



From the President

Geyer is New on Board of Trustees

by Mindy Pyle



Jon Geyer

BWAHS board is excited to welcome our newest trustee, Jon Geyer.

Mr. Geyer lives in Westerville and recently learned that his great-great grandparents previously owned a farm in Galena. His grandmother has fond memories of spending her summers at the Galena farm. Mr. Geyer also enjoys spending time in the Sunbury community.

Mr. Geyer works at Capital University and is the former board president and member of the The Alliance Chorus. He joins the board with a passion for his family’s history and the desire to be more connected with the community. We look forward to Mr. Geyer’s contributions to the board.

Currently the Big Walnut Area Historical Society board has a vacancy. The board meets at 6:00 pm on the second Tuesday of each month. We are in search of members that are passionate about our community’s history and have ideas to preserve the stories and history that has been established at the Myers Inn and through the Historical Society. If you are interested in joining the board please reach out by emailing info@bigwalnuthistory.org.

August 10, 2021

Annual Old Fashioned Picnic

Traditionally the BWAHS has held a picnic for the August meeting. Each family brings a dish to share, place setting and beverage for the family. We dine in the Sunbury Methodist Church ShelterHouse behind the church at 100 W. Cherry Street in Sunbury - go thru the lower parking lot.

There is no other formal program on this evening. Enjoy food and fellowship.

Myers Inn Museum Is Open

Myers Inn Museum is open on Saturdays from 10 to 1 for tours, visits or the gift shop. Hours will expand as docents are ready to come back to the Inn.

The first few weeks are being covered by BWAHS Trustees. If you have had docent training and would like to get back into helping people learn our local history, contact Polly Horn, 740-965-3582 and leave a message.

July Program Still Available

“Steam Engine Contributions to the Industrial Revolution,” presented by Jack Brown, is available on YouTube using a link from the BWAHS website at <http://BigWalnutHistory.org>. 40 people have seen the presentation and learned how steam power replaced water power in the industrial revolution.. Brings back memories of the steam engines on harvesters and trains.



Senator Whitney's Dinner Bell Installed at Myers Inn

During the fall months, while the museum was closed for covid, Damon Bower installed the bell donated by Whitney's granddaughter, Hannah Whitney Gabriel. It will remind us of a local politician who served us.

Big Walnut Area Historical Society

OFFICERS

Mindy Pyle, President
 Vice President to be selected
 Chip Welch, Secretary
 Bill Kavage, Treasurer
 Polly Horn, Curator, Webmaster
 and Editor of Newsletter

TRUSTEES

Alice Lacher
 Ashley Hornbaker
 Bill Comisford
 Carol Wood
 Damon Bower
 Jon Geyer
 Mel Meyers
 Roger Roberts

For Information Call 740-965-1154
 leave a message or
 email Info@BigWalnutHistory.org

Calendar of Events

August 6 BWAHS Board of Trustees will not meet
 August 10 at 6:00 Annual Old Fashioned Picnic in
 Sunbury United Methodist Shelterhouse at
 100 W. Cherry St. In Sunbury (see page 1)
 August 21 11a.m. to 11p.m. Sizzles and Sounds on
 Sunbury Square - Museum Closed

**MYERS INN MUSEUM IS NOW OPEN
 9-1 ON SATURDAYS Except August 21**

Myers Inn Museum and Forge Opened July 3rd

Sunbury's independence Day was celebrated on Saturday, July 3rd, with activities on the Village Square, the annual parade and fireworks in the evening.

200 children were given pinwheels and 80 people toured the Museum and visited the Blacksmith's forge.

Thanks to Mindy Pyle and daughters, Alice Chapan, Alice Lacher, Bob Meyer, Damon Bower and Rick Helwig.

Joining BWAHS is Easy

Circle One:

*Individual \$20, Family \$35, Business 10 or fewer employees \$50,
 Business 11-99 employees \$75,
 Business 100 or more employees \$100, Patron \$100, Other ?*

Name _____

Address or P. O. Box _____

Town _____ Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____

Email Address _____

Send with check for dues to BWAHS
P.O. Box 362
Sunbury, OH 43074

Senator Oatfield Whitney

by Polly Horn

My grandfather Whitney, known as Gramp to my generation, was the son of Civil War veteran Robert William Whitney, who had been run over by a cannon caisson and shot 3 times. In addition to farming, he was a noted wool buyer in eastern Delaware County. Grandfather's mother, Angeline DeGood, daughter of John and Hannah (Clawson) DeGood of Centerburg had helped raise her younger siblings after the death of her father when she was seven and her mother when she was 15. She went to college on OSU's Radio Station studying sociology from her home when she was 92.

Gramp was born at home on Whitney Road, now Longshore Road, in Trenton Township. His mother had already lost 2 sons so she did not want to name another to just die. The doctor wanted to leave so he insisted. She looked out the window at the empty field and said, "Call him Oatfield." He was the 6th child with 3 sisters, Jessie, Eliza and Winona. He told me about walking to school as a boy and I thought he walked from home in Trenton Township to Sunbury School, but his father and grandfather were indentured to build the Trenton School on Hartford Road - much closer than I walked from my home at 210 Granville Street to Sunbury School.

The week before graduation from Sunbury School, Oatfield was suspended for grabbing a girl by the ankle and flipping her over as she was walking by him in a school assembly. He had already been accepted at Ohio Wesleyan University so he got a college education studying Political Science before they discovered he had not completed high school. He was not allowed to get a college diploma.

Back in Sunbury in 1902, he used a horse and wagon to run a dray business buying, selling and delivering coal and ice to Sunbury residents. Oatfield began his political career as Sunbury's Marshall.

Rural Free Delivery began in Sunbury in 1898 with just one carrier, Mr. Longwell, delivering the mail. Within a short while 4 other carriers were hired. Oatfield had the Condit Route by 1903.

On October 7, 1903, Oatfield married Edna Pearl Green, daughter of Homer and Rovenia (Van Fossen)

Green of Johnstown. She was well educated and very polished (had attended a Girls Finishing School in Colorado) which made her the perfect wife for a politician. They set up housekeeping across from the Baptist Church on east Cherry Street.

Bill was born prematurely in April 1905 while his mother struggled to survive influenza. A bed was made for him in the Mission Rocker and a nurse took care of him. After 10 days they decided he would live and named him William Homer after his 2 grandfathers.

When Bill was about 2, they moved into the Cook house at 11 South Columbus Street across from Sunbury Square. He never mentioned the house but said his pony was buried in the field behind it - across the street from where O.W. lived on West Cherry Street.

In 1909, 4 year old Bill became paralyzed on his left side. The doctor said it was caused by a heart problem and prescribed a shot glass of whiskey daily. Pearl used Oatfield's belt to tie Bill to the bed post and refused to take him down until he moved a ball with his left leg. She would also hang a sack above his head when he was in bed and not feed him until he hit the sack with his left arm. Slowly he got so he could lift his arm to his shoulder and move his leg enough to walk. She told how she would cry because she was torturing her boy but she wanted him to be as normal as possible.

Three more boys were born: Hoyt in 1909, Oatfield II in 1914 and David in 1919. David died in Bill's arms during the Influenza Epidemic in 1919.

Oatfield was appointed Sunbury Postmaster from April 1912 through March 1916 under President William Howard Taft. The post office was on Vernon Street in the middle of the block facing the town square.

The Sunbury News was ordinarily printed in the glass block building on Granville Street where the drive goes around to the police station since 1983. Don Crawford and Fred Baker bought *The Sunbury News* and moved it to the 2 story frame building between the Farmers Bank and the Benoy House. Even though he knew nothing about running a newspaper, in 1906, Whitney bought out Don Crawford and was partners with Fred Baker and began learning the business from scratch. He was also writing insurance policies and kept his hand in the post office. **(Continue on page 4)**

In 1919 Whitney bought out Baker and became sole owner of *The Sunbury News*. With Pearl as his office girl they brought the community the news.

Running a newspaper with handset type was very time consuming. Each letter was taken from drawer, used to print the page and then women were hired to come in after and put the letters back in the right trays. Oatfield tried to talk his son, Bill into taking over the business.

Bill had gotten into Ohio Wesleyan but he was crippled and knew he would not be allowed to return the next year. He went to University of Missouri to Journalism School. He told his dad he would come home and run the newspaper if his father would buy a linotype to speed up setting the paper. They both agree and Bill went to Chicago to Mergenthaler Linotype School.

They had outgrown the Benoy Building so they moved into the Benoy house. Pearl helped run the News office and the insurance office. ***The following story came to me through a banker - not my family.*** During the Depression, Pearl looked out the window and saw men on the steps going into the Farmer's Bank. They were yelling at the banker to open the door. She knew the men were running the bank. She took the canvass bank bag she used for deposits and put all the coins in the cash drawer into it. There were only a few dollars, She went home, emptied the coin banks and dumped it in but still it looked like what it was - not much money. She took the buttons out of her button basket and filled the sack and rushed back to the bank. She pushed herself through the men and banged on the door shouting, "Mr. Armstrong, Open up. How can a woman run a business without the bank?" Mr. Armstrong thanked her and told her if she needed anything to let him know. As the Depression continued women would stop to talk with her saying they did not have money for their bank payment. She would borrow money from Mr. Armstrong, give it to the person who would then make their payment. Apparently they always paid the money back. The button box is in the Museum.

A lawyer, David Cupp, had become partners in an insurance business with Frank Whittier, a former editor of *The Sunbury News*. Cupp became partners with Asa Myers in 1920. Oatfield bought out Myers in 1922. In 1933, Oatfield was sole owner Whitney Insurance Agency next door to *The Sunbury News*. His son, Hoyt took it over until he had health issues and sold it to

Robert Morris. Oatfield Whitney, Junior, became a lawyer and eventually Judge of the Common Pleas Court in Delaware County.

Oatfield was never one to turn down an argument and, after serving as village marshall and on the Sunbury board of education, he got into the real love of his life, politics. He served on Sunbury council and as Sunbury Mayor.

In 1929, running on a platform of establishing sales tax to support schools in Ohio, he was elected to the Ohio General Assembly and served three terms.

In 1938, he was elected to the upper chamber for three terms serving as the 15th and 16th District (Muskingham, Perry, Licking and Delaware Counties) Senator from 1938-1944. During his legislative career O.W. authored laws giving free licenses to school buses, removing the Ohio Nurses Assn. From Ohio Medical Assn., changing the date of registering automobiles from January 1 to April 1, and prohibiting nudist camps in Ohio. A heart attack shortly before his final campaign victory, was to keep him from staying actively involved with political life. He recovered and finished his term in the Senate but did not seek reelection.

He came home to help with the paper. Once again he joined Don Crawford and this time they sold real estate - primarily farms in eastern Delaware County.

In 1954, Gaga, his wife of 50 years, died. In 1957 he married her cousin Verna Green who died in 1960. In 1961, he asked Peg my sister) and I to meet his new girl friend Goldie (Justiss) Juengert (a widow who was born in Olive Green and he met at the races with her friend Trixie). We were so relieved when the lady answering the door look just like our grandmother.

The Senator was a Mason and a charter member of Sunbury Lions Club. He served on the Sunbury Sesquicentennial Committee as one who had lived most of the things being celebrated in 1966. He lived to celebrate the nation's 200th birthday but none of his sons did. Until the last year of his life, he was still calling or writing politicians to give them his take on decisions before them. He died March 1978 at 96.

The dinner bell rung from his backyard to call the family to dinner. Hannah Whitney Gabriel got it at his death and donated it to the Myers Inn Museum.