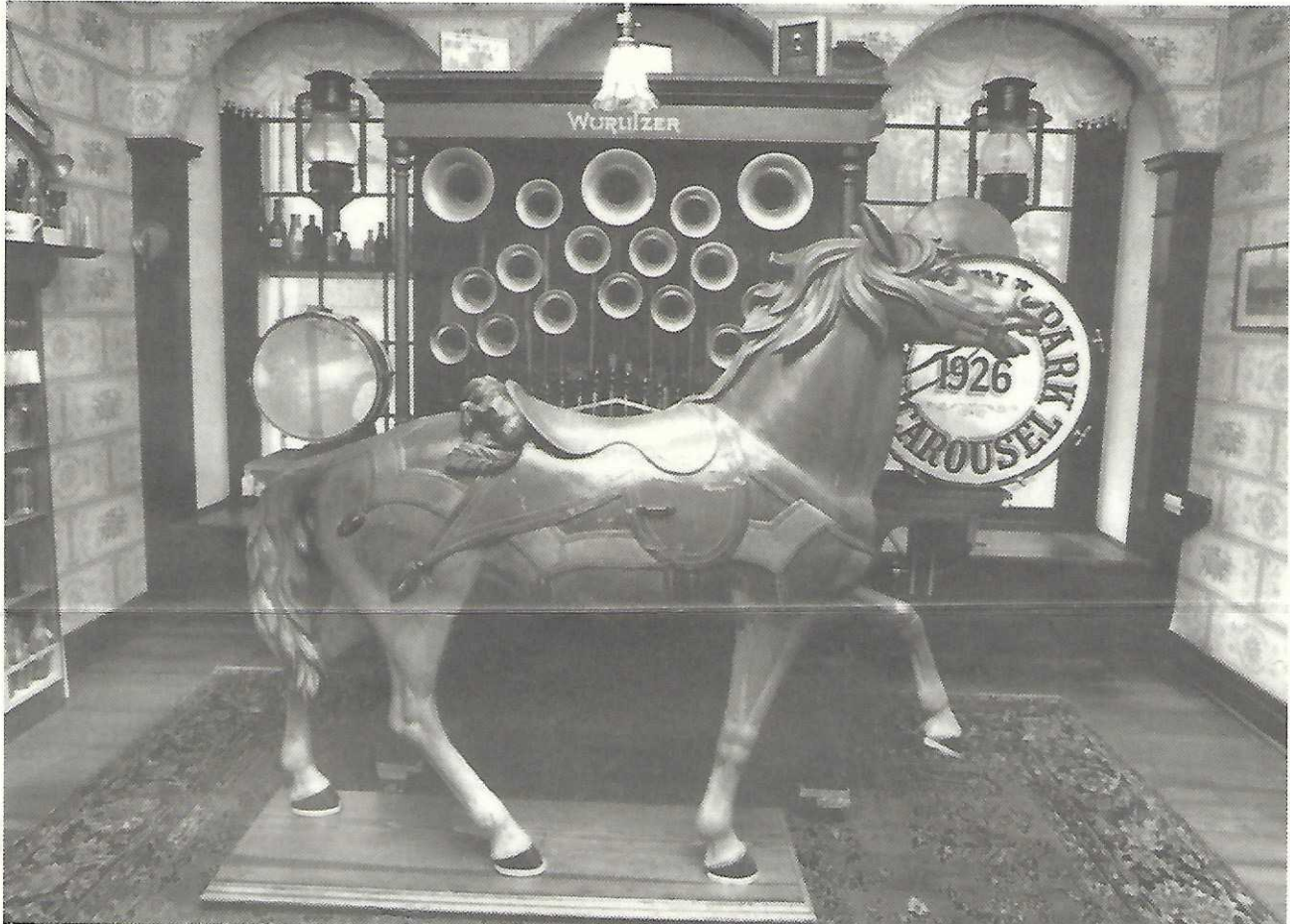




HOW IT ALL BEGAN

by Jack Bitner



Shown here is the 1926 carousel organ, or band organ as it was also called, where it resided in the dining room of Mr. Bitner's Muhlenberg Avenue cottage. The horse in front of the organ was also retrieved from the carousel.

All Mt Gretna knows Jack Bitner as "Mr Mt Gretna," the dedicated collector-historian who for many years has dreamed of preserving the artifacts and history of the Mt Gretna area. We took the opportunity to ask Jack how it all began. Here is the story, in his own words:

MT GRETNA RELICS

Mankind is afflicted by many ailments, but none is so pervasive and incurable as "Collectitis." It can be contracted in childhood or late in life, and once smitten there is no recovery. The symptoms can range from a passion for postage stamps to locomotives, postcards to carousels and can follow one to -- sometimes even into -- the grave.

My affliction started innocently enough:

I picked up a few Narrow Gauge Railroad spikes during my idyllic childhood summers at Mt Gretna. The symptoms lay dormant for eleven years of Air Force and college time, but then I again began spending summers in Mt Gretna. The symptoms worsened; I acquired a metal detector and my collection grew beyond metallic objects to include photographs and relics of all kinds related to Mt Gretna's past.



INSPECTION SERENDIPITY

As every good steward should do, the Buildings and Grounds Committee of the Chautauqua Board of Managers makes an annual inspection of Board-owned buildings. This inspection recently brought Committee members, along with Superintendent Bill Care, into the Hall of Philosophy. After a thorough check of the first floor, some Committee members, including Mike Russell, accepted Superintendent Care's invitation to join him in examining the upper floor.

For Mike, this examination turned into a trip back in time. Already moving around in a century old building, Mike looked into a passageway beside a partitioned section referred to as "the jail." (Nobody is quite sure about the origin of "the jail" or to what extent it might have been used for the incarceration of "prisoners".

Mike's interest, however, was in a pile of browned and dusty newspapers on a shelf; they were issues of The Pennsylvania Chautauquan, dating back to at least 1905 and possibly earlier.

Excerpts from the masthead reprinted here, convey the "Spirit of the Age."

The Pennsylvania Chautauquan is the official organ of the Pennsylvania Chautauqua, Mount Gretna Park, Pa. It is published quarterly during the year and daily, except Sunday, during the Annual Summer Assembly--July first to August fifth, inclusive. It contains the proceedings of the Board of Managers, the official program, reports of addresses and lectures delivered during the Assembly, as well as synopses of class work, personal items of interest, the daily news of the Assembly, book reviews, notes on education, and all matters relating to the C. L. S. C. and the Chautauqua system of instruction. Contributions from Chautauquans and others interested in popular education are solicited.

TERMS OF SUBSCRIPTION

For the Year, Quarterly and Daily, 50 cents, if paid in advance. 75 cents if not paid in advance.

For the daily issues at the office or news stand two cents per copy.

LEMONADE FROM AN OMISSION

Making lemonade from the lemon life hands you is sometimes easier said than done. Today's newspapers seem to make no effort to produce lemonade; they simply hide a little "CORRECTIONS" box on an inside page. Read what Editor Deatruck of The Pennsylvania Chautauquan had to say:

Hamlet With Hamlet Left Out

The Chautauquan printed several days ago a list of clergymen resident at Mount Gretna. This list, tho it contained a large number of names of gentlemen of the cloth was, after all, very much like Hamlet with Hamlet left out. For in some

strange way the names of two veteran and devoted Chautauquans were omitted. We refer to Rev. Dr. J. Max Hark and Rev. J. K. Knerr. We suppose the omission must have been due to that strange fatuity of mind which sometimes overlooks what is near and important and sees that which is remote and less significant. It is almost as bad a blunder as that of the boy who counting the boys rescued from an overturned boat, overlooking himself, found his count always one short. Apologies are due to these two friends for an omission entirely unintentional.



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

by Fred N. Buch

AN EXCITING BEGINNING

As I contemplated what should be said in this, the first Chairman's Report, so much came to mind that room will not permit me to cover all of it. A review of the highlights of the beginnings is all that space will allow.

After several months of meetings, the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society was founded on June 29, 2004 at a meeting in the Mount Gretna Heights Community Building at 7:30 P.M., with thirty-three people signing on as members. Proposed by-laws were adopted. The elected interim Board of Trustees met immediately following the public meeting and elected officers. They were Fred N. Buch, Chairman; Michael Russell, Vice Chairman; Peter Seibert, Secretary; and David Wood, Treasurer.

A second public meeting was held in the Campmeeting Tabernacle on July 12, 2004 with approximately one hundred people present despite a downpour of rain. Additional people became members.

Trustee Tim Nieman submitted an application to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania which resulted in the Society's being officially incorporated on July 13, 2004. The next and most complicated application was begun and was submitted to the Internal Revenue Service on October 22, 2004 to become a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. By mid December we were approved by the IRS, which means that all contributions to the Society are tax deductible to the extent of the law.

Committees worked during the fall months to create a Long Range Plan and a Collections Policy. Our first public program, presented as a slide show by long-time resident Pat Attwood, was held

on Sunday, November 21, 2004. A series of programs that will be presented during the summer of 2005 has been developed; it will be interesting to young and old alike.

Just recently, members and friends from Florida to Mount Gretna contributed funds that enabled us to make our first major purchase of artifacts at the estate sale of the late Jim Hunley.

Thanks to a very talented Board of Trustees, your Historical Society has accomplished more in nine months than most other organizations do in two years. Their plans will keep us moving forward in the year 2005 with more exciting events to come!

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Guidance for the young Mount Gretna Area Historical Society is provided by a dedicated group of talented individuals who, along with the officers, will be responsible for the growth and welfare of the Society. They are:

Dr. David Bronstein
Dick Smith
John Feather, Jr.
Deborah Hurst
Jeffrey Hurst
Thomas Mayer

Timothy Nieman
Roland Nissley
Michael Trump
Pat Attwood
George Resh
Peggy O'Neil



Some of the members of the first Board of Trustees of the Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society. Standing, from left, Roland Nissley, Fred Buch, Mike Russell, John Feather, Dr. David Brondstein, seated, Tom Mayer, Dick Smith, Tim Nieman, Michael Trump.



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By 1959 my mild "Collectitis" had exploded into an obsessive passion. Traveling through northern Pennsylvania that summer, Jeanine and I stopped to look at antiques in an old barn. As we were leaving, I happened to glance into a chicken coop. A large, framed lithograph caught my eye. Looking carefully at it, I saw that it was titled "Camp Siegfried, Mt Gretna, 1885." While I realized that it portrayed the first encampment of the Pennsylvania National Guard at Mt



Gretna, I had no idea of why it was named "Camp Siegfried." I did not haggle over the modest price and came home the happy owner of what extensive research indicates is the only copy of the lithograph known to exist today.

About this time I realized that living memory of Gretna's early years was virtually gone. This realization and the finding of the lithograph established in me a resolve to preserve her history. That summer I started research into how Mt Gretna came to be. While I pursued all possible sources, the microfilm files of The Lebanon Daily News in the library of the Lebanon County Historical Society was the primary source of information.

My passion for Mt Gretna relics really became obsessive now, and I searched eagerly and constantly, finding and collecting hundreds of Narrow Gauge Railroad spikes, braces, brakeshoes, and rails. The most interesting relics actually came from the bottom of Lake Conewago and the hill behind the Chautauqua.

At the bottom of the lake, in the swimming area, I found several sets of **PRESERVE OUR WAY OF LIFE!** wheels and car couplers. They were used as raft anchors after the NGRR was discontinued in 1915. Gene Otto, Sr helped me dig them from the mud when the lake was drained in the spring.

On the hill behind the Chautauqua an NGRR train had been derailed in June, 1892. More than thirty years later, I was searching the site and found two sections of rail and a wheel broken from its axle. It required a small expedition to retrieve these weighty items and get them to my cottage.

The Cornwall and Lebanon Railroad Park area held a treasure trove of early Mt Gretna relics, including the bell from the park dining hall, a seat from the pre-1900 Ferris Wheel, and many smaller items. These I obtained in various ways from the old buildings still standing, but in retrospect, I feel they should all be considered gifts to Mt Gretna from Gene and Midge Otto.

One winter, while I was still working for the Glenn L Martin Company and living in Baltimore, I was studying an early photo of the park and realized that the benches in the park were old railroad type reversible seats -- obviously from the Narrow Gauge Railroad! That spring, I came early to Gretna and found Gene Otto burning trash in the park. When I asked him if any of the benches remained, he said, "I burned the last of them yesterday." Sure enough, there in a pile of ashes were all the metal fittings. After half a century, had I missed saving a bench by one day? Fortunately, "No." I eventually found a couple of benches under the carousel building, and one has been reserved for appropriate display.



Our most spectacular relic is the Wurlitzer Carousel Organ which came to the park in 1926, together with a large carousel from the Philadelphia Toboggan Company. It had been stored in the Casino building for perhaps 40 years -- vandalized, rained on, and chewed by mice. I "acquired" it (with Gene's later blessing) and spent thousands of hours restoring it. It is currently being reconditioned in York and will return to Gretna this spring. The nostalgic music of the band organ will again welcome visitors to Mt Gretna.



More recently acquired relics include the telegraph set from the Mt Gretna station of the Cornwall and Lebanon Railroad and the grading calculations for the Narrow Gauge Railroad, written in the precise hand of chief engineer Michael Riley. And what might have been Governor Dick's shovel was dug from the floor of a charcoal burner's hut not long ago.

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LONG RANGE PLANS

For some folks, long range planning means figuring out what to do next weekend. For others, it means budgeting and saving for college expenses and retirement. But for the Mt Gretna Area Historical Society, "Long Range Planning" has meant the establishment of specific goals the Board believes will best ensure the growth and functioning of the Society. Accordingly, a detailed Long Range Plan was adopted by the Board in October, 2004.

The Plan basically covers three large areas of growth and activities: Membership, Artifacts, and Finances. The ultimate goal in terms of membership would be having every Mt Gretna property owner become a member. Developing memberships from the Mt Gretna business community is another aim.

Finances must be considered in any long range plan. The Board of Directors accepts this responsibility and will be developing specific plans with a variety of strategies and goals.

COLLECTIONS POLICY

The Mt Gretna Area Historical Society has as its main mission working to "preserve the past, and educate the present for the future," and the Society anticipates that many items reflecting the past history of the Mt Gretna area will be offered to it for safekeeping and public display.

Therefore the Society has adopted a comprehensive Collections Policy, a detailed statement of how donations will be accepted, recorded, and cared for.

Items being sought for the Society's collection include things made in Mt Gretna, or owned by Mt Gretna families, or anything relating to any of the cultural programs that have been so prominent in Mt Gretna's history.

A Museum Committee, reporting directly to the Board of Trustees, is responsible for managing the Society's collections. Details of the acceptance process, and registration and cataloging of all items accepted for the collection are carefully spelled out in the Collections Policy.

As the Society's collections grow, it is quite likely that there will be opportunities to have some items placed on loan to other organizations; the conditions of such loans are spelled out in the policy, as is the process of "deaccession," by which duplicate items may be removed from the collection. Although this process is rarely used, it is a sensitive one and requires a recommendation from the Museum Committee and final approval from the Board of Trustees.



Just outside the gate at the east entrance to the Campmeeting, "Princess Eagle Eyes" had her curio shop — a wonderful collection of exotic gifts, some of which may still be found among the treasured possessions of Mt Gretna residents.



MEMBERSHIP REPORT

The Mt Gretna Area Historical Society has come a long way since its founding less than a year ago. Individual and family members total more than 220 at this writing; in addition, eight area businesses have joined the Society.

Membership is open to all who are interested in finding, preserving, and learning about the history of this area.

The classes of membership are:

Individual	\$10 per year
Family	\$15 per year
Business	\$50 per year

More than 150 members and friends attended our first public program at which Pat Attwood showed a great collection of Mt Gretna pictures and postcards.

To join the Society, mail a check for the appropriate amount, payable to the Mt Gretna Area Historical Society to the Membership Secretary, P.O. Box 362, Mt Gretna, PA 17064.

BUSINESS MEMBERS

We especially appreciate the support of the following local business firms and ask that you support them as you have need of their products or services.

Hoaster and Gebhard & Co.

Insurance Consultants, Lebanon

Timbers Dinner Theater Restaurant

Timber Road, Mt Gretna

Designer Window Fashions

Blinds and Window Treatments, Mt Gretna

Buch Church Organ Company

Custom built church organs, Ephrata

Le Sorelle

Serving lunch and breakfast, Mt Gretna

Jigger Shop

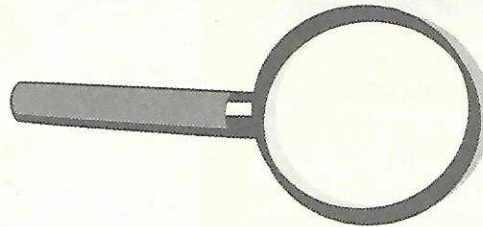
A Summer Tradition since 1895, Mt Gretna

La CIGALE

"From Provence to You", Mt Gretna

Remember When

An Unusual Gift Shop, Mt Gretna



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Mt Gretna has an unusual and interesting history that should not be lost. Therefore, the Mt Gretna Area Historical Society will establish an oral history program that aims to find and record the events of the past as they are stored in the memories of participants or observers who are still living.

Accordingly, this means that the Society wants to identify some people who like to visit and talk with neighbors to be trained as oral history interviewers. Training is

not difficult and will probably require only two sessions with an experienced oral history interviewer.

Also needed are people to be interviewed, people who have been long in this area and want to talk about their experiences and their memories.

If you fit either (or both) of these categories and would like to participate in the Oral History Program, please contact Jack Anderson at jackandjane@msn.com or by phone at 717-964-1975.



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A few weeks ago at Reninger's Antique Mall I picked up one of the thousands of books there. This one proved to be the official record of Pennsylvania troops in the Spanish-American War, including the name of every man who served, and a brief history of every outfit's time at Mt Gretna in 1898. It is autographed by General J P S Gobin, commanding officer, for whom the camp was named in 1899.

Our most priceless relic is the original Chautauqua minute book, 1891 to 1907. It had been lost for 80 years until I found it in the Dauphin County Historical Society. It is an unfailing source of information about Gretna's early years, and with the cooperation of Peter Seibert, then curator of the Society, a trade was arranged that brought the Chautauqua minute book back to Gretna. Incidentally, Peter is now a cottage owner in the Campmeeting and a pillar of the Mt Gretna Area Historical Society.

As the Society continues to mature under the capable leadership of Fred Buch more relics will come to light. It is my fond hope to add a few myself by whatever means!

CENTURY OLD SOCIAL REGISTER

From the pages of the Pennsylvania Chautauquan it is quite possible to compile a seasonal guest list for many of the cottages. Some examples are given here, culled from the issue of Thursday, July 27, 1905:

Mrs. D. B. Shuey, wife of Rev. D. B. Shuey, a prominent clergyman of the Reformed church, from Emporia, Kansas, was a recent visitor at Chautauqua. She was in the company of some relatives, Mr. and Mrs. Bushong, of Bird-in-Hand, Pa.

Miss Caroline S. Breneman, of Lancaster, has arrived at Chautauqua and

OUR SUMMER PROGRAMS

The Historical Society Program Committee is pleased to announce its first full season of summer programs.

Be sure to mark your calender — there's something for everyone

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| June 20,
7:00PM | A History of Cornwall,
presented by Michael Trump.
Freeman Hall, Cornwall Manor |
| June 22,
6:30PM | Victorian Games,
for the children enrolled
in the Summer
Playground Program.
Led by Chris Resh at the
Chautauqua Playgrounds |
| June 24,
7:30PM | History of The Mt Gretna
Narrow Gauge Railroad,
presented by Jack Bitner,
Chautauqua Hall of Philosophy,
Co-sponsored with PA
Chautauqua Programs |
| June 25,
9:30AM | A Hike along the NGRR
rail bed led by Jack Bitner
and George Resh.
Meet by the Roller Rink.
Co-sponsored by the
PA Chautauqua Programs |
| July 16,
7:00PM | Early Days in the Campmeeting,
by Tom Meredith, Tabernacle.
Co-sponsored with the
Campmeeting Heritage Festival |
| July 29,
7:30PM | Gretna Theatre, 1946-1960:
The Coghlan Years
presented by Jack Graham,
Chautauqua Hall of Philosophy.
Co-sponsored by the
PA Chautauqua Programs |
| August 12,
7:30PM | Memories of the Chautauqua Inn,
presented by alumni of the Inn
Chautauqua Hall of Philosophy.
Co-sponsored with the
PA Chautauqua Programs |



Continued from pg. 7

is occupying quarters at "Woodcliff." Miss Breneman is one of our most enthusiastic Chautauquans.

Miss Katherine Rohrbach, of Topton, a teacher in the public schools of Nazareth, is visiting her uncle, Rev. P. C. Croll.

Prof. Payson C. Bitner and Mrs. Bitner, of Leighton, are spending a few days at Mt. Gretna. Mr. Bitner is principal of the Leighton schools. Both are graduates of the Keystone State Normal School and old time pupils of the editor of The Chautauquan.

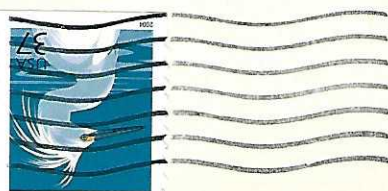
Mrs. Irvin Bickel and Miss Lavina Sassaman, both of Reading, are visitors at the cottage of our genial friend, Rev. P. C. Croll.

Miss Agnes Gillespie McConomy, of Philadelphia, arrived at Mt. Gretna on Monday. She is stopping at "Woodcliff."

Reading these items makes one wonder how many visitors the "genial" Rev. Croll could accommodate. And was "Woodcliff" a cottage where rooms were rented by the week, or were the owners just very hospitable people? Perhaps our readers can supply answers.

17042-6543

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