

# BEN AVON AREA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER

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### Collections

On May fifth we sponsored a meeting to share our collections with each other. Most of us have some favorite things we keep just because we like them. Sometimes these are carefully catalogued and displayed. Other times we just have them in a drawer or on a shelf. In any case we got fifteen or so people to bring some examples of their interests. I am not going to name names to protect against any unintended violation of privacy, but we had many interesting and some unusual items.

For example, eyecups were brought. Small porcelain or glass vessels to splash liquid into the eye. Accompanying these were invalid cups. Also porcelain or glass, like small gravy boats -- the ones with pour spouts. These were for feeding or administering liquid medicines.

Do you like music boxes? We had small (snuff box) and large (bread box).

A couple of dolls with porcelain heads and vintage clothing were displayed. Did you know when these dolls were playthings rather than collectibles the heads could be replaced for \$0.25 if broken?

Corporate memorabilia had a distinctly local flavor; some Heinz and some Gulf.

We saw some 1950's toy trucks with working parts, including steering from

inside the cab. These originally cost \$15.00 or more which would have been a rich toy for the time. Now adults find them much more expensive, even relatively, but even more irresistible now than then.

Several people brought unusual jewelry. Most pieces came with a story. For example, gold nuggets from the California Gold rush. Speaking of the gold rush, we saw a straight razor that had been carried by a miner.

Some collections were travel souvenir glass pieces (like Swarovski) or thimbles or Coalport porcelain. The Coalport pieces were amazing in the detail of their beauty. Some finished pieces need to survive multiple successive firings.

Milk memorabilia showed the changes in that industry over time and also reminded some guests of one of the old names: Kaelin (also Keystone or Milk Depot).

Not everything was old. A flag from the Arizona Memorial was just received as a gift. But we also had something very old (for our area). One member brought an antique wood plane marked "Wm. Courtney" who was one of the very first settlers. Courtney's land included the Avonworth baseball/soccer/football field on the Boulevard. The Courtney and Dickson families were joined by marriage.

A couple of old scrap books full of Cy Hungerford cartoons from the World War II period were displayed.

And finally we viewed bank notes from before the creation of the Federal Reserve system. Paper money at one point was literally a promise to pay from a specific, private bank.

### **250 Years is a Long Time**

In the early morning of May 28, 1754 Virginians and Indians under the command of Lt. Col. George Washington skirmished with a French scouting party under the command of Ensign de Jumonville. The French took the worst of it, including the death of Jumonville. The site, near Ft. Necessity became "Jumonville Glen." Most historians label this incident as the start of the French & Indian War – the North American campaign of the world wide Seven Years War to establish the British Empire as dominant over France's.

Our local connection is slim. The previous November and December Washington traveled through the area, probably using the Ohio river to pass by what became Ben Avon and Emsworth to visit Logstown (now Ambridge). His assignment from Virginia Gov. Dinwiddie was completed (12/11/1753) when he reached a French commander at Ft. LeBoeuf (Waterford, Erie County, PA) to warn the French to leave the Ohio Country claimed by Virginia. The French basically replied "stuff it" and told Washington to warn his superiors they would be treated as trespassers if they came back to the area. In April, 1754 the French took possession of the small Ft. Prince George at the head of the Ohio, expanded it and renamed it Ft. Duquesne.

Washington's arrival in May, 1754 was too late to prevent that. After the Jumonville skirmish, Washington prepared a defense against the expected response from Ft. Duquesne at Ft. Necessity but was soundly beaten in July (7/3/1754). Again the French allowed him to return to Virginia to deliver notice that they controlled the Ohio Country.

Things went rather badly in North America for the British until 1757 when William Pitt gained full control over strategy and policy. The fighting in the local area ended November 24, 1758 when the army of Brig. Gen. John Forbes took possession of Ft. Duquesne after the French destroyed it, rebuilding and renaming it Ft. Pitt.

That summary is not a "local" history story. Here's a connection: One artifact from the jar found in the Dixmont Hospital cornerstone was a leather covered, bound printed book titled "Oration delivered at the Centennial Celebration of the Evacuation of Fort Duquesne" by H. W. Loomis. I guess such orations were major "media" events of the time. This printed version is 33 pages long. It is hard to read given the flowery style, but some familiar ideas were present. These were American idealism and optimism, joy in securing equality before the law and liberty, wonderment at recent progress and satisfaction in the successful conquest of the frontier to create a "modern," civilized society.

Recent history is often personal in that the perspective is our life experience. This oration was delivered to people with family stories from direct ancestors who experienced the events. To us, the French & Indian War (250 years ago) is a mere setup to the Revolution. To those in 1858, looking back 250 years included

new Shakespeare plays, the King James Bible translation (1611), the settlement of Jamestown (1607), and the Puritan migration (1630).

For us, 150 years back is the founding of Dixmont (1859). To them, a 150 year look back marked the births of Ben Franklin (1706) and Geo. Washington (1732) as well as the establishment of the 13th colony (Georgia, also in 1732).

From their point of view technical progress since the Revolution was incredible reaching into the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Just a few ideas: Steam boat (1807), canals built and already superceded by railroads, mechanized farm machinery (reaper and thresher, 1830s), sewing machine (1833), photography (1838), telegraph (1844) and Bessemer converter (1854). They rightly were amazed at the pace of change and the accomplishments. But not yet "modern" to us. Ahead of the celebrants in 1858 were major changes in society based on clean water, indoor toilets/sanitary sewers and food storage. In technology, enormous advancements were around the corner: gasoline and diesel engines, telephone (1876), light bulb (1879) and radio (1896).

Try wearing the other fellow's shoes to put historical events in a different perspective. Context can shape understanding.

### **Subscription Due?**

We ask for annual subscription dues of \$10.00 (\$5.00 for singles) but there has always been a certain fuzziness about when the next payment is due. So we are going to start adding a month/year code to your mailing label. The month and year will be the time we last received

(or deposited) a donation from you. If it is more than a year old, please consider sending a "renewal" donation to us. We hope to get all the labels updated by the next edition of this newsletter.

### **AN OLD PATH**

by  
H. Ben Avon

There is an old path which runs down the hill,  
And, if you are careful, you may find it still,

It once was wide, with steps of stone,  
But now it's mean and overgrown  
With thorn and bramble, brush and weeds,  
It's hard to know the way it leads.  
Twixt Briar Cliff and Cambridge—up and down—  
The way was clear ere the years roll'd 'round  
Now it's so long since last 'twas mended  
It's lost as a lamb—or soul—untended.

There is an old path which runs down the hill,  
And, if you are careful, you may tread it still,

To encounter the mem'ries of times gone by:  
Of meetings chanc'd 'neath a Springtime sky;  
Or kisses stolen far from a neighbor's glance  
In breathless encounters of brief romance.  
Tho' winters' snows and summers' rains  
May change our paths—obscure old lanes—  
An ignorance of time within us stays  
To grant us the joys of all our days!

There is an old path which runs down the hill,  
And, if you are careful, you may use it still.

### **"Wanted" or "In Search Of"**

Sometimes our readers find old friends or common memories, such as school days. If you want to send us a brief notice of connections you would like to renew, we will include it in future newsletters as space allows. No guarantees of course, but our mailing list might include people you have lost contact with. Be sure to include a way (phone, mail, email) for people to contact you!

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