



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

The chief aim of history is preservation of memory, whether it is of a town, a nation, a people. The means by which history does that is essentially by telling a story: *history*. With this in mind, perhaps some clarity can be gained on the current issue of monuments to Confederate generals or others with slaveholding or other problematic associations. Monuments themselves are not history; they are erected to honor their subject. Even with an explanatory plaque, the placement of most in public squares, means they are usually viewed from afar, or when passing by. As such, they serve as memorials to their subject and do little to tell their story. So, removing a monument hardly erases history; the story of its subject—good and bad—persists. It is mainly a question of who do we want to honor. (After all, patriots in New York City tore down a statue of George III in 1776.) For example, with the question of slavery, is it *because of* one's support for slavery, or *despite* one's support, that a statue is erected? And while current mores should be taken into account, another angle to consider is whether contemporaries considered the subject's actions in keeping with the times, or even then were considered out-of-bounds.

At one extreme, consider the statue of Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest in Memphis, Tennessee, one of many to him throughout the South. It was erected in 1905 and removed from a public park in 2017. While he is well-regarded as a military tactician, to state the obvious, his efforts were in rebellion against the United States and to kill American soldiers. A well-known legacy is, after the war, he served as one of the principal organizers of terrorist campaigns of the Ku Klux Klan. Less well-known, is that in 1864 under his command, hundreds of surrendering Union soldiers were killed in what would be called the Fort Pillow Massacre. Accounts include the burning alive and crucifixion of the captured Union soldiers. This was viewed as a war crime then, as it would be today. His monument was erected at the depths of the Jim Crow era, likely because of his advocacy of white supremacy.

On the other hand, consider the case of Thomas Jefferson. His slaveholding is well-known, especially given his relationship with Sally Hemings. The current tours at Monticello give a balanced interpretation of Jefferson's life, including the life of the enslaved on the estate, as well as perspectives (from the few surviving sources) from the point of view of the Hemings family. While Jefferson was not considered a cruel slaveholder, the very system was cruel, with the enslaved person's body and even life subject to the whim of the master and with the very real possibility that one's spouse, parent, or child would be sold off never to be seen again. Against this very real defect in Jefferson's character stands the lofty ideals he wrote into our nation's founding document, the role he played in the Revolution, and in a successful Presidency. His history, whether presented in a book or during a visit to Monticello, can tell a fuller story of the man, who like us all is a mix of sin and virtue. But for the question of whether he is worthy of memorial, we should go back to whether it is because of, or despite, his slaveholding. Clearly, he is honored despite his slaveholding. The attitudes at the time should also be consulted; any Virginian with considerable acreage would have kept an enslaved workforce. While it does not excuse him, it makes him unexceptional in this regard.

Woodrow Wilson is yet another example to consider. While his presidency is generally regarded as unremarkable on domestic affairs, his efforts to bring a lasting peace following the end of the First World War is the reason he is honored today. Had his Fourteen Points not been undercut by the Treaty of Versailles, the seeds of Nazism may not have taken root. Yet, Wilson's unapologetic racism has only recently become more widely known. His long record of writings defended slavery and vigorously advocated white supremacy. He segregated a Federal workforce which had been desegregated since the end of the Civil War. (And in offices where segregation of white and black workers was logistically impossible, his directives required the black workers would sit at a desk surrounded by a cage.) Even his League of Nations proposal gave second- and third-class status to those countries of the "inferior races." Wilson's views on race, while shared by many, were still considered extreme at the time. With Princeton's recent decision to rename their school of public service and a residential college, the original honor was despite and not because of his deep flaws. On the other hand, they weren't necessarily named to honor his efforts toward peace among nations; it was more to recognize the only Princeton alumnus who became President.

In Sharpsville, we don't have monuments to problematic historical figures to reconsider. Yet, our town's history includes stories that need to be revealed and re-evaluated. Attitudes here toward African-Americans, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, the role of women in society, and a callous disregard for worker safety—while largely mirroring the nation as a whole at the time—are often disconcerting. Yet they are part of our history; we need to preserve the memory of both the good and the bad.

Traces of Lost Sharpsville

Deweyville

Despite its small size, a few neighborhoods or locales within Sharpsville have been distinguished by a name of their own. Irishtown, also called the East End, for example, once referred to the area of Walnut Street east of Mercer Avenue, along with the Twitmyer and Covert Avenue block. It was so named after the Irish immigrants who first settled there. Baptist Hill refers to the hill in the Church Street area. The church there was originally built as the First Baptist. Goat Hill is the elevation beginning at Pierce Avenue between Ninth and Tenth Streets, and so called because people used to keep goats there. Dunham's Hill refers to the steep bluff in South Pymatuning that overlooks the bend in the Shenango River. The family of the first settler, Jonathan Dunham, lived here. Other locales, like Strawbridge's Grove, are more obscure and predate living memory. It was a place for a picnic and dance "near the Ormsby Furnace," which would place it in the neighborhood of Eighth Street around Main or Ridge. None of these places, though, is as mysterious as Deweyville. Where exactly was it located, why was it so named, and what was Dewey Park?

Yes, there was a Deweyville, in the area where Sharpsville meets Sharon, where Ridge Avenue turns into Hall Avenue. (A little geographical clarification is in order though: Sharpsville's border never actually touches Sharon there. Instead, a slender isthmus of Hermitage connects the woods of the former Thornton Estate to Patagonia. A century or so ago, however, the separation between Sharpsville and Sharon was even greater. The section from 15th Street to the Borough line is known as Knight's Annex. It was named for M.L. Knight, an officer of the local street railway company. The area was annexed to Sharpsville in 1919. Likewise, on the Sharon side, the large area known as North Sharon remained part of Hickory Township until it was annexed to Sharon in 1928.)

As Atty. Mike Ristvey relates, his mother, Anna Holup Ristvey, grew up in the area on Hall Furnace Road, in the company houses near the former Taylor Supply. These tenements were likely built originally for the Sharon Furnace which one stood in the area. She was always proud to say she was from Deweyville. One of her recollections was to take the family cow out to graze on the other side of the Thornton Viaduct. (The Thornton Viaduct is perhaps the central point of reference for Deweyville, and is described in the January 2013 issue of this newsletter.) "Indian Joe," a vagabond of suspect motives, was also reputed to live in the woods around Deweyville.

The first mention of Deweyville found is in 1900, when the Sharon Presbyterians planned to erect mission chapels in South Sharon (i.e., what is now Farrell), Hickory township, and Deweyville, which were as "all in close proximity to Sharon." In 1906, a never-realized factory was planned "to be built by Sharon men at Deweyville, a short distance north of that place," and in 1914, in a horrific accident, runaway horses plunged over the streetcar trestle at Deweyville. This trestle, the Thornton Viaduct, was also sometimes referred to as the Deweyville Bridge. A 1915 real estate transfer includes in a description of a lot boundary "to the street Railway bridge or viaduct near Deweyville." Even as late as 2005, an obituary for

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Upcoming Events

COVID-19 UPDATE:

The Historical Society is open to visitors on the first and third Saturday of the month.

1:00pm to 3:00pm

Come inside and see the unique Victorian interior of our building as well as our growing display of Sharpsville memorabilia.



Monthly Meetings of the Historical Society have been resumed. First Monday of the Month, 7:00 pm. (September meeting is Sept. 14th due to Labor Day.) Face-masks are encouraged and social distancing is facilitated.



Please watch for announcements of resumption of our:

GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIPS
and

OTHER COMMUNITY-BUILDING EVENTS



As always, interesting items may be viewed under the Archives section of our website

www.sharpsvillehistorical.org

Building update

One of our headquarters building's outstanding features are its original pews. Made of heavy black walnut they are curved, in keeping with the auditorium-style sanctuaries often found in 19th century sacred architecture.

This past month, Furniture Medics of Cranberry, Pa. has re-fit and re-glued loose mortises, repaired split planks, replaced broken supports, and otherwise reconditioned this 136 year-old woodwork.

Work was able to be done on-site which reduced the risk of damage during handling and transport and allowed for significant cost savings.

Deweyville, cont'd.

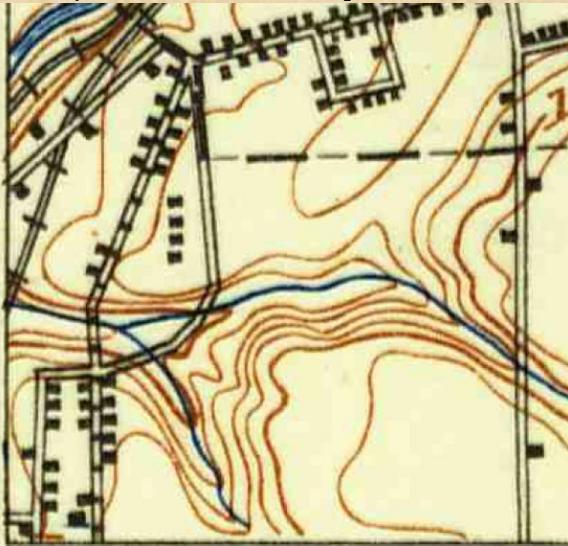
Mary S. Hull notes she was born “May 16, 1910 in Deweyville (North Sharon, Pa.)”

Adding to the intrigue is the existence of Dewey Park. It was a recreational area known as a trolley park. They were created by streetcar companies along their lines as a means of generating ridership on weekends, with 1,500-2,000 such parks estimated to be operating in 1919. Cascade Park in New Castle, Idora Park in Youngstown, and Waldameer in Erie were all associated with local streetcar lines. Scant information is known about Dewey Park's features, though it included picnic grounds, a carousel, swings, and probably a dance pavilion. Most early trolley parks featured similar limited recreation, though a few years later amusement rides would become commonplace. The Park was located near the hollow created by Thornton Run, in the vicinity of the viaduct. While no evidence of any structures there remains, two 1908 maps indicate possible access. They show 15th Street extending into



A view of the Thornton Viaduct before it was filled in 1925.

the ravine and making a turn before coming back up and intersecting Hall Avenue. (These were likely the Thornton and Knight Avenues, listed in city directories of the era, but previously unidentified.) Besides mentions since at least 1901 in a directory of parks published weekly in *The Billboard*, now the *Billboard of the Top 100*, (“Sharon, Pa.—Dewey Park, Sharon & Sharpsville Ry. Co, mgrs.”), and reference in two histories of the Valley streetcar system, scant record is found of gatherings there. One mention, from 1899, is a jocular attempt by the editor of *The Sharpsville Advertiser* to rejoin a Sharon paper's notice regarding African-American voters of Sharpsville and other Valley towns: “The delegation from Sharpsville will be an imposing one. We understand that 4,000 horsemen, with ten brass bands and Bauman's steam calliope, will meet the party of [African-American voters] at Dewey Park and escort them to Joe Chin's headquarters in Sharon. The fact is that there is not a colored individual, let alone a colored voter, residing within the limits of the borough of Sharpsville.” In contrast, local newspapers report popular resorts such as Trout Island or Conneaut Lake as the scene of many excursions from Sharpsville and Sharon.



This close-up from a 1908 USGS map shows the streets in the Deweyville area. The vertical lines are, L-R, Heinz Ave., Hall Ave. and 10th St. Hall changes to ridge at the slight bend; 15th St. juts down from Ridge at its sharper bend. Here we find a dog-leg continuation into the Hollow. Are these Thornton and Knight Avenues?

In 1906, the local streetcar line, now known as the Mahoning & Shenango Railway and Light Co., had abandoned Dewey Park in favor of the new Roseville Park. It was located across the Sharon-Masury border near where the Rte. 62-82 cloverleaf now stands. Following a naming contest that attracted over 200 contestants for a prize of a \$5 gold piece, Roseville was renamed Idlewild Park in December 1908. The suggestion of the winner, Miss Pearl McCann of Sharon, was selected even though there was already a park by that name near Pittsburgh. Idlewild was more of what we think of as an amusement park, with a roller coaster, boat launches, a dance hall, a small coal-fired steam train for youngsters, and numerous concession stands. A 1910 advertisement for six days of a “midsummer Mardi Gras” touted the “Great Johnny Jones Exposition Shows—3 Bands—5 Riding Devices—Boating, Bathing, Dancing—12 Big Shows 100 Features—Brilliant Dazzling Electrical Display—Most Pretentious Amusement in Sharon's History.” It was also the scene of varied (though perhaps less pretentious) entertainment, such as a 1914 boxing match and the child roller skating act Baby Margaret Chapman.

Dewey Park found a second life in 1907 when it was sold to the F.H.

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Despite being well within the Machine Age, this photo from around 1905 shows that horsepower was still sometimes provided by actual horses. The workers are possibly those of the T.D. West Foundry (later Valley Mould & Iron).

The bosses are distinguished by their vests and watch chains, and while this was hardly an era that recognized the rights of labor, an easy familiarity between boss and laborer comes across in the photo. A small town like ours, then as now, may perhaps better allow the interactions, that forge connections regardless of class or income, unlike the remote management and gated communities of much of today's America.



Deweyville, cont'd.

Buhl Club which was then acquiring land to be part of the future Buhl Farm Park. Two plots of land, totaling 11.8 acres were purchased from John and Clara Cook and James and Ida Mae Hoffman (the street railway had not owned, but only managed the park). Earlier that year, in late July, a Chautauqua Assembly was held under a large tent at Dewey Park. Coordinated by "the educational departments of the Buhl Club," the event counted lectures, entertainers, concert companies, and jubilee singers among the twenty high grade entertainments that were offered. By 1915, when Buhl Farm Park was opened, Dewey Park was incorporated as part of it and described as a "family picnic ground," with any other amusement facilities from earlier days apparently gone.

The remaining question, though, is why and when did Deweyville and Dewey Park get their name? The earliest instance found is Dewey Park in an August 4, 1898 newspaper article: "Afro-Americans held a celebration in Dewey park, Sharon, Pa., which 1,500 people attended. W.M. Randolph of Pittsburgh and Hon. Alex McDowell of Sharon were among the speakers." Given his great naval victory on May 1, 1898, without doubt, it was named in honor of Admiral George Dewey. The popularity at the time of the "Hero of Manila Bay," who won the Philippines from Spain in the Spanish-American War, is hard to understate. Places named in his honor quickly sprung up across the country: more than a dozen towns applied to have the name of their post office changed to Dewey or Deweyville. Countless streets and avenues,

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Collections Update

Ken Miller donated a souvenir ingot mould given to Shenango, Inc. employees and a ladle cup used for metallurgical samples at the Shenango.

Rod Alexander donated the sign from the Sharpsville VFW from before their 2007 remodeling.

Ann Angel Eberhardt donated two 1950s yearbooks, copies of her father's memoir of his time in the Valley, a large trove of photos and documents relating to her father's service on Borough Council, and a print-out of her blog of Sharpsville Memories

Contact Us

website: www.sharpsvillehistorical.org
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see our website for officers' phone numbers

Headquarters: 131 N. Mercer Ave., Sharpsville, Pa.

Mailing address: 955 Forest Lane,
Sharpsville, Pa. 16150

Meetings are held the First Monday of the Month
at 7:00pm at our headquarters

Deweyville, cont'd.

army camps, suburban developments, along with resorts and hotels, were renamed in the summer of '98 with some variant of Dewey or Manila. Few items of popular culture—names of soda fountain creations, clothing fads, sports slang, music scores, pins, badges, and banners, and, ultimately, baby names—escaped the effect of the “Dewey Craze.” In 1899, he was elevated to the rank “Admiral of the Navy” (which no man has since held), and Dewey Day was a widely-celebrated, albeit briefly, patriotic holiday.

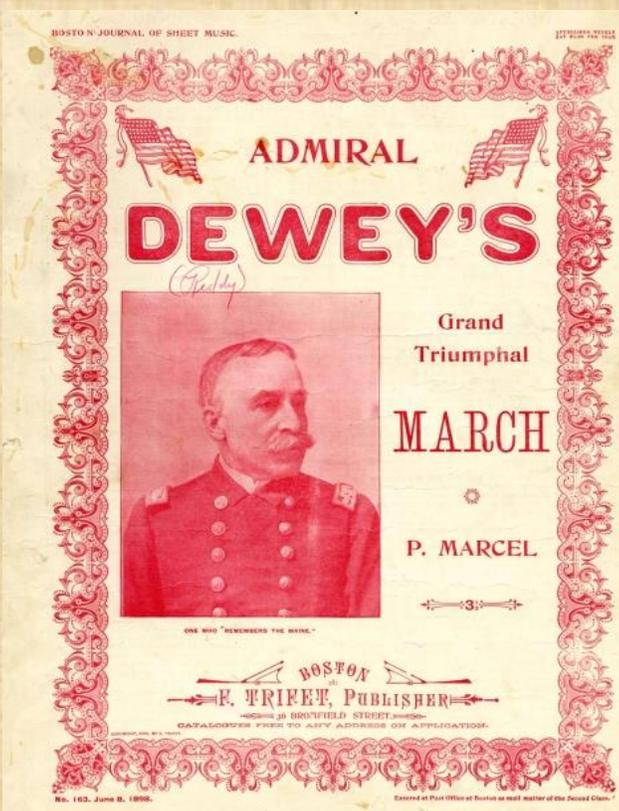
Since no trace of the trolley park prior to August 1898 has been found, this would argue that the formation of the park (and not a Dewey re-christening) was that summer and not earlier: that is, either at the start of streetcar service in December 1892, the opening of the Thornton Viaduct in July 1893, or the reorganization of the street railway in 1895 following the bankruptcy of the original firm. There was a picnic area called Thornton's Grove, which has been described variously as near either the Tenth Street end of Thornton Run or near the Hall Furnace Road end. But Dewey Park could not have been its successor since gatherings at the grove were reported as early as 1876 and as late as 1914.

But what of Deweyville? One account, relying on the research of our pre-eminent Sharpsville historian and Burgess Pete Joyce, traces both the name and the place to Charles Heinz, a cousin of H.J. Heinz, the Pittsburgh pickle and ketchup magnate, and after whom Sharon's Heinz Avenue is named. Heinz came to the United States from Rhenish Bavaria, settling first in Pittsburgh in 1868. A florist and horticulturalist by trade, he then moved to Sharon. Serving for two years as gardener on the James Westerman estate on the West Hill, he then moved to what was then called North Sharon (the area north of Thornton Avenue the current to city line) area in 1874 where he erected four large greenhouses, totaling

6,000 square feet under glass, where he grew fruits, vegetables and flowers. In April 1890, he became partner in four acres of real estate development in the area in question and at some point named it Deweyville, in honor of the Admiral. Joyce also credits Heinz with developing Dewey Park and an adjoining ballfield, Dewey Field.

Mention is made in 1893 of a ballfield in Knight's Annex (i.e., what is now the 15th to 18th street end of Sharpsville). This is likely what Joyce refers to as Dewey Field. Except for the Dewey references, the account seems to be taken from the sketch of Charles Heinz in the 1909 *Twentieth Century History of Mercer County*. For his real estate development, that sketch says: “Mr. Heinz bought, soon after locating here, additional tracts of land, which he afterwards platted and sold off in town lots, thus becoming in reality the ‘father’ of North Sharon.”

Based on the available evidence (which is frustrated by large gaps in extant newspapers), the best conclusion is that the Valley Street Railway Company named—and perhaps first established—Dewey Park shortly after the victory at Manila Bay, between May and August of 1898. The nickname Deweyville, first found in October 1900, seems to derive from the park, encompassing both the Sharpsville and Sharon side of Thornton Run. (Semi-officially, they were “Knight's Annex” and “North Sharon,” respectively, though both were legally still part of Hickory Township). Whether, the name Deweyville was bestowed by Charles Heinz or arose popularly, though—like much of the area—remains shrouded in mystery.



Sheet music from the “Dewey Craze”