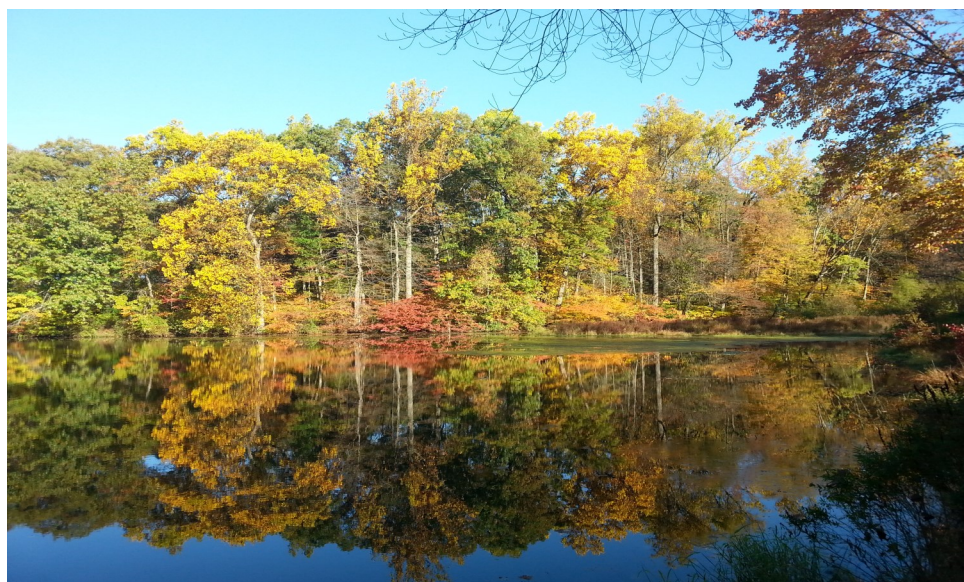


FALL 2014

# The Gretna Chronicles NEWSLETTER

## Inside this issue:

<i>MGAHS Chairman's Report</i>	1
<i>The Timbers— A Family Legacy in Mt. Gretna</i>	2
<i>Business Sponsors</i>	5
<i>Treasures from the Attic</i>	6
<i>MGAHS Board</i>	7



## *MGAHS Chairman's Report*

*By Fred Buch*

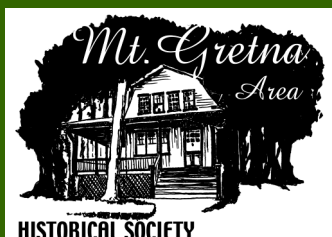
Bring together ten or more people, ages eighty and above, who grew up in Mount Gretna and you are bound to hear of life during a time when the pace was much slower and high-tech was transitioning from radio to television. Such was the case at the Tenth Anniversary Celebration of the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society on June 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Timbers. "Gretna old timers" told their stories, and members, their families and guests enjoyed a wonderful evening of food, drink, and reminiscing.

This year we are celebrating the Historical Society's tenth anniversary. Formed by a group of interested folks following three springtime exploratory meetings in 2004, the first official meeting was held on June 2004 at the Gretna Heights Community Building. By July 2004, we were incorporated as the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society, and awarded 501C3

non-profit status in November.

During the summer of 2007, the cottage that is now our headquarters was purchased and a year long project of restoration and renovation was begun. This included lifting the cottage off of its sandstone and cement block supports and creating a basement for use as an office, meeting room, and storage vault for artifacts and archived documents. The museum was formally dedicated and opened in spring of 2008.

Historian Jack Bitner's collection makes up the nucleus of our historical materials, along with thousands of photographs, artifacts, maps, books, posters, booklets, and objects donated by other residents. Our museum displays have been updated by board members Pat Pinsler, curator, and Glin Atkinson, professional decorator.



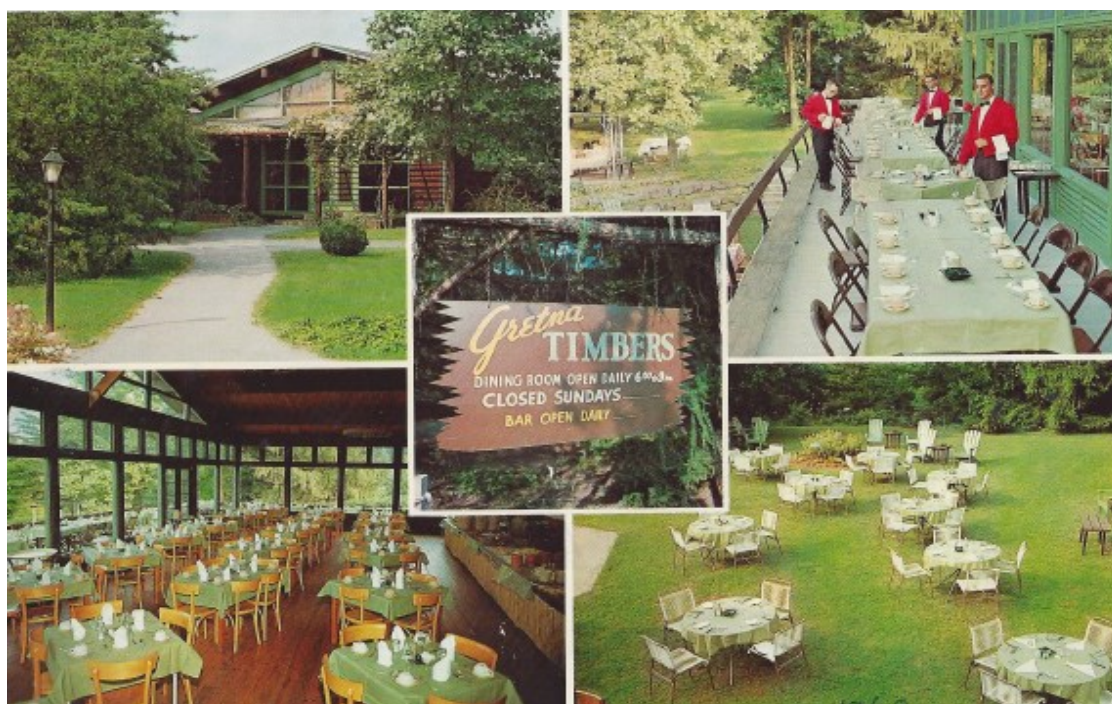
*A membership to the MGAHS is a great holiday gift for your friends and neighbors! ☞*

*Chairman's Report (Cont.)*

On behalf of our Board of Directors, I want to thank the many volunteers who worked as docents, archivists, researchers, newsletter writers and publishers, as well as those who help maintain the property exterior and interior. Additionally, thank you to those who have contributed to the mortgage reduction and operating expenses. This permits us to continue "free admission" to the museum and library/research areas. Your financial assistance also

provides for the much needed controlled environment for the valuable collection. Our Board of Directors and our Committees will be working throughout the winter months preparing for the 2015 season. If you wish to visit and/or bring guests to see the museum, or if you need information from our research center, we will be open all winter by appointment. Call Pat Pinsler at 964-3858 for an appointment.

## *The Timbers - A Family Legacy in Mt. Gretna* by Marla Pitt



### *The Timbers Inside and Outside Dining 1962* (Courtesy of Eleanor Otto Collection at MGAHS)

In 1952, John Briody had just completed his four year tour of duty in the Korean War. Unbeknownst to John, architectural plans were underway for construction of a building in Mt. Gretna, Pennsylvania, which would significantly affect John's life path, the future generations of his family, and help to shape the culture and character of Mt. Gretna.

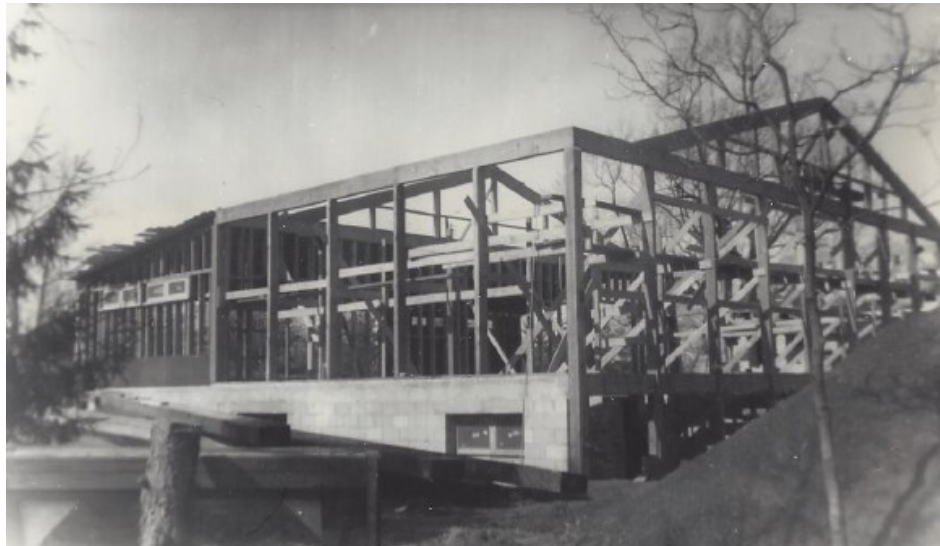
Members of the Otto family were the first to own and operate the venue known by locals today as "the Timbers." In 1953, Fahrney and (Eleanor) Ernie Otto watched as the construction of their uniquely designed restaurant began to take shape on the old site of the Officer's Quarters for the Pennsylvania National Guard. Water and sewer systems were already in place, making it a prime location for the project. Large timber beams created the cathedral ceiling in the main dining room, and massive picture windows and glass French doors opened onto



*The Timbers (Cont.)*

the second floor balcony. The restaurant plans included a masterfully crafted brick fireplace in the lower level, with French doors opening onto a patio area overlooking a lovely woodland setting with breathtaking view.

In May of 1953, with plans well underway to open the restaurant, the Ottos sought help from the general public in naming their establishment. They posted a contest advertisement in the *Lebanon Daily News* in mid-May offering ten free dinners at the restaurant to the person who submitted the best name. The Ottos settled on calling their new location The Gretna Timbers, and opened their dining room and bar in early summer. The prelude to the Briody family story began in 1954, when John Briody began tending bar at the new Mt. Gretna restaurant. The "Hickory Room Bar" was located on the lower level, so upon arrival guests would make their way downstairs to the bar to order drinks and cocktails. Guests wishing to enjoy a hot entree would carry their drinks upstairs to the main dining room, or remain downstairs for sandwiches. Mrs. Ernie Otto created the artistic ambience in the Hickory Room Bar by painting unique murals on its many walls. The murals depicted scenes from popular musicals such as *Can, Can*, the French cafe scene from *Frankie and Johnny*, and the most popular musical of the day, *Music Man*. John Briody enjoyed tending bar at the Gretna Timbers. One evening in 1954, he said, "I sure would like to own this one day." Six years later, John's dream would become reality, but much would happen in John's life in the course of those six years.



***The Timbers Restaurant Under Construction 1953***  
(Courtesy of the Eleanor Otto Collection at MGAHS)

In the winter of 1954, John married Joan (pronounced Jo Ann) Sforza. The couple lived on Locust Street in Lebanon for a short time before moving into an apartment in Mt. Gretna above the restaurant then called the Stober House. In 1955, John and Joan renamed the Stober House, *Briody's*, but the venue today is known as the Mt. Gretna Hideaway. Following their move to Gretna, John and Joan found themselves proprietors of not one, but two bars and restaurants: Briody's (or Mt. Gretna Hideaway), and a second bar, called The Web. The Web building is no longer standing, but was located directly across from the Hideaway's present day parking lot. The decision was made to close the Web Bar, shelve the liquor license, and move the license to Quentin, where John's parents also ran a restaurant. Following John's father's passing, John transferred the license to a personal friend, who at that time owned Fairview golf course in Quentin.

John and Joan's family grew during the mid to late 1950s. A son, Bart was born in December 1954, shortly before they moved into the apartment above the Stober House. Kathleen, also known as Tap, was born in 1956.

*The Timbers (Cont.)*

The twins, Rachel and Becky, soon followed in 1958. Life was very full for John and Joan as proprietors of Briody's. Besides running their restaurant, they rented rooms to equity actors working in summer stock at Gretna Theatre. But "The Big Move," as the family called it in later years, was on the horizon.

The Big Move occurred when John and Joan purchased the Mt. Gretna Timbers from Fahrney Otto in 1960, and built living quarters onto the Timbers building. As the new proprietors of the Timbers, they immediately changed to a new approach in the food service. The Timbers was the first restaurant in the area to introduce the idea of buffet dining. John and Joan wanted to serve a delicious hot meal simultaneously to a large number of people, enabling their guests to make the "curtain" for the productions at the Gretna Theatre. Their approach made summer stock theatre and dining at the Timbers a big part of the Mt. Gretna experience in the 1960s.

During the Briody's early years, the Timbers upstairs dining area showcased both indoor dining as well as outdoor dining under the stars on the second floor porch, overlooking a lovely lawn area surrounded by mature woodland. Tables were set with white linens in the main upstairs dining room and on the upstairs porch, where guests enjoyed the buffet dining and a beautiful view. The lawn below also offered a lovely dining experience. Tables set with white linen decorated the lawn area. In the early years, the buffet was not offered in the winter months, but steaks and other hot entrees could be enjoyed in the intimate downstairs setting with a cozy fire always blazing, much like it does today. Because of Pennsylvania's Blue Laws at the time, the restaurant was never open on Sundays. A day of rest was always welcome with the family's busy schedule in the 1960s.

In the winter of 1969, John Briody received a phone call from Gene Otto, Sr. Gene informed John he was not going to be producing the summer theatre for the upcoming season and wanted John to know in the event he may be interested in taking over the Gretna Theatre. The Timbers booked many large groups over the summer months, offering buffet style dining in conjunction with attending performances at the Theatre. What would happen to the Timbers' bookings if there was no summer stock theatre in Gretna?

Although they were skilled restaurant entrepreneurs, the Briodys knew nothing about the production of summer stock theatre, but decided to take a leap into unknown territory. The couple rented the Gretna Theatre from the Chautauqua and hired Charles F. Coghlan to direct the plays at the theatre. Equity actors came from New York to work in the many seasons of summer stock theatre that followed. The Briodys produced most of the then popular plays, such as *Red Head*, *George M. Cohan Story*, *Plain Betsy*, and *On A Clear Day*, while at the same time running the Timbers.

The 1970s proved to also be a busy time for John Briody and family. In 1970, they renovated the Timbers restaurant. They decided that the high cost of producing summer stock theatre, resulting from unionization of equity actors hired in the play programs, was no longer economically feasible. Instead, the Briodys built an addition on to the Timbers and produced a Dinner Theatre entertainment venue that opened during the summer of 1976. In 1977, the family also bought and renovated Gretna Inn, the former Abraham Kauffman family home, that is now a popular bed and breakfast in Mt. Gretna.

John Briody felt strongly about community and public service over his lifetime. In 1974, John ran for Lebanon County Commissioner to bring awareness about the emerging problem of drug and alcohol abuse in the state. The family conducted an Annual Summer Picnic for Children with Cerebral Palsy during summer months. And in 1979, when no one else would provide food service during the height of the TMI scare, the family served 2,000 meals a day.

John and Joan's offspring have continued the family's tradition of providing food service, and entertainment to the regional community. Their daughter Kathleen (Tap) manages the Timbers, coordinating all the large events upstairs, downstairs dining, hires the cast each year for their summer Dinner Theatre, and enhances the ambience with her seasonal decorations and welcoming smile. Their son, Bart is the proprietor of the Maple Street

*The Timbers (Cont.)*

Café in Lebanon, and on busy nights, especially First Fridays, he also helps serve at the Timbers. Rachel is the full time chef at the Timbers and also works as an appraiser. Becky has her own catering business, "Chef on the Go," but on busy evenings Becky joins Rachel in the kitchen.

On First Fridays it is truly a "family affair": Joan takes reservations, Kathleen runs the dining rooms, and chefs Rachel and Becky are in the kitchen. Bart helps to serve tables, and may take a break to play harmonica with jazz pianist Andy Roberts, Kathleen's husband who is the Musical Director for the Timbers, and American Music Theatre. Andy and Kathleen's daughter, Nicole can be found singing at the mic when she is home from Berklee College of Music, where she is a music business major. Bobby, Bart's son, is a computer engineer, but also has his own band and may join the family on First Fridays. The Briodys have made a great contribution to both the restaurant and art industries. Since its construction, the Timbers has significantly added many threads to the complex tapestry which creates Mt. Gretna's special character and unique personality.

## ***Please Support Our Business Sponsors***

### **Glin Atkinson, Interior Design**

Interior Design & Display  
Mt. Gretna, PA 17064  
717-964-3421

### **Buch Enterprises LLC**

1391 West Main St.  
Ephrata, Pa. 17522  
717-466-6433

### **Chef On The Go, Caterers**

P.O. Box 194  
Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064  
717-964-3541

### **David L. Garver Insurance**

809 Holly Lane  
Lebanon, Pa. 17042  
717-274-5810

### **Jigger Shop**

PO Box 520  
Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064

### **Madelaine Gray Photography**

PO Box 219  
Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064  
717-964-3118

### **Mt. Gretna Realty**

PO Box 338  
Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064  
717-964-2100

### **Gretna 3r's –Roofing, Remodeling , & Repairs**

Chip O'Neal  
717-228-0930

### **Gretna Graphics**

113 Timber Cove  
Mt. Gretna, 17064  
717-279-1433

### **Hershey Psychological Services**

**David A. Rogers, Ph. D.  
& Nancy L. Rogers, M.S.**  
431 E. Chocolate Ave.  
Hershey, PA. 17033  
717-533-5311

### **Taylor Miller Pipe Organs**

26 E. 10th Ave.  
York, PA. 17404  
717-845-6504

### **Timbers Dinner Theatre**

350 Timber Road  
P.O. Box 10  
Mt. Gretna, Pa. 17064  
717-964-3601



The Society's home at  
206 Pennsylvania Ave., Mt. Gretna  
Winter Hours by Appointment  
Please 964-3858 or 964-3813





## *Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society Board*

Fred N. Buch, Director & Chairman

Glin Atkinson, Director

Jack Anderson, Director

Larry Bowman, Director & Vice Chairman

Dr. David Bronstein, Director

Connie Dwyer, Director & Secretary

Dr. Patricia E. Gible, Director

Dwayne Heckert, Director

Susan Hostetter, Director

Ron Hontz, Director

Cindy Myer, Director & Treasurer

Pat Pinsler, Director

### *Advisory:*

*Dr. Jeff & Deborah Hurst*

*- Publications Chairpersons*

*Stephen R. Gible, Esq.*

*- Honorary Director*

*Shawn Harbaugh*

*- Webmaster*

*Earl Lenington - Architectural*

*Presentation Chairman*

*Teresa Marks - Membership Secretary*

*David Wood - Honorary Director*

*Thanks to the members of the Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society who are receiving their newsletter by e-mail. This helps to curtail printing and postage costs and allows downloading the entire newsletter in full color. To receive your newsletter by e-mail, visit the website at [www.mtgretnahistory.org](http://www.mtgretnahistory.org) and click on newsletter or e-mail [info@buchorgan.com](mailto:info@buchorgan.com).*

# Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society

FALL 2014

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](http://www.mtgretnahistory.org)

---



*Bright Colors,  
Chilly Winds,  
Shorter Days,  
Quiet Village,  
Ah! Fall*



