

# BEN AVON AREA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER

Vol. XVI - Number 1 November, 2000

### Annual Report

In 1998, Tracy Ferguson sent a letter to past members of BAAHA asking for a commitment of time to revitalize the organization. The response was encouraging. A small group of interim directors was chosen and began the task of carrying on the work originally begun in 1984.

As of last June 30th, we completed our first full fiscal year. This year followed the "restart" process lead by an interim Board in late 1998 and early 1999. My thanks to fellow Board members for their dedication and faithful work during the year:

Jean Henderson, Vice President  
Trudy File, Secretary  
Tracy Ferguson  
Ken Jaros  
Lori Kramer  
Jim Knox  
Darlene Phillips  
Lou Seifarth

In September Lori Kramer and Lou Seifarth were replaced by Bob Kiser and B. J. Robertson. Both Lori and Lou will be called on to continue helping on projects they were involved in as their time allows. B. J. and Bob are a welcome addition to our collective wisdom.

We meet monthly covering a range of issues which require consideration. Committees involve each member helping on specific ongoing projects. These include finding a permanent location for BAAHA, public education, log house maintenance, newsletter publication, public programs, archive organization, oral histories, collection of Dixmont documents and a publication of local memories of life here throughout the 20th century.

The log house and the public programs have the most visibility. We are encouraged by the participation and support of the community in the programs. Most gratifying was in August when our public program to welcome the Mississippi Queen riverboat combined with a log house open for visits. The crowd was large and spirits bright in

spite of the congestion throughout the area. Many people of all ages took a few minutes to visit and chat about the log house and local history.

In addition to our Board members, we have had important contributions of time by other local residents who have helped with specific projects small and large. These workers behind the scenes deserve a brief mention and thank you:

Dave Chalmers  
Chris Cieslak  
Jeff Cieslak  
Merle Culley  
Charles Davis  
Betty Haughin  
Nell Herchenroether  
Peter Herchenroether  
Jody Jackson  
Brian Jensen  
B. J. Robertson  
John Seifarth  
Ed Werley

This list does not include the many people who have donated materials to our care. We try to mention these gifts in each newsletter. A graduate student at Pitt School of Library Science prepared a manual to advise us on the storage of historical documents. We have purchased proper boxes and other materials. Progress on filing and cataloguing materials continues. Thanks to those who thought of us before consigning those things to the curb for the dump.

Financially we completed the year about even with the start. Our biggest single expense involved sponsoring the "Dear Friends" concert last December. Those who attended I think will agree that program perfectly fit the season in an historical context.

A financial statement appears on the next page. Our dues are currently \$10 for a family and \$5 for a single person. Actually these are charges to cover the direct costs of the newsletter and other communications with you who are most interested in BAAHA affairs. "Dues" are really a subscription charge. Since 1984, these amounts have remained unchanged. In September and

October the Board discussed an increase, but our decision was to keep the \$10 and \$5 schedule.

We want to encourage all citizens to take an interest in local history and the revenue at those rates covers the direct costs of copying and mailing. In addition, most of our supporters voluntarily add on an extra donation. We thank you for those donations. All donations are tax deductible if you itemize.

Ben Avon Area Historical Association  
July 1, 1999 through June 30, 2000

INCOME/EXPENSE

INCOME

501 Checking Interest	\$ 94.56
508 Certificate Interest	276.28
511 Mailing list dues	430.00
521 Donations	503.00
542 Program Admission	856.00
580 Items for sale	<u>67.00</u>

TOTAL INCOME \$2,226.84

EXPENSES

401 Postage and supplies	\$ 216.37
420 Electric service	60.00
430 Publishing	163.00
442 Program	1,412.17
451 Fund Raising items	136.00
461 Preservation (photos)	199.06
471 Property Insurance	<u>290.00</u>

TOTAL EXPENSES \$2,476.60

NET INCREASE \$ (249.76)

BALANCE SHEET

	<u>6/30/1999</u>	<u>6/30/2000</u>
Cash	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00
Checking	4,241.72	3,715.68
CD	<u>5,538.78</u>	<u>5,815.06</u>
TOTAL	<u>\$ 9,780.50</u>	<u>\$ 9,530.74</u>

Notes: The former account from the 1992 Ben Avon Centennial Committee has a balance as of \$2,970.97 as of June, 2000.

I have mentioned it before, but your support in non-financial ways is important. As mentioned

above, many have helped with time when asked. The donations of material will ultimately help everyone when we solve the puzzle of proper location for storing materials securely and safely but with access to those with simple questions or doing research in more depth.

Current Projects and Future Plans

But perhaps most important is passing on those stories and anecdotes that bring history alive and make it fascinating to current residents.

For example, last month some descendants of the Sturgeon family talked with various residents. They knew that the Sturgeon and Irwin families (namesakes of two of Ben Avon's streets) were related by marriage in the 1800s. Can anyone help us help them fill in some details?

The value of these remembrances are behind our interest in recording oral histories. The publication of memories of life in this area during the past hundred years is another part of this effort.

Our program committee also followed this theme in many of its suggestions for future gatherings. These include more lectures on the purchase and subdivisions of the Depreciation Land parcels and on into the formation of the various municipalities from the original Ohio Township.

We fantasize about hosting a local version of the Antiques Roadshow. It seems plausible that many residents have items related to local history they would enjoy showing to others. We don't claim any expertise so the story you tell will be accepted at face value -- unless your neighbor can weave a more convincing tale.

Another key link to local history is the genealogy of the families who reside here. Perhaps our next public program will focus on how to start learning your family's history, and most important, how to organize what you learn. We hope to find a dynamic speaker who can show us how to use personal computer and internet resources in genealogy research and documentation. This combination of new with old are a way for our generations to work together.

Another theme is the influence of our churches in local development. Those of you who know the history of your congregation are hereby put on notice that we will be looking for help in documenting these histories. We want to include those congregations who are no longer active.

As good fortune would have it an anniversary this year brings an opportunity to scratch the surface of the importance of churches. Hiland Presbyterian Church (Perry Highway) has been celebrating its bicentennial this year. Members Dorothy and Jim Braden delivered to us books prepared by the church for the 150th anniversary as well as this year's celebrations.

We do not think of Perry Highway as all that "local" in the usual area of interest to BAAHA. But there is a significant connection. William Courtney (Emsworth) was one of three Trustees who represented the congregation to obtain the grant of land originally and currently occupied by this congregation. The others were John Mason and James Sample.

Residents prior to the I-279 construction may remember how Courtney Mill Road was a direct, although bumpy, route from Shannopin to Highland country clubs. The church is only another hill beyond the Highland country club. Going the other direction (toward the Ohio river) one could travel down Perrysville Avenue to the area of the present day Stop 'n Go and Avonworth soccer and baseball field on Ohio River Boulevard where Courtney had his grist and saw mill.

In addition to the Courtney family, the Dickson and Hilands were other families prominent in the early years of Hiland Church. In the early 1800s people residing throughout the area now covered by the Avonworth, North Hills and Shaler school districts traveled to attend services at Hiland Church.

Subsequent population growth and the natural desire for reduced distance to travel lead to the establishment of many new congregations. The Presbyterian congregations at Cross Roads, Fairmont, Mount Pleasant, Emsworth, Allison Park, Glenshaw, Bellevue and West View served families who originally attended Hiland. Other congregations were formed from these. As an example, Community Presbyterian Church of Ben Avon also considers the Hiland Church as a mother congregation.

In preparing these remarks I learned that St. Mary's Church in Glenfield is reviewing its history as part of the millennium jubilee. The parish was founded in 1848. As the first Roman Catholic church serving our area its founding families are also names most of us associate with local history. Examples are Wintermantel and Hartle.

The choice of these two churches is not to slight other denominations or faiths. Rather, I

hope to tempt all church historians to send us copies of histories that have been prepared to celebrate your milestones. Better yet we are always looking for interesting articles for our newsletter.

#### Speaking of 1848

It was 1848 when land on the north bank of the Ohio river was acquired for the first railroad track. The project included moving Beaver (a.k.a. Brighton) road to higher ground. A single line opened in 1851 and was expanded to two tracks in 1857 plus a bridge over the Allegheny river provided access to Pittsburgh. By 1857 the name was Pittsburgh, Ft. Wayne and Chicago. The original name may have been simply the Ohio and Pennsylvania. Initially it was to run from Allegheny City to Mansfield, Ohio.

We would love to know more about the property acquisition, company history and the project of relocating Beaver road. We have plans and documents that relate to the land acquisition and construction of the Ohio River Boulevard. Houses, Forest avenue and Brighton road (again) were relocated. Information on the railroad would be a nice complement to the boulevard records.

Dick Herchenroether

#### Ohio Township History

Our board member, Darlene Phillips, presented a program last October 26th which reviewed the settlement of Ohio Township. Almost 50 people attended the talk at Mt. Nebo Church. Her review was organized around the purchase of each Depreciation Land tract which she then followed up to today.

She also brought several maps and other visual aids. Those in attendance spent some time after the talk swapping stories and reviewing the maps. Thanks, Darlene!

#### STOCKING STUFFER!

Our note cards with the drawing of the log house on the front are a good idea for an extra item to fill a stocking or whatever. They are sold in packs of 10 for \$2.00.

## **Memberships and Contributions**

June through October 2000

Jean S Buckman	Ben Avon
Helen Calhoun	Ben Avon
Charles & Sally Davis	Ben Avon
Miriam Dyhouse	Ben Avon
Fockler Family	Ben Avon Hgts
Mr. & Mrs. Andrew Forsyth	Kilbuck Twp
Ken & Betty Haughin	Bellevue
Dick & Sue Herchenroether	Ben Avon
Martin & Jennifer Knuth	Ben Avon Hgts
John & Loretta Rufer	Ben Avon
Richard & Susan Stewart	Ohio Twp
Mary Jane Trimble	Ben Avon
Dorothy Warren	Ben Avon
John Warren	Ben Avon

Garden Club. Tracy Ferguson turned in a VHS tape of the log house dedication ceremony.

Tick McClintock donated an old hand cultivator formerly used at his family's Butler County farm. The Bradens donated the Hiland Church anniversary booklets. Nell Herchenroether donated a copy of The History of Butler County (1895, Brown & Co.) and a copy of the Womens Literary Club papers on the 20th Century (1997-98). Peter Herchenroether copies of early maps showing the Dickson lands and estate settlement. B. J. Robertson gave a collection of yearbooks from the Emsworth

We appreciate the support from all of you who made monetary contributions in excess of your membership.

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