



### Campmeeting History by Tom Meredith

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Of the seven areas that are sometimes named as comprising "Mt. Gretna," the two oldest are the Pennsylvania Chautauqua and the Mt. Gretna Campmeeting. Both were chartered in 1892 and each began their continuous operation that summer, on land leased to them by iron magnate and entrepreneur Robert Coleman. Despite these similarities, each has developed in significantly different ways. They have remained good neighbors although separated physically by Pinch Road and by somewhat different founding purposes.

Before leasing 38 acres of woodland from Mr. Coleman, the Mount Gretna Campmeeting Association,

under another name, had been holding summertime campmeeting revival and evangelistic services at the Stoverdale campgrounds along the Swatara Creek between Hummelstown and Middletown, where certain "nefarious activities," such as the sale of ice cream, soda, candy, cigarettes, and newspapers on Sundays during the time of religious services finally drove the devout United Brethren to pull up stakes and move to Mt. Gretna.

Between March and August, 1892, a Board of Managers consisting of six ministers and three laymen of the UB church presided



over the clearing of the land, the laying out of lots for tents or cottages, the erection of a boarding hall, a dormitory, and a chapel, and arranging for a nine day program of worship, Bible study, and hymn singing. The physical labor involved in all this was supplied mainly by crews from Coleman Cornwall and Lebanon Railroad.

Lots as originally laid out were 20 by 24 feet in size and were (con't page 2)

Below: Peaceful Mt. Gretna in winter.  
Photo by Madelaine Gray



### Historical Society Event Community Show & Tell

Sunday, Jan. 30: Another chance to share a bit of Mt. Gretna's history from personal perspectives.

"Every few years we like to give folks an opportunity to share items with the community," says Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society President Fred Buch. He's urging people with Mt.

Gretna artifacts, documents, photographs and stories to bring them to this special session, which is open to the public.

Buch notes that while some participants may feel comfortable making presentations themselves, others might prefer to have histori-

cal society volunteers describe the items for them. Stories about activities or people of yesterday are also welcome. The event starts at 2 p.m. in the fire hall; there is no admission charge.

(*con't page 1*) used as tent sites by some of the early Campmeeters. However, more than one hundred cottages had been erected before the services, which took place on August 2, 1892. Most of those cottages are still in place today, little changed in outward appearance and still used as summer residences, weekend retreats, or in some cases year round residences following appropriate winterizing.

In 1899, John Cilley, a Lebanon carpenter – engineer and entrepreneur, was asked to build an auditorium on the site of the open grove that was being used for worship services. The result was the spectacular open-sided round structure with its massive conical roof, supported on 23 chestnut posts. It was designed to eliminate the need for interior support posts, giving every one of the 800 or 900 people it can accommodate unobstructed

views to the platform and pulpit.

The Tabernacle has been in continuous use ever since, for worship services, weddings, and funerals. The original Campmeeting services for which it was planned have changed somewhat over the years, although there has never since 1899 been a summer without a planned, spiritual-themed program. A Bible Festival Program Committee today carries on that tradition with a mix of worship services, hymn sings, lectures, dramatic presentations, and outstanding musical programs. The Susquehanna Chorale appears regularly, and Elizabeth von Trapp has made a number of appearances here.

Most of the 228 cottages on the Campmeeting grounds were built between 1892 and 1910; there has been little construction since 1940. Although there may be significant reno-

vations made to the cottages, careful attention is paid to maintaining the original appearance. It is not unusual to find members of the original owner's family still in possession of the same cottage.

An elected Board of Managers still supervises the activities of the Campmeeting guided by the mandate of the original 1892 charter "...to provide and maintain a proper, convenient, desirable, and permanent Campmeeting ground for the worship of God.") This was added in a 1989 revision, occasioned by the withdrawal of the United Methodist church from sponsorship of the Association, the responsibility for maintaining "a proper, convenient, desirable, and permanent residential community."



*Mt. Gretna's Conewago Creek*

*Photo by Madelaine Gray*

## *Old-Fashioned Holiday* by Evelyn Koppel

The third annual Old-Fashioned Holiday Open House took place on December 12. The museum was open and entertained at least 75 people. Docents showed visitors around and answered questions. Refreshments were served in the basement where Amanda Pennypacker was leading both adults and children in craft making. Sid Hostetter had fossils which he gave to those who were interested. Meanwhile, La Cigale hosted six local artists who displayed their wares which were for sale.

Luise Christensen-Howell designs her stained glass work in the true Tiffany method. Her creations include windows, entry-ways, cabinet doors, picture frames, lamps, ring boxes, bird houses, and

various glass mosaics.

Barbara Fishman displayed her funky handmade scarves, oil paintings, watercolors, and Mt. Gretna note cards.

Madelaine Gray displayed her photographs of Mt. Gretna and the 2010 poster of Mt. Gretna images. The poster is dedicated to the MTG Fire Company which receives 10 percent of her sales. In addition, she showed photographs of France and Italy as prints and note cards.

Betsy Stutzman displayed her watercolor and ink impressionistic paintings which reflect her love of nature.

Lydia Dierwechter showed her love of nature and her commitment to recycling that inspire the imaginative handbags and decor that she creates from reclaimed natural fibers

and found objects.

Nancy Perrotti displayed mixed media works that are influenced by the elements and life cycles of nature. Her paintings offer a whimsical, impressionistic approach to landscapes and botanicals, and also include a series of small paintings entitled "funky folk art."

Angela Licata hosted a beautiful display of holiday cookies, candies and other delectables.

Following the open houses, a small band of carolers braved the rain to carol through Campmeeting to the Mt. Gretna Inn where they met the rest of the carolers for more singing and enjoyment of the fire and hospitality of the Inn owners Frank Romonoski and Harry Short who provided hot beverages and sweets.

FYI —Earl Lenington offers Gretna preservation advice. Contact him at 717.964.1882 or [elenington@comcast.net](mailto:elenington@comcast.net).

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*The Society home at  
206 Pennsylvania Ave.  
Mt. Gretna.*

Seasonal Hours:

Sat. 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Sun. 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Winter hours by  
appointment.

Timbers  
350 Timber Road  
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Canoes wait for warmer  
Mt. Gretna weather.  
*Photo by Madelaine Gray*

# Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society

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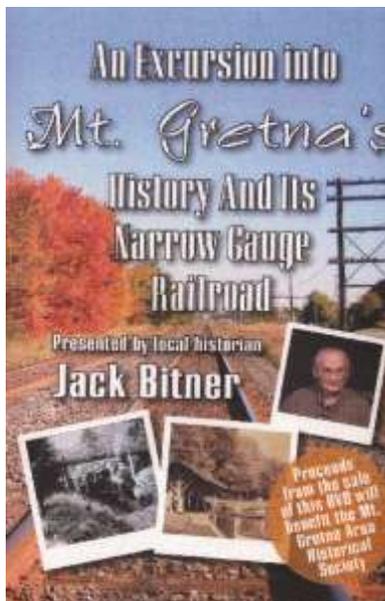
The Society home is  
206 Pennsylvania Ave. in Mt. Gretna  
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