

The Gretna Chronicles

PUBLISHED BY THE MOUNT GRETTA AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY • WINTER 2022



Camp Mount Gretna Hearing God’s Voice in the Woods by Margaret Hopkins

The titles are varied—“The Snooper,” “Gretnews,” “Gretna Gossip”—but the newsletters share a common theme: When we join with others in Christian camping, we grow stronger in our commitment to living a Christian life.

That theme was at the heart of Camp Mount Gretna, the summer residential camp in the Heights and the Campmeeting run by the United Brethren Church from 1949 to 1970. Hundreds of children and teenagers from UB churches in Lebanon and Lancaster counties came each summer for fun and fellowship—and to embrace the practices of Christian living.

The camp’s history is the subject of a publication-in-progress, tentatively titled “Summer’s Children: The Story of Camp Mount Gretna,” to be available in 2023

by the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society.

“Camp was a chance for kids to be away in the woods and enjoy kids and adults from different churches,” said Lois Herr, who attended Camp Mount Gretna as a teenager and who is writing its history for the historical society. “It was about appreciating the natural world and this community and about inspiring a meaningful experience in one’s relationship with God.”

Christian camps added another dimension to campers’ experience—namely, nurturing their faith and religious values by living with others in a Christian community.

Camp Mount Gretna grew out of the Campmeeting’s transition in the 20th century from annual campmeetings emphasizing prayer, praise and personal faith conversion to Bible Conference focused on Bible studies and educational programming for Sunday School teachers and church leaders.



Outdoor class session in Missions Study.

In its earliest years, the camp was intergenerational, but in 1949, Camp Mount Gretna initiated age-level programs for youths as part of its Christian education programming and outreach.

While cottage owners by this time no longer

had to be members of United Brethren churches, the camp nonetheless was a natural outgrowth of the Campmeeting’s original purpose “of supporting and conducting the worship of God in gatherings or assemblages....” (Charter).

To that end, typical camp activities such as swimming and crafts were bookended with activities geared to hearing God’s voice in nature and in daily living.

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Historians date the beginning of organized summer camps to the mid-to-late 1800s with a mission of developing campers’ character and moral standards while experiencing the outdoors. That emphasis continued throughout the early 20th century and after World War II when age-level camping surged. Camps continued to teach outdoor living skills and appreciation of the outdoors but expanded activities to include sports and arts and crafts.

Gretna Chronicles

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The Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization and is registered as a charitable organization with the State of Pennsylvania. The MGAHS is charged with preserving the heritage of the Mount Gretna area, including Mount Gretna Borough, Campmeeting, The Pennsylvania Chautauqua, the Heights, Timber Hills, Conewago Hill, Stoberdale, areas of Colebrook once occupied by the PA National Guard, and areas of Cornwall involved with the Coleman family.

THE MGAHS MUSEUM is open from Memorial Day weekend until Labor Day weekend, 1-4pm, or by appointment. We offer school and group tours, summer walking tours, and research assistance by appointment throughout the year.

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Collecting Stories of Camp Mount Gretna

by Margaret Hopkins

The dining room table of Lois Herr's Lancaster Avenue home is a smorgasbord of photographs, song sheets, nature guides and applications from would-be counselors, all relating to Camp Mount Gretna, the summer residential camp that the United Brethren Church held from 1949-1970 in the Heights and the Campmeeting.

For the past two years, Herr has been collecting these materials and conducting interviews of former campers in preparation for writing the camp's history, tentatively titled "Summer's Children: The Story of Camp Mount Gretna." The history, to be published by the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society, will be available in spring 2023.

"My intent is to weave people's stories about the fun times they had into the history of the camp," Herr said. "The camp directors were very focused on providing a religious experience for campers and on providing a context for kids to have fun in the woods."

Among the materials is Herr's own diary with brief entries ("went swimming," for instance) as well as a photo of her room in Hershey Hall with her six roommates and counselor from the week she attended Camp Mount Gretna in 1956.


The camp's commitment to combining religious instruction and fun is clear in newsletters published sometimes daily and sometimes weekly for junior high and senior high campers in the mid-1950s. Articles titled "Closing Devotions," "Commitment Service" and "Verse for the Day" speak to teaching campers to hear the voice of God and to develop a Christian life.

At the same time, issues frequently included a "Lover's Nest" column about budding camp romances, and all issues had "Table Topics," which provided information about individual campers such as one "who loves dogs and horses and dresses neatly" and another "who will never starve with his long reach at the table."

Herr has only one binder of newsletters and no knowledge of whether the effort of writing, editing and printing the issues became too much for camp staff after 1958 or whether issues from other years have simply gone missing.

Much of the memorabilia spread across Herr's table came from nearby Gretna Glen Camp and Retreat Center on Old Mine Road, which the United Brethren established in 1959 as Camp Mount Gretna outgrew its two dormitories in the Heights. While senior high campers transitioned to Gretna Glen in 1962, junior high campers were still at Camp Mount Gretna until 1970, according to a ledger of campers that Herr was given.

"But the camp records are not always complete," Herr said. "I'm looking for more photos, more memorabilia and more memories of what it was like to be at Camp Mount Gretna."

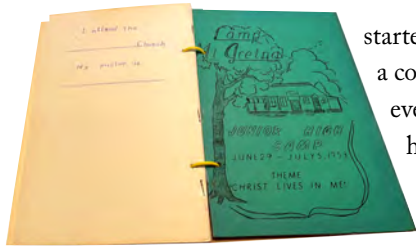
If you have information or memorabilia, please contact the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society at mtgretnahistory@gmail.com or 717-964-1105, or Lois Herr who can be reached at herrlk@me.com or 717-371-5721. 



Lois Herr pages through a book on Gretna Glen.

Camp Mount Gretna continued from page 1

So there were 'Morning Devotions'; 'Discovery Period'; 'Angelus,' a minute of silent prayer and thanksgiving; 'Glee and Glory,' when campers practiced hymns in the Tabernacle; and 'Hymn Hikes' as campers walked throughout the Campmeeting to sing to cottage owners because "singing," as stated in a newsletter, "brings us nearer to God."



started as a camper and later became a counselor. "It was beautiful, everyone was helpful, we didn't have to worry."

Indeed, little of the outside world seemed to have intruded

if the newsletters are any indication. One issue aimed at senior high campers took on the question of "God and war," concluding that "many of us may be forced in the not too distant future to bear arms in defense of our faith."

Another newsletter discussed appropriate standards of Christian behavior and asked, without answering, why social dancing was allowed in denominational colleges but not permitted at Mount Gretna.

Despite its genesis in the Campmeeting, Camp Mount Gretna was mostly located in two buildings in the Heights: Otterbein Lodge, the dining hall and boys' dormitory, and Hershey Hall, also on Kauffman Avenue,



Hershey Hall in the Heights, one of two dormitories for campers at Camp Mount Gretna.

For some campers, the highlight of their week was the Galilean Service when they walked

the lake where they sat on the beach while a minister led worship from a boat in the water and then had breakfast—although not of loaves and fishes.

For others, the campfire and decision service—when campers committed to following Christ—were the focal point (the newsletters always included the number of campers who committed to living Christian lives during camp sessions).

"I thought this [camp] must be what heaven is like," said Anita Meiser, Hershey, who

the girls' dormitory. Otterbein Lodge was torn down while Hershey Hall is a private residence.

The growth of Camp Mount Gretna and the growth of the Heights led the church—now the Evangelical United Brethren Church—to seek a new location. In 1958, 126 acres off Old Mine Road were purchased and the building of a new camp, Gretna Glen, began. MGAHS

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Camp Mount Gretna Timeline

1946: A camp for adults is added to the Mount Gretna Campmeeting Association's annual summer Bible Conference.

1947: The Mount Gretna Campmeeting Board purchases The Gables, a former dance hall on Kauffman Avenue, renaming it Otterbein Hall and converting it to a dormitory and dining hall.

1949: The Mount Gretna Campmeeting Association offers its first session for junior and senior high campers at Camp Mount Gretna.

1950: The Kauffman mansion is bought, renamed Hershey Hall and converted to a girls' dormitory for Camp Mount Gretna.

1958: Leaders of the United Brethren Church buy 126 acres on Old Mine Road for a new residential camp.

1962: A 9-day senior high camp and 5 weeks of junior high camp are held at Gretna Glen Camp.

1970: Last year for campers in grades 4, 5, and 6 at Camp Mount Gretna in the Heights. All campers are at Gretna Glen.

Monuments, Markers, & Foundations

In 2020, Ben Rodriguez created a 55-slide document entitled “Monuments – Markers & Foundations, Mt. Gretna & Colebrook, Pa.” that he gave to the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society.

The document was compiled from the many hours that Rodriguez spent along the Lebanon Valley Rail Trail, in the surrounding woods and off of State Route 117 between Colebrook and Mount Gretna. On those walks, Rodriguez uncovered historical artifacts—the monuments, markers and foundations of the area’s past.

Along with slides of historical photographs, pages from military journals and maps, Rodriguez included his own photographs and text explanations of what he had found and identified.

“Ben took on the role of historian of the Rail Trail,” said John Dissinger, Lebanon Valley Rail Trail co-founder and current board member. “The more he got involved, the deeper he dug into the history.”



Ben Rodriguez

About half of the document is focused on the Pennsylvania National Guard that brought thousands of men to train in Mount Gretna between 1885 and 1935. Some of the artifacts Rodriguez included are highly visible like the 16th Pennsylvania Infantry Monument on Timber Road that was dedicated to the infantry mobilized for three wars—Spanish-American War (1898); Mexican Border War (1916); and World War I (1917).




Keystone culvert built in 1923

Others, however, are in the woods and require a keen eye to find them. One of these is a Keystone culvert built in 1923 by the 103rd Engineers about 1¼ miles from Colebrook. Visible from the Lebanon Valley Rail Trail in winter and early spring, the culvert is under an old road that once led to a training area.

Rodriguez also included photographs of remains of foundations and watering troughs used by the National Guard Cavalry (104th Cavalry) at the Colebrook Encampment as well as artifacts from the Mount Gretna Park and Mount Gretna Narrow Gauge Railroad.

“Ben was a great resource of the area’s history and a great resource for the historical society,” said Susan Hostetter, Chair of the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society. “He was always willing and eager to share what he knew and what he had found. One afternoon Ben took me on a tour of the Rail Trail pointing out some of the harder to see markers.

Ben, we will miss you greatly.” 

IN MEMORIAM

Bentura Rodriguez, Jr.

BEN RODRIGUEZ, a long-time member of the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society and the Lebanon Valley Rail Trail, died Oct. 2, 2022, days before his 73rd birthday.

Born and raised in Lebanon, Pa., Rodriguez began biking on the Rail Trail after his retirement from the Hershey Company. He helped with trail maintenance and restored markers of the former Cornwall-Lebanon Railroad as well as the railroad crossing sign at Butler Road. He also served on the LVRT board.

While he was always interested in history, biking the rail trail piqued his interest and provided an opportunity to engage in first-hand exploration of the past.

Cathy Rodriguez, his wife of almost 52 years, shared that her husband often would spend entire days along the trail, in the surrounding woods and off of State Route 117 trying to find different places and buildings he had read about in Lebanon County history books. He also was a frequent visitor to Fort Indiantown Gap to add to his knowledge of the Pennsylvania National Guard when it was based in Mount Gretna.

“He would see or hear about things, and then he’d search them out,” she said. His forays led him into creating a display of the Mount Gretna area that showed both the training areas of the Pennsylvania National Guard in Mount Gretna and Colebrook and sites along the former railroad.

Weekends, he would set up this display in one of the pavilions by the Root Beer Barrel along the Rail Trail and share what he’d learned and found with anyone who’d stop by.


(continued on page 5)

SNAPSHOTS OF SOLDIERS FIELD

In future issues, we'll include a glimpse into the activity on Mount Gretna's Soldiers Field – from the Pennsylvania National Guard to athletic teams to a transient camp and more.

Snapshot #1:

The first National Guard of Pennsylvania Encampment was held at Mt. Gretna from July 25 to August 1, 1885. The roughly 120 acre site was donated by Robert H. Coleman.

The first camp was set-up by Gen. J. P. S. Gobin for the 3rd Brigade. Initially, camps were named to honor a favorite officer. Later the camps were named for an officer who died prior to a camp or who died in the line of duty. Most were named after an officer native to Pennsylvania. The first camp was named in honor of Gen. J.K. Siegfried, the first officer in charge of the 3rd Brigade. 



IN MEMORIUM

(Bentura Rodriguez, Jr., continued from page 4)

“He had tables and tables of things,” Cathy Rodriguez said. “It would take him two hours to set up, and he would stay there for almost 10 hours.”

Rodriguez’s legacy, however, extends beyond his many contributions to the area’s historical record, the artifacts he unearthed and restored, and the sites he identified.

He also painted images of animals and symbols on rocks—as many as 400, his wife estimated—and when he was weeding or trimming trees along the trail, he’d leave a rock. Sometimes he signed and dated the rocks, adding a flower on the back as his trademark. He placed them along the trail to lift people’s spirits.

“Ben wanted people to collect the rocks,” said Sheila Peters, who enjoyed learning from him whenever they ran into each other on the trail. “He was very generous, painting a special rock of my dog Jezebel for me. I will always cherish it as well as Ben’s friendship and kindness. He is missed.”




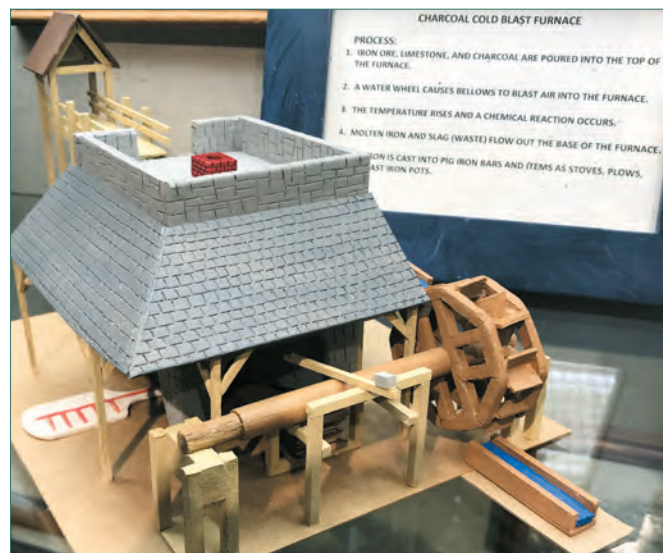
Stones painted by Ben Rodriguez

MGAHS Receives Model of Charcoal Cold Blast Furnace

THE Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society recently received a model of a charcoal cold blast furnace, which is now on display in the museum. Created and donated by Dick Williams, who also enjoys building models for train displays, it demonstrates the operations of a charcoal cold blast furnace, similar to the process that was used at our nearby Cornwall Furnace:

- Iron ore, limestone, and charcoal were poured into the top of the furnace;
- A water wheel caused the bellows to blast air into the furnace;
- The temperature rose and a chemical reaction occurred;
- Molten iron and slag (waste) flowed out the base of the furnace;
- The iron was cast into pig iron bars and items such as stoves, plows, and cast iron pots.

Thank you also to Bruce Chadbourne, Cornwall Furnace volunteer and local historian, who contributed as well to the display. 



Model of a charcoal cold blast furnace, now in our MGAHS museum.

A 'Slice' of History: Meet Gretna's Pie Baker

by Margaret Hopkins

Throughout the mid-1900s, Lillie M. Gantz would rise at 3 a.m. Monday through Saturday to begin making pies—as many as 150 a week—in the small kitchen of her 4th Street cottage in the Campmeeting.

Pies were by pre-order only, and purchasers had to provide their own baking dishes (aluminum pie pans not yet invented), recalled Gantz's



Lillie Gantz holding granddaughter

great-granddaughter Lorene Kazense, who grew up in Colebrook and now lives in Palmyra.

The pie-making was a family affair. Nehemiah Gantz, Lillie's husband, would peel apples and peaches, so she could concentrate on baking. Kazense and her siblings would make mudpies to sell.

"I don't think she owned a measuring cup or any measuring spoons," Kazense said of her great-grandmother. "When you would ask her about a recipe, she'd say, a 'handful,'

a 'pinch,' a 'touch'—that's the way she cooked."

Lillie and Nehemiah Gantz first came to the Campmeeting sometime in the early 1910s. Dairy and crop farmers in Mount Joy, they were members of the United Brethren Church, which founded the Campmeeting.

According to family lore, the couple would rise at dawn, load their wagon, hitch their horse and head for Gretna, arriving at dusk. Kazense and her siblings believe their great-grandparents built the cottage or had it built although no one knows exactly when that occurred (a sign on the cottage today reads "Established 1920").

The Gantzes continued summer treks from Mount Joy to Mount Gretna until 1940, when they moved full-time to the 4th Street cottage.

After Nehemiah Gantz died in 1950, Lillie Gantz began cooking for neighbors who summered in the Campmeeting. She continued baking pies but reduced the quantity. Two weeks before she died in 1970, she baked pies for her whole family which by then included 11 great-grandchildren and 3 great-great-grandchildren. MGAHS

Lillie M. Gantz
November 6, 1881- December 31, 1970

Help Us Catalogue Mount Gretna's Homes!



Have you got a history of an address that you'd like to share with us? If you are receiving this newsletter digitally, you can download the form, fill in your information in Microsoft Word, and email it back to us – no need to print it out, fill it in, and scan it! Please feel free to include any images, documents, or other information that you think deserves to be collected with this history.

You can also fill in a secure Google Forms version of the form at this link: forms.gle/drBXh5DsTDxGczPr9

If you would prefer to print the document or if you are receiving this newsletter in the mail, fill out the form and mail it to us at our post office address (listed on page 2 masthead). Learn more about this project at: mtgretnahistory.org/2021/03/03/if-cottages-could-talk MGAHS

Thank You Thank You Thank You

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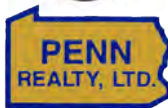
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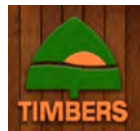
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A warm thank you to these business members. Consider supporting them and thank them for their support of the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society.

LEGACY GIFTS

Imagine what Robert Coleman would think if he could see Mount Gretna today? Many of our greatest community assets exist because someone thought it important enough to bequeath funds to develop and sustain them.

If you are interested in learning more about legacy gifts to the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society, call us at (717) 964-1105 or email us at info@mtgretnahistory.org

Consultation with a legal or financial adviser can help you to take advantage of any savings on inheritance tax.

Our Mount Gretna Area Historical Society representative will help you through the process and the details.



Give a Gift of History This Holiday

Need a holiday gift for that the history buff in your family? Consider giving *Mount Gretna Through the Decades*, a look at the history of the area organized by decades from 1881 through today.

The book includes photographs and maps from each of these 14 decades showing how the area has grown from its beginnings as Mt. Gretna Park and the Pennsylvania National Guard into its current mix of past and present, tradition and innovation.

The text highlights the places, people and events that have given Mount Gretna its identities—military, agricultural, recreational, religious, educational, artistic.

Cost of the book is \$30 for members of the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society. Non-members can purchase the book for \$35. To order your copy, visit <https://mtgretnahistory.org/shop/mount-gretna-through-the-decades/>



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OUR MEMBERS are the lifeblood of the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society. Your dues help us to maintain the MGAHS building and preserve our collection.

Your yearly membership includes discounts on merchandise, updates about the Society's programs, and newsletters with feature articles on area history. You will join a dedicated and growing group of people who value our past and who want to preserve it for future generations.

There are several ways to begin or renew your membership:

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