Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society

SPRING 2012



Historical Society Cottage Featured in Calendar



Watercolor painter and Mt. Gretna resident Bill Barlow painting entitled "Golden Hour" shows late afternoon warm autumn sunlight. He captures a feeling of light streaming through the trees with use of warm colors. Cooler colors are used for the "shade" side of the painting. The painting was part of his three painting contribution for the 2012 Mt Gretna calendar. 🗷

The Hotel Conewago History by Joyce Ebright

In the early 1900's, affluent vacationers were flocking to hotel resorts for stays that lasted anywhere from a week to a month. Mt. Gretna with its amusement park, various social, educational and religious programs and proximity to a rail line was a definite candidate for such a hotel. To that end, the Hotel Conewago Company was formed with Asa Weimer, owner of the Weimer Hotel in Lebanon, as the major financial backer. Plans were drawn up by architect, A. A.

Ritcher, and in 1909, a little over 10 acres with a stunning view of the lake was finally purchased from Anne Coleman Rogers of the Coleman Estate and sister of Robert H. Coleman.

This hotel was to be the most modern and luxurious of its day. According to the *Lebanon Daily News*, July 8, 1909, "it was to have 125 well-furnished sleeping rooms with hot and cold running water, electricity and a telephone. The lobby would provide an elegant entry with a grand staircase open to the top floor, a large sandstone fireplace and appropriate furnishings. It was to be conducted as a family hotel with both American and European plans available. All maids and servants were to be in uniform and the chefs brought in from New York. Dinner would be served in a large dining room which could be used for dancing later in the evening. An orchestra composed of ladies would provide the music for the entire season that would extend into October. Transportation was conveniently (con't pg 2)

Inside this issue:

Hotel Conewago Photo	2
Postcard Presentation	3
The Barnes Sisters	4
Campmeeting Walking Tour	5
<i>Jackson Taylor</i> The Blue Orchard	6
MGAHS Board	7
Summer Programs	8



The MGAHS Annual Meeting is June 5, 7:30 pm in the Heights Community Building. All members are invited to attend. «

The Hotel Conewago (con't from front page)

The Lebanon Daily News, July 12, 1909, reported this grand opening to be "one of the most **brilliant** social events in the history of **Mt. Gretna**." provided by an extension of the narrow gauge railroad." Guests seeking indoor rec-

reation could find billiard tables, pool rooms and bowling alleys in the basement. From the veranda, a peaceful view of Lake Conewago could be seen below. Outside, the tennis courts also overlooked the lake while the military parade grounds were located to the left and the artillery range to the rear of the hotel. Scheduled trains were available to transport guests to the depot, amusement park or lake for swimming.

Construction on the hotel began in April 1909, and by July 1st, guests were being received. A small amount of work remained in the basement area. This work was completed by Saturday, July 10th when the formal opening was planned with a dance in the dining room. Many military and civilian guests were invited. The *Lebanon Daily News*, July 12, 1909, reported this grand opening to be "one of the most brilliant social events in the history of Mt. Gretna."

The Hotel's popularity and success lasted well into the 1920's, however, there were three events lining up that would bring the Hotel to its knees. The first was the increasing popularity of the automobile. Vacationers were no longer tied to rail destinations. They had the freedom to go where and when they wished. The second event was the Stock Market Crash of 1929. This event had wide reaching consequences not only for hotel resorts but also for the country as a whole. The final event was the decision to move the National Guard encampment from Mt. Gretna to Indiantown Gap. The parades that once drew numerous watchers would now disappear. By the mid 1930's, the Hotel Conewago was forced to close its doors for good.

On May 16, 1940, the hotel

and surrounding acres were sold to Charles Buckius and his two associates for \$6,500.00. He in turn sold everything of value from the hotel and then demolished it. Stones from the grand fireplace were purchased by a Mt. Gretna resident who used them to add a fireplace in his own cottage. In addition, furniture, silverware and china were bought by many local residents as reminders of the once grand hotel resort.

On June 19, 1944, Charles Buckius sold the land to Sam Light for \$9,500.00. Sam Light and his brothers divided the property into lots for those interested in building permanent, yearround cottages. Sam Light was one of the first to construct a log cabin type home in what is today called Conewago Hills. Two of the homes presently located in Conewago Hills are built on what was once the basement foundation of the Conewago Hotel.03





Postcard Presentation to return this summer

Back by popular demand, Morris Greiner will again present his Mt. Gretna postcard collection. This winter, he shared the most complete collections in existence at a Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society program to a packed house at the Fire Hall.

He will again present "Old Mt. Gretna Through the Eyes of a Postcard Photographer" on Aug. 31, at 7:30 pm at the Hall of Philosophy.

Greiner, whose father once ran the Mt. Gretna telegraph station said Mt. Gretna is more than the focus of a lifetime search for postcards relating to this area, it underscores his own heritage. His father first began working for the military here, and Mt. Gretna is where he spent his childhood years.

His collection now includes hundreds of colored postcards, most in perfect condition and many with personal inscriptions written more than a century ago. Except for three that are copies, all of the original postcards of Mt. Gretna ever printed are now part of his vast collection. (Source: Roger Groce newsletter)

Museum open for summer by Pat Pinsler

The Museum will open for the summer season on June 2, and will be open on Saturdays & Sundays from 1:00 -4:00 pm. There are new displays telling the story of the beginning and the development of Mt. Gretna, in chronological order, from 1883 through the 1920's, along with several furnished typical early cottage bedrooms. There is always a need for additional volunteers to serve as docents, who spend time in attendance at the museum to answer questions and guide visitors through the displays. Members of the Historic Society are invited to join this fun group. Training is provided. It is time well spent, meeting and talking with people who are interested in our community and its history, or reminiscing the time they spent here in years gone by.

If you are interested in serving as a docent, please call Pat at 717-964-3858. **cs**





Renowned, elegant ladies of Mt. Gretna, Jeanette and Edna Barnes pose in their cottage. The rocking chair is the same one that their mother used to rock them when they were young. Photo by Madelaine Gray.

The Barnes Sisters by Joan M. Zercher

The charred trees and smoldering embers created billowing clouds as the light of the cold morning loomed over the snow covered November leaves. This was the scene of destruction after flames roared through the frame cottages and stately pine trees. The previous night's fire razed twenty-one cottages and damaged five others by the leaping flames that blazed through the streets of Mount Gretna Campmeeting.

Firemen from fourteen communities battled five hours to confine the blaze by stretching lines from Lake Conewago and the fire dam at Stoverdale to bolster the water supply from atop the mountain in Mt. Gretna, according to the Lebanon Daily News published November 28, 1949. At that time the second largest fire in Lebanon County's history caused an estimated damage of over one hundred thousand dollars and injured fourteen firemen.

The fire that started in a coal-burning heater at a cottage on the south side of Third Street within minutes spread to adjacent frame cottages. In no time the entire one-block was "transformed into a veritable inferno" that spread southward from Third Street, to Fourth Street and Fifth Street between Markwood Avenue and Otterbein Street.

One of those summer cottages razed by this disastrous fire was owned by

Clarence and Ella Barnes. The cottage was originally purchased in1898 by Ella Jacoby Barnes' grandmother, Frances Hoffman. "My recollections of Mt. Gretna begin when I was eight or nine years old and my great-grandmother had bought a double cottage on the corner of Fourth Street and Markwood Avenue on the Campmeeting grounds," states Edna Barnes.

Edna continues, "One of my outstanding events was going to the spring for water. We filled the bucket or pitcher by dipping it into the spring. This was the only way to have water in the cottage. Sometime later a pump and trough was installed which was safer and more sanitary."

Edna came with her family and sister. Jeanette. from Elizabethtown on the Pennsylvania Railroad to the Conewago Station, then switched to the Cornwall/Lebanon Railroad that ran through the Conewago Valley to Mt. Gretna. Edna and Jeanette enjoyed their childhood days in Mt. Gretna boating on Lake Conewago and feeding the swans, attending the children's services at the ten days of summer Campmeeting, and taking the "dinky train" to Governor Dick. This narrow-gauge railroad, a "hobby venture" of Mt. Gretna's founder Robert H. Coleman, ran from the park around the shores of the lake, behind the Chautauqua grounds to the summit of Governor

Dick – one of the highest points of the South Mountain.

During the hot summer days the sisters also took the train to the tree shaded park for "picnics, to ride the Merry-go-round with the large organ and attend the Farmers Fair." This second larger carousel in the park came from Atlantic City, NJ, and was housed in a tent, had three rows of animals to ride and a brass organ or calliope powered by a steam engine. The Farmer's Encampment was held in a wooden exhibition building east of the park for farmers from across the country. (Today, this is the oldest building remaining in Mt. Gretna and used as a roller skating rink.)

"Crossing the large arched bridge from the Park to the Parade grounds we'd watch the full dress parade held for the Governor of PA," comments Edna. In 1898 during the Spanish American War the Soldiers' Encampment was held at Soldier's Field located west of the park and in later years for the Pennsylvania National Guard. The annual encampment at Soldier's Field is where military inspections, daily parades, band concerts and boxing matches were held for nearly half a century.

Fall season was busy with hunting chestnuts (once the predominant tree in Mt. Gretna), playing in the leaves and taking evening walks with the coal oil (con't next page)



(continued) lanterns through the paths lined with quaint Victorian cottages. Edna says, "We had many happy memories until 1949 when our cottage was one of the many completely destroyed by the fire."

Both Edna and Jeanette having graduated from Elizabethtown High School and Elizabethtown College went on to teach second and third grades at Elizabethtown Elementary School for almost forty years. Edna played the organ, violin and viola and Jeanette

played the cello. They taught private lessons and shared their love of music playing at the Elizabethtown United Church of Christ and in three local symphony orchestras, including Harrisburg, Hershey and Lancaster.

Even though the sisters loved to travel to places like Japan, Germany and Panama, they treasured their fond memories of Mt. Gretna and loved to return in the summer. In 1975 the sisters purchased another summer cottage on Mills Avenue between Fourth and Fifth Street. Over the next thirty years they shared their love of music and artistic talents with their Mt. Gretna neighbors. They were Gretna Theatre board members, members of the Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society and active in the Mt. Gretna Fire department. They sold their Mills Avenue cottage in 2008.

The sisters shared their life together for 89 years until Jeanette's death last July. Edna continues to live at Masonic Village and the talented oil and watercolor painter has an art gallery in her home. She recently celebrated her 96th birthday with her Elizabethtown and Mt. Gretna friends.

Some of the best-known summer residents, the "Barnes Sisters" gained a reputation of being elegant, graceful women. In 1981 their manicured cottage was painted by artist Eva Bender and later used for the cover illustration of the Mt. Gretna Summer Calendar. Edna wrote these words in 1977 ... "all the happy memories and many new ones have made me happy to be <u>one</u> of the senior citizens of Mt. Gretna."

This charming, nostalgic mountain community that grew from a picnic stop in the lush gardens of the forest enchanted the "Barnes Sisters" for a lifetime.



Left: Edna at her 96th birthday party. Above: Photograph of Jeanette's 90th birthday party, Sept. 2010. This was her last birthday. Surrounding her are Rupert Bullard, Judy Bojko, Barbie Hoffsommer, Barbara Mark, Edna, Dave Adams (in back) Mary Kopala, and Victor Bojko. Photos by Madelaine Gray.



Walking Tour of

Campmeeting

Join Historical Society Board Member Ron Hontz on a Campmeeting History Walk, Sat., June 30, at 11 am. Meet at the Tabernacle to learn the history of Campmeeting when/how it was founded, view location of the fire (story on previous page) and what is now the park. The walk will also review some of the cottages – ones that remain in the same family, those that were connected to the cottage next door, and any other items of interest including the whimsical name of cottages. *Photo by Madelaine Gray* **CS**



Jackson Taylor will lecture at the Mt. Gretna Hall of Philosophy, Friday, July 13, at 10 am, as part of the Chautauqua Writers Series and Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society

Summer Programs. Taylor is the author of *The Blue Orchard,* a Depression-era novel that takes place in Harrisburg, Pa., and surrounding areas. A visit to Mt. Gretna is mentioned in the story.

Taylor used several local historical societies to research his book and will talk about the importance of historical societies in communities as well as other subjects.

Jackson Taylor to speak in Mt. Gretna

For more than twenty years Taylor has directed the Prison Writing Program at PEN American Center and recently has acted as an advisor to the Anne Frank Center USA's Prison Diary Project.

Taylor also helped found the Graduate Writing Program at The New School in Greenwich Village, New York where he often teaches a popular class in narrative form and structure. He also teaches at Mediabistro, as well as The Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen.

His poems have appeared in Sleeping Fish, Barrow Street, LIT, Witness and the anthology "What's your exit?: A Literary Detour through New Jersey." He holds a BA from Columbia University and an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College.

Taylor's debut novel *The Blue Orchard* was published by Simon and Schuster in January 2010. **C3**



Visitors to the Historical Society Museum can view furnished rooms with furniture and clothing donated from historic cottages in Mt. Gretna. The museum also holds the MGAHS archives where visitors can research history and view photographs. This summer, the first floor show cases feature new displays. Come visit us! *Photo by Madelaine Gray*.

Historical Society Museum Artifacts

Our Mission: The Society is charged with preserving the heritage of the entire Mount Gretna area, including Mount Gretna Borough, the Pennsylvania Chautauqua, Mount Gretna Campmeeting, Mount Gretna Heights, Timber Hills, Conewago Hill, Stoberdale, areas to Colebrook once occupied by the Pennsylvania National Guard, and areas of Cornwall which involved the Coleman family.

Please support our business sponsors

Jigger Shop

717-964-9686

Photography

710 5th Street

717-964-3118

P.O. Box 100

717-964-3130

717-964-3034

717-964-2100

Mt. Gretna Inn

16 Kauffman St.

Beach

Madelaine Gray

Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064

Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064

Mt. Gretna Lake and

Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064

Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064

Mt. Gretna Realty Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064

Buch Church Organ Co. 1391 Main St. Ephrata, Pa. 17522 717-733-6614

Chef On The Go P.O. Box 194 Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064 717-964-3541

David L. Garver Insurance 809 Holly Lane Lebanon, Pa. 17042 717-274-5810

Gretna Theatre P.O. Box 578 Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064 717-964-3627

Gretna Emporium 1 Carnegie Ave. Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064 717-964-1820

Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society Board

Fred N. Buch, Chairman & President Deborah Hurst Trustee & Secretary Cindy Myer Treas. & Fin./Endowments Jack Anderson Trustee & Oral History Larry Bowman, Trustee Dr. David Bronstein, Trustee Dr. Patricia E. Gibble, Trustee Robert Gokey, Trustee & Military Shawn Harbaugh, Webmaster Ronald Hontz, Trustee Dr. Jeffrey Hurst Trustee & Museum Comm. Chair Earl Lenington Architectural Preservation Chair Kerry McGuinness Royer Trustee & Newsletter

Thomas L. McMahan, Trustee Peggy O'Neil, Trustee Pat Pinsler Trustee & Volunteer Chair Marla Pitt, Trustee, Newsletter, Nominating Chair Rev. Michael Remel, Trustee Advisory: Connie Dnyer, Bulk Mail Supervisor Stepben R. Gibble, Esq., Honorary Trustee Roland Nissley, Honorary Trustee Peter S. Seibert, Honorary Trustee David Wood, Honorary Trustee Joan Zercher, Newsletter CS Roland Nissley, Architect Timber Road Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064 717-964-2235

Taylor Miller Pipe Organs 26 E. 10th Ave. York, PA. 17404 717-845-6504

Timbers 350 Timber Road P.O. Box 10 Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064





Thanks to the members of

the Mt. Gretna Area



The Society home at 206 Pennsylvania Ave., Mt. Gretna Seasonal Hours: Sat. 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Sun. 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Research Library is open Saturdays starting in June 9-11:30 a.m.

Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society

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

The Society home is 206 Pennsylvania Avenue in Mt. Gretna 717.964.1105

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





Explore Mt. Gretna. Check the Mt. Gretna Arts Council summer calendar for other program listings. *Photo by Madelaine Gray*.

Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society Summer Programs

Friday, June 1, 7:30 pm, Chautauqua Hall of Philosophy Opening of the 120th Pennsylvania Chautauqua

Tuesday, June 5, 7:30 pm, Heights Community Building MGAHS Annual Meeting

Monday, June 11, 7:00 pm, Mt. Gretna Community Library Book Talk: *Island Treasure* by Ann Hark (with library)

Saturday, June 30, 11:00 am, Meet at Campmeeting Tabernacle Campmeeting History Walk. Ron Hontz 610-585-7250

Friday, July 6, 7:30 pm, Chautauqua Hall of Philosophy Video/Lecture: Caring for your Mt. Gretna Trees. John Brewer

Friday, July 13, 10:00 am (with Chautauqua) Chautauqua Hall of Philosophy Writers Series: Jackson Taylor discusses *The Blue Orchard*

Friday, August 3, 7:30 pm, Chautauqua Hall of Philosophy Video and Archaeology at the Huber, Steigel, Coleman, Elizabeth Furnace in Brickerville. Daniel Snyder.

Friday, August 31, 7:30 pm, Chautauqua Hall of Philosophy Old Mount Gretna Postcards as seen through the camera lens of a post card photographer Presenter: Morris Greiner 🕼