



Allegheny Area Historical Association

March 2006

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Our Annual Christmas Cookie Sale was once again a huge success, thanks to all our very talented bakers! We only had about 2 dozen cookies left at the end of the day, and netted \$766.50. Our usual chairperson, Alice Altenburg, fell and broke her left arm quite badly just before the sale. It took 5 or 6 of us to fill her place, and we had to do a good job for her, or she would forever be after us. I'm pleased to report that Alice's arm is on the mend, the cast is off and she is driving once again. I think that was the hardest part for her, not being able to drive!

Our Community Christmas Service was also well attended, and Genesis House wrote a lovely thank-you note for all the canned goods and paper products we collected for them. Our thanks to Rev. Dan McKee, Beth Deitz, David Deitz and Jackie Steiner from the Allegheny First Presbyterian Church for their participation in the service. It is always a beautiful way to start the holiday season.

One of our long-time members, Orma Carls, is now confined to the Ecumenical Nursing Home in Bradford, PA. For many years, Orma took care of all the genealogy requests we received at the association. This is not an easy job, as it takes much digging through the files to come up the requested information. Part of the job is knowing where to look, and Orma always did. Orma has donated to AAHA a 4-year subscription of mailings from the Wolcott Historical Society, Wolcott, NY.

We lost two good members this last winter. Elizabeth "Betty" Nenno Wilson died in Arizona. Betty was an avid genealogist and had done much research on the Nenno family. The Nenno family has been in Allegheny since the 1850's. She authored a book, "The Nenno Family - How They Lived", which is a chronicle of the life and times of the Nenno family since the 1600's. She donated a copy to our association.

Our other long time member who died was Fred Grace. Fred will always be associated with football at Allegheny. He was the varsity coach for 18 years, and then became athletic director for 19 years when he had to give up coaching because of administrative duties as vice principal and then principal. Fred was from Pennsylvania, and went to St. Bonaventure on an athletic scholarship in the 1940's. His education was interrupted by three years of service in the U.S. Army Air Force in World War II, after which he returned to St. Bonaventure, graduating in 1947 with a business degree. His first love was football, and a few years ago, the football stadium at Allegheny-Limestone High School was named The Fred G. Grace Stadium in his honor. He shared some of his sports memories with us in an article in our newsletter in 1999. After he retired, Fred served on the Board of Education for several years. Fred was a fixture in education in Allegheny for 50 years and touched many lives.

I am going to speak at our next meeting (see the notice elsewhere in the newsletter) about my marvelous trip to St. Petersburg, Russia last August. St. Petersburg is not too old, they celebrated their 300th year in 2003, but has had a lot of history happen in that span of time. My son David helped me take my pictures off of a CD and arrange them in order on his computer, and he contacted Mike Higgins who has a projector that will take the pictures from David's computer and put them up on the screen for all to see. Technology is great, and it helps to have people who understand it - I don't. My thanks to David and Michael for their help.

Francie Potter, President

Since the March meeting will focus on Russia, we thought the following article would be interesting. It appeared in the Allegany Citizen in 1939.

The following letter comes from a former Allegany resident who with her husband is living in Russia for a time in the employ of the Max B. Miller Oil Company of New York. The company is constructing a refinery for the Russian government. The writer of the letter, Mrs. Marion Brison, is the daughter of Mr. And Mrs. Stanley P. Wilber of this village.

National Hotel, Moscow, Russia
August 13, 1939

Dearest Folks,

It will be a month tomorrow since we left New York. It seems years. We are very comfortable here in two big rooms with twin beds in each, facing on Red Square. We are only a block from the famous Kremlin where Stalin lives and can also see Lenin's tomb. Every day from ten o'clock until five there is a line blocks long and four deep to go into the tomb. We went in yesterday. We had been told by some Americans to go to an officer and say, "Intourist", and he would let us right in. We went to the head of the line but didn't open our mouths because the officer motioned for us to go in and so we walked along down into this dark place and finally into this cold room where Lenin has lain in state since 1924. (I am not too sure of that date.) We were all glad to get out of that place.

Almost every day we walk around the Kremlin about a mile and a half - for want of anything better to do. Time and money mean nothing to the Russians. Our expenses are being paid here and we are just waiting for the Russians to put our baggage through customs. They say the baggage hasn't arrived from Leningrad yet but Bill is sure it has. They just seem to be too lazy to open up the fifty-three pieces that we have together. Do you wonder? Our Macy box is too large to go through a door. We have three or four like that, Bill told me.

We are just next door to the American Embassy and every day we go there and sit around, talk to any Americans we know and read a little. The new American Ambassador just arrived and because of that we did not see him although a Mr. Chapman took our names and said that the ambassador would probably call us and make an appointment to talk to our men about the oil situation. We have visited the British Embassy and were invited to dinner to the Bagshaws. Mr. Bagshaw is the secretary to the Naval Attache and a charming Englishman. Did he make us feel at home! His wife is very nice too - asking the nine of us, perfect strangers, to dinner was something. The night we went over there we rode the Moscow subway (very modern and clean). Mrs. Bagshaw had set a small table in the living room for David and Betsy Midlam (3 years) to eat at. I knew the minute I saw it that probably there would be trouble and sure enough David went right to the big table and sat down. I thought to myself, "What will I do?" but Billy came to the rescue and said, "Oh, I will sit there," even though their son John who is just Billy's age, sat in the dining room with us. I couldn't scold Davy because I remember one time when we were invited to George Smith's (principal) and I had to sit at a little table. John Bagshaw is over here most every day - and he isn't a subdued English boy by any means. He races up and down the halls and teases the little ones until he has us most crazy. Billy hates to see him coming. It's only for a few hours each day and I do feel sorry for him. He has no one to play with except the Russian children.

The Russian children are kept very clean and seem to be healthy. The babies are always wrapped very tightly a certain way - to keep their legs straight. But the grown-ups - nobody has any clothes to fit except the army men. Everybody walks the streets with no place to go. The housing quarters are so small that the people have to spend their time on the streets. Women work with the men here - or rather they DO the work. The street cleaners are all women. Yesterday we watched four or five women loading big heavy stones onto a truck. The other day two women were white-washing a building. Seems queer, doesn't it? The people sit all along the curbs with their little bundles of something, some barefooted, some with very awful shoes. Our shoes are what take their eye. The all stare and stare at our feet. The Russians aren't allowed to associate with foreigners for fear they might get some ideas. We are just as well satisfied.

I haven't told you about the last night on the boat (the SS Sibley) before we arrived in Leningrad. We were farther north than southern Alaska and at twelve midnight it was still light. We went up on the upper deck of the boat and watched the most beautiful sunset and looked over the other side to see a big beautiful moon shining high in the sky. THE LAND OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN! We arrived in Leningrad early in the morning on Thursday, August 3. There we were met by an Intourist woman who had big beautiful Russian made cars to take us to the Hotel Astoria. (*Ed. note - the Hotel Astoria is still there and is very elegant*).

After dinner a tour of the city was all arranged for us with guides and two cars. It was very interesting. We saw Peter the Great's statue, the Winter Palace, where the Czars lived. Our guide told us so many interesting facts and stories. After that we had dinner. We have found that we can get vegetables, meat and potatoes everywhere we go. The milk is boiled in the hotels and we drink bottled mineral water or boiled water.

We got on the Leningrad train at ten o'clock at night the same day. The hotel packed a lunch for our breakfast on the train. We, our family, had one 4 berth compartment and slept all night. I should say Billy, David and I did. Bill said he woke up every time the train stopped but went to sleep again each time. We were all awake early, of course, and we got out our bundle of lunch and

opened it. There were millions of ham and cheese sandwiches - not dainty ones wrapped in wax paper, but thick slices of bread with great slabs of ham or cheese between - not too appetizing but we were hungry so we ate and then passed the package on to the Midlams and Hackstuffs. We had a package of bottles of mineral water, paper cups and each child had an orange. When the package of cakes, chocolate eclaires, etc. was opened, we found mold all over them so we threw them away. After everyone had feasted, Ed Midlam said, "Let's give the rest of the sandwiches to the conductor - we won't want those things." (We thought of those sandwiches a good many times later.)

We got off the train at 10 A.M. and found that somehow somebody had slipped up somewhere and there was no Intourist to meet us. The line was so long waiting for the phone that we couldn't ever get that. Without Intourist accommodations paper we had had to use in Leningrad we were at a loss to know what to do. Well, we all stood out in front of that station, or sat on our bags, for two hours. Bruce took a picture of us which I hope I can get to send you. We were a most dejected lot. Of course, Bill, Bruce and Ed were trying to get hold of someone and finally found an Intourist man who said he would send cars to get us up to the hotel. When we got to the Hotel Metropole we found no rooms had been reserved. (This was all a slip-up on the Russians' part. New York had made all arrangements before we started.) We sat around there until finally an American came up to us and asked if he could help. He said he had been in just the same fix and had no one to straighten him up. First he took us up to his room and told us to make ourselves comfortable, got out towels and soap, etc., and called a waiter. His room mate came in and said he would help us order lunch while Mr. Enter went back down to help the men. (We couldn't read the menu.) He took them to the American Embassy and from there to Machino-Import. This concern buys all foreign equipment used for the heavy industries so of course ALL their oil dealings was done through them.

We have learned now that two hours is nothing to wait for a meal here but that first day when we ordered our lunch at 12:30 and had it brought to us at 3:30 it seemed bad. The children were as patient as they could be. One thing that helped was the fact that this man talked and talked about his experiences here. He and some other men have lived here two months, haven't been allowed to go near their work. They are being paid all this time besides all their living expenses. They almost go crazy sitting around because there aren't any sights to see here. Well, we all felt better after we had food. Bill and the rest got back and by that time the hotel manager got us rooms at the National Hotel. We were mighty thankful to see a room and some beds.

We work it fine as far as meals are concerned because we eat before the rush hours. We put in our breakfast order at night - cream of wheat, (the best stuff cooked in milk), boiled milk, coffee (which is not too bad with hot milk in it. There is no cream around here), and stewed prunes. One night the waiter didn't understand and brought us our breakfast after we had gone to bed. We order our dinner at one while most people don't eat lunch or dinner until two. Then at night about 6:30 we get a lunch - sometimes cream of wheat again or cheese and bread and butter (good butter we have) and jam and stewed fruit. Most people order dinner at eight. Nothing much opens up here until 11:30 at night (I mean music and eating places) but until 3 A.M. it is as noisy as the day time. We aren't out, of course, but our room faces on the main street.

One thing we are so thankful for is that we are not traveling alone. Ed and Agnes have been in Germany, Italy and now here so they know the ropes. We laugh about it all - last night when we broke up our bridge part(y) Ed said, "We have to get to work at ten o'clock in the morning," meaning that Intourist opens at ten and maybe the luggage would be here so that customs can start proceedings. We have had wires from Grozny that our apartments are ready. We were told not to leave here until they were. One of Max Miller's men wired so we are sure of that. The telegram was signed, "The Forgotten Miller Boys."

We go out every morning to sit in the park. It's a poor excuse but at least our sons get the sun. This being cooped up in a hotel room gets monotonous although Billy and David really get along fine. I can't wait to get some news of you. Allan might even have taken his first steps. How I wish I could hug him - and you all! As Agnes says, "Time passes and someday it will all be in the past." She and Ed are to go back to Germany after this is over. When we get to Grozny and get busy it will be better but now there is nothing to do. There is nothing in the shops here - we can't even go window shopping.

I want to know all the news - it takes three weeks for a letter. How does Aunt Helen like Allegany? How is Uncle Glenn? Aunt Julia will soon be home, won't she? How is the weather? Does Allan give everybody a smile? Are your backs achy from lifting Allan?

Heaps of love,
Marion
(Mrs. William Brison)

Note: Allan is the baby son of Mr. and Mrs. Brinson who is staying with his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Wilber, in the absence of his parents.

The historical association would be greatly interested to hear from anyone who knows the rest of this story, given the fact that World War II is about to break out. We would like to know what happened to the Brinson family, and their traveling companions.

OLD BUILDING, NEW USE

The former Allegany Sub Shop, which was in business for 21 years, has been sold, and The Linger Longer Café is now operating in its place. The Café is owned by Beth Mitchell and Christine Scott, and is in one of the oldest business blocks in Allegany. Henry Harms built the east end of this block in 1887, with the Dye Brothers Bank in the west end of the block. The space where the café is was once occupied by the Blair and McCarty Furniture and Undertaking establishment. This was not an unusual combination, as there were at one time three other furniture and undertaking businesses in town. Furniture was made of wood as were the coffins, so it was an ideal mix.

Joseph Blair was the son of Jason Blair, an early resident in the Town of Allegany. Jason was born in Massachusetts in 1810, married Zeriah Graves of Lisle, New York in 1835 and moved to Allegany in 1836. Jason was a farmer, who bought a sawmill on the Five Mile Creek from S. B. Willard, cut hemlock on the hills at the corner of the West Five Mile Road and Wing Hollow, and built a plank house there for his family. The house was demolished in 2004. Jason and his wife are buried in Allegany Cemetery.

Joseph was born in 1836, married Mary Jane Ellis in 1872, and died in 1927. It is not known how long he operated the furniture and undertaking business. In later years, he and his wife spent time in Florida, where their grand-daughter, Reva Metzinger, lived.

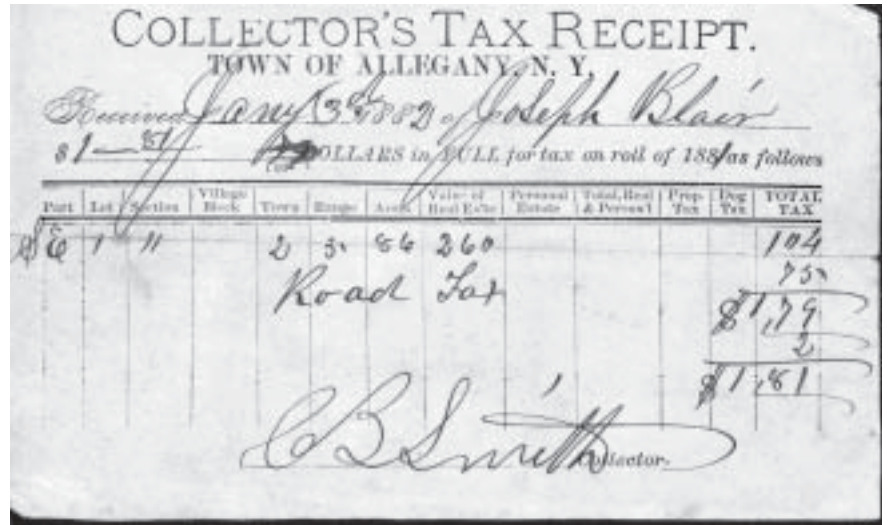
It is nice to see that the old business blocks of Allegany are being refurbished and used today. The new owners have taken some of the inside walls down to the original brick, which gives us a glimpse of construction methods in 1887. The floors are thought to be original also. Good luck to Beth and Christine in their new venture.



**Joseph Blair in doorway of Blair & McCarty Furniture and Undertaking, circa 1895.
Note Weyerstall Meat Market reflected in window at right**



**Joseph Blair and Mary Jane Ellis Blair
in Zepherhills, Florida, circa 1916.**



Joseph Blair Tax Receipt from 1882.

Memorials



For: Patrick J. Wiles
From: Mr. & Mrs. Raymond Jonak
Virginia M. Yehl

For: My Grandparents
From: Shirley Hitchcock Brown

For: Rita Salmonson
From: Mrs. Betty Smith

For: Florence Smith
From: Mrs. Betty Smith

For: Betty Nenno Wilson
From: Bob and Francie Potter
Joe and Helen Stayer

For: Fred Grace
From: Francis J. Hirt

MARCH MEETING



The Allegany Area Historical Association will meet on Sunday, March 12 at 2 p.m. at the Heritage Center, 25 North Second Street. Francie Potter will talk about and show pictures of her recent trip to St. Petersburg, Russia.

St. Petersburg is the home of the world famous Hermitage Museum, as well as other locations such as Peterhof, Peter the Great's summer palace, and the Catherine Palace, which contains the storied Amber Room, newly restored by the Russian government after its complete destruction by the Germans during World War II. We hope to see you there.

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INSIDE SPECIAL ISSUE:

Presidents Report

From Russia, with love

Old Building, New Business
