

SPRING 2013

The Gretna Chronicles NEWSLETTER

Campmeeting to Celebrate National Register of Historic Places

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The Mount Gretna Campmeeting is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A celebration of this accomplishment is scheduled for Sunday, May 26, at 7 p.m., at the Mt. Gretna Campmeeting Tabernacle. Join your Mt. Gretna neighbors and friends for this proud event! 

Mt. Gretna Farmers' Encampment by Joyce Ebright

Robert Coleman was always looking for ways to increase ridership on the Cornwall & Lebanon Railroad line to Mt. Gretna. Such an opportunity presented itself in an article appearing in the September 9, 1889, *Harrisburg Patriot*. This article announced that the farmers who held their annual "Grangers' Picnic" at Williams Grove were dissatisfied with the location and would be seeking approval to move their picnic to Mt. Gretna. Robert Coleman's business acumen kicked in, and he immediately made them an offer. He would provide a sizeable tract of land located east of the amusement park free of charge for farmers and exhibitors. This offer was


quickly accepted.

The first Mt. Gretna Farmers' Encampment was scheduled for a week in mid-August 1890. This encampment was more temporary in nature and was organized under the auspices of the Agricultural Implement Exhibitor's Union. Approximately thirty acres of land were cleared and sixteen permanent platforms measuring 150X32 feet were constructed. These platforms would prove insufficient for the daily crowds that attended thus requiring numerous temporary ones to be added. Exhibitors were not charged if they built their own platforms or buildings, and a substantial number of tents were available for rent.

A large, wooden exhibition building was erected near the Cornwall & Lebanon tracks where a siding from the tracks to the building was established to handle machinery and livestock that had to be brought in. That building is still present today, and is known as the Mt. Gretna Roller Skating Rink.

One of the major events of this first encampment happened on August 16, 1890, when what was called the "grand illumination" took place. From a special railroad car parked along the siding, a generator, probably driven by a steam engine, illuminated the park and encampment with electricity. Thus Mt. Gretna moved from *(more next page)*



A membership to the MGAHS helps to preserve a piece of your favorite community's history! 

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.

Farmers' Encampment (con't from front page)

traditional kerosene lamps to the age of electric lighting.

The Executive Committee of the Mt. Gretna Farmers' Encampment deemed the first encampment an unparalleled success with over 20,000 people attending daily. On April 9, 1891, a resolution which reaffirmed one adopted on March 4, 1891, requested "that all farmers and all organizations of farmers by whatsoever name known, take part in the encampment to be held at Mt. Gretna in August next and that a circular be issued by the Executive Committee of the Mt. Gretna Farmers' Encampment extending the invitations broadcast through the State and Union." Several of the organizations that would have received such an invitation included: National Granges, National Live Stock and Breeders Association and the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union. To give an idea of the scope of this broadcast, according to the *Lebanon Daily News*, July 1, 1893, the National Farmer's Alliance decided to attend the encampment and sent out announcements to their more than 3,000,000 members through their 1,100 papers.

The above resolution not only moved the encampment from a temporary to permanent status, but it also created a vision for it. According to this resolution, "farmers were to be called from their lonely, isolated fields to enjoy a season of bodily rest, physical recreation and social contact for the interchange of views pertaining to their industry, for intellectual improvement, for observation and mutual instruction."

Farmers and their families could explore new ideas, new equipment and new household products, all located in one



place. During the week, displays of carriages, wagons, mowers, threshers, pumps, sewing machines, fencing and household aids could be seen. Dealers and salesmen were on hand to demonstrate and answer questions about their products. So important was this encampment to local businesses that many ran announcements in the *Lebanon Daily News* informing customers they were suspending work on a particular day to give their employees an opportunity to attend the encampment at Mt. Gretna.

In addition to the displays, demonstrations and live stock judging, music and entertainment were ever present. Each day lecturers were invited to speak on a wide variety of topics ranging from butter to cheese making, Prohibition, trade and its effects on agricultural and even China when the Boxer Rebellion was so prominently in the news. Because there was a large "Dutch" population in attendance, several lectures were given in German. Obviously, with so many voters in one location, you could count on politicians showing up. Candidates for office, Senators, Congressmen, the U.S. Secretary of Agricultural and, of course, Pennsyl-

vania's Governor Hastings who spoke on August 20, 1895, were in attendance.

By the second year of the encampment, thirty more acres were cleared for an estimated 100,000 people to attend. Additional platforms were added and exhibition buildings constructed. In 1893, more buildings, including an auditorium to seat over 5,000 people with a view to increasing seating capacity to 12,000 on short notice, were constructed. Again in 1897, platforms were expanded to 85,000 square feet and twenty more acres cleared for exhibits. By 1900, the encampment had more than 100,000 square feet of platforms and more exhibition buildings.

Success always brings competition, and so it was with the encampment which, by 1897, was known as the Mt. Gretna Agricultural, Mechanical and Industrial Exposition. As the automobile gained in popularity and offered the ability to move more freely, additional Farmers' Expositions and Fairs sprang up across the nation and across Pennsylvania. Lebanon County had a very popular Fair, as did Frederickburg, York, Allentown, (con't next page)

Postcards illustrate our history



Shown above is a postcard photo of the Mount Gretna Farmers' Encampment. At left (previous page) is the Mount Gretna Roller Rink today. It is the oldest historical building in the community. ❧

(con't from previous page)

Lancaster, Reading and Williams Grove. Most states were now hosting their own popular Expositions and Fairs. State and County Farmers' Institutes were also being formed to offer more comprehensive instruction in modern methods and techniques of farming.

With all the success that the encampment had enjoyed, there must have been incredible shock to read in the February 23, 1903, *Lebanon Daily News* that it no longer existed. The Mt. Gretna Agricultural, Mechanical and Industrial Exposition had been "absorbed" by the National Live Stock and

Breeders Association of New York, which was looking for a place for their annual outings. By mid-August 1903, the new entity was named the Mt. Gretna Fair.

How long the Fair remained in Mt. Gretna is unknown. I could not find anything further on it. More than likely, it remained for several years before being absorbed into another entity. In any case, if you visit the area where this huge encampment would have been located, the only structure still there is the Mt. Gretna Roller Skating Rink. ❧

Chautauqua Filing for Historic Designation



This fall, Photographer Madelaine Gray cataloged Chautauqua cottages for an initial filing for this neighborhood of Mt. Gretna to be considered for Historic Designation. A committee headed by Earl Lenington is working on the narrative. Stay tuned! ❧



Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society Chair Report by Fred Buch

Please join us for the Historical Society Annual Meeting on June 4, 2013 at 7:00 PM in the Gretna Heights Community Center. This meeting is for members only.


In addition to a report on the State of the Society, we will be electing members to the Board of Directors, discussing our need for volunteers and will answer questions from our members.

It is amazing to think that your Mount Gretna Area Historical Society celebrates nine years of existence in 2013. Begun in June of 2004 with nothing more than an idea, a prodigious portion of faith and a group of excited people, the organization has become a

museum with a large collection of artifacts and a library/research center acclaimed by researchers, housed in a vintage cottage owned by the Society.

The Board of Directors took part in a strategic planning session hosted by the Timbers, in April, to plan for the future. The discussion included where have we been and where do we wish to go and how do we get there. The leader of our discussion was Mary Foltz, President of "Service Counts" from Annville. All Directors attending were pleased to have gained a new vision of our future.

One of the goals discussed by the Directors at the strate-


gic planning session was the need to retire the mortgage on our building. The \$300,000.00 debt has been reduced to approximately \$141,000.00. It is imperative that we raise the funds to clear that debt so that the organization can move forward with its plans for the future. You can assist us and memorialize, honor, and name family or friends by purchasing a showcase, a room or an area of the facility as others have already done. Each object or area will receive an engraved plaque lettered with information provided by you. Contact me at (717) 466-6433 or 964-3571 for details. 

Planning Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society Future

by Larry Bowman

On Saturday, April 20, the Board of Directors of the Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society gathered at The Timbers Restaurant for a much-anticipated planning retreat aimed at mapping the organization's future, as well as identifying opportunities for expanding its efforts to preserve, share and promote awareness of Mt. Gretna's rich history.

Facilitated by Mary Foltz, President of Service Counts!, a management training and leadership development firm based in Annville, and nurtured by the warm hospitality provided at the Timbers by Tap Roberts, the half-day planning retreat generated a wealth of ideas and recommendations in the areas of organizational growth, historic preservation opportunities and potential future programs for promoting greater awareness of the Society, its mission and the history of the Mt. Gretna area.

The next step in the Historical Society's planning process, begun with the April 20 gathering at The Timbers, was the presentation by Mary Foltz of the retreat's findings to the Historical Society Board at its regular meeting on May 7. Discussion followed at that meeting and is expected to continue at future Board gatherings on which of the many worthy ideas generated at the Board retreat will be pursued and in what order of priority. 



Shown at the conclusion of the April 20 Board retreat are, from left, Mary Foltz, Historical Society President Fred Buch and Society Board Member Marla Pitt.

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

Summer Hours beginning June 1:

Saturday & Sunday 1-4 p.m.

Research Library is open Saturday, 10 a.m.—12:00 p.m.

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



Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society 2013 Summer Programs

May 31: "The 5 Top Issues Facing Education in Pennsylvania" Program in conjunction with PA Chautauqua

July 5: "Mt. Hope Iron Furnace, Chemical Charcoal Works and the Community Established by the Grubbs" Presenter: Dr. William Rhodes

July 6: "On-Site Visit to Mt. Hope" Details to be announced at the program

July 26: "Mt. Gretna's Place in the 250th Anniversary of Lebanon County"

August 30: "Love & Devotion: Robert H. Coleman and Anne Rogers" Presenter: Jim Polechinski

All programs at 7:30 PM in the Chautauqua Hall of Philosophy unless otherwise noted.

Mt. Gretna History Walks with Ron Hontz

Saturday, June 29, at 11:00 am

Gretna Heights History Walk

Meet at the Firehouse parking lot.

Saturday, July 13, at 11:00 am

Mt Gretna Train Station, Amusement Park, and Narrow Gauge History Walk

Meet at the path to the Rails to Trails.



*There are many quiet places to relax
and enjoy spring in Mount Gretna!*