

THE GRETNA Chronicles

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An Unexpected Discovery on Mount Gretna's Former National Guard Lands

by Vince Montano, local historian and MGAHS member

I love exploring the forests around Mount Gretna. Today these lands are used by hunters, hikers, bikers and equestrians. But from 1885 until the 1930s, this was the training grounds of the Pennsylvania National Guard before its move to Fort Indiantown Gap.

Remnants of target areas, training sites and abandoned buildings may be found hidden throughout these woods. Large trenches, once used for training and launching weapons, still exist in the area today. A sign posted in the game land parking lot just south of Mount Gretna advises caution if one encounters military ordnance and provides a number to call if suspected objects are found.

After decades of exploring the area, I never thought I'd place such a call.



Caution sign at entrance to game lands.
Photo by Vince Montano

I know a little about what these objects looked like, so imagine my surprise when I came upon a Stokes mortar bomb half-buried under leaves. Just over 14 inches in length and cylindrical in shape, these devices were typically packed with Amatol, a highly explosive mixture of TNT and ammonium nitrate. A detonator inside was activated by an impact fuse. The Stokes mortar was issued to both U.S. and British armies during the latter half of World War I. Germany had its own version of the World War I mortar.

It was hard to believe that it had been lying here for well more than a century. Seeing this weapon on the grounds of Mount Gretna was a grim reminder of the horrifying dangers that young soldiers of the First World War faced, on both sides of the front lines. On July 15th, 1917, the 16th Pennsylvania Infantry, after mobilizing for federal service on Soldiers Field in Mount Gretna, entered the World War as the 112th United States Infantry.



The discovered Stokes World War I mortar.
Photo by Vince Montano

It was evening when I reported my discovery. The following morning, Pennsylvania State Police Hazardous Device and Explosives Section personnel were on-site to safely dispose of the bomb. Efforts have been underway by the Army Corps of Engineers to clear the area of these hazards.

If you encounter an unfamiliar metal object in the forests or fields of Mount Gretna's former Pennsylvania National Guard sites, do not handle or pick up the object. Call 911 or the PA Game Commission's 24-hour dispatch line at (610) 926-3136. If possible, use your cell phone to provide GPS coordinates to responders.

The chance of encountering this type of military relic over a century old is indeed rare. Or so I had thought.

ADDENDUM:

Shortly before this article was published, Vince discovered a second Stokes mortar in the former combat range southeast of

—continued on page 3

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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 President's Report

by Susan Hostetter, MGAHS Board Chair


Imagine it's 1895, and you are sitting in the train station waiting to board the Cornwall Lebanon train to journey home from a day spent in Mount Gretna. We have never seen a photo of the inside of the station, but now—thanks to the generosity of Noel and Ginny Perry—we have a glimpse of a part of it.



This bench was “rescued” by an area business, restored it to its current condition and then purchased by the Perrys. It currently resides on loan in the climate-controlled board room by the Post Office. Legend says the arms prevented stretching out for a quick nap.

While Gretna tends to be quieter in the winter months, that's less true for your Historical Society. Since our last newsletter, we have released another booklet, *Gone But Not Forgotten: The INN*. Written by our archiving coordinator Pat Gible, it tells the story of the Chautauqua Inn. It is Volume 7 in our series. Please visit our website to check out the previous six.

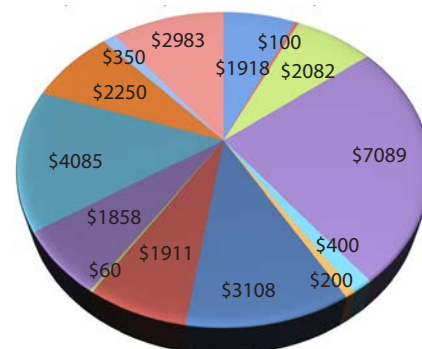
We held an antique appraisal event in March (see article) and two historical hikes in April. When the historical society opens, you also will see two new displays—Historic Hotels of Mount Gretna and Fifty Years of Gretna Music. Gretna was home to three hotels of note: the Inn, the Hotel Conewago and the Kauffman Hotel. Built in 1898, the Inn remained until 1970 while the other two were demolished in 1970. Gretna Music is celebrating its 50th year! Carl Ellenberger, founder, and Suzanne Stewart, executive director, have shared musical instruments, programs from performances and photos from the decades. Thank you to MGAHS board members Michelle Shay and Robin May for creating this year's new displays.

We love our members. So many of you either donate above and beyond your dues and/or donate your time and talents to us. Your advocacy in helping to retain and recruit new members is a gift that will have a positive impact on the community now and in the future. Happy spring! 

MGAHS 2024-2025 Financial Report

by Bob Eynon, Treasurer

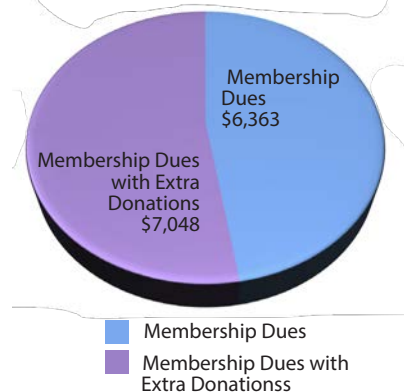
Expenses April 2024—April 2025



Building & Grounds \$1918
Event Costs \$400
Misc. \$60
Sales Tax Paid \$350
Charitable & License Fees \$100

Gifts & Donations \$200
Museum Collection \$1858
Utilities \$2983
Chautauqua Fees \$2082
Insurance \$3108

Membership Dues and Extra Donations with Them



Membership Dues
Membership Dues with Extra Donations

Office Costs \$4085
Cost of Goods for Sale \$7089
Marketing & Communic. \$1911
Professional \$2250



An Unexpected Discovery on Former National Guard Lands —continued from page 1


Mount Gretna. After calling it in and authorities responded, it was determined that the mortar was safe.

When these devices are sometimes found intact, it can be because the shells were used for test firing, containing “spotting charges” so one could see where the mortar was landing after firing. The spotting charge would detonate, but the shell remained intact. The soldiers could then adjust their aim and trajectory of the next mortar launch.

All in all, Vince said it was an interesting afternoon spent in the middle of the forest with three local police officers, a State Police bomb expert, and the same Game



Second Stokes mortar discovered.
Photo by Vince Montano

Commission warden who responded to Vince’s first mortar find in February. He refers to Vince as a “magnet.” 

MGAHS Steps into the Past with Historical Hikes

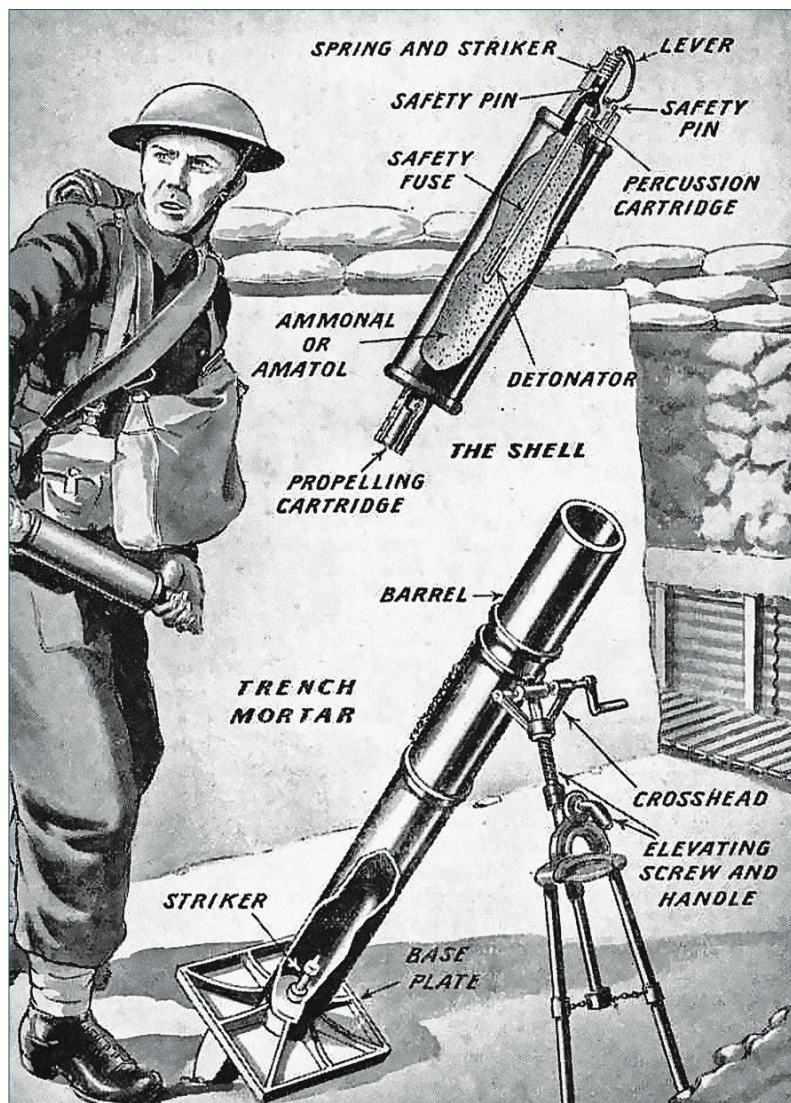
Veteran hiker and local historian Vince Montano recently led a hike through the woods to the area that once was rifle range of the former Pennsylvania National Guard (PNG).

From 1885 through most of the 1930s, thousands of PNG soldiers trained, slept and ate on the military reservation’s encampments surrounding Mount Gretna. At one point, the PNG had more than 300 buildings in the Mount Gretna area, according to *Back at the Gap: The History of Fort Indiantown Gap* by Major General Frank H. Smoker.

When the National Guard transitioned to Fort Indiantown Gap, most of the buildings were dismantled. Some foundations like those pictured here remain. Historical images show the training trenches, target areas and buildings.

A second hike at the end of April followed the Narrow Gauge Railroad. More historical hikes are planned, so stay tuned. We’ll notify our members via a Constant Contact email.





WWI-era illustration highlighting the use of the trench mortar.
Image from Alamay.com.



Hikers explore a foundation near the rifle range.
Image courtesy of Ralph Zimmerman

An Unexpected Guest Lands in Mount Gretna: A Glance into 1925

by Margaret Hopkins

It was dubbed, “The Freak of a Lifetime”—the ‘freak’ being a one-pound shell fired by the 109th Infantry during training exercises that inexplicably found its way into a second-floor room of the Chautauqua Inn and, fortunately for the guests, didn’t explode.

The ‘dud’ was front-page news in the *Daily News*’ July 14, 1925, edition (sharing space with a story on Clarence Darrow’s ‘thunderous speech on behalf of evolution’ in Dayton, Tenn.) Historical news stories such as these are available in a database of newspapers that MGAHS subscribes to and that includes several Lebanon County publications.

Some of what was printed 100 years ago would never appear in media today—stories about the arrival of cottage owners, dinner parties with menus, gatherings of guests on Gretna porches.

But reports of accidents, fires and crimes were as common in 1925 as they are today—with some obvious differences. A Philadelphia resident, for instance, was charged with selling liquor to the Pennsylvania National Guard during its summer encampment—a criminal case given we were still in the midst of Prohibition.

An April story on a fire in the Campmeeting mentioned the blaze was confined to the cottage porch due to ‘domestic supplies of water from cottages of winter residents’—winter residents in Campmeeting in 1925?

That same month, the *Lebanon Daily News* reported that legislation to add Lake Conewago to the Pennsylvania National Guard’s military reservation at Gretna was passed by both the Pennsylvania house and senate. Sen. William Freeman, Cornwall, sponsored the measure which would have placed some restrictions on public use of the lake.

Apparently, efforts to secure the lake had been ongoing in part because the federal War Department was eyeing Gretna for a federal military establishment, and the U.S. Army wanted soldiers to know how to swim. The lake’s purchase price was \$60,000.

But despite the legislature’s and War Department’s support, Gov. Gifford Pinchot vetoed the bill. “In a brief message accompanying the veto, the Governor gave the excuse that there were not sufficient funds available,” according to the *Lebanon Daily News*.

In other news from 1925, after more than a decade of discussion, a petition to create Mount Gretna Borough was filed in August on behalf of the ‘resident free holders of the town or village now known as The Pennsylvania Chautauqua’ in the Court of Quarter Sessions of the Peace of Lebanon County, according to the legal notice.

Behind the drive for independence was a familiar issue—taxes. Cottagers, according to news reports, were paying “thousands of dollars into the treasure of South Cornwall and North Londonderry townships and have had practically no returns,” declared a story published in 1915 (Chautauqua actually is in South Londonderry township).

When the petition was finally filed in 1925, those taxes were \$1,500/year and being paid to South Londonderry township. Chautauqua cottagers argued that they were not benefitting from what they were paying into the township’s coffers:

“the nearest school is three miles away; the township does nothing for the roads in the grounds and did next to nothing in repair of the lakeside road which has now been taken over by the state highway department; there is no police protection afforded although badly needed and sanitary measures are also required.”

(Sept. 25, 1925, *Lebanon Daily News*)

South Londonderry township challenged the petition claiming that cottagers were not ‘freeholders’ or residents because of their summer status. Furthermore, they didn’t understand what they had signed.

While the petition was heard by Judge C.V. Henry in September, he didn’t rule until Oct. 7, 1926, at which time he approved the creation of Mount Gretna Borough.

One additional note: The August 30, 1915, minutes of the Chautauqua stockholders’ meeting note that President A.D. Smith proposed that both Chautauqua and the Campmeeting be formed into a borough. He also wanted the picnic park included with the boundary being the Cornwall & Lebanon railroad. MGAHS

What in the World...?

This mystery item was found on the second floor of the Hall of Philosophy during a fall cleaning. Guesses as to what it was and how it was used?

Send your thoughts to mtgretnahistory@gmail.com and we’ll publish guesses in the fall newsletter. If you should ‘know’ what it is, please share that story. We’re interested in what it was called, how it was used, when it was invented, what it might have cost, and how widely it was used. MGAHS



MGAHS Member Eleanor Sarabia Recreates Gretna's Past by Margaret Hopkins

Eleanor Sarabia began painting Gretna scenes as a child when her great aunt would bring her here, and they would paint together.

Once she moved here in the 1990s, Eleanor returned to painting Gretna. Along with portraits of cottages, she provided the artwork for at least two dozen of the Mount Gretna Fire Company mugs.



*Eleanor Sarabia at her easel.
Photo by Susan Hostetter, MGAHS.*

Eleanor also works in three dimensions, constructing well-known Gretna buildings like the original post office now the information center and the gift shop. Her models are scaled 1 inch to 1 foot.

She also redid the Historical Society's Victorian dollhouse, rewiring it and repairing damage.

"I got into building dollhouses and ended up doing about 20," she said of the models that frequently become fundraisers for various Gretna organizations.

One Gretna gem she has not yet built is the Tabernacle where her son was married. "That building is a marvel—the ceiling is just incredible, and the weight distribution is sort of magical," she said. MGAHS



Model of the Visitors Center which was the original Mt. Gretna post office. Donated to MGAHS by David and Susan Wood. Photo courtesy of MGAHS.



*Dollhouse was donated by Emily Nagle Green.
Photo by Susan Hostetter, MGAHS.*

MGAHS Hosts Antiques Appraisal Fair in Firehall by Susan Wagner

A Pennsylvania long rifle. A silver and turquoise Navajo belt. A doll passed down generations.

These were among the 66 items appraised recently by experts Jane Siebert and Erika Kelly of Cordier Auctions, Harrisburg. For \$5 per item, participants could learn about historical information about their items as well as their estimated value.

The long rifle, for instance, was valued between \$5,000 and \$6,000; the Navajo belt, \$2,000; the doll with a German head dated 1916, between \$1,000- \$2,000.

The item with perhaps the highest value--\$8,000--was a George Washington inaugural button. Made of copper alloy, these buttons had "GW" stamped in the middle. Around the edge was "Long Live the President." For more info on these buttons, go to www.mountvernon.org.

Items came from near and far. One family brought dishware and glassware left in a corner cupboard of the cottage they had purchased. Another a figurine passed down from her grandmother.

Some attendees were surprised at the value of their items while others enjoyed learning information about their possessions.



Antique doll with German head dated 1916.



Middle Eastern brass coffee set and an 18th-19th century lap desk. Pictured is Erika Kelly, Cordier Auctions.

MGAHS

From Our **MGAAHS Bookshelves** *Take home a bit of history...*

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

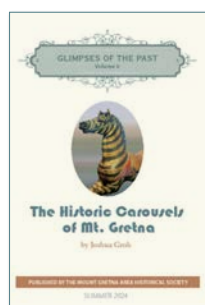
All are illustrated with images, objects, and information
gleaned from our MGAAHS Collections. Our authors and
archivists strive for authenticity; they spend countless
hours researching these topics making new discoveries.
(And we're still adding to our collection. Ask us about our
research in-process.) MGAAHS publications are available
at the MGAAHS 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," intro-
duced 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 MGAAHS members; \$10 non-members.

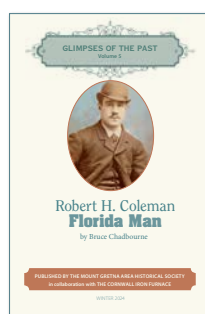


Robert H. Coleman: Florida Man

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 MGAAHS members; \$10 non-members.



Anne of Cornwall

by Bruce Chadbourne

Robert H. Coleman is well known for his
wealth, the railroad he built, his philan-
thropy, 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 MGAAHS members; \$10 non-members.

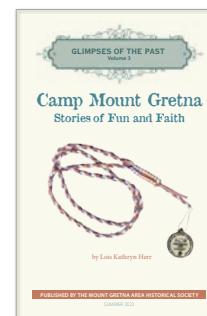


Camp Mount Gretna: Stories of Fun and Faith

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 MGAAHS 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 MGAAHS 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 MGAAHS members; \$10 non-members.



Gone but not Forgotten: The INN

by Pat Gible

In 1897, the Pa. Chautauqua Association
drew up a plan for building lots and public
services, featuring a hotel in the center of the
layout. It was designed and constructed by
John Cilley and Miller Construction Co. of
Lebanon. For 72 years that hotel, "the INN,"
provided rooms and meals for guests of Pa.
National Guard Soldiers and for those who
came to enjoy the "new" park and resort.

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



Available for purchase at the MGAAHS 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/drBXh5D5TDxGczPr9) 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.

MGHS

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.

MGHS



BUSINESS MEMBERS

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

Chef on the Go

PO Box 194, Mount Gretna, PA
717-964-3451
rbchefonthego@verizon.net



Colebrook Crossing

1550 Mt. Wilson Road, Lebanon, PA
www.colebrookcrossing.com



Feather & Feather, P.C.

22 W. Main St., Annville, PA
717-867-1200
jef@featherlaw.com



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717-274-5810
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Jonestown Bank & Trust Co.

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717-865-4246
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717-813-3880
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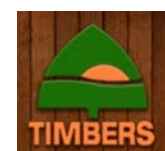
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Learn about our
Mount Gretna History
and help to preserve it

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.

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