

Spring 2014

# The Gretna Chronicles NEWSLETTER

## ***MGAHS Celebrates 10th Anniversary***

***By Vice Chairman Larry Bowman***

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It was in the spring of 2004, that a group of individuals began meeting to discuss the idea of establishing an organization to preserve and promote the rich history of Mt. Gretna. In June of that year, the first official meeting of the Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society was held. By August, the organization was incorporated, and three months later it received its 501(c)(3) non-profit tax exempt status. The rest, as they say, is history.

The Historical Society's first membership brochure soon followed and incorporated information drawn from the summary history of Mt. Gretna written by Mt. Gretna historian, Jack Bitner. Through the efforts of Pat Attwood, the Historical Society's first Membership Chair, the Society's first membership brochure was distributed to residents of the Mt. Gretna, as well as surrounding communities. The Society's membership quickly grew to over 200 members. Around this same time, programs on Mt. Gretna's history were presented by the Historical Society. Mt. Gretna-related artifacts and documents began being donated to the Society; and became the nucleus for displays at its informational programs and during the summer Art Show in the Hall of Philosophy.

In spring, 2007, the Pennsylvania Avenue cottage was purchased that would become the Historical Society's headquarters and museum for displaying and securing historic Mt. Gretna artifacts and documents. The cottage was renovated and opened to the public by summer, 2008. Since then, it has continued to attract increasing numbers of visitors eager to learn about the history of this unique community.

As the Society's 10-year anniversary approaches, we wish to recognize the tireless contributions and vision of Chairman Fred N. Buch, who has since MGAHS inception devoted endless hours and resources to make the organization such a success. We are eager to celebrate this anniversary milestone and what has been accomplished over the past decade in preserving and promoting Mt. Gretna's history. Join us this summer as we celebrate the Society's past and future with our 10-year anniversary banquet, our popular cottage home show, a recognition of the Mt Gretna Art Show's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and a presentation on the history of the Camp Meeting movement in America.

**Mark your calendars! The Anniversary Banquet will be held on Sunday, June 22 at the Timbers.**



***A Blue Bird of Happiness***  
*Photograph by Lynn Wenger*

## *The Time Before by Tom Meredith*



*Stoverdale United  
Methodist Church,  
Formerly the  
Stoverdale  
Memorial Church  
Built in Honor  
of Edward Stover  
In 1872*

This story is dedicated to Drew and Susan Hostetter, who generously provided funds for the purchase of a large collection of historic postcards. Through their efforts the curtain of time has ever so slightly been pulled back, allowing us to glimpse the pre-history of Mt. Gretna. As some of the newly obtained postcard photos reveal, the United Brethren cottages at a place called Stoverdale could just as well have been located in Mt. Gretna as on the bank of the Swatara Creek. By making it possible for the Historical Society to acquire these postcards, the Hostetters have enabled us to appreciate the delightful appearance of the earliest meeting place the United Brethren established before making Mt. Gretna its home base.

Stoverdale was a commercial campground providing a summer income for its owner, Edward Stover, a prosperous businessman who had a fine house in Harrisburg, operated a thriving lumber business in Hummelstown, and owned a large amount of land in Derry Township. The campground occupied a choice spot on the east bank of the Swatara Creek, midway between Hummelstown and Middletown. Convenient access by railroad from both towns as well as the metropolis of Harrisburg helped make the campground a popular profit center for Mr. Stover. There are indications that some United Brethren congregations had begun holding annual campmeetings there as early as 1866.

In 1870, Stover's son, Edward, fell ill while attending Dickinson College. He returned to his parents' Harrisburg home, where he died in July of that year. Stover was so shaken by the loss of his son, which he took to be a sign from

*Visit the MGAHS  
Museum to view  
historical documents  
and other relics of  
the community's  
history.*



*"Renewing Old Ties" at Stoverdale Camp Grounds, Near the Swatara Creek,  
Hummelstown, Pa.*



*The Time Before (cont.)*

*Ladies Enjoying  
the Picturesque  
Setting at the  
Stoverdale  
Campground*



a Higher Authority, that he set aside a small tract of his land for a cemetery and built the Stoverdale Memorial Church adjacent to it. That lovely little white church still houses an active United Methodist congregation and is located south of Hummelstown at the intersection of Wood Road and Middletown Road. And for good measure, he also renamed the campground as a memorial to his son.

During the 1870s and '80s the Hummelstown *Sun* obligingly reported on plans and activities at the Stoverdale Memorial Campground, activities that included much more than the UB religious gatherings. The dashing young men of the area reportedly emptied the local livery stables of horses on weekends, either riding them or hitching them to buggies and driving out to Stoverdale. They engaged in impromptu (or possibly pre-arranged) wild and dangerous races, raising such clouds of dust that the preacher's stand became almost invisible to the worshippers sitting on the outer rows of benches.

Of course, businessman Stover saw to it that his campmeeting store was well supplied with soda water, ice cream, cigarettes, and newspapers, selling these items every day and throughout the weekend. If he regarded the loss of his son as a sign from Higher Authority, he definitely did not think economic gain was contrary to a Higher Power's intentions. He refused to shut out customers, no matter how many times Rev. Hiram Dohner and other United Brethren figures insisted that the store should be closed on Sunday.

There may have been other difficulties

between Stover and the UB congregation as well. For whatever reasons, there was no campmeeting in 1890 at Stoverdale, but by August of 1891 the UB folks were coming back. The Rev. Isaiah Baltzell's book and music store was open, and John Lehman, mathematics professor at Lebanon Valley College, dedicated his musical talent to the camp music program. All nine members of the board of managers were on hand, and the main topic of their discussions was what to do about the "nefarious trafficking" in sodas and ice cream and other secular temptations on Sundays.



*View of Swatara Creek From the  
Stoverdale Campgrounds (Circa 1890s)*

## *The Time Before (cont.)*

Through the spring and early summer of 1891, Rev. H. B. Dohner – he was president of the Campmeeting board of managers as well as Presiding Elder of the Conference – had been attending meetings in Lebanon County with a group of men who were planning to establish a Pennsylvania State Chautauqua. As these discussions came to a head, Robert Habersham Coleman generously offered some choice sites near his new Mt. Gretna Park. Dohner's group could have a very advantageous lease on a plot southeast of the Park, on the south side of the Conewago Creek, if they chose to relocate.

Rev. Dohner presented Coleman's proposal – a twenty year lease on thirty acres of land for one dollar – to the Board of Managers and then to the membership at large at their annual business meeting on August 19, 1891. A measure of the distress with conditions at Stoverdale can be seen in the decision to “dispense with” the morning worship service in order to hear the propositions about Mt. Gretna. In the end, when the members voted, 102 favored relocating to Mt. Gretna; only 4 were willing to stick it out where they were. So it was that after a year of somewhat secular activity by the managers, the first in the unbroken series of summer campmeetings opened in Mt. Gretna on August 2, 1892.

The subsequent history of Stoverdale is somewhat less happy than that of Mt. Gretna. Campmeetings continued there until at least 1928, and at some point after 1892 a large pavilion was built. Edward Stover died in 1903, leaving a second wife and second son also named Edward to continue operating the campground. At some point ownership was transferred to the Edward Stover Trust, with residents inhabiting a collection of small homes on the original campground, and paying monthly rent to the Trust.

As late as the 1990s a small group of residents still lived in some of the modest homes on that land. They carried on a long battle against eviction into the 21st century, ultimately losing out when the trust was dissolved. The land has been sold to the neighboring Deer Run residential developers. So while Mt Gretna remains an active residential and Campmeeting community, Stoverdale has fallen victim to “progress”.

## *A Call for Volunteers*

In 2013-2014, our volunteers played a large role in the operation of MGAHS. Under the direction of Pat Pinsler, thirty volunteers acted as tour guides or docents at the Museum. Docents received information on Mt. Gretna history and training in providing educational tours to the hundreds of visitors to the Museum. **Many Thanks to the docent volunteers** who made the last season such a success. Those interested in participating in the museum docent program should contact Pat Pinsler at 964-3858.

Volunteer Carol Buck has begun to overhaul our archiving system for the numerous historical materials donated by local residents and other citizens. Carol holds a Masters Degrees in American Studies from Penn State University. She also volunteers at the State Archives and at the Dauphin County Historical Society archiving in their collections. During the cold winter months, Carol, Pat Pinsler, and Glin Atkinson began inventorying all MGAHS collections. Carol has also created and maintains our Facebook page. **Many Thanks to Carol !**

In order to finish the archiving project and bring our research library up to date, we have a great need for many more volunteers to assist with inventorying and entering data into the database. The work schedule is flexible to suit your busy schedule and travel. Please call Pat Pinsler if you wish to help with the archiving process at 964-3858.

MGAHS has also placed an announcement offering an educational internship with local colleges. This internship will provide undergrad and grad students interested in museum studies with hands-on experience in identify and archiving historical documents and artifacts, design and installation of new exhibits, and data entry using Past Perfect software. Students interested in apply for the internship should contact Pat Gibble at 964-3147.

**The Museum will open for the Summer Season beginning on May 31 through Sept. 1—Saturdays & Sundays from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. The Research Library is open Sat. 10 a.m. to Noon and by Appt.**



## *Treasures From the Attic*

Over the past 10 years since MGAHS's founding, local citizens have generously donated hundreds of historical documents, maps, original photographs, postcards, and artifacts to the Museum. These heirloom treasures have enriched the historical museum displays and added new information about the unique history of the Pennsylvania Chautauqua, Campmeeting, Mt. Gretna Park, Narrow Gage Railroad, Conewago Hotel, Penna. National Guard, Coleman Family, and Cornwall. We wish to thank Drew and Susan Hostetter who made possible our newest acquisition of a large postcard collection (see previous article). Their generous funding enabled purchase of the collection, which was part of Drew's father's estate. Our special thanks goes to Barney Myer who attended the estate action and made the successful bid for the postcards.



*Banana Split Dishes from Kauffman Park Ice Cream Stand (Circa 1925)  
Donated by Nancy B. Hatz*



*Pitcher, Bowl, and Bath Set from the Conewago Hotel  
Donated by Pauline Greiner*



*Hat Emblems & Performance Medals Awarded to Men  
of the Pa. National Guard—Donated by Morris Greiner*

A special **Thank You** to all those who have entrusted MGAHS with historical materials over the past 10 years. If you have an item you may wish to donate to the Museum, MGAHS has created a new gift acquisition form. The Archival Staff will review your donation and discuss either temporary loan of the items or permanent donation to the organization.

Please contact **Fred Buch at 466-6634** or **Pat Pinsler at 964-3858** for donation information.



*Metal Quoits Used by the Quoit Club of Mt. Gretna (Circa 1912-1960)  
Donated by Morris Greiner*

## *Upcoming Programs/Events*

### Programs

- Sat. May 31—Cottage Builder's Show—Hall of Philosophy 12:00-4:00
- Tues. June 3—Annual MGAHS Membership Meeting— Gretna Heights Building, 7:00pm.
- Sun. June 22—10th Anniversary Banquet at the Timbers
- Fri. June 27—History of American Campmeeting—Presenter: Rev. Michael Remel. Hall of Philosophy. 7:30 pm
- Fri. July 11—Gretna Theatre—The Coghland Years. Presenter: Jack Graham. Hall of Philosophy. 7:30 pm.
- Fri. August 8—History of the Mt. Gretna Art Show—Hall of Philosophy. 7:30 pm.
- Fri. August 29—Postcard Memorabilia Show—Presenter: Jim Paul.. Hall of Philosophy. 7:30 pm.

### History Walks

- Sat. June 28—History Walk—The National Guard, Lake and Hotel.. Meet at the Parking Lot up the hill from Mt. Gretna Pizza. Ron Hontz. 11:00 am.
- Sat. July 12—History Walk—Chautauqua Grounds—Meet at the Mt. Gretna Information Center. Ron Hontz. 11:00 am.

*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.*

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717-964-3601



**The Society's home at**  
**206 Pennsylvania Ave., Mt. Gretna**  
**Seasonal Hours: Sat. & Sun. 1-4pm**  
**Research Library is open— Sat. 10—Noon.**

**Please Call for an Appointment. 964-3858 or 964-3813**

*Thanks to the members of the Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society who are receiving their newsletter by e-mail. Let us know if your email address has changed. Receiving the newsletter via email helps to curtail printing and postage costs. You can download the entire newsletter in full color. 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).*



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

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

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We're on the web!  
[www.mtgretnahistory.org](http://www.mtgretnahistory.org)

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*Aconite—Harbinger of Spring*





