

# The Inkwell

The Newsletter of the Bradford Landmark Society

August 2017

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As the days go by, it's important to remember that history is being made every single day. What you may consider insignificant might become the stuff of history books. It's fun to look on the Internet and see what happened on this day, too, or in the month of August.

Here in McKean County, August is the month of activities that have made history in their own right. Many have been held for years and show signs of continuing for many more.

- The **Big 30 All Star Charity Classic Football** game, now in its 44th year.
- The **McKean County Fair** will be 112 years old this year.
- The **Mount Jewett Swedish** Festival hosts its 47<sup>th</sup> event.
- The **Crook Farm Country Fair**, held August 26 & 27<sup>th</sup>, will create its own little bit of history when we celebrate our 38<sup>th</sup> year of crafters, music, food, fun, and family!
- And of course, for many of those in Bradford, it wouldn't be August without **Festa Italiana**, celebrating the Italian heritage and history in our city.

But here's the thing – the exact year of the first Italian Festival is uncertain. One source dates its origin back to 1900; at the Landmark Society, we can prove that it was underway at least by 1912. The man generally thought of as the founder of the Italian Festival is Michael G. (Riccardi) Rich. Born in Italy in 1864, he immigrated to the United States, came to Bradford, and according to his obituary dated July 4, 1944, had served as Chairman of the St. Rocco's Festival, aka Italian Festival, for 44 years, since 1900. St. Rocco's Day is usually around August 18-20.

The early festivals also honored the Feast of the Assumption, which is August 15. (These two Catholic Feast Days are now celebrated as Festa Italiana.) Bradford Italians would celebrate with attending Mass, food, music, dancing and on St. Rocco's Day, fireworks. A City Council meeting in 1912 talks of a petition to allow shooting of fireworks in the city on the "Italian holiday" on Aug. 15 & Aug.16.

The Festival was suspended during World War II and resurrected again in 1971 during the Bradford Centennial celebration. In 1989 a committee was formed to run the Italian Festival and continues to do so. And the best part? You don't have to be Italian to take part in celebrating the heritage of Bradford's ethnic past.

*On Monday, August 21, 2017, all of North America will be treated to an eclipse of the sun. Anyone within the path of totality can see one of nature's most awe-inspiring sights – a total solar eclipse. That's history, too!*

## What's New at the Landmark?

- We now have two new fire proof files! Both are letter size, four drawer file cabinets, and we plan on filling both of them rather quickly with some of our 16,000+ photographs. Storage in fireproof, insect proof, and any other “anti” destructive condition is very important. They were moved into place by Austin Locksmithing of Allegany, NY – took four men, two dollies, and a truck to get them here, but it only took them about an hour. Good job, guys, and we love our new files.
- The 4<sup>th</sup> annual Creative Women Workshop was held July 29 at the Crook Farm with 72 women attending. Classes included Glass Etching, Wild Flower Identification, Knot Tying, Zen Meditation Sand Gardens, Horseshoes, Magnetic Memories, Self-Defense, Flower Pounding, Calligraphy, House Repair, Legacy Writing and Blacksmithing. The weather was beautiful and everyone had a great time. Already planning for next year!
- Check out our display at the Northwest Savings Bank window on Main Street.
- The Bradford High School History Club visited the Landmark a week ago. Nice bunch of kids. They will be recording the headstone locations of every grave in St. Bernard Cemetery, as a community project.. The Landmark has headstone records of all the county cemeteries, but most, like St. Bernard, don't have a corresponding location with the index. So, we can assure researchers and family genealogists that their ancestors are buried there - but we have no idea where! As you can imagine a big cemetery like St. Bernard has about 10,000 graves. It's very difficult to locate a particular grave by just walking around. So the History Club has taken this project on. They'll divide the cemetery into grids, locate and record the location, and then create a data base. If you see high school students wandering around the cemetery with cameras (probably their cell phones!), clipboards and notebooks, tell them that you appreciate their efforts.
- Thanks to Bill McCormack, retired Fire Chief, who recently donated about 100 match books to the Landmark Society. These match books (does anybody still use match books anymore?) were used as advertisements and promotional items for all sorts of businesses, stores, and restaurants – and even weddings. Bill's collection covers a wide range of topics, including the old Castle Restaurant in Allegany, the Holiday Inn motel here in Bradford, and many, many more. Thanks, Bill!
- The Landmark will sponsor a “Business After Hours” at the Crook Farm on October 12. If you are a member of the Bradford Chamber of Commerce, then you are invited! (Sorry, not open to the public).
- Remember our “Landmark Great Bake Sale” back in May? We held the first ever bake sale right here in the Herbig Bakery, as tribute to Gus Herbig, the original baker. We had over 1200 cookies for sale, as well as cakes, pies, scones, candy, rolls, bread, fudge, and more. Well, we plan on doing it again this October. Watch the newspaper in October for more details. We'll need bakers, as well, so if you like to bake....give us a call.



Join us at the 38th Annual 2017

# CROOK FARM COUNTRY FAIR &

## Old Time Country Music Festival

### Crafts & Vendor Show

August 26th & 27th

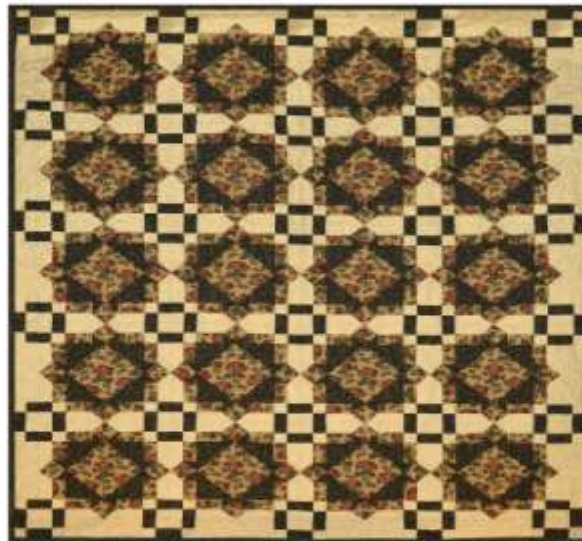
476 Seaward Avenue, Bradford, Pennsylvania

\$5.00 Admission, Children under 12 are free

### 38th Annual Crook Farm Country Fair

Saturday & Sunday, August 26th & 27th, 2017  
10 AM to 5 PM

### "Four In The Field" Quilt Raffle



Tickets: \$1.00 each  
or \$5.00 for six

66" x 82"

Tickets may be purchased at:

- Bradford Landmark Society Headquarters: 45 East Corydon St., Bradford, PA
- Little Fabric Garden: 25 Main St., Bradford, PA
- Crook Farm Fair at the barn
- Other participating locations

**Drawing Sunday, August 27, 2017 at the Crook Farm Fair**  
**Need not be present for drawing**

Quilt By: Kinzua Quilters Guild  
Quilted By: Gail Matthews

## The Building of the First Methodist Church, aka The Tower Church

*It has been said that "when you tear down the walls of a church the devil flies in."*

On September 25, 1927 - 90 years ago - the First Methodist Church of Bradford was completed and dedicated. Located between Chambers and Chestnut Streets, and beside East Corydon Street, the big stone church is well known in the city. Not surprisingly, it's now known as the Tower Church. The story of its construction is an interesting one.

Old photographs show a large wooden church on the same site. That church, made of wood, was built in 1878 with a brick "Epworth Chapel" added in 1896. But a new church was needed. The congregation had been known for years that someday a new church would have to be erected, but it was not until 1921 that it was discovered that the walls of the church were bulging outward. After careful investigation it was also found that the rafters under the roof had pulled entirely away and that the church was actually unsafe. Worried about the roof caving in, iron girders were put across the church to provide a temporary solution, but much thought was given to the building of a new church, how to finance it, what it would look like, and how long it would take. A building campaign was begun in May 1922.

And as for that quote, about the devil flying in when the walls of a church come down? Not in this case. It was said that there was remarkable harmony throughout the five year construction process, even though the congregation was forced to hold services in several different locations throughout the city as the new church was being built. Not only did the First Methodist not lose any members during that time period, the congregation actually grew by four hundred people!

The cost of a new brick church would be \$150,000 (when it was later decided to use stone and not brick, costs rose to \$300,000). Construction was finished in the summer of 1927. Dedication was held on September 25.

The foundation of the new church was laid in the winter of 1924. Original plans called for a red brick church, but after vigorous protest, it was decided to build with stone. A problem arose.

Thirty-five thousand square feet of stone were required to build the church, but since no stone quarries



were known near Bradford, it seemed impossible. Luckily, one of the contractors discovered enough stone on a side hill in Lewis Run belonging to the Lewis Run Manufacturing Company and they donated all the stone necessary to complete the church. The stone was brought to the site in the rough and measured and cut on six sides to fit the particular place it was to fill. Enough stone was cut during the winter to carry the masons through the following summer.

Almost immediately it was discovered that it would be necessary to buy more land for the new church – and that would cost money. For nearly a year, the work was at a standstill due to lack of funds but the money was eventually raised, and building went on. The church now stands on a space formerly occupied by five buildings and a vacant lot and its footprint is approximately 140'x 200'.

The most remarkable part of the church is the central tower.

The tower, designated in 1920s as the Cynthia Smathers tower, is supported on four columns, each having a foundation of its own approximately ten square feet and six feet deep, reinforced by two layers of steel beams, each column taking a carload of material. The steel columns that support the tower were rolled in H shape with a web an inch and a half thick and weigh about three hundred pounds to the foot. These columns are forty-seven feet long and support the steel girders on which the stone work of the tower rests, the tower itself being designated to be entirely independent of the rest of the building. On account of the massive construction of the church the tower does not appear to be very high; it is, however, a stone building with a base 37 feet square with 42 feet above the ground and 82 feet in height overall.

Nearly a third of the tower from a standpoint of cubic feet is out of sight under the ground. The framework is all of steel containing 356,000 pounds of steel. The corner stones of the water table of the tower are cast in one solid piece and weigh about three tons each. On account of their peculiar shape which made them hard to handle, getting them set in their places was one of the most difficult engineering feats of the entire building. The basement floor and the floor of the new church are on exactly the same level as the old church and the slope of the floor is the same.

But who was Cynthia Smathers? She was married to Phillip Smathers, a rig builder, lived on High Street. She was a member of the First Methodist Church at the turn of the century and was very active in church work. She died in 1903 at the age of 83. Her son, E.E. Smathers, “a former Bradford man who had accumulated great wealth” donated \$30,000 (over \$400,000 in today’s money) for the building of the church, with the stipulation that the tower be named the “Cynthia Smathers Memorial Tower.” And it was!

The official dedication of the new church was held September 25, 1927, with over 1000 people present. The Evening Star wrote “the public generally counts this new achievement as a community improvement of a high order – an architectural triumph and a visible moral asset of precious worth.”



*Sailing on Chautauqua Lake, 1899*



Bradford Landmark Society  
45 East Corydon Street  
Bradford, PA 16701

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