



# SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

On a recent podcast, a former senatorial candidate, and now part-time political pundit, commented on what would be a winning message be for someone running for office, particularly in this country's heartland. He said a candidate should be able to tell voters how he or she is going to keep their families happy, healthy, safe—and nearby. Now, it doesn't matter whether this advice was directed to candidates of a particular party, because both Republican and Democratic voters are anxious to have these concerns addressed. Indeed, the formulation is standard for a political stump speech—except that last element. Having family *nearby* is a new anxiety. That our kids go off to college, find a job in a metropolitan center, and then never return to their hometown is an increasing worry.

Indeed, one wonders whether the recent animosity, expressed in some political quarters, toward higher education stems more from fear that the kids will end up moving away, than from fear that they'll be indoctrinated by some goateed Marxist.

Of course, a country founded on the notion of democratic rule, historically, has been suspicious of elites, especially with higher education long the exclusive domain of the upper class. The “common-sense” of the common man has long been privileged here. Perhaps emblematic of this view was when Adlai Stevenson—derided as an “egghead”—in his unsuccessful '52 Presidential run was approached by a supporter who told him, “Senator, you have the vote of every thinking person!” Stevenson quipped, “That's not enough, madam, we need a majority!”

A revitalized Shenango Valley will need a mix of both of knowledge-based and skill-based career opportunities to retain our young people. But even setting aside the economic considerations, which of course cannot be ignored, this newsletter has long argued that quality-of-life considerations are just as important in bringing young people back to the Valley and in attracting out-of-towners here. A low cost-of-living and unhurried lifestyle isn't enough. A variety of recreational and cultural activities, vibrant nightspots—just plain fun and interesting things-to-do—will always be top-of-mind for the twenty-something, who feels the tug of being close to family, but also has the choice of Pittsburgh, or Charlotte, or Austin. Local businesses and organizations, understandably though, are reluctant to risk investing in bringing new things to the area, if they don't see a critical mass of customers or patrons already here. Nonetheless, places like Carried Away Recreation's kayaking or Area Community Theatre's 40 Below performance space show that it can be done. While the Valley will never be able to fully compete with large metro areas, we at least need the quality-of-life attractions and career opportunities to bring back those wanting the sense of belonging found in their hometown.

### With Gratitude

In November, the Historical Society sponsored the production of *Nightfall*. This dramatic adaptation of the tales of Edgar Allen Poe attracted large crowds and made the event a fundraising success for the Society.

We are very thankful for the hard work and talent of director Maria Ackley; actors, Brenton Lamp, Leon Avery III, Tina Greig, Ben Houston, Maggie Kelso, Lawrence Latsko, Patricia Manley, Sam Perry, Sarah Puhala, and Emily Royer; organist Maureen Murray-Jaklic, and sound technician John Ackley.

### Open House

As a reminder the Historical Society is open the first and third Saturday of the month from 1:00p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (Closed New Year's Day).

Come see the unique architecture of our historic building and a large display of our artifacts, documents, and photos of Sharpsville history.

### Contact Us

website: [www.sharpsvillehistorical.org](http://www.sharpsvillehistorical.org)

email: [sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com](mailto:sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com)

see our website for officers' phone numbers

Headquarters: 131 N. Mercer Ave.,  
Sharpsville, Pa.

Mailing address: 955 Forest Lane,  
Sharpsville, Pa. 16150

Meetings are held the First Monday of the Month at 7:00pm at our headquarters

## Odds & Ends

### Mary Murphy

Unfortunately only a little is known about the sports exploits of a trailblazing female athlete in the region, Sharpsville's Mary Wancho Murphy. She was born January 31, 1900 in Austria-Hungary and in 1902 came to this country with her mother and siblings to join her father. Married to Charles Murphy in 1919 and widowed in 1927, she was inducted into the Mercer County Hall of Fame in 1963. This organization, founded in 1947, bills itself as the "oldest local hall of fame in the world." Mary was only the second woman inducted into the Hall, with Agnes Hadley inducted the year before for golf.

Later in life, she recalled: "I was a born athlete; although this may sound fantastic, I can't remember when I wasn't one. I started off with pitching horse-shoes, played "alley hockey," and baseball at school with the boys." At just age 13, she pitched for the St. Anne's girls' baseball team against the Farrell Sokol's men's team. That same summer, a local men's team, the Farrell Braves, called on young Mary to pitch against the Chicago Bloomer Girls, one of the era's all-female baseball teams that barnstormed across the country playing exhibitions against local male talent. She notched wins in both her appearances on the mound against the ladies from Chicago. She was even better known as a wrestler. Again, at only 13, she began wrestling, against women in travelling carnivals who challenged locals in the audience. A woman billed as the "champion of France" was pinned by Mary in seven minutes. In 1916, the Striblings came to town in a travelling boxing act. The two sons, Ken and Billy (who would later lose to Max Schmeling for the heavyweight championship), and then the parents would meet in the ring. After the show, they would take on challengers from the audience. Mary boxed Mrs. Stribling, bested her on points, but turned down an offer to join their troupe. A newspaper article on her induction to the County Hall of Fame summed up the scope of her talents: "She was quite a girl in her younger days and could put men to shame with her tremendous sports ambition. She toured the circuit competing in baseball, boxing, wrestling, skating, swimming, and almost all phases of sports." Mary adds that she was considered one of the best ice skaters in the county, and was for many years the only lady swimmer here.

Her trailblazing was not limited to the world of sport. Mary worked as a mail carrier in Sharpsville during the First World War. While the occasional female carrier is reported for rural routes during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, city carriers were limited to males until the labor shortages resulting from men shipped to the Front necessitated "experimental" hiring of women. Even then, only a small number of women were hired across the country. Her "tremendous sports ambition" perhaps also translated to the assertiveness needed to help organize the employees at the Westinghouse plant in Sharon where she worked as a coil-winder for 36 years. Mary was one of ten representatives (and the only female) selected to serve on the initial "company union" there. After unions dominated by the employer were made illegal, and the

Westinghouse attempted to replace it with another company union in disguise, Mary resigned in protest and helped the United Electrical Workers organize a local at the Sharon plant. She was elected as a steward representing 1,400 workers.

Mary died in 1992 a day before her 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday.



Mary at the Mercer County Hall of Fame induction banquet.



Identification of this event comes from a 1924 Sharpsville High School student newspaper, "The Blue and White":  
**"Junior-Senior Banquet:** The Junior Class of the High School will play hosts to the Senior Class at a banquet to be held in the Domestic Science Rooms [of the newly built High School, later the Middle School] on Saturday evening, May 31<sup>st</sup> at 7 o'clock. A sumptuous spread has been prepared which will be served by the Malda Bell Class of the Methodist Church. After the banquet there will be speeches by some of the teachers and members of the classes. A short play will be given by members of the Junior Class and following this Morrin's Entertainers will play for the dancing. All in all an enjoyable night is expected.

## Collections Update

**Jim Redmond** donated a large and important collection consisting mainly of photos, documents, and artifacts of the Sharpsville Railroad; photos and documents of the Western Reserve Fish & Game Protective Assn.; and many sought after photos from the 1920s and 30s (including the photo above).

## Commemorative Bricks

*Please consider an "In Memory of" or "In Honor of" brick for a loved one.*

*4" x 8" bricks with three lines of inscription—\$75  
 8" x 8" bricks with six lines of inscription—\$125*

## Membership

If you are not already a member of the Society, please consider joining. In addition to receiving this newsletter, membership gives you a voice in the Society's direction, a closer connection with Society activities, and an opportunity to meet people who share an interest in improving our town.

Dues are low: \$10/year for individuals, \$5 for seniors or students, \$25 for families, and \$75 for a lifetime membership.

The bricks would be placed around the Shenango Furnace Ingot Mould in the town park.

**Stop at Mehler Insurance or call 724-962-2392  
 or email [sharpshvillehistorical@hotmail.com](mailto:sharpshvillehistorical@hotmail.com)**

## Odds & Ends

### Aspirations for Song and Stage

Throughout its existence, Sharpsville has usually been considered more of a gritty, workaday town, and less of a home to the Bohemian playwright or a Tin Pan Alley. Yet, we do come across traces of creativity originating in Sharpsville. Rev. Clarence J. Harris was pastor of the First Universalist Church of Sharpsville from 1905 to 1909 and became a prolific writer of motion picture screenplays after he had left here. While he was at Sharpsville, though, he wrote the play “Simple Simon Simple and the Goslins” which was performed by “home talent” in November 1906. Even earlier, entertainment by “home talent” is evident from this 1889 advertisement for the Cherry Avenue Comedy Company.

Willis Kitch and his family lived in the house on the corner of Church and Cherry Streets. An outbuilding in the back (the “barn”) would have faced Cherry and, by all appearances, was the scene of an impromptu set of comedy sketches featuring talent from the neighborhood.

A larger record of works for song and stage originating in Sharpsville, however, comes from the copyright entries published yearly by the U.S. Government.

From it, we see that Elsie May Williams tried her hand at two

stage productions in 1920—“A Kouple of Modern Kountry Jakes” (described as “a signing, talking, and dancing act”) and “Thru the Window” (“a comedy drama playlet in two scenes”). Most of the other entries, though, were sheet music. Included are Louis Yody’s 1917 “A Little Girl is Waiting for Me,” Florence Dorothea Wilson’s 1927 foxtrot “No Powder on your Nose,” Clarence Kloss’ 1938 “Somewhere Sweetheart,” Albert Ernest Whitmore’s 1941 “I Fell in Love

with Jesus.” Jimmy Anthony Sylvester wrote “Dreamy Melody” in 1940 and “Blow Your Top” in 1947, with Marjorie A. Swartz’ “Some Day” also from 1947. Almost nothing is known about the writers of these works, or of the works themselves, especially as some may have never been published.

We do know more about the Wasleys, though. Frank Wasley received a copyright in 1920 for “Bill’s Jazzy Band is Back in Jazzy Land,” and in 1922 for “May (Why Keep Me Waiting)”. He also wrote in 1919 “We Marched the Streets Until Midnight Came,” which celebrated the end of World War I. The Historical Society has copies of the sheet music for the first two. Frank came from a musical family. In the ca. 1927 photo below, his brothers Thomas Walsey and Lawrence Wasley are standing to the right of the leader of this yet-to-be- identified band.

