

BEN AVON AREA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

Vol. XVII - Number 2 October, 2001

Annual Report

As of last June 30th, we completed another fiscal year. 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
Bob Kiser
Jim Knox
Darlene Phillips
B. J. Robertson

In September Tracy Ferguson, Ken Jaros and Darlene Phillips were elected to new terms running through 2004. Officers will also continue unchanged in the coming year.

Our committees continue to make steady progress in their assigned areas. The landscaping at the log house is much improved, but more work is planned. The program committee organized a very successful evening at the river to welcome the Delta Queen last September 9th. The calliope concert was superb and we had many visitors at the log house. We look forward to a lecture on the importance of our local rivers.

In the publications department, in addition to the two newsletters in the past year we underwrote the "Dear Emsworth" book by Jim Knox. So far we have sold over 175 copies. Buy more as we need to hit 300 to recover the printing cost.

Our financial statement shows we had a successful year.

We want to encourage all citizens to take an interest in local history and the revenue to join our mailing list (\$10 family and \$5 individual) covers the direct costs of copying and mailing. In addition, some of you 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, 2000 through June 30, 2001

INCOME/EXPENSE

INCOME

501 Checking Interest	\$ 85.76
508 Certificate Interest	285.48
511 Mailing list dues	660.00
521 Donations	750.00
580 Items for sale	<u>223.00</u>

TOTAL INCOME \$2,004.24

EXPENSES

401 Postage and supplies	\$ 214.52
410 Maintenance	185.50
420 Electric service	200.00
430 Publishing	85.05
441 Education	35.00
442 Program	100.00
451 Fund Raising items	160.50
461 Preservation (photos)	389.73
471 Property Insurance	<u>290.00</u>

TOTAL EXPENSES \$1,660.30

NET INCREASE \$ 343.94

BALANCE SHEET

	corrected <u>6/30/2000</u>	<u>6/30/2001</u>
Cash	\$ 0.00	\$33.00
Checking	3,715.68	3,741.14
CD	<u>5,810.18</u>	<u>6,095.66</u>
TOTAL	<u>\$ 9,525.86</u>	<u>\$ 9,869.80</u>

Notes: The former account from the 1992 Ben Avon Centennial Committee has a balance as of \$3,046.14 as of June, 2001.

Since last June funds are significantly down based on the printing cost of "Dear Emsworth." But the sales are steady and with continuing

support in the form of payment of dues and donations received we are in solid financial shape for another year. Every little bit helps, as always!

The non-financial support we receive is also important. Many of you continue to give us items for our collection. We are discussing the possibility of using a portion of the old "Ferry Electric" building in Ben Avon for office and storage space. Ben Avon Borough owns the building and part of it is used by the Fire Department. Getting settled in a spot of our own would significantly help us do the work of organizing our materials. Once organized, we will be able to share with those who have questions or are simply interested in reviewing local history.

Our education committee continues to work with the Avonworth teachers to promote interest in local history. We are also trying to verify the local tradition that President Zachary Taylor visited (lunched?, stayed with?) the Courtney family. Can anyone provide a newspaper account or other contemporary evidence? It would be especially nice to know the exact date and whether the visit was connected to a special event or had any official purpose.

Dick Herchenroether

Applebutter Reunion at the Farm

The following letter, although current, provides some insight into the different pace of life which was typical only 100 years ago. The author is Tracy Ferguson.

Dear Morningstar,

The last Saturday in October, we drove to Uncle Sam Ferguson's farm in Ohio for the annual applebuttering reunion. The barn door was open and chairs formed a circle as the family gathered around the huge copper pot hanging from a spit over the red-hot coals. We arrived in the late morning, and although the sun was shining brightly, we could see our breath as we caught up on family news. One by one, we stepped up to take a turn stirring the pot. "There's 12 gallons of cider and 12 dozen apples in that pot," Uncle Sam told me as I slowly moved the long wooden ladle back and forth through the mixture. "And 8 copper pennies on the bottom to keep it from sticking. They'll be brighter than new when we're done!" Uncle Sam and Aunt Esther had been up

before sunrise preparing the concoction with the help of family who had traveled in trailers from as far away as Indianapolis. They poured the cider in first at 7:00 am and "boiled it down to half" before adding the apples hours later. A little butter kept it from boiling over.

Uncle Sam constantly fed and tended the fire, and took more turns stirring than the rest of us. But at 77, he's not ready to slow down. He's a wiry agile man who looks completely at home in his worn jeans, boots, and workshirt that I imagine Aunt Esther has to steal in the night to clean. It's his warm embrace and devilish grin that capture me heart; his private inquiry as to my welfare that binds our souls, having both lost children at an early age. I'm a devoted fan.

A potluck lunch was spread out on picnic tables, each family having brought something. The fire served double duty now, with hot dogs and smores cooking before hungry bellies. But the stirring never stopped.

As late afternoon approached, Uncle Sam hitched the mules to an old, black buggy with red velvet seats. The fringe on the roof danced and jiggled as we bounced down the long, stone driveway lined with now bare trees. Six of us laughed and joked with Uncle Sam sitting high up front, a relic like the carriage itself.

We had to return to our city lives before the applebutter was finished this time, but it was easy to imagine the family filling jar after jar with the sweetened paste. When the blackened pot was empty, they would grab a chunk of homemade bread and lick the sides clean. A day's work completed, they would gather around the dinner table and give thanks for the blessings in their lives. As for me, I would leave the smell of smoke on our clothes for another day, preserving the memory a little longer.

Love, Tracy

**Sisters Are Brides
June 12, 1900**

A member sent a newspaper clipping with the above headline with his letter about his grandmother (one of the sisters) and her children and grandchildren. The sisters were Mary Louise and Annie Lowry, daughters of J. Palmer O'Neil and a third sister Virginia Mason O'Neil served as maid of honor. The part of the news article with historical interest to Ben Avon:

"The two brides come of colonial families, being lineal descendants of the Halcey family of Connecticut and of George Mason of Virginia. ... Mr. [John Dickson] Hilands, who wedded the younger sister [Annie Lowry O'Neil] last evening, is a promising young business man. He is connected with the Pittsburgh Dry Goods Company, and is a representative of one of the oldest families in this part of the state."

Mr. Lawrence W. Snively, Jr. writes:

Enclosed is a news item from a Pittsburgh paper for June 12, 1900. Annie Lowry O'Neil was my mother's mother (my grandmother). Her sister, Mary Louise O'Neil apparently left Ben Avon after the wedding [to Clyde Bowman Furst] and I cannot recall any contact with the Fursts. But her other sister, Virginia Mason O'Neil, remained in the area and married Fred Stout. They resided on Forest Avenue at the foot of Woodland Road until they died.

Regrettably, I never knew either grandparent on my mother's side because they had died before I was born. My mother, Annie Lowry Hilands, married my dad, Lawrence White Snively, and they were Ben Avon or Ben Avon Heights residents all their lives.

Great-grandchildren of Annie Lowry O'Neil still in the area are my daughters Susan Snively Kuchma (Ben Avon) and Katherine Hilands Colville (Brighton Heights) and my brothers two sons, John Dickson Hilands Snively, Jr. (Ben Avon) and Jim Snively (Emsworth).

Incidentally, J. Palmer O'Neil was, I believe, in the insurance business, but also owned the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1891. If my information is correct, he was nicknamed J. "Pirate" O'Neil, because he stole players away from Philadelphia.

Very truly yours,
Lawrence W. Snively, Jr.

October Meeting

Mark your calendars! The speaker for our October meeting will be Art Parker. He will give us a presentation based on his book **"The Monongahela – River of Dreams, River of Sweat"**. The book is the story of the Monongahela River, a river that has been important to the development of the city of Pittsburgh, the state, and the nation. It is also the story of the river industry and its people and their role in this development.

The Monongahela was the river that opened up the Ohio Valley and was the first Gateway to the West. It was a River of Dreams for the early pioneers looking westward for a new home and new opportunities. It was a River of Sweat for the people of industry that settled there.

In the beginning, boatbuilding (from flatboats, to sailing vessels, to steamships); later coal mining and steelmaking made the Mon one of the busiest rivers in the world and it remains so today.

Mr. Parker worked with the Waterways Association of Pittsburgh and two other river-associated trade associations from 1970 to 1995. He managed the Mon-Yough Chamber of Commerce and three associated industrial development organizations from 1959 to 1987. This experience gave him the background and material for his book.

Thursday, October 25, 2001

7:30 PM

**Emsworth UP Church,
73 Hilands Ave, Emsworth**

A question/answer period will follow Mr. Parker's presentation. Refreshments will be served. Call 412-734-3906 with any questions.

Memberships and Contributions

August through September 2001

Archive Donations

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



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