

# The Gretna Chronicles

PUBLISHED BY MOUNT GRETTA AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY • NOVEMBER 2024



## Twenty Years of MGAHS by Susan Hostetter

Twenty years: That's how long the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society has been part of the community and area. Some of you may still have the memory of how we started through a conversation between Fred Buch and Jack Bitner. To quote Jack, "What are we going to do with all these things?" The rest, as they say, is history.

Fred and Jack were not alone. The first board and members, shown in the photos below, also believed in the vision of a museum which would fill a need to preserve and share our area's history. How many do you recognize? Some of them are gone from our midst but not forgotten.

The next step was to find a home for the treasures residing in homes scattered throughout the area and beyond. Options considered were buying land on which to build or purchasing an existing structure. The story of how we came to settle at 206 Pennsylvania Avenue is somewhat lengthy

but suffice to say, Fred persevered and, being the master negotiator he is, secured a house with a highly visible location.

But there was much work to be done. How were we to care for the fragile documents and objects donated to an organization with a house that had no air conditioning or heat? A climate-controlled basement and vault were added to the underside of the house and central air and heat were installed. So, while we look old on the outside and main and upper floors, we have modern technology just below to archive our collection, conduct research for patrons and host meetings.

As visitors tour our gem of a museum, they often stay and talk about their memories of good times staying with family in Mount Gretna. They trust us with their family photos, postcards, furniture, clothing and other items which "the kids don't want." We house board minutes from the start of Chautauqua and Campmeeting in 1892 which have been used to write books and articles.

So much has been accomplished in these past 20 years through the efforts of countless volunteer hours. What lies ahead for the next 20? Our hope is that you will continue to be part of helping us find out.

With much gratitude for your support,  
Susan Hostetter  
Chairman, MGAHS

*At left, our first board, June 2004*  
*Back (left to right): Roland Nissley, Fred Buch, Michael Russel, John Feather, David Bronstein.*  
*Front (left to right): Tom Mayer, Dick Smith, Tim Nieman, Michael Trump*  
*Photo: Madeline Gray*



*Below, our first meeting.*  
*Photo: Madeline Gray*



### In This Issue

Twenty Years of MGAHS .....	1
MGAHS Financial Report .....	2
On the Road: State Route 117, a Horseshoe and a Landmark Hero.....	3
MGAHS Celebrates Our Volunteers ....	4
Book Revives Connections Between Mount Gretna and Navajo Culture .....	4
The Friendly Inn .....	5
From Our MGAHS Bookshelves .....	6
If a Cottage Could Talk .....	7
MGAHS Legacy Gifts .....	7
Business Members.....	7
Join the Historical Society .....	8

## Gretna Chronicles

is published by the  
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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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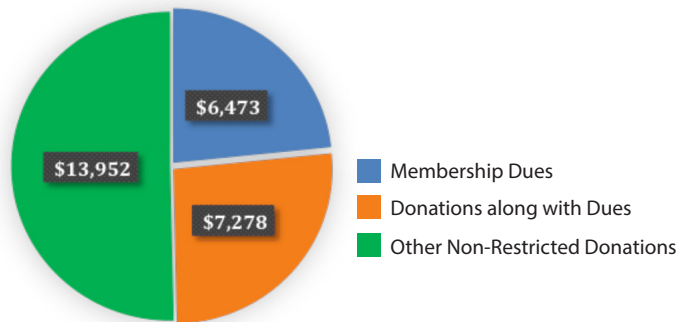


# MGAHS Financial Report

## October 2024 by Bob Eynon, Treasurer

As we look back over the last 12 months, we want to thank our members for their financial support. You are so important to our mission, and your generosity cannot be overemphasized. Our membership dues are significant, and even more impressive are the extra donations so many of you give. Donations given when membership is renewed have consistently been higher than the membership dues themselves. On top of that we had other non-earmarked donations even larger than the first two categories with several donations of \$1000 or more, and one of \$5000.

### Dues and Donations for the last 12 months



We are being good stewards of your contributions, and we 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 continue to invest in educational programs, add to our collection, and improve our historical cottage museum.

And, 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:

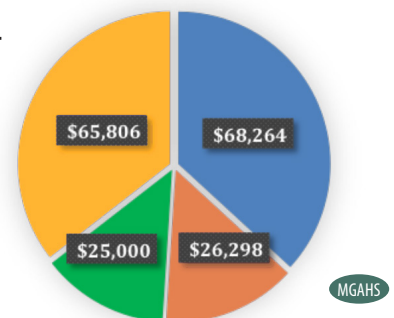
- The Anne Brossman Sweigart Charitable Foundation: \$7,500 that is added to the endowment.
- The Mount Gretna United Methodist Church's Drendall Grant: \$2,000 for historical booklet publications.
- The Lebanon County Commissioners Grant: \$5,000 toward the museum library upgrade.

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

- Total financial accounts: \$180,374.
- Endowment: \$68,264.
- Other funds restricted by donors for specific uses: \$26,298.
- Board of Directors emergency reserve: \$25,000.
- Funds available for general use: \$65,806.

### Financial Breakout as of September 2024

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



# On the Road: State Route 117, a Horseshoe and a Landmark Hero

by Margaret Hopkins

It was on, then off, then on again. On April 1, 1924, the *Lebanon Daily News* headlined, “Nothing Done About Mount Gretna Road,” noting that despite promises to build a road, the State Highway Department had omitted Lebanon County projects from its 1924 program.

Two days later, the *Evening Report* reported that Mount Gretna Road was now “on,” as Secretary of Highways P.D. Wright would open bids for 15,050 linear feet of reinforced concrete from Cold Spring—likely somewhere in Colebrook—in South Londonderry Township to Mount Gretna in West Cornwall Township.

Contractors Swanger & White, Lebanon, were the lower of two bids at \$158,714.24 for what would be about three miles of roadway. The *Lebanon Daily News*’ June 18, 1924, edition reported the project was “unattractive” because it involved construction “over virgin soil where much filling and grading will be required under aggravating conditions.”

The project also may have been unattractive because it required removal of what was described in news accounts as a ‘stately oak’ and ‘landmark hero’ smack in the middle of the mapped route—that is, between the post office and Gremminger’s store (what today would be Mount Gretna Pizzeria).

For years, traffic had gone around “Gretna’s Oak” in a sort of natural roundabout. While some cottagers argued that the tree was a ‘menace to automobilists,’ others advocated for the tree to remain because of its landmark status.

But keeping the tree in the roadway would have involved relocating the post office, and the leaders of the Pennsylvania Chautauqua didn’t want to give up any land to do that.

Preserving the oak also would have meant moving the Quoit Club which leaders of Campmeeting didn’t want to do.

So the tree was ‘sacrificed to progress’ and felled—which apparently took almost an entire day and which brought out a crowd to watch, according to news reports.

“In honor its passing, more than 100 residents of the summer colony were present when the giant tree crashed to the ground,” wrote a reporter for the *Lebanon Daily News*’ August 30, 1924 edition. “Immediately a rush was made for the stumps of the tree and examination made of its base which was found to be in a healthy condition.

“And so it went the way of many other good trees lying in the path of the road builders.”

Not long after, the first batch of concrete for the road was poured—also before a crowd of onlookers, according to local newspapers.

The next newsworthy event related to the road occurred when contractors moved a 75-pound boulder from the mapped route and found a mystery—a steel horseshoe.....“at a point where modern man had never undertaken any improvements,” according to the *Daily News* (Oct. 1, 1924). Nothing more was said about that horseshoe or how it might have come to be there.

It’s unclear if the contractors had a deadline by which to finish the road although the *Lebanon Semi-Weekly* reported on Dec. 1, 1924, that workers had no Thanksgiving as they “had just about eight days to go to complete the job.”

Snow didn’t keep the road from opening on Jan. 8, 1925, according to news reports. Whether there was any traffic that day is unknown. MGAHS



Postcards of SR117 are in the MGAHS collection



# MGHS Celebrates Our Volunteers

Mount Gretna's diverse history—that's what Connie and David Steinke hope people take away after stopping at the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society.

Long time volunteers, the Steinkes frequently serve as museum docents, sharing with visitors how Mount Gretna came to be and what went on in its early days from the logging and railroad to the brick plant, ice dam and first Farm Show.


"People are astonished that so much went on in this small community that for decades was just a summer place," said David, who is often found in the second-floor carousel room telling people about Mount Gretna's amusement parks.

Connie enjoys the first floor and introducing visitors to Robert Coleman who "developed Mount Gretna as a picnic grove for his employees at the iron furnace" as well as to the Pennsylvania Chautauqua and Mount Gretna Campmeeting.

Many visitors are unfamiliar with the Chautauqua and camp meeting movements, so explaining them can be a challenge, she said.

"We volunteer because of our love of Mount Gretna and its history," Connie said.

"We enjoy supporting the museum and the community, being docents, helping with spring cleaning and the many odd jobs that need to be done."

MGHS depends upon volunteers. If you would like to volunteer, let us know! We have many opportunities from serving as docents and creating displays to helping with society events and building upkeep. 



Connie and David Steinke  
Photo: Margaret Hopkins

## Book Revives Connections between Mount Gretna and Navajo Culture

Serendipity or alignment of the stars? Don "Stone" Kensinger and his wife Vicki discover that the Mount Gretna cottage they bought in 2011 was once owned by a man—W. Theodore Wittman—who shared Kensinger's lifelong passion and appreciation for Navajo culture and handwoven rugs.

Kensinger ties together the intersecting stories of his and Wittman's interests in his book, *Weaving Passions: Journey Stories from the Dinéyah to the Little Red Cottage on Brown Avenue*. The subtitle—Connecting the Threads of Navajo Rugs, Theo Wittman, and Mount Gretna, Pennsylvania—

spells out the interrelations among the three. The book is available at the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society.

Below, he shares some of how the book came to be and what he learned through the process of writing it.

**Q:** You mentioned that you ruminated for four years about writing this book. What prompted you to get started?

**A:** The connection of several components: my initial interest and then developed passion of Navajo rugs and appreciation of the Diné people; discovering the cottage we had purchased was originally owned by Wittman, a collector and purveyor of Navajo weavings; and that I had several years to read and conduct research, while recovering from surgeries. The impetus to write came when I was asked by the MGAHS to author a booklet, one that could be sold by the historical society. A few weeks into the project I realized the



endeavor would exceed a booklet and result in a much larger project.

**Q:** Besides hours spent at the keyboard, you also made several trips to the Southwest to 'hunt' for information. What were you looking for and where did you find it?

**A:** Vicki and I went to the SW with the intention of connecting with the land, the people, their artforms, and their culture. Writing about a topic


without firsthand experiences seems artificial and disingenuous.

During our travels we were fortunate to stay with a Navajo family, learn some of their beliefs and values, and gain a better understanding of Diné history. Hearing stories and gathering bits of information fueled my desire to learn more.

**Q:** What did you learn about writing and yourself in this process?

**A:** Writing is hard. A couple of times, I scrapped not one chapter but two. I revised and then revised again. But writing this book was also rewarding. Throughout this, I met weavers, curators, and new neighbors—and I also learned more than I ever imagined.

**Q:** Thoughts on your next project?

**A:** Four months since my book was published, I am less sure of my next project. Will it be something I write, something I do, maybe something I experience? Mary Oliver asked, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" Whatever my next project, it will be a result of something I am passionate about and something worthy of the time required to see it to the end. 





## The Friendly Inn

### Fifth Street, Mount Gretna Campmeeting

Malcolm Kent Meyer reaches up to a filament or Edison lightbulb and gently turns it on, remarking “it’s never been changed.”

True of the old-fashioned lightbulb, it also is true of much of the Friendly Inn, a fixture in Meyer’s family since 1943 when his grandparents bought the cottage. The family’s roots in Mount Gretna go back even further as his grandfather was a bugler who trained on Soldiers Field.

Meyer’s understanding is the three-bedroom cottage was built in 1920. Originally named the Beckon Inn, his grandmother changed it to the “Friendly Inn”—and the name has stuck.

While the Campmeeting was originally laid out in 20-ft X 24-ft lots, many cottages were built on more than one lot. That is true of The Friendly Inn which sits on much of four lots between Fourth and Fifth streets.

In the 1970s, his parents considered making some renovations but couldn’t get Board of Managers’ permission, Meyer recalled. He and his wife Leahn succeeded where his parents didn’t and began renovations in 2017 that added a room with full bath and laundry onto the back of the cottage. They also remodeled the kitchen—moving the original sink into a new space—and installed ceiling fans.

But other than those renovations completed in 2019, the cottage would seem to look much the same as it did when his

grandparents bought it, and he started coming as a young boy. The bedroom walls do not reach floor to ceiling, a typical way to allow for air movement during summer months. The bathroom has a claw-foot tub.

And most of the first-floor windows and doors have the waves and imperfections of old glass.

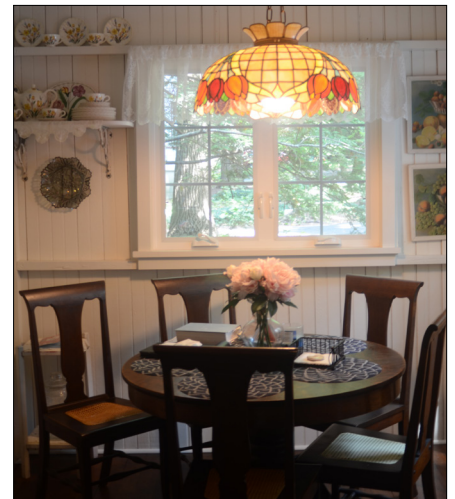
Still the same is the large wraparound porch and porch furniture bought by Malcolm’s grandfather, Edward L. Beck, in the 1940s.

Malcolm recalled how he, his brothers and grandparents would sit on the porch and talk to passersby. They also would play pinochle and canasta when they came every year.

That porch is home to similar card games played today with the Meyers, their children and their 12 grandchildren, ages 11-21 years old, when they come each summer.

“They all love Mount Gretna,” said Meyer, who is in residence most of the summer. “A couple of them have said, it’s their favorite place.”

Like most of the cottages built before the 1950s, the Friendly Inn is seasonal—that means no heat other than space heaters and no insulation. The Meyers have no plans to winterize—they like the Friendly Inn just the way it is. MGAHS



*Photos: Leahn Meyer and Kristi Donahue*

## From Our **MGAHS Bookshelves** *Take home a bit of history...*

*DON'T MISS OUR STORIES OF MOUNT GRETTA, as told by local authors — historians, MGAHS members, seasoned researchers and emerging new writers.*

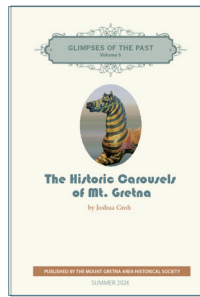
*All are illustrated with images, objects, and information gleaned from our MGAHS Collections. Our authors and archivists strive for authenticity; they spend countless hours researching these topics making new discoveries. (And we're still adding to our collection. Ask us about our research in-process.) MGAHS publications are available at the MGAHS museum and from our secure website at <https://mtgretnahistory.org/shop>*

### **The Historic Carousels of Mt. Gretna**

*by Joshua Groh*

Over the years Mt Gretna has been home to three carousels: the “Flying Horses,” introduced in June 1886; the “Palace of Flying Animals,” appearing in June 1891; and the “modern” carousel, arriving in June 1917. Learn about the manufacturers, the owners, and the demise of Mt. Gretna’s “Golden Age of Carousels,” including photos, facts, and a few unanswered questions.

\$8 MGAHS members; \$10 non-members.

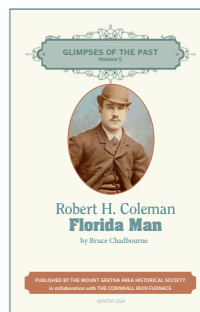


### **Robert H. Coleman: Florida Man**

*by Bruce Chadbourne*

Beloved son of Lebanon and Cornwall, Robert Habersham Coleman would ignore the advice of trusted advisors and risk all in pursuing his passion for all things railroads and trains. Despite his foibles, his legacy is a life well lived, in the midst of tragedy, and for that he was and still is admired.

\$8 MGAHS members; \$10 non-members.

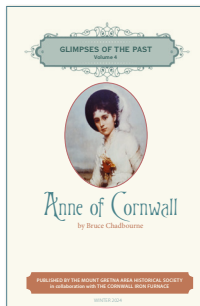


### **Anne of Cornwall**

*by Bruce Chadbourne*

Robert H. Coleman is well known for his wealth, the railroad he built, his philanthropy, and the founding of Mt. Gretna. But what about his sister, Anne Coleman Rogers? Spanning the timeframe of L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* series, you'll see that “our” Anne lived an equally remarkable and romantic life.

\$8 MGAHS members; \$10 non-members.

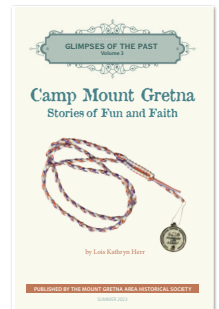


### **Camp Mount Gretna: Stories of Fun and Faith**

*by Lois Kathryn Herr*

Many of us, in our younger years, have gone to a camp. The experience can be life-changing, or at least memorable. Whether it was the songs, the crafts, the games or the friendships, camp can leave an indelible impression. From 1949-1970, Camp Mount Gretna did just that. Includes first person accounts and photos.

\$8 MGAHS members; \$10 non-members.

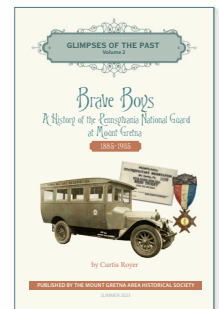


### **Brave Boys: A History of the Pennsylvania National Guard at Mt. Gretna**

*by Curtis Royer*

From 1885-1935, thousands of troops converged annually in Mt. Gretna for military training and to hone their marksmanship. Beginning with 125 acres donated in 1885, it served the Pa. National Guard and the U.S. Army until 1935. Visitors and dignitaries came to view troops preparing for a war with Spain, a Mexican border war, and WWI.

\$8 MGAHS members; \$10 non-members.



### **Farmers in the Woods: Mt. Gretna's Little Known Agricultural Background**

*by Lois Kathryn Herr*

Imagine thousands of visitors with their prized poultry and livestock, converging on Mt. Gretna for a ‘Farmers’ Encampment.’ It was an annual August event, from 1890-1916, held in the building now used as the Mt. Gretna Roller Rink. After the last Encampment in 1916, the Pa. Farm Show appeared in January 1917 (often considered a sequel to this early Encampment).

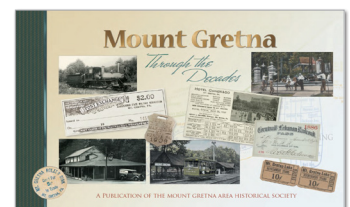
\$8 MGAHS members; \$10 non-members.



### **Mount Gretna Through the Decades**

Take a look at the history of the area organized by decades from 1881 to today. With photographs and maps from each of 14 decades, it takes us from the beginnings of Mt. Gretna Park, the Pa. National Guard, to its current mix of past and present, tradition and innovation.

\$30 MGAHS members;  
\$35 non-members.



Available for purchase at the MGAHS Museum and from our secure website at <https://mtgretnahistory.org/shop>



## If a Cottage Could Talk...


One of the most often asked questions asked at the Historical Society is, "What can you tell me about my cottage?"

We have a collection of cottage histories, so we might be able to provide some history. But if your cottage isn't in our



database, we can help you get started on learning the history of your property. Call the Society for an appointment. 717-964-1105.

Once you have completed your research, please share

what you have learned. We have both an Online Input Form (located at: [forms.gle/drBXh5DsTDxGczPr9](https://forms.gle/drBXh5DsTDxGczPr9)) and a Printable Input Form. If you wish to submit the printable History of Your Cottage, stop into Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society on a Tuesday or Friday morning. 

## MGAHS 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](mailto: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.



## BUSINESS MEMBERS

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

### Chef on the Go

PO Box 194, Mount Gretna, PA  
717-964-3451  
[rbchefonthego@verizon.net](mailto:rbchefonthego@verizon.net)

### Feather & Feather, P.C.

22 W. Main St., Annville, PA  
717-867-1200  
[jef@featherlaw.com](mailto:jef@featherlaw.com)

### Garver Insurance

809 Holly Lane, Lebanon, PA  
717-274-5810  
[eigarver@comcast.net](mailto:eigarver@comcast.net)

### Jonestown Bank & Trust Co.

PO Box 717, Jonestown, PA  
717-865-4246  
[tpeters@jbt.bank](mailto:tpeters@jbt.bank)



### Mt. Gretna Realty

PO Box 338, Mount Gretna, PA  
717-964-2100  
[gretna01@comcast.net](mailto:gretna01@comcast.net)

### Mt. Gretna Lake & Beach

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Learn about our  
Mount Gretna History  
& help to preserve it

## JOIN THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY!

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:

- complete an online membership form at <https://mtgretnahistory.org/membership/>
- print our membership form (at right), complete it and mail it to us at P.O. Box 362, Mt. Gretna, PA 17064;
- call us at (717) 964-1105 to provide your information.

Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, & YouTube!



## Join Mount Gretna Area Historical Society

- ☐ \$20 Individual Membership   ☐ \$30 Family Membership  
☐ \$75 Business Membership

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Check enclosed (payable to Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society)  
☐ Master Card   ☐ Visa

Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society  
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