

BEN AVON AREA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

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A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

by Tracy Ferguson

Many of our readers will remember the late Margaret “Bee” Arthur of Ben Avon. She lived in her family home at 7438 Perrysville Avenue on the corner of Perrysville and Church Avenues directly across the street from the Community Presbyterian Church of Ben Avon. BAAHA Board member, Jean Henderson, received a donation for our archives last year that pertained to Bee Arthur. Some pieces of Bee’s life at graduation from the Ben Avon High School (June 10, 1927) was captured in her personal memory book entitled, “The Girl Graduate: Her Own Book” that we now treasure. Carefully pressed between the pages are senior year classmates’ photos, newspaper clippings, copies of the Baccalaureate Service and Commencement programs, friends’ autographs, a Class Night program, a flower, and a few other items.

In receiving this little slice of local history, a spark was ignited in me to explore the recollection that Lake Arthur in Moraine State Park was named after a member of Bee Arthur’s family. In fact, Lake Arthur was named after Bee’s father, Edmund Watts Arthur. Of course, then I had to know why the lake was named after this Ben Avonite, and more precisely, just who was this man?

In a sentence, he was a prominent Pittsburgh attorney and devoted family man, who by avocation was a naturalist, conservationist, geologist, botanist, ornithologist, astronomer, entomologist and writer! Amazing! This multi-faceted man was also a poetic storyteller who found immense pleasure and peace in walking the hills and valleys of Western Pennsylvania, alone or with others in tow, to explore the flora and fauna, the lay of the land, and the elements to be discovered in all seasons. He would write about these forays in a column in the old Pittsburgh Sun called The Country Rambler between the years 1915 and 1927. He also contributed to local magazine, the Ben Avon Forum, 1928-1930.

Born July 15, 1874 in Pittsburgh into a family with four brothers and a sister, he graduated from the Western University of Pennsylvania (now the University of Pittsburgh) in 1895. He was admitted into the bar in 1897, and practiced law for fifty years, including the day he died, October 8, 1948 after collapsing on a downtown street outside his office. On June 26, 1902, he married Anna M. Robertson. They raised five children together in their Ben Avon home: Harriet, Anna Watts, Margaret “Bee”, Mary Helen, and William. He was a U.S. Commissioner for Allegheny County and a charter member of the Pittsburgh Law

Club. Mr. Arthur was an active volunteer, having served as an honorary member of the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, the vice president of the Western Pennsylvania Humane Society and an elder at the Ben Avon Presbyterian Church (now known as the Community Presbyterian Church of Ben Avon). He also served on the Cheswick School Board.

Edmund Arthur was a man who loved the outdoors and sharing that love with others. He studied and researched all aspects of nature and was highly respected for his knowledge by experts in the natural sciences. To better understand this mutual respect, I include excerpts from a memorial issue of the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, The Ruffed Grouse, that was dedicated to Edmund Watts Arthur in 1952. In the forward, it states, His vocation was the law, but his avocation was the interrogation of Nature and the investigation of her laws. He would have promptly disclaimed the title of astronomer, or ornithologist, or botanist, or entomologist, but, though not a professional, his general knowledge of most branches of natural science served the same purpose with most of us laymen. In addition to his grasp of the geology and geography of Western Pennsylvania, he had an intimate knowledge of the history of the region.

Dr. O. E. Jennings was a friend and fellow hiker who accompanied Edmund on walks, discussing such matters as “the saw-toothed skyline of the hills along the Allegheny River above Oakmont,” plant species, and the Butler County glacial geology including the terminal moraine. Dr. Jennings wrote of Edmund,

“He was, however, an inborn naturalist of the ‘Old School,’ with a keen and observant eye for Nature and her various moods and in her various fields, whether concerned with geology, physiography, birds or botany.” And, “He was keenly interested and actively participated in efforts to preserve areas of exceptional natural features. He was active and freely lent of his legal talents in our efforts in the Cook Forest Association to preserve the primeval aspect of the forest. He was likewise active with respect to the conservation of McConnell’s Mill and the ‘peninsula’ at Ohio-pyle.”

The former Curator of Ornithology at the Carnegie Museum and author of Birds of Western Pennsylvania (1940), W.E. Clyde Todd, met Edmund through the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania. When Mr. Todd’s book received the green light for publication, “it was to him (Edmund Arthur) that I looked for pen-pictures of certain kinds of birds with which he was familiar, and his ‘write-ups’ of these species, written in his characteristic style and with his sympathetic touch, are vivid interludes in the general level of the bird biographies.” The book was considered one of the most detailed and meticulous works of its kind to be published up to that date.

Dr. Frank W. Preston was an English-American glass engineer, ecologist and conservationist who helped to found the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. He also worked extensively with Edmund Arthur to reclaim the land in the Glacial Foreland of Butler County that is now known as Moraine State Park. He knew Edmund well, on both a personal and a

professional level. Dr. Preston memorialized Edmund in The Ruffed Grouse with heartfelt praise. "It is not given to many men to live, equally at home, in the world of hard facts and in fairyland; but Arthur did it. As a lawyer, dealing with business men, he could be as factual and straightforward as any. In yarning to his children, he created fairylands, and the fairies themselves would have listened and believed." On his keen mind, he wrote, "Ned wrote a good deal, but always in this human poetical vein. He published no scientific papers, though he read an amazing number of them, some of them being very involved and technical ones. His personal scientific

done. Yet in the ultimate analysis, this devotion to science and scientific truth was with him merely a reflection of his devotion to a higher sort of truth, which can be expressed only in poetry and religious faith. He was interested in nature rather than in science, which only partially interprets nature. He valued it for that even partial illumination, but his real interest was in creation in its entirety, and every phase of it, including the shabby human race with all the iniquities it inflicts upon the face of creation." He continued with, "I had occasion more than once to test his geological knowledge. It was often remarkable what he knew, but he made no parade of it. Nor was his knowledge



library contained much authentic material, geological material predominating. He was one of the founder members of the Pittsburgh Geological Society and gave the younger members some useful advice on how to run a scientific society that would get something

merely local." Dr. Preston was involved in producing a memorial film on the glacial history of the Foreland as a "small tribute to one of the most lovable men we ever had among us (Edmund Arthur)." An even greater testament was bestowed on Edmund Watts Arthur when Dr. Preston

and others named the glacial lakes Lake Edmund and Lake Watts. A lake similar to, but smaller than the glacial period Lake Watts is named Lake Arthur. This current lake in Moraine State Park was completed in 1970 by damming Muddy Creek.

To learn more about Edmund as a friend and good companion, quotes from a letter written by longtime family friend, Mary Lou (McConnell) Brown are of particular interest. She knew Edmund from her childhood years onward through her young adulthood and her work with the Audubon Society. "He had a way of speaking and of writing, a gift of expression which very few have, a sensitive reaching out, and a hearty humor. Many of us have thought his thoughts and been gladdened and uplifted a bit, because we listened and read. Seldom has God given so many gifts to one person- perfect integrity, a keen scientific mind, and a zest for acquiring and passing along fascinating knowledge. But the greatest gift was in his heart- an understanding and kindly love of others. He put his companions at ease, made us feel appreciated. He really wanted to hear what we had to say; he valued our ideas. He had a faith in the rest of us, and when we realized this we were both delighted and complimented, and we tried to be those good things he saw in us. It was a heart-warming experience to be with him. Well I remember the pleasure of visiting his Ben Avon home. What good hours we spent before the log fire in his hall! There was his beloved 'Anna' and always several of their children. The walls were covered with book shelves from floor to ceiling, for Ned Arthur keenly enjoyed books. As a man might browse through a pleasant library, so was a conversation with Uncle Ned, with here a jest, there a

recollection of his family doings, then a bit of natural history. If one drew him out on any subject, he could supply a wealth of detail. We think of him and know how powerless our words are to describe him. What can we say in eulogy, except that he raised us all a little higher? We are all a little better and richer because we knew him. He lives on in us and in the good things we will teach our children's children."

Finally, Ned Arthur as a family man can be gleaned from a letter written by his daughter, Anna Watts (Arthur) Kennedy, to Dr. Frank Preston. "From the point of view of his son and daughters and grandchildren, the loss is immeasurable, the heritage tremendous. The facets of his knowledge were almost innumerable. He taught us to know and love the stars, the rocks, the hills, the birds, the flowers, the weather. He sat up at night helping us translate Virgil, and Ovid, and Horace; and if we didn't want to see a trigonometry problem 'through', we knew better than to seek his help, for once started, it had to be finished correctly if it went to 3:00 A.M. He accompanied our first plodding efforts as pianists with his cornet or French horn, insisting that the time must be perfect, whether the notes were or not; so that today, mastering the intricacies of meter in Hoffman's 'Barcarolle' or 'Lead Kindly Light' is one of my model accomplishments. He could read from books or weave his own stories with the same enchanting expression. I can still hear the steady thump of his heart as my head rested on his breast while he read from Tanglewood Tales or Bulfinch, or told with his own embellishments the simple tale of 'The Three Pigs.' He could rock a fretful baby or sick child to sleep with the comforting cadences of 'Mr. Noah Built and Ark'; and he could play

dominoes or Parcheesi and be winning until the last minute, when, miraculously, the luck would always change and one of us would win. He surrounded Christmas with a magic that lives for all of us to this day, a magic that I hope I may be able to give to my children. We had a playroom when we were little, and Santa Claus always locked the door about a week before Christmas, ostensibly to have more time to do his work, but actually to increase in our hearts the excitement he loved to see. One Christmas I remember, the door had a note on it when we approached it before dawn.

*At seven o'clock and not before
You'll find the key to unlock this door
On a nail on the bathroom wall, so pause,
Until seven o'clock says Santa Claus.*

The whole fabric of our family life is woven with bright threads like these; no day could pass, for any of us, without our encountering over and over again some experience that recalls another in which he participated to our joy and inspiration.”

This description of Edmund Arthur would not be complete without a few words of his own taken from an article he wrote in 1929 for the Ben Avon Forum entitled “Some Adventures in Vinegar Hollow.” The hollow connects his former back yard near the base of the ravine with what is now my back yard at the top of the ravine on Newgate Road. It was perhaps one of his favorite places to explore, especially on an early weekend morning before breakfast. “Of course, a V-shaped ravine at one’s very back door is a constant temptation, a daily invitation to stray from the domain of bricks and asphalt to the land of brook and meadow path. All brooks are ‘murmuring’ or ‘babbling’ or ‘laughing’ or ‘gurgling’ and the rivulet- for it is scarcely more- of

Vinegar Hollow is no exception, unless it be that it is all of these at once. We have had many adventures by its side during the ‘eight years plus’ that have passed since we first ventured into the Hollow.” He described the “mossy spring- mossy even in winter- that bursts from the rock at the south wall near the mouth of the ravine.” And, “At the spring begins a long, grassy meadow, luxurious in summer with its ironweed, boneset, rosinweed, balsam, goldenrod, and later asters.” Geologically, he referred to the Ames limestone fragments from far up on the hill. “They are greenish-gray and are covered with tiny fossil shells of some ancient bivalve, crinoid stems, and an occasional gastropod.” His botanical interests included this passage, “There is an insignificant but interesting plant to be found below the path just before you reach the upper grassy knoll at the rocks. It is Lopseed, so called from the way the fruit, as it matures, turns over on the stem so that the tiny hook at the end may engage your clothing and thus be carried to fall and grow elsewhere. It bears the scientific name *Phyrma leptostachys*, which indicates a very exclusive strain. Indeed, it is the only species of the genus of the family of Phyrmeaceae that is scattered pretty well all over the Northern Hemisphere. The small purple flowers are so inconspicuous that you will probably miss it. It blooms in July and August and I will gladly give a quarter to the boy or girl who finds and shows me a specimen. Do not pick it. You may take me out to see it.”

Of course, he described the birds of Vinegar Hollow in all the seasons. He included details about their songs and calls, where they build their nests, the colors of the males and females, as well as, the delight he experienced in seeing individual birds or a migrating flock. He

wrote, "One Sunday morning late in April, I took my glass and sat on the hillside among the oaks at the upper end of the Hollow and watched the wood warblers in migration, hundreds of them, clad in gold and green and blue and chestnut and white and black, combinations of two or more of these. Such a host of live jewels are hard to imagine. One must see them swarming over the trees, feeding, singing, buzzing, living, to know what it all means. Perhaps we may organize an observation party to meet on the ground and witness the spectacle at and a little after dawn next April."

His love for Vinegar Hollow was obvious. "But Vinegar Hollow is no seasonal place. It is attractive all through the year. Autumn brings a riot of color until the yellow flame of witch hazel blossoms dies away after summer foliage has fallen. Winter with its white blanket or its brown, as the case may be, dresses the ravine for its hiemal [wintry, *ed.*] revelries. If you want to know who are the guests, just take a turn up there the second or third day after a snow storm. It requires a day or two to bring the hibernating folk out for a frolic. But the tell-tale snow records the story of 'whoopie' in which rabbits, squirrels, deer mice, blarinas [shrews, *ed.*], and some other earthbound people have vied with song sparrows, chickadees, crows, and their ilk of the feathered clans in high carnival. There are- but what's the use? You will have to see it all for yourself. Early Sunday morning is the best time. You can easily get home for breakfast cakes and sausages and in time for Sunday School or morning service as your custom is, and the invigoration of an hour among the primitive surroundings of this, one of the most beautiful of 'God's first temples', our own Vinegar Hollow, will 'tune your heart' into harmony with

the spirit of the day and with the singer of old you shall echo, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.'"

Edmund Watts Arthur was a man of integrity, conviction, abundant knowledge and talents, and devotion to his God, his family, nature and the human race- a man for all seasons. Bee Arthur must have felt the security that comes from living in a home with a father such as hers, as she graduated from the Ben Avon High School in 1927 and prepared for the next chapter in her life. I know that I have been moved by Edmund Arthur's life in Ben Avon. When I look out over Vinegar Hollow from my back yard, I see it with new eyes and imagine that perhaps Edmund Arthur stood in the same spot and admired the Hollow with all its living glory.

Mary Ann Graf

June 7, 1938 – January 8, 2014

We were saddened to receive notice of the passing of Mary Ann Graf. She was one of our founders, a small but committed group of Ben Avon residents who found a way to preserve the Dickson Log House. They also began the ties to local teachers and youth leaders (such as scout troops) to make visits to the Log House educational.

Gladys Phillips is often remembered as the *force majeure* of the preservation and our founding. But Gladys knew to enlist others for their expertise, "There were two people who gave instant support, Bill Trimble and Mary Ann Graf."

From February to September, 1984 the founders worked to acquire the log structure and land on which it now sits. Mary Ann served as board member, officer, liaison to Pittsburgh History &

Landmarks Foundation (bridge loan) and worked on public relations and educational projects. She remained a loyal and interested supporter of BAAHA even though she and Ed moved to the Deutschtown section of Pittsburgh's North Side to pursue restoration projects there that resulted in a European style boutique hotel, the Grand Hall for social events, a store front pastries business and a home for their retirement years.

We are honored by the family decision to suggest donations to BAAHA for friends to memorialize Mary Ann. For those who would like a fuller account of the many other charities she helped here is a link to the Post-Gazette obituary:

<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/postgazette/obituary.aspx?n=mary-ann-graf-johnston&pid=168984759&fhid=9803>

When you enter the address in your browser type it as one continuous line of characters.

Inside BAAHA

An update of goings on
Dick Herchenroether

Our readers are well aware it has been too long since we hosted a public meeting. There is no one reason why we have not. Coincident with production of this issue a joint meeting is scheduled with Sewickley Valley and Old Moon Township groups for January 23rd for dinner and a speaker. And we have been working with ACORD to introduce a newly renovated building at Avonworth Community Park to the public with a program hosted by BAAHA.

Our recent concentration on the acquisition and cataloging of historic materials has absorbed the resources available. We need volunteers devoted public relations efforts for BAAHA.

Such as:

Making the public aware of who we are and what we do.

Organize public meetings by securing speakers and venues and publicizing.

Creating and maintaining links with peer organizations (e.g. Sewickley and Old Moon) and regional groups (e.g. Pittsburgh History & Landmarks, Senator John Heinz History Center and Carnegie Library).

Coordinate our educational projects.

Regarding education, when Tiger Scouts visit the Dickson Log House, we have a retired elementary teacher talk with them about life as a pioneer in the early 1800s. This has been well received and we should build on it. Seeing the kids pay attention to her and come away with new knowledge is a welcome improvement. Thanks to my sister-in-law, Susan, for her efforts in this regard. Also, this month we begin our second year working jointly with Avonworth and Heinz History Center on a project focused around primary source research. Selected 8th graders work with volunteers to explore topics of their choice using our historic materials. Making our archives accessible to these students is exciting because their energy is infectious.

We installed a new Desktop PC in our office now have a Carbonite account for offsite backup for our digital files. Thanks to Mike Connolly for his help with the purchase and installation.

And thanks to Jim Sommers' donation of a copier visitors can make copies of materials to take with them. This service is essential. Our materials stay in the office for their preservation and to be available to the next visitor.

Ben Avon Area Historical Association
 300 Camp Horne Road
 Pittsburgh, PA 15202



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Renewing Members – THANK YOU!

Elizabeth & Paul Gaertner	EMS
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Margot Forsyth	Kilbuck Twp
Warren & Verna Kuhlber	Aleppo
Darlene Phillips	Ohio Twp
Marjorie Jones	Ohio Twp
Elizabeth Ann Powers	Owensboro KY
Ken & Chris Niklaus	Mercer PA
Mike Cozza	BA
Bill & Jody Jackson	Ohio Twp
Jaqueline Earles	Orlando FL
William Wills memorial	

NOTE: This list is too short. If your neighbor seems interested in local history we would appreciate a recommendation. We cover all five Avonworth municipalities Ohio and Kilbuck Townships and the Boroughs of Ben Avon, Emsworth and Ben Avon Heights.

Ben Avon Area Historical Association 300 Camp Horne Road, Pittsburgh PA 15202 baaha@benavon.org	
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