

The Gretna Chronicles

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Springs from the Geologic Past

by Margaret Hopkins

In the early 1880s, the men of the Cornwall & Lebanon Railroad sought to build a station along the rail line that could become a popular destination for day trippers. Finding a forested area with hills and natural springs, they named it Mount Gretna and began clearing the woodland for a picnic grove.

Those grounds, initially seen as income generation for the railroad, showcased the advantages of Mount Gretna, sparking its further development as training ground for the National Guard of Pennsylvania (1885) and establishment of the Pennsylvania Chautauqua and Mount Gretna Campmeeting (both in 1892).

Key to opening up the area was what an 1891 article in the *Lebanon Courier and Semi-Weekly Report* described as “an excellent water supply.”

That water supply, critical for Mount Gretna’s future growth, is actually a product of the area’s geologic past and particularly, of the Triassic Period, estimated to be 248-206 million years ago.

Broadly simplified, this geologic period consisted of the stretching apart of land masses and the breaking down or weathering of mountains, the latter leading to the formation of hills and valleys. The sedimentary rock strata found in eastern North America also was formed during this period through the processes of erosion and deposition.

Our area’s rock formations are essentially layers of sandstone, quartz pebble conglomerates, and shale. Sandstone, the dominant rock in the Mount Gretna area, is like a sponge in that it can hold large quantities of water that can easily be tapped by wells and pumps—and come to the surface as springs.

“The Triassic age sandstones have very large pore spaces between the sand grains and as a result, have provided the area with a very efficient aquifer for many years,” said Sid Hostetter, Mount Gretna resident and retired Earth Science teacher.

Springs occur where aquifers have so much water that it flows directly onto the land surface. Enclosing a spring in a spring house or box facilitates collection of water as well as protection from possible contamination.

Historical photographs show several of Mount Gretna’s natural springs enclosed in stone walls and capped with thick, circular rocks. That occurred in 1884, according to Jack Bitner in *Mt. Gretna: A Coleman Legacy*.

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Springs occur where groundwater flows out of the surface. Given that springs are abundant in the Mount Gretna area, it seems likely these couples are pointing at a natural spring. Photo from MGAHS Archives.

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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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Finance Report, October 2023

by Bob Eynon

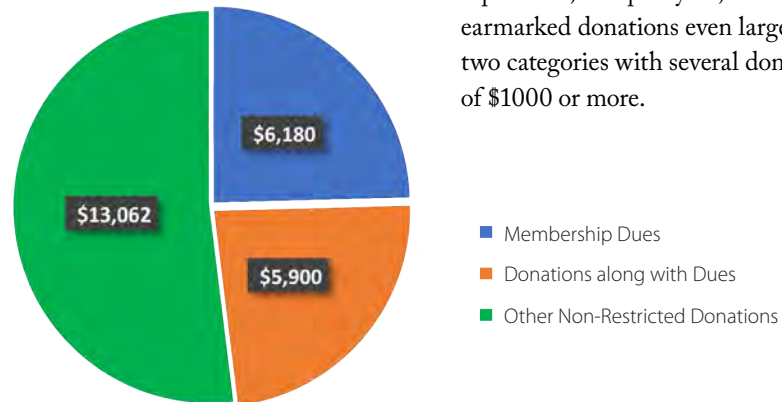
To Our Membership:

Thank you for your financial support! You are so important to our mission, and your generosity cannot be overemphasized.

While our membership dues provide significant income, even more impressive are the extra donations so many members give. Donations given when membership is renewed are about

equal to the membership dues themselves. On top of that, this past year, we had other non-earmarked donations even larger than the first two categories with several donations of \$1000 or more.

Dues and Donations



We are being good stewards of your contributions and are in sound financial shape. With your dues and donations, we continue to fulfill our mission of preserving and promoting the history of the larger Mount Gretna area. We are investing in educational programs and maintaining our historical cottage museum (the roof and air conditioning systems needed to be replaced last year). The endowment is growing, and we opened a brokerage account with Vanguard to take advantage of higher money market earnings rates while also making it possible to accept donated stocks.

Remember, as a charitable organization, donations of cash or equities to the Historical Society are tax deductible and many employers offer matching gifts.

We also continue to benefit from generous grants in the last twelve months including the Anne Brossman Sweigart Charitable Foundation (\$7,500 added to the endowment) and the Mount Gretna United Methodist Church's Drendall Grant (\$2,500 for historical booklet publications).

As of September, this is the breakout of our financial accounts:

Total financial accounts: \$157,698.

Endowment principal (restricted): \$55,537.

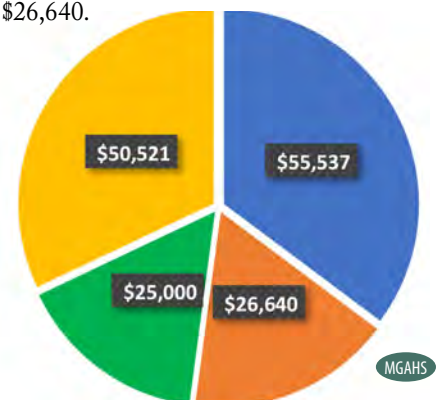
Other funds restricted by donors for specific uses: \$26,640.

Board of Directors emergency reserve: \$25,000.

Funds available for general use: \$50,521.

Financial Breakout as of September 2023

- Endowment Principal
- Restricted Donations
- Emergency Reserve
- Funds Available for General Use



Springs from the Geologic Past

continued from page 1

“Even after more than 135 years, some of the springs are still protected by their strong circular stone walls,” Hostetter said.

While the number of springs Coleman had enclosed is unknown, two with protective stonework can still be found in Chautauqua—one that doesn’t have a cap located across from the Porch & Pantry and one with a cap at the tennis courts. An undated photograph of the tennis courts spring shows a manual pump with cup for priming.

Why the one spring has no cap is unknown as is when the one at the tennis courts was enclosed, said Bill Care, director of public works, Mount Gretna Borough.

Visitors to Mount Gretna in the early 1890s likely saw the springs as a natural wonder rather than a source of water as wells provided larger volumes of water. The National Guard of Pennsylvania, for instance, had two wells—one in the vicinity of what is now The Gretna Timbers restaurant and the other in the vicinity of Conewago Hills, Care said.

Today the Mount Gretna Campmeeting, Mount Gretna Borough and Mount Gretna Heights rely upon wells that have been drilled into the aquifer to access groundwater.

That aquifer is likely a mix of the sandstone- and shale-layered sedimentary basin laid down long before the first train of the C&L Railroad stopped at the Mount Gretna station.

Sources:

Bitner, J. (1990). *Mt. Gretna: A Coleman Legacy*.

“Camp Meeting Grove.” (5 August 1891). *Lebanon Courier and Semi-Weekly Report*.

Boser, S., Swistock, B., Oleson, D., Galford, A., Micsky, G.W., Clark, J.A. (26 August 2022). Roadside Springs. *Penn State Extension*. <https://extension.psu.edu/roadside-springs>

MGHS



Pictured is one of two springs in Chautauqua. No one knows when this spring was enclosed. It is located near Porch & Pantry. Photo by K.Donahue for MGAHS.



In 1884, Robert Coleman directed masons to enclose springs like the one pictured above, likely in the Mount Gretna Park, according to Jack Bitner’s Mt. Gretna: A Coleman Legacy. Photo from MGAHS Archives.



Many of the springs were enclosed with rock structures as a means of collecting the water and protecting it from contamination. This photo likely is of one of the springs in Mount Gretna Park. Photo from MGAHS Archives



Pictured is one of two springs in Chautauqua. Next to the pump is a metal cup, likely used for priming the pump to remove air and allow water to be pumped. Photo from MGAHS Archives.

The Incomplete History of the Mount Gretna Campmeeting's Early Water System

by Margaret Hopkins

The history of the Mount Gretna Campmeeting Association's first water system is a puzzle with missing pieces and pieces that don't seem to fit together.

This is both surprising and unsurprising. The men who would become the Board of Directors of the Campmeeting¹ knew that those attending the inaugural camp meeting in August 1892 would need water for drinking and cooking.

At the same time, those men had seen the water system with springs, fountains and wells—and cooking facilities using that water—that Robert Coleman and his employees had constructed at the nearby Mount Gretna Park.

So, it is likely that the early Campmeeting board of mostly ministers had complete faith “that water will be introduced at every cottage” as representatives of Coleman's Cornwall & Lebanon railroad had agreed to on Sept. 2, 1891, according to the *Lebanon Daily News*.

The source of that water was not identified, but given the geology of the area, one can assume that the Campmeeting had several springs. Whether the organizers of the first camp meeting presumed these springs would be an adequate source of water is unknown.

But the board did resolve at its June 1, 1892, meeting to locate four spigots in the camp ground, a decision providing some evidence that manual pumps in or around the springs had been installed. (The *Lebanon Daily News* reported on June 2, 1892, that the “C&L railroad company...are now laying water pipes

An undated photograph of a child getting water from what appears to be a pipe with a spigot. Not known whether this is Campmeeting. Photo from MGAHS Archives.



and locating a number of hydrants,” but Campmeeting board minutes do not mention water in cottages.)

And six years later, the board instructed the superintendent to “put springs in proper condition with pumps for three.”

An undated photograph of a bridge into the Campmeeting suggests that a stream also was a water source. The photo's caption reads, “Residents of First Street used the stream as a refrigerator. It also supplied water for washing and drinking.” That stream on the eastern side of the Campmeeting has considerably less flow today than what is shown in the photograph.

The first mention of a water well surfaces in the August 1898 board minutes when the superintendent was instructed to dig an artesian well—location omitted. Subsequent minutes do not mention this well.

By the 1900s, these supplies apparently were no longer adequate as the board charged a committee with “securing an adequate water supply.” This committee's efforts become a frequent mention in minutes through 1909.



In September 1905, the women's Auxiliary Committee of the Board of Directors (Mount Gretna Campmeeting Association) requested that these structures be built over pumps on First Street, Fourth Street and below Markwood Avenue. It is unknown when the pumps stopped working although long-time resident Betsy Barnhart remembers playing in water pumped from the Markwood Avenue pump as a child in the 1960s. Photos by K. Donahue for MGAHS.



This undated photograph appears in the Centennial History of the Mount Gretna Campmeeting Association with the caption: "Residents of First Street used the stream as a refrigerator. It also supplied water for washing and drinking." Photo from MGAHS Archives.

In April 1905, the board decided to “place one or more stand-pipes on the highest part of the grounds and connect these with the deep well; and use gasoline engine (sic) to pump water and distribute this water over the camp grounds.” This is the first mention of a deep well, and no information about its depth or location is included.

In September 1905, the board agreed to hire a well digger, Myer Brothers of Myerstown, to dig a well. Cost was \$1.20 per foot for digging the first 100 feet and \$0.25 cents for additional feet.

That same month, the (women’s) Auxiliary Committee of the board requested that “the well on S. 5th St. below Markwood Avenue be fixed up nicely and covered, and the spring on First Street be wall(ed) up and a pump placed in it with a nice roof over it, and the swamp trained so that no wild water will contaminate. Also that the pump on 4th St. be covered and the pump put in condition suitable for its intended purpose....”

These three pumps could possibly be the pumps mentioned in 1898. They also likely are the rusted and inoperable pumps remaining on First Street, Fourth Street and near Markwood.

The gaps in the history of the Campmeeting’s water system are not unexpected. Most of us pay little attention to infrastructure—water and sewer—until it stops working. That this history is incomplete suggests the founders of the Mount Gretna Campmeeting Association perhaps had devised a system that at least initially met the needs of those attending camp meetings.

¹ When we capitalize Campmeeting, we are referring specifically to the Mount Gretna Campmeeting Association. When camp meeting appears as two words, we are referring to a religious gathering.

Sources:

- Bitner, J. (1990). *Mt. Gretna: A Coleman Legacy*.
 Book I, Mt. Gretna Campmeeting Minutes, 1891-1903.
 Book II, Mt. Gretna Campmeeting Association Minutes, 1903-1919.
 Meredith, T. & Ohms, E. (1992). *The Mt. Gretna Campmeeting Association: A Centennial History*.
 “Mt. Gretna Campmeeting. Bright Prospects for a Large and Successful Meeting. Board of Directors Met Yesterday.” 02 June 1892, *Lebanon Daily News*.
 “Stoverdale. The Board of Directors of Stoverdale Campmeeting Make a Final Decision. It will be moved to Mt. Gretna.” 02 Sept 1891. *Lebanon Daily News*.

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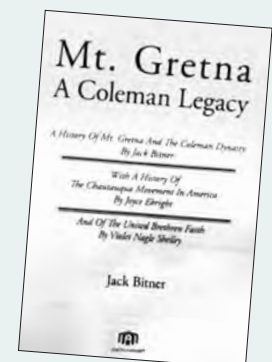
We need your help!

Did anyone out there know Violet Nagle Shelley or her family? We know that she passed away in 1991. We believe that she was a resident of Campmeeting.

We would like to contact her family members regarding the chapter she wrote for Jack Bitner’s book: *Mt. Gretna: A Coleman Legacy*.

Thank you ahead of time for any help you can give us. Contact us at 717-964-1105 or email us at

mtgretnahistory@gmail.com .



Searching for a Family Cottage

by Margaret Hopkins

This past summer, Historical Society Board Chair Susan Hostetter fielded an email request from Jen Oelschlager of Gilbertsville, Pa., asking for help in identifying a cottage that had once belonged to her great-great grandparents, Morton and Marie Easton.

She was planning to visit Mount Gretna, she wrote, and was curious about the cottage.

She included an undated photograph in her email that showed a two-story cottage with wrap-around porch and distinctive window and roof styles. The back of the photograph was labeled, “Easton Cottage in Mt. Gretna.”

“My parents had trunks of old stuff, and in one of the trunks was this picture of the cottage,” said Oelschlager, who recalled her mother once mentioning that ancestors had had a cottage in Gretna.

Hostetter forwarded the photograph to several MGAHS members with the query, “Any ideas?”

No one did. So Hostetter reached out to William Barlow, architect and Mount Gretna resident, who frequently conducts informal walking tours on which he points out cottages’ unique features.

The minute he saw the photograph, he knew he had seen the cottage before and set out to look for it. He found it within 10 minutes.

“There were some modifications, some changes, but I recognized its distinctive roof lines and distinctive window placement,” Barlow recalled. “Things had changed over the years—the railing style, for example—but the cottage had retained its distinctive qualities.”

Oelschlager and her brother did visit Mount Gretna over the summer and found the cottage. They hope to return next year and meet the current owners. The Kinch Family has owned the cottage continuously since purchasing it in 1962.

It is unclear how Morton William Easton who was born in Connecticut and graduated from Yale University came to Mount Gretna. Easton taught at the University of Pennsylvania at one point and that may have been when he learned of Mount Gretna, Oelschlager said.



Originally built in 1904 for Morton Easton, the cottage owned today by the Kinch family has retained many of the original features.

Top photo was provided by Jen Oelschlager, great great granddaughter of Morton Easton. Bottom photo by K. Donahue for MGAHS.

Chautauqua deeded the cottage to Morton Easton, the original owner, on March 12, 1904.

Easton earned a medical degree and then a doctoral degree in philology or the study of language and languages. A 1938 memoir notes Easton’s deep appreciation for the Mount Gretna woods where he frequently took long and solitary walks, returning to his cottage with a “treasure trove in the form of a choice assortment of edible fungi.” In 1917, Dr. Easton died at his Gretna cottage.

Source:

Haney, J.L. (1938). *Morton William Easton: A Memoir. Printed for private circulation.*



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

MGHS 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.



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A warm thank you to our business members. Consider supporting them and thanking them for their support of MGAHS.

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Mount Gretna History
& help to preserve it

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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.

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- print our membership form (at right), complete it and mail it to us at P.O. Box 362, Mt. Gretna, PA 17064;
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