



Allegheny Area Historical Association

March 2011

www.aaha.bfn.org

Issue XXX Vol. 1

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Well, we had our annual Christmas Cookie Sale on December 4 at Nature's Remedy in Allegheny. For our out-of-town members, that is the old Smith and Schultz store. Our sale hours were 9:30 to 2, but we closed down at 1 because we ran out of cookies! We made a profit of \$1,167.50. Our sincere thanks to Linda Kruppner for giving us the space for our sale. The next day, Sunday, December 5 we held our 28th annual Community Christmas Service; Pastor John Woodring and Church Organist Mrs. Beth Deitz of The First Presbyterian church of Allegheny did the service for us. We had a good attendance and also collected money and canned goods for Genesis House, a homeless shelter in Olean.

Allegheny lost a lifelong resident with the recent death of Robert Conhiser at age 88. Bob's grandfather arrived in Allegheny in 1854 and settled in Wing Hollow where the Conhisers still live today. After Bob retired from farming he would drive his truck up the West Five Mile Road each day to visit his long-time friend and fellow farmer, Vern Field, another member of a pioneer family. The Conhisers were one of the early pioneer families of Allegheny, and we lose some of our history when one of these family members dies.

For Heritage Days this year our major display will be "The Oil Industry in Allegheny". Oil was one the industries, along with farming and lumbering, that definitely shaped the town and village, with a big influx of people who were working in the industry. We are looking for stories, pictures and artifacts from this period. I know several of our members were or still are oil producers. If you or a family member has a story to tell, or pictures that you will share with us (we will make copies at our expense) or an artifact or two that we can display for the day of our celebration, please contact us as soon as possible. The sooner we can start planning, the better our display will be.

AAHA is a member of the New York State Historical Association in Cooperstown, New York. They run the Fenimore Art Museum and the Farmers' Museum. If you are planning a vacation this summer to the central part of the state, I urge you to try to get to Cooperstown to see their facilities, especially the Farmers' Museum. You could easily spend a whole day there, seeing farm and family life from bygone days. They have hands-on activities at many of the buildings such as the blacksmith shop and the docents welcome questions. It is a great place to visit with children of all ages, and of course, there is also the Baseball Hall of Fame to see there also.

Another good place to visit is the Genesee County Village and Museum in Mumford, New York. Again, this shows living history with many things to participate in, and also at historic buildings just like at the Farmers' Museum. As the Buffalo News says, this is a "one tank trip." Also in Mumford the LeRoy Historical Society has a museum devoted to Jello as Mumford is the birthplace of this popular treat.

Francie Potter, President

WE GET MAIL



We got a nice note from Bill and Shirley Brandel who live in Arizona. He says, "I was born and raised on the Four Mile (at the end of the road). I have very fond memories of the Allegany area – graduated in 1942 from the original Allegany High. Also graduated from St. Bonaventure in 1948. My schooling was interrupted by WW II, served in the 100th Infantry Division in France and Germany in Heilbron – almost got killed in April of 1945. —I still hear and "keep up" with 1942 classmates".

Shirley Hitchcock Brown, who lives in Michigan, says, "My roots go deep in your area as my father, Paul Hitchcock, grew up on the Two Mile with his parents, Warren and Anna (Benson) Hitchcock. Therefore I have subscribed to your newsletter for a number of years. Until this last newsletter I had seen very little concerning my family, but today I hit the jackpot. The 1960 Allegany Citizen (*Ed. Note -This is the mailing we send out each year for Heritage Days which*

shows the actual front page of the Citizen from a selected issue and has news items from that year, in this case, 1960. We send a copy of this to any of our out-of-town members who request it.), which was enclosed mentioned my parents and sisters' trip to visit Grandma and Grandpa, and I also saw several of the Two Mile Kysers mentioned. They are people I remember from my childhood visits to my grandparents.

I loved William Bonhoff's article, "Senior Biking" which brought me many laughs.

I would love to receive more of the Allegany Citizens from past years. My grandparents both died in 1971 and I miss them still today. Keep up the good work. If I come to Allegany in the future (maybe next summer) I would like to stop and see you and AAHA.

We got brief notes from Vern Field's daughter, Karen Streif, and from Raymond W. "Bill" Ryan.

Memorials



*For: Jeffrey Keim
From: Ruth F. Simms*

*For: Jenny Scarlato
From: Bob and Nickie Bergreen*

*For: Mary Gilbert
From: Karen and Vincent Streif*

*For: Genevieve Soplop
From: Michael and Martha Nenno
For: Warren and Anna Benson Hitchcock
From: Shirley Hitchcock Brown*

*For: Lucille Chesebro
From: Duane and Caroline Clark*

*For: Dotty Riley
From: Alice Altenburg*

*For: Linda Abrams
From: Tom and Cheryl Stetz*

*For: Bob Conhiser
From: Bob and Francie Potter*

*For: Pete and Dorothy Fortuna
From: Don and Becky Black*

*In **Honor** of Don Benson
From: Bob and Francie Potter*

*For: Richard Elling
From: Bob and Nickie Bergreen*

JANUARY THAW by Gertrude Schnell

The 1958 Junior Class of Allegany Central School put on a play called "January Thaw", directed by Irene Schnell. While attending a summer college class at Geneseo Irene wrote about the production of the play. Its performance date was April 18, 1958. This three act play was a delightful comedy. It was a story of people who weren't supposed to be there, but suddenly they were. It was also the story of a man who strongly disliked indoor plumbing and said so.

Some of the problems in putting on the play were that the Juniors had had no previous experience in acting or in stage work and the play was long. There were 33 people for the 13 parts, but when the final choice was posted everyone seemed quite happy. Another problem was the times of rehearsals. Since it was during Lent some evenings had to be eliminated because of services at the various churches. Also some of the characters had after-school jobs that complicated the rehearsal schedule.

Mrs. Owens, the art supervisor, helped design the sets. Some changes had to be made because of space, but were worked upon by her and Irene. The actual stage design was carried out by the art and industrial arts department. The setting of the play was a living room of an old Connecticut farmhouse built before the Revolutionary War. This required the collection of properties from many sources including Irene's heirloom furniture, borrowing from antique stores and making a dummy spice box from plywood.

Irene lamented that being an English teacher she was not knowledgeable about the many phases of lighting. She felt that many of the aspects of the lighting could have been better, but she also used kerosene lights.

The story included the use of two hams from the smokehouse. The students assigned to make the hams were slow about getting started so Irene decided to use two potato sacks. She removed the labels, covered them with cheesecloth that had been colored with black coffee, and weighed them down. She said that they looked nearly real, just like hams fresh from the smokehouse. The committee's papier-mache ham looked like an elongated pineapple, but was used in the name of art.

The make-up crew did a fine job changing Uncle Walter into an 87 year old farmer with a rugged weather-beaten skin and making Jonathan a younger edition of Uncle Walter. The final characterizations were excellent as was that of Aunt Mathilda, who stole the show as a typical farmer's wife and a religious New England woman.

So on Friday, April 18, 1958, the cast of characters including Chuck Geringer, Mary Barney, John Warren, Joe Arnold, Lola Russell, Ann Geary, Dave Mohr, Kay Norton, Joyce Keim, Francis Mallery, Gerry Smith and Bill Wiechmann presented the play, "January Thaw". It was not quite as professional as when it was presented by Mike Todd on Broadway, but was enjoyed by the people of Allegany.



During a recent conversation with my brother-in-law, the name "Sport Miller" came up. I told him I would get Mr. Miller's obituary for him from our files, which I did. But the whole story is so interesting I thought our members would be interested in it. I hope you enjoy it.

From the Allegany Citizen of November 1, 1951 ———



Sport Miller? & Friday Allen

"SUDDEN PASSING OF C. EVERETT MILLER STUNS COMMUNITY –
Well Known Tavern Owner Dead of Bullet Wound Saturday; Death is Mystery."

This community was unbelievably shocked and grieved last Saturday morning (October 27, 1951), when the news quickly spread that Charles Everett Miller, aged 54 years, had been found dead of a rifle bullet under highly mysterious circumstances at his tap room at 95 West Main Street. (*Ed. Note – Hair It is Beauty Salon is now in this location.*) While authorities believe he died of his own hand, we have known Mr. Miller for over 30 years and somehow the writer cannot visualize such a rash act on the part of a man who had no worries, financial or otherwise, and whom we had conversed with daily over a period of many years.

The discovery of Mr. Miller was made by Claude Reynolds who called at the tap room at 11:10 o'clock Saturday and although Mr. Miller usually opened at 11, the door was locked. Peering through the glass door, Mr. Reynolds saw what appeared to be the body of a man lying on the floor a short distance from the front door. Hurrying to the CITIZEN office two doors away, he asked us if we would return with him to confirm what he had seen. After taking one look at the gruesome sight, we first summoned Dr. Desmond D. Moleski who was in his office across the street and then notified the state troopers in the local barracks.

Dr. Moleski arrived in a few minutes and with the help of Rene Yehl and John Rado, working on a building next door, the front door of the tavern was forced open and Dr. Moleski found that Mr. Miller had expired some hours before. A few minutes later, state police arrived who in turn notified Coroner Donald F. MacDuffie of Olean. After a preliminary examination, the body was removed to Lennon's mortuary where an autopsy was conducted and a temporary certificate of death by a single 25-20 bullet was issued for the purpose of securing a burial permit. The rifle was sent to Batavia for finger prints and on Tuesday of this week, Coroner MacDuffie announced that due to oil on the weapon, it was impossible to secure prints clear enough to be identified and added that a certificate of death would be issued indicating a self-inflicted bullet. It was assumed the gun belonged to Mr. Miller because bullets which fit the gun were found on the premises.

When found, Mr. Miller was lying on his back in a pool of blood about four feet in diameter. His left hand was on his chest, and his right arm was outstretched. Near and just beyond his feet was a rifle with one bullet discharged. In addition to the blood on the floor, there were also spots of blood on the front of his white shirt. He was not fully dressed, being clothed in trousers, shirt partly buttoned and shoes without socks, indicating that he had retired for the night and got up when he heard the commotion outside. The coroner reported that the bullet entered his right temple, traveled upward and came out above the left ear, lodging in the wall of the tavern. Time of death was placed at about four o'clock that morning.

During the day hundreds of spectators milled about the place and stories by the hundreds flew throughout the village. The only facts, however, preceding the finding of the body were: Mr. Miller and a friend, Victor Burneal, had been at the home of a brother of the latter, Andrew Burneal, in Rock City Friday night to see the Joe Louis fight on television. Returning to the village about midnight, Mr. Miller had talked with several friends about the fight and all departed. About three o'clock Saturday morning, Carl Lauser of the Radiant Diner was burning papers at the rear of his business place when he heard what resembled shots and glass breaking. He notified his wife, Mary, at the Diner who called the state police.

The officers investigated and found an Allegany man throwing rocks through the windows of the rear and side of the tap room. They ordered him to go home and nothing more was heard of the incident until the next morning when it was found by passersby that two windows on the east side and three windows on the rear side were broken out in addition to one window on the second floor where Mr. Miller had his living quarters. The first floor windows at the rear are about twelve feet from the ground while the second story windows are more than twenty-four feet up, so that it would be physically impossible to scale the brick building without a ladder.

Mr. Miller or Sport as he was better known to his friends, was born in Allegany June 10, 1897, the only child of Andrew H. Miller and Mrs. Nellie Willard Miller. His father operated a tap room in the same location in the old days before prohibition and Sport carried on in the same venture after repeal until the time of his death. His father passed away at the home of a sister, the late Mrs. Henry Harms, on March 16, 1926 at the age of 57 years. His mother passed away at the home on North Fourth Street on December 1, 1916 at the age of 44 years. He has no immediate survivors, the closest being a sister of his father, Mrs. William (Rose) Le-Febre of Olean. He also has a number of first cousins here and in Olean.

Sport was a veteran of World War I, having served at Camp Wheeler, Ga. He was a charter member of Charles Harbel Post, No. 892, American Legion. Funeral services were held Tuesday afternoon at two o'clock at the Lennon Funeral Home with Rev. William W. Young, pastor of the Presbyterian church, officiating. Services at the grave in the Allegany Cemetery were in charge of the Legion with Rev. Clyde R. Hahn, pastor of the Lutheran Church in charge as Chaplain of the local organization. Pallbearers were John Laubenthal, Victor Burneal, Walter J. Nenno, Fred Lemon, Gilbert Scholl, Carroll Torrey, Wendell Ellsworth, and Donald Frisina. The firing squad who fired a volley over the grave was composed of Douglas Scholl, Edward Soplop, Francis Soplop, Joseph McCoy, William Weinaug and Vincent Riehle. Bugler was James Elling."

In the November 22 issue of the Allegany Citizen was an article that stated: "Petition To Seek further Action On Miller Death. Step Son and Many Others In Community Not In Accord With Announced Verdict." The text of the petition was as follows: We the undersigned, relatives, friends and citizens of Allegany, New York, do hereby petition the office of the district attorney to direct the sheriff of Cattaraugus County to make a thorough re-investigation into the death of Charles E. (Sport) Miller who died of a bullet wound in his tavern at 95 West main Street, Allegany, New York on the morning of October 27, 1951, under highly mysterious circumstances. We respectfully request the cooperation of the people of Allegany in assisting us to arrive at the facts leading up to the death of one who was very dear to us and who was so well liked and respected by his fellow citizens. (Signed by) Mr. and Mrs. Bert O. Wilcox" *Mr. Wilcox was Mr. Miller's step son.*

As a result of the petition drive, Sheriff Morgan Sigel promised to conduct a re-investigation into Mr. Miller's death. An article in the Buffalo Courier-Express said that robbery was ruled out as a motive of a possible assault by the discovery of almost \$3,000 in cash in drawers, also by the lack of evidence of a struggle, and there was no sign of forced entry.

After the re-investigation, a final verdict was issued by Coroner Dr. William E. MacDuffie that Mr. Miller died of a gunshot wound to the head, which was self-inflicted. District Attorney J. Richmond Page said that oil on the rifle had smeared the fingerprints, hence it was impossible to secure plain prints. He said shells found on the premises, which fit the rifle, indicated that the weapon was owned by Mr. Miller.

So it wasn't murder after all but I'm sure it was the talk of the town for many weeks, and I'm sure there were many different opinions voiced for weeks and years afterwards.

**Allegheny Area Historical Association
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INSIDE SPECIAL ISSUE:

Presidents Report

January Thaw

Miller Death - Murder?

NEXT MEETING

We will meet on Sunday, March 13 at 2 p.m. at the Heritage Center to hear the "Memoirs of a Fossil Hunter". Dr. Joseph DiDonato, a dentist at the Olean General Hospital Dental Center will give a presentation about his 35 years of fossil hunting all over the world. He will discuss some of his trips and why he was compelled to get off the couch and traipse across the globe to search for them. Our area is rich in fossils – I pick them up in my yard and give them to my grandchildren –but these are small potatoes compared to what Dr. DiDonato searches for. He has collected dinosaur fossils on four continents. His last expedition was to Beijing to see "The Feathered Dinosaurs of the Great Wall." His next expedition is to Egypt to search for the "Lost Dinosaurs of Egypt." Come join us for this interesting talk.

SUNDAY, MARCH 13 – 2 P.M. – HERITAGE CENTER – SUNDAY, MARCH 13