



Visit our website at WWW.MIFFLINTOWNSHIP.ORG

Portal to the Past

"Preserving Our Past . . . For The Future"

Volume 9 Number 4

APRIL 2009

Serving the Local Communities from the original Mifflin Township of 1788: Baldwin, Clairton, Dravosburg, Duquesne, Hays, Homestead, Jefferson Hills, Lincoln Place, Munhall, Pleasant Hills, West Elizabeth, West Homestead, West Mifflin and Whitaker.

A reminder to all — the monthly member meetings are now held on the SECOND MONDAY of the month at 7 p.m. at the West Mifflin Borough building, 3000 Lebanon Church Road, West Mifflin

APRIL MEETING ~~ Monday, April 13, 2009 7:00 p.m.

"TAMING OF THE TOMATO"

Sandra Baker, of the W. PA Historical Society, will give a presentation of the H. J. Heinz plant history. Come and learn how Heinz made an empire from pickles and tomatoes. "Taming of the Tomato" is about the founding of the H.J. Heinz Company with a focus on WW II Air Force flying ace Jim They who became General Manager of Manufacturing and was a key engineer in developing many innovations in food processing. I guarantee a fun time with Pickle Pins for everyone.

"Mr. Heinz, while in an elevated railroad train in New York, saw among the car-advertising cards one about shoes with the expression '21 Styles.' It set him to thinking, and as he told it: 'I said to myself, 'we do not have stylish products, but we do have varieties of products.' Counting up how many we had, I counted well beyond 57, but '57' kept coming back into my mind. 'Seven, seven' - there are so many illustrations of the psychological influence of that figure and of its alluring significance to people of all ages and races that '58 Varieties' or '59 Varieties' did not appeal at all to me as being equally strong.'



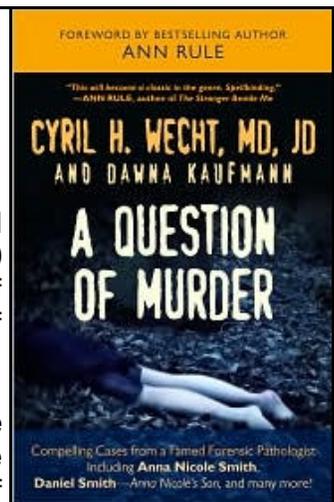
WHAT'S YOUR HISTORY ? Wednesday, April 15, 2009 ~ 7 pm

DR. CYRIL H. WECHT, M.D., J.D. A QUESTION OF MURDER

No one has performed more autopsies in high-profile cases than Dr. Cyril Wecht. During the past four decades, he has dissected more than 16,000 bodies to determine how and why they died. He has testified in hundreds of trials and exhumed dozens of corpses. He's investigated the deaths of presidents and princes, coal miners and Hollywood stars.

From the tragic homicides of Laci Peterson and Nicole Brown Simpson to the mysteries that surround the deaths of JonBenét Ramsey and Natalee Hollaway, CNN, MSNBC, FOX News, the New York Times, and scores of other publications constantly call upon Dr. Wecht to provide his expert analysis.

Cyril H. Wecht, MD, JD (Pittsburgh, PA), one of the world's leading pathologists, is the author of Tales from the Morgue, Mortal Evidence, Who Killed JonBenét Ramsey?, Grave Secrets, Cause of Death, and hundreds of professional publications. He has served as president of both the American College of Legal Medicine and the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, and has appeared on numerous nationally syndicated television programs, including Dateline NBC, Larry King Live, 20/20, On the Record With Greta Van Susteren, Geraldo At Large, Burden of Proof, and many others.



WATER THROWING IS BEING INDULGED IN

by George Tkach

"Water Throwing Is Being Indulged In." That was the Daily Messenger headline that caught my eye as I skimmed through old copies of Homestead's bygone newspaper digging up dead relatives to fill in my family tree. What was "water throwing"? My curiosity was now up and had to be satisfied, and so, as Paul Harvey used to say, here's the rest of the story.

The article was dated April 13, 1909, a century ago and two days after Easter Sunday that year. "Yesterday and today," the report began, "have been exciting ones among the foreign people, chiefly of the Slavonic race, who predominate in the 2nd ward."

My ears now joined my eyes in curiosity because, hey, I'm Slavonic, I mean Slavic. No one says Slavonic anymore. Actually grandpa was Slavic, but you know what I mean. And in the 2nd ward of old Homestead, as per Mifflin Township Historical Society material, while Slavic covered a number of ethnic groups, it mainly meant Slovak, and hey, I'm Slovak! Actually, grandpa was the Slovak, but you know what I mean. Anyway, my ears were up!

Continuing, "There is a strange custom, whose origin is unknown, at the close of the Easter season, when the women throw water on the men and the next day the men cast it on the women. Yesterday the women took their turn at throwing and today the men had theirs. The custom was followed



strictly yesterday and every man who passed a foreign woman, whether acquainted or not, had to take a sousing." [Sousing? Perhaps that's Slavonic for *dousing!*] "The streets were sprinkled with water and the men drenched. The latter did not change their clothes, as they knew they would get another drenching by the next woman they passed, so they went about all day with their clothing soaked with water. Today the women got it back on them and every one who appeared on the street got a ducking." [Aducking? I'm guessing it means "very wet."] "All was taken in good nature, and the participants seem to derive a great deal of amusement from it."

"This strange custom, as explained by a young foreigner who is highly educated, originated with the Slavonic people and has to some extent been taken up by the Polish people and the Hungarians, but among the latter it is not engaged in very extensively." The young foreigner's reference to Poles and Hungarians is another indication that we are talking about Slovaks here. The young foreigner,

who no doubt had a B.S. degree, then went on, "While the origin is unknown, and is comparable to the custom in this country of coloring Easter eggs which the children are taught to believe are laid by the rabbit, it probably had a more religious significance in the start, for it is the belief that it was, in the beginning of the custom, an imitation of the priests performing the ordinance of baptism by sprinkling." Huh? From what little I knew of Slovak customs and traditions, I at least knew that the Easter Bunny had nothing to do with "aducking." This was the part of the article that pushed me over the edge. I now had to research this Slovak water throwing. But before we go there the news story concluded, "What has started as an imitation of a religious ceremony has grown into a custom and degenerated into a joke. But it is altogether harmless and, as stated, affords much pleasure to a people who have not so many means of obtaining amusements in their adopted country." How condescending! Boy, he really got my Irish up with that one!

It's been a while but having read background material on Slovak customs and traditions

before journeying there a few years back, and once there, during the Easter season no less, having heard first hand a young female cousin's tale of her own watering ordeal, it was now time to re-research this matter and discover just what was going on down in the second ward way back then. Here's what I came up with.

In Slovakia Easter is a fun holiday as well as a religious one. The day after Easter, known as *Vel'konočný pondelok*, or Easter Monday, incorporates a tradition of sprinkling, or dunking, girls and young women with water. Among Poles this same tradition is labeled *Smigus-Dyngus*, and is observed on Wet Monday, or, as it has come to be known, Dingus Day.

It was customary a hundred years ago, and centuries before that, for both girls and young women to stay at home on this day in order to welcome the boys and men of their extended family as they went from house to house visiting their female relatives, bringing them greetings, of course, but also they came intending to *oblievat'*, or "to water" their womenfolk. In some areas this custom included even mothers as well as all other females, related or not. This tradition originated in pre-Christian Slavic beliefs about nature, where water was a symbol of life and the pouring of water upon a woman was a gesture meant to bestow year long health and beauty on the "bestow-ee." It symbolized the renewal and revitalization of life in the spring. Ergo, it had nothing to do with Christian baptism nor bunny rabbits.

The amount of water "bestowed" varied by region, from the mere sprinkling of a spoonful to a real skin-soaking dunk in the local stream. However, in some parts of eastern Slovakia the girls got their revenge on the following Tuesday when they repaid the men this symbolic rejuvenation with buckets of ice-cold water. In Poland, traditionally, the females are supposed to get their revenge on Tuesday by throwing dishes, but now most females just soak the men back with water on the same day. My research revealed that Monday, and only Monday, has always been the day for soaking the girls. Why the Homestead crowd had men on Monday and girls on Tuesday is unknown. Probably a regional difference, one not practiced by the Slovaks of Duquesne or McKeesport.

But that was then. Today the custom has tapered off a bit to where the main "victims" are teenage school-girls who no doubt secretly relish the attention poured upon them by their male counterparts. My young cousin certainly did. And also today, as well as a century ago, a well equipped water thrower will have a bit of perfume to spray on the girl he's just watered. A nice touch, you might think, until you consider the complaint of one girl whose grandpa used a special bottle of perfume he bought 20 years ago! Can you imagine that smell!

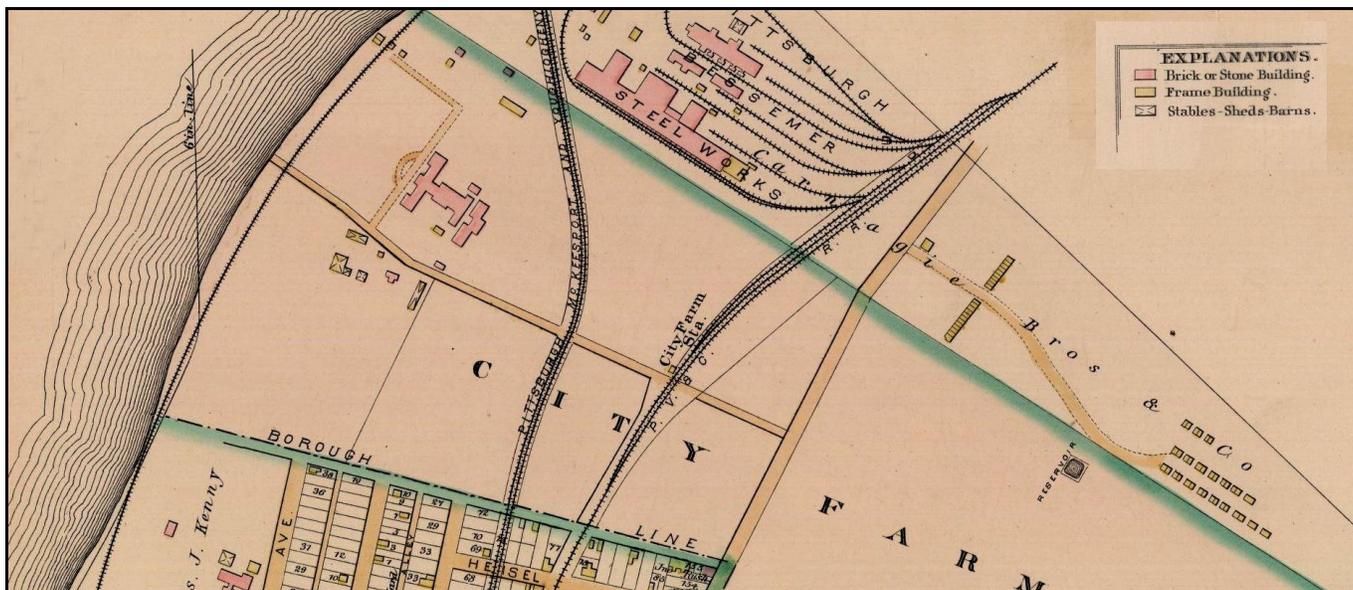
If you're not Slovak and didn't grow up around this particular custom you might think it a bit odd, to say the

least, but there's yet another ancient Slavic nature belief that Slovaks and some Poles have attached to Easter Monday that you might say is downright barbaric, and that is the use of Easter Whips. According to this age old tradition every young man must have his own handmade whip, or "korbáč", one braided together from long, thin, pliable willow switches and tipped with ribbons. Willow is used because it's the first tree that "wakes" in the spring. So, what happens next? Folklore has it that when the whips are used *symbolically* and *ceremoniously* on a female's legs, the fertility and vitality of the branches flows into her! Wow, what a sure-fire way to get attention from that special someone, first a splashing and then a thrashing!

Wait! There's more. After a watering and/or a whipping, the female was obliged to give the male a decorated egg, a ribbon for his whip, or, depending on his age, a piece of candy or a shot of whiskey! Nowadays, however, what was obviously a springtime courting ritual between those quite familiar with each other, has broken down to an extortion racket of sorts, the boys chasing the girls not for an egg token or candy but for the small coins that have replaced them.

So there you are, the foreign ladies of the 2nd ward got watered down all in the name of beauty and rejuvenation, while the men's spirits were just plain whetted for food and drink. When I explained to my wife the benefits she'd experience from indulging my throwing water on her next Easter Monday, she explained in return, that any such indulgence by me and I'd experience the benefits of our medical coverage.

Editor's Note: The Pittsburgh City Poor Farm was a large part of the early Mifflin Township history. The map (1886) shows the poor farm with the Carnegie Steel Co. at top (original Kloman Brothers foundry and Pittsburgh Bessemer Steel Co.) and the Homestead Borough at the bottom. This issue has some interesting history of the poor farm from research. The stories of the poor farm will continue with the May issue.



CITY ALMSHOUSES, POOR HOUSES, & POOR FARMS

By Jim Hartman — compiled from various articles

The concept that care of the poor was a local problem was a carryover from English Colonial law. Pittsburgh became a borough April 22, 1794. At that time there were approximately 3,000 residents in the community. The care of the poor needed attention. Overseers were authorized to impose taxes to raise relief funds for the needy. The position of overseer was an unpopular office, for they collected taxes to be given to the poor and needy "in their idleness." The overseers established the first home for the care of paupers on the South side of Virgin Alley (now Oliver Ave.) near Wood Street in 1804. This building could accommodate five people. It remained at this location until 1822. At that time anything beyond Wood Street was considered out in the country.

The pauper's house, or as it was at times called the almshouse, was not the ordinary means of caring for the poor. The most popular means of dis-

persing relief was for ward committees to collect cash, clothing and coal and distribute them. Churches and fraternal organizations were also active in relief of the poor. This method continued until the 1830s when care of the poor became an overwhelming burden. Then local government became deeply involved in the care of the poor.

In 1818 a site for the new poor house was chosen in the town of Allegheny (Now the north side of Pittsburgh) one half mile from the Allegheny Commons (Now the North Side Park). The land fronted on Ohio Lane, later known as Pennsylvania Avenue, it was bounded on the East by Allegheny Avenue, on the North by Franklin Street and on the West by Sedgwick Street. Construction was completed in 1822 and the poor house moved. The new home could accommodate thirty residents. The cost during the first year of operation was \$3,000. The cost of \$100 a year

for each resident was considered excessive and aroused opposition and complaints. This building served until 1848.

The Overseers of the city of Pittsburgh on September 1, 1846 purchased 102.5 acres located in the township of Mifflin, Pa. (in 1944 the name was changed to West Mifflin) on the south side of the Monongahela river. In 1847 the Overseers were replaced by the Guardians of the Poor. This group purchased another 50 adjacent acres and approved a contract for a three story brick building that would accommodate 300 persons. The building was large and pretentious. It was located beautifully and picturesquely on a magnificent bend in the Monongahela river. The almshouse was built on elevated ground with a lawn in front, ornamented with trees, shrubbery and walks sloping down to the river. The building cost \$42,000 and contained the usual almshouse accommodations. There were sitting rooms, sleeping

rooms, dormitories, kitchens, dining rooms, laundry, baths and quarters for the superintendent along with rooms for attendants. The sexes were kept segregated at all times, the two wings of the building being separated by permanent partitions. In 1852 the residents from the home on the North side were moved by barge to the new home at Homestead. In 1855 thirty-five acres, two rods, (rod 30.25 square yards) and six perches (perch 16.5 square feet) were purchased and added to the property. This brought the total acreage to about 190 acres.

The typical menu at the almshouse was: for breakfast the inmates received good bread, coffee or tea and molasses; at dinner they were given meat, vegetables, soup and bread. Once a week they were given pot-pie made of veal or some other fresh meat and sometimes milk. Supper was very similar to breakfast. All got meat at dinner and those who worked on the farm were allowed meat twice a day.

In 1870 there was no classification of the insane. They slept in the same rooms and associated freely throughout the day. The 59 mental inmates in the home in 1870 were mild mannered, chronic cases and restraints were not used unless an inmate became unruly. There was only treatment for common diseases and no attempt was made to treat mental patients except for organic disturbances. Those cases which were thought to be curable were kept at Dixmont. (opened November 11, 1861) In 1873 there were about 50 Pittsburgh patients at Dixmont.

In 1872 the superintendent stated the treatment of inmates must be kind but just. Do everything to make it appear as a home for the inmates, but make them understand they are under the discipline of officers. Have a system. Make them understand they must do something and do it at certain periods.

A separate building for the insane was erected in 1879. It was a three story brick building that had a capacity of one hundred and fifty, seventy-five of each sex. The sexes were separated as there were three male wards and three female wards. The cost of the building was \$47,698.27. The expenses of the insane department were

not kept separate from the other accounts of the poor institution. The average cost of the maintenance was \$1.85 per person per week. The males worked on the farm and the females made clothing for the inmates.

The vacancies left at the almshouse by the removal of mental patients into the newly constructed building for the insane, were soon filled with additional indigent inmates. The problem of increased immigration brought with it the blind, crippled, lunatic and infirmed paupers from foreign countries. The situation became so intolerable Congress authorized the Pennsylvania Board of Public Charities to screen all immigrants at the port of Philadelphia and return to their homeland those who would become a burden upon the community.

The improved physical facilities at the Pittsburgh home did not insure improved medical attention. There was one doctor assigned to both the almshouse and the insane asylum. Between March first and June first 1883 seventy-four inmates died. The Pennsylvania Board of Public Charities recommended that a standing board of physicians assist the physician at the almshouse and a physician was appointed to attend the mental patients. In 1884 each institution had its own superintendent. No trained nurses worked at the almshouse infirmary or the insane asylum. Patients were nursed by inmates. This situation changed and trained attendants were hired. In 1887 a citizen's visitation committee stated there were improvements. In the insane asylum there were no more blackened eyes or cowering frightened figures among the mental patients. Maintaining mental patients under these conditions cost the city about \$1.45 a week per patient. It would have been possible for the city to send the patients to Dixmont Hospital under the law of 1883 for \$2.00 a week per patient. However, the city preferred the more economical method of keeping them at Homestead. This meant a saving of \$3,500 annually.

The city farm at Homestead suffered from two serious problems in

the late 1880's, overcrowding and poor living conditions. Normally at least 140 patients occupied the insane department, which was its capacity. In 1886 through 1888 the census was 164 with an additional 96 patients kept at Dixmont. The second problem was the encroachment of the Carnegie Steel Mill on the city farm. The mills crowded to within a few yards of the farm buildings. Smoke and dirt made life miserable. Railroad tracks had cut through the city farm. The only solution to these problems was to find a new location.

It was decided to sell the Homestead site to the highest bidder. The Carnegie Steel Company needed the property for further development of their plant. They made an offer of \$450,000 in 1890 which was accepted. The home retained the right to occupy the buildings and remain in possession of a portion of the land for three years.

The George Neal Farm consisting of 243 acres (the grounds eventually increased over the years to 1001 acres) was purchased for \$61,687.50. This land was located along the Chartiers branch of the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and St. Louis Railroad. Plans for the new home were approved by the Pennsylvania Board of Public Charities in 1892.

Construction of the new half million dollar institution began in 1892. On December 21, 1893 the Pittsburgh Dispatch carried the news item: "The removal of the inmates of the City Poor Farm occurred yesterday. In less than eight hours after the work was commenced the city's poor were in their new quarters."

The moving of the inmates from the building at Homestead to the train required considerable work. There were forty invalids who had to be carried to the baggage cars provided for them. The two hundred or more insane remained until February 1894 when the new quarters at Marshallsea were completed. [This facility was later named Mayview].

The Local News
Saturday, August 16, 1890

THE CITY FARM

Ex-Superintendent William S. Bullock, of Homestead Writes Interesting Reminiscences

Queer Characters—Life Among the Unfortunate—History of an Institution That Will Soon Depart From Homestead

(Written Especially for THE LOCAL NEWS)

Perhaps, Mr. Editor, before entering upon the sketches it would be well to give a short history of the Alms House so far as location and growth may be concerned. It may not be generally known that the first Alms House governed or owned by Pittsburg was located in the lower part of what is now Allegheny City, a poor, rickety house, entirely inadequate, so far as comfort was concerned; for the purpose intended. But the growth of the city rendered it necessary to procure larger quarters for the increasing demand for the care of the unfortunate of the city, and the present location, origi-

nally the farm of Mr. Robert McClure, but which had passed into the hands of Mr. Daniel Risher, who, by deed dated Sept. 1, 1846, and for a consideration of \$9,109, conveyed it to the city of Pittsburg. But there being only an ordinary farm house on the premises, the Guardians proceeded at once to build additions attached to both ends of the old farm house making them what was considered a large establishment; but the mistake was soon seen and rectified by the building of the present poor department, a building in every respect situated for the purpose, which was finished in 1850. The original farm was further increased in size by the purchase of an additional 45 or 50 acres on the 20th of October, 1855, from Mr. Wm. McClure, making altogether a farm of about 150 acres.

Water being one of the necessities of an institution of this kind, the Guardians commenced looking round for a suitable supply for their purpose, and, after an unsuccessful attempt to get what is known as the big spring on the west addition to Homestead, they succeeded in purchasing about half an acre from what is now the Munhall farm. This was done in 1853, and after building a

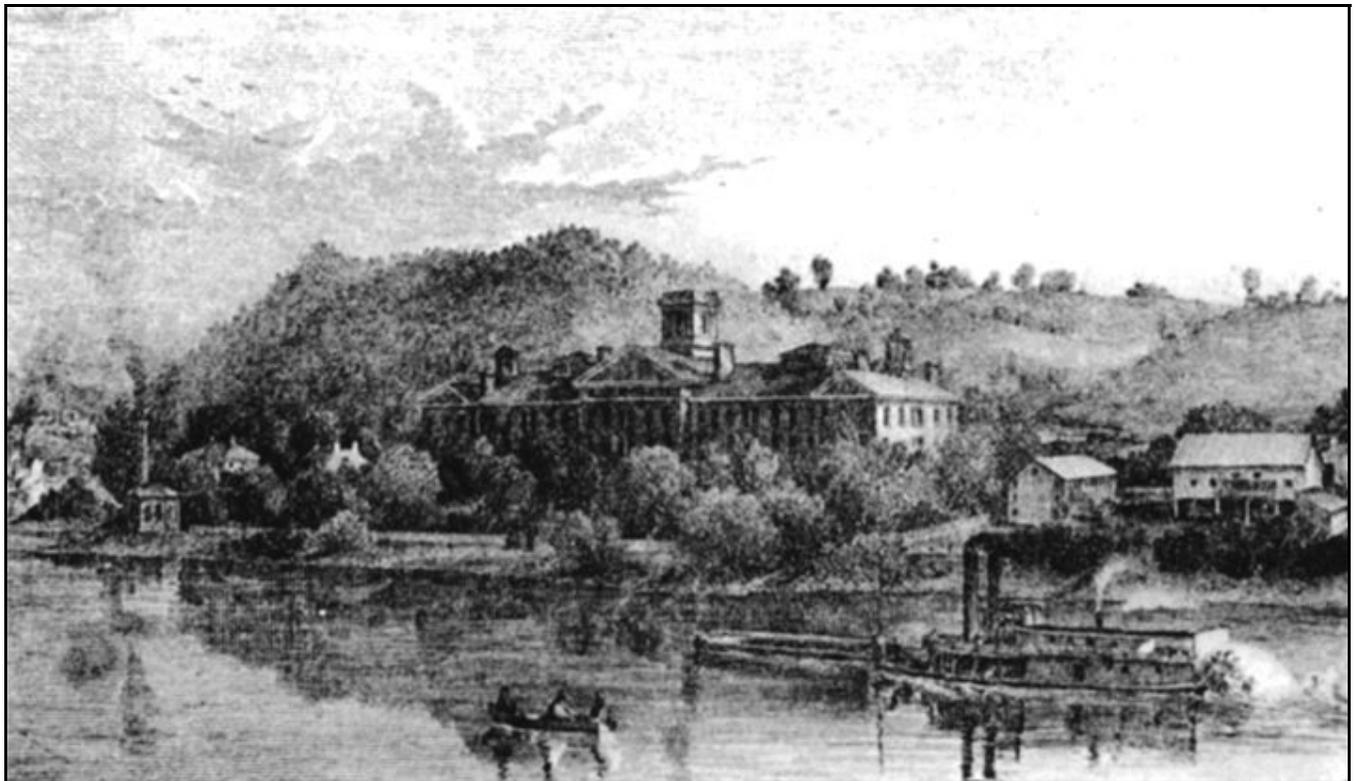
Mifflin Township Historical Society

reservoir and connection having been made, the house was supplied for years with the best of spring water, and in fact, I believe, has still sufficient for drinking and culinary purposes from the same source.

Mr. Thos. Chess was one of the first superintendents, being in charge at the time of the removal of inmates into what was then called the by house. He was followed in charge by W. D. Patterson, who conducted it acceptably for several years, when Mr. Jno. Dinickson succeeded him in 1856, and continued in charge, assisted by his nephew, Wm. Bullock, for some eight years, or until he died, when Mr. Bullock, having charge for nearly 4 years, resigned, to be followed by Mr. W. D. Patterson, and then Mr. Thos. Chess, and then again by Mr. Bullock, who again resigned to be succeeded by Gus. Braun, who in his time was followed by Mr. Wm. McCarty, who was succeeded by Mr. Brush and then the present incumbent, Mr. Linderman.

This, I believe is a true genealogy of the superintendents or keepers, since 1850.

At the time I first had knowledge of the Farm, Mr. Geo. Fortune was secretary of the Board of Guardians, with his office in the city, on Fourth avenue, below Smithfield street. Mr.



Fortune is well remembered by the older inhabitants of the city as being the man whose acquaintance with the poor and miserable of the city was very extensive, and who was looked up to and revered by the unfortunate of this world, but whose insight into character made the fraud quail before his piercing eye as if knowing that their character was being read by him, even as he was pouring question after question at them. The Board of Guardians was composed of men who I know to have had the interest of the home and its inhabitants at heart, as if they were their own family and whose duties were as strictly attended to as their own business. Such men as General J. K. Moorhead, Mr. Hartley, General Rawley, Jas. Kinkaid, David Hutcheson, David Fitzsimmons, George Albree, Mr. Wm. Douglas, Dr. McCandless, father of the present sheriff, and others, most of whom have gone to their long home. But under the new charter of city government, this has been abolished and the Department of Public Charities is now under one head. Robert Elliot, Esq., who is held responsible for the government of the institution, as well as for the alleviation and care of such as may require aid in the city; and the fact of the harmony that reigns since the new regime, indicates the wisdom of such a course, as all jealousies have been abated and the head sways the whole body, and no doubt method oils well the machinery and this prevents friction and jarring.

It would naturally be supposed that during quite a number of years of that time a variety of very interesting events (to the writer at least) would take place in an institution that is generally supposed to be the goal of all the unfortunate of the world. No matter whether through their own fault or not, but it must not be by any means supposed that all who have been compelled to become inmates have done so, through their own dissipation or indiscretions, though alas it may be true many such were inmates. Still a great many good and worthy men and women were through sickness or villainy of others brought them through the husband or father who became victims of the terrible habit of drink and dragged down to the depths of poverty

and misery, because of their misfortune to be tied to a poor weak creature, it may be who forgetting all the vows made in starting of life together, had gradually grown to become the brutalized creature that caused them to perhaps end their days in the Alms House, having through much tribulation, given up in despair of ever being able to hold up her head in society from which he has dragged her, and I might say, that it would astonish any thoughtful person to know how many of the population of the Poor House are there through the influence of rum, either directly or indirectly. Directly through the taking of it of themselves and indirectly through those upon whom they depend for support, taking that support away from them and giving it to the dealer in the horrible stuff. I have seen a babe not six months old screaming with a true case of delirium tremens as ever the old toper did, through drawing the cause of it along with the nourishment God had provided for it, but so adulterated by it debased mother's habit of drink. I at one time made an estimate of the number of inmates there through this cause and if I remember right, at least 75 per cent of the whole number then in the home were directly or indirectly there on the account of rum. But the strict rules on this subject making it a misdemeanor for any inmate to have it about the home, soon brought those that came there directly through this cause, to their senses, and in a few weeks the manhood or womanhood began to beam forth from the former besotted countenance and the mind resume its wonted vigor and the hands able to do the work at which the authorities placed them. Some also were there through too trustful confidence in so called friends, and had been compelled to make this the home of their declining years and perhaps sleep in a paupers grave, and if I shall in these papers, try to give some of the traits and idiosyncrasies of a number of those who have been members of the home during my sojourn there, it shall be to disabuse the mind of the public or I might say rather to enlighten the public upon

this subject, that all at least of the inmates of a home like this are not villains or worthless characters but may be by a combination of circumstances thrown upon the cold charities of a selfish world.

I remember as if it was but yesterday the 22nd of December, 1856, when I walked up the beautiful walk to the house and was met at the door by genial "Dick" Patterson as all Mifflin Township knew him, and welcomed to the hospitalities of the Alms House, and after giving all the information he could in so short space of time allotted him, bid us goodbye and left us alone in our glory, and oh, what a feeling of responsibility comes over us as we look around and see the anxious looks concentrated upon us, for mind you, the changing of a keeper in an Alms House is no idle thing in the minds of the inmates, for upon him rests the weal of woe for the future. But the first one of the inmates I remember meeting me and bidding me welcome was Joe Morrow, what boy does not know Joe. He was an exceedingly eccentric, addle pated fellow, through shrewd in many respects too, and is or was known by everyone living in this Township, for I believe he has traveled the whole ground over and who for his good nature was a general favorite of the children everywhere. Joe was a good worker when his hallucination was not upon him, but let a poor 'bob white' happen to whistle while Joe was working in the field, and the air would suddenly become blue with his emphatic utterances against the devil who he imagined was making fun of him, he appeared at that time to have the idea that it was his duty while in this world to clear it of his satanic majesty's presence, and he always appeared to be working towards that end. I remember giving him an axe one winter and setting him to chopping oven wood in the woods above the orchard. He worked very well for some days, when wood becoming scarce I went to see what was the matter, when I found Joe busy with spade and pick uncovering an old fallen tree that had been covered by the debris from the quarry. Upon inquiring he said he saw the devil doing into the hollow butt of that tree, and he had him just where he

wanted him and he was bound to catch him, and the world would soon be rid of its great enemy, but a small red squirrel springing out disappointed Joe's hopes as he thought Satan had again escaped him.

Joe was a philosopher in his way and his theory of the origin of the oil was unique and original if nothing else. He said the devil manufactured it as it came from the region where Hades is supposed to exist, and he was only waiting 'till enough holes were bored in the earth when he would blow it up and set it on fire. He roused me up one night and took me up to the road to see a dead man he had found in a fence corner, but naturally when we got there the dead man had flown and Joe was much mystified. I always thought that he was brought to this unhappy condition through disappointment in his love affair, as his most confidential talk with me would be about his sweetheart. He said she had the prettiest heart he ever saw; as she had a glass set in her bosom, through which he could see it in all its purity. When he got started on this subject he always became truly eloquent though terribly erratic. Nothing pleased him more than to give him a chance to dance, and he would hoe it down for dear life. Joe's favorite horse to work with was old Tom, with whom he would talk and joke with the whole day long, as he believed Tim knew all that was said to him, and he believed him to have once been a man.

Joe is still living. His mother and aunt were both inmates at the farm at one time, but Joe preferred to give them a wide berth rather than pay them any attention. A peculiarity which appears to be general among those that are insane, their nearest friends appears to them to be their greatest enemies. Joe had a great proclivity for seeing ghosts, and as a rule had a new one to tell about every day. In speaking of ghosts it appeared to be the prevailing opinion of the majority of the inmates that some of the noted characters that died in the institution always returned in ghostly apparel to visit the room in which they departed this life, and many a hunt have I had after the mysterious visitors, in order to get the inmates settled after hearing what they

supposed the unearthly tread of the visiting specter. We had at one time a member of the home named Hannah, who was bereft of one limb, she was of such disposition that it was impossible for anyone to room with her, so to have peace in the family she was given a room to herself on the third floor then occupied. Hannah spent her time sewing and jaw-boning the woman that happened to be within reach of her voice, her locomotion was accomplished by using a chair instead of a crutch and moving along with one limb on the chair she could get along the corridor very well, but it was accompanied by considerable noise of scraping along the floor. Hannah at last went the way of all flesh but according to those rooming on the floor immediately under where Hannah lived, her spirit still occupied the third floor and almost every night the scraping noise of her chair could be heard, and groups of frightened women with awe stricken faces would gather about the foot of the stairs to hear the mysterious sound. I, of course, phoo-phooed the idea, but one night I was quickly called by someone to come at once, as Hannah was on her walk, I hurried up and stood with the women and listened and then sure enough was the sound which imagination could very rudely construe into the moving chair so well known and so often heard. But I said, let's go and see her, who will follow. But there was a general shaking of heads and I started up, I got to the head of the stairs and stood and listened and soon found out where the ghost could be found, and laid that ghost by closing a door that happened to be opened ajar, which the wind moved and caused the creaking noise.

But I think one of the most trying predicaments I was ever placed in, occurred as follows: An old colored slave named Louie, who had wandered up North during the war, had become insane. He was picked up in the city and sent to the farm. Though insane he was considered harmless and given freedom of the house and yard. The old house at this time been converted into an insane asylum, not at all suitable, as all

the inmates, male and female were compelled to do down a narrow box stairway to the lower floor or what might be termed the basement for their meals. There were 50 or 60 that thus 3 times per day were congregated together in this place, but so far no trouble had occurred, as the keepers kept a close watch on any that might be supposed to kick up a racket. But one day I was summoned over from the new house to the insane department in all haste just at dinner time, and on getting there I found the house in a state of siege. Louie had gone up the stairs before any of the rest, and was standing at the head of the narrow stairway with a couple of half bricks in his hands ready for battle, and as soon as anyone attempted to ascend the stair, Louie who was very large formidable looking man, and you may sure as soon as his "get back dar" was heard, it was get back sure. But seeing the restlessness among the inmates confined in the dining room and knowing something had to be done and that quick too, I grasped a large iron poker that was standing at the furnace door and jumped out in the hall with a yell that would have done credit to a Comanche Indian, started up the stairs on the jump. Louis hesitated, gave a cry of fright and started on the run around the enclosure. I kept on after him prodding him occasionally with the poker and so kept him on the run until he cried out for mercy, and I was exceedingly glad he did, for I was about played out myself, but a better and more obedient fellow never lived then he, after that experience. He was a great admirer of "Abe Linkum" as he called him, and often talked about his hiding from the rebels and burning all de cotton, etc., etc., and he was going Souf to steal all their cotton, and let them starve to death. Louie was an expert at a hoe down and with feet that required a No. 14 brogan would make the dust fly at a great rate at our little dance we gave the insane about once every week or two. He was a regular southern darkey out and out. Louie disappeared one day and was never heard of since, but no doubt was picked up

by some other county institution and taken care of.

Charley Bryant was the old-time ferryman at the farm. Just at the time the B. & O. R. R., was finished through to the city. Before coming to the farm he followed the river in his vocation as fisherman, until about the year 1854, when he was found in a shanty on the banks of Turtle Creek at Port Perry as mad as a march hare, and made more so if it were possible, by the boys who plagued him by waving their straw hats at him, for which he appeared to have a horror and the sight of which worked him into a frenzy, at last the charitable people had him removed to the farm. Charley, although very lame, brought on by exposure and drink, could manage to get along very well, and being an expert oarsman settled down to the ferryboat as his natural vocation and although far from being sane, was trustworthy in his work. His swearing was terrific if he was crossed, and his hatred of the guardians of the poor was one of his peculiarities and if he could by any means play a trick on any of them he certain to do so, as was illustrated one occasion when Mr. Geo. Albree at that time president of the board, was coming to the farm with a number of cases of strawberries for the purpose of giving the inmates a treat, there being so many that the rear of the skiff was piled full and several cases in the bow, Mr. Albree took his seat on the top of them, I always thought Charley took this occasion for his revenge, for on nearing the shore on this side of the river he ran the skiff with such force in the shallow water at the shore as to send Mr. Albree boxes and all, pell mell into the river, ducking him completely. Charlie was very innocent

over the affair so much so that Mr. Albree had to ask that he be forgiven.

The Local News
Saturday, August 23, 1890

THE CITY FARM

VERY STRANGE PEOPLE

Luke Phillips was another queer character. An Englishman by birth, but by some means his mind became unsettled and the first known of him was the report that a wild man was haunting the hills and valleys of the East End, some 25 years ago, long before it was so thickly settled as at present; he was hard to locate, appearing to have the cunning of a fox. But he was at length captured and brought to the farm and placed in the insane department, where he sat day after day speaking to no one nor scarcely looking at anyone. But at one of the dances, the violin appeared to attract his attention and upon putting it into his hands, he fondled it, examined it all over and after awhile commenced tuning it, and at length astonished all present by producing music that proclaimed him a master of that instrument, and after that we had no difficulty in getting him to play for the folks to dance. In the course of time he became so much better that he was removed to the shoe shop and put at repair work and soon showed that he understood the business also, and his fine work on boots gave him quite a reputation. Luke is still living and I

believe pegging away as usual, but as silent as ever, never speaking unless to answer a question.

One of the most difficult cases to manage in the insane department was Grace, a homicide maniac, small and graceful as a fawn, and as fawning and purring as a cat and equally as deceitful. With hands and feet so small as to make it impossible to keep either hand-cuffs or hobbles on her, so that she had to be confined to her room most of the time. Her movements were exceedingly quick and her fists though so small, appeared to have the hardness of iron and came in contact with you with the force of a sledge hammer, so that the keeper was almost constantly decorated with a black eye or an abrasion of some kind, showing the effectiveness of Grace's attention. Her greatest antipathy appeared to be against those of her own sex. Great care had to be exercised in opening her room door to give her food, as you might be sure to find her crouched down ready for a spring on you as soon as the opportunity presented itself. At times she was allowed to exercise in the enclosure, but woe to the one who happened to come within her reach, as murder appeared to be the only thing that would sooth her into anything like a human frame of mind was music and in the dances, Grace would behave herself and dance as beautifully and gracefully as a fairy. Hearing a rumpus one day in the women's ward, I ran up and found Grace and the matron apparently running a race around the stand of pipe used for heating the apartment, and I really believe had I not happened to be on hand at that moment, Mrs. M----- would have received a severe punishment if not have been killed by the

WEST MIFFLIN LIONS



Support our Fund Raisers
Brooms & Garbage Bags
(412) 462-0847 or (412) 466-5970

THANKS TO OUR FRIENDS AT THE WEST MIFFLIN



2033 Lebanon Church Road #A
West Mifflin, PA 15122
412.650.9800

now infuriated woman; but grasping her round the arms, I got her to her room without damage to anyone. Many narrow escapes from her murderous clutches could be mentioned. If a stranger in passing would stop, Grace would pass her hands through the bars and ask them to look at her poor thin hands in a whining voice, but they were always warned to keep out of her reach as treachery was always lurking in her, and should she get hold of any part of the person something had to suffer. It however became so thoroughly unsafe as to make it necessary to remove her to Dixmont as a place better adapted to control her.

Cock Robin -- Smoking Through a Key Hole

“Cock Robin” as she was called, was a peculiar character. She could not be called insane, but I sometimes thought she was possessed with seven devils. Not of a murderous kind, but full of all kinds of mischief. Tall, angular, with a mass of gray hair, had been one of the vags of the city, and had spent most of her time in jail. She was an expert at quoting scripture and saying hymns, and could impose upon a stranger with as good a grace as any confidence man, and it required eternal vigilance to keep up to her and circumvent her in her tricks. She was a votary of tobacco and for fear she would burn the house down in order that she might get free, she was not allowed to have a pipe in her room, but several times each day the keeper would light a pipe and poking the stem through the key hole of the door, Robin would have her smoke and be satisfied for the time being. Her natural element was begging and no visitor escaped her importunities for a few pennies. I remember once Dr. Douglas was showing some of his friends around the palace, when Robin got on to her religious strains quoting scripture and in a short time had convinced the strangers that she certainly was a most worthy woman and had become demented through religious excitement or something of that sort, but when leaving the house she asked for a few cents, told them not give her any. Her tune changed and such a tirade of curses as came from her lips utterly confounded

them and their only desire was to get out of the gate and utter the expressive phrase, oh my did you ever! Robin in her young womanhood was said to be a beautiful girl, but being deceived into a wretched marriage became if it were possible, worse than he that was the cause of it.

Beautiful Katie

Katie, a young Irish girl, a very few months from her native land, was truly a beautiful young woman. Coal black hair and eyes of piercing blackness, but with a melancholy look continually to them, a complexion that might put to shame the lily and the rose, was a case that aroused the sympathy of all she came in contact with, speaking to none and scarcely looking at anyone, but setting with her eyes peering as though it were in the distance, looking for her lost love, for it was given as the cause of her dementia, that the one on whom she had given her young heart's affection had deserted her and gone no one knew where, but left her to a life of melancholy. She did not complain but the look of despair was touching in the extreme. She was allowed all the liberty that could well be accorded her, and little watch was kept on her, as no one supposed she would even make the attempt to escape. But one evening in looking for her to put her in her room Katie was missing and a search of hours failed to find her, but in a day or two word came that she was at a house on the hill just above Dravosburg. Hitching up the wagon the farmer and I started after her and thinking her so quiet, I neglected to take any manacles with me which I very soon regretted, for arriving at the where she was, we found a veritable tigress. She fought, bit, scratched, and did everything possible to prevent her being returned as she had taken a liking to the person who housed her for the couple of days. But we succeeded in getting her into the wagon. I concluded that driving was an easier job than holding her in the wagon, so I got hold of the lines and started for home at a brisk pace. The farmer had more of a task than he bargained for and we were compelled to stop at

a house and get a piece of cord to tie her hands, which we at length accomplished without hurting her, and starting off again, had not proceeded far when I felt a severe jab in the back and looking round I found Kate had gotten one hand loose, got hold of one of her hair pins and was stabbing me in the back as hard as she was able, but we got her home at last and thankful was I, and it took several days for Kate to get settled again after her escapade.

Polite and Business Like

Frank, the funny man as he was called, was well-known in Pittsburg as an intelligent, well-bred man, who in his time was a good business man, and expert book-keeper, a good writer and once a trusted employee of the Pittsburg Post Office, but whose mind through some unknown cause became disturbed, was placed in Dixmont, but after a time becoming tractable was sent to the Alms House. Frank in addition to running the ferry, kept the records of the house with neatness and care, the peculiar bent of his mind was to be alone, not forming many associates at the house, so he was given an apartment in the old house for himself, and eventually a little shanty was erected for him in the old orchard where he was ‘monarch of all he surveyed.’ He was allowed a small percentage on the receipts of the ferry and had accumulated quite a little sum of money, at least was supposed to have, and by means of which he kept himself supplied with many a luxury not accorded to the general inmate.

His social standing before coming to the farm was evident by his innate politeness and suavity of manners to everyone he came in contact with, and the perfect grammatical language he always used. Always trustworthy under all circumstances. Frank's end was dramatic, as he was found one morning in the river close to his skiff, drowned, how was never known.

[Editor's note: this article on the City Poor Farm will run in upcoming issues of our newsletter]

MTHS HISTORY STORE

Get your piece of local history! And help support YOUR Society with your purchase.

DUQUESNE — Images of America Series Arcadia Publishing

By Daniel J. Burns

A photographic history essay of the City of Duquesne, PA . 189 vintage photos/ 128 pages

PRICE: \$22.00 (includes shipping and handling)

Homestead & Mifflin Township — Postcard Series Arcadia Publishing

By Jim Hartman

A history of our local area through the media of vintage postcards. Over 200 postcards/ 128 pages

PRICE: \$22.00 (includes shipping and handling)

Homestead & the Steel Valley — Images of America Series Arcadia Publishing

By Daniel J. Burns

Homestead, West Homestead, and Munhall. Commonly referred to as the Steel Valley, these towns were home to some of the greatest steel-producing operations in the world. Through 200 photographs, “Homestead and the Steel Valley” conveys the proud heritage of three communities and their role in the nation’s history.

PRICE \$22.00 (includes shipping & handling)

Bedford & Its Neighbors — Images of America Series Arcadia Publishing

By Daniel J. Burns

The historical relevance of this proud Pennsylvania community. Over 200 vintage photos / 128 pages

PRICE: \$22.00 (includes shipping and handling)

Pittsburgh’s Rivers — Images of America Series Arcadia Publishing

By Daniel J. Burns

“Pittsburgh’s Rivers” highlights the immeasurable contributions these three rivers have made to the area both economically and socially.

PRICE: \$22.00 (includes shipping & handling)

Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh — Images of America Series Arcadia Publishing

By Mary Ann Knochel

illustrates how the seeds planted by this first humble faith community grew a rich Catholic tradition nurtured by émigrés from myriad European countries, who brought with them traditions and an unwavering faith PRICE: \$22.00 (includes shipping and handling)

Slovak Pittsburgh — Images of America Series Arcadia Publishing

By Lisa Alzo

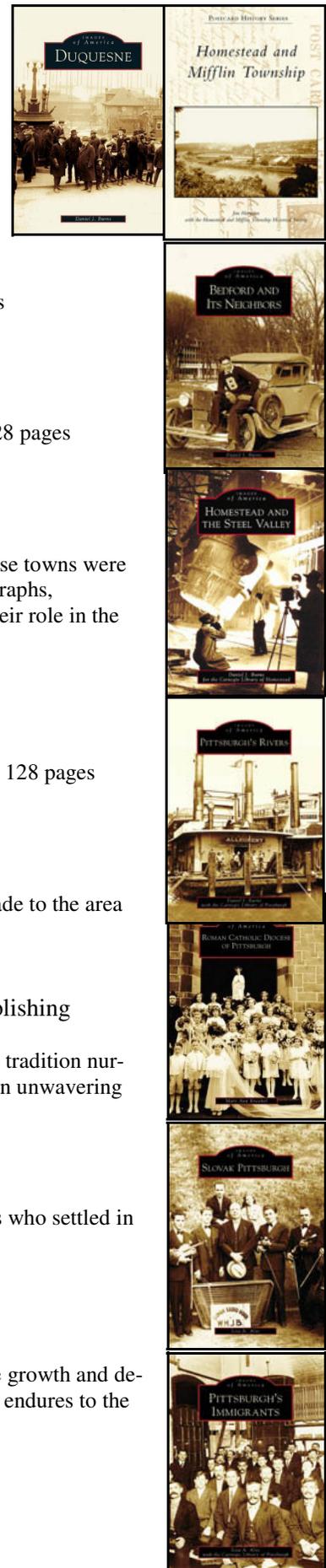
Through nearly 200 photographs, “Slovak Pittsburgh” celebrates the lives of those Slovaks who settled in Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania, and the rich heritage that is their legacy.

PRICE: \$22.00 (includes shipping & handling)

Pittsburgh’s Immigrants — Images of America Series Arcadia Publishing

By Lisa Alzo

Pays tribute to the hardworking men and women who made significant contributions to the growth and development of western Pennsylvania and left a legacy of rich and vibrant ethnic culture that endures to the present day. PRICE: \$22.00 (includes shipping & handling)



**HISTORICAL SOCIETY
SPONSORS**

These local businesses help us make this monthly newsletter possible. Please support them!

The Mifflin Township Historical Society Newsletter is published monthly and mailed to all *Paid Members*.

The MTHS Office is located on the second floor of the West Mifflin Borough Building. The office is staffed by volunteers on Fridays from 10 a.m. until 4:00 p.m.. Please contact Jim Hartman 412-600-0229 for more information or for special appointments

Correspondence can be addressed to:
Mifflin Township Historical Society
 3000 Lebanon Church Road Ste. 202
 West Mifflin, PA 15122-2603

For Information, Contact a Member of the Board of Directors:
 Jim Hartman, President/Secretary jhartman@mifflintownship.org
 Dan Burns, Vice President dburns@mifflintownship.org.com
 Albert Manns, Treasurer amanns@mifflintownship.org
 Sarah Manns, Director smanns@mifflintownship.org
 Mary Ann Knochel, Director mknochel@mifflintownship.org
 George Tkach, Director
 Mark Vehec, Director mvehec@mifflintownship.org

Newsletter Editor — Jim Hartman

J. Benjamin Baker (412) 466-5898
 Baker Group — Insurance and Financial Services

William and Roberta Campbell

Century Heritage Federal Credit Union
 700 Regis Ave., Pittsburgh 15122 412-650-2600

DOM's TV & Appliances (412) 466-2870
 Sales & Service, The Village Shopping Center

Bob Macey
 Allegheny County Councilman District 9

Maloy-Schleifer Funeral Home
 (412) 466-3300 Duquesne, PA

Constable Joseph Parkinson
 West Mifflin, PA 15122

Renee's Flowers (412) 466-6230
 1711 Route 885 (Next to the Pizza Company)

Savolskis-Wasik-Glenn Funeral Home
 3501 Main St., Munhall 412-462-2288

William S. Skovranko Memorial Home
 Commonwealth Ave., Duquesne 412-466-8555

Sportswear of West Mifflin (412) 461-6422
 Custom Design Sportswear—
 Print or Embroidery

Three Slovak Women written by Lisa Alzo
 P.O Box 4744, Ithica, NY 14852-4744

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 914 "Intrepid"
 Charles Krebs, Commander

Western Pennsylvania History Magazine
 Brian Butko, Editor (412) 454-6331
 Visit our website: heinzhistorycenter.org

PRESERVE YOUR HERITAGE BY SUPPORTING MTHS

The Mifflin Township Historical Society relies on contributions from thoughtful members and friends. Private donations to our Society are vital to continue sustaining and preserving our local items of historical significance for generations to come. No matter what the size, all gifts are meaningful and gratefully accepted to guarantee the mission of our Society to preserve your heritage. All monetary gifts are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Keep in mind that you might also give your donation in honor or memory of a person of your choice.

The Mifflin Township Historical Society is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) corporation



3000 Lebanon Church Rd. Ste. 202
 West Mifflin, PA 15122-2603

A non-profit 501 (c)(3) corporation

ACTIVE INDIVIDUAL

- 1 Year \$25.00
- 2 Years \$45.00

ACTIVE FAMILY

- 1 Year \$30.00
- 2 Years \$55.00

CONTRIBUTING

- 1 Year \$20.00

SENIOR (OVER 62)

- 1 Year \$17.00

STUDENT (UNDER 22)

- 1 Year \$15.00

DATE: _____

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP: _____

PHONE: () _____ B/DATE: _____

EMAIL: _____

Renewal Gift? ____ Gift from: _____

Wish to make a tax deductible donation?: ____

Total Amount: \$ _____

Checks payable to MTHS

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED: \$ _____