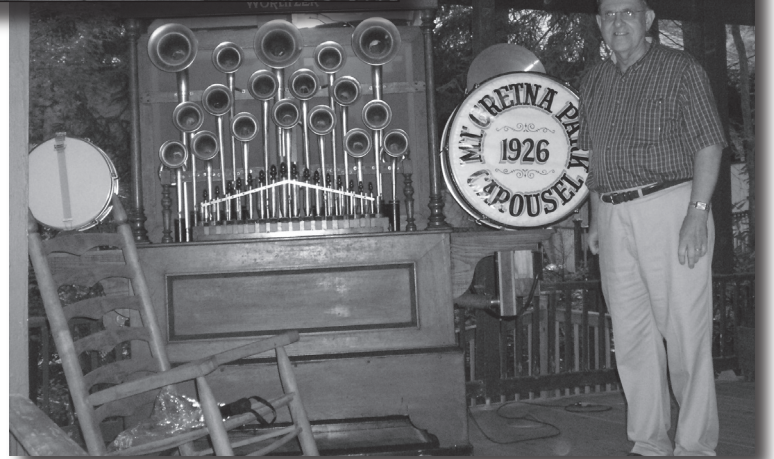
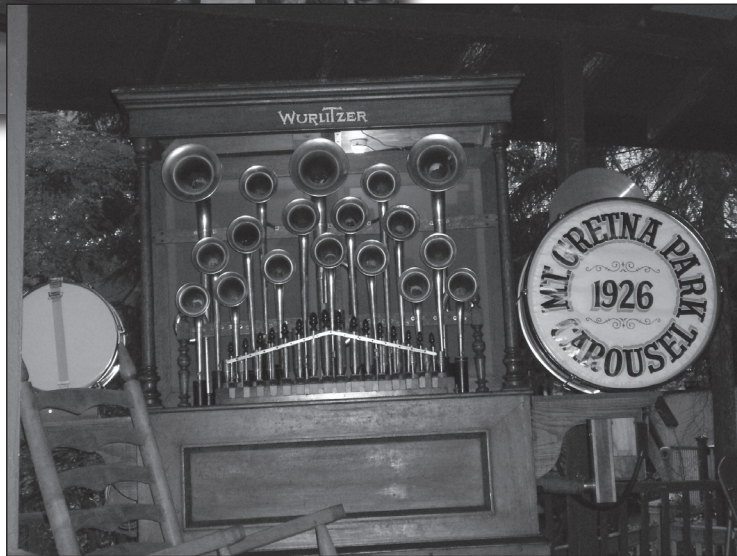
Pennsylvania was the home to the nation's first hospital, library and newspaper.

As of October 1, 2007, we have some minor landscaping issues to address, an intrusion and fire alarm system to be finished and some minor painting to be completed. There are six additional display cases soon to be delivered. These cases were purchased from the Heritage Center of Lancaster County at a very nominal cost.

This fall we need to move office equipment and much of the collection, now in storage, to the headquarters. If you or someone you know would be willing to help move these items, please call me toll free at 1-800-242-3901 and provide your contact information.

Now comes the important part of paying for the facility. A capital campaign is in the process of being formed and a grant request for a significant gift has been filed with a local charitable foundation.

During the winter and spring months, our members will be invited to a special presentation and showing of the facility. We hope that you will be as excited about the potential for this fine facility as we are. We are off and running.





## WHAT HAVE I DONE?

By Tom Meredith

When Robert Coleman signed leases with the Pennsylvania Chautauqua and a little later with the Mt. Gretna Campmeeting Association for the grounds near his park, he had no idea of the forces he was unleashing. The idea that he did have was that financially he could use a little more cash and that attendance at the park would probably increase if there were people living in close proximity.

What he did unleash was the astounding force of social, cultural, and political development, concentrated in two relatively small plots of ground. He certainly could not have conceived of a Campmeeting association that would transform itself from a ten-day spiritual "vacation time" into a "proper, desirable, and permanent residential community!" While he may have suspected that the Pennsylvania Chautauqua was a more stable and durable organization than a United Brethren Campmeeting association, it probably never occurred to him that the Chautauqua members would one day organize themselves into the Borough of Mt. Gretna, splitting off from South Londonderry Township in the process. Yet those two things did happen.

How they came about makes an interesting story, and in each case there is a substantial record of developments. First of all, population growth created the pressure for political solutions. The "salubrious, pine scented Mt. Gretna air" worked its magic on the thousands of visitors who attended Chautauqua's Summer Assembly and the services of worship and Bible study in the Campmeeting grove and in the Tabernacle built there in 1899.

It is intriguing to realize that the auditoriums for the Chautauqua programs and for the Campmeeting worship were built by the same man – John Cilley – at almost the same time. Cilley, a member of the Chautauqua board of trustees and an innovative carpenter-engineer-architect, had erected a round, open-sided auditorium on the Chautauqua grounds in 1892, in time for the first Summer Assembly. On November 29, 1898 the building was destroyed by fire, and Cilley promptly offered to rebuild it. Over in the Campmeeting, the Rev. J. R. Meredith had been appointed chair of a committee to look into building an auditorium.

No record exists of Meredith's specific actions other than his report that John Cilley had agreed to build an auditorium for the Campmeeting similar to the one in the Chautauqua. Both were completed in time for the 1899 summer programs.

## *Did you know?*

Fruits of the fall harvest were made a little easier to prepare thanks to the Pennsylvanian who invented the apple parer

But back to the "magic Mt. Gretna air." People began staying longer and longer, and the separate managements found that they had to extend the periods when electricity and water were supplied; there was more garbage to be collected, more sewage to dispose of. These are municipal problems, and in solving them, the management groups acted like municipal authorities.

The Chautauqua management group contained a mixture of businessmen and religious leaders, Dr. Max Hark, Moravian educator and pastor being the first Chancellor of the Chautauqua Association. The Campmeeting board of managers was originally more heavily weighted towards the clergy – six United Brethren pastors and three laymen—who were charged with managing the Campmeetings under the direct control of the East Penn Conference of the church. The Chautauqua management had no such direct controlling authority.

Chautauqua businessmen may have been better equipped than the Campmeeting pastors to deal with municipal problems, hence their decision to form a fully operational municipality – the Borough of Mt. Gretna – while the Campmeeting authorities tried to continue operating under Conference directives. That changed in 1910, when a threatened lawsuit forced them to recognize the presence of non-church members as Campmeeting residents. Thus the Campmeeting continued to meet its own municipal needs without redesigning the political foundation. By 1989, following a variety of church denomination mergers and changes, the ties between the Campmeeting and the church were completely severed. Today the managers conduct the affairs of the residential community, subject only to the ordinances of West Cornwall Township.

Robert Coleman, if he could know of the success of the two associations he had assisted, would undoubtedly say, "See, I told you it was a good investment."





## FIRE IN MT. GRETNA

By Jeff and Deborah Hurst

While many are familiar with the fire in the Campmeeting in 1949 that destroyed a block of 22 cottages, fewer are likely to be aware of the Mother's Day fire on May 13, 1923 that destroyed 8 cottages on Princeton Avenue.

A news report on the incident indicated that this fire, unfortunately like the one 26 years later, resulted from a faulty stove. Information seemed to indicate that what occurred was that a gasoline mixture needed to start the stoves of that time caught fire and in short order engulfed the cottage of Martha Snyder, the second of the row of cottages on Princeton Avenue. Once the fire started, it was said to have jumped from cottage to cottage. As all of us Gretnans know, we live in extremely close proximity to one another. Sometimes, so close you can't paint between houses without some difficulty. That day this fact led to disaster.

It was said that in addition to Chautauqua and Campmeeting Fire Departments that the Lebanon City department was also called and sent several items of equipment. Furthermore, equipment from Annville, Palmyra and Manheim were on the scene.

At that time the National Guard still had a presence in Mt. Gretna and a complement of troops and equipment joined the fight along with members of the newly formed State Police detachment. These organized efforts were in addition to all the local residents that provided support to the organized fire fighting activities.

Currently, we have a network of fire hydrants that can help serve the needs of fire fighters. But, even in recent fires, the lake is used as a source of water with a valve at the east end always at the ready. At the time of this fire, the major source of water was also the lake. Lines were laid approximately a mile from the site of the fire to the lake. An anecdote from the period, said that there were individuals who were able to procure a supply of explosives with a thought to taking a "proactive" step of blowing up the next cottage in the way of the fire. One can only imagine the lively discussion that ensued. Topics probably ranged from the reaction of the cottage owner, the response from insurance companies to the not so simple question as to how much explosive to use to ensure that the fire would be stopped and on and on. The fire of 1923 was said

*And here's a little  
fizz for your fall.  
Did you know that a  
Pennsylvanian invented  
Root Beer*

to be contained that evening and declared extinguished later that night. The cottages destroyed included those of Frank Becker, Mrs.

Martha J. Snyder, Mrs. Anna Miller, William Deblock, Rev. Dr. W.D. Harpel, Dr. J.H. Mease, EDW. W. Ewing, Frank Devis, Mrs. Kathryn Hauer and George D. Krause.

Information taken from a variety of sources including an article in Lebanon Daily News, Feb. 20, 1995 by Henry Homan

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## 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.



## MT. GRETNA AREA HISTORICAL

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## BUSINESS MEMBERS

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

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A Summer Tradition since 1895  
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### Le Sorelle

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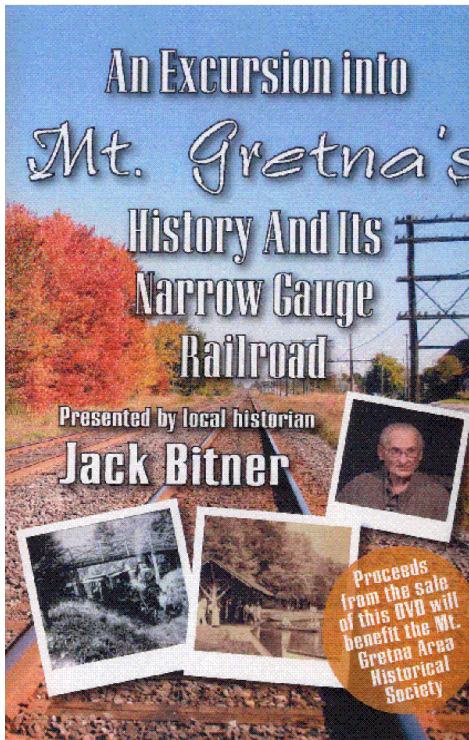
## Thank You!

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

Ted Martin, Editor



www.mtgretnahistory.org



### MT. 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.

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