



THE CEDAR TREE

Newsnotes from

The Historical Society of Mount Lebanon

P. O. Box 13423, Pittsburgh, PA 15243 (412) 561-0455

www.hsmtl.org

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SUMMER 2008

PRESIDENT'S LETTER: I recently saw some old pictures of the Denis Theatre from the late 1930s—probably 1938 as the marquee was advertising the Deanna Durbin movie “Mad About Music,” which was released that year. If that’s the case, then the pictures were taken during the theater’s first year of operation. My memories of the theater don’t go back that far—they begin in the mid 1970s (shortly before the main theater was subdivided)—so the snapshots are a revelation. The exterior photo shows a jutting marquee, an outside ticket booth, and front doors that were set back much further than they are today. The interior shots reveal shiny, art deco-inspired décor with geometric-patterned carpeting and a mezzanine with comfy seating, mirrors, and large floral arrangements. Most impressive was the theater itself with its curtained screen, seating for 1,200, and huge balcony. If I close my eyes I can see the patrons—women in feathered hats, gloves, and fur stoles and men in suits. In 1938, theater tickets might have cost only 23 cents, but going to the theater was an event.

A few days after seeing those pictures, I attended the hardhat preview of the Denis Theatre held by The Denis Theatre Foundation, a nonprofit organization whose goal is to get the theater back up and running in the next 18 to 24 months. What I saw broke my heart...ripped screens, stained seats and carpeting, piles of debris. What should be a shining star of Mt. Lebanon’s business district is derelict and forlorn. But if the Denis Theatre Foundation can raise the estimated \$3 million needed to undertake the massive project, Mt. Lebanon will once again have a community theater.

The Denis Theatre Foundation is seeking memories of the theater, and I certainly have mine—this is where I snuck into my first R-rated movie, where my dad and I spent Sunday afternoons watching truly awful Chevy Chase movies, and where my best friend sobbed throughout the comedy “48 Hours” (much to the annoyance of the rest of the audience) because her boyfriend had just dumped her. I’m sure you have a memory or two as well—in fact, I recently was told that during WWII, any child who brought in scrap metal for the war effort received free admission. So, if you’d like to share your memory of the theater and what it means to you, log on to www.denis theatre.org and click “Memories and Dreams.” Or send a letter to: The Denis Theatre Foundation, Attn: Memories & Dreams, 685 Washington Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15228. Old photographs of the theater are also being requested; they will be returned once scanned.

I am very curious to see what memories are recorded on the website as the Historical Society’s History Center—which will open later this year—will feature a “theater corner” featuring an old red fabric chair from the Denis as well as marquee letters and photographs.

But mostly I want to urge you to support the theater when it reopens. I’ve heard many people complain about how much they want a community theater, but then when one does open—such as the Hollywood Theater in Dormont—few people actually show up. Yes, it is easier to stay on your couch and rent a movie through Netflix, but that doesn’t support our local business district. Case in point: after only a year, the Hollywood Theater has closed again.

Don't let our community theater become a permanent memory.

Details of the Denis Theatre project, plus photographs of the theater—both in its heyday and currently—are posted at www.denistheatre.org.

M. A.

JACKSON

MT. LEBANON YEARBOOKS NEEDED

Every year, the Friends of Mt. Lebanon Library generously gives the Historical Society every Mt. Lebanon yearbook donated for its used book sale. This spring's book sale generated five yearbooks that were missing from our collection. We extend our deepest thanks to the Friends for thinking of us.

The Society still needs the following yearbooks.

1934, 1935, 1940, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1966, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1989, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007.

To donate, call 412-561-0455 or email info@hsmt.org. If you have yearbooks that are not on the list, the Society is still interested as several copies in our collection are in poor condition.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MOUNT LEBANON PROGRAM REVIEW:

Pittsburgh skyscrapers were the subject of a presentation by John Conti on May 21 at a meeting of the Historical Society in cooperation with the Mt. Lebanon Library. One of the Society's offerings which are regularly open to the public, Mr. Conti's presentation was entitled "Styles of Substance: The Tall Buildings of Downtown Pittsburgh" covering the history of skyscraper development in the city from the 1920s to the present. Mr. Conti is a member and past chairman of the Mt. Lebanon Historic Preservation Board, a student of architecture for many years, and author of the publication "Living with Styles."

His presentation, accompanied by stunning slides of his architectural subjects, began with a look at the early three skyscrapers: the Gulf,

were the images of the elegant interior of the Koppers building. These early photos demonstrated clearly the influence of the Art Deco period on the city's early architecture. Of special interest to those old enough to remember the Grant Building as it looked before remodeling were the changes made to the building which eliminated some of the early ornamentation while retaining the integrity of the structure. These three buildings remained the city's only tall buildings until after a hiatus in construction caused by World War II.

According to Conti, the chief architectural influence on the designers of Pittsburgh skyscrapers following the war was the French architect Le Corbusier, whose efforts to design buildings for Paris resulted in the kind of cruciform construction that can be seen in the three original Gateway Center buildings constructed in the early 1950s as part of the Point Park redevelopment and downtown renaissance. Corbusier exercised an influence over many architects for a number of years during this period.

The next influence in the design of buildings came from the work of Mies van der Rohe, who designed the bronze-and-glass Seagram's Building in New York, a model for many skyscrapers which followed both in New York and elsewhere in the United States, including Pittsburgh. These included buildings like the original United States Steel Building adjacent to the original Mellon Bank Building on Fifth Avenue.

In subsequent years Pittsburgh added several of these kinds of buildings and other buildings reflecting changing architectural styles including construction of what is now known as the USX Tower with its controversial exterior of COR-TEN steel and the Fifth Avenue Place building with its pyramidal top.

Mr. Conti's presentation was followed by a lively discussion with a well-informed audience, who were able to make contributions of information from their own memory and experiences.

Koppers, and Grant buildings. Especially beautiful
**MARK YOUR CALENDAR – UPCOMING
HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROGRAM
DATES:**

The Historical Society of Mount Lebanon's free public programs for the remainder of 2008 are:

September 24: "Life in a Pennsylvania Coal Patch" with Pamela Nixon (this is a repeat of an earlier program)

November 5: (annual meeting) "Women of Westsylvania in Story and Song" with Paula Purnell.

All programs begin at 7:30 p.m., at Mt. Lebanon Library, 16 Castle Shannon Boulevard. Refreshments will be served.

A SPECIAL THANKS

To Society member and former trustee Dick Walker for bringing his video camera to the last three Society Programs. Dick has taped these programs and provided a copy to the Society for its archives. When the history center opens, we hope to make these videos available for viewing.

NOTE CARDS FOR SALE

The Society is selling sets of eight note cards featuring different buildings and scenes of Mt. Lebanon for \$10 a box. Local artists drew the sketches, and all funds benefit the Society.

Cards are being sold at **Josephine's**, which recently moved from Castle Shannon Boulevard to Norman Center across from Borders Books and Music; **Planet Art Gallery**, Washington Road, **Blooming Dahlia**, Beverly Road, **Mt. Lebanon Public Library**, Castle Shannon Boulevard, **Mt. Lebanon Pharmacy**, Mt. Lebanon Boulevard, and **Borders Books and Music**, Norman Centre. Cards will also be sold at Society programs. Our thanks to the shop owners for helping us with this fundraiser.

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE: The Society's Web site is www.hsmtl.org. It contains old pictures, information about upcoming events, some of our old newsletters, and other interesting facts. We just added some new pictures, so please check them out. If you would like to add information

THE SOCIETY'S ANNUAL DINNER

The Society is planning a dinner Wednesday, October 15 at St. Clair Country Club. A social hour will begin at 6 p.m. and dinner at 7. Our speaker will be Paul Ostergaard, senior vice president for Urban Design Center and former board member of Mt. Lebanon's Historic Preservation Board. Ostergaard's work has focused on strategic plans for revitalizing downtowns and waterfronts, by creating new mixed use precincts, districts, and neighborhoods. Paul is also responsible for numerous traditional neighborhood projects as well as the architectural design of institutional buildings, university facilities, community centers, municipal buildings, and multi-family residential buildings.

A flyer with more information and a registration form will be sent to Society members in September, but if you would like to pre-register or request more information, call Ginny Nicklas at 412-531-5868.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY TRUSTEES

M.A. Jackson, president
Marty Carney, vice president
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David Borland
Lori Humphreys
Maggie McDermott
Wilma Novogradac
Virginia Nicklas
Wally Workmaster

about a picture, e-mail us at info@hsmtl.org.

DONATIONS TO THE SOCIETY

From Peg Smith:

- Mount Lebanon School District report from 1966.
- “Early They Came” leaflet
- Mellon Middle School plans
- “In Time of Emergency” handbook from 1968 (for nuclear attacks).
- Mount Lebanon Public Library program from the 1997 reopening.
- Middle Schools reopening program from 1998.
- Historical Society of Mount Lebanon organizational meeting minutes and membership list from 1998.

From Maxine Bickel:

- Shirt, blouse, and leather button-up shoes circa 1915. These items belonged to Maxine’s grandmother.
- T-shirt commemorating South Hills (trolley) Junction from April 1984.

BOOK AWARD

The Historical Society of Mount Lebanon, along with co-sponsor, Huntington Bank, presented its annual History Book Prize at the Mt. Lebanon High School awards ceremony on May 28. The History Book Prize is given to a Mt. Lebanon High School student, selected by the high school’s social studies teachers, as a way to recognize that student’s passion for and interest in U.S. History and encourage future study of our nation’s past. We also presented a copy of the book to the High School library in hopes of enlightening and edifying other students.

This year’s book is *Great American Documents*, which covers the years 1493—with a letter from Christopher Columbus to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain—to 2001—with the missing persons’ board erected after 9/11. From milestone decisions of the Supreme Court to international treaties, this book presents the most important documents in our history and includes information about the impact and legacy of every document. We hope it will prove a valuable resource during our winners’ college years.

The winners for 2008 are senior Christa Owens and junior Ryan Pollock.

Of Christa, her teachers said: “Christa demonstrated exceptional intellectual and personal growth, and dove into historical inquiry. Her research paper, on the media’s role in wartime was the best paper produced last year. She approached team-based projects with incredible creative energy, attended numerous voluntary evening sessions, and embraced the ideal of being a scholar-activist.”

Of Ryan, U.S. History teacher Pete DiNardo says, “Few students in my career have shown Ryan’s depth and range of personal reading. Beyond his natural skills, he loves to engage in discussion and analysis of historical issues. It has been a joy to witness his expanded concept of public service and impressive to see him wed his intellect and sense of republican duty.”

The Society wishes Christa and Ryan the best of luck in the future (and hope they consider joining the Society). We’d also like to express thanks to John McDonough of Huntington Bank for his continued support and Karen Cahall for her work in organizing the book award.

HELP THE CAUSE

The Society is supporting the efforts of the People for Better Pennsylvania Historical Records Access, a grassroots organization whose goal is to make older Pennsylvania state death certificates available online. Genealogists, researchers, and family historians will all benefit if this effort becomes a reality. The goal is to get the Pennsylvania state death certificates that are at least 50 years old available online in a fashion similar to what several other states (such as Arizona, Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio, Utah, and West Virginia) have done. In addition, Louisiana, New Hampshire, and Vermont are in the process of posting their death certificates, and numerous other states offer online indexes for their death records. Many Pennsylvanian genealogists/researchers have experienced frustration while gathering information because they must provide background information about when and where the person died in order to obtain his or her death records -- unfortunately, that data is usually the information being sought in the first place. The People for Better Pennsylvania

Historical Records Access are asking Pennsylvania residents to contact their state senator, state representative, and the governor in person, by letter, by phone, or by e-mail. The People for Better Pennsylvania Historical Records Access has made the process easier by supplying sample letters on its website: users.rcn.com/timarg/PaHRAccess. You also will find addresses, FAQ, forms, links, and more information at this website. The Historical Society of Mount Lebanon has already sent letter in support of this project. Please consider sending your own letter. It will take only a few minutes of your time.

THEN AND NOW

A few months ago, some of the Trustees of the Historical Society of Mount Lebanon were discussing how housekeeping chores have changed for the typical Mount Lebanon family since the 1930s and 1940s. Our problem is that the adults who did most of these chores in the 1930s and '40s are now in their 90s and precious few are available to interview.

But, the children who helped with those chores are still around ... they're YOU!!! If you remember ice boxes, coal-fired furnaces, wringer washers, curtain stretchers, and other bygone, could we say, tools of the trade, please take a few minutes, reminisce, write it all down and send it to us at P.O. Box 13423, Pittsburgh, PA 15243. We will be happy to share your memories with the rest of our Society members in future issues of our newsletter, and it will help us all to remember days gone by.

MEL BICKLE, Trustee

RECOGNITION OF MEMBERS:

Life Memberships - The Green & White

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THANK YOU TO NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS - APRIL - JUNE, 2008

Christopher A. Beck - - Individual (Renewal)
Clarence & Helen Betzler - Family (Renewal)
Maggie McDermott & Bill Bates
- Benefactors (Renewal)
George & Barbara Schoeppner
- Benefactors (Renewal)
Mrs. Edwin Ruh - Family (Renewal)
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John Conti - Individual (Renewal)
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Jim & Peggy Wojcik - Family (Renewal)
Mr. & Mrs. Edward Reno - Senior (Renewal)
Ruth Ann Kramer - Individual (Renewal)
William Cooper - Individual (Renewal)
Iannuzzi - Shenouda Family (Renewal)

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP TO THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MOUNT LEBANON BY COMPLETING THIS FORM AND FORWARDING TO THE ADDRESS LISTED:

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MOUNT LEBANON
P.O. BOX 13423, Pittsburgh, PA 15243

Please check applicable membership level:

Name: _____ Individual \$20 ___
Address: _____ Family \$35 ___
City/State/Zip _____ Benefactor \$100 ___
Phone: _____ Youth \$15 ___
E-mail _____ Senior \$15 ___
Life \$1,000 ___

Date of Application _____ New () Renewal ()

Membership runs January 1 to December 31.

Life Memberships are recognized upon payment of total amount within any single 12-mo. period.

Names of donors will appear in newsletters and appropriate membership announcements and mailings.

The Society is classified as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, charitable organization.

Enclosed is my tax-deductible check made payable to: The Historical Society of Mount Lebanon
