

FALL 2011

The Gretna Chronicles NEWSLETTER

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Historical Society Thanks Summer Volunteers

by Pat Pinsler, Volunteer Chair

Even though the economy is down, the unemployment rate is up and an unusually wet summer, the Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society Museum had a **great** summer season!


The Museum was open on Saturdays and Sundays from June until August with a grand total of 1,248 registered visitors. In August, during the Tour of Homes there were 262 visitors, and the weekend of the Art Show another 362 visitors. The hours were even extended on those very busy days, calling in a

double shift of docents.

A tribute to the many loyal and generous volunteer docents who served this summer at the Museum: Jack & Jane Anderson, Jan Borden, Claudett Chapman, Pat & Jack Graham. Morris & Pauline Greiner, Renee Hoffman, Tom & Joanne Honeychurch, Ron & Karrie Hontz, Jann Kehler, Mary Haines, George & Sandy Leyh, Ted & Esther Mefferd, Tom Meredith, George & Chris Resh,



Kathy Wall, Joan Zercher, and Mary Zesiger.

Your presence and guidance enriched and informed the experience of the many visitors. And the best part – you remarked to me how very much you enjoyed being there and talking with our visitors! Thanks again. 

Below: Working to preserve the trees that ignite Mt. Gretna in autumn splendor. *Photo by Madelaine Gray*

Historical Society Winter Event

Although the programs for 2012 are in the planning process, mark the calendar for the winter program to be held on Sunday, January 29, at 1:00 p.m., at the Mount Gretna Fire Hall. Look for more details in the January newsletter.

In response to the overwhelming interest, John Brewer from Arborists Enterprises will be

returning for our 2012 summer program series. John will show a new presentation on the restoration and preservation of our precious trees.

Thanks to the great support for the 2011 summer season and the Historical Society is looking forward to another year of interesting, informative programs. 



Promises Made, Promises Broken by Joyce Ebright



Mt. Gretna porch highlight.

Photo by Madelaine Gray

Developed in 1892, The Pennsylvania Chautauqua was located southeast of the Mount Gretna Park on 47 acres of land leased from Robert H. Colman. From the spring to mid-July of 1892, building construction amazingly grew to two dormitories, 23 cottages, a hotel cottage, a two-story lecture hall, a dining room with kitchen, a bookstore, wash rooms and an auditorium built by John Cilley. With that first Assembly of an estimated 8,798 people in attendance, the Pa. Chautauqua got off to a successful start.

But that all changed by 1896. An ongoing dispute between key members of the Pa. Chautauqua's Board of Managers and the Cornwall & Lebanon Railroad came to a head at a board meeting on August 4, 1896. The Rev. George B. Stewart, president of the Board of Managers, presented a letter tendering his and five other member's resignations. This letter was deferred to the following Stockholder's Meeting where a committee of five stockholders was appointed to investigate the issues and report back in two days.

The Stockholder's committee first met with the resigning board members. These members felt that when the Chautauqua was organized in the latter part of 1891, the officers and representatives of the Cornwall & Lebanon Railroad had taken an active and influential part in that organization. "Certain agreements and promises had been made that were thought to be valid. These agreements included an understanding that no Sunday passenger trains were to run to the Park; that sanitary regulations and regulations for the maintenance of public order, namely lamps and police, be under the control

of the railroad, and all associated expenses be paid by the railroad; and that the matter of ticket sharing, rates and rebates were to be placed in the hands of a committee." (Chautauqua Minutes Book, April 4, 1892)


Obviously, while Robert H. Coleman was involved, all seemed to work together in a harmonious fashion. Unfortunately, during the "depression of 1893," Robert Coleman suffered enormous financial losses, and eventually the Cornwall & Lebanon Railroad was placed under the management of B. Dawson Coleman, president, and A. D. Smith, general superintendent.

It was then that the resigning board members saw agreements and promises start to be modified, and the degree of support they thought they had, changed dramatically. The requested five cent increase in shared ticket price was ignored and the sanitary arrangements, lamps, police and other details became an ongoing negotiation. Also the railroad's announcement of Sunday trains to Mt. Gretna which appeared in "The Lebanon Daily News" on July 2, 1895, nearly brought the Summer Assembly to an early close. In addition, a threat was made to move the Chautauqua out of Mt. Gretna if these trains were not stopped. A compromise was quickly reached and Sunday trains were eliminated by the railroad.

The Stockholder's committee then met with the officials of the railroad. They discovered that most of what was thought of as contractual issues presented to the railroad by the Chautauqua, were unknown to the railroad officials. All the agreements the Chautauqua had reached were with Robert H. Coleman, and to make matters worse, none were

in writing. The new Cornwall & Lebanon Railroad management team viewed all promises made by Robert H. Coleman as personal promises and not those of the railroad. In addition, they did not want their business decisions and train schedules interfered with by others. While the Chautauqua wanted to hold the railroad to promises they felt were made, the railroad wanted to limit their involvement and financial exposure.

The Stockholder committee's report was read to the August 6, 1896 Stockholder's Meeting held in the Music Hall. This report agreed with the railroad on most of the issues. The committee's report stated that if Robert H. Coleman had not suffered financial embarrassment, the generous aid he promised might have continued. These promises, however, were his personal promises, which were not in writing, and could not be transferred to the railroad. On the issue of Sunday trains, they plainly stated "your committee submits that this Association, neither at law, nor in equity can say to the R.R. corporation, whether it shall or shall not, run trains on Sunday, as little as said corporation assumes to say to you whether you shall open or close your gates on Sunday."

The committee's report was adopted and the resignations of the board members accepted. Three of these members: J.B. McPherson, H. W. McKnight and G. B. Stewart were immediately replaced. Three others: T.E. Schmauk, J. M. Gossler and W. H. Dunbar continued to serve until the close of the fiscal year of the Association. Then they retired. Promises had been made, but also, promises had been broken! 

Visit the Mt Gretna Area Historical Society museum to view historical documents and other relics of the community's history.

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Along with the 1,250 visitors this summer at the Historical Society's museum, several groups had guided tours with President Fred Buch. One of these was the Questers from Lancaster, Pa., who visited the museum in late August.

On Wednesday, Sept. 21, 16 members of the Annville Forum conducted their meeting on the Museum porch. Then they moved inside to enjoy a box lunch and a program on the history of Mount Gretna, followed by a tour of the museum. In a thank you note from the Annville Forum, they stated that they had "an absolutely marvelous experience." Photo by Madelaine Gray.



In Memory of Special Historical Society Members



In memory
Gladys Norton
1903—2011



In memory
Natalie Smith
1935—2011

P.O. Box 362

Mt. Gretna, PA 17064

The Society home is

206 Pennsylvania Ave. in Mt. Gretna

717.964.1105

We're on the web!

www.mtgretnahistory.org



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Mt. Gretna porches — just as lovely in autumn as they are in summer!

Photo courtesy of Madelaine Gray.