

BEN AVON AREA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

Vol. XXIII - Number 1 September, 2007



Annual Report

from
Dick Herchenroether

Well it has been quite a year (ended June 30, 2007) for BAAHA. In our report for last year the big news was our move to occupy a small office space in the former Dixmont Cammarata Building: Which we did and generally reorganized our archived material. The building is renamed Emsworth Commons and owned by long time local resident Ralph Stroyne.

But since about May we have been busy doing the move thing all over again. What happened was Holy Family Institute needed to secure substantial space for one of its programs. Our space in Emsworth Commons was breaking up a full wing and Ralph asked BAAHA to move allowing Holy Family to occupy the wing. He made a generous offer of space in his building on Camp Horne Road and included the use of his employees to help with the move.

A connection with local history is retained as the building is the former Otto Dairy property, now known as Carmel Commons. The office space is on the first floor with an outside entry door. We hope to place an awning over this door which will give BAAHA a visible "presence" to traffic on Camp Horne Road. We also have the use of a second floor storage room. Our new lease ends May, 2010.

No doubt readers will sympathize with the disruption of moving twice in one year. As this is written more organizing and unpacking remains. With limited manpower the task proceeds, but slowly.

Which brings me to my annual recognition of the BAAHA volunteers. The success of BAAHA depends on their participation and thoughtful advice.

Board members are:

Jean Henderson, Vice President
Trudy File, Secretary
Darlene Phillips, Archivist
Tracy Ferguson
Ken Jaros
Bob Kiser
B. J. Robertson

The web pages are a joint effort of Jeff Cieslak and Lloyd Corder. Thanks to them and unnamed helpers! Take advantage of their work at <http://benavon.com/BAAHA>.

Much of the past year's activity has been building a foundation for the long term operation of BAAHA. Not exciting work, but necessary to make the transition from our dedicated, but small, group to be a community institution.

It has been 8 years since we announced the reactivation of BAAHA which had "gone silent" for a while as health concerns affected the ability of the original board members to maintain their former level of work.

Volunteers Needed

We also announced in March new annual membership fees and the creation of donor clubs to help support the new rent expense. The first official lists of givers will be next year, based on donations received through June, 2008. But we are pleased to report that so far (since March, 2007) donations exceed \$1,900 and each club level has at least one member. Thanks for giving us a great start!

Our current mailing list has around 250 addresses and 40% to 50% of that send in regular membership dues.

In addition to money, we also need "new blood" to be involved in project or committee work, help out with promoting BAAHA or create new ways to involve BAAHA in our communities' activity. A more dynamic organization is the antidote to falling into another quiescent period.

While anyone with time and energy who wants to volunteer is welcome, we should be actively involving people under 50 as another antidote to falling into an inactive period.

Some thoughts about who we are and examples of what we think our needs are follow. Do you fit in?

Our Mission Statement

BAAHA fosters interest in the history of the Avonworth and surrounding communities.

We collect, preserve, catalog and safeguard materials relating to area history to encourage and support research for private and public uses.

We publish newsletters, brochures, books and other materials to promote and disseminate area history.

We develop, present and support educational programs for local schools.

We organize and sponsor lectures, seminars, exhibitions and other meetings on historical topics.

Our Politics

We explicitly declare our work to be not political. We believe our role is educational, not regulatory. Each community has planning and zoning ordinances which are the result of the political process. We might be a resource to people involved in that process. If so, it would be in a way to provide fact based historical records and understanding, not to advocate a particular action or restriction. We advocate for the value in learning how and why we are what we are today.

How You Could Help

We have needs that individuals can work on independently. For other tasks we should have committees of 2 to 5 people to share talents and work. We currently rely on the board members too much and need to broaden our volunteer support.

We like to hold public meetings and present programs or talks to school classes. Both require ideas for topics, finding presenters or facilitators, and organizing all the logistics.

The Oral History project has been mentioned in our newsletter before. It is interesting work to do, but it takes time, so more interviewers would be helpful. And we could use nominations of people to interview. A nominee does not need to be born here to be an interesting interview.

Our membership outside of the Greater Pittsburgh area continues to grow. Many times a book order or donation comes with a short note. It would be nice to organize these better and also correspond more personally and fully with our out of town members. This is one task an out of town person could

do since the work is by mail, email, and telephone.

A review of what "roads" (paths really) existed in the late 1700s and how development proceeded from then on is a project that is suited to a computerized presentation where the map of each decade overlays the prior, but the first need would be a large research task.

Much of the original settlement was affected by the post-Revolutionary War Depreciation Lands program. We should have more detail on that history and probably an affiliation with the Depreciation Lands Museum.

For that matter a generic task would be our relationships with other local history groups small (Sewickley for example) and large (Heinz and Pittsburgh History and Landmarks). Heinz projects are to coordinate events for Pittsburgh's 250th anniversary (2008) and the Civil War sesquicentennial (2009-2015).

With more visibility in the community, we should try to have at least some regular schedule of open office hours. The same idea applies to opening the log house to the public. It is not a "destination" historical site, but whenever the door is open for a clean up or yard work, it is likely that a passerby will stop and ask to take a look. With more volunteer hours we could better meet that interest.

We always can use stories to include in these newsletters. If you feel you are not a "good" writer we will either disagree and publish your submission, or we could agree, in which case we will do some editing to fix it up. The idea is to get the story recorded and in circulation.

This list is not the end of ideas. You have those in your head. Volunteer to share them with BAAHA members.

Financial Report

A strong year, given that our notice of increased need lagged the beginning of rent payments by several months.

Ben Avon Area Historical Association
July 1, 2006 through June 30, 2007

INCOME/EXPENSE

INCOME

Checking Interest	\$ 77.74
Certificate Interest	319.56
Mailing list dues	935.00
Donations	2,447.00
Items for sale	<u>807.85</u>
TOTAL INCOME	<u>\$4,587.15</u>

EXPENSES

Postage and supplies	\$ 796.01
Rent	3,150.00
Maintenance	0.00
Electric service	100.00
Publishing	1,687.55
Program/Education	60.00
Preservation	625.00
Property Insurance	<u>560.00</u>
TOTAL EXPENSES	<u>\$6,978.56</u>

NET DECREASE **\$(2,394.41)**

BALANCE SHEET

	<u>6/30/2006</u>	<u>6/30/2007</u>
Cash	\$127.00	\$127.00
Checking	7,583.90	4,872.93
CD	<u>7,330.21</u>	<u>7,649.77</u>
TOTAL	<u>\$15,041.11</u>	<u>\$12,649.70</u>

Notes: The former account from the 1992 Ben Avon Centennial Committee has a balance as of \$3,225.49.

Dick Herchenroether, President & Treasurer

Have Times Changed?

by
H. Ben Avon

I read an article the other day which quoted an old French saying: "***The more things change, the more they stay the same.***" While this may have some truth in the broadest sense, my recollection of things I have known over the last seventy years or so tells me there have been some changes...

For four years of my life I commuted to Pitt, usually riding streetcars. (Avalon #14; Emsworth #13) Most, by then, were the red and cream streamliners that were the forerunners of today's "T". Some, however, were the big, blocky orange cars. A few still had the hard straw seats and were, I believe, "summer" cars. What strikes me now was the reliability and cleanliness of that "outdated" electric-rail

system. I don't remember ever being late for class at Pitt and the only interruption to service I recall was in the snow storm of November 1950. That particular snow stranded several cars between Dickson and Ridge avenues in Ben Avon for two or three days.

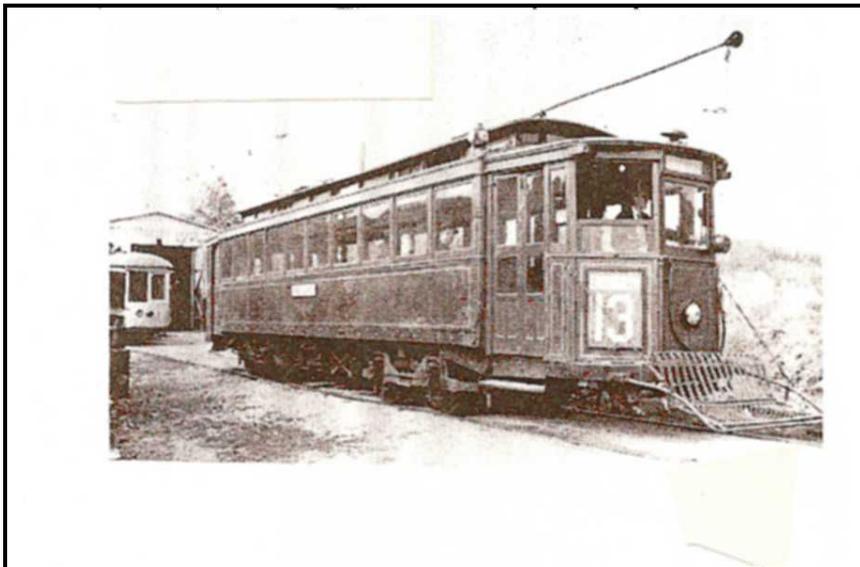
Such frequent and regular service was not confined to streetcars. Mail was delivered twice a day when I was a boy

and stamps were three cents. I am told that stamps went to four cents before WW II and that residential delivery was confined to once a day in the late forties or early fifties.

Another regular visitor to our house was the Haller's Bakery truck. Every morning for years when I was small a familiar toot would signal the arrival of one of Haller's green trucks selling fresh baked goods right off the truck. It was my cue to try to inveigle my mother into buying doughnuts or cupcakes when all she needed was a loaf of bread.

In those days, too, downtown department store trucks were a common sight on our streets and in our driveways.

Horne's, Kaufmann's, Gimbel's, Rosenbaum's and Boggs and Buhl all had trucks which regularly delivered purchases from their stores. A common question after a sale was, "Shall we



send it out?" I believe Boggs and Buhl, the store located on Federal street on the Northside, was the first to switch from its own trucks to an early forerunner of UPS.

Milk trucks were also regular visitors to our neighborhood, daily except Sunday, when I was very young and later three days a week. Milk then came in pint or quart glass bottles. Most had a round, flat cardboard top with a little tab

which could be raised by a fingernail to pull it out. And some had a pleated paper "hat" over the entire bottle top with a little wire "twist'em" to hold it in place. Often times in winter weather, the cream at the top of the bottle would be frozen and protruding an inch or so with the cap and hat askew, after sitting out from delivery time until breakfast. Rieck's, the Sealtest dairy in Pittsburgh, Meadow Gold and our own "Otto's" from Camp Horne Road in Emsworth, were among the more common trucks with "milkmen" operators. As a sidelight, I believe Rieck's was the first to offer homogenized milk. We didn't even know how to say the word when they sent out a letter touting the new product and enclosing a penny to make up the difference in the price per quart over regular milk. Was it 15 to 16 or 16 to 17 cents?

One other thought about dairies. Some other old-timers may also remember Merry's Dairy which used to occupy a house and out-buildings near the historical log house across from the Emsworth lock entrance. A battered fleet of Hudson trucks with the name "Merry's Dairy" on the sides rusted away on the property long after the dairy's active days. I recall river men climbing the ladders of the lock walls from their boats and barges while toting a five gallon milk can. While their vessel was being raised or lowered in the lock these men would hurry over to Merry's, get their can filled and lug it back aboard before moving on up or downstream. And, in a final comment about this enterprise, one of the owner's daughters used to ride horseback all over Ben Avon and Emsworth. If her horse was not the very last one to be domiciled within either borough's limits, it was surely one of the last.

Still another fleet of well-known trucks

in the neighborhood were the Tejan coal company behemoths. While many different companies delivered coal for household heating, the nearest local outfit was Tejan's who operated huge blue dump trucks. Coal was delivered to their trestle-like siding near the Emsworth railroad station and stored in piles all around their coal yard. In the early days all coal came in fairly good-sized lumps – some large enough to have to be broken up for handling. These lumps were shoveled into hot-air or hot-water furnaces several times a day from mid-Fall to late Spring.

The first major improvement to this system was a coal stoker. This was a machine that fed small lumps of coal through a screw inside a tube into a burner with air-jets inside the furnace. Not only did it need attention only once or twice a day, but it formed clinkers instead of ashes which made disposal easier and cleaner. But even with this advance the dirty-faced –and –clothed job of shoveling coal into the basement coal-bin was a regular activity all around town and all winter long.

It could be noted here that coal-fired home furnaces were not the only smoke producers. All the riverboats were steam driven and there were far more of them than today. Coal-fired steam also powered all the trains: passenger and freight. It was not until after WW II that the big conversion to diesels and diesel-electrics took place. When I started to Pitt in the late forties smoke and smog were synonymous with Pittsburgh and many mornings I could not see the lights on the three-story-high ceiling of the Commons room in the Cathedral of Learning for the amount of smog hanging inside the building. It was not uncommon for one of the dailies to run side-by-side

pictures of downtown Pittsburgh and a suburban location taken simultaneously at 11 am or noon. Street lights were often still burning in the downtown shot while Mt. Lebanon, or elsewhere, was in bright sunshine. And if you wore a white shirt, you could expect a black ring at the collar by lunchtime.

The one thing about those old days of coal and steam that I miss is the plaintive call of steam locomotive whistle echoing through the middle of the night. Those long, lonesome wails were far more romantic than the blare of today's horns.

Newspaper boys were also a regular part of the neighborhood scene. For many years Pittsburgh had three daily papers, two offering Sunday editions. These were the morning Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (no Sunday paper for many years), the Pittsburgh Press, an afternoon Scripps-Howard paper, with a Sunday edition, and The Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph, a Hearst afternoon paper plus Sunday morning. All were delivered by young boys eager to earn some spending money from their "paper routes".

And last, but far from least, as a visitor to our domestic realm, was the grocery man and his truck. Elste's, a Ben Avon grocery owned by Bill Elste, and the Central Market, at the Avalon street car loop, made daily deliveries of phoned-in orders which were usually charged to monthly accounts. Two other groceries operated in Ben Avon but they were the cash-and-carry type: the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P) at Dalzell and Church Avenues (later the site of the Selective Service Board in WW II; and the Clover Farms Store, next to Hamilton's Garage Between Dalzell and Breeding Avenues of Church. The

Hamilton structure is now the Ben Avon Fire Station.

Another phenomenon of this era, while not every one had one, was the household maid. Many homeowners contracted with agencies to hire young girls from Scotland, Ireland or other European countries. These girls were given their own quarters, full board, usually Wednesday and Sunday afternoons off and a small salary of six or seven dollars a week. While a few became almost family members over time, most served two or three years, during which they contrived to find husbands through friend-of-a-friend, deliverymen or down-the-street contacts. Some wore uniforms and some did not but all usually helped with cooking meals, kitchen clean-up, lighthouse-keeping and -- raising children.

Now in a different vein, partially spurred by thinking of Otto's a while back and the fun it was to stop there for an ice cream cone on a hot summer evening, let's turn to a few what-used-to-be-there ventures in our neighborhood. Approximately at the intersection of I-279 and Comp Horne Road, down almost at the Lowries Run level, was a long, low barn housing a riding stable. Horses were available for hire by the hour, or privately owned animals could be boarded there. This operation folded early in the Depression of the Thirties and a bar and eatery appeared in the renovated building. Known as Tex and Ginger's, this was a lively night spot (I am told) until Tex's roving eye got too wayward for Ginger and she shot him. Since I was too young to hear about such things, I don't know whether or not it was the demise of Tex but it was lights out for T&G's. For a time (before or after?) the same structure housed The Buckaroo

Inn. I don't know when all this night-life ended but later on many of our younger set attended the Drive-in theater that occupied the area about where the Giant Eagle is now. Known locally as the Passion Pit, and by other descriptive names as well, this enterprise was in business for years although it is doubtful that a majority of its viewers could tell you what film was on when they were there.

A bit downstream from the Drive-in, and immediately below what is now The Willows, stood Ward's trailer camp. In the very late forties or early fifties a sudden violent thunder storm turned Lowries Run into a ten of twelve foot deep raging torrent. This flooded the trailer camp and everything from there to eth Ohio River. Mr. Ward, in saving the life of a child marooned in one of the trailers, tragically lost his own life. Perhaps someone knows more of the details of this story. But, I will add, that sometime later Ward's main building, during a roof repair or replacement project, went up in a spectacular fire.

Another fiercely destructive fire from years ago was the one ending The Colonial, an establishment on the boulevard in Avalon. In my high school and early college days the Colonial was a popular place to eat with a large dance hall often boasting live music. Beneath all this were a few dozen or so bowling alleys which were home to many leagues and bowling clubs. Once again, I believe a roofing project was blamed for a fire that completely destroyed it. I remember watching this fire from a viewpoint on Grandview avenue near the Suburban Hospital. If my memory is right the current Eat'n Park is about where the Colonial stood. And as an aside Eat'n Park started as a drive-in restaurant where girls (some on roller skates?)

anchored trays to your car's window sill. I think strawberry pie has been a specialty on the menu all these years.

So, those are a few of the changes. While we still live in houses, eat three meals a day and depend on others for much of our existence, many of the changes have been significant—and for the better I like to think. As for me, personally, (you would never guess I'm a rail enthusiast) I will never forget the mighty, staccato chugs of a steam locomotive getting underway; the excited rush of blood through my veins as a monstrous double-header, belching smoke and steam and cinders, pounded by the Emsworth station dragging a 100-car train at fifty or sixty miles an hour and, most of all, that lonesome call of a P&LE steam-whistle on a train racing along the far side of the Ohio river in the wee hours of the night.

"The more things change, the more they stay the same." I'll have to give that more thought.

Ed: Thank you H. Ben Avon, for another installment from your fond memories of yesteryear. For what its worth, Marburger Dairy of Evans City still delivers here, but only once per week.

Renewing Members – THANK YOU!

Dave & Mary Chalmers	Sewickley PA
John & Lou Seifarth	BA
Albert Keller	Towson MD
Elizabeth J Garmon	BA
Darlene Phillips	Ohio Twp
Lloyd & Patty Corder	BA
Lynn Evans	BAH
Frank & Rose Meacci	BA
Robert C and Marjorie A Seelhorst	Indiana PA
Paula Templeton	BA
Jim & Bonnie Bass	Ross Twp PA
Lanis Liggett	Moon Twp PA
Mary & Al Zamba	BAH

Ben Avon Area Historical Association
 c/o 136 Dickson Avenue
 Ben Avon
 Pittsburgh, PA 15202



Renewing Members – THANK YOU!

Harvey & Barbara Hinch	Moon Twp PA
Margot Forsyth	Kilbuck Twp
Bill & Barbara Millar	Falls Church VA
Bernadette & Herb Hartle	Ohio Twp
Jane & John Angelini	BA
Martha B Huddy	Williamsport PA
Jean Clem	Aleppo Twp
Nelson & Carol Craige	BA
Bill & Jody Jackson	Ohio Twp
Robert & Marlis Kiser	Kilbuck
Kathleen Elder	BA
Leo Stember	Baldwin PA
Richard & Carol Snively	Mentor OH
Beth McNeil Johnson	Sarasota FL
Bill & Sharon Trimble	Auburn AL
Ken & Karen Jaros	BA
Mary Ellen & Dave Davisson	BA
Fred & Judi Duda	BA
Jean Kratzert	Aliquippa PA
Brian Jensen	BA
Janet White Buckley	Wichita KS
Carol White Stirr	Clearwater FL

Ben Avon Area Historical Association c/o 136 Dickson Avenue, Ben Avon, PA 15202		
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Local Municipality:		
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