

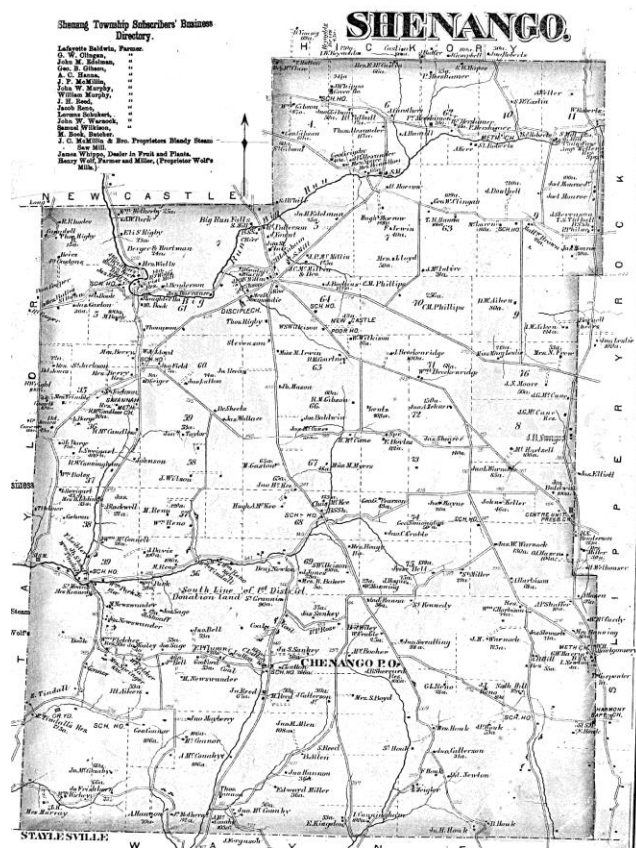


Comprehensive Development Plan

Shenango Township, Lawrence County, PA

Chapter 2 – Early History and Settlement Pattern

History



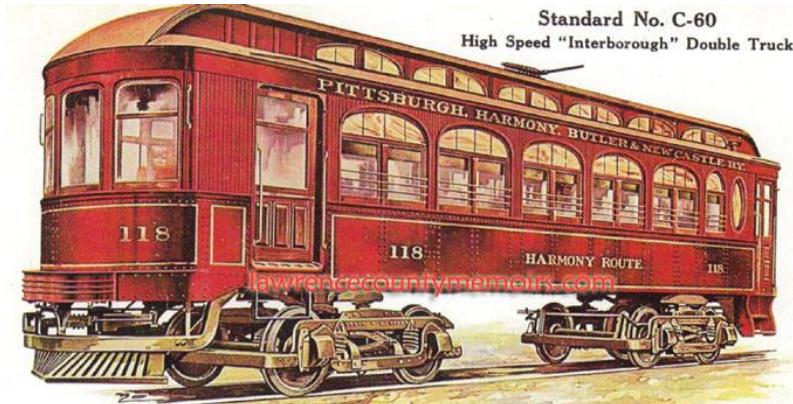
1872 Lawrence County Atlas

Named for the Shenango River, Shenango Township was incorporated in 1796 as a part of Beaver County, Pennsylvania; Lawrence County did not yet exist. Shenango later became one of Lawrence County's original townships and quickly became one of the most populous areas, because the land was suitable for many different purposes. One of the first settlers to live in Shenango was William Carins. He came to this area in 1796 and was the man who gave Shenango its name. Carins was awarded the land after his service in the Revolutionary War; he was paid in 500 acres (200 ha) of land. Carins worked as a cloth weaver and ran a small store where he sold his goods. William Tindall was another one of Shenango's first settlers. Tindall was paid 400 acres (1.6 km²) for his service in the Revolutionary War. He lived to the age of 93 and was buried in the Tindall family

cemetery near the "Turkey Hill" section of the township. The Tindall family cemetery is most famously known as the resting place of Mary Black, a supposed, but never proven, witch of around the same time period. Her grave is separate from the others and is the only one dug up. Shenango's largest land owner was a Philadelphia lawyer named Benjamin Chew. Chew bought up large portions of the southern extent of the township under assumed names for pennies an

acre. He later resold the land for a profit, and the small town of Chewton was later named after him.¹

The township was linked to New Castle, Ellwood and Pittsburgh in 1908 by the Pittsburgh, Harmony, Butler and New Castle Railway, an interurban trolley line. The railway was developed by business partners Russel H. Boggs and Henry Buhl as an adjunct to their



Lawrence County Memoirs

department store in Pittsburgh. Mr. Boggs already had a business relationship with many of the farms between Evans City and Pittsburgh and proposed exchanging the right of way across their land for one dollar, a guaranteed trolley stop and an electricity supply.

The first trolley ran to Ellwood City on July 2, 1908.

At the southern end of the line Pittsburgh Railways took over the trolley for the run into Pittsburgh, as the final few miles was over their rails. In 1914 an extension along the Beaver Valley was opened. This left Ellwood City heading south west and crossed the Beaver River on Koppel Bridge which was built for the purpose. This bridge also carried vehicle and pedestrian traffic and was subject to a toll. The line closed on 15 June 1931, and the trolleys were replaced by buses.²

National Register of Historic Places

New Castle Armory is a historic National Guard armory located at Shenango Township, Lawrence County, Pennsylvania. It was built in 1938, and is an "I"-plan stone building consisting of a one- to two-story administration building, with a connected riding hall and former stable building. It was built as a



New Castle Armory

¹ Wikipedia

² <http://www.lawrencecountymemoirs.com/lcmpages/10/harmony-short-line>

Federal public works project and is in the Art Deco style.

It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1991.³

Lawrence County Home (Hill View Manor)⁴

In June 1925 the city of New Castle, Pennsylvania, started accepting bids to build the new Lawrence County Home for the Aged, essentially a “poor house” for the county’s mentally ill, severely destitute, and elderly residents with no known family. This joint city-county home, to be built in Shenango Township on the New Castle-Ellwood Road (Route 65), would replace the aging New Castle City Home and consolidate various smaller institutions around the county.



The New Castle City Home, a working farm and collection of buildings located on Old Pittsburg Road near the present day site of the Shenango Elementary School, had been around since opening in November 1867. The facility had been built on forty-four acres donated by Charles Philips of New Castle. Although there was initially a three-man board of “poor directors,” one of them, a man named Robert Reynolds, largely kept the home in operation with his own financing and tireless efforts behind the scenes. I believe Reynolds was the son of Robert Reynolds Sr., who was born in Boonsboro, Maryland, in 1776 and was one of the earliest settlers in New Castle when he settled in the area in 1805.

Over the next three decades the home usually maintained only two full-time staff members and housed about ten “inmates” (as they were called) at any given time. By 1900 the resident population (at its peak) had increased to twenty-seven inmates, but was down to eighteen in 1920. The institution was for New Castle residents only and was run by a superintendent, who was elected to a four-year term by the city commissioners. Assisting the superintendent was a similarly-elected “matron,” who personally oversaw all the female inmates. Perry D. Snyder and his wife Mary A. Snyder, first elected in March 1913, would serve in those respective posts for the next three decades.

³ Wikipedia

⁴ Lawrence County Memoirs, Jeff Bale, Jr.

The state-of-the-art County Home also included vocational rooms, a smoking room, several lounges, a bomb shelter, a laundry, a four-car garage, a large garden, a small working farm, and a cemetery. An excerpt from an article about the county home in *New Castle News* of October 23, 1925, explains that, "...aged people, without a friend in the world, will be able to spend their declining years in comfort." Most of the inmates were wards of the county and "sentenced" to confinement at the home.

Construction was behind schedule but the facility finally opened on Tuesday, October 19, 1926. On that day the Snyder's and their two children, about a dozen staff members, and the first twenty inmates left the old City Home and took up residence in the nearby Lawrence County Home. The new home did not generally take children, although a young boy was among the first twenty residents. Some of the work was still awaiting completion and the long driveway was still being paved. The old City Home was abandoned soon after and was later sold.

The new County Home worked in conjunction with several other facilities, including the Margaret Henry Home and the Almira Home. Orphaned and other similarly disadvantaged children were handled at the Margaret Henry Home, known as the Holy Family Home prior to 1921, on Cunningham Avenue in New Castle. The Almira Home on East Washington Street in New Castle was a haven for elderly woman. Under the Snyder's long reign the number of inmates steadily grew but fluctuated over the years from seventy-two inmates in December 1928, to 176 in December 1934, and 136 in December 1939.

In June 1944 county welfare officials and the Snyder's came under fire during a rather heated public hearing held at the county courthouse investigating claims of incompetency at the home. The Snyder's were both in their late seventies and probably not suited to operate such a challenging facility. In the wake of the hearing the Snyder's were basically retired with pensions, but allowed to stay on at the home with reduced roles. By late August, with Perry Snyder sick in bed and Mary tending to him on many days, the Snyder's were given three weeks to vacate the premises. I believe their daughter Jeannette, who had lived at the home for many years, also passed away at about that same time. That vacate order ended the Snyder's run of over thirty years of service to the local community. Mantz B. Hogue, the longtime director of the county's welfare department, took over operation of the home.

The Lawrence County Home continued in operation for many years and in the latter half of the 1960's, while under the supervision of Director Clarence E. Covert, was remodeled and morphed into a skilled nursing center. By 1970 the home was facing severe overcrowding issues and was housing an average of about 115 elderly people at any one time. Covert, who also dealt with criticism and complaints regarding alleged discrimination practices in regard to his

admission policies, became bitter about a lack of county support and resigned in protest in January 1973.

In December 1974 the county decided to update and expand the home by adding a whole new section and remodeling some of the existing floors. The new three-story addition (with an additional basement floor), to be built off of the woman's department, would allow the home to accommodate another thirty or so residents. A new kitchen and dining room and other occupational rooms were also included in the construction. The new "north wing" cost \$1.7 million and opened in mid-1977. Meanwhile, after a contest to find a more suitable name for the antiquated-sounding Lawrence County Home for the Aged, it was renamed as the Hill View Manor on March 22, 1977.

Due financial constraints the county shut down Hill View Manor in January of 2004. The building and its twenty-two acres went on the market for \$1.7 million and was bought by Triko Enterprises of McKees Rocks about a year later. The building sat vacant with an uncertain future and in July 2007 thieves broke in and stole approximately \$150,000 worth of copper wiring and pipes. This further clouded the building future as replacing the wiring/pipes would prove costly. The site has become of particular concern to the Shenango Township Police as burglars, vandals, and teenaged thrill seekers often attempted to sneak into the abandoned building.

The old home has gained quite the notoriety for being touted as one of the most haunted locations in all of Western Pennsylvania. In 2008, local paranomalist Candy Braniff began leasing the facility and conducting "ghost tours" for the public. Braniff is more than just a ghost chaser as she has a genuine interest in preserving the facility and all its rich history. Many nationally renowned paranomalists have visited the site and have recorded numerous recording of some strange sights and sounds. In May of 2013, Haunted Hill View Manor Incorporated has taken over the property and offers a wide variety of activities on the site. For more information see <http://www.hauntedhillviewmanor.com/>