



NEWSLETTER

#2 2006

A History Of The Blair County Chapter, SAR

Here is part 2 of the "History of the Blair County Chapter" which was included in my book, **"Mother Bedford And The American Revolutionary War"**. In this issue, we will look at the early years of the Chapter.

The Early Years

During the first decade of the Blair County Chapter's existence, the members participated in a variety of activities and special events throughout the county. Many of the events were engaged in jointly with the local Daughters of the American Revolution chapters.

The first event to be recorded in the *Altoona Mirror* following the Institution Dinner was the placement of decorations on gravesites of twenty-six Patriots. The practice of decorating local gravesites for Memorial Day by the DAR was reported in the newspaper on Monday, 02 June, 1947. The article stated that:

"Memory of 26 American patriots who heeded Washington's call to arms after the shot that was 'heard found the world' was fired was honored during the Memorial day period when the Daughters of the American Revolution, aided by the Blair County chapter, Sons of the American Revolution, decorated the graves of Revolutionary war soldiers buried in Blair County. A committee of the S.A.R., headed by M. W. Hazel, newly-elected president, and John Holliday of Tipton, visited 14 cemeteries or burial grounds and placed the decorations. In former years the visitation was made by the D.A.R. members."

In the early part of 1948 the first of something that would become a tradition in Blair County took place. That something was the

celebration of George Washington's birthday by the SAR together with the DAR chapters. On 16

January, 1948 the following notice appeared in the | *Altoona Mirror*:

“The Logan room of the Penn-Alto hotel will be the scene Feb. 26 of a combined Blair county Daughters of the American Revolution and Sons of the American Revolution dinner in commemoration of George Washington’s birthday.

“The banquet, which is being instituted by the Blair County S.A.R. chapter, will include the following D.A.R. chapters: Fort Roberdeau of Tyrone, Adam Holliday of Hollidaysburg, and the Col. John Proctor of Altoona.

“Under the sponsorship of the S.A.R., information concerning the event has been mailed all S.A.R. and D.A.R. members. Among the many state and national officers who are expected to attend will be Dr. John Fritchey, second national vice president of the S.A.R., and Mrs. Fritchey, who is state president of the Children of the American Revolution. The C.A.R., a relatively new organization for Altoona, is headed by Miss Vivian Carter.”

The first of so many enjoyable joint dinners between the DAR and SAR, held on that 26th of February, 1948 was attended by roughly 125 members and their guests. As guest speaker, Mrs. Harlow B. Kirkpatrick of Pittsburgh, the state regent of the Pennsylvania Society, Daughters of the American Revolution, told those attending that *“Just to say ‘I am an American’ is not the answer. It must be ‘I am a Good American’ if we are to make a contribution.*” Other speakers at the dinner included Mrs. Thomas Henry Lee of Philadelphia, state vice-regent of the DAR and Capt. Charles B. Shaler, guiding spirit behind the formation of the Blair County Chapter and future president-general of the National Society, SAR. The Fritcheyes were

unable to attend because Mrs. Fritchey had taken ill. Following the dinner, the group was entertained by the Altoona High School octet.

During the Memorial day weekend of 1948 the SAR again placed decorations upon the gravesites of Patriots buried within Blair County. This time the decorations took the form of thirteen-star flags.

The Blair County Chapter met at various locations throughout the county to hold their meetings during the first few years, such as at the Eldon Inn of Roaring Spring on 10 May, 1950. The group also met at various local historical landmarks for informal get-togethers. On Friday, 19 May, 1950 the *Altoona Mirror* carried the following notice:

“The Blair County chapter, Sons of the American Revolution, is planning an informal gathering for 2 o’clock Sunday afternoon to inspect the old Holliday cemetery on the Blair Guyer farm near Gaysport. Other interested persons are invited to attend.

“This spring the Blair chapter undertook the work of renovating the grounds and has assumed the maintenance of the site where are buried a number of Revolutionary soldiers and where rest some score of members of the early pioneer families. As this is one of the oldest cemeteries in the county, ancient weatherworn headstones, dating from the 182 century, may be found still standing.

“Because the place had not been in use for several generations and would in time suffer from neglect, the local chapter, S.A.R., in line with the policy of the national society in its efforts to locate and to preserve historic sites, has interested itself in this project.

“The committee members who planned and assisted in the work are Floyd

G. Hoenstine, chairman; C. Campbell Beck, William E. Boyer, Joseph R. Holliday and Bruce B. Watson.”

The chapter held their spring quarterly meeting for the year 1951 at the Royer homestead at the Springfield Furnace near Williamsburg. The dinner/meeting was held on the 21st of June with the members' wives as guests along with members of the Col. John Proctor and Adam Holliday chapters of the DAR attending. The event was held on the lawn under the ancient shade trees. During the meeting Mr. Morris W. Hazel, the charter/past president, inducted eight new members into the society. The business portion of the meeting was followed by a talk given by W. Ray Metz on the methods of iron manufacturing in the early days of the Springfield Furnace and on the construction of the stone mansion house erected in 1815. Dr. B.F. Royer, a descendant of the Royer clan which operated the furnace complex, spoke to the

attendees on the subject of the changes that had taken place in the social and industrial life of America since the pioneer days. The program was concluded by a tour of the spacious mansion by Mrs. Royer Hartman. Mr. Hoenstine and Mr. Metz had prepared a brochure for the occasion which explained the methods of iron manufacture at Springfield Furnace along with a Royer family genealogy.

The Bellwood-Antis High School held a special ceremony at 3 o'clock on the Friday afternoon of the 6th of May, 1950 during which facsimile copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights were presented to the supervising principal of the school, George Weiss. According to the newspaper article which appeared the following day in the Altoona Mirror:

“The presentation was made in accordance with a recent action of the membership of the local S.A.R. authorizing a committee consisting of Floyd G. Hoenstine, Fred T. Schenk and Charles A. Faris to present copies of these basic documents to each of two Blair county high schools every year until all county high schools have been included.

“The committee decided to award this year's copies, suitably framed, to the Bellwood-Antis High school and the Altoona Senior High school. At a service later this month Joseph N. Maddocks, principal of A.H.S., has consented to accept copies of these documents on behalf of Altoona High.

“Members of the Blair County chapter, S.A.R., taking part in the presentation ceremony to Mr. Weiss at Bellwood-Antis include: Joseph R. Holliday, chapter president; William A. Whittaker, secretary; Charles A. Faris, registrar, and Alfred M. Wasson.”

A similar presentation was made to the Hollidaysburg Senior High School on 17 September, 1951 as part of a Constitution Day program. The presentation at the high school of the documents was made by Joseph R. Holliday at 3 o'clock. An hour later the group traveled to the Holliday burial ground where Revolutionary War flags were placed on the gravesites of William and Adam Holliday. The group then were served a turkey dinner by the ladies of the Baptist Church and a business meeting was conducted, at the conclusion of which entertainment was

provided by the Senior High chorus. The day's festivities were then completed with an address delivered by attorney John M. Klepser, who chose as his subject the efforts of the colonies to unite under a common form of government that resulted in the ratification of the Constitution of the United States.

The Summit Mansion House, located at the head of Incline #6 of the Portage Railroad, was the site of another dinner/meeting sponsored by the Blair County Chapter and the Cambria County Chapter. The date was Flag Day, Saturday, 14

June, 1952 and the event was commemorated by an outstanding publication authored by Mahlon J. Baumgardner (historian of the Cambria County Chapter) and Floyd G. Hoenstine (president of the Blair County Chapter) titled, *The Allegheny Old Portage Railroad 1834-1854*. The publication is a definitive history of the Portage Railroad and is a favorable reflection of the good intentions and ambition of the chapter.

During the year 1952 the neighboring county of Bedford experienced a touch of the Sons of the American Revolution when, on 25 October, the Pennsylvania Society held a service at the Memorial Park and placed flags on gravesites of numerous Revolutionary War Patriots interred there. The cemetery lies adjacent to the Methodist Church property. The Pennsylvania Society was holding its annual convention at the Bedford Springs Hotel in Bedford during that weekend. The memorial event, reported in the *Bedford Gazette* did not mention if any members of the Blair County Chapter, in particular, attended the event, although the *Altoona Mirror* reported that Mr. and Mrs. Floyd G. Hoenstine, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce B. Watson and Mr. and Mrs.

Morris W. Hazel were there. There was another reason for members of the Blair County Chapter to have attended the Bedford event - their charter president, Morris W. Hazel was elected to the office of third vice-president of the Pennsylvania Society at that meeting.

The chapter sponsored a walking tour of the historic district of Hollidaysburg and visited various of the older structures to be found there on Saturday, 18 June, 1955. A brochure was produced by Floyd G. Hoenstine titled, *Some Historic Homes of Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania* to commemorate the event.

Mr. Hoenstine, a past-president of the Blair County Chapter was the chapter's secretary-treasurer at that time, and was by then the historian of the Pennsylvania Society. It should be noted that Mr. Hoenstine was at that same time (circa 1955) working on *The 1955 Year Book of the Pennsylvania Society Sons of the American Revolution*. That immense volume, compiled by Mr. Hoenstine while he served as the Society's historian, was published in 1956 by the Pennsylvania Society.

To be continued... (**The Blair County Chapter Weathers Some Stormy Decades**)

3rd Quarterly Meeting

The 3rd Quarterly Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR will be held, starting at 12:00 noon on Saturday, 12 August 2006 at the Kings Family Restaurant on 6th Avenue, Altoona, PA.

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Fall 2006 Patriot Dinner

The Blair County Chapter, SAR will host a dinner starting at 5:00pm on Saturday, 07 October 2006 at ThePark in Morrisons Cove at Martinsburg, PA. The purpose of the dinner is threefold: to celebrate Patriot Day, Constitution Day, and especially the 60th Anniversary of the formal organization of the Blair County Chapter (13 December, 1946). Attendees will have the choice of chicken cordon bleu or swiss steak. The cost of the dinner will be \$15. Reservations should be sent to John D. Faulds by 22 September.