



# SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

In researching local history or one's family tree, the scope of resources now available online could not have been imagined twenty years ago. Digitization of records, newspapers, and other publications makes a trip to a distant courthouse or research library unnecessary. Moreover, since the text in these documents are largely searchable, information can come to light from an unlikely corner. And, the available documents continue to grow each month, through the efforts of for-profit companies like Ancestry.com, non-profit or governmental entities, or even individual volunteers. (Tom Tryniski has single-handedly scanned and digitized over 57 million newspaper pages on the website he hosts!)

Despite being awash in these records, we can still lack a full comprehension of our past. The individual memories, whether recorded as an oral history, or written in a letter or diary, add a completely different aspect to the often impersonal information contained in a government record or a newspaper report. Since it often contains motivation, nuance, or emotion, a personal account can give life to an understanding of the history of one's family or the history of one's town.

The Historical Society is lucky to have two extended diaries full of the authors' thoughts and opinions. Plus, we have several shorter letters or anecdotes that provide valuable insights. But, we would still like to know more. An article suitable for this newsletter—such as Deb Derrenbacher's "Picking Apples at Midnight" which appeared in our September 2024 edition—would be very welcome. Shorter reminiscences, particularly those that recall a by-gone way of life here, are equally appreciated. If you have something you want to tell us, please do so.

### With Gratitude

Significant donations were received from

**Ralph & Carol Mehler**

and the **Estate of Robert Rannard**

allowing us to continue the restoration of our historic headquarters

### Upcoming Events

**GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIPS**

**Rivers Casino Pittsburgh, May 13<sup>th</sup>**

**Two-night Getaway to Bally's Atlantic City  
Casino, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>**

**Call 724-813-9199 for details**

### 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.**

Come see the unique architecture—both interior and exterior—of our historic building and a large display of our artifacts, documents, and photos of Sharpsville history. With our basement displays recently expanded they may include items you may have missed on a prior visit.

*Check our Facebook page for any changes due to building renovations*

### 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

## A Look Back

### I.O.O.F.

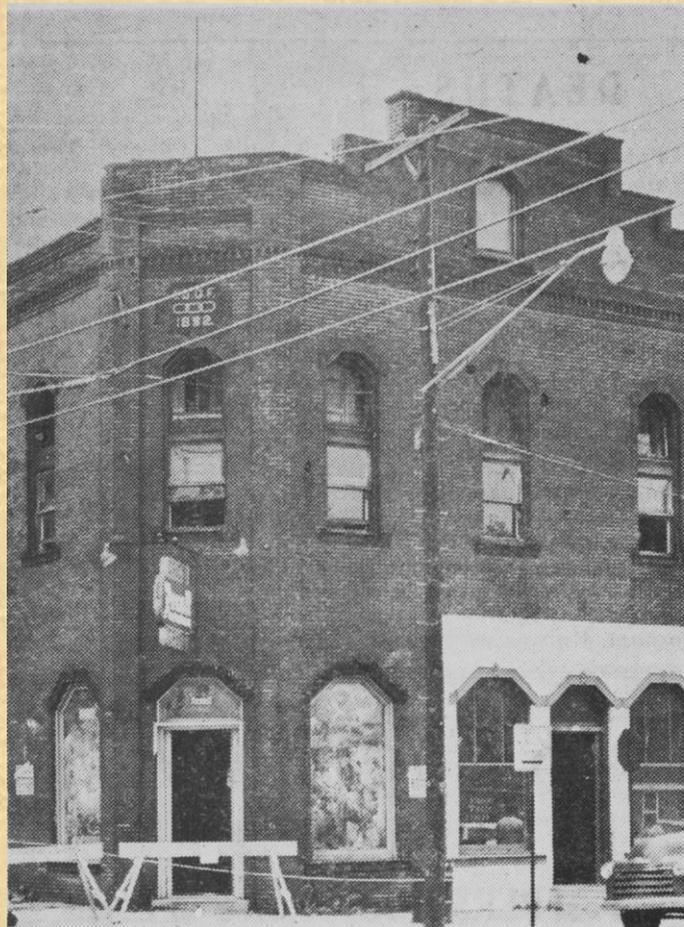
Well before the Urban Renewal projects of the 1970s, in 1959 a landmark building in Sharpsville was torn down, yet today it is barely remembered. Built in 1892, the lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows once stood in a at the southwest corner of Mercer Avenue and Shenango Street (catty-corner from the Pierce Opera House).

The era of the fraternal club has long passed. Organizations like the Masons or the Elks, while still very much in existence, no longer have the membership or influence they once held. In 1907, it was estimated that 40% of American men were members of a fraternal order.

Sharpsville's first fraternal club was a lodge of the oldest fraternal order in America, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, often known by its initials, I.O.O.F. The Adoniram Lodge No. 739 was founded at Sharpsville on November 10, 1870. It originally met on the second story of Wesley S. Bebout's drug store, which once stood on Mercer Avenue across from Furnace Street. They later moved their meeting to a building that contained T.M. McMillan's general store, on the same block. The Lodge was forced to relocate again when that building burned in 1877. (That fire destroyed much of what was then Sharpsville's business section on the block of Mercer Avenue between Canal and Furnace Streets. Besides McMillan's building, Miles Lightner's grocery store, Clothenstein's bakery, Bebout's drug store, Mrs. Hannah Dull's millinery shop, Harshaw's grocery and dry goods store, and John Cole's blacksmith shop were all consumed. These structures were never rebuilt and the town's business center moved up the hill on Mercer Avenue.) The Odd Fellows' new home was in the upper floor of Fish's Block, which is the large three-story brick building at 120 N. Mercer Avenue. That meeting space was the hall of another fraternal and beneficial society, the Ancient Order of United Workmen, and was shared with several other clubs. Finally, in 1892, the I.O.O.F. erected their own building at the southwest corner of Mercer Avenue and Shenango Street.

Not only was the Sharpsville lodge the oldest fraternal organization here, it was also the town's largest, mirroring national figures for the Odd Fellows throughout the nineteenth century. With their motto, "Friendship, Love, and Truth," they once provided benefits to disabled members as well as to their widows and orphans. They continue in their missions of community service, forging close friendships, and personal development. A ladies' auxiliary, Rebekah Lodge No. 110 was founded on December 30, 1902. The organization divided in May 1909 with the splinter group known at Endeavor Rebekah Lodge No. 367. The reason for the schism is not known and each of the ladies' lodges had around 200 members in 1924. Another offshoot, was a men's organization founded here September 4, 1920, Khlit Sanctorum, No. 179. Self-described as the "The Funfield of Odd Fellowship," this auxiliary was set up for purely social purposes, along with Middle-Eastern themed rites and regalia. Their motto was "We Never Sleep," and two big hoot owls with "electric eyes" their emblem.

The Odd Fellows temple was located in at the center what was then Sharpsville's prime business district. On the first floor, facing Shenango Street were two storefronts. At the corner, one was initially a grocery store, and then for many years a drugstore. Next to it was Perry's Shoe Store. Initially, an apartment was in the middle section facing Mercer Avenue, until by 1905 it became a storage area, and by 1912, the drugstore was expanded to include this area. The rear third consisted of an office, first Dr. Catron's, and then Dr. Twitmyer's. The entire second floor was the



A newspaper photo of the old I.O.O.F. lodge, August 1959, shortly before it was torn down.

## I.O.O.F., cont'd.

I.O.O.F. meeting hall. Because of the profusion of clubs and lodges at the time—many with low or passing membership levels—several used this space for their own meetings. Among these other groups were the local chapters of the Equitable Aid Union, Royal Templars of Temperance, and Knights of Pythias. A third floor, barely-evident from photos, and more like an attic, was described as a gymnasium!

With burgeoning membership—412 members by 1924—the club built a new building on Walnut Street in 1913. It was dedicated, free of debt, on September 1<sup>st</sup> of that year. This imposing building had in its basement two pool tables, a billiard table, and three duckpin alleys. Included in the first floor were a ladies' parlor, a card room, smoking room, and a large dining room with a kitchen. The main lodge room, measuring 45' x 60', occupied the second floor. Used for meetings as well as a dance floor, it was considered one of the finest dance floors in the Shenango Valley. Lighting, wired in series, allowed the colored bulbs of red, white, and blue to be used singly or in combination. As with the old



Parade float of the Rebekah Lodge No. 110 on Walnut Street, year uncertain

hall, the new lodge also served as a meeting place for other societies as well as a facility for school and church events.

Before their move, the old hall at Mercer and Shenango had been sold to Richard Patterson in 1906. It was afterwards generally known as Patterson's Hall. In the storefront next to the corner space, John Perry's Shoe Store continued business until at least 1924. An occupant there isn't found until Hugh Kirkwood opened a shop for repair and sales of electrical appliances. By 1952, it became Lloyd Appliances. The drugstore on the corner, was first run by an A.A. Reichard who moved his pharmacy there about 1900. Dan H. Beck then purchased the store until he

sold it to Fred K. "Skip" Reichard in around 1912. It was here that Skip and his wife Gertrude came up with the uniquely refreshing and uniquely Sharpsville coffee stir. In 1952, the drugstore was sold to "Obie" Cricks who continued serving the beloved coffee stir.

A newspaper report shortly before the hall was torn down says the building was originally built as wood-frame and at some point later veneered with brick. If this was the case, it was within three years of the original construction. Regardless, the bricks became a problem. They had been pulling away from the frame and by early 1959 began falling to the sidewalk. This prompted the Borough Council to condemn the building. Dean Alexander Construction Company won the contract to raze it. Cricks' drugstore, as a result, moved to a new building he put up across the street.

Urban Renewal of the 1960s and 70s, now carries a negative connotation, and, in hindsight, rightly so. New four-lane highways cut through swaths of urban centers, and displaced local businesses and lower-income neighborhoods who did not have the political clout to block development. At least in Sharpsville, though, the condition of much of what was torn down was then—and would still be today—considered substandard. A 1959 newspaper report described the building as at one time "considered the finest apartment house in the boro and in the area," but that "over the years little work was done in maintenance and the building gradually deteriorated to its present condition." While the streetcar had a significant effect on the placement of residences and businesses two generations earlier, it did not radicalize urban planning like the automobile. Blocks built for walkability did not fit in with an environment centered on car



Compared to the large number of photos and souvenirs from Sharpsville's Centennial celebration in 1974, we have relatively few items from our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1949. Here, though, is a photo of a float during one of the four parades held during the week-long festivities. It is on Mercer Avenue on the former bridge, coming from Main Street.

### Items for Sale

## Traces of Old Sharpsville

A thoroughly researched history of Sharpsville with short, readable articles grouped into themed chapters and many photos — \$40

## Charcuterie Boards

Engraved with images of Pierce Mansion, First Universalist Church, or the Jonas Pierce House — \$40

## Santa Collection

Featuring images of Sharpsville's beloved Santa visits

Mugs — \$15

Ornaments — \$15

T-Shirts — \$20

## Bookmarks

Engraved with the 150th Anniversary Logo — \$5

To purchase, call 724-877-9958 or visit [sharpvillehistorical.org](http://sharpvillehistorical.org)

We still have limited quantities of:

**Natural Stone Drink Coasters** featuring lithographed scenes of Old Sharpsville — \$5

**CAT'S MEOW** art portraits of the First Universalist church or Pierce Mansion — \$10

**T-Shirts with the Historical Society Logo** M-L — \$12; XL and above — \$15

## I.O.O.F., cont'd.



The old Odd Fellows Temple at Mercer & Shenango, in 1957. Signage for Cricks' Pharmacy and their coffee stirs can be seen on the Mercer Avenue side.

travel and parking. With a captive group of local customers, Sharpsville once had seventeen grocers. They were doomed when a short car ride (and a car trunk) allowed shopping at a supermarket—and the better value larger sales volume entailed. This consolidation of retail commerce made running a neighborhood mom-and-pop shop profitably much more difficult, with building maintenance often the first to be deferred. Surely, the deterioration of much of Old Sharpsville's buildings can be blamed on the neglect of building owners or lack of commitment to historic preservation (which wasn't even an idea until the late 1960s), but the economic headwinds they faced cannot be ignored.

The 1913 Odd Fellows Temple on Walnut Street, however, still stands. With membership waning, the building was sold in May of 1980 to Richard and Mary Ellen Foltz, and the club relocated to a rented space at 25. W. Shenango Street. In April 2003, they moved out of town and met at a church in Hermitage. The Walnut Street building has since been home to Walnut Street Lodge and continues today as the offices of Puskar Chiropractic (with remnants of the duckpin lanes still in the basement). Adoniram Lodge No 739 consolidated with Sandy Lake Lodge 573 in 2008, and remains the last lodge in Mercer County. Orchard Manor Nursing Home in Grove City was originally founded in 1901 as the Wayside Inn, a rest home for elderly Odd Fellows and their widows. While it serves the general population today, it is still sponsored by the I.O.O.F. While their numbers have declined significantly from a peak of about 3,400,000 in 1915, there are still around 25,000 Odd Fellows in the United States and 600,000 worldwide, with membership in European lodges growing.



Some of the Adoniram Lodge's regalia in the Historical Society's collection.



The later Odd Fellows Temple on Walnut Street, today